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EDMUND BURKE'S MORAL IMAGINATION:
INTERPRETATION AND CULTIVATION

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INTERPRETATION AND CULTIVATION

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To Sarah for her longsuffering support:

“An excellent wife, who can find her?

For her worth is far above jewels” (Prov 31:10, NASB).

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is an inescapably human enterprise, requiring the whole person. Human beings are a composite of many faculties and powers, including reason, senses, imagination, feelings, desires, will, and action. This dissertation focuses especially on the imaginative faculty in the person's ethical development. Relevant literature commonly uses the term "moral imagination" to describe the role of imagination in ethics.¹ However, few ethicists trace the concept to its fountainhead, Edmund Burke (1729–1797).²

Burke coined "moral imagination" in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in which he criticized the loss of traditional, chivalric values that was resulting from the subversion of Jacobin revolutionaries during the French Revolution: "All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion."³ Burke scholarship has rightly emphasized

¹ E.g., Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 36, 257–58; Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Edward Tivnan, *The Moral Imagination: Confronting the Ethical Issues of Our Day* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); and Amy Kind, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy and Imagination*, Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2016).

² Scholars disagree on Burke's birth year (c. 1728–30). This challenge is compounded by the change in dating system from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar. See Dixon Wecker, "Burke's Birthday," *Notes and Queries* 172, no. 25 (June 19, 1937): 441; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commentated Anthology of Edmund Burke* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3; and F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: 1730–1784*, vol. 1 (1998; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16–17.

³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, 9 vols., ed Paul Langford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981–), 8:128.

the concept of moral imagination; still, even Burke scholars often fail to trace the concept to Burke. “Although the term ‘moral imagination’ originated with Edmund Burke,” remarks William F. Byrne, “much Burke scholarship fails to mention it.”⁴

Additionally, the concept of moral imagination does not generally receive prolonged philosophical engagement from Burke scholarship. Byrne explains that it “has appeared more and more frequently” since the early- to mid-twentieth century “but has received even less serious attention from those writing on Burke.” To the extent they engage it, they do so “in a vague way, and its real significance in his thought is rarely explored.”⁵ Many Burke scholars use the term “moral imagination” to describe his view of economics or politics or tradition or some other theme but do not examine his understanding of the term itself.⁶ Consequently, this dissertation seeks to examine Burke’s view of moral imagination holistically.

Thesis and Methodology

This dissertation argues that the faculty of imagination is crucial to Burke’s view of man, the sublime and beautiful, the arts, morality, society, and politics and that, therefore, the cultivation of a moral imagination is likewise crucial to his ethic. To argue this thesis, the following chapters attempt a systematic examination of (nearly) every

Hereafter, this collection will be referred to as *Writings*. Additionally, owing to the historical nature of this dissertation, the citations interacting with primary figures (e.g., Burke or Rousseau) typically provide the original date on which, or year in which, the source was written, published, or given (in the case of speeches).

⁴ William F. Byrne, *Edmund Burke for Our Time: Moral Imagination, Meaning, and Politics* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 7. Cf. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Moral Imagination: From Adam Smith to Lionel Trilling*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), ix; and David Bromwich, *Moral Imagination: Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5.

⁵ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 7.

⁶ E.g., Gerald W. Chapman, *Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); and Douglas Archibald, “Edmund Burke and the Conservative Imagination,” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland Society* 10, no. 1 (1995): 132, 141, 146.

usage of the term “imagination(s)” in Burke’s known corpus.⁷ This methodology offers a meaningful contribution to the field because no one source seems to have engaged the topic in this manner.⁸ Any interaction with derivatives (e.g., “imaginary,” “imaginative,” or “imagine”) or substitute terms (e.g., “mind” or “enthusiasm”) is incidental and inexhaustive.⁹ Additionally, this dissertation provides relevant textual and historical analyses for the passages it studies to avoid irresponsible prooftexts that mistake Burke’s meaning.¹⁰

A genuine challenge to this thesis and methodology concerns the fact that Burke’s discussion of imagination was often indirect. He analyzed imagination specifically in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, but because his career subsequently shifted to practical politics, his writings likewise shifted. Consequently, many references to “imagination” occur amid a discussion of something else. Still, they are pertinent to Burke’s theory of imagination

⁷ I do not examine any references to “imagination(s)” in *The Annual Register*, which Burke founded in 1758 and edited until 1765, because biographers disagree concerning the precise extent of Burke’s authorship. Additionally, I reviewed the major collections of writings but was unable to access volumes 3 and 5 of *The Works and Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, new ed., 8 vols., ed. Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam, and Sir Richard Bourke (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1852); and volume 6 of *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 10 vols., ed. Thomas Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958–1978). Hereafter, the collection edited by William, Fitzwilliam, and Bourke will be referred to as *Works and Correspondence*, and the collection edited by Copeland will be referred to as *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*.

⁸ Owing to space restraints, I do not analyze or even mention Burke’s usage of “imagination” in the following instances: Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton (June 26, 1744), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 1:22; “The Character of a Good Man,” in *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke: Poems, Characters, Essays and Other Sketches in the Hands of Edmund and William Burke Now Printed for the First Time in Their Entirety*, ed. H. V. F. Somerset (1957; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xi; “The Character of a Wise Man,” in *Note-Book*, 110; Edmund Burke to James Thistlethwaite (October 20, 1775), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 3:231; Speech on Sixth Article (April 21, 1789; May 7, 1789), in *Writings*, 7:32, 35; and Speech on Fox’s Motion to Treat with France (December 15, 1792), in *Writings*, 4:525–26. Concerning the citation of Burke’s writings, speeches, letters, etc., I have attempted to adopt the conventions that are present in the Burke scholarship with which I have interacted so that some source titles are italicized, some are placed in quotation marks, and some have neither italics nor quotation marks; for example, some speech titles are italicized (corresponding generally to speeches that were formally published during his lifetime), whereas other speech titles are not italicized (corresponding generally to speeches that were not formally published during his lifetime).

⁹ Subsequent studies should tease out the implications of such terms in a systematic way.

¹⁰ F. P. Lock comments on the importance of context without which “readers are liable to misconstrue his [Burke’s] arguments” (“Burke’s Life,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 15).

because they reveal some element of his view, making this dissertation constructive in nature. If each reference to “imagination” signifies a piece of the puzzle, then this dissertation aims to help build the puzzle from the available evidence. That Burke did not explicate his theory of imagination systematically does not mean he did not have one.¹¹

Chapters 2–3 focus on Burke’s view of the imagination as a creative faculty of the mind with the powers of representation, wit, fancy, and invention. Additionally, imagination reflects the senses, interacts with reason, gives rise to emotions, and shapes the will; therefore, it plays a key role in mediating the various faculties and powers of human nature. Although Burke lived in the shadow of and was influenced by British empiricism, he was not a strict empiricist, rather affirming *a priori* truths of imagination. Imagination also gives form to thought, whether representational or non-representational, about everything including one’s memories, plans, and beliefs. Furthermore, it undergirds the expression of one’s thought, namely, language. However, the imagination may be deceived, and it may deceive even through exaggeration. For these reasons, Burke ascribed numerous analogies and characteristics to illustrate the multifaceted quality of this faculty.

Chapter 4 introduces Burke’s enquiry into the sublime, the beautiful, and the arts. The imagination experiences the sublime and beautiful, which gives rise to corresponding feelings of terror and love. Whereas the sublime results from causes like divinity, infinity, and eternity, the beautiful results from loveliness; notably, Burke’s view of the imagination prompted him to reject proportion and fitness in themselves as causes of beauty. These reflections undergird his view of the arts. By imagination, the person may observe and produce different artifacts, and by the arts, people and societies are formed, making the arts exceedingly important for both the individual and social

¹¹ William Francis Byrne, “Edmund Burke’s ‘Moral Imagination’ and the Problem of Political Order” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2003), 5; Nathanael Alan Blake, “Natural Law and History: The Use and Abuse of Practical Reason” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2015), 254–55.

imagination. Finally, by imagination, man cultivates taste, which he develops by improving his sensibility and judgment, knowledge and attention, morals and manners, and exercise and labor.

Chapter 5 examines Burke's articulation of the "moral imagination." The moral imagination is the sociohistorical inheritance of Christianity, which extols noble equality and chivalry and balances restraint and liberty. Burke characterized the moral imagination as the pleasing illusions, decent drapery, and superadded ideas of private and public life that cover man's nakedness and dignify his nature. While the moral imagination is socially received, it is also individually cultivated in the mind and heart; it likewise bridges the sublime and beautiful, and balances universals, circumstance, and perfection. By contrast, the proponent of the Enlightenment destroys the moral imagination, realizing the worst aspects of the French Revolution.

Finally, chapters 6–7 build on chapter 5 by evaluating Burke's integration of the doctrine of moral imagination with the topics of virtue, vice, authority, rights, and social change. The moral imagination, he demonstrated, is cultivated by the virtues of humility, truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom. However, the immoral imagination is vain, revealing a faculty that is weak and juvenile, infected and strange, disordered and distempered, unbounded and wild, and revolutionary. Whereas the moral imagination submits to good authorities, including good tradition, prejudice, community, religion, and government, the immoral imagination does not submit to good authorities but rather subverts them. Authorities should reflect true natural rights, not false abstracted rights, and to the extent they do not, they should be changed by reform not revolution.

Introduction to Edmund Burke

This section summarizes aspects of Edmund Burke's life and career, including his writings and speeches, that bear relevance to this dissertation.¹² Burke was born on January 12, 1729, in Dublin, Ireland, to an Anglican father and a Roman Catholic mother. This "mixed marriage" profoundly shaped Burke's moral outlook. Jesse Norman proposes that it helped him develop an "extraordinary moral imagination, able to reach out at once in all directions, to comprehend aristocrat and revolutionary, Catholic and Protestant, underclass and hierarchy alike."¹³ Burke remained Anglican, but he demonstrated great sympathy toward others throughout his lifetime.

As a child, Burke loved to read and learn and spent much time in the Irish countryside. From 1741 until 1744, he attended a boarding school founded by the Quaker schoolmaster Abraham Shackleton in Ballitore, County Kildare.¹⁴ Then, from 1744 until 1748, he went to Trinity College Dublin, receiving an education in classics and theology. At Trinity he founded a debating club, producing a corresponding minute book with notes; and he established a magazine entitled *The Reformer* in which he and his friends analyzed the arts (e.g., plays, novels, and poems). In 1750, his father wanting him to pursue law, Burke was admitted to the Middle Temple, one of the four Inns of Court in

¹² The following sources inform this biographical sketch: Steven Blakemore, ed., "Chronology of Important Dates," in *Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Essays* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), xiii–xvi; David Bromwich, *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke: From the Sublime and Beautiful to American Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 491–93; David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole, eds., "Chronology," in *Cambridge Companion*, xxiii–xxvi; Paul Guyer, ed., "A Chronology of Edmund Burke," in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, by Edmund Burke, Oxford World's Classics (1990; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), i, xliii–xliv; Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (1967; repr., Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009), xiii–xv; Jesse Norman, ed., "Chronology," in *Reflections on the Revolution in France and Other Writings*, by Edmund Burke, Everyman's Library (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), xxx–lxi; and Adam Phillips, ed., "A Chronology of Edmund Burke," in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, by Edmund Burke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), xxvii–xxviii.

¹³ Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (New York: Basic, 2015), 12.

¹⁴ Shackleton's granddaughter Mary Leadbeater later remarked on Burke's "profound knowledge of books and universal acquaintance with men and things" (*London Evening Post*, in *The Leadbeater Papers*, vol. 2 [London: Bell and Daldy, 1862], 115).

London; however, by 1755, Burke left law to pursue a literary career. Around this period, he likely penned his draft of “Religion of No Efficacy.”

Through the remainder of the 1750s, Burke engaged with philosophy, the arts, history, and reference work and journalism. He wrote “Several Scattered Hints concerning Philosophy and Learning”; published *A Vindication of Natural Society*, a satire of the political philosophy of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, an Enlightenment rationalist; and produced *An Account of the European Settlement in America* (which he likely coauthored with William Burke). In 1757, Burke published the highly important *Philosophical Enquiry*, which was followed by a second edition in 1759 that included an Introduction on Taste.¹⁵ The *Enquiry* provides Burke’s most direct and prolonged engagement with the topic of imagination.¹⁶ Around this time, he also contracted with Robert Dodsley to publish a history of the English people (coauthored with William Burke); it was not finished, although the portion they completed was published in 1812, entitled *An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History*. Burke married Jane Nugent in 1757 with whom he had two children, Christopher, who died in infancy, and Richard, who preceded Burke in death by approximately three years.

The trajectory of Burke’s career shifted considerably in the 1760s. He was hired as a private secretary to William Gerard Hamilton, Chief Secretary for Ireland, from 1759 until 1765. During this period, he extended his reflections on the arts and produced the unfinished *Hints for an Essay on the Drama*. Then, in 1765, he was hired as private secretary to Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marquess of Rockingham before beginning his service as a member of Parliament (MP) for Wendover, a position he held from 1765 until 1774. Through the second half of the 1760s, Burke published his Tracts

¹⁵ Legend holds that Burke first authored the treatise at the age of nineteen; see John Morley, *Burke* (London: Macmillan, 1879), 12. Fifteen more editions would follow this “early masterpiece” (Lock, “Burke’s Life,” 16).

¹⁶ See Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 67.

Relating to Popery Laws, which concerned the rights of Irish Catholics. He also wrote under the pseudonym “Mnemon” to the *Public Advertiser* about the Nullum Tempus affair and the relative powers of the Crown. The issues of Catholic rights and royal prerogative would fill Burke’s imagination throughout his career. Finally, he defended the policy of the Rockingham Whigs on the American Colonies and trade against that of the Grenville Whigs in his most consequential piece of the period, entitled *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*.

In the early 1770s, Burke voiced his support for church establishment and subscription, giving speeches on the Acts of Uniformity, clerical subscription, and a bill for the relief of Protestant dissenters. He also expressed opposition to the ministerial budget in his Speech on North’s Budget. Then, in November 1774, Burke was elected as MP for Bristol, a position he would hold until 1780; in his Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll, he outlined his view that the MP must use his judgment rather than act as proxy for the electorate.

The topic that most occupied his imagination during this period was Britain’s worsening relationship with the Colonies. This problem resulted in numerous publications, including his *Speech on American Taxation*, *Speech on Conciliation with America*, *Second Speech on Conciliation*, and *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*; in them, Burke disagreed strongly with Britain’s handling of the Colonies. Still, other subjects concerned him, too. Burke produced a document entitled *On Education*, prompted by the young princes’ changes of household, that regards educational theory. He also offered several principles of commerce against the backdrop of economic relations between Britain and Ireland in *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland*, believing that Britain should revise its restrictions. Finally, in his Speech on Public Expenses, he discussed the difficulties resulting from royal influence and heavy tax burdens from the war.

Burke continued to serve in Parliament through the 1780s until 1794, except that he was MP for Malton. During this period, he gave his *Speech on Economical*

Reform, which revisited concerns about Irish trade and royal influence. He delivered his *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election* in which he justified some of his unpopular views, including the nature of representation, Irish trade, Catholic rights, the American War, and the slave trade, which he opposed; he may have also composed his unpublished *Sketch of a Negro Code* around this time.¹⁷ Burke delivered two speeches on St Eustatius, criticizing Britain's mistreatment of people and property amid its war with the Dutch in the Caribbean; these speeches anticipate Burke's subsequent criticism of Warren Hastings and the East India Company.

In addition to acting as MP, Burke served as Paymaster of the Forces in 1782 and from 1783 until 1784 and Rector of the University of the Glasgow from 1783 until 1785. He made several consequential speeches during this time, including his *Speech on Remuneration Bill* on the rights of the Irish parliament and courts and his *Speech on John Powell and Charles Bembridge* who were accused of fraud. Additionally, he gave his *Speech on Parliamentary Reform*, emphasizing the doctrine of prescription, a theme he would sound for his remaining years.

The most significant development during this period concerned Burke's attempted impeachment of Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal, who Burke believed exploited and oppressed the Indian people through the East India Company. This issue would capture Burke's attention for about a decade; Hastings was impeached but later acquitted. These events form the background for numerous speeches, including Burke's *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, *Speech on Almas Ali Khan*, *Speech on Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, and *Speech on Opening of Impeachment*. An additional challenge of the late 1780s was the regency crisis during which King George III demonstrated signs of

¹⁷ Such unpopular positions with the people likely contributed to Burke's losing the election. See Warren M. Elofson, John A. Woods, and William B. Todd, eds., *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election* (September 6, 1780), by Edmund Burke, in *Writings*, 3:620–23.

madness, which resulted in Burke's debating the relative authority of the Crown and Parliament in his Speech on Regency Bill.

Whereas India occupied Burke's imagination in the 1780s, France occupied it in the 1790s. His output during these years was remarkable. In 1790, he gave his *Speech on the Army Estimates* concerning Britain's army budget. He also published his most important work *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in which he strongly condemned the Revolution. He continued this criticism in 1791 with his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, *Speech on Quebec Bill*, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, and *Thoughts on French Affairs*. Charles James Fox praised the Revolution and criticized Burke's arguments in the Quebec Bill, which led to a rebuttal from Burke that publicly ended his decades-long friendship with Fox. In the *Appeal*, Burke defended his consistency between his positions on the American versus the French wars.

Over the course of 1792–1793, Burke continued publishing on French affairs. He published his *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, and in *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority*, he sought to offset Fox's influence by criticizing revolutionary sympathy in Britain. Religious matters also prompted Burke's attention during these years. For example, in his *Speech on Unitarians' Petition for Relief*, he opposed a motion to repeal certain statutes against Unitarians because he believed they were a faction whose legitimacy would have dire political consequences.

Burke continued writing about the Revolution over the last three years of his life. In 1794, he made two speeches on the French Corps Bill. Then, tragically, his son Richard died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-six, inducing him to pen an unpublished character sketch about him. From 1795 until 1797, Burke composed his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* in which he criticized William Pitt's attempt at peace with France. He also produced a tract on economics, entitled *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, which generally supported market-based principles and opposed state interference. Finally, in

his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, he discussed the Revolution and defended himself and his pension against the Foxite Whigs. He died the following year on July 9, 1797.

CHAPTER 2

THE ROLE AND POWER OF IMAGINATION

Before analyzing Burke's views on the intersection of imagination and ethics, this dissertation examines his understanding of imagination as a distinct, creative faculty of the mind with the powers of representation, wit, fancy, and invention. As such it receives impressions from the senses, interacts with reason, gives rise to emotion, and shapes the will. Yet it is also an *a priori* structure with *a priori* knowledge.

The Powers of Imagination

In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke identified three "faculties of the mind," namely, "the Senses; the Imagination; and the Judgment [Reason]," which together comprise the faculty of taste.¹ He did not define "faculty" as such or interact with any voices on what precisely it is. In fact, he explicitly resisted strict definitions for "figurative terms," explaining that "when we define, we seem in danger of circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own notions. . . . A definition may be very exact, and yet go but a very little way towards informing us of the nature of the thing defined."² For support, he quoted Horace's *De Arte Poetica* for the proposition that disagreements over definitions lead to shameful behavior and prevent progress.³

¹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), in *Writings*, 1:197–98.

² Burke, *Enquiry*, 197.

³ Ostensibly, Burke held this view throughout his lifetime because about three decades later, he wrote, "Metaphysics cannot live without definition; but prudence is cautious how she defines" (Edmund Burke, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* [1791], in *Writings*, 4:383).

Furthermore, Burke observed that the objects of his study were “obscure and intricate.”⁴ His attitude toward definition, therefore, was careful; he did not want to presume. Still, while he did not define the term explicitly, his usage suggests he viewed it as a mental power that the person uses for sensing, imagining, or reasoning by which he may perform different cognitive acts, such as receiving, representing, inventing, judging, and concluding.⁵

Although Burke did not define “faculty,” he defined “imagination”:

[T]he mind of man possesses a sort of creative power of its own; either in representing at pleasure the images of things in the order and manner in which they were received by the senses, or in combining those images in a new manner, and according to a different order. This power is called Imagination; and to this belongs whatever is called wit, fancy, invention, and the like. But it must be observed, that this power of the imagination is incapable of producing any thing absolutely new; it can only vary the disposition of those ideas which it has received from the senses.⁶

This passage is brimming with importance. Burke characterized the imagination as a creative faculty with the powers of representation, wit, fancy, and invention.

Consequently, the imagination is not merely passive but rather active and creative. While the imagination may produce new things, it may not produce absolutely new things. This section analyzes these claims and interacts with the (extensive) scholarship on it.

Creation

Burke clearly identified the imagination as a creative power. By representation, the person creates impressions of his sense experiences as he receives them, and by combination, he creates new ideas by using his imagination to unite his experiences in ways that differ from how he received them. Still, one interpretive tradition denies that

⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 189.

⁵ In fact, Burke used “faculty” or “faculties” only nineteen times throughout the Introduction and *Enquiry* (196–98, 201–2, 206–9, 221, 224, 238, 248, 251, 288, 313–14).

⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Burke retain the published conventions, including capitalization and spelling.

Burke supported a truly creative imagination. According to this view, he extended to imagination the powers of association, combination, imitation, reaction, rearrangement, recollection, and reproduction; but such powers are not the power of creation. Many of the scholars holding this interpretation adopt an empiricist view of Burke's epistemology.

While Burke maintained belief in such powers for the imagination, he interpreted them as being fundamentally creative powers because the imagination must create the representations and combinations that fill it. In declaring that the "imagination is incapable of producing any thing absolutely new," he was not shortchanging the faculty; he was simply defining it.⁷ In fact, the root of "imagination" is the word "image," which relates to concepts of representation, imitation, and resemblance. The imagination images things; it cannot image nothing. The imagination may create, but significantly, it may not create *ex nihilo*; it may create only *ex aliquo*. It is, in the words of Jesse Norman, a "recreative imagination," which allows the person "to extend experience into an understanding of new things and places and people."⁸ To claim the imagination may create something "absolutely new," to claim it may create *ex nihilo*, is to ascribe a divine status to it. For this reason, Lisa Rado's suggestion that Burke's view of the imagination "involves an inspired imitation of divine creation" may extend his meaning beyond his intention.⁹

However, the idea of conception rightly illustrates Burke's meaning. In his later career, he ascribed to imagination the capacity to conceive, for example in the *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*.¹⁰ That is, the imagination gives birth to an idea or image. Conception does not occur from nothing, yet it is truly creation; in the case of

⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2.

⁸ Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (New York: Basic, 2015), 27.

⁹ Lisa Rado, *The Modern Androgyne Imagination: A Failed Sublime* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 6.

¹⁰ Edmund Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1795), in *Writings*, 9:76, 78.

literal conception, it results in a new life, not simply a derivative one. Hence, Burke did not deny a creative imagination, but he defined the concept of creation differently than the proponents of this interpretative tradition.

Disagreements concerning Burke's view of the imagination may also correspond to how an interpreter places him historically. Whereas some assert that Burke was not Romantic enough, others posit he was proto-Romantic.¹¹ In fact, Burke was "romantic" in some ways but not in other ways. In an age of rationalism, he criticized the idolization of reason and emphasized powers like imagination and passion.¹² As Norman articulates it, Burke believed that "reason itself is limited and fallible."¹³ But he did not exchange the idolization of reason for the idolization of imagination. Consequently, William F. Byrne writes about "the 'romantic' Burke," precisely because he stressed the "creative" capacity of imagination, not just its "mimetic" one.¹⁴ Or as Paul Avis puts it, Burke challenged the rationalist hostility toward imagination but avoided Romantic excess.¹⁵ In summary, Burke defended a creative imagination while also recognizing it has natural limitations.

¹¹ Charles Edwyn Vaughan, *The Romantic Revolt*, vol. 10, *Periods of European Literature*, ed. Professor Saintsbury (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 120–37; Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929), 78, 94, 189, 262; William F. Byrne, "Burke's Higher Romanticism: Politics and the Sublime," *Humanitas* 19, nos. 1, 2 (2006): 15; Jonathan Shears, *The Romantic Legacy of Paradise Lost: Reading Against the Grain*, The Nineteenth Century Series (Farnham, GB: Ashgate, 2009), ch. 2; Richard Bourke, "Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Cf. Claes G. Ryn, *Will, Imagination and Reason: Irving Babbitt and the Problem of Reality* (Chicago: Regnery, 1986), 46.

¹² For example, the *Vindication* is a satire of the rationalism of Bolingbroke; see Edmund Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), in *Writings*, 1:129–33.

¹³ Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 258.

¹⁴ William F. Byrne, *Edmund Burke for Our Time: Moral Imagination, Meaning, and Politics* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 53.

¹⁵ Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 26, 39.

Representation

One way that Burke characterized the creative imagination is by the concept of representation whereby the imagination portrays the person's experience in his mind. In his introduction to the *Enquiry*, he described the pleasure of imagination in representing the senses by images that resemble them, as well as in representing passions like sympathy, love, grief, fear, anger, and joy.¹⁶ Burke maintained this basic position throughout his lifetime; approximately thirty years later, he wrote to his son, Richard Jr., that his (Richard's) situation was as "delicate as one's imagination can represent any thing."¹⁷ Burke's usage of "any thing" demonstrates a broad power of representation. He also commented in other letters on the imagination's power to "frame" (or represent) a scene, thereby showing the relationship between sense experience and the imagination's representation of the experience.¹⁸

However, interpreters disagree about Burke's view of the nature of imagination's power of representation. Vanessa L. Ryan interprets Burke's view of the imagination as "supplying the equivalent of sensation" and "merely a substitute . . . for sensation."¹⁹ Garrett Jeter also uses the word "substitution" and even argues that Burke "transposes" the imagination with the senses to achieve a "psychocorporealization" in which the "operations of the imagination [are] somewhat outside of the mind and within the senses" and that the "sensorium [establishes] a presence within the mind."²⁰ However,

¹⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2, 205; see also 204, 312.

¹⁷ The Right Hon. Edmund Burke to Richard Burke (August 16, 1791), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 4 vols., ed. Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam, and Sir Richard Bourke (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1844), 3:265. Hereafter, this collection will be referred to as *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*.

¹⁸ Edmund Burke to Henry Dundas (October 8, 1792), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 7:253; Edmund Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam (May 15, 1795), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 8:242.

¹⁹ Vanessa L. Ryan, "The Physiological Sublime: Burke's Critique of Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 2 (April 2001): 271.

²⁰ Garrett Jeter, "Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*: Towards a Corporeal Epistemology and Politics," *The CEA Critic* 76, no. 3 (November 2014): 240. Additional scholars following a similar interpretive line to Jeter and Ryan include Manuel Olguín, "The Theory of Ideal Beauty in Arteaga and

Jeter's interpretation strains Burke's view, reading into him what he did not state. Burke described the imagination in terms of representation, not transposition; additionally, he believed the sense faculty is distinct from the imaginative faculty.²¹ Thus, their operations differ so that, according to Bruce C. Swaffield, the impressions of imagination, including representations, "are as genuine as physical sensations."²²

Furthermore, Ryan's and Jeter's characterizations of "equivalency" and "substitution" are too strong. Burke articulated the impressions of imagination as being representative of the senses but not equivalent to them or a substitution for them; he did not portray the imagination as creating an exact replica of an object. Admittedly, he said it represents the person's sense impressions "in the order and manner in which they were received" so that there is close agreement between the senses and imagination.²³ Indeed, barring some mental inadequacy or problem, a representation has likeness (close agreement) to the person's impression, but it is not equivalent to it or a substitution for it. Tom Huhn's interpretation correctly preserves the proper difference between the functions of these two faculties: "Imagination, if you will, *imagines* itself continuous with sense. . . . [T]he imagination invites us to return to sense, even if it is only a return to the *idea* of sense."²⁴ Additionally, characterizations like "equivalency" and "substitution" do not adequately account for Burke's examination of the imagination's capacity for deception, delusion, and exaggeration (examined in chapter 3), in which cases other

Winckelmann," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 8, no. 1 (Sept 1949–June 1950): 22; R. L. Brett, *Fancy and Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1969; repr., New York: Routledge, 2018), 27–28; and Christopher Reid, *Edmund Burke and the Practice of Political Writing* (Dublin: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 192.

²¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197–98.

²² Bruce C. Swaffield, *Rising from the Ruins: Roman Antiquities in Neoclassic Literature* (Newcastle upon Tyne, GB: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 89.

²³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

²⁴ Tom Huhn, *Imitation and Society: The Persistence of Mimesis in the Aesthetics of Burke, Hogarth, and Kant* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 23.

powers of imagination, such as its capacity for invention, have joined with its power of representation.

Wit

Burke also characterized the creative imagination by the term “wit,” which relates to the concept of sight and refers to the ability to perceive the resemblance between objects. “Perception” refers to the concept of cognitive sight. The imagination may simply represent its impression of a given object so that wit may discern much resemblance. Or the imagination may vary its impression of the object so that wit discerns some resemblance. In these ways, “wit” concerns the powers of representation and combination but is distinct from them. Representation reproduces; combination varies; wit compares.

Burke used two expressions in his *Enquiry* to describe this power: wit is chiefly conversant in “tracing resemblances” and in “making resemblances.”²⁵ Huhn rightly observes that Burke was not making a material distinction by these two expressions. But then Huhn criticizes “Burke’s conflation” for introducing an “ambiguity of mimesis” and proceeds to demarcate “mimesis as *tracing*” and “mimesis as *making*,” which he defines as meaning “mere reproduction” and “production of new resemblances,” respectively.²⁶ However, Huhn’s issue is not fundamentally with Burke’s conflating two ideas but rather with his defining of creation. That is, Burke did not treat tracing resemblances and making resemblances as being materially different because tracing is a form of making, just as representation is a form of creating.

²⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2.

²⁶ Huhn, *Imitation and Society*, 17.

Burke then proceeded to contrast wit with judgment. Whereas wit traces resemblances, judgment finds differences.²⁷ Wit synthesizes and forms; it makes analogies and sees likenesses and organizes the person's thought so that he sees an object according to a particular order or structure.²⁸ In tracing resemblances, wit makes connections and so builds one's epistemic outlook. As Burke stated, "[B]y making resemblances . . . we enlarge our stock."²⁹ However, judgment analyzes and evaluates; it notes dissimilarities. Koen Vermeir and Michal Funk Deckard interpret Burke to admit a "fundamental difference" between wit and judgment but not a "material distinction" between them.³⁰ However, Burke stated explicitly that "they differ so very materially in many respects."³¹ Hence, when Burke contrasted wit and judgment, which are functions of imagination and reason, he was contrasting two materially distinct faculties.

Interpreters have disagreed about how precisely Burke correlated the imagination-judgment relationship. For example, Neal Wood interpreted him to oppose imagination and judgment.³² Indeed, both faculties may oppose each other in their natural tendencies, but they may also mutually benefit one another. Accordingly, Rob Goodman posits a "complex relationship between the two, in which well-functioning judgment does obstruct the imagination, but in which imagination moves us to practice and develop

²⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201. Byrne argues Burke used "judgment" in two different ways, but this distinction goes beyond the scope of this work (*Burke for Our Time*, 55).

²⁸ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 67; David Dwan, "Edmund Burke and the Emotions," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 4 (2011): 585.

²⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 202.

³⁰ Koen Vermeir and Michal Funk Deckard, eds., "Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility: An Introductory Essay," in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's Philosophical Enquiry*, International Archives of the History of Ideas (New York: Springer, 2012), 52.

³¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2.

³² Neal Wood, "The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke's Political Thought," *Journal of British Studies* 4, no. 1 (November 1964): 45.

judgment.”³³ In fact, more than three decades later, Burke, writing in *Thoughts on French Affairs*, observed that imagination takes part in judgment.³⁴ Or as Byrne states, “Judgment always involves the imagination.”³⁵

However, Frans De Bruyn remarks that Burke’s view means the “imagination’s power of comparison must be policed, restrained, placed under tutelage; it is akin to an appetite that must be controlled. This task falls to the judgement.”³⁶ Burke undoubtedly recognized the potential for an immoral imagination, but he also recognized the potential for an immoral reasoning faculty. Overall, Burke did not believe that reason is necessarily over imagination or that imagination is necessarily over reason; rather, he believed they assist one another in their respective weaknesses. For this reason, Dugald Stewart, writing shortly after Burke’s death, understood Burke to hold that imagination is the essential zest that enlivens judgment from its indolence.³⁷ Ideally, imagination and judgment function as an epistemic system of checks and balances. Nevertheless, Burke recognized that people often do not balance these faculties properly: a “perfect union of wit and judgment is one of the rarest things in the world.”³⁸

Fancy

Burke did not examine the concept of fancy as such in the *Enquiry*, but he used the term or a derivative throughout.³⁹ While he sometimes used “fancy” metonymically

³³ Rob Goodman, *Words on Fire: Eloquence and Its Conditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 115n93.

³⁴ Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791), in *Writings*, 8:349.

³⁵ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 194.

³⁶ Frans De Bruyn, “‘Expressive Uncertainty’: Edmund Burke’s Theory of the Sublime and Eighteenth-Century Conceptions of Metaphor,” in *Science of Sensibility*, ed. Vermeir and Deckard, 272.

³⁷ Dugald Stewart, *Philosophical Essays* (Edinburgh: George Ramsay, 1810), 520.

³⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 202.

³⁹ E.g., Burke, *Enquiry*, 197, 201, 234–35, 272, 277, 279, 316.

for imagination,⁴⁰ he generally articulated it as a capacity of imagination.⁴¹ Thus, N. S. Glazkov argues that Burke distinguished imagination and fancy but did not openly contrast them.⁴² At root, “fancy,” which contracts “fantasy,” relates to the production of mental phantasms. In this sense, all people participate in fancy because the mind’s powers of representation and combination create different possible images. Fancy is a function of imagination but not a synonym for it, meaning to imagine or suppose. Someone may fancy that something is likely or true.⁴³ Or he may fancy something that is unlikely or false, such as whims or fallacious ideas.⁴⁴

Burke also warned, in *An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History*, that the “imagination” not balanced with reason may lead to what is “strained and fanciful.”⁴⁵ He even identified some “fancies” as “brilliant imaginations” in his speech on the Acts of Uniformity, while still believing they were implausible.⁴⁶ Sometimes false fancies are relatively innocent and innocuous. Other times they are quite dangerous for individuals and societies. Burke exemplified this point in a letter by describing some gentlemen as having a “disturbed imagination” on the level of madmen,

⁴⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 234, 316. Burke also used the term “fancy” metonymically for the term “taste” (277).

⁴¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

⁴² Н. С. Глазков, “Воображение и фантазия в консервативном дискурсе: особенности перевода,” *Филос. науки* 63, нет. 4 (2020): 105. Cf. James Engell who notes that Burke distinguished the two faculties (*The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981], 174).

⁴³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 198, 279, 283–84; cf. 235.

⁴⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197, 272.

⁴⁵ Edmund Burke, *An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History* (1757–?), in *Writings*, 1:401.

⁴⁶ Edmund Burke, Speech on the Acts of Uniformity (February 6, 1772), in *Works and Correspondence*, 6:86.

“fancying” they have problems they do not actually have.⁴⁷ Additionally, his persistent criticisms of abstractionism throughout his career illustrate the problems with confusing fallacious fancies with reality. In such cases, perception is not reality. But in a manner of speaking, perception may become reality when the person acts on it because his actions prompt counteractions, contributing to the self-fulfilling prophecy of the person’s imaginary perception. Because Burke recognized the perils that may result from such fancies, he stressed the cultivation of a moral imagination.

Invention

Alongside wit and fancy, Burke ascribed invention to the creative imagination. The “mind of man possesses a sort of creative power,” he said in his *Enquiry*, in “combining” the person’s sense impressions “in a new manner, and according to a different order.”⁴⁸ Burke then illustrated the imagination’s inventive power in three ways: the imagination may combine images from sense experience in new and different ways, it may vary ideas it has received from sense experience, and it may produce new images by making resemblances.⁴⁹

Hence, Burke believed the imagination may invent (new manner, different order), but it has limits. Burke hinted at these limits by the qualification “sort of,” which Christophe Madelein interprets to mean the imagination is creative but not beyond the power of combination, as well as by his statement (previously considered) that the imagination may produce new things but not “absolutely” new things.⁵⁰ Burke’s

⁴⁷ Edmund Burke to Unknown (post February 18, 1793), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 7:350–51. Cf. Burke, *Enquiry*, 244; and Burke, *Appeal*, 460.

⁴⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

⁴⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2. Burke’s statements resolutely discount Derek Robbins’s claim that Burke held that the imagination has “no capacity to vary what it represents” (*Self-Presentation and Representative Politics: Essays in Context, 1960–2020* [London: Anthem, 2022], 97). Cf. Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 53.

⁵⁰ Christophe Madelein, *Juigchen in den Adel der Menschlijke Natuur: Het Verhevene in de Nederlanden (1770–1830)* (Gent, BE: Academia Press, 2010), 69. In fact, Burke used “sort of” several

articulation of the inventive imagination shows how he avoided the rationalist presumption of explaining phenomena completely and removing from them any sense of mystery but rather displayed epistemic humility (examined in chapter 6) in an age of presumed certainty, a theme he developed further in his discussion of the sublime.

Some interpreters have criticized Burke's understanding of the inventive imagination. For example, Huhn argues that the "term 'new resemblance' is itself fraught with an entanglement in what already exists," thereby diminishing the notion that an idea is new.⁵¹ However, Burke did not use the term "new resemblance." He used "new images," which the person may produce by making resemblances, which, for Burke, is the nature of human creation.⁵² Additionally, of course the imagination is entangled with what already exists because it cannot create from nothing; it must create from something. Yet what it produces or invents is truly new. The person may represent a goat or a man, and he may combine qualities from each and imagine a faun. Hence, James Engell rightly explains that the imagination has the "power to reorder experience and to cast nature in a new mould."⁵³ Similarly, Byrne interprets Burke's view to mean the imagination is not a "merely mimetic faculty" but a "great creative power."⁵⁴ Therefore, the imagination is a strong, constructive, synthetic faculty.

Burke's appeal to an inventive imagination was not limited to the *Enquiry* but appeared throughout his career in which he demonstrated its possibilities, limitations, and

dozen times throughout his *Enquiry* alone (198, 201, 208, 211–14, 220, 223, 225, 233, 235, 239, 243, 245–47, 252–53, 257, 262, 265–66, 275, 277, 279, 284, 287–88, 290, 292, 298, 302–4, 310, 317, 320).

⁵¹ Huhn, *Imitation and Society*, 17.

⁵² Burke, *Enquiry*, 202.

⁵³ Engell, *Creative Imagination*, 71. Ralph Cohen, whose interpretation has more in common with Huhn's, criticizes Engell's interpretation, arguing that Burke said "just the opposite" when he contended that imagination cannot create anything absolutely new but can only vary the dispositions of its sense experiences (*The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* by James Engell," *Criticism* 24, no. 2 [Spring 1982]: 176). However, Burke contended only that the imagination can create something new, not that it can create something absolutely new.

⁵⁴ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 182.

dangers. For example, in his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, while explaining England's profound economic growth vis-à-vis the American Colonies, Burke wrote that "invention is unfruitful, and imagination cold and barren."⁵⁵ Here, Burke closely associated imagination with invention. The inventive imagination may exaggerate specific claims for different purposes, but in this case, invention was unnecessary because circumstance exceeded fiction.

Burke also illustrated the inventive imagination in a passage from the *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election* about the politician George Savile, whom he described as being "illuminated with a most unbounded, peculiar, and original cast of imagination."⁵⁶ By "unbounded," Burke was likely not contradicting his prior statement that the imagination may not create "any thing absolutely new."⁵⁷ Neither was he using the term in the same sense he would use it later when criticizing the unbounded imagination of fanatics and zealots.⁵⁸ Rather, he was using the term figuratively to describe an imagination that shows genuine creative potential. In Savile's case, the inventive imagination produced distinction, refinement, and understanding, as well as fortune, benevolence, and patriotism. In others' cases, the inventive imagination may make plans, solve problems, create art, and a hundred other things.

However, the inventive imagination is not literally unbounded. Burke made this point in his *Abridgement* amid an explanation of the Saxons' theories of government. Certain ideas, he wrote, such as monarchy or aristocracy or representative government, "never could have entered their imaginations."⁵⁹ Burke was not insulting the Saxons; he

⁵⁵ Edmund Burke, *Speech on Conciliation with America* (March 22, 1775), in *Writings*, 3:116.

⁵⁶ Burke, *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, 644.

⁵⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

⁵⁸ Burke, *Appeal*, 460.

⁵⁹ Burke, *Abridgement*, 429.

was simply describing human nature. He was not attacking their governmental structure; he was explaining why their governmental system differed from England's, thereby exhibiting a sympathetic imagination. The inventive imagination may conceive of myriad possibilities and turn many of them into actualities, but it is not unlimited. Some ideas will likely never enter some people's imaginations because they lack the requisite background or experience. Burke made this same point in a character sketch about his son in which he alluded to the limitations of the child's imagination that is still in development and furnished with relatively little experience and knowledge.⁶⁰ Hence, the imagination is naturally inventive, but it cannot invent except that it has material from which to invent.

Again, Burke considered the inventive imagination in a letter, except that he used the imagery of metamorphosis. Recounting a "bumper toast" he heard from the attorney Thomas Erskine, Burke explained that Erskine "supplied something, I allow, from the stores of his imagination, in metamorphosing the jovial toasts of clubs, into solemn special arguments at the bar."⁶¹ The mind may store an idea and then transform that idea into something else. By using the term "metamorphose," Burke indicated a change in form or nature, demonstrating his abiding belief in an inventive imagination that may create something truly new and not simply derivative. If the hypothetical imagination sees possibility, the metamorphosing imagination sees actuality.

The inventive imagination has much potential for good and bad alike. For example, in *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland*, Burke wrote that bad ideas should be "entirely banished from our imaginations (where alone it has, or can have any

⁶⁰ Edmund Burke, "Character of His Son and Brother," in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 7:580.

⁶¹ Edmund Burke to William Elliot (May 26, 1795), in *Writings*, 9:30–31. Additionally, Burke referred to the "inventive" imagination amid the Hastings impeachment proceedings (Edmund Burke, Trial of Warren Hastings: Fifth Day [February 17, 1788], in *Works and Correspondence*, 7:431. Cf. Edmund Burke, Trial of Warren Hastings: Speech on the Sixth Charge [May 7, 1789], in *Works and Correspondence*, 8:32).

existence).”⁶² Imagined ideas may have unrealized existence in the sense that they do not exist in space-time world; even so, they have genuine existence because they exist in the imagination, without which they could not come to exist in the space-time world. This point highlights the awesome, creative power of imagination, which may give life to all manner of possible worlds. Ideas in the world exist first as ideas in the imagination. To keep bad ideas out of the world, people must keep bad ideas out of their imaginations. Consequently, Burke emphasized not simply the importance of the life of the mind; he emphasized more particularly the importance of the life of imagination.

Especially in his later career, Burke criticized the innovator’s use of imagination. Writing in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, he said, “Criticism is almost baffled in discovering the defects of what has not existed; and eager enthusiasm, and cheating hope, have all the wide field of imagination in which they may expatiate with little or no opposition.”⁶³ The innovating imagination may easily point to problems of the past, but critics of innovation may not as easily point to the problems of innovation because they do not yet exist. Then, by the time difficulties arise with an innovation, the innovator imagines still more untried, untested innovations.

But just as the inventive imagination may propagate bad ideas, it may also propagate good ones. Burke made this point in a prefatory remark before responding to William Knox’s *State of the Nation*: “The reader does not, I hope, imagine that I mean seriously to set about the refutation of these uningenius paradoxes and reveries without imagination.”⁶⁴ Knox’s ideas resulted from a fanciful imagination. However, the problem of bad ideas is not a problem of imagination per se; it is a problem of the idea. Thus, Burke aimed to refute Knox’s positions by making use of imagination.

⁶² Edmund Burke, *Two Letters on the Trade of Ireland* (April 23, 1778; May 2, 1778), in *Writings*, 9:510.

⁶³ Burke, *Reflections*, 216.

⁶⁴ Edmund Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* (1769), in *Writings*, 2:117.

Imagination in Relation to Other Powers of Human Nature

Significantly, the creative imagination does not exist in isolation from the other powers of human nature. It relates to the senses, reason, passions, and will, performing an important intermediary role among them. Imagination mediates the person's senses so that his impressions and thoughts are imagined impressions and thoughts. Burke was not suggesting the person cannot know the world outside of his mind; he was simply observing that the imagination mediates that knowledge. Additionally, the imagination gives rise to one's emotions and undergirds his actions. Hence, the imagination, as a faculty with the power of combination, also integrates the person's cognitive, affective, and volitive capacities.

Senses

First, concerning the senses and imagination, Burke wrote in his *Enquiry* that “the imagination is only the representative of the senses” and that “there must be just as close an agreement in the imaginations as in the senses of men.”⁶⁵ While the sense organs exist outside of the mind, the sense faculty exists within one's overall noetic structure, and crucially the imagination represents what the sense faculty has received. Burke's usage of “only” and his strong correlation between reality, the senses, and imagination have caused some scholars to paint him with colors of empiricism, sensationism, and mechanism.⁶⁶ Admittedly, Burke's language can sometimes sound empiricist.

However, other passages seem to conflict with aspects of these characterizations. For example, Burke described the imagination as an active faculty that creates representations and combinations, interacts with reason, gives rise to emotions,

⁶⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

⁶⁶ E.g., Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 312; Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 234; Ryan, “Physiological Sublime,” 271; and Dermot Ryan, *Technologies of Empire: Writing, Imagination, and the Making of Imperial Networks, 1750–1820* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), 43.

and shapes the will. Scholars have proposed numerous explanations to this puzzle. Empiricist interpreters admit that his position has some nuance but still hold that sense experience is nonetheless dominant in Burke's epistemology.⁶⁷ Other interpreters rightly observe that empiricist interpretations do not sufficiently account for Burke's strong statements on the power of imagination.⁶⁸

Engell argues that empiricist interpretations may misunderstand Burke's methodology. In his telling, Burke deviated from British empiricism by representing a "new criticism" that accepted the basic assumptions of empiricism but then used those assumptions to subvert empiricism. Specifically, Burke appealed to the doctrine of imagination in a manner that was distinctive from the empiricist tradition to provide for a "fuller, dynamic relationship between mind and nature."⁶⁹ Engell's interpretation makes sense of what appears confusing in Burke's epistemology. He was clearly operating within the tradition of British empiricism, interacting with figures like John Locke. Additionally, he had employed a similar methodology in *A Vindication of Natural Society* where he used the rationalist form to undermine rationalism. However, this interpretation is not the dominant or simplest one.

Others conclude that Burke was simply inconsistent. For example, Byrne holds to that position when considering this passage from the *Enquiry* but clarifies it did not result from any incompetence on Burke's part. Rather, he was young when writing it and was still working through his ideas. Additionally, he wanted to avoid "distorting or oversimplifying his analysis through a false precision" so as not "to become trapped in a particular philosophical box" but "to maintain the maximum possible openness toward

⁶⁷ E.g., Jeter, "Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*," 240.

⁶⁸ Taylor Burleigh Wilkins, "Natural Law, Human Nature, and Natural Rights in Edmund Burke" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1965), 165–68.

⁶⁹ Engell, *Creative Imagination*, 71.

the subject matter.”⁷⁰ Perhaps Byrne is correct with his interpretation, but it is not as straightforward as it may appear. For example, Burke closely associated the senses and imagination throughout his career, while also affirming belief in a strong imagination and *a priori* knowledge. Also, Burke’s expressions frequently sound categorical and unequivocal throughout the *Enquiry*.

The simplest solution to this apparent incongruity may be to interpret it closely in consideration of the immediate textual context. Burke described the imagination as representing the senses. Again, barring some mental shortcoming, the imagination may closely resemble the senses, but notably the resemblance is a representation of the person’s impressions; it is not one and the same with them. Therefore, the imagination connects the person’s mind to the space-time world. The idea of mediation may explain Burke’s meaning of “only.” In explaining that the “imagination is only the representative of the senses,” he could have intended for “only” to modify “representative” rather than “is.” In that case, the imagination is not only the representative of the senses but rather the only representative of the senses. After all, just three sentences prior, Burke referred to the power of imagination not just to represent but also to combine, characterizing it by wit, fancy, and invention. This interpretation makes sense of the context, permitting greater continuity and less incoherence between Burke’s statements.

This proposition has ramifications for Burke’s understanding not just of the senses and imagination but also of man’s nature more generally. Specifically, the person’s powers of the senses, reason, passions, and will do not interact with the world except that such interactions are mediated or translated by the imagination. Engell comments on this point, saying, “The imagination mediates between and joins the inner

⁷⁰ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 54–56. For more sources concluding that Burke was inconsistent, see Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 295; and Francis P. Canavan, *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1960), 37–39, 45.

self with the external world.”⁷¹ Yuval Levin expresses a similar idea, describing the imagination as giving “order and shape” to the person’s sense data.⁷² The same principle would apply also to any of the person’s *a priori* ideas.

Thus, the imagination is not a tool the person occasionally uses but an ever-present component of the human constitution. It is the form or filter or grid or lens through which the person sees the world, providing a picture from which he thinks, feels, and acts. No one faculty functions “in a vacuum” but rather operates “within an imaginative context.”⁷³ Immanuel Kant, who had read Burke’s *Enquiry*, would also examine the mind’s role in shaping the person’s understanding of the world.⁷⁴ But Kant, in his transcendental idealism, went much further than Burke went to the point of claiming the person may know only phenomena but not noumena.

Burke believed the person may truly know the space-time world, even if it is an imagined knowledge, because the imagination, as an *a priori* noetic structure that mediates the world to the mind, establishes continuity between the world and the mind. To explain the logic of Burke’s position, Byrne appeals to the concept of precognition, which he uses to mean that the imagination “gives order and meaning” to an experience or idea even before the person has consciously considered it. The person lives “in a world that is an imaginative construct.” Yet he can truly “perceive or ‘get at’ reality with the aid of the imagination.”⁷⁵ Hence, the imagination powerfully shapes the person’s epistemic

⁷¹ Engell, *Creative Imagination*, 71.

⁷² Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 182; Yuval Levin, *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left* (New York: Basic, 2014), 58.

⁷³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 66.

⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 427.

⁷⁵ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 67; cf. 182–83, 194–95. Byrne borrows the concept of precognition from Ryn whose interactions with Burke are present but scant (*Will, Imagination and Reason*, 144). Cf. Blake, “Natural Law and History,” 254.

vision; still, he may know the space-time world external to his mind because it is mediated by the imagination from the senses.

The sheer power of imagination has profound importance for man's other powers. Byrne, having explained the imagination makes sense data "meaningful" through its power of representation, nonetheless recognizes that an apparent "problem with one's 'reason' may not be a problem with 'reason' per se but with the imaginative framework within which it is functioning"⁷⁶ so that the "extent to which one's imagination succeeds or fails in getting at reality has a tremendous impact on the results of one's reasoning."⁷⁷ A similar logic would also apply to "problems" with people's passions and wills. Of course, this point does not simply exculpate the person's reason, passions, and will because Burke also discussed the problems with each of these powers. It simply means that anthropological troubleshooting is complex.

Jeter acknowledges that reality is mediated to the human person, except that, as one adopting an empiricist interpretation of Burke, he ascribes this mediatory role to the senses.⁷⁸ Indeed, the faculty of sense likewise plays a mediatory role in the person's picture of the world. Specifically, said Burke in his *Enquiry*, the senses receive images or ideas from the world and then present them to the person's imagination, which then represents those images.⁷⁹ In this way, the faculties of sense and imagination, while distinct, work together with the imagination playing a vital role in the process.

Burke did not limit his remarks on the connection between the faculties of sense and imagination to the *Enquiry*; he also illustrated it elsewhere, demonstrating that the ways imagination may be acted on are as wide as one's experiences. For example, in

⁷⁶ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 182.

⁷⁷ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 67; cf. 35.

⁷⁸ Jeter, "Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*," 240.

⁷⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 198 ("present"), 201 ("received").

Conciliation, referring to the poet and politician Richard Glover, Burke wrote, “[T]o the fire of imagination and extent of erudition . . . he has added a consummate knowledge in the commercial interest of his country, formed by a long course of enlightened and discriminating experience.”⁸⁰ Through the course of a person’s experiences, he may add knowledge to his imagination; in Glover’s case, it was economic knowledge.⁸¹ Reason alone does not hold knowledge; the imagination holds knowledge. Thus, knowledge is not knowledge alone; it is imaginative knowledge. Ideas are not ideas alone; they are imaginative ideas. The imagination mediates concepts to one’s reasoning faculty.

Here, Burke also commented on the quality of one’s sense experiences, describing the nature of Glover’s experience as “enlightened” and “discriminating.” While Burke opposed certain Enlightenment ideals, he did not oppose true enlightenment. Good experiences and good ideas enlighten the imagination. However, bad experiences may have a poor effect on the imagination. So, the wise person manages his experiences well, knowing their power to form the imagination and thus the person according to a particular pattern.

While the imagination may represent economic and political ideas, more generally it concerns the stuff of ordinary, everyday life. Burke made this point in a letter to the Marquess of Rockingham, explaining he did not want to think about politics and public affairs: “I endeavour to banish them out of my imagination as much as I can.”⁸² He had not even read a newspaper in the previous month, he said, but admitted to reading a political pamphlet. What fills one’s sense experiences fills his imagination; for his part,

⁸⁰ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 112.

⁸¹ That knowledge may come from the senses and *a posteriori* experience is a given to practically everyone, denied only by the strictest rationalists.

⁸² Edmund Burke to the Marquess of Rockingham (September 1777), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 3:378.

Burke wanted to fill his experiences and therefore his imagination with something other than politics. However, imagination does not act in isolation from reason.

Reason

Burke correlated imagination and reason throughout his career.⁸³ Several passages from his early career especially express this connection. In summary, they show that imagination and reason alike may help or harm. They also show that the wise person allows the strengths of imagination to assist the weaknesses of reason and the strengths of reason to assist the weaknesses of imagination. Finally, they show that the imagination is properly restrained by right morality and does not presume an elevated rank with dangerous speculations.

For example, in “Religion of No Efficacy,” Burke wrote, “It is true indeed that enthusiasm often misleads us. So does reason too.” Burke plainly distinguished imagination and reason (by “enthusiasm,” he was referring to the passions arising from the imagination).⁸⁴ Moreover, he remarked that each may deceive the person. Still, he did not dismiss either imagination or reason because they each comprise part of man’s epistemic constitution.

Yet just as imagination and reason may mislead the person, they may also assist him: “I believe that we act most when we act with all the Powers of our Soul; when we use our Enthusiasm to elevate and expand our Reasonings; and our Reasoning to

⁸³ E.g., Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 180; Edmund Burke to the Bishop of Chester (November 24, 1771), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 1:313; Burke, *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, 644; Edmund Burke, *Speech on Fox’s India Bill* (December 1, 1783), in *Writings*, 5:426; Burke, *Trial of Hastings: Fifth Day*, 431; and Burke, *Appeal*, 463. Each of these passages, excepting the one in his *Observations*, is analyzed subsequently.

⁸⁴ Most interpreters link Burke’s reference to enthusiasm to emotion, e.g., Peter J. Stanlis, ed., “Edmund Burke and the Scientific Rationalism of the Enlightenment,” in *Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and the Modern World* (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1967), 105; and Francis Canavan, *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1987), 65. However, emotion results from imagination in Burke’s viewpoint. Hence, some interpreters link Burke’s reference to enthusiasm specifically to imagination, e.g., Orienne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Property: Rebellious Daughters, 1786–1826* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 40.

check the Roving of our Enthusiasm.”⁸⁵ Burke did not prioritize either imagination or reason over the other but rather spoke of them together as “soul.” R. R. Fennessey supports this interpretation, explaining, “A man is not a simple thinking machine, but a creature of feeling, passion, instinct, and habit. All these are part of his nature as much as reason is; and to be true to his nature a man should use them all.”⁸⁶

This passage from “Religion” also shows that Burke believed not simply that imagination and reason are individual faculties that may mislead or assist the person but more specifically that they interrelate and may mutually help or harm one another. Richard Bourke remarks on the prospect of harm when he explains that “imagination [is] vulnerable to enthusiasm or inspiration, laying the mind open to the extremes of passion and self-regard.”⁸⁷ Yet also imagination and reason may help one another, Burke explained, the imagination elevating and expanding reason, and reason checking and correcting imagination. So, when the imagination is tempted to rove, reason may anchor it.

Burke further related imagination and reason in his *Abridgement*, explaining that each may lead the person into falsehood and inconsistency. A false opinion may owe its birth to the “weak struggles of unenlightened reason” or to the “simplicity” of “imagination” so that the human mind blends “imagination and reasoning together, to unite ideas the most inconsistent.”⁸⁸ Whereas rationalists associated reason with enlightenment, Burke observed that reason may be unenlightened. Again, Burke

⁸⁵ Edmund Burke, “Religion of No Efficacy Considered as a State Engine” [1750–1756], in *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke: Poems, Characters, Essays and Other Sketches in the Hands of Edmund and William Burke Now Printed for the First Time in Their Entirety*, ed. H. V. F. Somerset (1957; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 68–69.

⁸⁶ R. R. Fennessey, *Burke, Paine, and the Rights of Man: A Difference of Political Opinion* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), 72.

⁸⁷ Bourke, “Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism,” 30.

⁸⁸ Burke, *Abridgement*, 352–53.

criticized many Enlightenment ideals, but he did not oppose true enlightenment. Additionally, he observed that the imagination may be simple or gullible. The wise person thus guards against such prospects. Yet, just as the mind may lead the person into falsehood, it may also lead him to truth if he enlightens his reason and cultivates a careful imagination.

As in both “Religion” and *Abridgement*, Burke connected the faculties of imagination and reason in the preface of the second edition of the *Vindication* where he parodied Bolingbroke’s deism and rationalism. Specifically, Burke, while criticizing the deists’ “indefensible” religious and political theories, observed how they cause people to “grow doubtful of their own Reason” by their “pleasing Impressions on the Imagination,” which “subsist and produce their Effect, even after the Understanding has been satisfied of their unsubstantial Nature.” The person’s imagination may give life to bad ideas, causing him to doubt his reason, even after his understanding has demonstrated the falsehood of the ideas: “There is a sort of Gloss upon ingenuous Falsehoods, that dazzles the Imagination, but which neither belongs to, nor becomes the sober Aspect of Truth.”⁸⁹ Here, Burke criticized the way one’s reason may impress and deceive another’s imagination and reason, even though he knows better.

This passage is contested in the scholarship. Sharon Spaulding Biddle posits from it that Burke suggested two types of reason: (a) right or constructive reason and (b) speculative or destructive reason.⁹⁰ Biddle rightly distinguishes between good and bad thinking. However, Burke’s primary division does not seem to be between two types of reason; it seems to be between imagination and reason. Again, he described imagination as being more gullible than reason because it is more easily dazzled by falsehoods.

⁸⁹ Burke, *Vindication*, 134–35.

⁹⁰ Sharon Spaulding Biddle, “Conservative Communication: A Critical Analysis of the Rhetorical Behaviors of Edmund Burke, Conservative Exemplar” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1973), 110.

Additionally, the imagination is powerful, capable of causing the person to doubt his reason even when he knows it is right.⁹¹ Hence, the unanchored imagination roves.

Even so, Burke did not dismiss the faculty of imagination, just as he did not dismiss the faculty of reason. His point was to forewarn that each may be deceived. Bolingbroke represented a form of rationalist skepticism. However, Burke subverted rationalism by being skeptical of its skepticism. Peter J. Stanlis thus argued that Burke belongs to the “English tradition of intellectual skepticism.”⁹² The wise person does not take his sense experiences for granted but reflects on whether they would lead him to truth or falsehood and how they would affect his mental faculties.

Burke continued, still in the *Vindication*, explaining that a “Mind which has no Restraint from a Sense of its own Weakness, of its subordinate Rank in the Creation, and of the extreme Danger of letting the Imagination loose upon some Subjects may very plausibly attack every thing the most excellent and venerable,” such as the “divine Fabricks” of the “Wisdom and Power of God in his Creation.” Burke additionally identified the unrestrained mind with man’s “Ideas of Reason and Fitness,” which result in “vulgar Reasonings.”⁹³ In summary, this passage teaches that the wise person restrains the faculties of his mind from speculations that presume an elevated rank; the restrained mind is the mind that is cultivated by a moral imagination. By contrast, the unrestrained mind, which includes a loose imagination and vulgar reason, is exceedingly dangerous because it does not subordinate itself to God and attacks divine excellencies.

The restrained mind does not participate in dangerous speculations. While Burke did not use the word “speculation” in the immediate textual context, it rightly

⁹¹ See Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 126.

⁹² Stanlis, “Edmund Burke and the Scientific Rationalism of the Enlightenment,” 93–102. Stanlis argued that others belonging to this tradition include Samuel Butler; John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester; John Dryden; Jonathan Swift; and Samuel Johnson.

⁹³ Burke, *Vindication*, 135.

describes his point. Several interpreters make this connection, including both Neill Randolph Joy and Richard Bourke who articulate the unrestrained mind in terms of “speculation.” Joy refers to such speculation as being unstable, unguarded, incautious, irreverent, arrogant, and destructive, subverting and revolutionizing morality, and Bourke connects it with an “empire of reason” that applies “abstract truth” without reference to circumstances.⁹⁴ Bourke additionally observes, “Reason, when it lacks restraint, loses the quality of reasonableness; it is derailed by a native enthusiasm for invention.”⁹⁵ Thus, Burke admitted dangerous speculations, but speculation as such is not the problem because, as he would acknowledge in his *Enquiry*, speculations may also be “exalted.”⁹⁶ The danger is not in speculation itself but in unrestrained speculation; the imagination may speculate but not beyond its rightful rank. So, Burke was not wholly against imagination, reason, or speculation; he was against only the abuse of them.

The restrained mind is also a mind that is cultivated by a moral imagination. The term “moral imagination” does not appear in this passage—it would not appear for thirty-five years—but the idea is partly present with Burke’s recognition that man’s mind and therefore imagination occupies a subordinate place in God’s created order. Consequently, Byrne explains that the person restrains his mind by cultivating a moral imagination without which he finds himself “hurtling toward an abyss in which anything and everything is questioned, and in which much that is ‘excellent and venerable’ is destroyed, along with any sense of meaning.” In Byrne’s telling, the unrestrained mind precipitates even nihilism, whereas the restrained mind, the moral imagination, brings

⁹⁴ Neill Randolph Joy, “The Art of Political Satire in Five Works of Edmund Burke” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), 47; Richard Bourke, “Liberty, Authority, and Trust in Burke’s Idea of Empire,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 3 (July 2000): 462. Bourke’s interpretation highlights the connections between Burke’s earlier and later writings because Burke would later criticize the “new conquering empire of light of reason” in *Reflections* (128).

⁹⁵ Bourke, “Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism,” 31.

⁹⁶ As Burke acknowledges in his *Enquiry*, speculations may also be “exalted” (191).

about true meaning. Byrne continues, “This [loss of meaning] occurs if we lose the ‘sublime principles’ by which we remove ourselves from the center stage and treat the world with a measure of awe and respect, instead of treating it as no more than raw material to be made subject to our capricious will.”⁹⁷ Like the roving imagination, the extravagant sublime can be dangerous, leading to arrogance; but like the restrained imagination, the principled sublime can be helpful, teaching the person humility.

However, just as the imagination may be restrained, it may also be unrestrained. Charles Parkin leaned into this negative prospect for imagination: “There is a boundary to men’s passions when they act from feeling, none when they are under the influence of imagination; and uncontrolled reason partakes of this expansive quality,” which then “spins theories and speculations.”⁹⁸ While Parkin rightly noted the challenges of imagination, his evaluation of the faculty (“none”) may be too strong. Yes, Burke commented on the “extreme danger” of the loose imagination, but he did not say it is without boundaries. Imagination is limited by the mind’s capacities and experiences. Additionally, feeling is not limited where imagination is not because, according to Burke, feeling arises from imagination.⁹⁹ But certainly, this passage from the *Vindication*, like the passages from both “Religion” and *Abridgement*, demonstrates the importance of the person forming and using his imagination morally.

⁹⁷ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 101. Byrne’s reference to the sublime invokes Burke’s development of the concept in the *Enquiry*, which should prompt the person to wonder in amazement at his subordinate place in the created order. Even so, Burke also referred to the concept in his *Vindication*, commenting again on the “Restraint” the person “ought to lay on the extravagant Sublimities, and excentrick Rovings of our Minds” (138).

⁹⁸ Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke’s Political Thought: An Essay* (Cambridge University Press, 1956; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 106.

⁹⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

Passions

In addition to interacting with the senses and reason, the imagination connects to the person's passions. Writing in his *Enquiry*, Burke described the "imagination" as the "most extensive province . . . of all our passions."¹⁰⁰ Again, he mentioned "the passions" and "the imagination which principally raises them."¹⁰¹ While the passions do not refer to a faculty of the mind like sense, imagination, and reason, they are nonetheless "organs of the mind."¹⁰² Thus, they have what David Dwan calls a "cognitive dimension."¹⁰³ In a manner of speaking, the imagination transforms one's experiences and reflections into passions. The precise nature of this transformation depends on how the person has formed his imagination.

Burke held to this understanding throughout his career. For example, amid a discussion of biblical hermeneutics in the *Abridgement*, he remarked that "the allegorical gave way to the literal explication; the imagination had less scope; and the affections were less touched."¹⁰⁴ Just as he closely associated imagination and invention, he closely associated imagination and affection. Imagination supports affection; but an object may not evoke one's passions if it has not captured his imagination. Similarly, some forty years later in his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke commented that the historical European commonwealth had produced a "pleasing variety" to "enrich the imagination" and "meliorate the heart," again linking imagination and passion.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

¹⁰¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 269. Cf. Wood, "The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke's Political Thought," 46; Wilkins, "Natural Law, Human Nature, and Natural Rights in Edmund Burke," 178–79; and Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 29.

¹⁰² Burke, *Enquiry*, 227.

¹⁰³ Dwan, "Edmund Burke and the Emotions," 585.

¹⁰⁴ Burke, *Abridgement*, 401.

¹⁰⁵ Edmund Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), in *Writings*, 9:249.

If imagination and reason interrelate, and if imagination gives rise to the passions, then reason would presumably relate to the passions, even if indirectly. But then in the *Enquiry* Burke states, “So long as we are conversant with the sensible qualities of things, hardly any more than the imagination seems concerned; little more also than the imagination seems concerned when the passions are represented, because by the force of natural sympathy they are felt in all men without any recourse to reasoning.”¹⁰⁶ This statement appears to create inconsistency with his other statements about the person’s faculties and powers. As a result, some scholars understandably interpret this passage to mean that reason is not involved in the person’s production of passion and sympathy.¹⁰⁷ Jeter even argues that Burke devalued not only reason but also imagination in favor of a corporeal epistemology: “*Enquiry* diminishes imagination’s and reason’s significances in human phenomenological experience vis-à-vis corporeal motions. . . . The mental ideative ability yields to senses, and passions circumvent the rational powers, creating a physicalized epistemological structure understanding.”¹⁰⁸

Such interpretations are understandable but not required by the text so that Burke’s remark does not create necessary contradiction with his other statements. The whole of the *Enquiry* suggests that Burke did not diminish the imagination in his discussion of the passions. But neither did he diminish reason. Rather, he was attempting to place the person’s mental faculties in their proper relations in view of his common experiences. Admittedly, Burke isolated such concepts more in the *Enquiry* than in subsequent works, whereas he integrated them more in other works. This methodological difference may have resulted from Burke’s development as a thinker, or it may have resulted from his purpose in the *Enquiry* to analyze such concepts individually, or it may

¹⁰⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 205.

¹⁰⁷ E.g., Matthew W. Binney, “Edmund Burke’s Sublime Cosmopolitan Aesthetic,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 647.

¹⁰⁸ Jeter, “Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry*,” 240.

be both. Either way, Burke did not argue from this passage that imagination alone perceives the sensible world; he qualified his statement: “hardly more than imagination” and “little more than imagination.” Additionally, he used the indeterminate “seems.” In fact, Burke specified several pages later that reason may influence the passions but not nearly to the same degree as the imagination.¹⁰⁹

By imagination, the person perceives the sensible representation of the passions and feels the force of natural sympathy in his breast. Often, this phenomenon occurs without much conscious reflection. Thus, Byrne interprets Burke’s meaning to include the capacity to make judgments on a “subconscious level” so that “we are not fully aware that we are making a judgment at the time.”¹¹⁰ While Burke did not use the language of “subconsciousness,” his understanding of these concepts demonstrates that idea. Hence, Byrne explains that the person’s “feelings” are “reflective of judgments we have made . . . on a subconscious level.”¹¹¹ The person may later engage his reason consciously and analyze any experiences he has had. Such reflection thereafter shapes his imaginative outlook, impacting the way he sees the sensible world and the passions he feels from it. In this way, the faculty of reason also informs one’s passions, even if subconsciously.

Burke also joined imagination, emotion, and reason in his *Reflections* by qualifying his reference to the “moral imagination” with the phrase, “which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies.”¹¹² Here, Burke integrated the person’s mental powers. Interestingly, Mary Wollstonecraft criticized Burke, with no small degree of *ad hominem* rhetoric, for succumbing to emotion and imagination rather than turning to

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 221.

¹¹⁰ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 70.

¹¹¹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 73.

¹¹² Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

reason: “[Y]our pretty flights arise from your pampered sensibility. . . . [Y]ou foster every emotion till the fumes, mounting to your brain, dispel the sober suggestions of reason. . . . [R]eflection inflames your imagination, instead of enlightening your understanding.”¹¹³ Burke would not agree with her characterization of his position because he appeals explicitly to reason and understanding in his writings and speeches. The issue is not that he opposed reason but that he opposed rationalism. In his anthropology, Burke viewed man rather as a composite of sense, imagination, reason, passion, and will.

Will

Finally, Burke also presented the power of will. In his *Enquiry*, for example, he observed that “an act of the will is necessary”¹¹⁴ for raising images or ideas in the mind and that “the will” may seize “upon the senses and imagination.”¹¹⁵ In one sense, the will precedes the operation of one’s cognitive faculties, meaning the person must direct his senses, imagination, and reason to function in certain ways. To this extent, the will is powerful and consequently may profoundly shape these other faculties. Sometimes the reason two people see the same object in radically distinct ways is because they have different habits or patterns of living. For this reason, the person must form his will carefully and prudently. As Byrne states, the person must be “internally oriented toward the true and the good,”¹¹⁶ and the will must be “properly bounded.”¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Women and Hints*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6–7.

¹¹⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 314.

¹¹⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268. This dissertation does not systematically trace Burke’s doctrine of the will, meaning that these passages signify only a representative sampling. Additionally, more discussion is given to the concept of the will in subsequent chapters.

¹¹⁶ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 186

¹¹⁷ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 114.

Yet also the imagination precedes the will. The imagination receives all kinds of impressions, but these impressions are not determinative because the imagination is an active, creative faculty that may be “pleased or displeased” with a given impression.¹¹⁸ The imagination mediates between the person’s thoughts so that he acts according to the picture he has formed in his mind. Sometimes people interpret an object in fundamentally different ways because they see it or imagine it differently. So, the imagination may also profoundly shape the will. It necessarily guides the person’s “sense of what one ought and ought not to do under particular circumstances.”¹¹⁹ Therefore, the person must form his imagination by the right standards: “religion, respect for ancestors, [and] the right sort of theatrical and literary references.”¹²⁰ Burke thus recognized a circular nature to the imagination-will relationship by which each power may challenge or support the other one and highlighted the importance of the moral will and moral imagination.

Paul Fussell associated Burke with the “humanist sense of the absolute freedom of the will as the basis for ethics.”¹²¹ While Burke undoubtedly engaged the topic of the will, he did not affirm its absolute freedom because it is bounded by its capacity and cultivation. In fact, he did not even treat the will as a central category in the same manner that he treats the senses, imagination, reason, and passions, resulting in Byrne’s claim that Burke “rarely discusse[d] the will, and then usually in negative terms.”¹²² Certainly, Burke spoke of the will in negative terms throughout his career, whether regarding rationalism or radicalism or some other problem. Yet he also observed the person’s capacity to practice virtues like humility and justice. In summary, Burke’s

¹¹⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

¹¹⁹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 183.

¹²⁰ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 114.

¹²¹ Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 108.

¹²² Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 29.

doctrine of the will is more implicit and indirect than explicit and systematic, but the available evidence suggests a nuanced view of a will that is capable of vice and virtue.

Imagination

The imagination connects to each of man's powers in different ways, mediating the senses and reason and giving rise to the passions and will. The imagination, therefore, is vital, central, and integrative. Different interpreters have argued that Burke viewed certain elements as having greater primacy than others. For example, some scholars have asserted that Burke believed emotion to be the most fundamental human power.¹²³ Others have contended that Burke was a rationalist.¹²⁴ However, in view of his full corpus, Burke does not seem to have presented a specific anthropological component as being more foundational than another. Rather, he treated them all as essential powers that interrelate and influence one another, sometimes in harmony and sometimes at discord. The imagination elevates reason, but then reason corrects the imagination and consequently the passions. Abstracted reason and subjectivized emotion alike are dangerous: "Leave a man to his passions," wrote Burke amid the French Revolution, and "you leave a wild, eccentric nature, you leave a wild beast."¹²⁵

In other words, man's powers balance each other out. The imagination is a dynamic faculty. Because other human powers influence and guide the imagination, it is malleable; in manner of speaking, it has neuroplasticity. But because the imagination is active and creative, it also influences and guides the other human powers so that they too are changeable. Stanlis explained that Burke recognized that human nature is

¹²³ E.g., Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 256, 258.

¹²⁴ Wilkins, "Natural Law, Human Nature, and Natural Rights in Edmund Burke," 198. Wilkins clarifies that Burke opposed eighteenth-century, Enlightenment rationalism (150) but nonetheless characterizes him as a "rationalist in aesthetics" and "rationalist in politics" (198).

¹²⁵ Edmund Burke, Speech in Reply (May 30, 1794), in *Writings*, 7:289.

“mysterious” yet contains a “rich fusion” of elements that should be “integrated.”¹²⁶ Byrne expresses a similar point, saying the imagination is somehow “identified” with these other powers.¹²⁷ In fact, the failure to grasp this idea—that the imagination is a dynamic power that is distinctive from yet interacts with man’s other capacities—may have contributed to the confusion and disagreement that ensues from the scholarship on the precise nature of Burke’s anthropology. In many ways, Burke’s view is that the imagination functions as the metaphorical heart of this anthropological fusion because of the role it plays in relation to the other components. To that extent, the imagination is the center of the person’s being, the place where his cognitive, affective, and volitive components converge. Not for nothing did Burke associate the imagination with the soul and highlight its importance in the human constitution and for ethical development.¹²⁸

The person’s anthropology has profound implications for his ethic. From Burke’s perspective, a proper anthropology undergirds a proper ethic. William Hazlitt, writing approximately a decade after Burke’s death, recognized this point in Burke’s viewpoint, remarking that he knew the basis of morality is not founded in abstract reason but in the “nature of man, and his capacity of being affected by certain things from habit, from imagination, and sentiment, as well as from reason.”¹²⁹ Hence, the wise person works to form his total personality, including his imagination, according to good morals. If the imagination is “left untended,” says Levin, “it will direct our reason toward

¹²⁶ Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law*, 168. Although Stanlis was speaking specifically about the integration of reason and emotion, the principle he established may apply more broadly.

¹²⁷ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 83.

¹²⁸ Burke, “Religion of No Efficacy,” 68.

¹²⁹ William Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Burke” (1807), in *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*, 2nd ed. (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1822), 368.

violence and disorder.”¹³⁰ Additionally, the morals and stories by which the person forms his imagination have far-reaching consequences for every aspect of his existence.

The moral imagination assists the person in perceiving the world rightly, but the malformed imagination deceives him into seeing it wrongly. For such reasons, the ethical cultivation of imagination is paramount for the moral formation of his other faculties and powers. Burke’s contribution to this broader topic is significant because he lived against the backdrop of British empiricism. While he emphasized the faculties of sense and reason, he also emphasized the faculty of imagination, demonstrating that it mediates between man’s mental faculties and gives rise to his passions and will.

Imagination and the *A Priori*

While Burke lived in the stream of British empiricism, he nonetheless affirmed belief in an *a priori* cognitive structure, which includes imagination, that contains *a priori* knowledge about such phenomena as taste, pleasure, beauty, darkness, immortality, logic, mathematics, and feeling.¹³¹

***A Priori* Structure**

Burke believed that imagination—as well as the other faculties and powers of the human person—is an *a priori* structure that grounds discussion of the arts and morals. For example, in his *Enquiry*, he considered whether any “fixed principles” exist upon which one may analyze taste because, absent some standard, such analysis is vain, useless, and absurd.¹³² Burke then pointed to the universality of man’s mental faculties as evidence for a fixed principle: all people naturally have sense, imagination, and reason.

¹³⁰ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 58; cf. 62.

¹³¹ As with Burke’s doctrine of the will, this dissertation does not systematically treat his doctrine of human nature. These passages are considered to establish the point that he defended belief in *a priori* human structures and knowledge with special reference to the intersection of these concepts with his doctrine of imagination.

¹³² Burke, *Enquiry*, 197.

He further described this principle by words like “invariable,” “certain,” “natural,” and “uniform.”¹³³ Therefore, “the whole ground-work of Taste is common to all”; it is universal. Undoubtedly, different people form their faculties in distinct ways: “[T]he degree in which these principles prevail in the several individuals of mankind, is altogether as different as the principles themselves are similar.”¹³⁴ However, the underlying point is that all people have the faculties of sense, imagination, and reason, which are given to them by the infinitely wise Creator.¹³⁵

Vermeir and Deckard, who appear to adopt a more empiricist reading of Burke’s views, challenge this idea: “Although this anthropology beginning with sense perception may seem like an *a priori* view placed onto taste, in discussing whether taste can be disputed, Burke grounds each judgement in a kind of naturalism.”¹³⁶ They proceed to cite a passage in which Burke admitted that “we may dispute, and with sufficient clearness too, concerning the things which are naturally pleasing or disagreeable to the sense.”¹³⁷ Indeed, Burke grounded judgment in a kind of naturalism. However, the passage they cite appears to concern the application of taste, not the groundwork of taste. Certainly, people have different tastes, but they all naturally possess specific epistemic structures by which they analyze taste. Hence, the principles Burke established seem to acknowledge *a priori* structure.

Burke’s *Enquiry* is not the only source in which he referenced *a priori* structure because he also appealed to it in a letter to Adam Smith after Smith’s

¹³³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197, 206. Burke continued to hold throughout his career to the fixed principle that all people have an imagination because, according to a report of his speech on a remuneration bill, he suggested that circumstances, such as they are, “suggest themselves to every man’s imagination” (Edmund Burke, Speech on Remuneration Bill [February 19, 1783], in *Writings*, 9:584).

¹³⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206–7.

¹³⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 227.

¹³⁶ Vermeir and Deckard, “Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility,” 50.

¹³⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 199.

publication of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “A theory like yours founded on the Nature of man, which is always the same, will last, when those that are founded on his opinions, which are always changing, will and must be forgotten.”¹³⁸ In contrast to the changing temperament of *a posteriori* human opinion, Burke highlighted a human nature, which includes the faculty of imagination, that is “always the same.” Burke would emphasize the importance of human nature throughout his career, saying for example in his *Reflections*, “I have endeavored through my whole life to make myself acquainted with human nature.”¹³⁹ Thus, Burke undergirded ethical questions with appeals to *a priori* structure.¹⁴⁰ Yet also he responded to such questions with appeals to *a priori* knowledge.

***A Priori* Knowledge**

Burke held that the mind (which includes the imagination) contains *a priori* ideas and feelings—that it has natural, inherent knowledge. As this section and subsequent chapters show, Burke believed that nature is given by a God Who has embedded it with a certain order, including with respect to man, morals, and knowledge. Burke acknowledged that nature may be known partly but not fully. For this reason, he remarked that the “characters of nature are legible” but “not plain.” Again, Burke stated that the obscurity and intricacy of the subject caused “impediments” to his study that “render[ed] it a matter of no small difficulty to shew in a clear light the genuine face of nature.”¹⁴¹ So, while he affirmed belief in the laws and principles of nature, he also

¹³⁸ Edmund Burke to Adam Smith (September 10, 1759), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 1:130.

¹³⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 185 (cf. 115); Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 196; Edmund Burke, Speech on Parliamentary Reform (June 16, 1784), in *Writings*, 4:221.

¹⁴⁰ James Conniff analyzes Burke’s letter to Smith amid the broader backdrop of moral sense philosophy in *The Useful Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 35.

¹⁴¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 189.

recognized the “danger of circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own notions” and therefore sometimes resisted strict definitions.¹⁴²

Even so, Burke demonstrated his belief in *a priori* knowledge. As early as the 1740s, he wrote in *The Reformer* about an “inborn inexpressible Rule, that Men of Taste go by,” which is “not to be flattered but by something that ravishes the Imagination.”¹⁴³ The person is impressed by what impresses him. Sense experience does not teach him this rule; it exists from birth. Of course, what delights the imagination depends on the way the person has cultivated it. Burke could conceive of the person whose imagination is impressed by good artifacts and unimpressed by bad ones or ravished by bad ones and bored with good ones. However, Burke focused on the person of taste. If man has *a priori* knowledge that he is flattered by what ravishes his imagination, then the wise man cultivates his imagination according to good taste.

Burke also discussed the concept of *a priori* knowledge throughout his *Enquiry*. For example, he distinguished between natural and acquired pleasures and pains. He recognized that custom may influence one’s knowledge of pleasure and pain so that it changes, but the point is that the knowledge itself is natural. By nature, people know that sugar is sweet and vinegar sour.¹⁴⁴ “Burke’s supposition of a common natural taste,” comments Dabney Townsend, “is really *a priori*.”¹⁴⁵ Even if the person does not have experiential knowledge of certain propositions, he still has knowledge of them. Sense experience may cause him to realize sugar is sweet, but it does not give him the knowledge it is sweet because it is inborn.

¹⁴² Burke, *Enquiry*, 197; for references to laws and principles of nature, see 188, 201.

¹⁴³ Edmund Burke, *The Reformer* no. 10 (March 31, 1748), in *Writings*, 1:114.

¹⁴⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 199.

¹⁴⁵ Dabney Townsend, *Taste and Experience in Eighteenth Century British Aesthetics: The Move towards Empiricism* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 91.

So, whereas Burke presented the idea of inborn notions in *The Reformer*, he considered how they interrelate with sense experiences in the *Enquiry*, demonstrating an expansion of his thought on the subject. That some seeds of *a priori* knowledge, and the pleasures and pains resulting from them, are ungerminated or nascent does not mean they are absent. Certainly, the person may prefer one pleasure over another pleasure, but the question of preference while related is distinct.¹⁴⁶ In summary, Burke believed in natural knowledge but also recognized that experience may cause that knowledge to be realized or even challenged. Hence, he stated that people have “natural ideas” and “natural feelings” of beauty,¹⁴⁷ which have been given by the “infinitely wise and good Creator,”¹⁴⁸ that nonetheless have been confounded by “whimsical theory” about “proportion, congruity and perfection.”¹⁴⁹

Burke also analyzed the natural knowledge that darkness is scary. He disagreed with Locke’s opinion that “darkness is not naturally an idea of terror” and that “a nurse or an old woman [] once associated the ideas of ghosts and goblins with that of darkness” so that “night ever after [became] painful and horrible to the imagination.”¹⁵⁰ Some interpreters focus on Burke’s point that the nature of darkness as such is terrible.¹⁵¹ Yet he was also arguing that man’s nature causes him to perceive this idea *a priori*; thus, both Karen Swann and Roy Sorensen understand Burke to mean that such knowledge is

¹⁴⁶ Burke considered the application of these principles throughout his Introduction on Taste, e.g., *Enquiry*, 201, 204.

¹⁴⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268, 272; for “natural feelings,” see 268, 272; and for “natural ideas,” see 272.

¹⁴⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268.

¹⁴⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 272.

¹⁵⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 294; cf. 294n2.

¹⁵¹ Meg Armstrong, “‘The Effects of Blackness’: Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 219; Dabney Townsend, “Lockean Aesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 1991): 354.

“innate.”¹⁵² Again, even if this knowledge has not been consciously recognized, its germ is rooted in the person’s mind. “[I]t is very hard to imagine,” Burke added, “that the effect of an idea so universally terrible in all times, and in all countries, as darkness, could possibly have been owing to a set of idle stories.”¹⁵³

Again, Burke appealed to the concept of inherent knowledge in his book on English history. Discussing the Druid imagination concerning the afterlife, he wrote, “The idea of the soul’s immortality is indeed ancient, universal, and in a manner inherent in our nature.”¹⁵⁴ Throughout his references to *a priori* knowledge, particular concepts or words arise with some frequency, including “ancient” and “universal,” suggesting a certain constancy of thought.¹⁵⁵ While he qualifies “inherent” by the phrase “in a manner,” perhaps conceding the complicated task of distinguishing natural knowledge and acquired knowledge, it does not contradict his basic claim. Additionally, while this passage likely does not signify an echo of Ecclesiastes, it is reminiscent of the Teacher’s statement that God has set eternity in man’s heart.¹⁵⁶

Burke also referred to the concept of the universality of knowledge in a discussion about economics in his *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*: “From two shillings to one shilling, is a fall, in all mens [*sic*] imaginations, which no calculation upon a difference in the price of the necessaries of life can compensate.”¹⁵⁷ Burke thus

¹⁵² Karen Swann, “The Sublime and the Vulgar,” *College English* 52, no. 1 (Jan 1990): 17; Roy Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 254. Sorensen ultimately disagrees with Burke’s counterexample to Locke’s epistemology, but the question of Sorensen’s interpretation is beyond the present purview.

¹⁵³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 295.

¹⁵⁴ Burke, *Abridgement*, 352.

¹⁵⁵ Burke also used “inherent” in the *Enquiry*, 257.

¹⁵⁶ Eccl 3:11. As this dissertation illustrates, Burke regularly echoed the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures throughout his corpus, and sometimes he directly quoted them. A catalog of Burke’s usage of the Scriptures throughout his corpus would be a fascinating project.

¹⁵⁷ Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 138.

observed *a priori* truths of logic and mathematics. One is less than two; two is more than one. Half is less than whole; whole is more than half. All people know the concept of profit and loss, whatever sign they choose to ascribe to it. One interpreter emphasizes, “All men’s imagination, said Burke; not the stupid plumber’s imagination, the uneducated coal miner’s imagination only, but the imagination of the professor of economics, and of the man with a large safety-deposit box.”¹⁵⁸ The loss of a single shilling may seem less severe to the nobleman than to the man of humble means; still, it is a loss. Hence, however people’s stations and experiences differ, they all know basic truths of logic and mathematics.

Finally, Burke wrote about man’s “natural feelings” on several occasions throughout his career. Because imagination gives rise to his passions, it makes any cognizance of this knowledge possible. For example, in his *Enquiry* Burke considered the “force of natural sympathy” that is “felt in all men without any recourse to reasoning, and their justness recognized in every breast.” He then showed how the imagination connects man’s heart and head by explaining that “love, grief, fear, anger, [and] joy” affect “every mind” upon “certain, natural and uniform principles.”¹⁵⁹ Two propositions appear in this passage. First concerns the universality of natural feelings. Just as *a priori* noetic structures are “common to all,” so also natural feelings are felt in “all men” and in “every mind.” While the cause of such feelings invariably arises from one’s sense experience, the knowledge of those feelings is natural and universal, and when evoked they are realized immediately. In Burke’s thinking, any failures on the part of such feelings do not render his positions false but rather exemplify the perversion of one’s inborn knowledge.

A second proposition from this passage concerns the justness of natural feelings and more particularly the justness of natural sympathy. Burke subsequently

¹⁵⁸ *The Villager*, no. 245 (Saturday, February 11, 1922), 146 (italics added).

¹⁵⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 205–6.

wrote, “The more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we every where find of his wisdom who made it.” He additionally ascribed “to him [God] whatever we find of right, or good, or fair in ourselves.”¹⁶⁰ That is, God has created the *a priori* structure of the mind and implanted *a priori* ideas into that structure, which manifest as natural feelings.

Burke appears to have maintained this belief throughout his lifetime, describing the justness of innate ideas and innate feelings. For example, he remarked in his *Reflections* that he was influenced unto melancholy by the “inborn feelings of [his] nature”¹⁶¹ upon learning the French royal family (including the children) had suffered at the hands of “ruffians and assassins.”¹⁶² This scene with the royal family clearly pricked Burke’s “moral imagination.”¹⁶³ Approximately a half-year later, he referred to the same incident in a letter to the Chevalier Claude-François de Rivarol: “That fury which arises in the minds of men on being stripped of their goods and turned out of their houses by acts of power, and our sympathy with them under such wrongs, are feelings implanted in us by our Creator, to be (under the direction of His laws) the means of our preservation.”¹⁶⁴ By saying the Creator has implanted certain feelings in people, Burke recalled his remark from his *Enquiry* in which he stated that Creator has given people certain natural feelings.¹⁶⁵

While several interpreters tie Burke’s remarks to Rivarol to the concept of natural or self-evident rights, the present point is that Burke believed God, according to

¹⁶⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 227.

¹⁶¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 125.

¹⁶² Burke, *Reflections*, 121.

¹⁶³ Burke, *Reflections*, 128. “Moral imagination” (examined in chapter 5) refers to a host of concepts, but they include such inborn feelings.

¹⁶⁴ Edmund Burke to Chev. de Rivarol (June 1, 1791), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 3:208.

¹⁶⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268, 272.

His law, has sown feelings into man's very nature.¹⁶⁶ In this case, Burke mentioned fury and sympathy, although his broader corpus reveals more, and he characterized such feelings as being just because he described this event as being "wrong." However, Burke qualified that just because the imagination gives rise to an idea or feeling does not mean it is good. Radicals may invent "imaginary political systems concerning governments" that then prompt them to attack a palace and a family.¹⁶⁷ Thus, the ideas and feelings of the person's imagination are just insofar as they accord with God's design and law.

Again, Burke appealed to the concept of natural and God-given feelings in his *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*: "A kind Providence has placed in our breasts a hatred of the unjust and cruel, in order that we may preserve ourselves from cruelty and injustice. They who bear cruelty, are accomplices in it."¹⁶⁸ Whereas Burke spoke previously about such feelings arising in the mind, emphasizing the cognitive quality of feelings, he referred here to them arising in the breast, emphasizing the affective quality of feelings and perhaps demonstrating a development of his anthropology and thinking about *a priori* knowledge. Because the imagination connects man's thoughts and passions, such feelings arise in and from the imagination. In this case, God has implanted not only feelings like fury and sympathy but also hatred at the unjust.

Nevertheless, one interpretive tradition has regularly painted Burke with empiricist colors. For example, Rodney W. Kilcup described Burke as being committed to the "modern conception of reason as a reasoning process dependent upon a world of

¹⁶⁶ J. R. Dinwiddy referred to "self-evident rights" ("Utility and Natural Law in Burke's Thought: A Reconsideration," *Studies in Burke and His Time* 16 [1974]: 105–28), whereas others have spoken of *natural rights*, e.g., Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought*, 19–20; Michael Oakeshott, *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe: The Harvard Lectures*, ed. Shirley Robin Letwin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 70; and Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler*, 236.

¹⁶⁷ Burke to Chev. de Rivarol, 208.

¹⁶⁸ Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 103.

sense impressions.”¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Stephen Howard Browne portrays Burke as being “constrained by a sensate psychology.”¹⁷⁰ To give some credence to these perspectives, Burke operated within the stream of British empiricism for which reason he spent considerable space examining the roles of sense and reason in his anthropology and interacting with figures like Locke, all in a manner that causes some interpreters to hold he was an empiricist. However, as this section has shown, other interpreters, such as Townsend, Swann, and Sorensen have understandably resisted that interpretation. Similarly, Francis Canavan contended that Kilcup overstated his case.¹⁷¹ So, Burke emphasized imagination in addition to reason, and he did not believe those faculties are utterly dependent on the senses, even if they are largely dependent on them.

In conclusion, the person may have knowledge by nature or acculturation. Although Burke lived in and was influenced by the age of British empiricism, he also appealed to *a priori* concepts. He did not believe the mind is a blank tablet or empty cabinet.¹⁷² It is representative not only of sense impressions but also of *a priori* ideas. While experiences may cause an awareness of some ideas, they do not cause the knowledge of them. Rather, God has implanted some knowledge in the person’s mind so that it is like a seed that may germinate and grow. However, the affirmation of *a priori* structure and knowledge in Burke’s thinking should not be confused with the affirmation of *a priori* ethical principles that are applied abstractly absent circumstance, which Burke resolutely criticized.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Rodney W. Kilcup, “Reason and the Basis of Morality in Burke,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (1979): 279.

¹⁷⁰ Stephen Howard Browne, “Edmund Burke in the Humanist Tradition: Case Studies in Rhetoric and Rhetorical Judgment” (PhD diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987), 93.

¹⁷¹ Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, 63.

¹⁷² Norman R. Phillips, *The Quest for Excellence: The Neo-Conservative Critique of Educational Mediocrity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1978), 35; Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 175.

¹⁷³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 11, 175, 186, 195.

This chapter has introduced Burke's doctrine of imagination. The imagination is an active faculty of the mind with the powers of representation, wit, fancy, and invention. It is, therefore, not simply mimetic but rather may reproduce, vary, compare, and even create. Additionally, the imagination serves an intermediary and integrative role for the person's other faculties and powers, including his senses, reason, passions, and will, thereby linking the cognitive, affective, and volitive aspects of man's nature. Hence, these functions of human nature do not operate except that the imagination operates. Finally, Burke held that the imagination is an *a priori* structure, and while recognizing that the ideas of imagination often come from the person's experiences, he maintains that the ideas of imagination may also arise from within his nature. This chapter having presented the epistemic foundations of man's ideas, the following chapter examines the form, content, and expression of man's ideas.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGINATION AND THOUGHT

The first two chapters of this dissertation have attempted to examine aspects of Burke's epistemology, the previous chapter arguing that he believed imagination is a powerful, creative faculty that mediates between man's other faculties. This chapter builds on that one, showing that imagination supports the form, content, and expression of one's thought. The imagination, because it builds and synthesizes, gives form to man's thought, whether in representational or non-representational form. However, the form is not empty, instead containing specific content, including memories, plans, and beliefs. Additionally, the imagination undergirds the expression of one's thought through the phenomenon of language. Yet the imagination is not foolproof because it is capable of deception and exaggeration.

Imagination and the Form of Thought

Because the imagination is an active faculty, it is a place of ideas resulting from thought. As Francis Canavan succinctly put it, "'imagination' = thought."¹ On one occasion, Burke even used "imagination" metonymically for thought, referring to the "fondest imaginations" of James II.² Additionally, Burke believed the form of thought may be either non-representational or representational. In fact, he spent considerable time in part five of *A Philosophical Enquiry* arguing against the notion that form is necessarily representational, holding rather that it is often non-representational, especially when the

¹ Francis Canavan, ed., *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 404L.6.

² Edmund Burke to Lord Loughborough (circa March 17, 1796), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 8:431.

medium is verbal. However, he was not denying that the form may be visual. He held that these distinctions often depend on the medium through which the idea is being communicated. The nature of images is different from that of words and consequently affects the imagination differently.

This section primarily analyzes Burke's argument from the *Enquiry* on the non-representational effect of words on the imagination. But it also considers several passages from other works about the non-representational form before giving some explanation to his view of the representational form. Before examining these issues though, this section reviews various modes by which imagination functions.

Mode

Burke characterized the modes of imagination in multiple ways, ascribing to imagination the capacities to conceive, contemplate, and realize. In the *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he recounted that state ambassadors appeared before the chief Director of the Regicide Directory in France. Rather than receiving the more customary gold or diamonds, these ambassadors received epigrams. Burke then imagined the insult the national heads of state would feel when their ambassadors presented these "epigrams of contempt."³ He wrote, "Few can have so little imagination, as not readily to conceive the nature of the boxes of epigrammatick lozenges, that will be presented to them."⁴ The imagination thus *conceives* or gives birth to an idea or image of an object.

Similarly, Burke described the imagination as being capable of contemplation in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*. Referring to the innovators of the French Revolution, Burke explained, "Their imagination is not fatigued, with the contemplation of human suffering

³ Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 76.

⁴ Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 78.

thro' the wild waste of centuries added to centuries, of misery and desolation.”⁵

“Contemplation” carries with it the ideas not only of “thinking about” and “mediating upon” but also of “looking at” something, illustrating the imagination’s connection to cognitive sight. The imagination contemplates what fills it, whether moral or immoral.

Additionally, over the course of time, the imagination may gain strength in its capacity to contemplate its object so that it is not worn out by it. In this case, the revolutionaries had filled it such that, like Lady Macbeth, they could endure the extended contemplation of “evil.” Habit of thought wears a powerful groove in the imagination. Ludwig Feuerbach wrote, “*Der Mensch ist was er isst*” (“Man is what he eats”).⁶ In a manner of speaking, Burke said that man is what he thinks or imagines. The contemplation of an evil object in the wrong way forms an evil imagination, whereas the contemplation of a good object in the right way forms a good imagination. In short, the imagination contemplates, and the object of its contemplation has profound significance for the person’s anthropological and ethical development.

Finally, in addition to holding the imagination may conceive and contemplate, Burke said in his *Reflections on a Revolution in France* that it may realize. When surrounded by evil, the imagination may “realize” a “standard of virtue and wisdom” in the example of one’s ancestors “beyond the vulgar practice of the hour.”⁷ To “realize” carries with it the idea of understanding something clearly. Burke’s word choice highlights the connection between imagination and the real world since the root of

⁵ Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord* [1796], in *Writings*, 9:176. Frans De Bruyn observes that Burke’s language alludes to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (“William Shakespeare and Edmund Burke: Literary Allusion in Eighteenth-Century British Political Rhetoric,” in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin [London: Routledge, 2008], 94).

⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, “Die Naturwissenschaft und die Revolution” (1850), in *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 10, ed. Friedrich Jodl, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Frommann Verlag, 1960), 22. In fact, this saying is older even than Feuerbach because, twenty-five years prior to him, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote, “Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are” (*The Physiology of Taste: Or Meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy*, trans. M. F. K. Fisher [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009], 15).

⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 86.

“realize” is the word “real.” While the imagination may certainly conceive of the fantastical, it is also rooted in reality.

Whereas the passage from *Noble Lord* demonstrates a negative example of imagination, this one from *Reflections* demonstrates a positive one. The imagination may think of wicked objects, but it may also think of righteous ones. Several scholars have remarked on the importance of Burke’s emphasis on “imagination” during this period. Irving Babbitt described him as an “exceptional Whig” for admitting the “supreme rôle of the imagination” at a time when Whigs were suspicious of it.⁸ In the words of John Barrell, Burke’s defenders received his positive assessment of imagination “with silence.” However, it was “greeted with derision” by his opponents such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft.⁹ Even so, Burke exemplified a positive role for imagination, namely, the realization of virtue. In summary, the imagination, in its act of imagining, may conceive, contemplate, and realize.

The Non-representational Form

Burke demonstrated the non-representational form of imagination most plainly by his discussion of words in the *Enquiry*. He began his examination by explaining that words may produce three effects in the person’s imagination: sound, picture, and affection. Whereas the effects of sound and affection signify the non-representational form in the imagination, the effect of a picture signifies the representational form in the imagination. However, not all types of words give rise to each of those effects. For example, he posited, the imagination does not form images of compounded abstract

⁸ Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 103.

⁹ John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25. See Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* (1791), in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 2, 1779–1792, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894); and Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Women and Hints*, ed. Sylvania Tomaselli, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6–7, 28.

words (e.g., honor, justice, and liberty); while it may form pictures of examples of these words, such examples are no longer compounded abstract words. However, the imagination may form images of simple abstract words (e.g., blue, green, hot, and cold) and aggregate words (e.g., man, castle, and horse). But even then, he submitted, it often does not do so because such words usually affect the imagination with the non-representational form, such as the production of an emotion or the echo of a sound.¹⁰

Burke recognized his position ran counter to the “common notion” that words raise images in the mind.¹¹ Consequently, he gave numerous examples to illustrate his viewpoint that imagination often assumes the non-representational form, including the general example of common experience and more specific examples of experiences relating to the Danube River, blind men, a trip to Italy, and samples from poetry and painting. Before considering these examples though, this section examines Burke’s argument concerning the effect of words, which provides context for his examples.

While the imagination may not form images of compounded abstract words, it may form images of simple abstract words and aggregate words; even so, it often does not, instead producing the effects of affection and sound. Burke plainly spoke in terms of the “most general effect” of these words, not the exclusive effect.¹² Hence, Dixon Wecter rightly interprets Burke’s meaning when he states that words may evoke the full sound-image-emotion cycle but then adds “even here an ellipsis is likely,” the ellipsis referring to the point that the element of an image may be absent from the cycle.¹³ Tom Furniss likewise acknowledges Burke’s nuance, explaining that words “in general” represent the

¹⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 312.

¹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 309.

¹² Burke, *Enquiry*, 312.

¹³ Dixon Wecter, “Burke’s Theory Concerning Words, Images, and Emotion,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 55, no. 1 (Mar 1940): 172.

“non-imagistic medium” or the “non-representational medium,” which derives its power in other ways, such as inducing sympathy.¹⁴

However, some interpretations appear to push Burke’s position that the imagination often neglects to form images further than he applies it. For example, Jules David Law writes, “Burke consistently rejects the suggestion that words ‘raise’ pictures or images in our minds, or that language allows ideas to ‘emerge.’”¹⁵ Burke undoubtedly argued that words often affect the imagination with the non-representational form. But he did not deny that the effect of words may raise images or that the effect of language may allow ideas, only that they often do not.

Similarly, Erin M. Goss interprets Burke to mean that “words, unlike objects, circumvent the imagination as a literal process—a creation of images.”¹⁶ Goss rightly observes that, in Burke’s thinking, words often do not result in cognitive images. However, strictly speaking, he said that the “most general effect even of these words,” referring to simple abstract and aggregate words, “does not arise from their forming pictures of the several things they would represent in the imagination.”¹⁷ Therefore, Burke acknowledged that words may affect the imagination by the representational form; his point was only that they may also (and often do) affect it by the non-representational form.

Burke supported his view that the non-representational form often fills the imagination by appealing to multiple examples, his first being common experience: “[O]n

¹⁴ Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 101 (italics removed). Cf. Stephen H. Browne, “Aesthetics and the Heteronomy of Rhetorical Judgment,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 148; and Heather Tilley, *Blindness and Writing: From Wordsworth to Gissing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 28.

¹⁵ Jules David Law, *The Rhetoric of Empiricism: Language and Perception from Locke to I. A. Richards* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 162.

¹⁶ Erin M. Goss, *Revealing Bodies: Anatomy, Allegory, and the Grounds of Knowledge in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 74.

¹⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 312.

a very diligent examination of my own mind, and getting others to consider theirs, I do not find that once in twenty times any such picture is formed, and when it is, there is most commonly a particular effort of the imagination for that purpose.”¹⁸ Again, some scholars interpret Burke to deny that words may evoke pictures in the imagination, such as Bullard who contends that Burke “denies that language has any such power to denote or to communicate mental images.”¹⁹ Perhaps Bullard’s point concerns the power of language to effect the representational form in the imagination as a matter of necessity rather than possibility. If so, Burke certainly held that the faculty of imagination has the agency of will because he explicitly stated that words may form pictures in the mind but that this prospect usually requires an act of the will.²⁰

Even so, Burke provided subtlety because he explained that it “commonly” requires the will, thereby suggesting that sometimes the power of words is in the picture it produces absent a “particular effort” to that effect. In the words of William Edinger, Burke aimed to refute the “*assumption* that words are the images of things.”²¹ Burke was not denying that words may produce imaginative pictures. He was observing that they frequently do not do so because the verbal form generally derives its power from other non-representational effects on the imagination.

In addition to speaking from common experience to make his argument, Burke pointed to several illustrations. For example, he shared a passage full of specific details about the Danube River winding through specific countries and then contended that the

¹⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 312.

¹⁹ Paddy Bullard, “Rhetoric and Eloquence: The Language of Persuasion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. James Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 88.

²⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 314.

²¹ William Edinger, “Johnson on Conceit: The Limits of Particularity,” *English Literary History* 39, no. 4 (Dec 1972): 614–15 (italics added). Cf. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 123; and Furniss, *Edmund Burke’s Aesthetic Ideology*, 101.

passage operates on the imagination without “presenting any image to the mind.” Having prefaced this example with the phrase, “I do not find,” Burke invited others to conduct the experiment for themselves to determine whether any pictures of a “river, mountain, watery soil, [or] Germany” form in their imaginations. Burke commented that, in his experience, it is “impossible” to have the representational form appear “in the rapidity and quick succession of words in conversation.”²² While Burke employed the strong language of impossibility, he limited the example to the course of ordinary conversation. In other words, the person does not typically have a picture show running through his imagination when conversing with someone; the imagination is not a film projector.

Rather, in such scenarios, the imagination typically gives rise to the non-representational form; at least, that was his experience. By adding the qualification that his argument represents his personal experience, he was not discounting the possibility that it may not represent others’ experiences. He thereby left open the possibility that the imagination could give rise to the representational form if the person focuses on it or reflects on it by an act of the will. This point is consistent with Burke’s previous statements acknowledging that his position dissents from the “common notion” and that the “general effect,” not the exclusive effect, of words on the imagination is the non-representational form according to a “diligent examination” of his own mind and others’ minds alike.²³

Notwithstanding his appeal to common experience and the Danube River, Burke conceded he is often unsuccessful in convincing people of his thesis concerning the non-representational form; indeed, he was proposing something of a minority report. He did not examine questions relating to how different people process ideas in different

²² Burke, *Enquiry*, 312.

²³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 309, 312, 315. “Common notion” appears on 309, “general effect” on 312, and “diligent examination” on 312, 315.

ways. His failure to convince others of his viewpoint may illustrate the proposition that different people process ideas in different ways; however, he did not engage that theory. Furthermore, Burke admitted that “we are often at a loss to know what ideas we have of things.”²⁴ By so stating, he demonstrated epistemic humility (which is examined at length in chapter 6) amid a rationalistic age concerning his proposal.

Burke then considered the examples of two blind men for his argument that the common effect of words on the imagination is the non-representational form. First, he examined the poet Thomas Blacklock who, upon hearing words describing objects, was able only to form the non-representational form in his imagination; he could not form the representational form because he was blind. Yet he could describe visual objects more beautifully than people with sight: “Few men blessed with the most perfect sight can describe visual objects with more spirit and justness than this blind man.”²⁵ Therefore, Burke held that Blacklock exemplified his argument about non-representational form.

Second, Burke looked to the example of the mathematics professor Nicholas Saunderson. Although he was blind, “he gave excellent lectures upon light and colours; and this man taught others the theory of those ideas which they had, and which he himself undoubtedly had not.” Additionally, “it is probable, that the words red, blue, green, answered to him as well as the ideas of the colours themselves.” Burke then remarked that Saunderson’s experience reflected his own experience: words of color do not result in “rays of light” flashing across his imagination.²⁶ Hence, like Blacklock, Saunderson represented an example of the argument that words may meaningfully affect the imagination with the non-representational form.

²⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 312–13.

²⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 313.

²⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 314.

Again, Burke was under no impression that the representational form is impossible for people with the capacity for sight: “I know very well that the mind possesses a faculty of raising such images at pleasure.” But it is not necessarily automatic. Rather, “an act of the will is necessary to this,” which is qualified by his previous statement that a “particular effort” is “commonly” required.²⁷ Thus, he couched his argument in terms of probabilities and recognized exceptions.

Continuing his argument about non-representational form, Burke turned to another example about going to Italy on horseback or by carriage and seeing green fields and ripening fruit: “[E]ven of particular real beings . . . we converse without having any idea of them excited in the imagination.”²⁸ This illustration is like the one he gave about the Danube River. As with these other examples, some of the scholarship appears to interpret Burke in unequivocal terms. For example, Ellen Scheible asserts that Burke “directly claims that all words shun representation,” and Michelle Goodin characterizes Burke as “discounting the possibility” that someone may conjure an image from such ideas.²⁹ Yes, Burke emphasized the non-representational form, but he did not shun the representational form or discount its possibility; he argued rather that the non-representational form often fills the person’s imagination and that the representational form often requires an act of the will.

Additionally, Burke was speaking largely from his own experience and then inviting others to consider their experiences. Still, he recognized that others remained unconvinced by his ideas, perhaps because their experiences differed from his, and that exceptions may apply to his suggestions (e.g., “ordinary conversation,” “rarely,” and

²⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 314–15.

²⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 314–15.

²⁹ Ellen Scheible, “The Sublime Moment: Confrontation, Colonization, and the Modern Irish Novel” (PhD diss., The Claremont Graduate University, 2008), 47; Michelle Leona Goodin, “The Spectator and the Blind Man: Seeing and Not-Seeing in the Wake of Empiricism” (PhD diss., New York University, 2009), 203.

“exact figure”).³⁰ After all, his examples about the two blind men and a trip to Italy appeared within a section entitled, “examples that words *may* affect without raising images.”³¹ In contrast to some interpreters, Joshua C. Gregory accurately captures Burke’s meaning. To the extent that images follow words, they “will normally be sketchy, shadowy, vague and undefined—mere ghosts of their physical prototypes” because the imagination does not usually produce a “visualised duplicate” of a scene such that images disintegrate in the imagination, “dissolved in the mental process like salt in water.”³² Still, Burke’s experience was that the imagination does not generally produce images from words; it produces non-representational forms such as sound and affection.

As a final example, Burke examined the effects of poetry on the imagination, interacting specifically with passages from Virgil, Homer, and Lucretius, which he contrasted with the effects of painting on the imagination. Because poetry and painting signify distinct media, verbal and visual, they affect the imagination differently. Concerning poetry, Burke contended that it depends “little” for “its effect on the power of raising sensible images.”³³ Burke was not thereby denying that the words of poetry may raise pictures in the person’s mind; he was saying that the power of poetry is in its ability to make the reader feel a certain way. Therefore, its power is in the non-representational form of affection rather than the representational form of an image. However, Juliet Sychrava interprets this passage for the proposition that Burke was an empiricist after the likenesses of John Locke and George Berkeley and that Burke “strongly resist[ed]” the idea that words “work by sensuous representation” but then “continue[d] to fall into the old idiom” that words may produce imaginative representations before “swiftly

³⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 314.

³¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 312 (italics added).

³² Joshua C. Gregory, “Thought and Mental Image, Art and Imitation: A Parallel,” *The Monist* 31, no. 3 (July 1921): 431–32.

³³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 315.

retracting” the point.³⁴ This interpretation asserts unnecessary contradiction and incoherence in Burke that his statements do not require.

Burke recognized that images are possible but maintained they are not necessary. As he explained, the “picturesque connection is not demanded.”³⁵ To illustrate his position, Burke considered a passage from *De rerum natura* by Lucretius and concluded that the poet’s words do not “mark a single limb or feature of the phantom, which he intended to represent in all the horrors imagination can conceive.”³⁶ The reader does not have to see the horrors because he feels the horrors, signifying the non-representational form. Burke’s example thus illustrates that “language has an emotional effect on readers,” explains Bullard, “even when there are no distinct images or even ideas attached to a writer’s words.”³⁷

Still other passages in the *Enquiry* demonstrate Burke’s argument that the imagination commonly gives rise to the non-representational form. However, he continued to provide the caveat that it may also give rise to the representational form. For example, he wrote, “The images raised by poetry are always of this obscure kind; though in general the effects of poetry, are by no means to be attributed to the images it raises.”³⁸ Poetry may raise images, but its power is in how it makes the person feel not see. His reference to “obscure” images recalls Gregory’s interpretation that Burke believed such images may be “sketchy, shadowy, vague and undefined.” So, while Burke undoubtedly

³⁴ Juliet Sychrava, *Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 118–19.

³⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 315.

³⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 316.

³⁷ Paddy Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 105. Bullard also explains that Burke’s theory of the imagination was “distinctive” because he argued “against the accepted wisdom of the time, that descriptive language in poetry evokes no vivid mental image in the mind of the reader” (71). Interestingly, Bullard elsewhere interpreted Burke to “deny that language has any such power to denote or to communicate mental images” (“Rhetoric and Eloquence,” 88).

³⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 234.

challenged the “common notion” that the power of poetry (and rhetoric) is in its effect of raising images in the mind, he did not dismiss the possibility outright.³⁹ In fact, he titled the section in which that phrase (“common notion”) appears as “the *common* effect of poetry, not by raising ideas of things.” Thus, Burke argued that while the representational form is possible, the non-representational form is common.⁴⁰

Burke also illustrated his broader argument about non-representational form by contrasting poetry from painting. Because they are different media, they operate differently on the imagination. Poetry does “not succeed in exact description so well as painting does.” Burke had written previously about prose literature not presenting an “exact figure” in the imagination; in this passage, he wrote about poetry not presenting an “exact description” to the imagination. Burke was not saying the verbal medium cannot produce some representation in the imagination, especially from an act of the will; he was simply contending it strikes the imagination differently than the visual medium, affecting it more by sympathy than by imitation. Again, he described sympathy as the “most extensive province” of words, not the sole province of words (Burke’s reflections on sympathy are examined in chapter 6).⁴¹ In summary, Burke recognized that words may affect the imagination with the representational form of an image but argues that they most commonly affect it with the non-representational forms of sound or affection, and he appealed to numerous examples to illustrate his position.

The Representational Form

While Burke spent considerable space in his *Enquiry* examining how ideas may take the non-representational form in the imagination, he did not deny they may also

³⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 309. Cf. Dermot Ryan, “‘A New Description of Empire’: Edmund Burke and the Regicide Republic of Letters,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 3.

⁴⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 309 (italics added).

⁴¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 221–25.

take the representational form, such as with the visual medium of painting, which affects “by the images it presents.”⁴² Burke’s overall point concerning non-representational and representational forms was that different phenomena generally affect the imagination in different ways. Hence, whether poetry, painting, music, or any other media of the “affecting arts,” they strike the imagination in distinct manners, according to whether they are auditory, verbal, visual, or something else.⁴³

Burke also associated the imagination and representational form beyond his work in the *Enquiry*. For example, in his speeches, he joined “visions and imaginations,” speaking to the mind’s ability to imagine possibilities.⁴⁴ Significantly, his usage of “visions” suggests that these instances are not merely affective but also representational. At root, “vision” relates to the ability to see something so that adjoining visions and imaginations means the ability to see specific images in the mind’s eye. The imagination is that part of the mind where mental visualization occurs. The object of such possibilities may be good or bad, highlighting the importance of imagination for ethics, but the point is that such representational prospects begin in the imagination.

Again, Burke evoked the representational form in his *Speech on Nabob of Arcot’s Debts*. He was horrified at the destruction in India and invited the Speaker to imagine how he would feel if such wanton waste had occurred in his homeland: “Figure to yourself, Mr. Speaker, the land in whose representative chair you sit; figure to yourself the form and fashion of your sweet and cheerful country from Thames to Trent, north and south, and from the Irish to the German sea east and west, emptied and embowelled (May God avert the omen of our crimes!) by so accomplished a desolation.”⁴⁵

⁴² Burke, *Enquiry*, 234.

⁴³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 316–17.

⁴⁴ Edmund Burke, Speech on Public Expenses (December 15, 1779), in *Writings*, 3:470n5; Burke, *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, 662.

⁴⁵ Edmund Burke, *Speech on Nabob of Arcot’s Debts* (February 28, 1785), in *Writings*, 5:520.

Interpreting this passage in view of Burke's argument in the *Enquiry*, one could argue he intended to evoke a feeling not a picture. Certainly, he aimed to evoke a feeling; however, he also seems to have aimed to raise an image. This passage reads differently than his examples about the Danube River and trip to Italy. He expressly used the term "figure," meaning "to represent," and related words like "form" and "fashion." It is as if he was bringing all the powers of the verbal medium to bear on his argument: sound, picture, and affection. Thus, this passage may indicate development in Burke's thinking on the question of the effect of words on the imagination. On the other hand, he had also written in the *Enquiry* that in his experience not "once in twenty times" did a picture form in the imagination from the verbal medium.⁴⁶ Perhaps this example represents the exception.

Burke continued: "Extend your imagination a little further, and then suppose your ministers taking a survey of this scene of waste and desolation" in order to compute the excises, customs, and taxes and charge for public service.⁴⁷ Again, Burke demonstrated a sympathetic imagination at the Indians' horrors and the seeming disregard they received. Daniel I. O'Neill explains that Burke was "indeed asking his auditors to engage in an act of theoretical imagination" to "cut down the conceptual distance" between "Europe and India."⁴⁸ Burke's method of accomplishing this goal was to evoke a feeling and to paint a picture.

Hence, Burke believed that thought may take both representational and non-representational forms in the imagination. Ideas may come from different media, but they may also come from deep within the human mind. The content of ideas is as broad as the

⁴⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 312.

⁴⁷ Burke, *Speech on Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, 520–21.

⁴⁸ Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 97–98. Cf. Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 134.

capacity for imagination is wide and may concern everything from beliefs to the arts to ethics to politics. The following chapters examine these connections.

Imagination and the Content of Thought

The previous section considered imagination and the form of thought; this section shows from Burke that the form thought takes in the imagination may represent memories, possibilities, and beliefs. By imagination, the person recalls and remembers; plans and invents; and commits and entrusts. These prospects result from the imagination's capacity to create new things. Memories may not seem new since they represent things that have occurred, but the memory itself does not exist until the imagination has created it. Possibilities also illustrate the imagination's creative power to envision both the good and the bad. As for beliefs, they do not exist in isolation from one another but converge into a specific worldview; while Burke never used the term "worldview," the principles he established illustrate the role of imagination in one's worldview, which the secondary literature bears out (discussed below). However, Burke also recognized the potential for the imagination to be deceived, whether innocently or maliciously. Consequently, the wise person takes care not to be deceived and to form his imagination with the right kind of content.

Memory

Burke joined imagination with memory on several occasions. For example, in a passage considered previously, Burke recalled a "bumper toast" in which Thomas Erskine "supplied something, I allow, from the stores of his imagination."⁴⁹ That is, he remembered something; he recalled it. Additionally, Burke exhibited his own memory by recalling Erskine's speech in the first place. Notably, the stores of the person's imagination supply a memory. Memory is not only about significant events in one's life

⁴⁹ Burke to William Elliot, 30.

but also about information generally. Over the course of a life, the store of imagination typically increases as experience and learning increases so that some people have an epistemic mom-and-pop store while others have a seemingly worldwide conglomerate. Different people may recall memories faster or slower than others because of such differences as intelligence quotients and dopamine levels, but practically all people have memory and thereby demonstrate their near ceaseless reliance on imagination.

Burke also linked imagination and memory amid the period of the French Revolution in his Speech on French Corps Bill: “At the period of life at which he [man] had arrived, when he had no imagination nor fancy, it surely ought to be allowed him, by way of consolation, to recur to the stumps of his memory.”⁵⁰ The circumstances of the Revolution were bad. Burke was reminding people that the good points of the past may offer them some consolation. This passage may seem to contradict the previous one because in that one the imagination precedes memory since it supplies the content of memory, whereas in this one memory precedes imagination since it may persist even without imagination. However, the surrounding textual context suggests that Burke was using “imagination” in two distinct manners. There, Burke was referring to the imagination as an epistemic concept relating to the individual imagination; here, he was referring to it as a sociohistorical concept relating to the social imagination. Burke thereby demonstrated a breadth of understanding concerning the term “imagination.” More specifically, by joining “imagination” with “fancy,” Burke was referring to a period in which the stores of imagination were smaller. Hence, he used the imagery of a stump. The Revolution had felled the tree of tradition, burning its memories in a fantastic blaze, but, said Burke, the good stump remained, if only the people would remember. The past had its problems, but it was also a place of charity, support, and justice. For this reason,

⁵⁰ Edmund Burke, Speech on French Corps Bill (April 17, 1794), in *Writings*, 4:617n3 (italics removed).

Burke stated, “To some Gentleman it might appear disorderly to mention facts.”⁵¹ Burke was prompting people to forsake their historical amnesia and to remember.

A final example occurs in his *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, also set against the backdrop of the Revolution, where Burke explained that the recollections of imagination may weaken and that memories may fade. After observing how the Jacobins’ strategy regarding public sentiment shifted over time from confession to apology to defense to recrimination to justification, Burke wrote, “Grown bolder, as the first feeling of mankind decayed and the colour of these horrors [of the Revolution] began to fade upon the imagination, they [the Jacobins] proceeded from apology to defence. . . . They attempted to assassinate the memory of those, whose bodies their friends had massacred.”⁵² Burke thereby tied memory not only to imagination but also to feeling. Having murdered their friends, the Jacobins were next attempting to murder the survivors’ memories of them; they were trying to induce a sort of imaginative dementia (literally, “out of one’s mind”). The imagination that may remember may also forget. In a manner of speaking, Burke was accusing the Jacobins of psychologically manipulating their enemies. Hence, people must strengthen their imaginations so that they are not victims of social manipulation.

Possibility

Just as imagination is a place of memory, it is also a place of possibility. For example, Burke remarked in a letter about Major Maxwell, who was being tried a third time for breaking his arrest, that he “has as many reasons to offer in alleviation as

⁵¹ Burke, Speech on French Corps Bill (April 17, 1794), 617n3.

⁵² Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 105–6. Burke employed the term “Jacobin,” explains Daniel I. O’Neill, as a “catch-all term for the principles of all those who opposed the Old Regime, be they French, British, Irish, or anything else” (*The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007], 219).

imagination can suggest as possible to have existed at the same time.”⁵³ The creative imagination may suggest countless reasons for which the person could defend his actions. Hence, imagination concerns the possible. Burke made frequent reference to this function of imagination, considering the possibilities of misery, success, and virtue.

Misery

First, Burke illustrated how the imagination may envision miserable possibilities, whether in the context of love, politics, or career. For instance, Burke examined the case of the forsaken lover in his *Enquiry*, saying that “he insists largely on the pleasures which he enjoyed, or hoped to enjoy, and on the perfection of the object of his desires; it is the loss which is always uppermost in his mind.” The forsaken lover imagines the possible until it utterly consumes him: “When men have suffered their imaginations to be long affected with any idea, it so wholly engrosses them as to shut out by degrees almost every other, and to break down every partition of the mind which would confine it.” The imagination is so powerful that it can turn an idea into an all-encompassing passion to the point even of “madness.”⁵⁴

Burke knew of the tragic power of imagined love. He had previously recounted in a letter the death of a man who, after experiencing unrequited love, consumed arsenic and died. “This accident,” wrote Burke, “has altered my sentiments concerning Love.” He even mentioned how “our great Enemy” may turn “unrestrained Passion tho virtuous in itself” against people: “[W]ith how much craft and subtlety our great Enemy endeavours by all means to work our Destruction, how he lays a bait in every thing, and

⁵³ Edmund Burke to Henry Strachey (June 13, 1776), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 3:273.

⁵⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 217–18. Numerous scholars have examined this passage in relation to Burke’s view of love and sexual pursuit, e.g., Dennis Pahl, “Poe’s Sublimity: The Role of Burkean Aesthetics,” *The Edgar Allan Poe Review* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 35; and Andrew Warren, “Designing and Undrawing Veils: Anxiety and Authorship in Radcliffe’s ‘The Italian,’” *The Eighteenth Century* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 529.

how much need we have to care Lest he make too sure of us, as is the case of that unfortunate youth.”⁵⁵ The imagination is powerful, and imagined love can be deadly. Moreover, just as Burke made references to God, he also made references to God’s adversary the devil who can turn the person’s imagination against him. The object of the person’s love, therefore, is deeply important because it fills and shapes his imagination, whether for good or for bad.

Certainly, Burke’s comments about the forsaken lover apply to the topic of love. But the principle underlying his remarks is much more expansive. By using the term “any idea,” Burke extended his application considerably. In the words of Taylor Burleigh Wilkins, “Burke believed the imagination to have a great power over the passions.”⁵⁶ The imagination is that faculty that may turn undeveloped notions into much more substantial ideas; it may picture how an idea could materialize so that it becomes the lens through which one sees the world. In this way, the imagination is not merely a passive recipient of one’s sense experiences; it may “metamorphose” an idea from a small egg to a creature with wings. This prospect is good or bad depending on the content of the idea or passion. However, strong passion need not lead to madness. The imagination with power over passion is balanced with reason and anchored within a proper ethic.

Just as the possible may lead people to misery, it may also lead societies to misery. Burke made this point in his *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*. Being deeply concerned about the possibility of William Knox’s pamphlet inciting his readers, Burke invited readers to consider the prospects: “Let us therefore calmly, if we can for the fright into which he [Knox] has put us, appreciate those dreadful and deformed gorgons and hydras, which inhabit the joyless regions of an imagination, fruitful in

⁵⁵ Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton (July 7, 1744), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 1:27–28.

⁵⁶ Taylor Burleigh Wilkins, “Natural Law, Human Nature, and Natural Rights in Edmund Burke” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1965), 178.

nothing but the production of monsters.”⁵⁷ The imagination may be like a serpentine monster that plummets an entire society into despair.

Burke used similar imagery nearly thirty years later in his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* to describe war: “As if the dire goddess that presides over it [war], with her murderous spear in her hand, and her gorgon at her breast, was a coquette to be flirted with!”⁵⁸ Burke’s express imagery in these passages—gorgons, hydras, and monsters—in addition to exhibiting his rhetorical prowess, evokes the theme of misery he was discussing.⁵⁹ The mind may imagine the miserable prospect of riot and revolution. It is a powerful sword that may cut in a positive or negative direction, a virtuous or vicious direction, the former resulting from a proper ethic, the latter resulting from a “vitiating” and “perverted” ethic.⁶⁰

A final example of the imagination’s capacity to envision a possibility that would lead to misery occurs in a letter. Responding to John Barrow, who wanted to “abandon” a “very respectable trade” to pursue painting, Burke enjoined him to “put a little restraint on your imagination.” Imagination may envision a possibility that will not (presently) match reality, which may “improve and adorn society.” Or it may imagine a possibility that would be the “cause of the greatest disappointments, miseries and

⁵⁷ Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 137.

⁵⁸ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 237.

⁵⁹ Burke’s references trace back to Greek mythology and the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures. The biblical literature refers to a great dragon and ancient serpent that has deceived the world (Rev 21:9) and darkened the understanding and blinded the minds of the unbelieving (Eph 4:18; 2 Cor 4:4). Burke was familiar with the biblical stories and regularly made biblical allusions and appealed to biblical passages in his writings and speeches. However, in these passages, Burke’s direct allusion is to Greek mythology. For further discussion on these ideas, see Stephen H. Browne, *Edmund Burke and the Discourse of Virtue* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 6; F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: 1784–1797*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37; and Christopher J. Insole, “Burke and the Natural Law,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 124.

⁶⁰ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 242.

misfortunes, and sometimes of dangerous immoralities.”⁶¹ One’s dreams may reflect prudence and lead to success, or they may reveal imprudence and lead to misfortune. Burke seems to have believed that Barrow’s desires would precipitate the latter. Additionally, Burke explicitly invoked ethics in this passage, referring to “immoralities,” thereby demonstrating the importance of this imaginative function for ethical deliberation.

Success

Just as the person may imagine what results in misery, he may also imagine what results in success. Burke illustrated this point in *An Account of the European Settlements in America*. Imagination, he said, enabled the European settlement of Georgia because of the possibility of material gain: “Men are seldom induced to leave their country, but upon some extraordinary prospects” that “strike powerfully upon their imagination.”⁶² Again, he wrote, “It was necessary there should be something of immediate and uncommon gain, fitted to strike the imaginations of men forcibly, to tempt them to such hazardous designs.”⁶³ The adventurer does not usually assume certain risks except that he might gain certain rewards. Significantly, he cannot see such prospects except that he imagines them. By imagination, the adventurer may plot and plan and dream. The person makes decisions in life according to the possibilities he can imagine. Such prospects may be financial, as they were for many of these adventurers, or they may be something else.⁶⁴ The point is that man envisions the possible by imagination.

⁶¹ Edmund Burke to John S. Barrow (October 1, 1786), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 10:19.

⁶² *An Account of the European Settlements in America. In Six Parts*, 2 vols., 5th ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1770), 2:267 (spelling from this publication modernized throughout).

⁶³ *Account*, 1:47–48.

⁶⁴ Several scholars have analyzed these passages in relation to the topic of material gain, e.g., Frank W. Blackmar, *Spanish Institutions of the Southwest*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, vol. 10 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1891), 66; Frank W. Blackmar, “The

Additionally, the person may imagine possibilities that advance his condition. Burke wrote about these prospects in a letter to the Bishop of Chester: “Your lordship tells me that my ideas of that proscription had arisen only from my imagination having outrun my judgment.” As examined previously, the imagination gives rise to ideas and is distinct from judgment. But as this selection argues, the ideas of imagination may have great ambition. Keeping with his imagery of running, Burke continued tongue-in-cheek: “I have no such races between my imagination and my judgment,” before comparing them to racing horses that pull him along: “They have no king’s plate before them to animate the contention. They are a pair of slow and orderly beasts of very little figure, but fit enough to draw together, and, I trust, to pull themselves and their poor master out of all the mire into which our enemies have endeavoured to plunge us.” Consequently, he stated, “It was neither my arrogance, nor my irregular imagination, that induced me to think as I did.”⁶⁵

In his *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, Burke associated the imagination with dangerous serpentine monsters; in this letter, he compared it to a slow but sufficient racing horse, capable of lifting someone from the bog of despondency. Burke had previously employed the imagery of a horse in his *Enquiry* to demonstrate power, usefulness, and beauty.⁶⁶ The imagination thus may bear each of these qualities. It is like a horse that together with judgment may improve the person’s condition. Burke’s imagery is not unlike Plato’s, who, in his allegory of the chariot, imagined horses pulling the person along for the proposition that man has a tripartite soul, which he analogized to a charioteer (head, reason) leading a two-horse chariot (chest, spirit; stomach, desire).⁶⁷

Conquest of New Spain.” *The Agora* 5 (1895–96): 338; and Gregory M. Collins, *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke’s Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 227.

⁶⁵ Burke to the Bishop of Chester, 313.

⁶⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 237, 259, 275.

⁶⁷ Plato uses this analogy in both *Phaedrus* and *The Republic*.

Also, not unlike Burke, Plato envisioned good and bad uses of imagination: true versus false, higher versus lower.⁶⁸

Even so, Burke's epistemology differs from Plato's. Plato believed imagination serves reason because reason is higher than imagination.⁶⁹ Burke believed that reason may be given an outsized influence over imagination or vice versa. Consequently, the person should balance them according to their relative strengths and weaknesses so that both imagination and reason, or "judgment" as he stated here, serve the "poor master." Finally, by this analogy, Burke highlighted moral choice and responsibility. Just as the horse must be disciplined to be strong and useful, so also imagination and judgment must be properly trained to be "fit enough" to accomplish the moral will. The failure to discipline one's mental faculties properly results in a will that lacks the strength to follow the moral path.

Virtue

Through each of these examples, Burke showed how the imagination is crucial for ethical deliberation. One of the figures with whom he disagreed considerably during his life was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), whose ideas Burke challenged especially during the French Revolution. But they agreed on this sentiment from Rousseau: "It is imagination which extends for us the measure of the possible, whether for good or bad."⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, they disagreed about how to define the good and bad, but they both believed that a key purpose of imagination is to envision the possibility of virtue. It is not enough simply to justify one's actions, pursue love, engage in politics,

⁶⁸ Murray W. Bundy, "Plato's View of the Imagination," *Studies in Philology* 19, no. 4 (October 1922): 370, 379–80, 386, 391, 393.

⁶⁹ Bundy, "Plato's View of the Imagination," 368, 389.

⁷⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic, 1979), 81.

change one's career, follow adventure, and seek advancement. Burke held that people should do such things with virtue.

In addition, the possible is not simply about what to do but how to do it. To appeal to Burke's term in the *Reflections*, the possible should be supported by means of a "moral imagination." This concept entails the phenomenon of belief. For this reason, Susan E. Babbitt refers to moral imagination as the person's "general beliefs about what *ought* to be possible."⁷¹ Imagination and belief, therefore, undergird the person's pursuit of the possible. The person may lack virtue in an area of his life, but imagining it precedes doing it, whether because he mentally visualizes someone else living virtuously or because he envisions himself living virtuously.

Belief

The phenomenon of belief is thus also a function of imagination. Burke gave evidence of this connection on several occasions. For example, in *An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History*, he explained the Druids adopted their religious beliefs concerning the afterlife because they "follow[ed] their imagination."⁷² He also remarked that they adopted their medical-religious beliefs on the same basis. Imagining that "their diseases were inflicted by the immediate displeasure of the deity," the Druids joined medicine with magic so that "plants and herbs . . . struck powerfully on the imaginations of a superstitious people."⁷³ The imagination that envisions the possible may come to believe it, whether its object corresponds to reality or not. Societies may even build entire civilizations around their beliefs.

⁷¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 128; Susan E. Babbitt, *Impossible Dreams: Rationality, Integrity, and Moral Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996), 7–8. Incidentally, Babbitt does not actually engage Burke himself throughout this volume.

⁷² Burke, *Abridgement*, 353.

⁷³ Burke, *Abridgement*, 355.

Burke also linked imagination and religious belief during the Hastings impeachment proceedings. Discussing the actions of Warren Hastings's subordinates, Burke stated, "Even the lands and funds set aside for their funeral ceremonies, in which they hoped to find an end to their miseries, and some indemnity of imagination for all the substantial sufferings of their lives" were "seized and taken to make good the honour of corruption, and the faith of bribery pledged to Mr. Hastings or his instruments."⁷⁴ Hastings's subordinates, in their indiscriminate taking, seized what the Indians had set aside for their funerals, thereby robbing them not only of their lands and monies but also of their consolations. The Indians' funeral rituals and their beliefs in what funerals signified provided them with comfort from their miseries and protection from their sufferings; these rites freed them from their anxiety and worry. Significantly, these rituals helped them in this way only because they believed in them, which Burke indicated by the phrase "indemnity of imagination." The Indians' indemnity, their feelings of security from suffering, resulted from the beliefs they held in their imaginations.

These two examples indicate how Burke understood the relationship between imagination and religious beliefs not simply for individuals but also for societies. Certainly, such beliefs implicate what people believe about medicine, funeral rites, and the afterlife. But the principle undergirding Burke's remarks extends also to beliefs about love, the arts, politics, economics—anything. Belief, which describes the acceptance of a given idea of things, is a function of imagination because imagination gives form to thought. Whatever the object of belief, imagination makes such belief possible. However, not all beliefs, not all hopes, correspond to truth and virtue. Consequently, the wise person cultivates his imagination and forms his beliefs according to such standards.

Burke's association of imagination with belief raises the related topic of worldview. A worldview is the frame through which a person perceives the world, like a

⁷⁴ Burke, Trial of Warren Hastings: Fifth Day, 430.

pair of spectacles. One's worldview implicates the whole person and therefore concerns everything from one's beliefs to his behaviors.⁷⁵ Burke's concept of imagination is not unrelated to the concept of worldview.⁷⁶ As previously established, he viewed the imagination as the faculty through which the person sees and represents the world (one's cognitive lens) implicating the cognitive, affective, and volitive aspects of his nature. For this reason, Byrne associates Burke's doctrine of imagination with the concept of "worldview," as well as of "imaginative frameworks" and "imaginative wholes" to describe the same idea.⁷⁷ Byrne additionally traces this connection to Burke's belief that the imagination traces resemblances between ideas and "thereby gives meaning and creates a coherent conception of the world."⁷⁸ In short, the person perceives and thinks and feels and acts according to his imaginative outlook or his worldview.

In fact, Burke used related imagery amid the impeachment proceedings against Hastings. Having accused Hastings of wicked and vile behavior, including bribery, robbery, and fraud, Burke stated: "My Lords, no example of antiquity, nothing in the modern world, nothing in the range of human imagination can supply us with a Tribunal like this. My Lords, here we see virtually, in the mind's eye, that sacred majesty of the Crown, under whose authority you sit and whose power you exercise."⁷⁹ In this statement, Burke directly correlated "imagination" and "mind's eye." The imagination is

⁷⁵ To view a helpful explanation on the concept of worldview, see James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015), 141.

⁷⁶ Many scholars trace "worldview" back to the German term *weltanschauung*, first used by Immanuel Kant in *Critique of Judgment*. See David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 55–67; and Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 23–32.

⁷⁷ These concepts are ubiquitous through Byrne's work. For some examples, see William F. Byrne, *Edmund Burke for Our Time: Moral Imagination, Meaning, and Politics* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 7, 67, 80–83, 114, 118, 121, 164. Additionally, Byrne acknowledges that he obtained the concept of "wholes" from Claes G. Ryn, *Will, Imagination and Reason: Irving Babbitt and the Problem of Reality* (Chicago: Regnery, 1986), 51–52.

⁷⁸ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 182.

⁷⁹ Edmund Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 19, 1788), in *Writings*, 6:458.

the mind's eye, the cognitive pair of spectacles, by which the person perceives the world. So, it is a descriptive faculty. But it is also a prescriptive, ethical faculty relating to one's beliefs. In this case, the person not only observes crimes by imagination but also condemns them according to the beliefs of his imagination.

Undoubtedly, the differences in people's imaginative frameworks (to use Byrne's phrase) or worldviews cause them to interpret the same phenomena differently, a point that Burke made during the French Revolution. Whereas the Jacobins supported the Revolution, Burke opposed it. Yet he recognized that someone could view it positively: "If we were to know nothing of this [National] Assembly but by its title and function, no colours could paint to the imagination any thing more venerable." The Assembly appears "exceptional enough" so that an "enquirer" may "pause and hesitate in condemning things even of the very worst aspect," interpreting them as "only mysterious" rather than "blameable." Here, Burke used the conditional "if" and subjunctive "could"; he imagined a hypothetical. The problem is that his opponents did not see it as being hypothetical; they did not believe like Burke believed. To them the Assembly was venerable and exceptional. However, Burke believed it lacked in "virtue and wisdom" and displayed an "awful image."⁸⁰

Such differences of opinion demonstrate differences of imaginative framework or worldview. People often believe that their own views are reasonable and sensible, while seeing those who disagree with them as unreasonable and insensible.⁸¹ The cause of this phenomenon is that these different people have formed different imaginative visions of the world; they have formed different worldviews. Such judgments, says

⁸⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 91. Burke's usage of terms like "enquirer" and "awful image" establishes a lexical link to his work in the *Enquiry* some thirty years prior (See Philip Ellis Ray, "The Metaphors of Edmund Burke: Figurative Patterns and Meanings in His Political Prose" [PhD diss., Yale University, 1973], 67). In that work, he explained that power and terror may invoke the sublime (*Enquiry*, 230–31, 236–42).

⁸¹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 187.

Byrne, are “largely the function of one’s moral-imaginative framework.”⁸² For this reason, the wise person works to ensure he is not deceived.

Deception

Just as the imagination may remember, plan, and believe, it may also be deceived. Some deceptions result from a genuine misunderstanding of the facts. Other deceptions follow from susceptibility. Still other deceptions arise because of exploitation by a sinister actor.

Misunderstanding and Misinterpretation

Burke referred to the imagination and its prospect of misunderstanding on several occasions. In a letter to Charles Townsend, Burke ventured an opinion but prefaced it with an admission he had not lately seen many people or read much news and could be mistaken: “I have known myself sometimes mistaken in such an imagination.” He then praised Townsend’s patience, good nature, and virtue.⁸³ Burke believed his interpretation of the data was correct but exhibited a sort of virtue epistemology, acknowledging he could be wrong. One’s interpretation of an event is the work of imagination. However, the interpretation may be incorrect. The mistaken imagination is not immoral. But it may become immoral if the person refuses to acknowledge his limitations or act in humility toward others occupying a better epistemic position.

The imagination may also be deceived because it misinterprets larger trends. Burke addressed this possibility in his *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* while discussing the economy. It had some “bad harvests,” but these were the exception rather than the rule and “cannot long subsist.” However, others saw these harvests as the norm:

⁸² Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 189.

⁸³ Edmund Burke to Charles Townsend (June 25, 1765), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 1:205.

“Their imaginations entail these accidents upon us in perpetuity.”⁸⁴ In Burke’s view, they had misinterpreted the larger economic trends, believing a state of affairs that was wrong. Certainly, the imagination may paint a picture not reflecting reality. Whether Burke or his interlocutors were right in this circumstance is immaterial; the point is that the person interprets data by his imagination, which may be accurate or inaccurate. For this reason, the person must work to cultivate an imagination that together with reason analyzes data carefully and morally.

Susceptibility and Exploitation

Deception may also result from susceptibility. In the *Reflections*, Burke considered certain “adventurers” and “money-dealers” who romanticized an interest in country life they did not fully understand: “At first, perhaps, their tender and susceptible imaginations may be captivated with the innocent and unprofitable delights of a pastoral life; but in a little time they will find that agriculture is a trade much more laborious, and much less lucrative than that which they had left.”⁸⁵ The tender and susceptible imagination is naive and not sufficiently grounded in sober reflection. Burke’s usage of the word “tender” even suggests these men were behaving like youth.⁸⁶ Thus, he referred to them as “‘enlightened’ usurers.”⁸⁷ Annabel Patterson discerns satire in Burke.⁸⁸ Still, his underlying point stands: the susceptible imagination is liable to be deceived.

Burke favored the reverence of the “Carthusian monk” and the knowledge of the “old experienced peasant” to the slick talk of academics and experts who lack faith in

⁸⁴ Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 146.

⁸⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 239.

⁸⁶ *Account*, 2:157.

⁸⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 239 (italics removed).

⁸⁸ Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 196.

God: “I cannot conceive how a man’s not believing in God can teach him to cultivate the earth with the least of any additional skill or encouragement.”⁸⁹ In contrast to the tender and susceptible imagination, the moral imagination is neither arrogant nor gullible. It believes rightly, operates from a proper worldview, and exudes a wisdom that is not beguiled by falsehood.

Again, Burke discussed the deceived imagination, also in the *Reflections*, in relation to economics and politics. The National Assembly faced an economic crisis. The minister of finance, Jacques Necker, had forewarned the Assembly that the state could not persist on paper currency alone, which the Assembly ignored. Burke evaluated the situation thus: “A grand imagination found in this flight of commerce something to captivate. It was wherewithal to dazzle the eye of an eagle,” but it “was not made to entice the smell of a mole, nuzzling and burying himself in his mother earth.” The imagination may be grand in its designs yet deceived in its understanding, like the eagle is grand in its flight yet victim to the mole’s “vulgar deceptions.”⁹⁰

The economy’s foundation appeared stable from the top-down, but it was precarious from the bottom-up. A grand imagination has much to gain if it sees the world accurately and much to lose if it does not; the Assembly’s grand imagination was not so grand. Burke blamed “degrading and sordid philosophy,” which he compared to “alchemy” and “fraud,” for introducing structural compromise to their economy.⁹¹ The philosophy by which the person forms his imagination and constructs his worldview has vast implications for the ideas he adopts and pursues. Poor philosophy leads to deception; good philosophy leads to truth.

⁸⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 239.

⁹⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 287.

⁹¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 287.

Burke also warned about the prospect of a deceived imagination in the *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*. Comparing the strength of a constitution to a fortress, he remarked: “Nothing looks more awful and imposing than an ancient fortification. Its lofty embattled walk, its bold, projecting, rounded towers that pierce the sky, strike the imagination and promise inexpugnable strength.” However, appearances deceive. The fortress may be in “ruinous repair” with a “practicable breach in every part of it.” Constitutions, and the laws resulting from them, are only as strong as the human spirit animating them. Strong constitutions and strong societies are undergirded by the “wisdom and fortitude of men,” which are “gifts of God.”⁹²

However, a people who have abandoned godly wisdom and fortitude may think more of their constitution and laws than is warranted. Times of trial test the picture in one’s imagination and reveal whether reality substantiates supposition. Again, as demonstrated by the example of the Carthusian monk, belief in God occupied an important place in Burke’s political ethic; it undergirds right thinking about the world so that one’s imagination is not deceived. However, in cases where the person has abandoned faith in God, his susceptibility is willful.

Finally, Burke considered some examples of deception that go beyond simple misunderstanding or willful susceptibility. That is, people may actively seek to deceive others, knowingly presenting as true what is false. For instance, Burke wrote to Adam Smith that Richard Champion had applied for a patent, but that Josiah Wedgwood had opposed it by pretending he was “actuated” when in fact he could “feel no injury except in his imaginations of unmeasurable gain.” Burke offered Wedgwood’s own testimony as

⁹² Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 111. Editor E. J. Payne suggested the allusion was to Windsor Castle (*Burke: Select Works*, vol. 2 [Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1875], 311).

evidence: “[A]nd so he told me.”⁹³ Here, Burke described active deception and dishonesty on the part of Wedgwood who exhibited an immoral imagination.

Burke also spoke of how the imagination can become deluded in a deeply exploitive and sinister manner. Writing in *Letter to a Member of National Assembly* amid the French Revolution, Burke explained: “But the deluded people of France are like other madmen, who, to a miracle, bear hunger, and thirst, and cold, and confinement, and the chains and lash of their keeper, whilst all the while they support themselves by the imagination that they are generals of armies, prophets, kings, and emperors.”⁹⁴ Burke hereby illustrated that imagination may be misled. As James Conniff explains, the people “ran wild in their delusions.”⁹⁵ The imagination may become deluded into believing something that does not obtain; possible worlds are sometimes not real worlds. The madman imagines himself a prophet; the confined man believes himself a king. Many people failed to see the Revolution for what it was because they failed to cultivate moral imaginations, and demagogues exploited them for it.

Although the imagination may be innocently, willfully, or viciously deceived, imagination itself is not the problem; (the lack of) cultivation is the problem. The failure to envision accurately the requisite work and standard wages of pastoral life is not a problem of imagination but a problem of equipping the imagination properly. The failure to recognize a weak economy or weak constitution is not a problem of imagination but a problem of belief and worldview; such people see the world wrongly because they believe the wrong things. In a very real sense, such problems result from “foolishness.”⁹⁶ However, the failure to identify someone else’s deception, or to identify hunger and thirst

⁹³ Edmund Burke to Adam Smith (May 1, 1775), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 3:153.

⁹⁴ Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of National Assembly* (1791), in *Writings*, 8:305.

⁹⁵ James Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 223–24.

⁹⁶ Conniff, *The Useful Cobbler*, 223.

and cold and confinement for what they are, is somewhat different and speaks to the importance of building mental discernment and fortitude. Finally, these examples demonstrate that the person must guard against overconfidence, gullibility, and naivete and develop epistemic virtues, such as humility, discernment, carefulness, and strength.

Imagination and the Expression of Thought

The content of the person's memories, plans, and beliefs are not limited to the confines of imagination. He may imagine how he may express them and, together with an act of the will, give rise to words and to language. Hence, Burke's doctrine of imagination reveals a faculty that is foundational also for speaking and writing because the person must organize his thoughts and figure out how to communicate them. Additionally, Burke recognized that the person may use language for different purposes, including eloquence and exaggeration.

Language

Burke established the connection between imagination and language on several occasions. One instance occurs in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*. While quoting a passage from Virgil in which he had describe an awful beast, Burke noted he "breaks the line." He explained that Virgil "had not verse or language to describe that monster even as he had conceived her" because he was "overpowered . . . with the imagination."⁹⁷ The imagination that may conjure terrible creatures may also give expression to those creatures; however, imagination also has its limits because language has its limits, especially when faced with the sublime.

Additionally, several reports make similar connections in reference to Burke. For example, the *Morning Chronicle* reported that Burke, who had given a speech about the conduct of John Powell and Charles Bembridge (who were accused of fraud),

⁹⁷ Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord*, 156*.

“sported with his accustomed share of fancy, imagination, and pleasantry, and interspersed what he said with abundance of apposite Latin quotations.”⁹⁸ Along these same lines, after Burke had spoken on the Regency Bill, a report described his speech as “an effusion of rich ideas wildly communicated as the imagination suggested.”⁹⁹ By imagination, Burke spoke, and by imagination, he envisioned how to incorporate Latin, or whatever other ideas, into his speaking.

Burke’s doctrine of imagination suggests that all language is the work of imagination. Just as the imagination gives form to thought, it gives expression to that thought through language. Words are the vehicles of ideas that are based in imagination. By imagination, the person envisions what words best communicate his ideas and in what order and what manner to convey them. He may express them with “pleasantry” or “wildly.” This phenomenon occurs at such a proficient level that people may not consciously think about the role imagination plays in it. However, the picture of a child learning how to put ideas and language together illustrates an imagination that is learning to function at a higher capacity until it is seemingly instinctive.

Rhetoric

Numerous people have noted Burke’s eloquence through the centuries. His contemporaries Horace Walpole and King George III referred to his “fertile imagination.”¹⁰⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft and Beilby Porteus spoke of his “lively

⁹⁸ Edmund Burke, Speech on Powell and Bembridge (May 21, 1783), in *Writings*, 4:167.

⁹⁹ Edmund Burke, Speech on Regency Bill (February 6, 1789), in *Writings*, 4:258.

¹⁰⁰ Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third*, vol. 2, ed. Denis Le Marchant (London: Bentley, Wilson, and Fley, 1845), 273; *The Manuscripts of the Duke of Beaufort, K.G., the Earl of Donoughmore, and Others*, Historical Manuscripts Commission (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1891), 350, quoted in *Writings*, 6:60.

imagination.”¹⁰¹ In the nineteenth century, Jeremy Bentham, Augustine Birrell, and Woodrow Wilson made similar comments.¹⁰² More recently, Paul Fussell described Burke’s “literary imagination” as occupying the “central nervous system” of the eighteenth-century rhetorical world, and Paddy Bullard has referred to him as the “most eloquent writer and speaker of his age.”¹⁰³ Burke used imagery, metaphor, and other rhetorical devices to communicate his ideas, appealing to anatomical, architectural, celestial, historical, maritime, medicinal, military, and pastoral figures, as his imagination suggested.

However, on other occasions, Burke chose not to supply such images. He left his point undefined by referring to idioms like “beyond imagination.” This usage of “imagination” also demonstrates the rhetorical imagination, allowing the person to describe something that is beyond what one might expect, whether profoundly good or profoundly bad. As this section examines, Burke invoked the term “imagination(s)” in this manner in relation to subjects like riches, wonders, advocacy, policy, trade, commerce, government, wickedness, persecution, and revolution.

Early Uses, the Colonies, and the Hastings Impeachment

The rhetorical appeal to imagination appears throughout Burke’s career. For example, while describing the British adventurers who joined an expedition to Georgia,

¹⁰¹ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 5, 57, 141; Beilby Porteus, Transcript of ‘Occasional Memorandums,’ vol. 3, July 12, 1797 (Lambeth Palace Library, MS 2100, fos. 117–18), quoted in Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 2:585.

¹⁰² Jeremy Bentham, “Advertisement for Tract the First of This Second Publication” (1820), in *On the Liberty of the Press, and Public Discussion, and Other Legal and Political Writings for Spain and Portugal*, ed. Catherine Pease-Watkin and Philip Schofield, The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 67; Augustine Birrell, *Obiter Dicta* (London: Duckworth, 1910), 254; Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature and Other Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896), 159–60.

¹⁰³ Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), vii, 202 (Fussell grouped five other figures into this category: Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds, and Edward Gibbon); Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric*, 3. Cf. Christopher Reid, “Burke as Rhetorician and Orator,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 41–52.

he remarked that they “made a fortune even beyond their imaginations.”¹⁰⁴ The wealth they gained went beyond what they could have imagined. Similarly, Burke observed that Christopher Columbus collected “such a number of curiosities of all kinds as might strike the imaginations.”¹⁰⁵ Because Europeans had never seen those cultural wonders, their imaginations were struck; such wonders were overwhelming and unexpected. Thus, the rhetorical appeal to imagination may express the sense of surprise people experience when reality does not match their expectations.

Burke employed the same idea a decade later in a letter. Upon describing a party’s defense of a bill to be “weak, trivial, inconsistent, and indeed childish and absurd” so that it “sunk far below what either friends or enemies expected from them,” Burke stated: “Paint as you please to your imagination the figure that they made . . . you will never sink to the true pitch.”¹⁰⁶ This party’s support for its position was worse than one might imagine. In like manner, after advocating for the enclosure of some wastelands, Burke commented that he could hardly imagine a worst prospect if the policy were not pursued: “But a more universal Calamity I believe can hardly be conceived, in the most gloomy imagination than the same project not pursued with the same equity.”¹⁰⁷ Hence, the person may refer to the word “imagination” rhetorically to communicate the importance of his position on a given point, whether about wastelands or anything else.

Burke also made a rhetorical usage of “imagination” several times during Britain’s conflict with the American Colonies. For instance, he declared that the “trade of America had increased far beyond the speculations of the most sanguine imagination.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Account*, 1:141.

¹⁰⁵ *Account*, 1:12.

¹⁰⁶ Edmund Burke to Charles O’Hara (February 20, 1768), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 1:344.

¹⁰⁷ Edmund Burke, “Mnemon” to the *Public Advertiser* [March 1768], in *Writings*, 2:85.

¹⁰⁸ Edmund Burke, *Speech on American Taxation* (April 19, 1774), in *Writings*, 2:432–33.

That is, reality may exceed even the most optimistic expectations. Again, nearly a year later, after observing that Pennsylvania's commerce had grown "nearly Fifty times" from 1704 to 1772, Burke stated, "When we speak of the commerce with our Colonies, fiction lags after truth; invention is unfruitful, and imagination cold and barren."¹⁰⁹ Burke was not saying that imagination is literally inoperative but that no one needed to invent fictions about commerce in the Colonies because the actual details were sufficiently impressive. Their trade was "so expansive and vigorous," says Bullard, "that it stagger[ed] representation."¹¹⁰ Because these facts were inconvenient, Burke's opponents relied on "generalities," thereby producing a fiction that lagged after truth.¹¹¹

This usage of "imagination" continued in Burke's work into the 1780s. In a letter to Richard Champion, Burke wrote that "there was no distress which imagination could figure, that ought not to be submitted to, rather than to receive your relief from him [Charles Bembridge]." Champion had borrowed money from the "violent, heady, and presumptuous" Bembridge, whom Burke described as the "last in the world" from whom Champion should have been in debt.¹¹² No amount of anxiety or anguish that one might imagine could be worse.

The rhetorical appeal to imagination also appears in Burke's writings and speeches concerning Hastings. For example, Burke made the following comment about a specific governmental arrangement: "It was an invention beyond the imagination of all the speculatists of our speculating age."¹¹³ The most brilliant thinkers could have

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 116.

¹¹⁰ Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric*, 109.

¹¹¹ Browne, *Edmund Burke and the Discourse of Virtue*, 56.

¹¹² Edmund Burke to Richard Champion (October 2, 1784), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 5:172–73. The amount in question was likely only a small amount because it did not appear in Bembridge's will (170n7).

¹¹³ Burke, *Speech on Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, 500.

imagined all kinds of arrangements without considering that one; some ideas, some inventions, are so unexpected that they could not have been guessed. Similarly, at the opening of impeachment, Burke commented that “nothing in the range of human imagination can supply us with a Tribunal like this” and that the wickedness of the East India Company stood “as a monument to astonish the imagination.”¹¹⁴ The imagination cannot provide a better example of vile behavior than what Hastings and the East India Company provided. By employing the expressions he used in these excerpts, Burke illustrated the rhetorical appeal to imagination.

French Revolution

While Burke appealed to “imagination” in this rhetorical manner throughout his career, the French Revolution inspired its frequency considerably. For example, Burke wrote to his son: “I think, indeed, your situation to be as delicate as one’s imagination can represent any thing.”¹¹⁵ Burke had published *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* less than two weeks prior and observed that not one minister thanked him for it. Here, Burke’s rhetoric shows the extreme nature of his interpretation of the events at hand.

Approximately four months later in *Thoughts on French Affairs*, Burke used an analogous expression. Addressing the prospect of the revolutionary spirit possessing the Romans, he commented that their government was “feeble and resourceless beyond all imagination.” It lacked sufficient physical and financial strength to resist revolution. Only their reverence for the Pope preempted it, which served as a “bridle” to their otherwise

¹¹⁴ Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 19, 1788), 458; Burke, *Speech on Fox’s India Bill*, 426–27. In cases where the title alone is not enough to identify the source, I also include the date even in short citations, which occurs especially in some letters and speeches.

¹¹⁵ Burke to Richard Burke (August 16, 1791), 265.

“turbulent, ferocious, and headlong” natures.¹¹⁶ However, their government was fantastically ineffective.

Several years into the Revolution, Burke invoked “imagination” for rhetorical purposes in a letter in which he criticized the persecution of the clergy, aristocracy, and monarchy by revolutionaries. Burke hoped that their “hunger for destruction” would “relent a little” and that their “thirst for persecution” would be “glutted,” but he did not expect it: “I do suppose, that such a Termination of the misery and captivity of three years, attending with humiliations and mortifications of every sort, could hardly be exceeded by any Effort of imagination.”¹¹⁷ The revolutionary cannot imagine ending the misery he has caused; his hunger and thirst for destruction and death will not be sated. Sometimes the person has so malformed his imagination that he cannot do something decent even if part of him wants to.

Again, Burke used “imagination” rhetorically to illustrate the veritable “hell” the Reign of Terror had unleashed in Paris. Imagining Milton putting the scene to verse, Burke remarked that “he would have thought his design revolting to the most unlimited imagination, and his colouring overcharged beyond all allowance for the licence even of poetical painting.”¹¹⁸ Parisian conditions were so bad that he drew a comparison between Milton’s hell and the Revolution’s Paris.¹¹⁹ The way that Burke described these horrors recalls his earlier discussion of the sublime in the *Enquiry*. The sublime excites ideas of pain, danger, or terror so that the imagination is unable to “rise” to the occasion and

¹¹⁶ Burke, *French Affairs*, 356–57.

¹¹⁷ Edmund Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam (August 17, 1792), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 7:170–71.

¹¹⁸ Edmund Burke, Speech on French Corps Bill (April 11, 1794), in *Writings*, 4:607–8.

¹¹⁹ Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789–1820)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 66–67; William L. Pressly, *The French Revolution as Blasphemy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 46. Cf. Joseph Crawford who argues more strongly that even the idea of Milton’s hell cannot quite capture the Parisian hell (*Raising Milton’s Ghost: John Milton and the Sublime of Terror in the Early Romantic Period* [London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011]).

becomes “lost.”¹²⁰ Burke’s notion is akin to the operating system that cannot read an old application. Paul Mattick Jr. remarks that it is “an experience so frightful as to lie outside the bounds of artistic representation.”¹²¹ Burke thus layered rhetoric atop a literal point: the imagination may not sufficiently represent some particularly bad scenes.

Burke continued with the theme of the sublime in his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*: “But out of the tomb of the murdered Monarchy in France, has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man.”¹²² The Revolution was more dreadful than one could imagine. When Burke first published his *Reflections and Appeal*, many received his warnings with incredulity and replied with mockery. *Regicide Peace* stood as confirmation for his concerns. His reference to the murdered monarchy is more than metaphorical; by this point, both Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had faced the guillotine. Furthermore, Burke, in *French Affairs*, had described the Revolution as a ghost that he feared would float past France’s borders and haunt the continent and the world.¹²³ In fact, Conor Cruise O’Brien states that Burke’s terrible phantom corporealized approximately fifty years later with the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*; for “arise,” see 216; for “rise,” see 245; for “lost,” see 241, 243, 245.

¹²¹ Paul Mattick Jr., “Beautiful and Sublime: Gender Totemism in the Constitution,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Autumn 1990): 299. Cf. Taran Kang, *Transgression and the Aesthetics of Evil* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 103.

¹²² Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 190–91.

¹²³ E.g., Burke, *French Affairs*, 349. Related, Burke also made use of the rhetorical imagination in his letter to William Elliot in which he expressed concern that some members of the Aulic Council were corrupt such that they “should give a judgment so shameless and so prostitute, of such monstrous and even portentous corruption, that no example in the history of human depravity, or even in the fictions of poëtick imagination, could possibly match it” (Burke to William Elliot, 38).

¹²⁴ Conor Cruise O’Brien, ed., Introduction to *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, by Edmund Burke (1982; repr., London: Penguin, 2004), 9. Some commentators, often sympathetic to the revolutionary cause, have argued that Burke’s rhetoric is fanciful and that he misunderstood the actual circumstances in France; however, this line of inquiry exceeds present purposes.

Scholars have debated how best to interpret Burke's imagery of "spectre." One relatively new stream interprets it through the lens of sexuality, gender, and the patriarchy; after all, he characterized the ghost as feminine.¹²⁵ However, a more straightforward interpretation relates to the historical and literary tradition he had inherited. For example, later in his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke referred to a goddess and gorgon—also feminine—not because of the patriarchy but because of Greek mythology.¹²⁶ In fact, Burke had drawn on such imagery throughout his career, interacting with the symbolism of spirits, phantoms, apparitions, chimeras, and harpies from the Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Christian traditions broadly.¹²⁷ Other interpreters have compared Burke's imagery to the Gothic era and to Milton's *Death*.¹²⁸ Consequently, Burke's reference to a spectre did not signify an ideological point about gender but a rhetorical point about the Revolution. In fact, Burke was saying that this ghost is worse than the terrible monsters of the tradition because it wore a "far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination." Burke was not the only person to compare the Revolution to a monster; Mary Shelley would likewise symbolize it as Frankenstein's creature.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ E.g., Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 82; Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 47; Sue Chaplin, *Law, Sensibility and the Sublime in Eighteenth-Century Women's Fiction: Speaking of Dread* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 28–29, 108; Ryan, "A New Description of Empire," 9; and Anne Norton, *Bloodrites of the Post-Structuralists: Word, Flesh and Revolution* (2002; repr., New York: Routledge, 2011), 151.

¹²⁶ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 237. Cf. *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 137.

¹²⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 235–36, 316, where he cited Job, Homer, Lucretius, Virgil, and St. Anthony.

¹²⁸ Paulson, *Representations of Revolution*, 72; Joseph Crawford, *Gothic Fiction and the Invention of Terrorism: The Politics and Aesthetics of Fear in the Age of the Reign of Terror* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), viii.

¹²⁹ E.g., Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, 82. While Frankenstein's monster likely symbolizes more than the Revolution, it does not symbolize less than the Revolution.

Also, several scholars have commented on the supernatural quality of Burke's imagery. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville described Burke's expression as one of "religious terror."¹³⁰ Similarly, Leslie Stephen remarked, "Burke looked upon the Revolution with that kind of shudder with which man acknowledges the presence of a being believed to be supernatural."¹³¹ The Revolution affected Burke on a deep level; he viewed it in sublime horror so that, whatever rhetorical tools he employed to depict it, they were ultimately insufficient for the task.

These examples illustrate that appeal to "imagination" for rhetorical purposes may describe something exceedingly good, such as riches or commerce, or exceedingly bad, such as a policy or situation or revolution. Burke used different terms or expressions to indicate this form of rhetoric. For example, he used variations of "beyond imagination." He availed himself of indefinite pronouns like "all," "anything," and "nothing." He utilized adverbs like "hardly" or verbs like "figure," such as when an object can hardly exceed imagination or when the imagination cannot figure the object in question. He also joined imagination and invention for similar reasons. Hence, Burke showed that imagination is foundational for language and that invoking such expressions may capture a rhetorical emphasis.

Exaggeration

Because imagination is a faculty of creation, just as it enables rhetoric, it also enables exaggeration. However, whereas Burke supported the use of imagination for rhetoric, he was more critical of its use for the purpose of exaggeration because

¹³⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13. Cf. Burke, *Enquiry*, 230–31, 242–43; Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 190–91; Ronald Paulson, "Burke's Sublime and the Representation of Revolution," in *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 265n29; Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime*, 47; and Norton, *Bloodrites of the Post-Structuralists*, 151.

¹³¹ Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (1881; repr, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), 243.

exaggeration does not reflect the entire truth, instead occupying some place between the truth and falsehood.¹³² That is, it represents a form of deception. For example, in his Speech on St Eustatius, after accusing General John Vaughan and Admiral George Rodney of committing atrocities, Burke clarified that his charges were “not suggestions of imagination” or “exaggerated by any factious spirit.”¹³³ His allegations against these men included intimidation of residents; confiscation of property; refusal of sustenance; separation of families; and persecution of Jews, Americans, French, and Dutch.¹³⁴ However, he specified that he was not taking imaginative liberty and exaggerating his claim.

Similarly, when Burke brought charges against Hastings and appealed to the reports that John David Paterson had submitted, Burke’s critics accused Paterson of exaggerating his claims by the “warmth of imagination.” Burke countered them by stating that Paterson was the “coldest and most phlegmatic of men.”¹³⁵ Burke had used the same phrase decades prior in his *Enquiry*: “There are some men formed with feelings so blunt, with tempers so cold and phlegmatic, that they can hardly be said to be awake during the whole course of their lives.”¹³⁶ Recognizing that people may use their imagination to exaggerate claims, Burke aimed to impress upon his hearers that Paterson was not using imagination in this fashion.

¹³² Burke, *Reflections*, 166.

¹³³ Edmund Burke, Speech on St Eustatius (May 14, 1781), in *Writings*, 4:76.

¹³⁴ Burke, Speech on St Eustatius, 70–76. The House rejected Burke’s plea for an inquiry into these matters.

¹³⁵ Edmund Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 18, 1788), in *Writings*, 6:426.

¹³⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206–7. Betsy Bolton observes that Burke’s opponents did not take him seriously, accusing him of engaging in “sentimental politics” and “theatricals” to the point of “farce.” Even so, she continues, Burke’s “moral indignation” triumphed in the end, and Colonial India was “structured along universal principles of justice” (“Imperial Sensibilities, Colonial Ambivalence: Edmund Burke and Frances Burney,” *English Literary History* 72, no. 4 [Winter 2005]: 882–84).

Again, in a letter to Gilbert Elliot, Burke acknowledged the propensity of imagination to exaggerate. Elliot was planning to publish his speeches in two volumes, but Burke warned him against it. He explained, “It is true that for the mere reading, the difference of one Volume containing the matter of two, is nothing; but the imagination finds a difference in the outset.”¹³⁷ In other words, Burke wanted Elliot to avoid even the appearance of a falsehood.

This section has contended that imagination undergirds language, rhetoric, and exaggeration in Burke’s thinking. Without imagination people could not speak or even think coherently. Clearly, Burke supported the rhetorical imagination. But his comments on the exaggerating imagination were more critical. While his critics have interpreted his rhetorical flair as a form of exaggeration, Burke did not see it that way. For this reason, Bullard writes that rhetoric was a deeply ethical matter for Burke, not a parlor trick, and even remarks on Burke’s “rhetoric of character.”¹³⁸ Whereas rhetoric is based in truth, exaggeration tends away from truth.

Chapters 2–3 have introduced Burke’s doctrine of imagination as it operates within the human person to provide a foundation for chapters 4–7, which examine his view of the imagination in relation to the sublime and beautiful, the arts, morality, society, and politics.

¹³⁷ Edmund Burke to Sir Gilbert Elliot (June 23, 1788), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 5:403.

¹³⁸ Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric*, 140–73.

CHAPTER 4

THE SUBLIME, THE BEAUTIFUL, AND THE ARTS

This chapter sets out to accomplish three goals. First, it presents Burke's notion of the intersection of imagination with the concepts of the sublime and beautiful, which relate to his view of both the arts and ethics. Then, it reviews Burke's understanding of the arts and the cultivation of taste. Finally, before examining the topic of the moral imagination in chapter 5, it formally introduces Burke's view of the social imagination, which undergirds what follows in the remaining chapters.

Imagination, the Sublime, and the Beautiful

Whereas neoclassicists in Burke's day often combined the concepts of the sublime and beautiful, Burke distinguished them, arguing they have "remarkable contrast" in their natures.¹ Writing in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, he explained that each bears a "positive nature" in man's imaginative experience of the world so that neither is "necessarily dependent" on the other for its existence.² Even so, he did not treat them as being necessarily mutually exclusive. The qualities of the sublime or the beautiful do not require the "ceasing or diminution"³ of the other so that they are "sometimes found united."⁴ Therefore, the sublime and beautiful are distinct and may exist independently of one other, but they may also overlap with one another. That is, Burke's methodology led

¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 281.

² Burke, *Enquiry*, 211–12.

³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 211–14.

⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 282.

him to consider them separately, but he did not deny that they may overlap (this overlap is considered below in the discussion of the divine sublime).

In terms of their effects on the person, Burke linked the sublime with pain and the beautiful with pleasure and explained that imagination plays a vital role in man's experience of these feelings: "Now the imagination is the most extensive province of pleasure and pain." The person subjectively experiences them "in the imagination" but does not objectively cause them. Rather, pain and pleasure arise from the "properties of the natural object." Additionally, pleasure arises from an imitation in the imagination bearing resemblance to the object.⁵

However, Burke was not an ethical hedonist or utilitarian, as one historiographical tradition has held. For example, Elie Halévy included Burke in his history of "philosophical radicalism," and John Plamenatz grouped him with the "English utilitarians."⁶ John Morley even interpreted Burke as a "true Benthamite."⁷ This tradition emphasizes Burke's Whiggism and sees his writings from the 1790s as an aberration from his otherwise utilitarian philosophy.⁸ Insofar as *hēdonē* means "pleasure," Burke

⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

⁶ Élie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism*, trans. Mary Morris (London: Faber & Faber, 1928), 155–64; John Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1949), 41–43, 52, 56–58.

⁷ See William F. Byrne, *Edmund Burke for Our Time: Moral Imagination, Meaning, and Politics* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 155.

⁸ Other scholars following this tradition include Henry Buckle, William Edward Hartpole Lecky, Leslie Stephen, Harold Laski, Charles Vaughan, George Sabine, and Richard M. Weaver. Burke scholars painting Burke with the colors of utilitarianism include John MacCunn, Alfred Cobban, Frank O'Gorman, Isaac Kramnick, C. B. Macpherson, George Fasel, Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., F. P. Lock, Christopher Reid, Iain Hampsher-Monk, James Conniff, and Jesse Norman. Even so, many of these figures have rightly recognized some nuance in Burke's ethic, most holding he counterbalances liberal utilitarianism with traditional emphases on natural law and prescription. Of course, this historiographical tradition stands in contrast to the one that interprets Burke through the lens of natural law, which includes figures like Russell Kirk, Charles Parkin, Peter J. Stanlis, Francis Canavan, Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, Michael Freeman, Joseph Pappin III, Christopher Insole, and Frederick Whelan; or the lens of historicism, such as Leo Strauss. The historiography of Burke is broader still than this short overview. For more information, see C. B. Macpherson, *Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3–5; Joseph Pappin III, *The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), 22–44; Stephen Howard Browne, "Edmund Burke in the Humanist Tradition: Case Studies in Rhetoric and Rhetorical Judgment" (PhD diss., The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987), 1–7; James Conniff, *The Useful*

certainly considered hedonic factors in his broader theory of man and morality, but the designation “hedonist” in the strict sense fails to appreciate the nuance of his position.⁹

In Burke’s view, neither the sublime nor beautiful, neither pain nor pleasure, are good or bad as such. Both have a good role to play in man’s affective experience of the world. The absence of pain is not pleasure but rather “delight,” and the absence of pleasure is not pain but rather (a) “indifference” if the pleasure “simply ceases,” (b) “disappointment” if it is “abruptly terminated,” or (c) “grief” if it is “totally lost.”¹⁰ The sublime may result in amazement, awe, and reverence, whereas the beautiful may cause affection, love, and pity. Yet the sublime is more “powerful” than beauty in its “effect on the body and mind” because even the “liveliest imagination” cannot capture it.¹¹ Having introduced Burke’s understanding of the sublime and beautiful, this section examines Burke’s usage of “imagination” in his discussion of each of them.

The Sublime

Burke defined the sublime by stating, “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger . . . is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”¹² The sublime may amaze and

Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 1–3; and Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 154–60.

⁹ Cf. J. R. Dinwiddy, “Utility and Natural Law in Burke’s Thought: A Reconsideration,” *Studies in Burke and His Time* 16 (1974): 105–28; Paddy Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 97; Paddy Bullard, “Edmund Burke Among the Poets: Milton, Lucretius, and the *Philosophical Enquiry*,” in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michal Funk Deckard, International Archives of the History of Ideas (New York: Springer, 2012), 263; and David Dwan, “Burke and Utility,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 134.

¹⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 211–15. Burke recognized that his understanding of “delight” was uncommon but used it to distinguish the feeling of the absence of pain, which is a sort of “relative pleasure,” from the feeling of “positive pleasure,” which are distinct phenomena (214).

¹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 216–17.

¹² Burke, *Enquiry*, 216.

confound the imagination so that it “effectually robs” the mind of its reasoning power and the imagination is filled with admiration, reverence, and respect, as well as awe, fear, grandeur, horror, solemnity, and wonder, depending on the cause.¹³ Burke then presented a catalog of causes that may create such impressions on the imagination and give rise to the sublime: terror, obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession and uniformity, and magnitude in building, difficulty, magnificence, light, color, sound and loudness, suddenness, intermitting, cries of animals, smell and taste, and the feeling of pain.¹⁴ This section reviews only those causes in which Burke explicitly invoked the term “imagination(s).” However, by not using the term in his discussion of the other causes does not mean he denied its role in them, an idea that would contradict his understanding of imagination, only that he did not use the term in his explanation of them.

*Obscurity and the Relative Power
of Words and Images*

When something lacks clarity, wrote Burke, it may cause the person to feel the sublime: “It is one thing to make an idea clear [to the imagination], and another to make it *affecting* to the imagination.”¹⁵ The obscure idea affects the imagination more strongly than the clear one; the obscured monster is scarier than the unobscured one. When an image is clear, it has form and limitation; the imagination can define it, comprehend it.

¹³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 230.

¹⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 230–54. Examples of causes that Burke provided appear in parentheses: terror (pain or death), obscurity (despotic governments or dark woods), power (God), privation (darkness or solitude), vastness (including the excessively big or excessively small), infinity (scarcely are things truly infinite), succession and uniformity (rotund buildings or ancient heathen temples), magnitude in building (great dimensions but not too great), difficulty (Stonehenge), magnificence (starry heaven), light (sun or lightening), color (cloudy skies), sound and loudness (raging storms and shouting multitudes), suddenness (“striking of a great clock”), intermitting (“low, confused, uncertain sounds”), cries of animals (in anger, danger, or pain), smell and taste (the “vapour of Albunea” or the “apples of ‘Sodom’”), and the feeling of pain (“labour, pain, anguish, torment”).

¹⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 232.

But when an image is obscure, its form is elusive, and it moves the imagination to envision terrible prospects until it is finally overwhelmed.¹⁶

To illustrate his claim, Burke pointed to ghosts and goblins, despotic governments and religions, and terrible landscapes, such as dark woods. He also appealed to the writings of specific authors. Of all the authors he could have chosen, he referenced John Milton's descriptions of Death and Satan, as well as Job's accounts of the wild ass, unicorn, and leviathan.¹⁷ These images and descriptions, said Burke, display the sublime because they are affecting to the imagination by exciting the ideas of pain and danger.

Additionally, anticipating his discussion about how the verbal form often brings about the non-representational form in the person's imagination, Burke appealed to Milton and Job to substantiate further his position that words have more relative power than images to convey the sublime: "[I]t is in my power to raise a stronger *emotion* by the description than I could do by the best painting."¹⁸ Burke defended his position by considering the differences in clarity and obscurity between images (e.g., drawings and paintings) and words (e.g., poems and rhetoric).

Murray Krieger, interacting with this passage, characterizes Burke's position by saying that clarity, like the pictorial art that produces it, is left for the more trivial category of the 'beautiful,' and concludes that Burke's view is "extreme."¹⁹ Murray appears to interpret Burke's statement that a description may evoke stronger emotions than a painting to mean that Burke was trivializing the visual form. Burke certainly held that words are more affecting to the imagination's experience of the sublime than images

¹⁶ See Pragyant Rath, *The "I" and the "Eye": The Verbal and the Visual in Post-Renaissance Western Aesthetics* (Newcastle upon Tyne, GB: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 37.

¹⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 232, 234, 237.

¹⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 232.

¹⁹ Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 101.

are. However, Burke did not affix the language of “triviality” to his discussion of the beautiful. As examined below, he did not view the beautiful as being unimportant or insignificant at all. He believed only that it is not as affecting to the imagination.

Burke supported his position that words convey stronger emotions than images by appealing to paintings that assemble “as many horrid phantoms as [one’s] imagination could suggest; but all the designs I have chanced to meet of the temptations of St. Anthony, were rather a sort of odd wild grotesques, than any thing capable of producing a serious passion.”²⁰ Because images include boundaries, the fearful ideas they contain are limited in their effect. Burke was not suggesting that words are better than images, only that they have different values because they are effective unto different ends. Whereas painting succeeds better in “exact description” and “imitation,” poetry and rhetoric succeed better in displaying the “effect of things.”²¹ The principles Burke presented would not mean that a specific image could not be scarier than a specific passage; the expert painter may invoke more terror than the amateur writer. However, all else being equal, the word is more affecting than the image. Even so, Burke qualified his argument by phrases such as “all the designs I have chanced to meet.”²² His broader point was not to insult the image but to show that the natures of image and word are distinct. In the words of Stephen Land, Burke placed them “in different semantic categories.”²³

Burke’s enquiry into the relative value of verbal descriptions and visual depictions creates incongruity for those arguing that he was an empiricist who viewed imagination simply as a mimetic faculty. Philip Shaw recognizes this point and claims

²⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 235.

²¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 316–17. Cf. Hélène Ibata, *The Challenge of the Sublime: From Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry to British Romantic Art* (Manchester, GB: Manchester University Press, 2018).

²² Burke, *Enquiry*, 235.

²³ Stephen K. Land, *From Signs to Propositions: The Concept of Form in Eighteenth-Century Semantic Theory*, Longman Linguistic Library (London: Longman, 1974), 40.

inconsistency in Burke.²⁴ However, this charge is unwarranted if Burke was not actually an empiricist. As considered in chapter 3, he did not believe that words are simply mimetic for what the person can rationally comprehend, thereby demonstrating his distinction from the Hobbesian-Lockean tradition. Rather than beginning with the “representational concept of the sign,” says Land, Burke began with the “rhetorical one.”²⁵ Undoubtedly, words represent the things they signify, but the point is that the power of words on the imagination is not simply or firstly in their representation but in their effect. As Russell Kirk explained it, Burke believed the world is a “place of wonder and obscurity, not a rational construction.”²⁶ In a word, Burke believed it is a place of the “sublime” because it is a place of obscurity.

Power and the Divine Sublime

In addition to obscurity, Burke explained that power is a source of the sublime. He considered natural and supernatural causes alike. For example, he examined the animal kingdom to indicate that some but not all power is sublime. When the person can control power to the benefit of his pleasure or utility (e.g., ox or dog), it is not sublime. When he cannot control it (e.g., bull or wolf), it becomes dangerous, destructive, and

²⁴ Philip Shaw, *The Sublime*, *The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 49–50.

²⁵ Land, *From Signs to Propositions*, 40; Land suggests that Burke’s argument is subject to “confusion” because he pursues multiple points at once (41). Cf. I. W. Hampsher-Monk, “Rhetoric and Opinion in the Politics of Edmund Burke,” *History of Political Thought* 9, no. 3 (Winter 1988): 472; and A. W. Phinney, “Wordsworth’s Winander Boy and Romantic Theories of Language,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 71.

²⁶ Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (1967; repr., Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009), 21. Some interpreters have criticized Kirk’s contribution to Burke scholarship, such as Seamus Deane, who refers to it as a “polemical endorsement of Burke” that is “doomsday evangelism, as kitsch as can be” (“Burke in the United States,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 223–24). Others, however, have admitted that Kirk sometimes made interpretive errors but are more charitable in their overall analysis of him, observing that modern Burke scholarship partly rests on the shoulders of people like Kirk (e.g., Bradley J. Birzer, *Russell Kirk: American Conservative* [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015]).

terrible. Of course, whether an animal causes the sublime may depend on circumstantial considerations (e.g., horse or ass).²⁷

However, the example with which Burke spent the most time is a supernatural cause: “that great and tremendous being” of “the Godhead.”²⁸ This section argues that Burke believed the divine sublime may fill man’s reason and excite his imagination, giving rise to feelings of fear and terror that are nonetheless mixed with love and rejoicing, thereby demonstrating the possible intersection of the sublime and beautiful. Again, while pain and pleasure are unique and “by no means necessarily dependent on each other for their existence,” they are not simply mutually exclusive because neither requires the “ceasing or diminution” of the other.²⁹ While Burke’s presentation of the sublime and beautiful does not otherwise appear to identify the same source as causing both the sublime and the beautiful, since his broader purpose is to show their distinction, it presents the Christian God as capable of producing both feelings.

Burke began this exploration by observing that some people claim not to think of God as an object of “terror” and “awe” because they consider Him only by reason and not by imagination: “merely as he is an object of the understanding” so that “the imagination and passions are little or nothing affected.”³⁰ This distinction of imagination from understanding here leads F. P. Lock to remark that, for Burke, “imaginative response is primarily emotive, not intellectual.”³¹ Indeed, Burke frequently connected

²⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 237–38.

²⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 236–39.

²⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 211.

³⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 238–39. This passage appears to challenge Patricia Meyer Spacks’s contention: “Contemplation of the Deity necessarily affects the imagination—and, as Burke goes on to specify, the passions” (*Desire and Truth: Functions of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novels* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 117).

³¹ F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: 1730–1784*, vol. 1 (1998; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112.

imagination with emotion. Still, as chapter 2 contends, he also regularly connected it with reason, with the intellect. While analyzing the divine sublime, Burke stated that man's nature causes him to judge "divine qualities" by "pure and intellectual ideas," yet "when we contemplate the Deity, his attributes and their operation coming united on the mind, form a sort of sensible image, and as such are capable of affecting the imagination."³² The person may contemplate God merely as an object of understanding, or he may contemplate Him also with his imagination and passions. For the contemplation of divinity to exceed the bounds of man's comprehension, it must first fill them.

In a manner of speaking, reason may work without an imagination that is grounded in circumstance, but, as Burke developed this idea throughout his career, he explained it leads to abstractionism. At the same time, in a manner of speaking, imagination may work without reason, but it leads to mob rule.³³ Neither abstraction nor mob rule is desirable in Burke's ethic. However, these statements are only in a manner of speaking. In fact, as Burke discussed reason and imagination throughout his career, he recognized that the issue is not with which of these faculties people use—they invariably use both—but with how they use them.

Perhaps Burke's views substantively changed over time. Or perhaps his purpose in the *Enquiry* was to demonstrate the distinction of different faculties so that he presented them differently than he does subsequently. In any case, Burke showed that reason and imagination are distinct yet also interworking. The imagination gives form to the person's ideas, including his ideas about God. It also bridges his intellectual and emotional centers; it is in the mind yet gives rise to the sublime.

³² Burke, *Enquiry*, 239.

³³ Burke held the Creator has endued man with the power of reason so that his imagination is not seized without first demonstrating some semblance of understanding (*Enquiry*, 268).

Additionally, Burke stated that contemplating the divine sublime forms a “sort of sensible image” in the mind. This remark, too, illustrates his epistemology. He resisted the idea that imagination may have utter clarity of the sublime (“sort of”); he was simply pointing out that thought must assume a form of some kind. Some thinkers have posited Locke’s influence on Burke’s thinking because of his reference to a “sensible image,” but Helen Fletcher Thompson correctly notes distinction between them, observing that Burke did not begin with the concept of an “empty Cabinet” like Locke did.³⁴

Having established that the divine sublime affects the imagination, Burke then examined how the divine sublime affects the imagination: “Now, though in a just idea of the Deity, perhaps none of his attributes are predominant, yet to our imagination, his power is by far the most striking. Some *reflection*, some *comparing* is necessary to satisfy us of his wisdom, his justice, and his goodness; to be struck with his power, it is only necessary that we should open our eyes.”³⁵ Burke thereby distinguished between objective reality and the person’s subjective experience of that reality. The imagination may magnify one’s sense impressions so that he is struck more by one attribute than other attributes.

Michael Baron argues that imagination is a “casualty of Burke’s argument” because he circumvents the idea that “imagination *confers* power on the idea of God . . . by saying that imagining is simply like opening our eyes—a mechanical reflex.” Baron then states that Burke’s view of the imagination “is of a kind that is radically challenged in . . . every other Romantic discussion of imagination.” Burke’s view of the imagination was undoubtedly distinct from the Romantic view, which holds, for example, that the

³⁴ Helen Fletcher Thompson, “Discourse and Display: Edmund Burke, Frances Burney, and the Practice of Publicity, 1757–1814” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1998), 60–62. See also John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (1689; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 48; he similarly compared the mind to a sheet of white paper (121).

³⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 239 (italics added).

sublime is “always accompanied by ‘an overbalance of pleasure’ over pain,” whereas Burke did not believe the sublime requires the beautiful.³⁶

However, as examined previously, the imagination’s power exceeds mere mechanical reflex. Imagination is the power of creation, the powers of representation, wit, fancy, and invention. This point is illustrated in Burke’s references to “reflection” and “comparing.” His remark about “opening our eyes” is metaphorical in view of his larger discussion, representing a floor, not a ceiling, for imagination. Indeed, Burke denied that imagination confers divine power, a view that confuses the cause for the effect. But he did remark that imagination magnifies it, which, again, exceeds the idea of mere mechanical reflex. Burke’s point was not to limit imagination’s scope but to emphasize God’s power.

Burke then turned to the effects of the divine sublime in the person’s experience: “But whilst we contemplate so vast an object, under the arm, as it were, of almighty power, and invested upon every side with omnipresence, we shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him.” Mankind is minute compared to the omnipotent and omnipresent God. “And though a consideration of his other attributes [wisdom, justice, and goodness] may relieve in some measure our apprehensions; yet no conviction of the justice with which it is exercised, nor the mercy with which it is tempered, can wholly remove the terror that naturally arises from a force which nothing can withstand.” Notwithstanding God’s justice and mercy, the divine sublime invokes apprehension, even terror: “[W]e cannot but shudder at [this] power.”³⁷

To support this point, Burke appealed to Psalm 139:14: “When the prophet David contemplated the wonders of wisdom and power, which are displayed in the

³⁶ Michael Baron, *Language and Relationship in Wordsworth’s Writing* (Longman, 1995; repr., New York: Routledge, 2014), 103.

³⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 239.

œconomy of man, he seems to be struck with a sort of divine horror, and cries out, *fearfully and wonderfully am I made!*” The wonders of divine wisdom and power, said Burke, are displayed in man’s economy; that is, they are displayed in his imagination. People rightly feel “dread” or “fear” before the Almighty because those passions “necessarily follow the idea of such a power, when it is once excited in the mind.”³⁸ Because God is powerful, evoking fear and wonder, He is sublime.

Yet God is not merely sublime. Burke explained He is also wise, just, good, and merciful so that “we rejoice with trembling.”³⁹ Whereas the language of “trembling” evokes the sublime, the language of “rejoicing” evokes the beautiful.⁴⁰ Again, the feelings of the sublime and beautiful may exist simultaneously in the imagination when an object—in this case, God—gives rise to both. Burke illustrated this connection further by explaining that Christianity, unlike “false religions,” does not rely only on fear. Instead, it looks also to love: “Before the Christian religion had, as it were, humanized the idea of the divinity, and brought it somewhat nearer to us,” said Burke, referencing the doctrine of the incarnation, “there was very little said of the love of God.”⁴¹ Burke thus wed the terrible and lovely, the sublime and beautiful, in the God of Christianity. David Bromwich hence remarks on the “resourcefulness of the faith,” saying, “Christianity goes as far as any religion can to humanize God without losing the fear that prompts all belief from the start.”⁴² Additionally, observes Robert M. Maniquis, Burke’s remarks reflect his broader historical context: “The traces of Protestant theological

³⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 239–41. Robert Doran clarifies that Burke did not fall “into an anti-Christian stance” in characterizing God as sublime (*The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015], 166).

³⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 239.

⁴⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 219.

⁴¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 241.

⁴² David Bromwich, *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke: From the Sublime and Beautiful to American Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 75.

discussion of a simultaneously vengeful and loving God are apparent here.”⁴³ For these reasons, Burke viewed God as both sublime and beautiful.

Significantly though, it is by the person’s imagination that he can respond to God with both fear and love. Imagination plays the intermediary role between the cause and feeling of the sublime and beautiful. “When humans encounter the sublime directly,” explains Jesse Norman, “they naturally turn away and seek refuge. But when they encounter it indirectly or at a distance, as in a work of art or in imagination, they can be amazed or delighted.”⁴⁴ The imagination thus mediates man’s encounter with the divine sublime so that the same object may cause feelings of both the sublime and beautiful. While the imagination may trace the divine sublime “as far as [it] possibly can,” it cannot trace it to its end because the powers of imagination are finite: “[O]ur imagination is finally lost.”⁴⁵

Interestingly, Ernest Lee Tuveson described imagination as a “means of grace” that accounts for “supranatural influences on the mind” and for spiritual “life and purpose” but then interprets Burke as challenging that view.⁴⁶ Likewise, Barbara Taylor discusses a “sacralised imagination” that functions as “a psychic pathway between humanity and the divine” but argues that Burke viewed judgment as thwarting imagination.⁴⁷ Certainly, Burke appealed to reason to correct imaginative flights of fancy, but he did not deny the important role that imagination plays in the person’s

⁴³ Robert M. Maniquis, “Filling up and Emptying out the Sublime: Terror in British Radical Culture,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2000): 381–82.

⁴⁴ Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (New York: Basic, 2015), 27.

⁴⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 241.

⁴⁶ Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 86 (“supranatural influences on the mind”), 97 (“life and purpose”); for Tuveson’s discussion of Burke, see 166–76, 182–84.

⁴⁷ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60–61.

contemplation of God. As one commentator rightly put it, the “imaginative faculty is that which appears to be the most transcendent in the mental constitution of Burke.”⁴⁸

Privation and Darkness

In addition to obscurity and power, Burke examined the connection between the “fire of imagination” and the privation of darkness.⁴⁹ Burke had previously established that sense objects giving rise to passions like the sublime have inherent qualities within them that prompt such responses; for example, darkness is scary. He extended that point here to blackness, which is “much the same” as darkness, except that “blackness is a more confined idea.” He considered the story from physician William Cheselden of a boy who was born blind but received sight at age thirteen and upon seeing a “black object” had “great uneasiness.” Burke surmised that the boy had “no reason to think, that the ill effects of black on his imagination were more owing to its connexion with any disagreeable ideas, than that the good effects of more cheerful colours were derived from their connexion with pleasing ones.” Burke thus theorized that the boy’s reactions to gloomy versus cheerful colors did not result from prejudice but rather from the “natural operation” of “their effects.” But with time, Burke explained, first impressions may subside: “[I]n ordinary cases, it is indeed frequently lost. . . . Custom reconciles us to every thing.”⁵⁰

This passage is not without some controversy because it also describes Cheselden’s account of the first time the boy saw a black woman.⁵¹ Consequently, some interpreters employing a Marxist hermeneutic have painted Burke with the colors of

⁴⁸ “Introductory Essay,” in *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Edmund Burke*, by Edmund Burke, Sir John Lubbock’s Hundred Books (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1893), xi.

⁴⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 242.

⁵⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 295–98.

⁵¹ See William Cheselden, “An Account of Some Observations Made by a Young Gentleman,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 35 (April, May, June 1728): 448.

racism and misogyny.⁵² However, such treatments sometimes interpret Burke to say what he simply did not say and other times fail to capture the nuance of Burke's position or period; for example, Burke held a minority position with respect to the topic of slavery that may have contributed to his losing an election.⁵³ Additionally, such treatments fail to account for the fact that Burke did not associate sublimity-pain as such with badness; after all, he associated it with divinity. In Burke's view, both the sublime and the beautiful have positive roles to play in the human experience. His broader point was that some sense objects naturally give rise to certain passions in the imagination, namely, pain from the sublime and pleasure from the beautiful, according to the Creator's wisdom and design.

Smallness and the Wonders of Minuteness

Burke also appealed to smallness as a source of the sublime. He alluded to this cause in his examination of the divine sublime: man shrinks into the "minuteness of [his] own nature" when faced with sublime power. Just as the imagination is lost in the contemplation of divine power, "the imagination is lost" in the contemplation of extreme smallness so that "we become amazed and confounded at the wonders of minuteness." Burke mentioned several examples: the infinite divisibility of matter, excessively small animal life, creatures yet smaller, and the diminishing scale of existence.⁵⁴

The age of Burke was an age of discovery, including the realization that an entire world exists that is smaller than the naked eye's capacity for perception but that is

⁵² E.g., W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 130–31; and Ellen Scheible, "The Sublime Moment: Confrontation, Colonization, and the Modern Irish Novel" (PhD diss., The Claremont Graduate University, 2008), 55–63.

⁵³ See Edmund Burke, Sketch of a Negro Code (post April 9, 1780), in *Writings*, 3:562–71; Edmund Burke to Henry Dundas (April 9, 1792), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 7:122–25; Robert W. Smith, "Edmund Burke's Negro Code," *History Today* 26, no. 11 (November 1976): 715–23; James Conniff, "Burke on Political Economy: The Nature and Extent of State Authority," *Review of Politics* 49 (1987): 507–11; and Elofson, Woods, and Todd, eds., *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, 620–23.

⁵⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 243.

observable through the microscope.⁵⁵ The idea that such worlds exist confounds the imagination. Laura Forsberg explains that a “miniature both stimulates the imagination to conceive of a limit to miniaturization and baffles the imagination, which cannot find an end to its search.”⁵⁶ The imagination is engaged yet overwhelmed.

Quantum mechanics would not be discovered for another century-and-a-half, but Burke rightly hypothesized about a world that is smaller even than the microscopic level, to the point of infinity (“diminishing scale of existence”). In fact, Mark Fiege links this passage from the *Enquiry* to the world of Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer: “That which defied their powers, that which remained unfathomable and mysterious, forever ignited their wonder.”⁵⁷ Such worlds exist, and the imagination cannot capture them, thereby demonstrating the limits of empiricism and bringing about the feelings of awe and marvel. Burke’s assessments of power and smallness show that the person experiences the sublime whenever his imagination is arrested by what it envisions—whenever it cannot capture his experience. Opposite Enlightenment theorists, the imagination is mysterious and creative, but opposite Romantic theorists, it has limitations. The human mind is more than mimetic, said Burke, but it is not divine.

*Infinity and Eternity, Succession
and Uniformity, and Magnitude
in Building*

Burke also mentioned imagination in relation to infinity and eternity, which are logical corollaries of obscurity, power, and smallness.⁵⁸ The senses may “deceive” the

⁵⁵ Burke implied the discovery of the microscope in this passage but then explicitly mentioned it subsequently (e.g., *Enquiry*, 302).

⁵⁶ Laura Forsberg, “The Miniature and Victorian Literature” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2015), 8.

⁵⁷ Mark Fiege, “The Atomic Scientists, the Sense of Wonder, and the Bomb,” *Environmental History* 12, no. 3 (July 2007): 583, 583n11.

⁵⁸ David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in the 18th-Century England* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 166.

imagination into believing an object is infinite or eternal when it is not or that an effect continues after it has ceased. For example, when the eye does not “perceive the bounds” of an object, the “imagination meets no check” to hinder its progress, thereby creating a sense of the infinite. Again, when the ear experiences a “long succession of noises,” the “mind by a sort of mechanism repeats it long after the first cause has ceased to operate”; Burke seems to be speaking here partly of tinnitus. He also gave the examples of beating hammers and falling water, saying that “the hammers beat and the water roars in the imagination long after the first sounds have ceased to affect it.”⁵⁹ These examples show that man experiences the sublime whenever his experiences exceed his cognitive capacities.

The imagination, said Burke, is that human faculty that repeats experiences to the point it creates the sense of infinity and eternity. Burke acknowledged the person cannot “really” perceive objects that are “in their own nature infinite.” But external causes may trick the imagination so that it is “deceived” into experiencing the sensation of infinity.⁶⁰ Hence, Rachel Feder refers to this experience as a “sublime form of self-deception.”⁶¹ Similarly, Joseph Brackenridge Cary Jr. says it demonstrates the “susceptibilities of the imagination.”⁶²

However, whereas Burke criticized certain manifestations of the deceived imagination, such as that resulting from overconfidence, gullibility, and naivete, he did not criticize it in this instance because it results from the divine design of human nature. Also, the object in question is not false. For example, the imagination may perceive a

⁵⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 243. Cf. Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, 228.

⁶⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 243.

⁶¹ Rachel Feder, “The Poetic Limit: Mathematics, Aesthetics, and the Crisis of Infinity,” *English Literary History* 81, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 176.

⁶² Joseph Brackenridge Cary Jr., “The Theory and Practice of the Vague: A Study in a Mode of Nineteenth Century Lyric Poetry” (PhD diss., New York University, 1962), 71.

desert pool or rainbow. Although such phenomena do not exist in the manner the person imagines them, they indicate something genuine: refracted light. Likewise, the imagination that perceives infinity or eternity does not actually perceive them in themselves, but it has not perceived something false. The imagination, by what Tom Huhn calls its “natural tendency,” prods the person in particular directions.⁶³ Such “deception” is not immoral but natural; it is a “generous deceit.”⁶⁴

Alan Richardson articulates Burke’s notion in terms of the “Romantic neural sublime” that depends on a “palpable if vertiginous sense of the active brain that subtends the ordinary workings of the mind” and creates “perceptual illusions” of what is “ordinarily subsensible.” Richardson aims to distance Burke from Kant’s transcendental idealism in which such intuitions depend on a “transcendent realm somehow above the ordinary mind.” Thus, he interprets Burke in terms of the material, earthly, or physiological sublime instead of the transcendent, lofty, or spiritual sublime.⁶⁵ Richardson rightly distinguishes Burke from Kant, and his images of illusion and vertigo helpfully illustrate Burke’s view. However, Burke did not deny all connection to transcendence. For Burke, the imagination is, in a manner of speaking, a bridge between heaven and earth, lifting man beyond himself but never to utter transcendence. For this reason, said Burke, “Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime.”⁶⁶ Here, Burke

⁶³ Tom Huhn, *Imitation and Society: The Persistence of Mimesis in the Aesthetics of Burke, Hogarth, and Kant* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 21.

⁶⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 246.

⁶⁵ Alan Richardson, *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 34. Cf. Amit S. Yahav, *Feeling Time: Duration, the Novel, and Eighteenth-Century Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 120.

⁶⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 243. Paddy Bullard ties Burke’s notion of horror to Lucretius, explaining the “Lucretian sublime is an enlightened sublime” (“Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 57).

associated the sublime with the “delightful,” again demonstrating that the sublime is not bad as such.⁶⁷

Burke further discussed this source of the sublime in terms of the “artificial infinite,” which creates the sensation of infinity in the imagination. The artificial infinite results from the “succession and uniformity of parts,” which impresses the “imagination with an idea of their progress beyond their actual limits.” He clarified that “uniformity” is required because the “imagination at every change finds a check.” Varied succession will “wholly turn the imagination” and dispel the illusion. Burke gave the example of a rotund, explaining that “you can no where fix a boundary” so that the “imagination has no rest.”⁶⁸

Again, Burke discussed infinity with reference to magnitude in building. The “imagination cannot rise to any idea of infinity” without “greatness of dimension.”⁶⁹ Matthew W. Binney remarks that the magnitudinous sublime reminds man of his minuteness and that a “sublime experience occurs when the imagination fails to grasp the dimensions and scope of the external object.”⁷⁰ However, size does not automatically equal sublimity; excessive dimensions destroy such feelings. For this reason, Burke cautioned: “A true artist should put a generous deceit on the spectators, and effect the noblest designs by easy methods. Designs that are vast only by their dimensions, are always the sign of a common and low imagination.”⁷¹ Interpreters have applied this passage not only to buildings but also to architecture generally, including gardens,

⁶⁷ Cf. Burke, *Enquiry*, 214.

⁶⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 244. Burke also gave the examples of a heathen temple and an English cathedral (245).

⁶⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 245.

⁷⁰ Matthew W. Binney, “Edmund Burke’s Sublime Cosmopolitan Aesthetic,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 649.

⁷¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 246.

historical painting, and even bridges.⁷² Achieving the sublime in artistic production thus requires intelligence and skill.

Finally, Burke noted that pleasing objects may also induce a feeling of the sublime. For example, in the hope offered by the dawn of spring or the newness of life or the sketch of a drawing, the “imagination is entertained with the promise of something more.”⁷³ The person may experience the sublime from what is just begun or unfinished. Several scholars have rightly distinguished Burke’s view from the neoclassical view that placed satisfaction in the anticipation of the final product, as opposed to the “indeterminate experience.”⁷⁴ In contrast, Burke believed the imagination is affected even by the experience of an expectation or hope in something more.

Sound, Loudness, and the Mob

A final cause of the sublime in which Burke explicitly invoked the term “imagination” concerns sound, loudness, and the mob. For example, a feeling of the sublime may result from “vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery” and the “shouting of multitudes,” which “amazes and confounds the imagination” by the “sole strength of the sound.” Even the “best established tempers can scarcely forbear being bore down” in the “staggering and hurry of the mind” to join in the “common cry and

⁷² Buildings: T. F. Hunt, *Architettura Campestre: Displayed in Lodges, Gardeners’ Houses, and Other Buildings* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1827), 5; C. J. Richardson, *Picturesque Designs for Mansions, Villas, and Lodges* (London: Atchley, 1870), 12; Thomas Grantham Jackson, *The Renaissance of Roman Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 130; Jonathan Hill, *A Landscape of Architecture, History and Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2016), 88; gardens: Humphry Repton, *Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture* (London: Longman & Paternoster, 1839), 77, 238, 374; Jonathan Hill, *Weather Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2012), 125; historical painting: John Clark, *Elements of Drawing and Painting in Water Colours* (London: Wm. S. Orr, 1838), 162; bridges: David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 86.

⁷³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 246.

⁷⁴ E.g., Wendelin A. Guentner, “British Aesthetic Discourse, 1780–1830: The Sketch, the *Non Finito*, and the Imagination,” *Art Journal* 52, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 41; and Yi-Ping Ong, *The Art of Being: Poetics of the Novel and Existentialist Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 199. Guentner also refers to Burke’s view as “proto-Romantic.”

common resolution of the croud.”⁷⁵ James T. Boulton suggests that Burke was thinking of the Black Dogs riot, which occurred at Trinity College Dublin during his student days.⁷⁶ Over Burke’s career, still more mobs would exemplify his theory, including those resulting from the Whiteboy disturbances in Munster, the murder of William Smith, the Gordon Riots, and the French Revolution.⁷⁷

Burke knew firsthand that mobs may easily overwhelm the senses and imagination so that the person acts without thought or wisdom, giving rise to immoral passions that devastate populations. So, while the sublime may lead to what is moral (e.g., the divine sublime), it may also lead to what is immoral. The mob may easily cause the person to do what he would not otherwise do. This passage shows the importance of cultivating a moral imagination and of balancing it with reason. In summary, the sublime may result from supernatural, natural, artificial, and even social causes, but whether good or bad, it confounds the imagination.

The Beautiful

The beautiful does not confound the imagination. Burke defined beauty as that which causes love or satisfaction.⁷⁸ Just as imagination is the most extensive province of pain, it is also the most extensive province of pleasure.⁷⁹ He also argued that beauty is caused by loveliness rather than by proportion or fitness; beauty may possess proportion or fitness, but it is not caused by them. Yet in rejecting these causes, he was not rejecting

⁷⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 250.

⁷⁶ T. O. McLoughlin and James T. Boulton, eds., *Enquiry*, 250n1.

⁷⁷ Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 162; and Isaac Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative* (New York: Basic, 1977), 84

⁷⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 255, 272.

⁷⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

order and reason. As with the sublime, Burke related the beautiful to larger themes of morality and society.

*Loveliness Not Proportion
the Cause of Beauty*

Burke denied that proportion is the cause of beauty, pointing rather to loveliness. To demonstrate, he considered examples of humans, animals, and plants that lack proportion yet possess great beauty.⁸⁰ For instance, in relation to the human figure, he wrote:

If you assign any determinate proportions to the limbs of a man, and if you limit human beauty to these proportions, when you find a woman who differs in the make and measures of almost every part, you must conclude her not to be beautiful in spite of the suggestions of your imagination; or in obedience to your imagination you must renounce your rules; you must lay by the scale and compass, and look out for some other cause of beauty.⁸¹

Someone may define beauty according to a given set of man-made measurements, but because such proportions, whatever they are, are not the cause of beauty, the person's imagination revolts against his reason if he insists on them. Instead, what causes beauty is loveliness.

Burke appealed to God and nature to substantiate his position: "Providence" has displayed the "riches of his wisdom and goodness in his creation" by providing a "diversity hardly short of infinite" in the "disposition, measures, and relation" of people's (or animals') features. Therefore, no "principle in nature" attaches beauty to "certain measures." Yet Burke observed that "one particular is common" to all cases of beauty: they "affect [] us with a sense of loveliness."⁸² Burke extended his comments also to the masculine figure, referring both to "handsome men" alongside "beautiful women" and

⁸⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 257.

⁸¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 260–61.

⁸² Burke, *Enquiry*, 261 (italics removed).

remarking that “both sexes are undoubtedly capable of beauty.”⁸³ In summary, a good and wise Providence has designed the imagination to find beauty in what is lovely.

Although Burke wanted to “open our view a little” with respect to the cause of beauty, he was not arguing that it is simply subjective.⁸⁴ He was observing it is broader than man’s prescribed proportions. In the words of Gregory M. Collins, beauty-as-proportion “imposed a rigidly abstract view” on beauty that “reflected human beings’ haughty confidence in their ability to evaluate form based on man-made measurements.”⁸⁵ Thus, the standard for beauty is loveliness, which man experiences by his imagination.

The Purpose of Proportion

In contending that proportion is not the cause of beauty, Burke was not saying it is without purpose because he proceeded to discuss it. First, proportion relates “almost wholly to convenience” and is a “creature of the understanding, rather than a primary cause acting on the senses and imagination.”⁸⁶ Significantly, Burke held that proportion relates “almost” wholly to convenience, which cuts against Michael Griffin’s interpretation that “proportion is allied with mere convenience.”⁸⁷ In addition, Burke did not deny that proportion acts on the senses and imagination, only that it is not a primary cause on them. Burke continued, explaining, “[B]eauty demands no assistance from our reasoning.”⁸⁸ By so stating, he did not deny that beauty may receive assistance from

⁸³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 260.

⁸⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 261. Cf. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 1:110.

⁸⁵ Collins, *Commerce and Manners*, 132.

⁸⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 255–56.

⁸⁷ Michael Griffin, “Delicate Allegories, Deceitful Mazes: Goldsmith’s Landscapes,” *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 16 (2001): 116.

⁸⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 256.

reason, only that it does not “demand” it; this interpretation adds a nuance to Daniel I. O’Neill’s suggestion that beauty is “not connected to study or reason” in Burke’s thinking.⁸⁹ Throughout the *Enquiry*, Burke demonstrated that imagination and understanding are distinct yet overlapping, making beauty and proportion also distinct yet overlapping. That which is proportionate and convenient may be beautiful if it is also lovely.

Second, proportion concerns “mathematical speculations,” which, said Burke, does “nothing to interest the imagination” as the cause of beauty.⁹⁰ He illustrated this claim with the example of a garden. Although the “patrons of proportion” form gardens into “mathematical figures, with exactness and symmetry,” their designs do not stand. Burke’s “principle in nature” revolts against man’s presumption, teaching him that “mathematical ideas are not the true measures of beauty.”⁹¹ W. J. T. Mitchell proposes that, for Burke, “rational clarity and ‘mathematical speculations’ could excite no passions concerned with either the sublime *or* the beautiful.” Mitchell then argues that Burke had moderated his views considerably by the period of the French Revolution, seeing cold speculation as the domain also of imagination. Mitchell thus concludes that this passage “reveals the gulf” in Burke’s understanding between his *Enquiry* and *Reflections* and that, in the former, he did not account for the “possibility of an alliance between the faculties of imagination and reason.”⁹²

Indeed, in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, Burke criticized the “thorough-bred metaphysician” whose “imagination is not fatigued” with the “contemplation of human

⁸⁹ Daniel Irvin O’Neill, “A Revolution in Morals and Manners: The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1999), 79. This passage does not seem to appear in his book *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate*.

⁹⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 256.

⁹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 262–63.

⁹² Mitchell, *Iconology*, 135.

suffering” in his later career.⁹³ Also, Burke’s views undoubtedly developed over the course of his lifetime. But the interpretation that a gulf opened between the *Enquiry* and the *Reflections* is not required by Burke’s discussion of the sublime and beautiful. Since one of Burke’s purposes in his *Enquiry* was to examine the imagination and reason as distinct faculties, he teased out their differences. However, as demonstrated in chapters 2–3, Burke recognized, even in the *Enquiry*, that these faculties are not mutually exclusive but overlap and interact. Additionally, in this passage specifically, Burke was saying only that mathematics does not interest the imagination as a cause for beauty, not that it does not interest the imagination at all. That is, mathematics may be beautiful if it is also lovely.

Loveliness Not Fitness the Cause of Beauty

Burke extended his argument concerning proportion to fitness, or utility. The imagination may suggest any number of examples that are fit yet lack beauty. Some of his illustrations include the swine’s snout, pelican’s throat pouch, hedgehog’s hide, porcupine’s quills, and elephant’s trunk. Confusion about beauty ensues though, because what is beautiful may also be useful according to the bounty of the “infinitely wise and good Creator.” But, Burke explained, such examples are beautiful only insofar as they are also lovely.⁹⁴

As with proportion, the operation of fitness tends toward the understanding rather than the imagination: “The passions, and the imagination which principally raises

⁹³ Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord*, 175–77.

⁹⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 266–68. However, Burke also stated that he excluded “proportion and fitness from any share of beauty” (268). If this statement is taken at face value, it creates inconsistencies with other statements Burke made. But if it is taken to mean that proportion and fitness have no share in the *cause* of beauty, which the broader context justifies, it does not create inconsistency; even so, it creates confusion. These types of difficulties underlie some of the interpretive disagreements examined in this section.

them, have here very little to do.”⁹⁵ Just as Burke said the imagination is not the primary faculty of proportion, he stated here that it has “little” to do with fitness and proportion but not that it has nothing to do with them. Fitness may be beautiful if it is also lovely. Additionally, Burke did not state that the imagination and understanding have little to do with one another at all, only that imagination has little to do “here”—that is, with reference to fitness and proportion as a cause for beauty.

Burke illustrated his point by contrasting a bare room with excellent proportion and a furnished room with poor proportion. He concluded the second room “will make the imagination revolt against the reason; it will please much more than the naked proportion of the first room which the understanding has so much approved, as admirably fitted for its purposes.”⁹⁶ Burke was not strictly pitting imagination and reason against each other, only the sort of reason to which the “patrons of proportion” appeal. Also, Burke did not say that proportion and fitness never excite the imagination and passions; he said, rather, that elegance and loveliness excite them “much more.” In summary, beauty does not consist in proportion and fitness as such because the Creator has provided for the imagination to find beauty in what is lovely.

*Rejection of Neoclassicism
but Not Order and Reason*

In denying that proportion and fitness are the causes of beauty, Burke opposed the classical and neoclassical traditions in this respect. In his immediate historical context, therefore, he rejected the theories of people like Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson, who held that qualities such as order,

⁹⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 269. Burke’s position stood in contrast to Hume’s, which held that fitness is a source of beauty; see Paul Guyer, ed., Introduction to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, by Edmund Burke, Oxford World’s Classics (1990; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xviii.

⁹⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 269–70.

symmetry, and proportion cause beauty.⁹⁷ Even so, Burke was knowledgeable and respectful of these traditions and did not reject them lightly.⁹⁸ Part of what prompted his views was his developing doctrine of imagination, which revolts against reason when reason elevates artificial standards that run counter to the design of the Creator and the order of nature.

Because Burke rejected proportion as the cause of beauty, Francis Canavan concluded that “his aesthetic theory cannot be used to interpret his moral and political theory” because it destroys the idea of an “order” that is “known by reason,” which is a “central idea” of his “moral philosophy.”⁹⁹ Similarly, Lock observes that Burke’s rejection of proportion and utility as causes of beauty “foregrounds the anti-rational element in his theory.”¹⁰⁰ Burke clearly countered rationalism throughout his career. Where he strove against the “patrons of proportion” here, he struggled against “calculators” and “metaphysicians” subsequently. However, even in the *Enquiry*, Burke did not dismiss reason outright, only its presumption. Additionally, his theory of the arts did not destroy order; it just defined order according to nature and its Creator rather than proportion and fitness. For this reason, interpreters ranging from Ian Crowe to William F. Byrne contend that Burke’s theories of the arts and morality are compatible.¹⁰¹

In fact, Burke explained that he viewed imagination and reason as ultimately working together according to God’s designs:

⁹⁷ Guyer, Introduction, xvii.

⁹⁸ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 45.

⁹⁹ Canavan, *Political Reason of Burke*, 40–41. Cf. Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 45.

¹⁰⁰ Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 1:110.

¹⁰¹ Ian Crowe, ed., “The Whig Imagination of Edmund Burke,” in *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 10–11; William Francis Byrne, “Edmund Burke’s ‘Moral Imagination’ and the Problem of Political Order” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2003), 53–54.

Whenever the wisdom of our Creator intended that we should be affected with any thing, he did not confide the execution of his design to the languid and precarious operation of our reason; but he endued it with powers and properties that prevent the understanding, and even the will, which seizing upon the senses and imagination, captivate the soul before the understanding is ready either to join with them or to oppose them.¹⁰²

God has designed the imagination to be affected by external causes and to give rise to passions. However, the person may respond to an object prior to the conscious reflection of it, which may be good or bad depending on the object. Thus, Burke further observed, God has also given man reason to prevent the imagination, passions, and will from joining themselves prematurely to some (unworthy) object that would captivate the soul. Burke made this point previously when he said that reason checks the person's roving enthusiasm.¹⁰³ In this way, God has designed imagination and reason to work together.

To demonstrate the problem of an imagination that is not counterbalanced with reason, Burke considered how different people may respond to the same features of human anatomy. The "anatomist," who understands the technical design of the human body, finds great beauty in it and looks up "to the Maker with admiration and praise." Conversely, the "ordinary man" finds the same object "odious and distasteful" because of "its power on the imagination." In such cases, said Burke, "we have need of a strong effort of our reason to disentangle our minds from the allurements of the object to a consideration of that wisdom which invented so powerful a machine."¹⁰⁴ The ordinary man imagines an object is disgusting and responds with corresponding dislike; the anatomist understands the object and sees it as lovely. As Paddy Bullard comments,

¹⁰² Burke, *Enquiry*, 268.

¹⁰³ Edmund Burke, "Religion of No Efficacy," in *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke: Poems, Characters, Essays and Other Sketches in the Hands of Edmund and William Burke Now Printed for the First Time in Their Entirety*, ed. H. V. F. Somerset (1957; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 68–69.

¹⁰⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268–69.

Burke believed that even a “bloody discourse of anatomy might be ‘considered as an hymn to the Creator.’”¹⁰⁵

The person often responds to stimuli at an instinctive level before he responds to them at an intellectual level. Whereas imagination is instantaneous, reason is slow and careful. Byrne explains, “Aesthetic experience has an immediacy to which Burke is very sensitive.”¹⁰⁶ For this reason, Burke pointed to the “powerful machine” of reason, which the “wisdom of our Creator” has provided. And for this reason, he also pointed subsequently to the moral imagination so that its instantaneous responses are good.

Beauty, Morality, and Society

Having examined proportion and fitness in relation to beauty, Burke also considered how far the idea of beauty may apply to the virtues of the mind and will. He described “fortitude, justice, wisdom, and the like” as sublime and “easiness of temper, compassion, kindness and liberality” as beautiful. Whereas the former produces reverence, the latter produces loveliness. Hence, an objective virtue or vice may be impressed on the person’s imagination so that it fills his mind with an ethical idea. Then, he may come to realize that virtue or vice subjectively in his mind and by his will.¹⁰⁷

Shaftesbury and Hutcheson also tied virtue to imagination, but they did so from the position of moral sense theory. This approach to moral philosophy, explains Ian Harris, “tended to make ethics autonomous in relation to theology” and to explain virtue “without reference to God.”¹⁰⁸ Recognizing this point, Burke remarked that the

¹⁰⁵ Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric*, 89.

¹⁰⁶ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 271. The virtues Burke related to the sublime correspond to the classical cardinal virtues.

¹⁰⁸ Ian Harris, ed., Introduction to *A Philosophical Enquiry*, in *Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (2003; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 59. Cf. Daniel I. O’Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 65; Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 1:93–94, 98–100;

“application of beauty to virtue . . . has a strong tendency to confound our ideas of things,” giving rise to “an infinite deal of whimsical theory” like “affixing the name of beauty to proportion, congruity and perfection.” Even so, Burke affirmed that the “application of beauty to virtue may be made with propriety.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, rather than defining beauty and virtue by the presumptions of human reason, he defined them by the order of nature and the design of God.

Burke explored this idea by considering the phenomenon of society, which he subdivided into the (a) society of sex, which concerns propagation, and (b) general society, which concerns man’s relation with people, animals, and inanimate objects.¹¹⁰ Both fill man’s imagination. Men and women impress upon one another a mutual loveliness, resulting in general society. Significantly, Burke explained, the foremost passions of general society are sympathy, imitation, and ambition, describing them as the “principal links” in the “great chain” of general society.¹¹¹ Sympathy leads people to show mutual concern for one other, imitation impels them to “copy” one another, and ambition causes them to improve. In each case, imagination is imperative. Additionally, Burke traced each of these passions to God’s design: “[O]ur Creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy. . . . [I]mitation is one of the great instruments used by Providence in bringing our nature towards its perfection. . . . God has planted in man a sense of ambition.”¹¹² God has designed imagination to give rise to these passions for man’s betterment.

and Stephen K. White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics*, *Modernity and Political Thought*, vol. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994; repr., New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 25–26.

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 272.

¹¹⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 217.

¹¹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 220.

¹¹² Burke, *Enquiry*, 222, 225.

Burke also connected these passions to considerations of morality. For example, he remarked that imitation profoundly impacts man's moral development because it forms his passions, manners, opinions, and lives.¹¹³ Therefore, the person must choose his friends carefully. A given set of people necessarily presents pictures of morality or immorality to one's imagination. While the person may choose not to imitate them, Providence has framed man to find pleasure in imitating others: it is a "species of mutual compliance which all men yield to each other, without constraint to themselves."¹¹⁴

Of course, the person must interact with people of all sorts; Burke interacted with Tories and Whigs alike. But, he continued, the person should beware of the danger of choosing companions who are not "persons of shining qualities, nor strong virtues," ensuring his imagination is not captivated by unsavory allurements.¹¹⁵ Hence, says Robert J. Lacey, because "we mainly learn through imitation," the "most important faculty in the development of morals is imagination."¹¹⁶ Yet Burke also recognized the person should balance society with solitude: "Good company, lively conversations, and the endearments of friendship, fill the mind with great pleasure; a temporary solitude on the other hand, is itself agreeable."¹¹⁷ Solitude grants the person an opportunity for the "languid and precarious operation of our reason" to do its work: to reflect on the quality of his society and hence to improve the development of his moral imagination.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 220.

¹¹⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 224.

¹¹⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 271.

¹¹⁶ Robert J. Lacey, *Pragmatic Conservatism: Edmund Burke and His American Heirs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 45.

¹¹⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 220.

¹¹⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268.

Burke's connections between imitation, virtue, society, and solitude demonstrate that ethics is a personal, social, and political issue. In fact, he subsequently considered epistemic, social, domestic, political, and military virtues.¹¹⁹ But imitation is not limited to companionship; it extends also to the arts through which, says Lacey, "we learn to imitate the lives of others" and "to imagine living in another person's place, seeing things from his unique perspective."¹²⁰ For this reason, good art also contributes to the development of a moral imagination.¹²¹

The Arts and the Cultivation of Taste

Imagination is a creative faculty with the powers to represent, resemble, combine, and create.¹²² Among its objects of production, said Burke, are both the style and substance of the "works of imagination and the elegant arts."¹²³ Certainly, art includes the "elegant arts."¹²⁴ But more broadly, it refers to the "works of imagination." Art is not the domain of the professional artist exclusively but the person generally. While the imagination creates masterly works of painting, sculpture, architecture, literature/poetry, and music, it also produces the ordinary stuff of culture, society, and state.¹²⁵ For example, describing artifacts of Mexico, Burke wrote, "[T]he shops glitter upon all sides with the exposure of gold, silver, and jewels, and surprise yet more by the

¹¹⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 306–7.

¹²⁰ Lacey, *Pragmatic Conservatism*, 45.

¹²¹ See Burke, *Enquiry*, 206; and Lucyle Werkmeister, "Coleridge's 'Mathematical Problem,'" *Modern Language Notes* 74, no. 8 (December 1959): 692.

¹²² Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2.

¹²³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197.

¹²⁴ Jerome Stolnitz interprets Burke's articulation of the "elegant arts" to refer to the "fine arts," which have traditionally included painting, sculpture, architecture, literature/poetry, and music ("On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness,'" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 2 [Winter 1961]: 142).

¹²⁵ E.g., Burke, *Enquiry*, 197, 204, 246; Edmund Burke, *Hints for an Essay on the Drama* (c. 1761), in *Writings*, 1:560; and Edmund Burke, *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1797), in *Writings*, 9:321.

work of the imagination upon the treasures which fill great chests piled up to the ceilings.”¹²⁶ Again, in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, he remarked, “Art is man’s nature,” implicating even “civil society.”¹²⁷ Broadly speaking then, a human imagination is an artistic imagination because it makes culture and contributes to society.

Just as everyone is an artist, everyone also has taste.¹²⁸ Burke recognized that people vary profoundly in their tastes but held that the principles of taste are uniform. The reason people differ in their tastes is because of differences in sensibility, imagination, and judgment. However, people may improve their tastes by improved knowledge and attention, morals and manners, and exercise and labor. To improve taste, therefore, one must improve his outlook. This section considers these claims.

Uniformity and Difference

Burke was reluctant to define “taste” because it runs the danger of “circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own notions.”¹²⁹ He demonstrated a similar sensitivity in his refusal to define beauty according to proportion and fitness or to define the terms “pain” and “pleasure.”¹³⁰ His resistance to defining ideas too precisely seems to irk some interpreters. However, his methodology signifies a sense of wonder with the world; man may understand its truths partly but never wholly. Even so, Burke reluctantly suggested: “Taste [is] no more than that faculty, or those faculties of the mind which are affected with, or which form a judgment of the works of imagination and the

¹²⁶ *Account*, 1:229.

¹²⁷ Burke, *Appeal*, 449. Cf. David Bromwich, “Burke, The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,” *Political Theory* 19, no. 4 (1991): 667; and Iain Hampsher-Monk, “Reflections on the Revolution in France,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 202.

¹²⁸ Melanie Lowe, *Pleasure and Meaning in the Classical Symphony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 103.

¹²⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197.

¹³⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 211–13.

elegant arts.” He then described these faculties as the “natural powers in man” and identified them as sense, imagination, and reason.¹³¹ Taste is not a “separate faculty of the mind” but a compound faculty involving man’s natural powers.¹³² No one faculty itself is sufficient for taste.¹³³

Burke then queried “whether there are any principles” that are “common to all” and “grounded and certain.” He answered affirmatively, describing them as “fixed” and “various.”¹³⁴ The overarching principle is that God has given all people the natural powers of sense, imagination, and reason, as well as passion, from which people may experience the sublime and beautiful. Even the most “ignorant and barbarous nations” illustrate this principle.¹³⁵ The “ground-work of all these is the same in the human mind,” and consequently the “whole ground-work of Taste is common to all.”¹³⁶ Therefore, taste—even good taste—is not limited to aristocrats or the educated. It is more like an open-access order than a limited-access one.

¹³¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197–98. Although Burke frequently differed with the neoclassicists, Jennifer A. Herdt notes that here he “follow[ed] the rationalist neoclassicists in drawing a sharp distinction between two components of taste—imagination and judgment” (*Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 135).

¹³² Burke, *Enquiry*, 208. Burke thus diverged from Hutcheson and Hume, each of whom believed that taste is a distinct faculty of the mind. Several interpreters suggest the word “composite,” e.g., Browne, “Burke in the Humanist Tradition,” 95–96; or “compound,” e.g., Rob Goodman, *Words on Fire: Eloquence and Its Conditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 115; and Richard Taruskin, *Musical Lives and Times Examined: Keynotes and Clippings, 2006–2019* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023), 49.

¹³³ Several authors explain that imagination is a necessary but not sufficient condition for taste, e.g., Taylor Burleigh Wilkins, “Natural Law, Human Nature, and Natural Rights in Edmund Burke” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1965), 195; and Goodman, *Words on Fire*, 115.

¹³⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197–99; cf. 196, 205.

¹³⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 202.

¹³⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206; he qualified this point slightly, explaining that natural taste is “nearly common to all” (204) to account for exceptions like madness (199). Cf. Browne, “Burke in the Humanist Tradition,” 93; Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 40; Huhn, *Imitation and Society*, 23; Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “The Senses of Taste,” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 2 (April 2011): 376, 376n15; and Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 158.

Concerning the imagination specifically, Burke argued it is affected by “invariable and certain laws” that establish “fixed principles” for taste by which man may “lay down rules” and act as “legislator.”¹³⁷ That is, all people possess imagination, which, said Paul Fussell, is the “quintessential human attribute.”¹³⁸ Without it the person is less than human. Additionally, Crowe comments on Burke’s metaphor of “legislator,” observing it is “revealing” in view of his professional trajectory.¹³⁹ But in stating that everyone possesses imagination, Burke was not suggesting everyone possesses the same imagination. People’s imaginations differ because God has given them different minds and because people adopt different ethics and have different experiences. For this reason, Burke, in his *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, mentioned George Savile’s “most unbounded, peculiar, and original cast of imagination.”¹⁴⁰ “Peculiar” and “original” shows that Burke saw variety in the natural order.

Having identified the objective principle that all people have a mind with the faculties of sense, imagination, and reason, Burke pointed also to the objective principle that all people have passions arising from their minds. The causes of the sublime and beautiful have the “same power pretty equally over all men” because they “affect the imagination” according to “principles in nature.”¹⁴¹ More specifically, “Love, grief, fear, anger, joy, all of these passions have in their turns affected every mind” upon “certain, natural and uniform principles.” The application of the passions often differs, but the principles undergirding them do not. Therefore, Burke established what Monroe C.

¹³⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197.

¹³⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 5.

¹³⁹ Crowe, “The Whig Imagination of Edmund Burke,” 10–11.

¹⁴⁰ Burke, *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, 644.

¹⁴¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201.

Beardsley called an “intersubjectively valid standard of taste.”¹⁴² That is, Burke supported a uniformity of principles within which exists degrees of difference. Natural uniformity does not amount to ethical uniformity because of human will.

Some scholars have resisted this subjective component in Burke’s theory. For example, Dabney Townsend remarks it is “illusory.”¹⁴³ However, Seamus Deane allows for this nuance in Burke’s theory, noting, “To some readers, Burke’s weakness, to others his strength, is his capacity to find in subjectivity a universal dimension.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Burke affirmed subjectivity within a larger objective order, particularity within a larger uniformity, because he recognized that people are individuals living in a world of fixed principles. People “vary exceedingly” in their tastes. Yet such differences are not (normally) differences of “nature” but rather differences of “degree,” which are “altogether as different as the principles themselves are similar.”¹⁴⁵

For this reason, some interpreters, such as G. W. Samson, Timothy M. Costelloe, and Paddy Bullard, have recognized a two-dimensional quality to Burke’s theory of taste: (a) taste as perception or sensation and (b) taste as discernment or judgment.¹⁴⁶ Nicholas Pearson likewise articulates a two-dimensional quality in Burke’s theory, noting his distinction in terms of an “aesthetic concept” and a “moral concept.” But then he qualifies that moral taste “is not so much taste itself, as the negative of

¹⁴² Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1966), 193.

¹⁴³ Townsend, *Taste and Experience*, 92.

¹⁴⁴ Seamus Deane, *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke*, Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays and Monographs (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 5. Cf. David Lloyd, “The Pathological Sublime: Pleasure and Pain in the Colonial Context,” in *Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 89.

¹⁴⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206; cf. 199.

¹⁴⁶ G. W. Samson, *Elements of Art Criticism* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1867), 135; Timothy M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition: From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 77; Bullard, “Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology,” 58–69.

taste.”¹⁴⁷ However, Pearson’s distinction works only if “aesthetic” refers strictly to sense perception and not to the criticism of taste more generally. Additionally, Burke’s inquiry into taste predated the emergence of the discipline of aesthetics as such, making its usage in his system strictly anachronistic.¹⁴⁸ Notwithstanding subsequent developments in aesthetics, Burke viewed taste as a composite faculty of sense, imagination, and judgment that encompasses perception and discernment and overlaps with morals. He stated explicitly that taste consists in the pleasures of sense and imagination and the conclusions of reason concerning the interrelation of these faculties together with the person’s passions, manners, and actions.¹⁴⁹ Even so, differences in taste may result from numerous causes, including differences in sensibility and judgment, knowledge and attention, morals and manners, and exercise and labor.

Sensibility and Judgment

Burke observed that some differences in taste result from natural variances in sensibility and judgment. Concerning sensibility, he wrote in his *Enquiry* that some differences come from a “defect” in sensibility. Some people are “formed” more blunt, cold, and phlegmatic than others.¹⁵⁰ He made a similar point by the designation “dull” in a letter to Adam Smith shortly after *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* released. He praised much of Smith’s work but then remarked he was sometimes too “diffuse” before qualifying his criticism and saying that this “fault of the generous kind” was “infinitely

¹⁴⁷ Nicholas M. Pearson, *The State and the Visual Arts: A Discussion of State Intervention in the Visual Arts in Britain, 1760–1981* (Milton Keynes, GB: Open University Press, 1982), 17–18.

¹⁴⁸ Alexander Baumgarten published *Aesthetica* in 1750, but, says Paddy Bullard, Burke was likely unfamiliar with it. Of course, Immanuel Kant also discussed “aesthetics” in *Critique of Pure Reason*, first published in 1781. However, the term did not appear in English until 1798 after Burke’s death. See Bullard, “Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology,” 53; and White, *Edmund Burke*, 5.

¹⁴⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206.

¹⁵⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206. Cf. Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 18, 1788), 426.

preferable to the dry sterile manner, which those of dull imaginations are apt to fall into.”¹⁵¹ Sometimes people differ in taste because of dull imaginations or cold sensibilities.

However, continued Burke in the *Enquiry*, others have a “greater degree of natural sensibility”¹⁵² or a greater “bent to the pleasures of the imagination.”¹⁵³ Still, such people may have bad taste because they may direct lively imaginations toward unwise or wicked ends. For example, Burke explained in his *Speech on American Taxation*, Lord Carmarthen’s “lively imagination” led him to support the unwise policy of taxing the Colonists and to compare them to children who would not “revolt against their parent.” By contrast, Burke believed America should be left to “tax herself.” He did not think the parent-child analogy was apt: “When you drive him hard, the boar will surely turn upon the hunters.” Time confirmed Burke’s predictions. Yet Burke tempered his evaluation of Carmarthen, observing he was young and “further experience” would reveal his quality.¹⁵⁴

Burke’s comments toward Jean-Jacques Rousseau were considerably less forbearing: “Rousseau with his exuberant and vehement torrent of Style and imagination that disdains all {Bounds} has hurried it down the precipices of Paradox.”¹⁵⁵ Having read *Julie*, *Émile*, *The Social Contract*, and *Confessions*, Burke viewed Rousseau’s style as being lively or exuberant but also vehement, contemptuous, and disorderly, to say

¹⁵¹ Burke to Adam Smith (September 10, 1759), 130. Although Burke praised *Moral Sentiments*, his analysis of it evolved over the decades, becoming more “cold,” according to Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 1:187.

¹⁵² Burke, *Enquiry*, 205.

¹⁵³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 207.

¹⁵⁴ Burke, *American Taxation*, 458–59.

¹⁵⁵ Edmund Burke, On Education [June 1776], in *Writings*, 3:244. Concerning “{Bounds},” a note on transcription reads, “Angle brackets (...) are used to indicate words or phrases which are illegible, or to enclose uncertain readings” (54). Additionally, some Burke scholars believe he reviewed Rousseau’s *Emile* for the *Annual Register*: “There were copies of the French text and English translation in Burke’s library” (Elofson, Woods, and Todd, eds., On Education, 244n1).

nothing of his substance, which disdained all moral bounds. Burke believed Rousseau's works shaped the social imagination (examined below) in dangerous and, as Bullard describes it, "pernicious" ways.¹⁵⁶ Burke disagreed strongly with Rousseau's teachings about topics including education, family, morals, politics, and tradition because he interpreted Rousseau to teach that youth owe no special respect to parents, teachers, or the past, thereby inciting them to revolution.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, Burke held that a lively imagination is not a virtue when it is employed in the wrong manner unto wrong ends.

Burke's analyses of Carmarthen and Rousseau are not contradictory because they represent differences of kind, not simply differences of degree. Whereas Carmarthen made his remarks in his youth, Rousseau was forty years his senior. Whereas Carmarthen lacked experience, Rousseau lacked sanity (Burke's engagement with Rousseau is examined at length in chapter 6). Burke explained this point by describing Rousseau as a "flighty madman" who exhibited a "fine Phrensy"¹⁵⁸ and was "deranged in his intellects."¹⁵⁹ Or as Annie Marion Osborn put it, Burke regard Rousseau's works as resulting from a "diseased imagination" and a "fantastic imagination."¹⁶⁰ Thus, enthusiasm or exuberance has a rightful role to play within the person's character, but it must be balanced by good reason and good morals.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric*, 185.

¹⁵⁷ E.g., Burke, *National Assembly*, 314, 317. Additionally, Eileen Hunt Botting discusses Burke's view of Rousseau throughout her book, *Family Feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Rousseau on the Transformation of the Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁸ Burke, *On Education*, 244.

¹⁵⁹ Edmund Burke, in *Memoir of the Life and Character of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*, by James Prior (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824), 354.

¹⁶⁰ Annie Marion Osborn, *Rousseau and Burke: A Study of the Idea of Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (1940; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 17. In making this comment, Osborn is referring specifically to *Julie* and *Confessions*.

¹⁶¹ See Burke, *Enquiry*, 207–8; and Burke, *Appeal*, 383

Just as the person may have a defect of sensibility, he may also have a “defect of judgment,” which may arise from a “natural weakness of understanding.” In Burke’s time, Enlightenment rationalism displayed heightened confidence in the power of reason. While Burke valued reason, he also believed it is capable of weakness and fault that may lead to “bad” or “wrong” taste.¹⁶² However, notwithstanding such natural differences in sensibility and judgment, the person may “improve” his taste in multiple ways.¹⁶³

Knowledge and Attention

The person may improve his taste by increasing his knowledge and attention and by ridding himself of bad prejudices. Burke wrote in his *Enquiry*, “Now as the pleasure of resemblance is that which principally flatters the imagination, all men are nearly equal in this point, as far as their knowledge of the things represented or compared extends,” which depends on “experience and observation.”¹⁶⁴ By nature, people are equal in imagination and pleasure, but by knowledge, experience, and observation, they are unequal in taste. Bruce C. Swaffield interprets Burke as believing that “imagination is grounded in experience or education.”¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Iain Hampsher-Monk explains that taste is “subject to associations and usages which render it various” according to the person’s cultivation, refinement, and education.¹⁶⁶ Certainly, Burke thought that experience and education play an important role in the person’s taste, but he also integrated that point with the more fundamental point about man’s God-given human nature.

¹⁶² Burke, *Enquiry*, 206–7. James Fitzjames Stephen interpreted “taste” in Burke to mean “forming a judgment” (*Horae Sabbaticae* [London: Macmillan, 1892], 98).

¹⁶³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206, 209.

¹⁶⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 202; cf. 209.

¹⁶⁵ Bruce C. Swaffield, *Rising from the Ruins: Roman Antiquities in Neoclassic Literature* (Newcastle upon Tyne, GB: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 89.

¹⁶⁶ Hampsher-Monk, “Rhetoric and Opinion in the Politics of Edmund Burke,” 471.

By emphasizing knowledge, Burke observed that the prospect of good taste is not limited to the elites but rather is available practically to anyone who applies himself and increases his knowledge, whether with respect to painting, poetry, or something else. He began this discussion with a proposition concerning the natural knowledge of literal taste. Barring some defect, all people have natural knowledge, such as knowing that “sugar is sweet” and “vinegar is sour.” He then shifted his argument to the phenomenon of acquired knowledge, which people do not have until learning it or developing it, such as knowing how to paint a shoe, muscle, or head that corresponds to the natural object.¹⁶⁷ For example, Burke wrote that Gentile Bellini’s *The Head of St. John the Baptist* seemingly demonstrated a lack of knowledge on the artist’s part. This point was discovered when a Turkish sultan observed, on seeing the painting, that the “skin did not shrink from the wounded part of the neck.” Burke then noted, “His Turkish majesty had indeed been well acquainted with that terrible spectacle, which the others could only have represented in their imagination.”¹⁶⁸ This sultan, whom Luke Gibbons describes as making “ostentatious use of spectacle to pander to indolent imaginations,” had acquired knowledge of how such skin would appear.¹⁶⁹

Geraldine Friedman argues that Burke’s anecdote is “modeled loosely on Newtonian physics.”¹⁷⁰ Perhaps she is correct, but Burke’s underlying concern regards epistemology not physics. She quotes passages in which Burke says that “bodies [objects] present similar images to the whole species,” giving rise to certain passions “in all mankind,” and that like causes produce like effects in like subjects.¹⁷¹ However, these

¹⁶⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 198–99.

¹⁶⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 203–4.

¹⁶⁹ Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, 26.

¹⁷⁰ Geraldine Friedman, *The Insistence of History: Revolution in Burke, Wordsworth, Keats, and Baudelaire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 16.

¹⁷¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 198.

passages concern Burke's uniformity of principles. Practically all people perceive phenomena in their imaginations that give rise to certain passions. Burke's point was not that skin on a headless neck always shrivels per se but that the person who has witnessed such a spectacle has acquired a form of knowledge that the person who has not witnessed it has not.

Of course, a given artifact does not have to correspond to reality; it may be a fictional or fantastical pleasure of imagination. However, if the goal is representational accuracy, then "wrong Taste" may result from "ignorance" because the judgment is "false and inaccurate."¹⁷² To this end, "critical" or "superior" knowledge often precedes improving one's taste.¹⁷³ Just as a sultan may acquire the knowledge to recognize whether the representation of a decollated head corresponds to reality, so also the person may acquire the requisite knowledge to improve his taste (Burke's point was not that people should become experts in beheadings). Thus, one of the ways the person may increase his knowledge is to give "closer and longer attention to the object."¹⁷⁴ He may thereby improve his judgment and therefore his taste. Practically anyone can increase in knowledge because he can cultivate the virtue of careful and patient contemplation. Of course, knowledge does not concern only one's reason but also his imagination since imagination gives form to thought.

Townsend criticizes the methodology of Burke's argument in moving from literal tastes (sugar as sweet, vinegar as sour) to artistic ones. Natural pleasures can be "empirically justified," he says, but "imaginative pleasures" cannot. Burke needs literal taste and artistic taste "to be the same," but the fact is that they "do not have the same basis." For this reason, artistic tastes are so much more subjective than literal ones: "[I]f I

¹⁷² Burke, *Enquiry*, 207–8.

¹⁷³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 203.

¹⁷⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 205; cf. 209.

find something pleasant, it is pleasant to me.”¹⁷⁵ Townsend’s criticism seems to confuse Burke’s argument. Obviously, imaginative pleasures cannot be empirically verified (unless mind-brain identity theory, or something like it, is true). However, Burke did not require literal and artistic tastes to be equal for his analogy to work.

Just as some literal tastes are natural, some artistic tastes are natural; and just as some literal tastes are acquired, so also some artistic tastes are acquired. For example, practically everyone agrees that sugar is sweet, but not everyone agrees that tobacco is preferable to sugar or vinegar to milk. In this way, literal taste can be as subjective as artistic taste. Practically everyone admires stories with action, passion, voyages, battles, triumphs, and changes in fortune, but not everyone admires the *Aeneid* over Don Belianís.¹⁷⁶ Burke recognized that people’s artistic tastes differ and that such variances may be fine. However, they are problematic when they signify an ethical relativism that treats the banal as excellent or derives pleasure from vice. Hence, Burke spoke to the importance of “cultivating” good taste.¹⁷⁷

In contrast to good taste, “wrong Taste” may result from “inattention, prejudice, rashness, levity, [and] obstinacy.” Burke appears to have treated these five terms together, suggesting a connection between them: someone may obstinately refuse to give his attention to an object because of his prejudice and make rash or light decisions. In fact, Burke described these causes as “vices” that malform the imagination and “pervert the judgment.”¹⁷⁸ Everyone has a mind with which to give objects attention, but not everyone gives such objects the same attention. As Burke stated, “If Taste has not been so happily cultivated,” it is not because it is reserved for aristocrats but because “the

¹⁷⁵ Townsend, *Taste and Experience*, 91.

¹⁷⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 199, 204–6.

¹⁷⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 196, 209; strictly speaking, Burke used the term “cultivated” in each of these passages.

¹⁷⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 207.

labourers were few or negligent.”¹⁷⁹ Such people have not applied their faculties to the task, revealing what David Dwan calls an “undisciplined imagination” and “enervated sensibility.”¹⁸⁰

This passage strikes a different tone concerning its remarks about prejudice than his comments about it some three decades later in his *Reflections* where he associated it with the moral imagination. However, these different usages do not contradict. In both cases, Burke’s concern was virtue. In the *Enquiry*, prejudice signifies vice because it keeps the person from improving his taste; in the *Reflections*, prejudice signifies virtue because it prompts the person toward improving his morals.¹⁸¹ At root, a “prejudice” refers to a person’s pre-judgment and thus may be right or wrong, good or bad, virtuous or vicious, depending on the nature of the judgment.¹⁸² Insofar as prejudice preempts virtue or promotes vice, it is not good. But insofar as it promotes virtue and preempts vice, it is good.

Burke recognized that all people have prejudices because all people have opinions. Also, he remarked that the person’s prejudices, and his habits and distempers, necessarily inform his acquired tastes.¹⁸³ According to Bullard, “It is impossible, Burke reckons, to say anything about a taste that has been ‘acquired’ . . . without descending from philosophy to biography.”¹⁸⁴ That is, taste relates invariably to prejudice in one way

¹⁷⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 196; this quotation may signify a subtle echo of Matthew 22:14.

¹⁸⁰ David Dwan, “Edmund Burke and the Emotions,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 4 (2011): 585.

¹⁸¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 207; *Reflections*, 138.

¹⁸² A prejudice may even describe a difference of opinion, such as when Burke referred to the “prejudice in favour of proportion” concerning the cause of beauty (*Enquiry*, 263).

¹⁸³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 199.

¹⁸⁴ Bullard, “Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology,” 58.

or another. Consequently, to improve his taste, the person must take honest stock of his prejudices and rid himself of any bad ones.

Morals and Manners

As these points about good taste versus bad taste demonstrate, Burke related the topic of taste to issues of morality and manners. That is, the development of good taste also results from the development of good morals. However, some interpreters downplay this connection. For example, Bullard denies that Burke approached taste as the “philosophic cultivation of a ‘moral taste,’” describing “this sort of analogy between art and ethics as misleading.” Rather, he says that Burke offered a “strict contrast between taste-as-sensation and taste-as-judgment” and placed the “primary faculties of sense and imagination” at a “distance from the secondary cognitive process” of “moral judgment.”¹⁸⁵

Undoubtedly, Burke connected taste both to sensation and imagination and to judgment. He also acknowledged that sense and imagination are often in close agreement and that judgment may oppose them.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, he distinguished them. But he did not strictly contrast them. Burke recognized that imagination and judgment may also reinforce one another; additionally, he spoke in terms of “sensibility and judgment”¹⁸⁷ as well as “judgment and imagination.”¹⁸⁸

Furthermore, Burke did not couch the senses and imagination as the primary faculties of taste and judgment as the secondary faculty of taste. Rather, he articulated taste as a composite faculty that consists “of the primary pleasures of sense, of the

¹⁸⁵ Bullard, “Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology,” 58–60. Cf. Walter John Hipple Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), 143.

¹⁸⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201, 207.

¹⁸⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206.

¹⁸⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 208.

secondary pleasures of the imagination, and of the conclusions of the reasoning faculty, concerning the various relations of these.”¹⁸⁹ Burke’s usage of “primary” and “secondary” does not correlate with Bullard’s articulation. Also, Burke’s statement was not an evaluation of epistemic or moral significance but of common temporal experience. That is, the person generally forms an idea in his imagination from sense experience that he then reflects on. So, taste relates to morals because it relates to the faculties of imagination and judgment, which are distinct yet with the faculty of sense forms the composite faculty of taste with which the person may pursue moral and artistic excellence.

Moral Imagination and Moral Judgment

Burke thus linked morals with both imagination and judgment. Writing in the *Enquiry*, he stated: “But as many of the works of imagination are not confined to the representation of sensible objects, nor to efforts upon the passions, but extend themselves to the manners, the characters, the actions, and designs of men, their relations, their virtues and vices, they come within the province of the judgment, which is improved by attention and by the habit of reasoning.”¹⁹⁰ Here, Burke explained that the works of imagination are not limited to representation and the passions. They extend also to people’s manners, characters, actions, designs, relations, virtues, and vices. Furthermore, the works of imagination, and all they include, come within the province of judgment, demonstrating an interplay between these two faculties.

Still, one interpretive line reads Burke in this passage to tie matters of morality to judgment but not the imagination. For instance, Tuveson proposed, “Burke regarded

¹⁸⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206.

¹⁹⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206.

the understanding as the only responsible faculty.”¹⁹¹ Even Byrne interprets Burke this way, arguing the statement is “somewhat at odds with his reference to a ‘moral imagination’ decades later in the *Reflections*.”¹⁹² This interpretation appears to read Burke to establish discontinuity between the functions of imagination and judgment. Burke clearly connected morals to judgment. For instance, he characterized judgment as potentially not only defective, weak, false, and inaccurate but also perverted, good, and righteous (rectitude).¹⁹³ However, Burke could have also meant that morals extend additionally to the imagination so that the faculties of imagination and judgment invariably overlap and the works of imagination, which include morals, come within the province of judgment.

Therefore, a second interpretive line views Burke as connecting imagination and morals. As Frans De Bruyn explains, “[J]udgement must *accompany* sensibility” and hence imagination.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Emily Dumler-Winckler observes, “The imagination does not end where judgment begins, but rather *extends* beyond sensible objects to the manners, characters, virtues and vices of persons.”¹⁹⁵ Burke aimed to establish continuity, not discontinuity, between sensation, imagination, judgment, and morality. As his next sentence reads, “*All these* make a very considerable part of what are considered as the objects of Taste.”¹⁹⁶ Objects of taste include objects of morality, and the composite

¹⁹¹ Tuveson, *Imagination as a Means of Grace*, 173. Cf. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy*, 135–36.

¹⁹² Byrne, “Edmund Burke’s ‘Moral Imagination,’” 66; cf. 95. Incidentally, these statements do not seem to appear in *Burke for Our Time*, nor even an interaction with this passage.

¹⁹³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 207–8.

¹⁹⁴ Frans De Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 122 (italics added).

¹⁹⁵ Emily Jaye Dumler-Winckler, “Modern Virtue: Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft and a Tradition of Dissent” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2015), 84. Cf. Binney, “Edmund Burke’s Sublime Cosmopolitan Aesthetic,” 653.

¹⁹⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206 (italics added).

faculty of taste includes sense, imagination, and judgment. Burke related morals to imagination because he viewed imagination as bridging the faculties and giving form to thought, including moral thought.

In a second passage, Burke commented that some people do not appreciate “elegance or greatness . . . in any work of art” because they do not pursue the “delicate and refined play of the imagination” or “refined judgment,” choosing rather to focus on money, sex, and rank.¹⁹⁷ Robert Herbert Doran proposes that Burke offered a “stern condemnation of pleasure and vice,” pointing rather to the role of the sublime, which “awaken[s] the mind through pain and terror.”¹⁹⁸ While Burke opposed vice and elevated the sublime, his view of pleasure was more nuanced than Doran’s proposal suggests because he recognized that pleasure may be virtuous or vicious. In this case, Burke criticized, for example, those “gross and merely sensual pleasures” resulting from the storms of “violent and tempestuous passions,” not pleasure itself.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, Burke’s concern was not that such people lack imagination or judgment but that they lack refined imagination and judgment.²⁰⁰

Burke would not articulate the “moral imagination” as such until three decades later in the *Reflections*, but he set forth the basic idea in his Introduction on Taste to the *Enquiry*. Of course, his ideas developed and matured over the ensuing decades, but the seed of these connections was planted decades prior. Notwithstanding Byrne’s interpretation of this passage, he interpreted Burke to hold that people always interpret the world through a “moral-imaginative” framework. For this reason, “In whatever

¹⁹⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206–7.

¹⁹⁸ Robert Herbert Doran, “The Sublime and Modern Subjectivity: The Discourse of Elevation from Neo-Classical to French Romanticism” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2004), 174–75.

¹⁹⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 207.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Koen Vermeir and Michal Funk Deckard, eds., who say that such people “lack judgment” (“Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility: An Introductory Essay,” in *Science of Sensibility*, 41).

manner one may choose to divide this activity between the imagination itself and the reasoning faculty, which works with the imagination, it is clear that perception must by necessity be powerfully shaped by the imaginative wholes which precede it.”²⁰¹ Burke recognized that these faculties operate organically and dynamically. Furthermore, unlike Bullard, Byrne does not believe that Burke established “sharp categorical distinctions between the aesthetic and the ethical.”²⁰²

In addition to showing that imagination and judgment each contribute to the person’s sense of artistic and moral taste, Burke stated that judgment may oppose imagination. Specifically, he presented the “rectitude of the judgment” as “throwing stumbling blocks in the way of the imagination, in dissipating the scenes of its enchantment, and in tying us down to the disagreeable yoke of our reason.”²⁰³ That is, the person’s judgment may exercise power over the imagination. In this sense, judgment is certainly not secondary.

Scholars have disagreed about whether Burke was favoring imagination or reason in this passage. One interpretation argues that Burke “prioritizes” or “privileges” imagination and degrades reason, even accusing him of an anti-intellectualism.²⁰⁴ Certainly, he described judgment as tying imagination down to the “disagreeable yoke” of reason. However, the yoke is disagreeable only to an imagination that is wrongly enchanted. Significantly, Burke qualified his reference to judgment by the term

²⁰¹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 71.

²⁰² Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 194.

²⁰³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 207–8. Burke’s reference to “stumbling blocks” may echo the Bible’s usage of that phrase.

²⁰⁴ James T. Boulton, ed., Introduction to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, by Edmund Burke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), xx. Cf. Richard Olson, *Science Deified and Science Defied: The Historical Significance of Science in Western Culture*, vol. 2, From the Early Modern Age through the Early Romantic Era, ca. 1640 to ca. 1820 (1982; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 300; and Nella Cotrupi, “Vico, Burke, and Frye’s Flirtation with the Sublime,” in *Giambattista Vico and Anglo-American Science: Philosophy and Writing*, ed. Marcel Danesi, *Approaches to Semiotics* 199 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 41.

“rectitude.” The righteous judgment may throw stumbling blocks in the way of imagination when it is “captivated” or “dazzled” by what is artistically or morally poor.²⁰⁵ In this way, the yoke of reason is a helpful if uncomfortable instrument of discipline. Burke’s point was not to disparage reason but to commend it. Judgment directs the imagination to keep it from straying to the wrong path.

However, a second interpretation argues that Burke was elevating reason. Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, not unlike Tuveson, states that, in Burke’s meaning, reason “forms a final and indispensable element in our judging a work of art.”²⁰⁶ Not quite as strongly, Stephen K. White remarks that Burke “gives to judgment a fairly substantial judicial function.”²⁰⁷ Assuredly, Burke viewed the faculty of reason as being relevant to artistic-moral analysis and acknowledged it may draw “conclusions.” However, he gave it the final say only insofar as it has rectitude; he fully recognized it may be defective or perverse.²⁰⁸

Rob Goodman interprets Burke from this passage to mean that imagination and judgment are in “persistent tension.” Burke surely saw them as being in tension when one faculty is moral, and the other is not. But if they are not operating at cross purposes, they are not in tension. Goodman continues, rightly observing that this tension “can be highly productive” and lead to “good taste” when “both of these faculties are well developed and operating in tandem.”²⁰⁹ Indeed, part of Burke’s state goal in his Introduction on Taste to the *Enquiry* was to examine and to improve “critical Taste.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Cf. Burke, *Vindication*, 134–35; and Burke, *Enquiry*, 268.

²⁰⁶ Wilkins, “Natural Law, Human Nature, and Natural Rights in Edmund Burke,” 196.

²⁰⁷ White, *Edmund Burke*, 34.

²⁰⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206–7.

²⁰⁹ Goodman, *Words on Fire*, 115.

²¹⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 203.

In summary, Burke did not favor the faculty of imagination over reason or the faculty of reason over imagination. He recognized that each may be moral or immoral, and he held that each may counterbalance the other. Just as imagination may revolt against reason when it would presume too much, so reason may hold back imagination when it would be swept away; just as imagination may pull reason from its high perch, reason may disentangle imagination from its poor allurements. If the precise relationship between these two faculties is difficult to comprehend or articulate, Burke observed, “It is by a long deduction and much study that we discover the adorable wisdom of God in his works.”²¹¹ Thus, imagination and reason may oppose one another, but they may also work together, all according to God’s wisdom.

The *Enquiry* was not the only place Burke interrelated the themes of imagination, reason, and morality. He also discussed them in “Several Scattered Hints concerning Philosophy and Learning,” where he explained that, while understanding plays an important role in the person’s ethical development, it does not move the person’s passions and desires in the same way imagination does: “Dry precepts and reasoning do little. It is from the imagination and will that our Errors rise, and in them, as in their first beginnings, they ought to be attacked.”²¹² Virtue and vice alike begin in the imagination. Even Burke’s critic, William Hazlitt, recognized this point in Burke: “He knew that the rules that form the basis of private morality are not found in reason, that is, in the abstract properties of those things which are the subjects of them, but in the nature of man, and his capacity of being affected by certain things from habit, from imagination, and sentiment, as well as from reason.”²¹³

²¹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268.

²¹² Edmund Burke, “Several Scattered Hints concerning Philosophy and Learning,” in *Note-Book*, 96.

²¹³ William Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Burke” (1807), in *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*, 2nd ed. (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1822), 368.

Burke then illustrated his claim by appealing to several examples. First, he considered a publication that presented vice rationally without appeal to imagination before concluding the reader was affected “very little” by it. Then, he considered a “Lascivious Song” that was “directed to the imagination,” discovering that “in a Moment the Desires are raised. And so undoubtedly and much more will it hold in Virtue.” Imagination is powerful for the cause of vice; thus, the wise person counterbalances imagination with well-formed reason. Yet imagination is even more powerful for the cause of virtue. Moreover, Burke explained, God has ordered the world accordingly: “The wisdom of Nature ought to be strictly imitated; which has made all things necessary to our preservation [virtue] in the highest degree pleasing to our Appetites.”²¹⁴ If the parent or teacher or artist would teach someone else virtue, he must appeal to imagination.

Even so, Burke did not leave his argument about the imagination unqualified but proceeded to counterbalance an emphasis on imagination with an emphasis on reason. Just as appeal to reason alone is insufficient, so also appeal to imagination alone is insufficient. Imagination and reason benefit one another. Reason may do little to move the person, but it guards him from “folly” and “wickedness.” Burke offered the example of religious fervor: “They who would introduce new Religions must aim at the Imagination not the Understanding.” Again, he continued, “[T]heir Imagination is engaged,” but not their understanding.²¹⁵ Consequently, the cause for virtue must appeal to an imagination that is tethered by reason so that it inspires the person’s desires without propelling them into foolishness or wickedness.

²¹⁴ Burke, “Scattered Hints,” 96.

²¹⁵ Burke, “Scattered Hints,” 96–97. Specifically, Burke gave the examples of Mohammedanism and Methodism because he perceived in them a fanaticism that can be hyper-emotional and uber-subjective.

Burke's ideal for ethical development, says Ruth A. Bevan, bridges and integrates "the rational and emotional individual."²¹⁶ The virtuous imagination interacts with reason and gives rise to the right kinds of passions and actions. The key question for the person's moral character concerns how he has trained his imagination, whether like a racing horse that pulls the person from the mire or a gorgon that drags him into the pits of despair, whether unto virtue or unto vice.

Moral and Artistic Excellence

Just as Burke believed in fixed principles of epistemology, he believed in fixed principles of axiology. In the opening lines of his *Enquiry*, he wrote that "with regard to truth and falshood [*sic*] there is something fixed."²¹⁷ Although Burke would also highlight the importance of circumstance and utility in political ethic, he believed they operate within the broader context of a universal moral order. With respect to the arts then, he recognized that taste may be morally good or bad. Burke connected these themes especially in his early career.

While still a student at Trinity, Burke deplored the immorality of the theater in *The Reformer*. He remarked that "the Depravation of Taste is as great as that of Morals" because the person's taste reveals his morals.²¹⁸ Hence, Bruyn describes taste as an "indispensible moral touchstone."²¹⁹ Burke was concerned that the immorality of the theater was malforming people's imaginations. Even though "every one is sensible how much they [plays] influence their Taste and Manners," they still treat them as their

²¹⁶ Ruth A. Bevan, *Marx and Burke: A Revisionist View* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1973), 126.

²¹⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 196.

²¹⁸ Edmund Burke, *The Reformer* no. 1 (January 28, 1747), in *Writings*, 1:66.

²¹⁹ Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke*, 122. Cf. Harris, Introduction to *Edmund Burke*, 58–59; Karen Valihora, *Austen's Oughts: Judgment after Locke and Shaftesbury* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 49; and Jeff Mitchell, *On the Decline of the Genteel Virtues: From Gentility to Technocracy* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 166.

“favourite Diversion.”²²⁰ However, the wise person does not take the arts for granted but recognizes they invariably teach some kind of moral.

Burke illustrated this point in the *Enquiry*, observing that people associate giants with “tyranny, cruelty, injustice, and every thing horrid and abominable” because they “let [their] imaginations loose in romance,” such as the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*.²²¹ Again, he explained that the business of “poetry and rhetoric” is to bring about sympathy on the part of the reader or listener.²²² As Byrne explains, the arts invite the person to experience something “vicariously” in his imagination.²²³ While imaginative knowledge alone is not equal to experiential knowledge, it is still valuable and moves the person to compassion, kindness, and support. Along these same lines, Burke commented several decades later in a letter to Mary Shackleton about how some verses owing “much to the imagination” may move a person toward a “Standard of perfection.”²²⁴ The arts present a moral, and consequently, people must assess the moral value of a given artifact to assure they do not malform their imaginations according to bad morals.

In addition to upholding moral excellence, Burke also upheld artistic excellence. From his student days, he contended in *The Reformer* that artifacts lacking a “true poetical Spirit” do not warrant sustained reflection. “Men of Taste” are flattered only by what “ravishes the Imagination”—that is, the well-formed imagination. Conversely, for the person who has “no Perception of those Things, the most lifeless and terse will always be the most charming Performance.”²²⁵ However, said Burke, the

²²⁰ Burke, *The Reformer* no. 1, 67.

²²¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 306.

²²² Burke, *Enquiry*, 317.

²²³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 96.

²²⁴ Edmund Burke to Miss Mary Shackleton (December 13, 1784), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 5:200.

²²⁵ Burke, *The Reformer* no. 10, 114.

lackluster and inarticulate should not move the imagination. Thus, his aim in *The Reformer* was to push people not only away from immoral productions but also toward excellent ones.

Again, in his Introduction to the *Enquiry*, Burke prefixed “taste” with words of moral and aesthetic significance: “bad,” “good,” “better,” “higher,” and “best.”²²⁶ He explained, “But as the arts advance towards their perfection, the science of criticism advances with equal pace, and the pleasure of judges is frequently interrupted by the faults which are discovered in the most finished compositions.”²²⁷ The person will not enjoy what he once enjoyed because he will realize it is not as good as he imagined.

Furthermore, discussing the interplay of the person’s faculties of taste, Burke wrote, “So far as the imagination and the passions are concerned, I believe it true, that the reason is little consulted; but . . . wherever the best Taste differs from the worst, I am convinced that the understanding operates and nothing else; and its operation is in reality far from being always sudden, or when it is sudden, it is often far from being right.”²²⁸ This passage may seem to create some difficulties regarding the connection between imagination and reason and the connection between imagination and “best Taste.” In fact, Alastair A. MacDonald, who interprets Burke to associate morals and manners chiefly with reason rather than imagination, asserts that imagination is “not responsible for producing the highest excellencies in the most serious art,” adding that such a move would signify “an important step towards the evolution of Romantic theory” that Burke has not taken.²²⁹ Wilkins even concludes that Burke was a rationalist (in contrast to those

²²⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 203–4, 206–7, 209.

²²⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 208.

²²⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 208–9.

²²⁹ Alastair A. MacDonald, “Significant Trends towards the Romantic Theory of Imagination in Critical Writings of the Later Eighteenth Century” (PhD diss., The University of Manchester, 1961), 66–68.

scholars accusing him of anti-intellectualism).²³⁰ However, Joseph Pappin III rightly remarks that Wilkins's view "cuts against the grain of much Burkean scholarship," while still observing that the "role of 'reason' . . . is ultimately considered of the highest order in both Burke's aesthetics and his epistemology."²³¹ However, as previously argued, Burke balanced the faculties of imagination and reason in their interrelationship so that neither is necessarily higher than the other.

The immediate textual context of the passage reveals that Burke was contending against the claim that taste is an instinctive, mental faculty that is distinctive from the imaginative and reasoning faculties. Certainly, people may lead with their imaginations and passions, instinctively liking what they like and not attending to reason, reflection, and judgment, but that approach leads to bad taste. As an example of this phenomenon, Bullard points to Rousseau who was "totally destitute of [good] taste" precisely because his "eloquence belongs to the realm of passions, and not the realm of judgment, evaluation, or reason."²³² Thus, for the person to have the "best Taste," he cannot rely simply on instincts.²³³

Rather, the best taste comes from increasing one's knowledge and attention or, as Burke articulated it here, "understanding." Such understanding is not achieved strictly by reason but by the composite faculty of taste comprising the senses, imagination, and reason. Whereas some scholars interpret Burke to prioritize reason over imagination, and others interpret him to prioritize imagination over reason, Burke's actual position seems to lie between these two interpretations. He viewed these faculties as being dynamic and relating to one another in various ways. He clearly highlighted imagination and, in this

²³⁰ Wilkins, "Natural Law, Human Nature, and Natural Rights in Edmund Burke," 198.

²³¹ Joseph Pappin III, "Edmund Burke and John Locke on the Metaphysics of Substance," in *Science of Sensibility*, ed. Vermeir and Deckard, 116.

²³² Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric*, 189.

²³³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 209.

sense, represented a transitional figure between the rationalism preceding him and the romanticism succeeding him. However, he recognized that both imagination and reason are subject to positive and negative propensities in general and in the arts.

Some interpreters have criticized Burke's connection between the arts and excellence, accusing him of elitism and judgmentalism. For example, Taylor writes, "Only minds of genius could handle these mental intoxications [of imagination]; for the rest of humanity, sober reflection was an essential check on the imaginative excess."²³⁴ However, nowhere in these passages did Burke limit the "mental intoxication" of imagination to geniuses. In fact, he wrote, "The true standard of the arts is in every man's power," namely, the rectitude of judgment.²³⁵ He even noted that the child ("in the morning of our days") may experience good pleasures by his imagination.²³⁶ It was David Hume, not Edmund Burke, who believed that few would work toward the end of improving their tastes.²³⁷ Hence, Burke extended the "mental intoxications" of imagination even to the "rest of humanity." Additionally, "sober reflection" is an essential check for all people, including "geniuses," to guard against excess in the unexceptional and the immoral.

Similarly, Townsend charges Burke with judgmentalism: "This is not a standard of taste but a formula for placing blame," writes Townsend. "Those who do not agree with the best judges are either weak-minded or lazy!"²³⁸ Burke would not deny that some people are lazy, referring to them as "negligent"²³⁹ and to their "indolence and

²³⁴ Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, 61.

²³⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 228.

²³⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 208.

²³⁷ See Guyer, Introduction, xxviii.

²³⁸ Dabney Townsend, "Lockean Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 1991): 356.

²³⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 196.

inaction.”²⁴⁰ However, his comments were not coming from a place of judgmentalism or pretension but from an abiding belief that truth and falsehood are fixed. His aim was not to place blame so much as to inspire excellence, not according to the “best judges” per se, but according to the universal moral order.

Richard Taruskin has sounded similar notes, describing Burke’s ideas as “baleful” because they connect “bad taste or wrong taste” to a “symptom of vice or perversion.” He then writes that this idea “diminishes rather than enhances pleasure because it lessens the number of objects from which we can naively derive satisfaction.” Taruskin appears to suggest that moral ignorance is aesthetic bliss. He concludes that Burke signified the “birth, or at least the christening, of aesthetic snobbery, which is always and only social snobbery in disguise.”²⁴¹ In Taruskin’s view, the denial of aesthetic relativism is tantamount to aesthetic arrogance. Burke admitted that a “sort of conscious pride and superiority may arise from thinking rightly” but also observed it is an accidental not essential property of believing in standards.²⁴² Hence, Goodman rightly remarks that Burke’s position is “not necessarily snobbish.”²⁴³

Additionally, while Burke recognized a connection between the artistic and the social, he did not conflate “aesthetic snobbery” and “social snobbery.” Burke argued that the arts form the morality not only of people but also of societies since societies are composed of people. Although morals may seem more important than taste, they also depend on taste. From his earliest to his latest writings, Burke made this point. For example, writing in *The Reformer*, he explained, “[T]ho’ the correcting the latter [morals]

²⁴⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 218; cf. 222, 287 (“indolence”).

²⁴¹ Taruskin, *Musical Lives*, 49–50. Taruskin remarks that this passage is among the earliest to suggest that “there can be such a thing as bad taste” (49). Cf. Philip Gould, *Writing the Rebellion: Loyalists and the Literature of Politics in British America*, Oxford Studies in American Literary History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 91.

²⁴² Burke, *Enquiry*, 208.

²⁴³ Goodman, *Words on Fire*, 115.

may seem a more laudable Design [than taste], and more consistent with *public-spirit*; yet there is so strong a Connection between them, and the morals of a Nation have so great Dependence on their taste and Writings, that the fixing the latter, seems the first and surest Method of establishing the former.”²⁴⁴ Culture, society, and politics depend on the arts. The improvement of taste results in the improvement of morals and society. Hence, the arts play a significant role in the improvement or deterioration of society.

Again, a half-century later, Burke mentioned in his *Reflections* that the arts “beautify and polish life.”²⁴⁵ Also, in his *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he commented critically of the “artists of the French Revolution” who made sketches of robbery, desolation, and murder, thereby preparing the way for revolution.²⁴⁶ As Bruce Mazlish stated, “[B]efore a political revolution could occur, there must be a revolution in taste, morals and manners,” which was the “work of savants and philosophers, using the press and propaganda.”²⁴⁷ Byrne also comments on these connections, observing, “[T]he plays we see, the stories we read, and all of our experiences can shape us in powerful ways, by equipping our imagination for good or for ill.”²⁴⁸ The wise person takes the arts seriously, not simply in his personal life but also as a matter of public policy. The arts shape people and politics alike. Thus, while the arts and society are overlapping, they are not one and the same.

In summary, Burke believed that the person may improve his taste by improving not only his sensibility and judgment and his knowledge and attention but also

²⁴⁴ Burke, *The Reformer* no. 1, 66.

²⁴⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 180.

²⁴⁶ Burke, *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 321. See also Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 242.

²⁴⁷ Bruce Mazlish, “Burke, Bonald and De Maistre: A Study in Conservatism” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1955), 119–20.

²⁴⁸ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 91.

his morals and manners. He believed that both imagination and judgment may play a role toward this end. Burke was not a relativist with respect to morals or the arts. But neither was he a snob because he believed that everyone may cultivate good taste.

Exercise and Labor

Finally, just as a bad or wrong taste may result from defect, ignorance, inattention, and vice, it may also result from a “want of a proper and well-directed exercise, which alone can make it [judgment] strong and ready.”²⁴⁹ Here, Burke argued that the person may improve his judgment and hence his taste by “frequent exercise” or “labour,” thereby noting a correlation between the body and mind.²⁵⁰ Through the course of the *Enquiry*, he proposed several theories about the nature of this correlation, for example hypothesizing about the efficient causes of the feelings of the sublime and beautiful.²⁵¹ Scholars have criticized Burke’s precise hypotheses of how the physical and psychological impact one another, such as Thomas Weiskel calling them “silly,” Paul Guyer referring to them as “fanciful,” and Vanessa L. Ryan saying they invite “criticism and ridicule.”²⁵²

However, Burke proffered his hypotheses prior to the advent of modern neuroscience. Subsequent study has surely demonstrated that some of his ideas were wrong, but as Mario Livio argues, even the most respected scientists, from Charles Darwin to Albert Einstein, have committed “brilliant blunders.”²⁵³ And still these men are

²⁴⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 207.

²⁵⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 209 (“frequent exercise”), 288 (“labour”).

²⁵¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 283ff.

²⁵² Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 88; Guyer, Introduction, xxi; Vanessa L. Ryan, “The Physiological Sublime: Burke’s Critique of Reason,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 2 (April 2001): 269.

²⁵³ Mario Livio, *Brilliant Blunders: From Darwin to Einstein; Colossal Mistakes by Great Scientists That Changed Our Understanding of Life and the Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013). Additionally, Livio considers the brilliant blunders of Lord Kelvin, Linus Pauling, and Fred Hoyle.

respected. Even if Burke erred in some of his hypotheses, a hermeneutic of charity may affirm his underlying point: physical activity produces a healthy body and mind, including imagination. Exercise and labor support a moral imagination. Numerous studies have supported the correlation between physical activity and mental health generally.²⁵⁴ Some studies have even related physical exercise to imagination specifically, with Linlin Cai, for example, observing, “Regular physical activity . . . is beneficial to the healthy development of . . . imagination.”²⁵⁵

One argument that Burke made is that “Providence has so ordered” mankind that “a state of rest and inaction” may result in physiological and psychological disorders (e.g., “melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder”). “The best remedy for all these evils is exercise or *labour*,” which “preserve[s] the coarser organs in a state fit for their functions, but it is equally necessary to these finer and more delicate organs, on which, and by which, the imagination, and perhaps the other mental powers act.”²⁵⁶ God has designed man such that the body and mind, including imagination, form a reciprocal relationship. For example, the imagination often acts from the person’s sense organs (e.g., eye and ear) so that it is impacted if these organs are compromised. The person should then exercise and work to preserve a healthy body and mind. By contrast,

²⁵⁴ Most studies relate physical exercise and mental health generically, e.g., Chiara Fossati et al., “Physical Exercise and Mental Health: The Routes of a Reciprocal Relation,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 23 (November 24, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182312364>; Aditya Mahindru, Pradeep Patil, and Varun Agrawal, “Role of Physical Activity on Mental Health and Well-Being: A Review,” *National Library of Medicine* 15, no. 1 (January 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.33475>; and Ben Singh et al., “Effectiveness of Physical Activity Interventions for Improving Depression, Anxiety and Distress: An Overview of Systematic Reviews,” *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 57, no. 18 (February 16, 2023): 1203–209, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2022-106195>.

²⁵⁵ Linlin Cai, “Effect of Physical Exercise Intervention Based on Improved Neural Network on College Students’ Mental Health,” *Computational and Mathematical Methods in Medicine* (June 21, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/4884109>.

²⁵⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 287–88.

inactivity and carelessness yields a defective imagination and as such a defective experience with and understanding of the sublime and beautiful.²⁵⁷

Notwithstanding the critical interpretations of Burke's hypotheses, the scholarship is not altogether dismissive of Burke's position. Aris Sarafianos, who couches Burke's remarks within the wider tradition of bodily health and exercise, refers to Burke's emphasis as the "medical sublime."²⁵⁸ Simon Wilson states that the "physical and psychic effects of the sublime" revivifies people "both physically and psychically."²⁵⁹ Gregory M. Collins notes that Burke "detected a connection between labor and industry—and mental repose." Therefore, a healthy body and a healthy mind (imagination) contribute to the person's "commercial virtues" including frugality, loyalty, order, patience, piety, religion, and sobriety, the absence of which breeds "dire psychological effects."²⁶⁰ A healthy body protects a healthy imagination.

In summary, differences in taste are not differences in constitution but rather are differences in cultivation; differences in taste are not differences of foundation but rather are differences in formation. The development of good taste takes time but gets easier with practice, said Burke, not unlike the discipline of reading: "At first they are obliged to spell, but at last they read with ease and with celerity." People who have not cultivated good taste may evaluate artifacts quickly, but "their quickness is owing to their

²⁵⁷ See Ryan, "Physiological Sublime," 271.

²⁵⁸ Aris Sarafianos, "Pain, Labor, and the Sublime: Medical Gymnastics and Burke's Aesthetics," *Representations* 91, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 67.

²⁵⁹ Simon Wilson, "Burke's Aesthetics of the Spirit," in *Daimonic Imagination: Uncanny Intelligence*, ed. Angela Voss and William Rowlandson (Newcastle upon Tyne, GB: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 105. Cf. Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 26, 29; Erin M. Goss, *Revealing Bodies: Anatomy, Allegory, and the Grounds of Knowledge in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 64; and Vermeir and Deckard, "Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility," 24.

²⁶⁰ Collins, *Commerce and Manners*, 124–25. Burke mentioned these virtues in the following sources: *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), in *Writings*, 9:121; and *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 355. Cf. Daniel Schierenbeck, "'Sublime Labours': Aesthetics and Political Economy in Blake's 'Jerusalem,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 26.

presumption and rashness, and not to any sudden irradiation that in a moment dispels all darkness from their minds.”²⁶¹ The person may, therefore, develop good taste by improving sensibility and judgment, increasing knowledge and attention, cultivating good morals and manners, and pursuing exercise and labor. Yet all of these strategies are undergirded by a moral imagination, the subject of the following chapter. However, before examining it, this chapter concludes by reviewing Burke’s view of the social imagination, which undergirds the subjects of the remaining chapters.

The Social Imagination

Burke’s discussion of the arts and the cultivation of taste demonstrates the relationship between the individual imagination and the social imagination. Because the arts influence the person’s morality, they also influence society’s morality since people make up societies. As Norman writes, one of Burke’s “central themes” is that “humans have a distinctive social nature of their own.”²⁶² However, the doctrine of the social imagination is broader than the arts; it impacts life generally. It undergirds societies of all sorts, including family, community, and religion, as well as the interplay of both private and public society.

While the imagination has great individual power, it has even greater social power because the group carries with it a greater momentum and energy than the individual. The individual throws a temper tantrum; the group forms a mob. The social imagination has great power in shaping the person’s worldview, whether for good or bad. For this reason, Charles Taylor has spoken of the concept of a “‘social imaginary’, that is, the way that we collectively imagine, even pre-theoretically, our social life.”²⁶³ However,

²⁶¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 209.

²⁶² Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (New York: Basic, 2015), 258.

²⁶³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 146.

before Taylor coined “social imaginary,” Burke considered the idea of the social imagination. The section introduces his view of the connection between the imagination and the group.

As early as his *Enquiry*, Burke alluded to the idea of the social imagination. The forsaken lover imagines what could have been and turns to madness. Crucially though, Burke did not speak only of the individual imagination in that passage; he spoke of the social imagination: “When *men* have suffered their *imaginations* to be long affected with any idea, it so wholly engrosses them as to shut out by degrees almost every other.”²⁶⁴ The case of the forsaken lover reveals a broader principle that Burke would develop through the decades: society is composed of competing social visions, and the vision that takes root invariably influences the trajectory of the society, whether in sanity or insanity. Therefore, a society in which the Jacobin imagination takes hold is thrust into revolution. In fact, Byrne connects this passage from the *Enquiry* to that very point, explaining that the Jacobin imagination had become unmoored from the “old prejudices, customs, traditions, [and] ideas” that help “anchor a moral imagination.”²⁶⁵ Hence, the social imagination is powerful, steering even the ship of state.

Burke also illustrated the power of the social imagination in his account of European settlement in America amid a discussion of the Salem witch trials. An American Indian woman confessed to bewitching a child with convulsions, but, said Burke, the “imaginations of the people were not yet sufficiently heated to make a very formal business of this.” Although the flame did not yet roar, it evoked the prospect of intensity and passion. However, further episodes would generate higher temperatures to the point that the “imaginations of the people, powerfully affected by these shocking

²⁶⁴ Burke, *Enquiry*, 218 (italics added).

²⁶⁵ Byrne, “Edmund Burke’s ‘Moral Imagination,’” 45. Cf. Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 39. Burke’s usage of “metaphysician” appears in his writing throughout the 1790s, including in *Reflections*, 232, 288; Burke to Richard Burke (post February 19, 1792), in *Writings*, 9:655; *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796), in *Writings*, 9:295; and *Letter to a Noble Lord*, 176.

examples, turned upon nothing but the most gloomy and horrid ideas.” Over time they suffered their imaginations to be long affected with the ideas of enchantment and witchcraft so that even the “most ordinary and innocent actions were metamorphized into magical ceremonies, and the fury of the people, augmented in proportion as this gloom of imagination increased.”²⁶⁶

Burke remarked that this spirit infected practically everyone: young and old, men and women, rich and poor. The peoples’ imagination, the social imagination, influences even people of “character,” even people in the “sacredness of the ministry.”²⁶⁷ This passage shows how the imagination bridges the cognitive, affective, and volitive aspects of the human person, turning an idea of the imagination into the heat of passion and fury of action. Horrid ideas may turn to rage, directing an entire population toward the fantastical, the shocking, and the evil. Burke placed all this weight on the faculty of imagination, which may be a source of great vice. The sheer power of imagination speaks to the value of cultivating a strong and moral epistemic constitution.

Again, Burke indicated the idea of the social imagination in a letter to Henry Flood: “These matters so fill our imaginations here, that with our mob of six or seven thousand weavers, who pursue the ministry, and do not leave them quiet or safety in their houses, we have little to think of other things.” The words “these matters” refer to issues relating to policy in Ireland and the “intractable temper” of William Pitt.²⁶⁸ Burke’s usage of the plural (“our imaginations”) shows that imagination is the place of thought not only for the person but also for a people.

Burke spoke of a similar concept in his *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* in which he accused William Knox of using scare tactics to incite fear: “But

²⁶⁶ *Account*, 2:156–57.

²⁶⁷ *Account*, 2:157.

²⁶⁸ Edmund Burke to Henry Flood (May 18, 1765), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 1:80.

before he commences his operations, in order to scare the public imagination, he raises by art magic a thick mist before our eyes, through which glare the most ghastly and horrible phantoms.”²⁶⁹ A key issue was taxes, and Burke aimed to show “how little oppressive those taxes are on the shoulders of the publick, with which he [Knox] labours so earnestly to load its imagination.”²⁷⁰ Whereas Burke referred to the imaginations of the people in the previous instance, he referred to the public imagination in this one, which appears to refer to popular opinion. Knox wished to incite the public; Burke wished to calm the public.

Burke also invoked the concept of the social imagination at several points during the Colonial crisis. For example, recounting the “disturbances” from the Colonies in his *Speech on American Taxation*, he wrote, “When the accounts of the American Governors came before the House, they appeared stronger even than the warmth of public imagination had painted them.”²⁷¹ Then, approximately a year later in his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, Burke related the social imagination to one’s sense of historical identity, observing that Parliament’s mode of governing the Colonists had “confirmed them in the imagination” that they are “descendants of Englishmen” with a legitimate interest in liberty.²⁷²

Several years later, Burke observed in a letter, this time in the context of the American War for Independence, “There is something so weighty and decisive in the events of war, something that so completely overpowers the imagination of the vulgar,

²⁶⁹ Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 137.

²⁷⁰ Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 141.

²⁷¹ Burke, *American Taxation*, 445.

²⁷² Burke, *Speech on Conciliation*, 120–21.

that all counsels must, in a great degree, be subordinate to, and attendant on, them.”²⁷³ By “vulgar,” Burke meant common. In one sense, representatives govern the masses, but in another sense, the masses govern their representatives who are “subordinate” and “attendant” to them. Notably, the reason common people have such social influence owes to the power of imagination. Thus, Burke illustrated the power of imagination over everything from popular opinion to historical identity to social influence.

The concept of the social imagination also arises in relation to the Hastings impeachment proceedings. For example, Burke described how Hastings’s agents robbed Indian landowners of their houses and lands, including those set apart for funeral customs and death rites: “There were things yet dearer to them [the landowners], the poor consolations of imagination at death for all the substantial miseries of life; there were lands set apart for their funeral ceremonies.”²⁷⁴ The social imagination concerns even the commonly held religious beliefs of the group that manifest in terms of local custom. Burke strongly defended local custom throughout his career because they are external pictures of a social imagination. Again, approximately a half-dozen years later, Burke attacked Hastings’s unjust attempt to seize title to land that properly belonged to some Indian women. Responding to the strategy of the “learned Counsel” to lessen the women’s claim, Burke retorted, “Do they [these women] imagine in the most confused and melancholy imaginations that you [the counsel] can be here trying such a question and venturing to decide the law upon it?”²⁷⁵ Here, Burke was describing the social imagination of these women who would be bewildered and saddened at such patent injustice.

²⁷³ Edmund Burke to the Honourable Charles James Fox on the American War (October 8, 1777), in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 8 vols. (London: Bohn’s British Classics, 1854–89), 5:449.

²⁷⁴ Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 18, 1788), 415.

²⁷⁵ Edmund Burke, Speech in Reply (June 7, 1794), in *Writings*, 7:458–59.

In summary, the individual imagination makes up the social imagination, but the social imagination influences and reinforces the individual imagination. Therefore, the doctrine of imagination is relevant to personal and social ethics alike. As Burke demonstrated, the social imagination is powerful, including people's beliefs about current events, political issues, and historical and religious identity. Yet it is also susceptible to the whims of assertive cultural and political leaders. For this reason, the wise person remains mindful of the importance of the groups with which he identifies and the leaders to whom he submits, and he associates with worthwhile societies in which he may cultivate a moral imagination.

CHAPTER 5

THE MORAL IMAGINATION

Many contemporary authors in all kinds of subjects employ the term “moral imagination.” John Paul Lederach observes that they often relate the idea to one of five spheres: (1) ethics and decision making, especially in the areas of business and public policy; (2) literature and the arts; (3) development of professional disciplines; (4) biography; and (5) the interplay between tradition and progress. Whatever the author’s views of the moral imagination, Lederach argues they converge on several points: the moral imagination perceives that circumstance concerns more than what meets the eye and that it has a creative and transcendent quality.¹ Each of these spheres appears to have some basis in Burke’s articulation of the moral imagination and is developed over the course of the remaining chapters.

The phrase “moral imagination” first appeared in Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*:

But the age of chivalry is gone.—That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. . . . But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, *furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination*, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.²

¹ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26.

² Burke, *Reflections*, 127–28 (italics added).

This passage is full of poetic nuance and richness but, says David Bromwich, “by no means easy to interpret.”³ Still, it communicates a key idea: revolutionaries would destroy the age of chivalry for an age of “enlightenment.” Significantly, this glorious age of chivalry hangs on the phrase, “the wardrobe of a moral imagination,” which furnishes all the superadded ideas, all the decent drapery, and all the pleasing illusions of life. Burke’s anaphoric usage of “all the” shows the interrelationship of these ideas within the age of chivalry. The moral imagination makes power gentle, increases obedience, harmonizes the shades of life, incorporates beauty and elegance into private society and political life, covers man’s defects, and dignifies his nature. This chapter examines this passage to understand Burke’s doctrine of the moral imagination.

The Age of Chivalry

The passage begins with Burke’s declaration that the “age of chivalry is gone.” Even in his contemporary context, interpreters disagreed wildly about its meaning or implications. Mary Wollstonecraft responded that “chivalry is in the wane,” Thomas Paine ridiculed it as “chivalry nonsense,” and William Hazlitt described it as “false refinement.”⁴ However, such evaluations represented polemics. The *Monthly Review* rightly reflected that it would be “extravagantly extolled by one party, and extravagantly abused by the other.”⁵

³ David Bromwich, *Moral Imagination: Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 6.

⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Women and Hints*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 29; Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* (1791), in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 2, 1779–1792, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894), 287; William Hazlitt, “Biographia Literaria,” *Edinburgh Review* 28 (August 1817): 506. Paul Elmer More stated that Paine’s critiques of Burke contained an “element of truth” but also “distortion” to the point of “wanton slander” on Paine’s part (“Natural Aristocracy,” *The Unpopular Review* 1 (January-June 1914): 282.

⁵ Review of Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, *Monthly Review* n.s. 3 (1790): 315, quoted in Miranda J. Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order, 1740–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 130.

Whether the interpreter believes that Burke's argument has merit relates partly to his analysis of the Revolution and Enlightenment. Hence, Yuval Levin argues that the differences between Burke and Paine symbolize the "great debate" and "birth of the right and left."⁶ Disagreements about the age of chivalry are about more than the circumstance of the Revolution. They are about deeper issues relating to the role of the past, the manner of change, the place of circumstance, and the meaning of concepts like equality and liberty. At bottom, such disagreements reveal distinct ethical visions of the world.

In the context surrounding the passage about the age of chivalry and the moral imagination, Burke lamented the behavior of the French people. In October 1789, a "band of cruel ruffians and assassins" had stormed the palace with designs to murder the monarchs. Rather than defending their rank and honor, especially that of the queen, they celebrated it. Failing in the "actual murder" of monarchs (and bishops), these rogues captured and beheaded two members of the king's bodyguard, sticking their heads on spears and leading a twelve-mile, six-hour procession, which resulted, not in despondency, but in "unguarded transport" on the multitude's part comparable to "Theban and Thracian Orgies." Burke described this event as an "atrocious spectacle" and "shocking" to the "inborn feelings of [his] nature."⁷ Such wanton violence and immorality, and the indiscriminate destruction of throne and church, said Burke, characterize the immoral imagination and the age of Enlightenment.

Burke then cataloged what is lost in the conquering empire of light and reason: a generous loyalty to rank and sex, proud submission, dignified obedience, subordination of the heart, a spirit of an exalted freedom, the unbought grace of life, the cheap defense of nations, manly sentiment, heroic enterprise, sensibility of principle, and chastity of

⁶ Yuval Levin, *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left* (New York: Basic, 2014).

⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 121–25, 131. "Atrocious spectacle" comes from 131; the rest of this paragraph summarizes Burke's description of the event (121–25). Scholars have disputed the accuracy of Burke's understanding of the events of October 5–6, 1789, but that question exceeds my focus.

honor, which inspired selflessness, courage, dignity, and virtue by producing a noble equality that socializes people of different ranks, subdues pride and power, and teaches elegance and manners.⁸

Burke's notion of noble equality has especially caught the ire of critics. Isaac Kramnick wrote that "noble equality" is a "far cry from *liberal* notions of equality."⁹ Burke's view of equality recognizes equality before God, the church, and the law but is, indeed, distinct from the liberal view, not confounding rank, sex, or socioeconomic status. It affirms the "natural equality of man" but does not support "social and political leveling."¹⁰ Timothy Sandefur also interacts with Burke's idea, arguing it is "not *actual* equality" and associating it with feudalism and chattel slavery.¹¹ However, Sandefur's comments are excessive. Burke's Sketch of a Negro Code demonstrates his deep disapproval of the slave trade.¹² Robert W. Smith even argues he was the "first British statesman to produce a plan for ending it," and Christopher Brown identifies him as an "emancipationist."¹³

The moral imagination recognizes distinction but does not justify all such examples of distinction. Burke criticized the tyranny and despotism that can arise in

⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

⁹ Isaac Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative* (New York: Basic, 1977), 32 (italics added).

¹⁰ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 87.

¹¹ Timothy Sandefur, "Leading an Enlightenment Life in an Anti-Enlightenment World," *The Objective Standard* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2019–2020): 25. Related, Harry V. Jaffa connected Burke's articulation of "superadded ideas" to the defense of slavery during the American Civil War (*American Conservatism and the American Founding* [Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1984], 87). However, these interpretations do not appear to represent Burke's meaning.

¹² Burke, Sketch of a Negro Code, 562–71.

¹³ Robert W. Smith, "Edmund Burke's Negro Code," *History Today* 26, no. 11 (November 1976): 715; Christopher L. Brown, "Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (April 1999): 290, 293. Cf. Richard M. Weaver, "The Southern Tradition at Bay," in *Keeping the Tablets: Modern American Conservative Thought*, ed. William F. Buckley Jr. and Charles R. Kesler (New York: Perennial, 1988), 68–71.

monarchies, aristocracies, and churches, and he argued that such leaders should be subject to suitable controls. However, Burke also observed that liberal notions of equality fail to preempt tyranny because even they may precipitate “democratic tyranny”¹⁴ or “despotism of the multitude.”¹⁵ Emily Finley articulates this idea as the “ideology of democratism,” which, she says, descends from Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹⁶ Thus, the liberal imagination is as prone to corruption as the non-liberal imagination. The deeper question concerns the virtues or vices undergirding one’s view of equality.

In Burke’s meaning, noble equality represents a double entendre because it makes room for nobility, and it is noble or virtuous. It is not just a defense for monarchy and aristocracy; more broadly, it is a recognition of social rank, which Burke explained has “varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs.” Monarchy and aristocracy are but types of the broader principle that there are “gradations of social life,” and not just in the state but even in the home and classroom.¹⁷ For this reason, writing in his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, Burke also defended the noble equality of parent-child and teacher-pupil relationships against the revolutionary argument that youth owe no moral duty to such figures.¹⁸ Noble equality is the application of the moral imagination within a specific tradition, society, or circumstance. It guards people from acting like beasts by encouraging them, and it guards them from acting like gods by humbling them. Therefore, interpretations accusing Burke of defending ignoble nobles in his defense of noble equality misunderstand him.

¹⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 132 (cf. 270; Burke, *National Assembly*, 296).

¹⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 173.

¹⁶ Emily B. Finley, *The Ideology of Democratism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 1–22. Cf. Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence*, 2nd ed. (1993; repr., Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2004), 2, 194, 219, 279–84; and George A. Panichas, *Growing Wings to Overcome Gravity: Criticism as the Pursuit of Virtue* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 153.

¹⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

¹⁸ Burke, *National Assembly*, 312, 315–16.

However, Burke continued in the *Reflections*, revolutionaries would abolish all such distinctions: “On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order. All homage paid to the sex in general as such, and without distinct views, is to be regarded as romance and folly.”¹⁹ The moral imagination honors rank and gender. The liberal imagination eliminates rank, not just between kings and commoners but also between people and animals; additionally, it conflates sex. The eradication of such distinctions has far-reaching implications for issues related to feminism, transsexualism, transgenderism, and even transhumanism. As Alex Zakaras explains, the liberal imagination has a “dramatic effect on individual self-conceptions.”²⁰ Under this scheme, one’s sense of personal identity becomes much more fluid.

Sue Chaplin summarizes Burke’s position as a “strategy of control.”²¹ But practically all ethical visions (excepting perhaps anarchism) balance control and liberty in some way. True liberty is not tantamount to license; it consists rather in restraints on base passions and checks on gross evils.²² A false liberty pursues baseness and evil. “I tremble for the cause of liberty,” said Burke.²³ Whereas he commended a liberty that is rational, civil, venerable, tranquil, prosperous, constitutional, and virtuous, he condemned a “liberty” that is levelling, dehumanizing, illiberal, tyrannical, crude, and violent.²⁴ The

¹⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 128. Cf. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 25.

²⁰ Alex Zakaras, *Individuality and Mass Democracy: Mill, Emerson, and the Burdens of Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.

²¹ Sue Chaplin, *Law, Sensibility and the Sublime in Eighteenth-Century Women’s Fiction: Speaking of Dread* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 28.

²² Burke, *Reflections*, 111, 251.

²³ Burke, *Reflections*, 133.

²⁴ Burke mentioned these characteristics throughout the *Reflections*: true liberty (54, 62, 87, 90, 103, 106, 138, 153) and false liberty (128, 131, 144, 173).

destruction of noble equality in the name of liberty threatens not only moral, social, and political order but also, says Yi Zheng, the “very touchstones of humanity.”²⁵

True liberty is consistent with truth and falsehood, which Burke had explained is fixed.²⁶ Men and women, and man and animal, are distinct. People may ingress and egress into different social ranks, but the fact of rank is fixed. All societies include rank, whether explicitly or implicitly. Some lead—in the home, the classroom, or the state—and some follow. The idea of “absolute freedom or ‘license,’” says Jesse Norman, “is disastrous both for individuals and for the social order.”²⁷ Burke did not believe that leaders properly have the liberty to lead in any manner of their choosing; leaders have the liberty to lead in virtue. Hence, rank concerns ideals, not just control. As David Dwan explains, for Burke, terms like “king” and “queen” have a “normative dimension” with “moral and political resonance.”²⁸ When people of a moral imagination occupy positions of rank, they create a noble ideal toward which others may reach.

Virtues such as noble equality and true liberty inform Burke’s understanding of the age of chivalry. They fill out all the pleasing illusions, all the decent drapery, and all the superadded ideas of a moral imagination. His repetition of the word “all” communicates an exhaustive, holistic quality to these concepts. The literature has used many, at times overlapping, terms to describe Burke’s age of chivalry, including civil virtue, civilization, culture, convention, custom, elegance, experience, habit, history, ideals, inheritance, institutions, manners, monarchy, morality, national heritage, piety, prejudice, prescription, presumption, principles, religion, ritual, sentiment, symbol, taste,

²⁵ Yi Zheng, *From Burke and Wordsworth to the Modern Sublime in Chinese Literature*, Comparative Cultural Studies (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011), 38.

²⁶ Burke, *Enquiry*, 196.

²⁷ Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (New York: Basic, 2015), 258.

²⁸ David Dwan, “Edmund Burke and the Emotions,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 4 (2011): 591.

tradition, and wisdom.²⁹ Burke himself used many of these terms, for example referring in the *Reflections* to the events of October 1789 as a “revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions.”³⁰ He had emphasized such ideas since he was a young man and spoke of the importance of “decency and good manners, virtue and religion” as the first law of a debating club he founded as a student at Trinity College Dublin.³¹ Thus, Burke’s age of chivalry may be characterized generally as the good inheritance of a Christian civilization.³²

Such virtuous bequests of the tradition typify the “unbought grace of life.” Overturn them, and power is brutal, obedience sparing, and conflict abounding; private and political life is uglified and hardened, and man is naked, shivering, and undignified.³³ Contrary to liberal individualism of an age of “enlightenment,” Burke’s age of chivalry demonstrates man’s sociohistorical nature. History, explains W. Wesley McDonald, is a “guide to the moral imagination” that offers a “vast body of wisdom that provides us with insight and standards.”³⁴ However, history is more than the past; it also contains the present and the future, leading Burke to articulate the doctrine of the “contract of eternal

²⁹ E.g., William F. Byrne, *Edmund Burke for Our Time: Moral Imagination, Meaning, and Politics* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 23; Gerald W. Chapman, *Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 208; Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke*, 33; W. Wesley McDonald, “Imaginative Moralists,” *The American Conservative* (September 25, 2006), 33; and Emily Jaye Dumler-Winckler, “Modern Virtue: Edmund Burke, Mary Wollstonecraft and a Tradition of Dissent” (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2015), 110.

³⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 131.

³¹ Edmund Burke, “The Minute Book and Notes” [1747], in *The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, ed. Arthur P. I. Samuels (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), 228 (spelling and conventions from this publication modernized throughout).

³² E.g., “*Reflections* burns with all the wrath and anguish of a prophet who saw the traditions of Christendom and the fabric of civil society dissolving before his eyes” (Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* [1967; repr., Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009], 154).

³³ Burke, *Reflections*, 127–28.

³⁴ W. Wesley McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 64. Cf. Seán Patrick Donlan, “Burke on Law and Legal Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 75; and Christopher J. Insole, “Burke and the Natural Law,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 120–21.

society.”³⁵ The age of chivalry aims to uphold the virtues of the past and to reform the vices of the past for the sake of the present and the future because it is an age that has been produced by a moral imagination.

Metaphors of a Moral Imagination

Burke used three metaphors to describe the age of chivalry: pleasing illusions, decent drapery, and superadded ideas.

Pleasing Illusions

The pleasing illusions of a moral imagination make power gentle, increase obedience, harmonize the different shades of life, and incorporate beauty and elegance into private society and political life. By the term “pleasing,” Burke indicated an aesthetic quality to the age of chivalry, linking back to *A Philosophical Enquiry*. And by “illusion,” he admitted a constructive role to the age of chivalry. An illusion “covers” reality for some reason, making it seem better or worse than it is. In this instance, Burke used it positively. He recognized that reality can be unpleasant, full of brutal power, defiance, contention, unpleasantness, and un-refinement yet believed it can be improved.

Sandefur accuses Burke of “playing a trick on his readers” by “disregarding the harsh, material reality of the oppression, ignorance, and misery, of which the pre-Enlightenment world consisted.”³⁶ However, Burke’s reference to illusions is no trick. An illusion may undoubtedly deceive the person who is unaware of it. But Burke fully acknowledged the illusion by identifying it as such. Burke knew that life can be harsh. For that reason, he spoke about pleasing illusions in the first place and discussed the “miseries brought upon the world” by vice, which the moral imagination seeks to

³⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 147.

³⁶ Sandefur, “Leading an Enlightenment Life,” 24.

improve.³⁷ Reverence to chivalry is not mere glorification of the past; it is respect for what is worth persevering.

Marshall Berman also criticized Burke for his praise of pleasing illusions, calling him an “avid opponent” of the “ideal of authenticity” and interpreting him to admit that the “whole social system of Europe was essentially a system of lies” and that the “basic fact of social life” is one of “repression,” “masquerade,” and “fiction.”³⁸ However, Berman’s criticisms are unbalanced. Burke recognized problems in the world, and he commended “authenticity.”³⁹ The whole question concerns whether the age of “enlightenment” or the age of chivalry reveals one’s authentic self. Berman looked to enlightenment and revolution to “see through” the “costumes and masks” of chivalry and “expose” man’s true nature.⁴⁰ In this way, he seems to have followed in the path of Rousseau or Paine. Conversely, Burke believed that the pleasing illusions of a moral imagination help the person reach his authentic self. By dispelling these good illusions, the person reveals himself to be a barbarian or an animal on the level of swine. Burke’s critics have harshly condemned his reference to the “swinish multitude” for exemplifying elitism.⁴¹ However, he was not calling all masses swine. The circumstance of his comment regards a specific multitude that celebrated the gruesome attack and murder of the royal guard. His reference was a moral one, not a social one; he was applying a universal truth to a particular circumstance. He knew that monarchs and aristocrats can be as swinish as anyone else. In Burke’s view, authenticity is not achieved by embracing one’s worst vices.

³⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 189.

³⁸ Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society*, Studies in Political Theory (1970; repr., New York: Atheneum, 1980), xxii–xxiv.

³⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 246.

⁴⁰ Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity*, xxiv.

⁴¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 130; cf. 128.

In Burke's meaning, the pleasing illusions do not signify deception. They present an ideal or a "central form" for which to aim.⁴² Perhaps it provides a sort of social fiction, but in that case, it is a fiction that pushes people to improve themselves. Notwithstanding the ridicule Burke received for his veneration of the queen, such as Wollstonecraft's gloss that Burke adored her "golden image," he did not claim she was without error but that she represented an important symbol that the people desecrated.⁴³ Linking Burke's imagery of the pleasing illusions with that of the decent drapery and superadded ideas, Drew Maciag observes, "Burke here was arguing for a usable ideal, for an image of a nation's past that was dressed-up (to use his own metaphor) to look its best."⁴⁴ Burke knew that the reality of the past and the present is difficult, but he also knew that a good ethic may prop it up and improve it.

Decent Drapery

In his articulation of the moral imagination, Burke folded the imagery of decent drapery and superadded ideas together. His sartorial imagery neither begins nor ends with his reference to "drapery." It begins, in this passage, in the prior sentence about the pleasing illusions that "beautify" society, and it continues in the subsequent sentence with his references to "wardrobe" and "fashion." Again, contrary to the suggestion that Burke ignored life's bitter realities, he plainly acknowledged them in his discussion of the moral imagination because it furnishes the very drapery that covers what is otherwise indecent and ugly with what is fitting and proper, namely, the virtues of chivalry.

⁴² Christopher Rovee, *Imagining the Gallery: The Social Body of British Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 60–61. Cf. Frans De Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 246.

⁴³ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 12. L. G. Mitchell gives a good introduction to the ridicule Burke received for this position (*Reflections*, 126n1).

⁴⁴ Drew Maciag, "Edmund Burke and American Civilization" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2005), 78.

Paine interpreted Burke's "drapery" as the "curtain" of monarchy, which he described as "silly," "contemptible," and "laughable."⁴⁵ Similarly, Ronald Paulson critically connected Burke's imagery to monarchy: "When you strip the queen, you expose the principle of [liberal] equality."⁴⁶ However, these interpretations mistake a circumstance for the principle and a part for the whole. Burke supported the ideal of monarchy but not every particular of monarchy. Even then he did not believe the answer to any problem was to storm the palace and parade the streets.

Additionally, monarchy is only one article of the drapery in question. More broadly, it concerns the inheritance of a moral imagination according to one's varied tradition. All traditions, all societies—even liberal ones—reveal distinction of rank, with or without monarchy, such as in parent-child or instructor-pupil relationships. The point of Burke's metaphor, Maciag explains, is to establish a "distinction between a less refined, more savage, 'naked,' lower stage of civilization, and a more advanced, refined, higher, and appropriately attired one."⁴⁷ Drapery is the image of civilization and progress, and the moral elements of the tradition (any tradition) are not silly, contemptible, and laughable but sensible, admirable, and sound.

Superadded Ideas

Significantly, the articles forming the drapery of life are handed down, generation by generation, and they are received, worn, and appropriately altered so that

⁴⁵ Paine, *Rights of Man*, 426.

⁴⁶ Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789–1820)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 61. Cf. Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 244.

⁴⁷ Maciag, "Edmund Burke and American Civilization," 79. Cf. Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 132; Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 225, 232; and Eileen Hunt Botting, *Family Feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Rousseau on the Transformation of the Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 117.

they become superadded.⁴⁸ Because imagination is a faculty of the mind, it furnishes ideas, and because a tradition builds them up over time, they become superadded—hence the phrase “superadded ideas,” which refers to the collective virtue and wisdom of a tradition. As Gerald W. Chapman explained, Burke’s superadded ideas “make up the whole formative and operating inheritance.”⁴⁹

Superadded ideas profoundly shape the imaginative vision or worldview of the person who submits to them, building up one’s character so that he can function in society without succumbing to revolutionary radicalism. The moral imagination beautifies itself with the drapery of one’s superadded inheritance to cover the defects of his naked nature and raise his dignity. Thus, Burke explained that man is “destined to hold no trivial place in the creation.”⁵⁰ Man is noble. In the words of Russell Kirk, human beings are “more than naked apes,”⁵¹ and the adornment of a superadded moral imagination separates man from beast by dignifying and ennobling him and by teaching him how to perceive truth, greatness, justice, and order.

Burke’s usage of these three metaphors demonstrates a dynamic interplay between universals and circumstance. However, numerous interpreters have focused only on the phenomenon of circumstance. For example, Richard M. Weaver criticized Burke because of his “argument from circumstance,” which he contended is the “argument

⁴⁸ Phillip Ellis Ray proposes that Burke got the word “superadded” from Joseph Addison (“The Metaphors of Edmund Burke: Figurative Patterns and Meanings in His Political Prose” [PhD diss., Yale University, 1973], 125–26).

⁴⁹ Chapman, *Edmund Burke*, 208.

⁵⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 143.

⁵¹ Russell Kirk, *Redeeming the Time*, ed. Jeffrey O. Nelson (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996), 71; Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations of Abnormality in Literature and Politics* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1969), 119. Cf. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7th rev. ed. (1953; repr., Washington, D.C.: Gateway, 2014), 67; Ian Carter, “Respect and the Basis of Equality,” *Ethics* 121, no. 3 (April 2011): 556; and Samuel Fleischacker, *What Is Enlightenment?* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 48.

philosophically appropriate to the liberal”⁵² that comes “full flower” in the passage on the moral imagination.⁵³ Clearly, many of Burke’s interpreters, from Wollstonecraft to Paine to Kramnick to Paulson, would disagree with Weaver’s assessment because, as this chapter has examined, each of these figures criticized Burke’s defense of tradition and rejection of liberalism.⁵⁴

Analysis

Several authors focus especially on Burke’s metaphors. Frans De Bruyn describes Burke’s metaphors as being “too slippery, too unstable, to bear the weight of the political [ethical] vision he is trying to convey, for if political traditions are like the clothes that ‘unaccommodated man’ requires to cover his ‘naked shivering nature’, then the subversive thought occurs that one suit of clothes can keep out the weather as well as another.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Emily Dumler-Winckler argues that Burke’s “wardrobe metaphor” shows “he is a skeptic about moral foundations” because the “garments” of the wardrobe, while inherited, are “revisable” according to the “latest vogue” of “each new generation.”⁵⁶

Practically all metaphors break down, including sartorial imagery. Even so, Burke’s intended meaning demonstrates he balanced circumstance with universals; otherwise, his criticism of the Enlightenment, which is but another set of clothes, fails. Rather, Burke was judging French circumstances according to a larger belief that universals are fixed. The decent drapery of the wardrobe of a moral imagination does not

⁵² Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), 58.

⁵³ Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 72.

⁵⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 12, 29; Paine, *Rights of Man*, 287, 426; Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke*, 32; Paulson, *Representations of Revolution*, 61.

⁵⁵ Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke*, 246.

⁵⁶ Dumler-Winckler, “Modern Virtue,” 110–11.

refer to different clothing articles that come in and out of fashion that each new generation can change according to its passing whims; it refers to the same articles that are passed down generation by generation. While the precise fit changes according to differences in size, its form abides; while the precise articulation of a given moral idea varies according to age or circumstance, its form is constant.

Francis Canavan captured the nuance of Burke's ethic well: "Burke was not a situation ethicist for whom there were no moral absolutes. He meant, rather, that our duties, rooted though they are in immutable principles of natural and divine law, become actual in the situations in which we in fact find ourselves."⁵⁷ Burke argued from circumstance because all of life is circumstance, but he did not argue from mere circumstance. Similarly, Kirk explained that the "ideas of the moral imagination" are "drawn from centuries of human experience" but are "expressed afresh from age to age."⁵⁸ The moral imagination, therefore, bridges not only man's cognitive, affective, and volitive capacities but also universals and circumstance. It grants the person the ability to see how objective morals apply in specific circumstances. Burke's thoughtfulness of circumstance is a caution against the kind of abstractionism that justified anti-Catholic discrimination in Ireland, English imperialism in India, and Jacobin radicalism in France. In summary, universals do not compete with circumstance; they contain circumstance.

Nakedness

Notwithstanding the pleasing illusions, decent drapery, and superadded ideas of a moral imagination, Burke said the sophists, economists, and calculators had "exploded" them as ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated. Whereas the age of chivalry covers man's defects, the age of enlightenment rudely tears off these coverings. The

⁵⁷ Francis Canavan, *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1987), 163.

⁵⁸ Russell Kirk, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1971), 8.

problem with revolutionaries is not that they alter the fashion of the inheritance per se. Sometimes things must change not because they are wrong but because circumstances change. Inherited clothing often requires alteration because bodies differ; inherited ethical norms often require alteration because bodies politic differ. Burke's repeated references to reform bear out this point. However, the moral form remains; an underlying ethical principle may transcend generations, since truth and falsehood are fixed, even if its precise articulation changes.

Rather, the problem with revolutionaries is that they reject the inheritance altogether, good aspects included. Furthermore, they do so in an aggressive, turbulent, and violent manner, hence Burke's usage of "explode." Rather than altering the fashion, they throw it out completely, exposing man's naked shivering nature. In his nakedness, man is unadorned by the elegant and gracious wardrobe of the past, and he is fully exposed to life's cold and bitter realities. Burke's imagery of nakedness is much discussed in the scholarship with proposals for its inspiration ranging from Marie Antoinette to the arts to philosophy to theology.

Marie Antoinette

One theory links Burke's statement about the moral imagination to his statement about Marie Antoinette. In that passage, Burke remarked that "this persecuted woman had but just time to fly *almost naked*" from a "band of cruel ruffians and assassins" who had rushed into her chamber and "pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed."⁵⁹ For this reason, Paulson connected the "literal stripping of the queen" to the "metaphoric stripping of society."⁶⁰ As the rich garments of the queen were stripped from her, so the decent drapery of the moral imagination was rudely

⁵⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 121–22 (italics added).

⁶⁰ Paulson, *Representations of Revolution*, 61.

torn off. Following Paulson's interpretation, Eileen Hunt Botting interprets Burke's language of "piercing" as representing the "symbolic rape and physical violation of the queen." Just as the queen was violently "raped" of her dignity, so also the moral imagination was violently "exploded" of its superadded ideas.⁶¹

These interpretations rightly observe that both passages employ the imagery of nakedness. Also, Burke associated the age of chivalry with "that generous loyalty to rank and sex," which applied to the French queen.⁶² However, monarchy is only a circumstance of Burke's view of chivalry. Therefore, even if this connection bears some accuracy, it is an accidental connection rather than an essential one. Furthermore, whether Burke alluded to rape in the passage about the queen, which is a matter of some debate, his basic point concerned her attempted (and eventually, actual) murder, as well as that of the king, nobility, and bishops. Consequently, applying the imagery of rape to the passage about the moral imagination may exaggerate the connection; if anything, Burke's usage of "explode" has more in common with murder than with rape. Additionally, the passage about the moral imagination concerns, on its face, nakedness, not rape.

Pigalle and the Pretended Philosophers

Another interpretation for Burke's inspiration of nakedness concerns the art and philosophy that was contemporary to Burke's period. F. P. Lock points to Jean-Baptiste Pigalle's nude statue of Voltaire that several *philosophes* commissioned in the decades prior. This interpretation identifies nakedness with the contemporary tastes that

⁶¹ Botting, *Family Feuds*, 116–17. Other examples of this interpretation include Jeffrey C. Robinson, *The Current of Romantic Passion* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 62; David Womersley, "Friendship in the Political Thought of Edmund Burke," in *Love and Friendship: Rethinking Politics and Affection in Modern Times*, ed. Eduardo A. Velásquez (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003), 276; and Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, 244.

⁶² Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

flouted traditional morality.⁶³ From his earliest writings criticizing Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, Burke interacted with relevant philosophical figures. Likewise, in the *Reflections*, he denounced the “pretended philosophers of the hour,” including Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Denis Diderot, Claude-Adrien Helvétius, and Jean-Léonard d’Alembert.⁶⁴ Thus, Lock’s theory could be correct. However, Burke did not explicitly mention Pigalle in his *Reflections*. Still, Lock rightly remarks, “It is natural for man to be clothed; the French ‘philosophers’ want to strip him naked.”⁶⁵ In Burke’s words, the *philosophes* peddled a philosophy that was “short-sighted,” “barbarous,” “licentious,” “false,” and “unfeeling”⁶⁶ and make “a philosophy and a religion of their hostility” toward the “Christian religion.”⁶⁷ By contrast, Burke extolled the “morals and true philosophy”⁶⁸ that “cover the defects of [man’s] naked shivering nature.”⁶⁹

Shakespeare, Milton, and Locke

A third theory for Burke’s sartorial imagery points to the broader historic literary and philosophical tradition. Certainly, he was not the first to use such metaphors. For instance, Paul Fussell explained that both William Shakespeare and John Milton employed this “clothing imagery” and that Burke was the “fortunate inheritor” of it who

⁶³ F. P. Lock, *Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Routledge Library Editions: Political Science (1985; repr., New York: Routledge, 2010), 127–28. In fact, Joshua Reynolds, with whom Burke was friendly, specifically condemned the artifact for “flouting ‘the prejudices of mankind.’”

⁶⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 208; cf. 137, 261.

⁶⁵ Lock, *Burke’s Reflections*, 127.

⁶⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 103 (“short-sighted”), 128 (“barbarous”), 187 (“licentious”), 192 (“barbarous”), 289 (“false,” “unfeeling”).

⁶⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 142.

⁶⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 161.

⁶⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

then elucidated its “ethical dimensions.”⁷⁰ Fussell commented at some length on the ways in which Burke’s *Reflections* echoes Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in (some of) its imagery where the “clothing” of “symbols, institutions, and inheritances” distinguishes man from beast.⁷¹ Burke plainly associated nakedness with animals in the *Reflections*.⁷² However, he did not appeal explicitly to Shakespeare, much less to *King Lear*, although his broader corpus demonstrates familiarity with Shakespeare.

Scholars have also proposed connections between Burke and Locke. Whereas Burke referenced the wardrobe of a moral imagination that is furnished with decent drapery and superadded ideas, Locke compared the mind to an “empty cabinet” that is furnished by “external objects” according to one’s sense experience.⁷³ Accordingly, said Fussell, the wardrobe of imagination “holds the moral ideas, collected like furniture in a house.”⁷⁴ Philip Ellis Ray also draws a comparison to Locke, interpreting Burke’s decent drapery in terms of a secondary quality that is not “essential to human existence” but makes life “bearable and perhaps even somewhat pleasant.”⁷⁵ However, just as Burke did

⁷⁰ Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 223. John Dryden is another poet who made these connections, describing elocution as the clothing of an otherwise naked imagination (“An Account of the Ensuing Poem,” in *Dryden: Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell; Astraea Redux; Annus Mirabilis; Absalom and Achitophel; Religio Laici; The Hind and the Panther*, ed. W. D. Christie, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1878], 29).

⁷¹ Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 230. Cf. Jeffrey Hart, “Burke and Radical Freedom,” in *American Conservative Thought in the Twentieth Century: Did You Ever See a Dream Walking*, ed. William F. Buckley Jr., The American Heritage Series (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 467; Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke*, 187; Frans De Bruyn, “William Shakespeare and Edmund Burke: Literary Allusion in Eighteenth-Century British Political Rhetoric,” in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin (London: Routledge, 2008); and Frans De Bruyn, “Shakespeare and the French Revolution,” in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 95–98.

⁷² Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

⁷³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (1689; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), 48.

⁷⁴ Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 227.

⁷⁵ Ray, “The Metaphors of Edmund Burke,” 125.

not engage Shakespeare in the *Reflections*, neither did he engage Locke, his empty cabinet, or his distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

Genesis

A final interpretation for Burke's imagery of nakedness suggests it is an allusion to the early chapters of Genesis. Before their fall into sin, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed in the Garden of Eden.⁷⁶ Afterward, they felt shame at their nakedness. Outward nakedness came to indicate inward shame because man's nature was no longer covered by innocence. Hence, they proceeded to cover themselves with fig leaves after which God also provided garments of skin to cover their nakedness.⁷⁷ Remarkably, God has continued to provide garments to cover the defects of man's nature, which Burke articulated as the decent drapery of life that is furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination. Thus, by this interpretation, the imagery of nakedness traces back to the Garden and represents the deep shame, even depravity, of man's nature.

Several arguments commend this theory. First, Burke was familiar with the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures because he regularly quoted from and alluded to them.⁷⁸ Second, he was clearly familiar with the early chapters of Genesis. As a young man, he wrote, "But still, thro' all his [John Damer's] Life pursued the plan, That form'd by God, seems fitting most for man, Revives in Gardens by well orderd cost / The paradise that Adam's folly Lost!"⁷⁹ Additionally, Burke alluded regularly to Milton's *Paradise Lost*,

⁷⁶ Gen 2:25.

⁷⁷ Gen 3:7, 10–11, 21. While not all instances of nakedness in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures signify sin and shame, many of them carry that meaning, e.g., Isa 47:3, Ezek 23:29, Hos 2:2–3, Nah 3:4–5, and Rev 16:15. Additionally, Genesis 9:22–27 demonstrates that covering man's nakedness warrants God's blessings, whereas leaving it exposed results in His curses.

⁷⁸ The instances for this claim are too ubiquitous to list exhaustively, but examples from just one of his speeches, namely, *American Taxation*, demonstrate it: 443n3 (Acts 6:15), 451n2 (Isa 54:8), 454n1 (1 Cor 7:31), 457n2 (1 Chr 21:12), 458n1 (Ps 34:14), 458n2 (Matt 19:8), and 459n1 (Matt 7:9).

⁷⁹ Edmund Burke to John Damer Esq (1747), in *Writings*, 1:28. Cf. Edmund Burke, Speech on Rohilla War Charge (June 1, 1786), in *Writings*, 6:110; Burke, *Appeal*, 451, 474n1; and P. J. Marshall and William B. Todd, eds., Rohilla War Charge (April 4, 1786), in *Writings*, 6:81.

which provides an additional touchpoint for Genesis and, notably, employs the imagery of nakedness.⁸⁰ Therefore, the prospect of Burke's alluding to Genesis in his *Reflections* is consistent with his background and knowledge.

A final argument commending this theory concerns the available evidence in the *Reflections*. It contains numerous other quotations or allusions to the Bible so that an allusion to Genesis is consistent with his methodological and rhetorical approach. In fact, immediately prior to Burke's discussion of the age of chivalry and the moral imagination, he alluded to the prophet Isaiah in his description of Marie Antoinette who was "glittering like the morning-star" the last time he saw her some sixteen or seventeen years prior but has since fallen from her exalted place; Isaiah had also referred to a monarch shining like the morning star that then falls from its place in the heavens.⁸¹

Having thus alluded to the biblical text, Burke could have then made another allusion to Genesis in his discussion of the decent drapery that is furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination and covers the "defects" of man's naked nature. These covers signify the "gifts of Providence"⁸² representing the "unbought grace of life."⁸³ Significantly, Burke did not understand the concept of "defect" in a trivial way but connected it to man's nature. For this reason, Fussell stated that the "chief premise upon

⁸⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Pearson, 1968; repr., New York: Routledge, 2013), 240, 263, 309, 532, 536, 550–51. Burke was familiar with the books in which Milton's references to nakedness appear because he cited passages from them, e.g., *American Taxation*, 443n2 (book IX); *Speech on Conciliation*, 165n1 (book IV), 129n1 (book IX); *Speech on Economical Reform* (February 11, 1780), in *Writings*, 3:510n1 (book X); *Speech on Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, 494n1 (book IV); *Reflections*, 289n2 (book X); *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 215n2 (book IV); and *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 279n1 (book IV).

⁸¹ Isa 14:12; Burke, *Reflections*, 126. Of course, these two passages are not precisely the same. Whereas Isaiah's remarks form a taunt, Burke's form a lament; so, the imagery is the same in the two examples, but its purpose is not consistent in them. Additionally, Burke made other biblical allusions in the *Reflections* and even quoted explicitly from Psalm 149:6–8 and Ecclesiasticus 38:24–25, 27, 33–34 (Ecclesiasticus appeared in the Authorized Version of the Bible of Burke's day, although he remarked, "I do not determine whether this book be canonical . . . or apocryphal" [62, 101n*]).

⁸² Burke, *Reflections*, 84.

⁸³ Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

which the passage rests is the . . . universal discomfort and shame of man when naked.”⁸⁴ Like the Genesis account, Burke had a healthy understanding of man’s “depravity” and “shame.”⁸⁵ He spoke also of man’s “errors,” “frailty,” “imperfections,” “infirmities,” “selfish[ness],” “weakness,” and other such terms.⁸⁶

Additionally, a clearly theological tenor continues to characterize Burke’s imagery of clothing and nakedness throughout the *Reflections*. For example, having written here, “All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off,”⁸⁷ he also expressed concern that “we should uncover our nakedness by throwing off that Christian religion.”⁸⁸ Burke continued this same imagery several years later in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, criticizing the revolutionaries for having “thrown off the fear of God.”⁸⁹ For these reasons, while the imagery of nakedness is likely more than theological, it is not less than theological.

Characteristics of a Moral Imagination

Burke’s many figures for the moral imagination illustrate important components of its meaning but do not explain what it is. The moral imagination is a rich, multi-faceted concept that Greg Weiner describes as being “among the most complicated

⁸⁴ Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 227. Cf. Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke*, 32; Norman R. Phillips, *The Quest for Excellence: The Neo-Conservative Critique of Educational Mediocrity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1978), 34; Dietmar Schloss, *Culture and Criticism in Henry James* (Tübingen, DE: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1992), 29; John Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure, 1789–1832: Aesthetics, Politics and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21; and Robert J. Lacey, *Pragmatic Conservatism: Edmund Burke and His American Heirs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 39.

⁸⁵ Burke, *Reflections*; for “depravity,” see 106, 196, and for “shame,” 119, 138, and 166.

⁸⁶ Burke, *Reflections*; for “errors,” see 189; “frailty,” 192; “imperfections,” 145; “infirmities,” 145, 189; “selfish,” 83, 97, 145, 154; and “weakness,” 102, 210.

⁸⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

⁸⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 142.

⁸⁹ Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord*, 176.

ideas in the Burkean corpus.”⁹⁰ Indeed, it is not a simple concept but refers to a host of ideas that form a composite. This section examines several of the concepts that inform Burke’s understanding of the moral imagination in the *Reflections*. Subsequent chapters then examine further concepts related more generally to the theme of moral imagination.

Inheritance and Acquisition of the Christian Tradition

For one, the moral imagination refers to the inheritance of the Christian tradition, which, in a manner of speaking, God uses to cover the defects of man’s naked nature. In this sense, it is both objectively singular and objectively plural. Burke’s language of “decent drapery” and repeated references to the “Christian religion” in the *Reflections* bears out its singular quality.⁹¹ The moral imagination builds, sustains, and improves society and civilization. However, it does not refer to the inheritance of just any tradition because it is the “moral” imagination. Insofar as a civilization devolves, it has not exhibited a moral imagination.⁹² Burke’s language of “pleasing illusions” and “superadded ideas” bears out the plural quality of a moral imagination.⁹³ That is, the tradition has many components and many people. Burke’s various figures illustrate this idea. For example, the moral imagination builds on the inheritance it receives so that its ideas become superadded. Again, a wardrobe is singular yet contains varied articles. Thus, because the moral imagination is both one and many, it unifies while avoiding uniformity.

⁹⁰ Greg Weiner, *Old Whigs: Burke, Lincoln, and the Politics of Prudence* (New York: Encounter, 2019), ch. 1. Weiner proceeds to argue that moral imagination concerns empathy, mystery, reason, feeling, society, and memory.

⁹¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 128, 142, 160, 197–98.

⁹² See Fennessey, *Burke, Paine, and the Rights of Man*, 121; Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure*, 20; Ian Harris, “Burke and Religion,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 93, 100.

⁹³ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

However, the moral imagination does not refer only to the objective inheritance of the Christian tradition. It refers also to the subjective epistemic faculty that the person individually forms by virtue because he has appropriated the inheritance of the good tradition. Charles Lindholm captures these two senses of moral imagination, objective and subjective, when he refers to it as the “wardrobe of cultural conditioning and personal history.”⁹⁴

Burke then qualified his reference to moral imagination by the phrase, “which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies.”⁹⁵ This statement demonstrates several aspects of this component of the moral imagination. For one, just like he did in his earlier writings, Burke affirmed the basic continuity and integration of imagination, passion, and reason. The cultivation of a moral imagination invariably impacts both the heart and understanding. Norman Phillips describes the moral imagination as the “power of combining images in terms of moral values.”⁹⁶ Hence, the moral imagination integrates emotion and reason so that passion is sensible and understanding is sympathetic.

Yet also each faculty or organ of the human person occupies a unique position. The heart owns and the understanding ratifies the moral imagination. The person’s reason counterbalances his imagination so that he cannot ultimately hide from his true moral values because his feelings, arising primarily from imagination but also from reason, manifest them. The person feels and believes the moral imagination in the core of his being. Still, the heart and understanding depend on imagination, since the word “which” introduces a dependent clause. Levin elucidates this point, saying, “Man’s reliance on his imagination to guide even his reason is a natural fact crucially relevant to political life.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 69.

⁹⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

⁹⁶ Phillips, *The Quest for Excellence*, 35.

⁹⁷ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 64.

Imagination is thus vital for all of life or, as Burke put it, both to “politics” and to “private society.”⁹⁸

Accordingly, Burke championed the cultivation of a “moral” imagination, which leads also to moral passions and moral understanding. For example, he commended the “moral constitution of the heart.”⁹⁹ But he condemned the “politics of revolution” that “temper and harden the breast” so that the “moral sentiments suffer not a little,” and “all the well-placed sympathies of the human breast” are “perverted.”¹⁰⁰ Again, he praised people with “real hearts of flesh and blood beating in [their] bosoms” who “fear God,” honor their “forefathers,” and esteem rank. But he opposed people whose chests are like those of “stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags, and paltry, blurred shreds of paper”; these are people whose “feelings are false and spurious” and “untaught.”¹⁰¹

The person cultivates a moral imagination by appropriating the good inheritance of the tradition. For this reason, Burke spoke in *National Assembly* to the gravity of parent-child and teacher-pupil relationships.¹⁰² Wise parents and teachers, whom Vigen Guroian describes as “gardeners of the moral life,” enrich the imagination with the nutrients of the past.¹⁰³ Burke presented two paths: the moral versus the perverted, the elegant versus the barbarous, the real versus the false. Guroian characterizes these paths as the moral imagination versus the diabolic imagination. “If not properly attended the tea rose withers and thistle grows in its place.” Without appropriate

⁹⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

⁹⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 132.

¹⁰⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 115.

¹⁰¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 137–38.

¹⁰² Burke, *National Assembly*, 312, 315–16.

¹⁰³ Vigen Guroian, *Rallying the Really Human Things: The Moral Imagination in Politics, Literature, and Everyday Life* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2005), 55.

“nurture and cultivation,” the imagination journeys down the path that is perverted, barbarous, and false.¹⁰⁴ By contrast, the moral imagination is the properly cultivated imagination.

While the moral imagination is individual and, in that sense, subjective, it is not, explains Matthew D. Wright, “mere subjective feeling.” It is rather a “faculty of real moral perception” that describes the “spiritual condition of an individual soul” and the “cultural storehouse of feeling and sentiment that informs social relationships.”¹⁰⁵ That is, the moral imagination teaches the person how to relate well to the society around him. It combines the past with the present for the sake of the future so that the person can wisely steward his temporal moment. In these ways, the doctrine of the moral imagination protects the individual while guarding against individualism.

Sublime and Beautiful

Burke’s doctrine of the moral imagination, in referring to an objective inheritance that is based still deeper in divine Providence and to the subjective appropriation of that tradition in the person individually and in a society corporately, also illustrates his doctrine of the sublime and beautiful. As shown from the *Enquiry*, the imagination gives rise to each of these passions. The moral imagination reveals the sublime in several ways.

For one, it evokes a sense of respect and veneration for the superadded ideas of the past so that the imagination is overawed and overwhelmed at it.¹⁰⁶ While various

¹⁰⁴ Guroian, *Rallying the Really Human Things*, 65; cf. 50.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew D. Wright, *A Vindication of Politics: On the Common Good and Human Flourishing* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019), 129. Wright’s statement is reminiscent of Kirk’s: “Burke meant [by ‘moral imagination’] that power of ethical perception which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and events of the moment. . . . [T]he moral imagination aspires to apprehend right order in the soul and right order in the commonwealth” (*Eliot and His Age*, 7–8). Cf. Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure*, 20–21.

¹⁰⁶ See Daniel I. O’Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 164; Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 107; Alan Cardew, “The Archaic and the Sublimity of Origins,” in *The Archaic: The Past in the Present*,

interpreters have made this connection, Tom Furniss questions it, asking whether Burke's criticism of the "'radical' sublime" in his *Reflections* marks a rejection only of the counterfeit sublime or a "rejection of the sublime *per se*."¹⁰⁷ Burke undoubtedly recognized a false sublime in the *Reflections*, but he also seems to have upheld a true sublime, associating it with divinity, morality, and religion.¹⁰⁸ The moral imagination may consequently raise the sublime because it is based ultimately in the divine sublime. However, a false sublime emerges in such cases as revolution, which, says Levin, "draws on man's simultaneous fear of and fascination with death" and "exercises enormous power over the human imagination."¹⁰⁹ So, while the sublime is awesome, it likewise can be awful, depending on its object. In addition, the moral imagination displays the beautiful because it "beautifies" private society with its "pleasing illusions" and its "decent drapery."¹¹⁰

Burke seems to have integrated the themes of the sublime and the beautiful by his three metaphors because each of them anticipates or recalls something about the other ones. For example, he anticipated his metaphor of decent drapery in the prior sentence about the pleasing illusions that "beautify" society. Furthermore, in the sentence about the drapery, he anticipated his imagery of wardrobe and fashion in the subsequent sentence about the superadded ideas of the tradition. He also recalled his metaphor of the pleasing illusions in the sentence about the superadded ideas that "cover" the defects of

ed. Paul Bishop (New York: Routledge, 2012), 95; and Iain Hampsher-Monk, Introduction to *Revolutionary Writings: Reflections on the Revolution in France and the First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, by Edmund Burke, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), xxxi.

¹⁰⁷ Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender, and Political Economy in Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 134.

¹⁰⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 114, 143.

¹⁰⁹ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 57.

¹¹⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

man's naked nature.¹¹¹ In other words, Burke threaded each of these metaphors into the other ones so that they form a complex tapestry of the moral imagination that demonstrates both the sublime and beautiful.

Universals and Circumstance

A third characteristic of the moral imagination is that it balances universals with circumstance. Burke did not deny universals, but he strongly criticized the type of abstractionism that disregards sociohistorical circumstance. In addition to using the imagery of nakedness to show the loss of moral imagination, he employed it to account for the disregard of circumstance, criticizing the “nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction.” The “circumstances,” wrote Burke, “are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind.”¹¹²

The refusal to face circumstance is a refusal to live in the world as it exists. If the person imposes metaphysical ideas onto a society without considering its circumstance, he risks great harm to that society, even if his ideas are good ones (the immediate context of Burke's remarks concerned government and liberty, both of which he supported). Catharine Macaulay criticized Burke for making an “eternal war” against the “simplicity of all abstract principles.”¹¹³ However, Burke was not warring against principles per se but against their application absent circumstance.¹¹⁴ God has created a world in which truth and falsehood are fixed and circumstance is variable. The drapery is constant, but its fit changes.

¹¹¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

¹¹² Burke, *Reflections*, 58.

¹¹³ Catharine Macaulay, *Observations on the Reflections of Edmund Burke on the Revolution in France*, Cambridge Library Collection (1790; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 55 (italics removed).

¹¹⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 58, 71, 110–11, 174.

Burke discussed universals and circumstance throughout his career. However, the scholarship disagrees considerably regarding the relative significance of these components in Burke's ethic. Still, some scholars posit a synthesis of these phenomena in Burke. For this reason, one interpreter has observed, "The union of ideal theory and practical realisation, of imaginative creation with logical induction, is indeed so rare, we cannot be surprised at the injustice which the genius of Burke has had to endure in this respect."¹¹⁵ When taken as a whole, Burke seems to have emphasized circumstance, abstraction, and teleology in his ethic with the faculty of imagination playing a leading role in the proper negotiation of them. This section examines these three themes.

Circumstance

Burke unquestionably highlighted the importance of circumstance throughout his writings and speeches, discussing it in relation to the Colonies, India, and France. His underlying point in these sources was that the moral imagination engages fact not fancy, no matter how difficult or inconvenient it may be. Speculation and theory have a legitimate place in reflection and discourse, but they do not ground morality. Neither does circumstance ground morality, but it confirms whether a given idea coheres with reality and nature. Circumstance bears out whether a principle is accurate and practicable.

For instance, in his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, Burke demonstrated that imagination may conceive of circumstances rightly or wrongly. He beseeched the House of Commons to consider the "true nature" and "peculiar circumstances" of the Colonial conflict. Assuming victory, he explained, they must "govern America, according to that nature, and to those circumstances, and not according to [their] own imaginations" or "abstract ideas of right" or "mere general theories of government."¹¹⁶ Burke warned

¹¹⁵ "Introductory Essay," in *Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Edmund Burke*, by Edmund Burke, Sir John Lubbock's Hundred Books (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1893), xi.

¹¹⁶ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 110–11.

against imagining a state of affairs that does not obtain and relying on ideas that do not account for the actual circumstances.

Antonio Negri describes Burke's position as one of "extreme realism."¹¹⁷

While the evaluation that Burke was an "extreme" realist is perhaps too strong, he was certainly a realist; the realist faces circumstance. But that is not to say Burke repudiated abstract reason and theory; his point was that the real world is not abstracted from circumstanced, contingent realities. He was not against general theories but rather "mere general theories,"¹¹⁸ as well as "mischievous theory."¹¹⁹ Neither was he against abstraction as such; he was against an abstractionism that substitutes imaginative fancy for sociohistorical fact.¹²⁰ As Bruce Mazlish put it, Burke looked to "actual man" not "abstract man."¹²¹ Therefore, the moral imagination envisions the world realistically.

Some interpreters have argued that Burke's appeal to circumstance preempts a meaningful appeal to nature. For example, Trygve Throntveit posits that it provides "no absolute standard of appeal in times of conflict."¹²² However, an appeal to circumstance is not a denial of absolutes; it is simply an appeal to circumstance. In fact, Burke couched circumstance in terms of "nature," referring to the "true nature" of the "peculiar

¹¹⁷ Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizia Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 141.

¹¹⁸ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 111.

¹¹⁹ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 152.

¹²⁰ See also Burke, Speech on French Corps Bill (April 17, 1794), 617n3 (italics removed). Additional references to circumstance include Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 125, 136, 154; *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, 404; *Reflections*, 58, 230, 250; and *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 258. This dissertation does not analyze all these passages because they do not invoke "imagination." However, Stanlis considered a representative sampling of them (*Edmund Burke and the Natural Law*, 119–20).

¹²¹ Bruce Mazlish, "Burke, Bonald and De Maistre: A Study in Conservatism" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1955), 180 ("actual man"), 187 ("abstract man").

¹²² Trygve Van Regenmorter Throntveit, "Related States: Pragmatism, Progressivism, and Internationalism in American Thought and Politics, 1880–1920" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2008), 97.

circumstance.” Rather than seeing nature and circumstance as being uneasy neighbors, he viewed them as being friends.

Burke then, having discussed details related to population, commerce, agriculture, and fishing in the Colonies, then queried: “[W]hether you will chuse to abide by a profitable experience, or a mischievous theory; whether you chuse to build on imagination or fact; whether you prefer enjoyment or hope; satisfaction in your subjects, or discontent?”¹²³ Burke offered two paths: profitable experience and historical fact or fanciful imagination and mischievous theory. He believed that a functional society with “social and political bonds” must be built on the reality of mutual affection and sympathy.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, Burke’s rivals in Parliament did not sufficiently account for the circumstances of these bonds and continued to provoke the Colonists with its passage of the Prohibitory Act, which P. J. Marshall describes as type of piracy and sanction of war.¹²⁵ That is, they chose personal enjoyment over social happiness, and in the words of Levin, they “pushed too hard against the grain of the American character and the English constitution,” leaving “no hope of reconciliation.”¹²⁶

In the end, Burke’s position did not win the day. But neither did his opponents win the war. Stephen Browne describes Burke’s enemies as being “enamored” with abstractionism to the point of being “blind to the realities of the situation.”¹²⁷ They did

¹²³ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 152. Cf. Stephen H. Browne, *Edmund Burke and the Discourse of Virtue* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 63.

¹²⁴ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 173.

¹²⁵ P. J. Marshall, *Edmund Burke and the British Empire in the West Indies: Wealth, Power, and Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 130.

¹²⁶ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 173.

¹²⁷ Browne, *Edmund Burke and the Discourse of Virtue*, 56. Cf. David Schneiderman, *Red, White, and Kind of Blue? The Conservatives and the Americanization of Canadian Constitutional Culture* (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 292.

not account for sociohistorical circumstance. By contrast, the moral imagination does account for sociohistorical circumstance.

Continuing in *Conciliation*, Burke showed that the imagination, in addition to creating false impressions based in abstractions, may also confirm true ones. He explained that the Colonists were devoted to the principle of liberty “according to English ideas, and on English principles” because they were “descendants of Englishmen” and drew their “life-blood” from them. To the House of Commons, Burke declared: “[Y]our mode of governing them, whether through lenity or indolence, through wisdom or mistake, confirmed them in the imagination, that they, as well as you, had an interest in these common principles.”¹²⁸

Burke pointed to two facts to illustrate the Colonial interest in English liberty, both relating to sociohistorical circumstance. First concerned their ancestry. Because history provides the “moral-imaginative context” in which a peoples’ rights exist, the Colonists understandably thought of themselves as being British.¹²⁹ Second concerned Britain’s mode of governance; they governed them as if they were British. Owing to these circumstances, the Colonists believed they had an interest in liberty. Hence, Peter Berkowitz describes the “rooted interest” of liberty as the “most important circumstance” between Britain and the Colonists.¹³⁰ Consequently, the moral imagination faces concrete circumstance head-on, notwithstanding its difficulty.

Burke recognized Parliament had the theoretical power of taxation but that it was inappropriate in these circumstances to exert that power because of the shared imaginative context between Britain and the Colonies. This background, argued Joseph

¹²⁸ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 120–21.

¹²⁹ See Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 194.

¹³⁰ Peter Berkowitz, *Constitutional Conservatism: Liberty, Self-Government, and Political Moderation* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2013), 21.

Story, undergirded the “true origin of this resistance to the power of taxation.”¹³¹ Whereas the Colonists honored the “common principles” of their shared ancestry, the British did not. This fact distinguishes the Colonial conflict from the French Revolution some fifteen years later. The Colonists looked to their history, whereas the revolutionaries did not. The Colonists “realized” in their imaginations a standard of ancestral “virtue and wisdom,” whereas the revolutionaries did not.¹³² In some ways, the Parliamentarians prefigured the revolutionaries in their interaction with the Colonists because they did not look to their history and realize a standard of virtue in it; not without reason would many of them later side with the revolutionaries. The moral imagination recognizes that people adopt certain principles and rights because they have confirmed them in their imaginations according to sociohistorical circumstance.

Just as Burke considered the connection between imagination and circumstance during the Colonial conflict, he did the same during the Hastings impeachment proceedings. He asked whether anyone “who has taken the smallest trouble to be informed concerning the affairs of India” can “amuse himself with so strange an imagination” that its problems “can be fully corrected in a shorter term than four years.” Here, Burke criticized the imagination that is idealistic because it does not account sufficiently for circumstance. The East India Company’s occupation of India resulted in despotism, oppression, monopoly, speculation, and destruction of legal authority. Moreover, these problems grew over the course of twenty years in a faraway land at the hands of bold and cunning delinquents who amassed great financial and political power to fight accusations of injustice.¹³³ The moral imagination is properly involved in the

¹³¹ Joseph Story, *Commentaries on the Constitution of the United States*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (1833; repr., Clark, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, 2005), 115.

¹³² See Burke, *Reflections*, 86.

¹³³ Burke, *Speech on Fox’s India Bill*, 446. During this same general period, according to a report, Burke mentioned specifically the “circumstances” that “suggest themselves to every man’s imagination” (Speech on Remuneration Bill, 584).

details, and only the naivest imagination could believe that these injustices could be addressed in such a short period. The moral imagination faces facts squarely and recognizes that big problems take time to address.

Again, Burke raised the issue of circumstance during the Revolution. Writing in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, he stated: “The foundation of government is there laid, not in imaginary rights of men, (which at best is a confusion of judicial with civil principles) but in political convenience, and in human nature; either as that nature is universal, or as it is modified by local habits and social aptitudes.”¹³⁴ Burke made two basis points. First, the government is not grounded in imaginary rights. Burke’s criticism was not a criticism against either imagination or rights as such but against the imagination that invents rights lacking basis in nature or warrant in circumstance. The “imaginary rights of men” signify a vain imagination that looks ultimately to self.¹³⁵ Such “presumption,” wrote Alexander M. Bickel, “appalled Burke.”¹³⁶ The moral imagination does not base its ideas about the world on false ideas.

Second, government, rather than being grounded in abstractionism, is grounded in human nature and political convenience, that is, in universals that are socially modified. Also, immediately prior to his statement, Burke praised the principles he established in the *Reflections* for avoiding “hazardous” extremes.¹³⁷ Burke thereby established at least three components to a full-orbed ethic: circumstance, principle, and nature. Therefore, he emphasized circumstance, but he was no situationist because he built it atop the foundation of belief in principles and universals. Burke believed in the

¹³⁴ Burke, *Appeal*, 470.

¹³⁵ See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 297; and Joseph Pappin III, “Edmund Burke’s Philosophy of Rights,” in *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy*, ed. Ian Crowe (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), 125.

¹³⁶ Alexander M. Bickel, *The Morality of Consent* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 19.

¹³⁷ Burke, *Appeal*, 469–70.

ontological existence of universals, but he also saw universals as being imaginatively known and applied within unique circumstances.

Canavan offered this helpful interpretive key to Burke's ethic: "In the created universe, the necessary is realized in the contingent, the universal in the particular, the natural in the conventional. . . . The universal moral order is the order of a real, historically existing world."¹³⁸ Circumstance is the cultural form within which universals fit so that the form varies according to locality and society. For this reason, Burke observed that principle is "varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs" and appealed to the imagery of drapery to describe the moral imagination, which may be altered while still retaining its basic shape.¹³⁹

Adrian Pabst rightly interprets Burke's position as a "middle path" that steers clear of "inductive observation" and "empirical realism" on one side and "deductive speculation" and "rationalist idealism" on the other side. He describes Burke's approach as "principled practice," which simultaneously avoids "mere facts without theory" and "pure abstraction without practical meaning." In this way, Burke's position reflects "both universal truths in nature and particular arrangements in culture."¹⁴⁰ Thus, circumstance does not render the moral imagination utterly relative; it describes the form within which universals may apply.

¹³⁸ Francis Canavan, "Burke on Prescription of Government," *The Review of Politics* 35, no. 4 (October 1973): 461–62.

¹³⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 127–28. Burke was referring in this instance to the principle of a "mixed system of opinion and sentiment."

¹⁴⁰ Adrian Pabst, "'Obligations Written in the Heart': Burke's Primacy of Association and the Renewal of Political Theology," in *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, ed. Vassilios Paipais (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 28–29. Other scholars who examine this nuance in Burke's ethic include Peter Viereck, *Conservative Thinkers from John Adams to Winston Churchill* (1956; repr., New Brunswick: Transaction, 2006), 31; Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 188; Lacey, *Pragmatic Conservatism*, 21; and Yoram Hazony, *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 2022), 200.

Abstraction

While Burke affirmed circumstance, he did not affirm mere circumstance. He also considered the role of abstract theory. Certainly, Burke opposed the presumptive abstractionism of Enlightenment rationalism because it accounts poorly for circumstance, but he did not oppose abstraction itself. For example, he pronounced in his Speech on the Representation of the Commons in Parliament: “I do not vilify theory and speculation—no, because that would be to vilify reason itself. No; whenever I speak against theory, I mean always a weak, erroneous, fallacious, unfounded, or imperfect theory.”¹⁴¹ Burke did not discount theory because he did not discount reason. He knew that reason can be used rightly or wrongly, and he discounted it when it is used wrongly.

However, just as Burke did not affirm mere circumstance, neither did he affirm mere abstraction. Rather, he joined reason with practice: “[O]ne of the ways of discovering, that it is a false theory, is by comparing it with practice. This is the true touchstone of all theories, which regard man and the affairs of men—does it suit his nature in general; does it suit his nature as modified by his habits?”¹⁴² Burke did not deny a law of nature, but he also realized that practice often shows whether a person’s idea of nature is true or false or practical.¹⁴³ Byrne picks up on Burke’s usage of “touchstone,” applying it to his concept of the moral imagination. The touchstone, which joins theory to practice, keeps the person grounded. By contrast, the “unanchored imagination is likely to drift farther and farther from reality” because it has a “less accurate, and more

¹⁴¹ Edmund Burke, Speech on the Representation of the Commons in Parliament (1782), in *Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Peter J. Stanlis (Doubleday Anchor, 1963; repr., London: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 399.

¹⁴² Burke, Speech on the Representation of the Commons in Parliament, 399–400. Cf. Burke, *Reflections*, 268.

¹⁴³ See Mazlish, “Burke, Bonald and De Maistre,” 180; and David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole, eds., “Introduction: Philosophy in Action,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 3.

incomplete, understanding of reality.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, the moral imagination is not allergic to theory, but it tests theory by practice.

Burke upheld the same principles in his Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief, given approximately ten years later. He stated, “I never govern myself, no rational man ever did govern himself, by *abstractions* and *universals*,” before clarifying, “I do not put *abstract* Ideas *wholly* out of *any* question, because I well know, that under that name, I should dismiss *Principles*” without which “all reasonings . . . would be only a confused jumble of particular *facts*, and *details*, without the means of drawing out any sort of theoretical or practical conclusion.”¹⁴⁵ Without appeal to principles, the moral imagination cannot make coherent sense of a circumstance to make a judgment of it. So, abstraction and theory have their place in a Burkean ethic, but they are balanced with circumstance and practice and therefore with prejudice and prescription (examined at length in chapter 7).¹⁴⁶

In fact, the application of a principle without consideration of the “exigencies of the moment” may produce eternal “ruin.” Burke wrote, “He who does not take them [circumstances] into consideration, is not erroneous but stark mad . . . metaphysically mad.” The moral imagination may express ethical truths as abstract principles that are based on objective, universal realities, but it also knows that the application of such principles must consider and correspond to concrete circumstance; in this way, the moral imagination avoids both situationism and abstractionism. Burke continued, “A Statesman (never losing sight of principles) is to be guided by circumstances.”¹⁴⁷ Crucially, he did not say that ethical decision-making is based in circumstance; he said it is guided by it. If

¹⁴⁴ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 37–39.

¹⁴⁵ Edmund Burke, Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief (May 11, 1792), in *Writings*, 4:490.

¹⁴⁶ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Burke, Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief, 489–90.

universals are the road, circumstances are the guide rails. Meaningful ethical deliberation is an interplay between the subjective mind and the objective world. Repeated validations of a given principle within concrete reality demonstrate its truth and practicality, whereas repeated contradictions of the principle demonstrate its falsehood and impracticality.

These passages challenge interpretations contending that Burke stood resolutely against abstraction. For example, Weaver described the “argument from circumstance,” which he associated with Burke, as “making present circumstance the overbearing consideration” and thereby “keep[ing] from sight the nexus of cause and effect.”¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Kramnick asserted that Burke displayed a “ruthless skepticism” about “abstract ideals” and “a priori reasoning.”¹⁴⁹ Yes, as the previous section argued, Burke defended circumstance, but he also defended abstraction and consequence and was not against *a priori* reasoning as such. However, he criticized abstractionism; that is, he rejected particular manifestations of abstraction when they are undergirded by a rationalist ethic and divorced from circumstance and consequence, thereby precipitating revolutionary ends like during the French Revolution. However, as this section has maintained, he did not reject abstraction itself.

In fact, Weaver admitted that Burke argued from abstraction but interpreted such instances to signify an argument from circumstance: “Whenever Burke introduced the subject of metaphysics, he was in effect arguing from contraries; that is to say, he was asserting that what is metaphysically true is politically false or unfeasible.”¹⁵⁰ Weaver’s position was that an apparent appeal to abstraction in Burke’s corpus is not an actual appeal to abstraction because circumstance was Burke’s overarching concern. However, as both Pappin and Byrne correctly show, Burke appealed to concepts like nature and

¹⁴⁸ Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 57.

¹⁴⁹ Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke*, 20. See also Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure*, 32.

¹⁵⁰ Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 72.

theory even when they did not serve the circumstance of his gain and would even harm it.¹⁵¹ For Burke, the difference between a proper and improper abstraction concerns the claim of the abstraction in question and the interaction of the abstraction with the relevant circumstances and possible consequences. In summary, the moral imagination affirms universals and principles, but it does not presume to know them or apply them absent particulars and circumstances.

Teleology

Finally, the moral imagination is characterized not only by a recognition of universals and circumstance but also of purpose. Numerous interpreters have articulated this component of Burke's position in terms of teleology.¹⁵² A focus on ends or perfection appears throughout his corpus. For example, in his *Enquiry*, Burke couched his discussion of imagination specifically in terms of ends: "The elevation of the mind ought to be the principal end of all our studies, which if they do not in some measure effect, they are of very little service to us." Significantly, this end is based on a strong and wise Creator Who is the foundation for rightness, goodness, and fairness. In fact, Burke proposed his whole discourse as a hymn to God, producing in man admiration, adoration, and praise for Him. In other words, God created the imagination in accordance with His "strength and wisdom" to comprehend the moral law and to cultivate its truths.¹⁵³ Burke

¹⁵¹ Joseph Pappin III, *The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993), 42; Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 159.

¹⁵² E.g., Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, 4, 112; Don Herzog, "Puzzling through Burke," *Political Theory* 19, no. 3 (August 1991): 342; and Joseph L. Pappin III, "Edmund Burke and the Thomistic Foundations of Natural Law," in *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke*, ed. Ian Crowe (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 227.

¹⁵³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 227. The full passage reads: "The more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we every where find of his wisdom who made it. If a discourse on the use of the parts of the body may be considered as an hymn to the Creator; the use of the passions, which are the organs of the mind, cannot be barren of praise to him, nor unproductive to ourselves of that noble and uncommon union of science and admiration, which a contemplation of the works of infinite wisdom alone can afford to a rational mind; whilst referring to him whatever we find of right, or good, or fair in ourselves, discovering his strength and wisdom even in our own weakness and imperfection, honouring them where we discover them clearly, and adoring their profundity where we are lost in our search, we may be inquisitive without impertinence, and elevated without pride; we may be admitted, if I may dare to say

would not coin the phrase “moral imagination” for over three decades, but its foundations are present even here.

Burke also discussed purpose in his *Reflections*, except that he expressed it in terms of “perfection.” While he spoke against abstract perfection, he commended the practical perfection of man and culture, and the role that society and state play in that perfection, which accords with divine perfection.¹⁵⁴ The problem with abstracted teleology is that it is not grounded and exchanges reality for utopia. Additionally, when it becomes conjoined with an immoral imagination, it becomes destructive and ruinous for society.¹⁵⁵ Hence, Burke emphasized a teleology that is grounded and practical.

One interpretive tradition of Burke scholarship interprets his focus on ends and perfection in terms of utilitarianism. Certainly, Burke affirmed utility, but he did not affirm utilitarianism; therefore, any affirmation of utility on Burke’s part should not be confused with utilitarianism. Too many counterexamples from throughout his career contradict it; in addition to supporting American Colonists, Irish Catholics, and native Indians, he stood against practices like pillory and slavery. So, as Irving Babbitt put it, Burke upheld utility but not “mere utility.”¹⁵⁶ That is, utilitarianism is a type of teleological ethic, but teleological ethics is broader than utilitarianism. Dwan thus argues that terms like “utility,” “interest,” “benefit,” and “advantage” in Burke’s corpus are not based in some “contingent” or “mercenary” ethic but rather in an “objective foundation” of the “real and universal.”¹⁵⁷

so, into the counsels of the Almighty by a consideration of his works.” Burke’s aimed thus to stand in contrast to those of Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson. See Ian Harris, ed., Introduction to *A Philosophical Enquiry*, in *Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (2003; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 59.

¹⁵⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 106, 110, 143, 147–48, 180, 208.

¹⁵⁵ See Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 164.

¹⁵⁶ Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 102.

¹⁵⁷ David Dwan, “Burke and Utility,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 137–38.

Another interpretive tradition has tied Burke's focus on telos to an Aristotelian ethic that highlights the four cardinal virtues (temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice), while also balancing universals, circumstance, and ends. For example, Christopher J. Insole comments on Burke's belief in the "teleological structure of a divinely framed universe" in which virtues function as "habits or dispositions by which we stretch out to our perfection" and realize "human flourishing within a wider order."¹⁵⁸ Byrne has also integrated these themes but expresses them in terms of "moral imagination." By cultivating a moral imagination, which "helps to shape and direct the will," the person is "oriented toward the good."¹⁵⁹ Virtuous character gives rise to proper affections and actions, leading to proper ends.

In summary, the inheritance of a moral imagination gives attention to universals, circumstance, and ends. The failure to cultivate a moral imagination may lead to the overemphasis of one of these components, whether abstractionism, situationism, or utilitarianism. As Dwan and Insole express it, Burke's ethic is deontological, eudaimonistic, and teleological.¹⁶⁰ Throughout the history of Burke scholarship, different interpreters have proposed different frames through which to integrate these various themes. Byrne helpfully demonstrates that Burke's doctrine of the moral imagination is an important key to understanding his position.¹⁶¹ The moral imagination recognizes that moral truth is given by God, revealed in nature, confirmed by tradition, and applied in circumstance.

¹⁵⁸ Insole, "Burke and the Natural Law," 121.

¹⁵⁹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 172. For Byrne's examination of an Aristotelian quality to Burke's ethic, see 80, 103–4, and 195.

¹⁶⁰ Insole, "Burke and the Natural Law," 124, 127; Dwan, "Burke and Utility," 142 (cf. 138). Cf. Herzog, "Puzzling through Burke," 338–42.

¹⁶¹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 35, 197–98.

Destruction of a Moral Imagination

“But now all is to be changed,” pronounced Burke in what Edwin A. Abbott and J. R. Seeley called a “kind of *introductory epitome*” to his lament.¹⁶² Just as Burke used anaphora to introduce the three metaphors, he employed epistrophe to conclude them (is to be changed, are to be dissolved, is to be torn off, are to be exploded). The revolutionaries would destroy the inheritance of a moral imagination as if is outdated, irrational, and laughable. In its place, they would establish an empire of “enlightenment” and reason. Burke referred to these revolutionaries by the terms “sophisters,” “economists,” and “calculators.” Sophisters are people who presume to rely on reason but use it speciously, economists are physiocrats who imagine the world simply through their theories, and calculators are people who reason by calculating like a machine.

Burke deeply valued reason, philosophy, economics, and commerce, but he challenged worldviews that limit morality to theory or measurement or utility.¹⁶³ Good ethics is not less than these factors, but it is more than them, including the inheritance of a moral imagination. However, the revolutionaries exploded the superadded ideas of a moral imagination, establishing rationalism, empiricism, and mechanism in its place; they tore off the decent drapery of life, exposing only the defects of man’s naked nature. The destruction of a moral imagination is not enlightening but decivilizing and dehumanizing so that man is reduced to a barbarian and even a beast. “Their humanity,” wrote Burke, “is savage and brutal.”¹⁶⁴ The age of chivalry—the age of benevolence, dignity, honor, and manners—was lost, and only the “will to power” and “brute force” remained.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Burke, *Reflections*, 128; Edwin A. Abbott and J. R. Seeley, *English Lessons for English People* (London: Seeley, 1886), 122.

¹⁶³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 22.

¹⁶⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 131; cf. 128. See also Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 27; and Phillips, *The Quest for Excellence*, 34–35.

¹⁶⁵ “Will to power” is Guroian’s phrase, and “brute force” was McDonald’s (Guroian, *Rallying the Really Human Things*, 65; McDonald, “Imaginative Moralists,” 33). Cf. Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Western Thought* (New York: Anchor, 2003), 133; and Jenny Davidson,

Burke's critics accused him of exaggeration against the Revolution. Macaulay, writing shortly after the publication of *Reflections*, stated that "in no part of Europe, have the evils which must necessarily attend all Revolutions . . . been more exaggerated, and more affectedly lamented" than in England.¹⁶⁶ Such statements would not age well. Marie Antoinette was replaced by Madame La Guillotine. In the words of Wright, "By severing the ties of inherited tradition, they lost their hearts as well as their heads."¹⁶⁷

Burke's critique against this destruction of the moral imagination persisted. Several years later, writing in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, he criticized the metaphysicians, geometricians, and chemists for exchanging the "fear of God" for the "fear of man" and revealing a "wicked spirit" and the "principle of Evil himself, incorporeal, pure, unmixed, dephlegmated, defecated evil."¹⁶⁸ The destruction of a moral imagination was not a small matter but wicked. Kramnick and Paulson analyzed Burke's imagery of devilry and anality through the lens of modern psychoanalysis.¹⁶⁹ However, a better candidate to explain this imagery is the literary tradition of Burke's inheritance, which associated such figures with strong moral dislike. In the words of Maurice Crosland, Burke believed the innovator's "bleak new world" was "intensely evil."¹⁷⁰

The Reign of Terror would lead to the Napoleonic Era. Nearly a century later, William Samuel Lilly recounted, "It was in such an age, and among the ruins of the old order, that Napoleon arose to proclaim, amid the roar of his victorious cannon, the new

Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.

¹⁶⁶ Macaulay, *Observations*, 24 (italics removed).

¹⁶⁷ Wright, *Vindication of Politics*, 128.

¹⁶⁸ Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord*, 175–77.

¹⁶⁹ Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke*, 180–89; Paulson, *Representations of Revolution*, 65–68.

¹⁷⁰ Maurice Crosland, "The Image of Science as a Threat: Burke versus Priestly and the 'Philosophic Revolution,'" *The British Journal for the History of Science* 20, no. 3 (Jul 1987): 295. Cf. Lacey, *Pragmatic Conservatism*, 39–41.

gospel that force was the measure of truth, success the test of right, and personal interest the great law of action.”¹⁷¹ Napoleon was (eventually) defeated and exiled, but still the conquering empire has marched ever onward. Michael Sonenscher argues that Burke’s conquering empire has persisted with the “staggered emergence of those systems of government that now seem most compatible with the modern world” but often “default into conquest, pure and simple.”¹⁷² Democratism is as tyrannical as dictatorship.

In Burke’s view, the French Revolution and its underlying ethic represented a watershed in history, changing the very foundations of society. Burke’s critics accused him of writing fiction and chasing windmills like Don Quixote.¹⁷³ However, history has demonstrated his prescience.¹⁷⁴ Interpreters may evaluate the Revolution differently, but they all agree that something momentous occurred. For Burke, it represented the destruction of a moral imagination.

¹⁷¹ W. S. Lilly, “The Age of Balzac,” *The Contemporary Review* 37 (January-June 1880): 1044.

¹⁷² Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 37.

¹⁷³ E.g., Paine, *Rights of Man*, 287. Cf. R. B. McDowell, ed., Introduction to *Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9:17, 25; and Frans De Bruyn, “Edmund Burke the Political Quixote: Romance, Chivalry, and the Political Imagination,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16 (2004): 695–733.

¹⁷⁴ See Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment, 1660–1830: Stress Points in the English Augustan Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 133.

CHAPTER 6

IMAGINATION, VIRTUE, AND VICE

The previous chapter considered Burke's specific doctrine of the moral imagination as he presented it in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. This chapter examines passages from *Reflections* and from across his writings and speeches in which he correlated imagination and virtue, and gives especial attention to the virtues of humility, truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom. In addition, this chapter examines Burke's understanding of the vicious imagination, looking at themes like vanity, disorder, wildness, and revolution. Certainly, his doctrine of the faculty of imagination is not limited to the expressions of virtue and vice that are covered here because the imagination, giving form to thought and possibility to will, undergirds all expressions of virtue and vice. However, this chapter analyzes only these themes because they arise in passages in which Burke explicitly invoked the term "imagination(s)."

The Moral Imagination and Virtue

Burke demonstrated throughout his writings and speeches how the person may cultivate a moral imagination or an immoral imagination. William F. Byrne, in his work, highlights numerous "characteristics of a moral imagination," including the theater and art as moral shapers; religion, humility, and standards; the venerable as a bridge to the universal; education and the moral imagination; and personal relationships and the liberal state.¹ This dissertation has some overlap with Byrne's presentation but is distinct from it because of its methodology; with chapter 4 introducing considerations of artistic and

¹ William F. Byrne, *Edmund Burke for Our Time: Moral Imagination, Meaning, and Politics* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 94–116.

moral taste; chapter 5 discussing the inheritance of a moral imagination; this chapter examining the development of a moral or immoral imagination according to the person's discipline in virtue or vice; and the next chapter considering topics like authority, religion, rights, and reform. This section underscores the virtues that arise amid Burke's discussion of imagination.

Humility

Humility is a key epistemic virtue for Burke. Even as a teenager, he wrote in a letter that it is the "greatest of Christian virtues."² This theme arose on numerous occasions. For example, in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, he wrote,

If we can direct the lights we derive from such exalted speculations, upon the humbler field of the imagination, whilst we investigate the springs and trace the courses of our passions, we may not only communicate to the taste a sort of philosophical solidity, but we may reflect back on the severer sciences some of the grace and elegance of taste, without which the greatest proficiency in those sciences will always have the appearance of something illiberal.³

By this statement, Burke suggested something of a marriage between the arts and sciences so that imagination humbles reason, and reason elevates imagination.

The *Enquiry* principally concerns the origin of man's passions of the sublime and beautiful. Passion arises from the mind, which includes both imagination and reason. Repeatedly, Burke showed how these faculties complement one another. In this passage, he advocated for people integrating the humility of imagination into the pursuit of knowledge; that is, he associated imagination with the virtue of humility. Throughout his career, Burke criticized the arrogance of reason, and here said that imagination exists on a "humbler field." But by allowing imagination and reason to balance one another, the

² Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton (October 15, 1744), in *The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, ed. Arthur P. I. Samuels (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), 56.

³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 191.

person gives philosophical reliability to his artistic and moral tastes and grace and elegance to the “severer sciences.”

Eric R. Baker describes Burke’s “‘modest’ service of such an enquiry [as] nothing less than the metaphorical marriage of the arts and the sciences.”⁴ The sciences may gain the light of knowledge, but they can become proud; however, the arts may humble such “exalted speculations.” Some have characterized Burke’s view of the arts and sciences as having a “reciprocal relationship.”⁵ Others have offered more critical interpretations, such as calling his view a “paradoxical exhortation” that leads to an “irreconcilable duality of method” wherein he “want[ed] to have it both ways,” a “science of aesthetics” and an “aesthetically-grounded science” that leads to “subjectivistic” and “pseudo-scientific” conclusions.⁶ This point is borne out by some of Burke’s theories on the efficient cause of the sublime and beautiful. However, it is pressed too hard. Burke may have wrongly construed the application of this marriage at times, but the marriage itself is a good one because imagination and reason go together.

Burke’s view of how imagination and reason integrate seems to have matured through his career. While some interpreters see a pronounced discontinuity between the *Enquiry* and his later writings, I have argued that many foundations for his mature view appear in the *Enquiry*, even if they took time to work out. Rather, the discontinuity emerges when examining his writings from the decade prior: “That the provinces of philosophy and poetry are so different that they can never coincide, that philosophy to gain its end addresses to the understanding, poetry to the imagination which by pleasing

⁴ Eric R. Baker, “Atomism and the Sublime: On the Reception of Epicurus and Lucretius in the Aesthetics of Edmund Burke, Kant, and Schiller” (PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 2002), 100.

⁵ Christine Maria Skolnik, “The Sublime in Eighteenth-Century British Criticism and Rhetoric” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2001), 105.

⁶ Thomas William Sheehy, “Reason’s Tragic Conflict with Tradition: The Aesthetic Dimension of Edmund Burke’s Political Philosophy” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1998), 52–53.

it finds a nearer way to the heart, that the coldness of philosophy hurts the imagination and taking away as much of its power must consequently lessen its effect, and so prejudice it.”⁷

Even then Burke associated imagination with the heart. But his view of the association of reason and imagination was more dualistic on its face than it was as he developed his ideas. Accordingly, Anthony James Caschetta interprets Burke to mean that poetry and philosophy are “radically different things and cannot be intermixed.”⁸ One interpretation even links this statement to the passage from the *Enquiry* where Burke characterized judgment as throwing stumbling blocks in the way of imagination.⁹ He undoubtedly saw the prospect of antagonism between them, but the larger argument in that work reveals a more dynamic interplay between these faculties, which seems only to grow throughout his career. One could also observe that Burke’s statement about philosophy and poetry appears within a debate so that it signifies the position he was arguing rather than the position he held. Another interpretation proposes that Burke was employing a particular *a posteriori* methodology whereby he worked from the particular to the universal.¹⁰

In any case, throughout his work in the *Enquiry*, Burke illustrated the virtue of humility. For example, prior to hypothesizing about the efficient cause of the sublime and beautiful, he clarified he would “not be understood to say” he could “come to the ultimate

⁷ Edmund Burke, “The Minute Book and Notes,” in *Early Life Correspondence*, 249. Cf. Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton (July 12, 1746), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 1:20.

⁸ Anthony James Caschetta, “Wordsworth’s Composite Order: Politics and Genre in ‘The Prelude’” (PhD diss., New York University, 1995), 342.

⁹ E.g., James T. Boulton, ed., Introduction to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, by Edmund Burke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), xx. Cf. Richard Olson, *Science Deified and Science Defied: The Historical Significance of Science in Western Culture*, vol. 2, From the Early Modern Age through the Early Romantic Era, ca. 1640 to ca. 1820 (1982; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 300.

¹⁰ Simon B. Kress, “Hurt into Poetry: The Politics of Sentiment in Northern Irish Poetry, 1966–1998” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2010), 219–20.

cause” because that “great chain of causes, which linking one to another even to the throne of God himself, can never be unravelled by any industry of ours.”¹¹ Richard Bourke interprets Burke to mean that “religious feeling proceeds from ignorance,” as if he is writing on religious epistemology.¹² However, David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole more reasonably suggest that Burke had “an intense awareness of the limitations of knowledge.”¹³ Indeed, one of Burke’s broader themes, throughout his corpus, concerns presumptive reason. Or in the words of Joseph L. Pappin III, Burke had a “healthy skepticism toward excessively bold claims made by reason beyond its proper scope.”¹⁴ One may know causes partly but not fully. The person may gain genuine knowledge while avoiding the hubris of rationalism by the development of a moral imagination.

This theme of humility and its connection to imagination continues through Burke’s later career. For example, he followed his statement on the moral imagination in the *Reflections* with praise for the “spirit of a gentleman” and “spirit of religion,”¹⁵ which Byrne ties to a “spirit of humility and reverence.”¹⁶ Furthermore, Burke criticized a spirit

¹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 283. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (editors) remark from this passage that Burke is “clearly a staunch critic of enlightenment” (“Introduction: Philosophy in Action,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 8).

¹² Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 148.

¹³ Dwan and Insole, “Introduction: Philosophy in Action,” 8. Cf. Paddy Bullard, *Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 99.

¹⁴ Joseph L. Pappin III, “Edmund Burke and the Thomistic Foundations of Natural Law,” in *An Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke*, ed. Ian Crowe (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 217. Cf. Iain Hampsher-Monk, “Burke and the Religious Sources of Skeptical Conservatism,” in *The Skeptical Tradition Around 1800: Skepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society*, ed. Johan van der Zande and Richard H. Popkin, 235–60 (Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer, 1998), 256; Steffen Ducheyne, “‘Communicating a Sort of Philosophical Solidity of Taste’: Newtonian Elements in Burke’s Methodology in *Philosophical Enquiry*,” in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michal Funk Deckard, International Archives of the History of Ideas (New York: Springer, 2012), 63; and Garrett Jeter, “Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry*: Towards a Corporeal Epistemology and Politics,” *The CEA Critic* 76, no. 3 (November 2014): 243.

¹⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 130.

¹⁶ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 99.

of “self-sufficiency and arrogance.”¹⁷ Related to the humility of a moral imagination, Burke also praised the “pious imagination” of monks who, even in their imperfection, placed their resources in the “service of God” by preserving historical and cultural artifacts and by serving the community.¹⁸ The moral imagination, argued Burke, is formed by an ethic that is humble before God.

Burke continued this theme in *National Assembly* where he contrasted the humble imagination from the vain imagination. Reminiscent of his statement as a teenager nearly fifty years prior, he wrote, “True humility, the basis of the Christian system, is the low, but deep and firm foundation of all real virtue.”¹⁹ The virtue of humility underlies all the rest. Humility leads the person to submit to good parents, teachers, leaders, institutions, and traditions. Humility leads the person ultimately to submit to God.²⁰

Carl Johan Lennard Ljungberg interprets Burke’s idea of true humility as a “notion of restraint,” which he relates to Paul Elmer More’s concept of an “inner check.” Additionally, the inheritance of manners, chivalry, religion, and the church, serves in “aiding the check.”²¹ This inheritance of the tradition helps to grow a moral imagination, which is a humble imagination that challenges the presumptions of reason. As Bourke observes, “Reason, when it lacks restraint, loses the quality of reasonableness.”²² Thus,

¹⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 146; cf. 97, 132, 152, 214.

¹⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 211. See also Francis Canavan, *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke: The Role of Property in His Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995), 43.

¹⁹ Burke, *National Assembly*, 313.

²⁰ See Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 6; and Bruce Frohnen, *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism: The Legacy of Burke and Tocqueville* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 67.

²¹ Carl Johan Lennard Ljungberg, “The Liberalism of Edmund Burke: The Idea of the Constitution (Britain)” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1983), 48.

²² Richard Bourke, “Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 31.

from his earliest to his latest publications, Burke demonstrated his belief that imagination and reason may either oppose or support one another.

Byrne comments that “Burke place[d] humility first among the virtues” because it is “important for developing a sound perception of reality.” Because man views the world by imagination, he must form it so that he sees the world rightly. The humble imagination allows the person to shape an epistemic structure that sees the world rightly. Again, the humble imagination is not perfect; it makes mistakes, it learns, and it grows. But it provides rich soil for the cultivation of a moral imagination that values truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom.²³

Truth

Significantly, humility alone gets the person only so far. The moral imagination is humble before what is true. Ontologically, truth precedes humility, but epistemologically and ethically, humility precedes truth because the person must lower himself before the object of truth. If the person cannot humble himself, then he demonstrates an ethic of vanity. Burke’s discussion of truth cuts against vanity and considers the importance of imagination being shaped by objects of truth rather than by objects of mere fancy.

For example, Burke remarked that the natural purpose of imagination is to acquire knowledge of the truth. Writing about his son at a young age, he stated, “The imagination is not at that time furnished, nor the passions engaged. The simple acquisition of knowledge as such is the only object and nothing perhaps can more clearly <than> this evince the dignity of human nature and the appetite of the Mind for Truth as its natural Diet.”²⁴ Like in other places, Burke closely associated imagination and

²³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 197; cf. 178–79. Cf. Bourke, “Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism,” 34.

²⁴ Burke, “Character of His Son and Brother,” 580 (brackets in original).

passion. He used two metaphors to describe the imagination. First, it is like an unfurnished room that is properly furnished by truth. This idea is not admission of an epistemic blank slate or empty cabinet but a recognition that the experiences of youth are limited.

Second, the imagination is like a stomach that is properly fed by truth. Again, the expression, “Man is what he eats,” comes to mind. The person may mentally consume what is false, but it results in an unhealthy mind that imagines the world falsely. In addition, the false imagination is never sated because the imagination by its nature requires truth. Feeding an imagination by truth reveals man’s dignity, whereas feeding it by falsehood conceals it. This passage is reminiscent of the *Reflections* where a moral imagination raises man’s dignity, but an immoral imagination lowers man’s worth to that of “an animal not of the highest order.”²⁵ Thus, the moral imagination is the healthy imagination that is nourished by the knowledge of truth.

Burke also used the imagery of food to discuss the diet of imagination in his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*. Penned in 1777 when circumstances still favored England in the American War for Independence, Burke, forecasting British defeat, predicted the Tories would subsequently “feed their imaginations with the possible good consequences which might have attended success.” The hypothetical imagination may envision what could have been. Burke believed the Tories would not admit their mistake because they would feed their imaginations with “delusion” that no presentation of facts could correct.²⁶ Refusing to see the truth, the person may use his imagination as an instrument of self-deception.

However, the person does not have to feed his imagination with falsehood. The imagination vis-à-vis the senses may bridge the person’s subjective ideas and objective

²⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

²⁶ Edmund Burke, *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (April 3, 1777), in *Writings*, 3:303–4.

reality. Therefore, the hypothetical imagination may also recognize that a possible world is not the actual world and lead the person to introspection and correction. In this way, the imagination is central to the person's ability to reconsider his past actions and improve his future ones. Because imagination has the power of thought and memory, it both gives shape to and takes account of one's behavior; it is teeming with ethical significance. David Bromwich writes, "The use of moral imagination is to gauge the self-deception that intervenes when in the apparent service of high-minded aims we come to describe our appetites as needs."²⁷ The moral imagination admits that its desires are not always in keeping with the truth, and it chooses the humble path of self-reflection and self-correction rather than the hubristic path of self-delusion.

Justice

Just as Burke discussed imagination in relation to humility and truth, he discussed it in relation to justice. If the previous virtue concerns the recognition of truth, this one concerns the administration of truth. In his *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, Burke considered the prospect of losing reelection. While he would have liked to continue in public service, he would not renounce the objects of "doing good" and "resisting evil." Again using the analogy of food, he wrote, "I [would] much rather pass the remainder of my life hidden in the recesses of the deepest obscurity, feeding my mind even with the visions and imaginations of such things, than to be placed on the most splendid throne of the universe, tantalized with a denial of the practice of all which can make the greatest situation any other than the greatest curse."²⁸ Given the option between obscurity with justice or fame with injustice, the moral imagination chooses the former. Better to lose the world than to forfeit one's soul.

²⁷ David Bromwich, *Moral Imagination: Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 32.

²⁸ Burke, *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, 662.

Burke stood on justice and lost the election. But he never hid in the recesses of obscurity, even when his positions were unpopular. Byrne explains that “Burkean humility does not lead to passivity or quietism” but “promotes the right kind of political and social engagement as one comes to perceive one’s obligations.”²⁹ Over and again, Burke’s recommendations of moral imagination to contemporary problems did not carry sufficient currency. He suggested conciliation with the Colonies; the American War for Independence followed. He suggested greater freedom and representation for Irish Catholics; greater conflict followed. He suggested Hastings’s impeachment; acquittal followed. He suggested swift movement against the French Revolution; moderation followed.

The moral imagination is not always triumphant—at least not immediately. But in each case, Burke remained committed to what he believed was just, even when it cost him. For example, his stand on the Revolution resulted in his functional excommunication from the Whigs. Yet according to a report on his Speech on Quebec Bill, he stated, “[L]et not the party that had excommunicated him, imagine that he stood deprived of every comfort; though all was solitude without, there was sunshine and company enough within.”³⁰ One may lose his friends but keep his integrity. The moral imagination gives the person the fortitude to withstand the challenges of life for the cause of justice.

Burke also correlated justice and imagination, both positively and negatively, throughout the Hastings impeachment proceedings. Referencing the incomparable and horrific oppression and usurpation of the East India Company against the “most established rights” of the Indians, he stated, “It stands as a monument to astonish the imagination, to confound the reason of mankind.” Employing a rhetorical imagination,

²⁹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 196.

³⁰ Edmund Burke, Speech on Quebec Bill (May 11, 1791), in *Writings*, 4:361.

Burke explained that the moral imagination is an imagination that is astonished and even “stupefied” at such examples of injustice. He extended the same point to reason, observing that moral reason is a confounded reason in the face of injustice. Again, in his *Speech on Fox’s India Bill*, the moral imagination and moral reason experience “indignation” at such wickedness.³¹ Even Richard M. Weaver, who otherwise contended that Burke argued from circumstance rather than definition, admitted that “Burke’s interest in the affairs of India” signifies an “argument for justice.”³²

Just as justice sometimes means standing on principle when it is unpopular, it also sometimes means standing for the least of these. Bromwich explains, “Here, the test of the justice of a moral imagination turns out to be justice to a stranger.”³³ Justice does not show partiality, and it does not look the other way. Similarly, Sara Suleri explains that Burke exhibited great “cultural sympathy” in his position. Additionally, he “dismantled” the “prevailing colonial stereotype” in which a “tale-questioning and abundant British imagination traverses the ancient and reprehensible lassitude of the Indian subcontinent” because it manifests “ethical and epistemological vacuity.”³⁴ Burke demonstrated a higher purpose for imagination than adventure and colonialism, which may offend fundamental principles of justice.

Approximately a half-year later, still in the context of India, Burke commented on the toll that standing for justice takes on the person. He declared he “deprecated” the day he learned of his countrymen’s evils because they had come to haunt his “imagination” to the point he could not sleep. Because imagination gives form to thought,

³¹ Burke, *Speech on Fox’s India Bill*, 426–27. He began the speech by declaring his concern was “justice” (381), and the theme persisted throughout the speech and proceedings.

³² Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), 65. Even so, Weaver hedged his statement, remarking, “it is conditioned upon a circumstance” (67).

³³ Bromwich, *Moral Imagination*, 15.

³⁴ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 33.

it filled his mind with “shocking” images, full of “horror” and “barbarities” of the most “savage” sort.³⁵ The imagination embodies what is otherwise abstract. Burke did not discuss the efficient causes of the sublime and beautiful as such in this passage, although he employed language related to these passions, but his insomnia seems to have demonstrated some aspects of his theory from the *Enquiry* concerning the relationship between the mind and body. Such circumstances, like the depopulation and destruction of Indian culture and society, deeply offend “justice,” even “eternal justice.”³⁶ Thus, the moral imagination is shocked, even haunted, by injustice.

Again, another half-year later, Burke appealed to the faculty of imagination, inviting the Speaker, “Extend your imagination a little further,” to consider how he would think, feel, and act if his land were treated like that of India. Having painted a mental picture, he asked, “What would you call it? To call it tyranny, sublimed into madness, would be too faint an image.” This passage also recalls the *Enquiry* for several reasons. It represents an exception to Burke’s theory that the non-representational form generally follows the verbal medium; however, in this case, Burke was literally asking his audience to conjure the representational form. Also, whereas he did not refer to the sublime in the prior passage, he did so in this one, associating the injustice of tyranny with the sublimity of madness. His stated purpose was to steer the speaker away from such madness and to awaken his sense of “justice.”³⁷ Jennifer Pitts remarks that Burke aimed “to rouse the moral imagination and emotional indignation of his audience—his parliamentary colleagues, public opinion, even posterity—and transform the scope of their moral community and to force them to acknowledge the moral and political standing of

³⁵ Edmund Burke, Speech on Almas Ali Khan (July 30, 1784), in *Writings*, 5:471.

³⁶ Burke, Speech on Almas Ali Khan, 472; see also 461–63 for further discussion of the theme of justice.

³⁷ Burke, *Speech on Nabob of Arcot’s Debts*, 519–21.

others.”³⁸ Hence, by imagination, the person warns others of vice or, alternatively, tries to convince them of righteousness, whether personal, social, or political.

Yet Burke recognized that the imagination can be a faculty of exaggeration just as it can be a faculty for conviction. For this reason, he clarified, in a speech over four years later, that his proofs against Debi Singh had not resulted from a “disordered imagination” that had given itself to “invention.” They resulted rather from a concern for “justice” that could be “substantiated by authentic reports” that this “monster of iniquity” with “wicked and abominable hands” had committed “ravages” and “savage barbarities.”³⁹ The moral imagination is ordered by justice, and it is astonished at injustice. This point is consistent with the types of statements he made thirty years prior, such as when, in the *Vindication*, he wrote that the idea of leaders banishing and murdering their citizens ought to “strike [the observer’s] Imagination with the Image of a sort of a complex Nero?”⁴⁰

Finally, just as Burke spoke of the imagination being shocked at injustice, he spoke also of it being confused and saddened at injustice. He mentioned the “confused and melancholy imaginations” of the Indian women who were victims of robbery by Hastings and his agents who seized their land.⁴¹ The moral imagination is rightly confused at injustice, especially if it is state-sanctioned. Ministers of state rightly hold robbers guilty for their crimes, and ministers who would be complicit in injustice are unfit to occupy such stations. So, justice causes the moral imagination to feel dismay and anger, and shock and confusion, at the tyrant, but it also causes the moral imagination to feel sympathy for the victim.

³⁸ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 71.

³⁹ Burke, Trial of Warren Hastings: Speech on the Sixth Charge, 31–32.

⁴⁰ Burke, *Vindication*, 164 (italics removed).

⁴¹ Burke, Speech in Reply (June 7, 1794), 459.

Sympathy

Sympathy is a fourth virtue Burke associated with the imagination. Although he demonstrated deep sympathy for the Indians amid the Hastings impeachment proceedings, he laid the foundation for it decades prior. He explained in his *Enquiry* that sympathy allows the person to “enter into the concerns of others” and described it as a “sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected.”⁴² Accordingly, it is an overarching passion that encompasses all the other passions, permitting the person to enter another’s pain or pleasure. Sympathy results from the imagination’s power to trace and make resemblances. As Byrne puts it, it permits the person to imagine he is in “the shoes of others.”⁴³ The doctrine of sympathy accounts for why the arts are so affective, and certainly it has ethical implications. The moral imagination is the sympathetic imagination.

Burke’s emphasis on a sympathetic imagination provides evidence that he was a transitional figure between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Seamus Deane contrasts the Enlightenment doctrine of self-love from the Romantic “doctrine of the sympathetic imagination,” presenting Francis Hutcheson as a forerunner of this Romantic sensibility.⁴⁴ In fact, the Romantic view of sympathy is summed up in many ways by the term *sensibilité*, which, says Michael Ferber, describes “sensitivity or emotional responsiveness, bordering on sentimentalism, as opposed to reasonableness and detachment, painted as cold rationality and heartless wit,”⁴⁵ which “might not reveal itself

⁴² Burke, *Enquiry*, 220–21.

⁴³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 85. Cf. Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–3, 220.

⁴⁴ Deane discusses this concept on several occasions. See Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England, 1789–1832* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 154, 171; and Seamus Deane, *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke*, Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays and Monographs (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 17.

⁴⁵ Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

in anything but sympathizing tears.”⁴⁶ To this extent, it is an emotional sensitivity to another person’s experiences that is not sufficiently counterbalanced by reason so that, in some cases, the person’s feelings are elevated as the moral good of the situation.

Even so, some interpreters have criticized Burke’s lack of sympathy toward the masses and revolutionaries during the period of the French Revolution. Burke showed great sympathy toward the Colonists, the Catholics, and the Indians but, allegedly, not toward French peasants. For such reasons, Hazlitt remarked that Burke was a man “not of sound and practical judgment, nor of high or rigid principles.”⁴⁷ However, it is not that Burke lacked sympathy during the Revolution, but that he counterbalanced it with reason and undergirded it with morality.

While sympathy is an overarching passion, it is not an overarching virtue; it must be marked by colors of humility, truth, and justice. The moral imagination is sympathetic in the right ways and toward the right causes. At the time he published his *Reflections*, Burke’s sympathies lay with an assaulted throne, a murdered nobility, and a persecuted church not because he defended all they did but because people should not be assaulted, murdered, and persecuted. That is, Burke charged the Jacobins with perverting the “well-placed sympathies of the human breast.”⁴⁸ Injustice in the name of sympathy does not amount to virtue.

Additionally, the sword of sympathy cuts both ways. If the critics accused Burke of not sympathizing with the Jacobins, he accused them of not sympathizing with

⁴⁶ Ferber, *Romanticism*, 17. In fact, Ferber suggests seeing Romanticism (which he approximates to 1789–1832), not simply as a “reaction against Enlightenment rationalism,” but as an “episode within the larger movement of Sensibility,” which he defines as 1740–1789 (30). Similarly, Donald A. Stauffer described *sensibilité* as the “poignant expansion of consciousness” (*The Art of Biography in Eighteenth Century England* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941], viii, 167–95), and Dupré pointed to Rousseau as an example of this “moral sentimentalism” (*The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004], 124–27).

⁴⁷ William Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Burke” (1817), in *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*, 2nd ed. (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1822), 266.

⁴⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 115.

kings, lords, and clerics. Besides, Burke was not unaware of the peasants' plight. One person can sympathize with another person without agreeing with his interpretation of the circumstances or means of redress. Hence, the question of Burke's legacy with respect to a sympathetic imagination is less about whether he had one and more about the underlying ethic informing it. As Jesse Norman writes, "Burke's awareness of other cultures, and his extraordinary capacity to immerse himself imaginatively in them, make him acutely sensitive to different sources of moral motivation."⁴⁹ In short, the issue is not sympathy; it is the ethic underlying one's sympathy.

Several decades prior to the Revolution, Burke had explicitly connected the sympathetic imagination to morals. Writing in the *Enquiry*, he contended that "our Creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy"⁵⁰ and discussed the "force of natural sympathy" in relation to "justness" and "virtues and vices."⁵¹ Consequently, Burke's manner of evaluating the Colonists, the Catholics, and the Indians compared to the French did not signify inconsistency. The foundation for his reflections on the Revolution were laid in his enquiry into the origin of man's ideas of morality and sympathy. Certainly, tradition and authority may misconstrue justice, but as Burke stated in the *Reflections*, the "people at large" may also misconstrue justice: even "they should not be suffered to imagine that their will, any more than that of kings, is the standard of right and wrong."⁵² Instead, proper morals are premised ultimately in God. By cultivating a moral imagination, ordinary citizens and leadership alike may address challenging circumstances in a sympathetic and just manner.⁵³

⁴⁹ Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (New York: Basic, 2015), 275–76.

⁵⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 222.

⁵¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 205–6.

⁵² Burke, *Reflections*, 144.

⁵³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 39, 102.

Moral imagination and moral judgment—sympathy and justice—thus go together. For this reason, Robert J. Lacey rightly observes that “moral judgment” requires an “ability to view situations from the perspective of others,” adding, “not obedience to doctrines etched in stone.” Burke undoubtedly appealed to circumstance and expediency; to use Lacey’s term, he was “pragmatic.”⁵⁴ But Burke was not a pragmatist because he advocated for causes that lack expediency. Doctrines are not etched in stone since circumstances change, but the truths and falsehoods underlying such doctrines are etched in stone; as Burke stated, they are “fixed.”⁵⁵ Lacey continues, “In the end, Burke was neither a relativist nor an absolutist, neither a Romantic nor a rationalist.”⁵⁶ He was rather a transitional figure who recognized that the application of universals varies according to the relatively of circumstance.

Several scholars interpret Burke’s doctrine of sympathy to involve some degree of sympathy for the self in addition to sympathy for others. For instance, Bromwich articulates that the “motive for sympathetic action” is sometimes undergirded by the question of “what I owe to myself” because the person with the “wrong or weak imagining,” with a “mistake of imagination,” will be poorly able, if not unable, to sympathize with others.⁵⁷ In other words, the person who would sympathize with others must be able to do so, which means he must know how to sympathize with himself. A strong imagination allows the person, whether prince or pauper, to envision who he could

⁵⁴ Robert J. Lacey, *Pragmatic Conservatism: Edmund Burke and His American Heirs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21.

⁵⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 196–97.

⁵⁶ Lacey, *Pragmatic Conservatism*, 21. Cf. Koen Vermeir and Michal Funk Deckard, eds., “Philosophical Enquiries into the Science of Sensibility: An Introductory Essay,” in *Science of Sensibility*, 54.

⁵⁷ Bromwich, *Moral Imagination*, 16–17. Interestingly, Bromwich identifies both Burke and Lincoln as examples of this principle, whereas Weaver contrasted them (*The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 55–114).

be.⁵⁸ Sympathy of self thus leads to sympathy of others, which leads to true social reform. Sympathy bonds society, Martha C. Nussbaum explains, by guiding people's hearts and minds as they relate one to other.⁵⁹ By contrast, social revolution is not evidence of sympathy; in reality, it is the failure of sympathy because parties are unable or unwilling to engage in mutual sympathy.

Burke's doctrine of sympathy caused him to hold out hope even for Jacobins: "Whilst Shame keeps its watch, Virtue is not wholly extinguished in the heart; nor will Moderation be utterly exiled from the minds of tyrants." To illustrate this proposition, Burke quoted a passage from John Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, which he prefaced by saying, "I believe every honest man sympathizes in his reflections with our political poet" and "will pray to avert the omen whenever these acts of rapacious despotism present themselves to his view or his imagination."⁶⁰ Just because injustice presents itself to one's imagination does not mean he has to follow the idea. And even if the person has pursued the object of injustice does not mean he must continue doing so. By extending sympathy to himself and imagining what he could be, he may repent of his injustice and truly extend sympathy to others.

Wisdom

Finally, the moral imagination knows how to apply the truth, justice, and sympathy by the virtue of wisdom, which Burke referred to as the "mother virtue."⁶¹ Burke correlated these concepts on several occasions. In his *Observations on a Late State*

⁵⁸ Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 276.

⁵⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 1–12.

⁶⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 166.

⁶¹ Edmund Burke, Speech on Economical Reform Bill (February 15, 1781), in *Writings*, 4:63. Cf. Burke, *Appeal*, 383; Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 225; and Burke, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 269.

of the Nation, he explained that he would refute William Knox with imagination, wisdom, and virtue,⁶² which assist the person in balancing universals, history, and circumstances and avoiding abstractionism, historicism, and situationism. Wisdom is Burke's middle way between Weaver's polarities of argument from definition versus argument from circumstance, for by wisdom, the moral imagination translates universals and prescription into concrete circumstance.⁶³

Peter J. Stanlis articulated Burke's view of wisdom as the interplay of natural law, history, and expediency.⁶⁴ Burke certainly believed in universals. But he did not present himself as a natural law theorist; for one, he was much more critical of reason than standard presentations of natural law.⁶⁵ Still, Stanlis was right in noting Burke's emphasis on history and expediency within the broader context of universals. Stanlis then proceeded to explain, "Burke's principle of prudence is more an ethical than an intellectual virtue" but then defined this principle as the "spirit of practical morality" that relates to both "understanding and action."⁶⁶ However, "understanding" relates to the intellect. Therefore, wisdom is an intellectual and an ethical virtue, relating to the mind and the will. The moral imagination translates the conceptual into the actual.

Burke also explained his view of wisdom in a passage from *Reflections* about the beauty and majesty of France: "I behold in all this something which awes and commands the imagination, which checks the mind on the brink of precipitate and indiscriminate censure, and which demands, that we should very seriously examine, what

⁶² Burke, *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*, 117.

⁶³ See Frank S. Meyer, "In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo" (1962), in *In Defense of Freedom and Related Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1996), 64–65; and Christopher J. Insole, "Burke and the Natural Law," in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 121.

⁶⁴ Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 118–20.

⁶⁵ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 12.

⁶⁶ Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law*, 120 (italics removed).

and how great are the latent vices that could authorise us at once to level so spacious a fabric with the ground.”⁶⁷ The sentence to which this selection belongs is much scrutinized by interpreters because of its masterful rhetorical style with F. P. Lock describing it as the “*chef-d’œuvre*” of *Reflections*.⁶⁸ At nearly 300 words in length, it begins with a word to arrest the reader’s attention (“indeed”) and then proceeds through nearly 250 words worth of dependent and subordinate clauses until it finally reaches its main clause about imagination, which is awed and commanded by France’s cultural achievements. Burke’s usage of “awe” has prompted some scholars to link this passage to his concept of the sublime in the *Enquiry* with the idea being that history and civilization prompts the moral imagination unto feelings of sublimity.⁶⁹

Burke illustrated his doctrine of wisdom in two ways in this passage. First, the moral imagination is cautious. Certainly, Burke recognized reason as performing an important check on the imagination that becomes prematurely enchanted with an object.⁷⁰ But he also recognized that the imagination appropriately awed by the sublime may perform an important check on reason that is on the brink of careless judgment. Not just any imagination can rightly check reason though; the vain or disordered or revolutionary imagination cannot help in this regard. For this reason, says John Whale, the imagination

⁶⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 180.

⁶⁸ F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: 1784–1797*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 327–29. Cf. Francis McDougall Charlewood Turner, *The Element of Irony in English Literature: An Essay* (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), 68; W. Somerset Maugham, *Essays on Literature* (London: New English Library, 1967), 67–70; and Frans De Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 76–77. Of course, many of his contemporaries replied to the expression of Burke’s imagination in *Reflections*, often critically; see John Barrell who interacts with many of these responses in *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9–20.

⁶⁹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 238, 289, 305. E.g., Philip Ellis Ray, “The Metaphors of Edmund Burke: Figurative Patterns and Meanings in His Political Prose” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1973), 69. Incidentally, this sentence is not Burke’s longest sentence because he penned a sentence, beginning with, “I am sure it will give me . . .,” that equals nearly 575 words in a letter to Mons. Dupont (October 1789), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 3:107–9.

⁷⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 268.

“must be made moral or pious.”⁷¹ Hence, only the moral imagination may demonstrate wisdom because it is cautious and careful.

Second, the moral imagination is vigilant. It examines whether any vices lurk unawares beneath the surface of a potential course of action, especially if that path would destroy something that is otherwise majestic. Weaver cited this passage as evidence of Burke’s argument of circumstance.⁷² Of course, wisdom weighs circumstance, but it does not do so absent justice. In summary, the moral imagination is an awed imagination that demonstrates wisdom by its caution and vigilance. By contrast, the immoral imagination does not concern itself with virtue.

This section has demonstrated the interplay between the moral imagination and the virtues of humility, truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom. Therefore, it provides something of a counterproposal to Ian Crowe’s suggestion that “Burke, appears, on the whole, to have used the term [‘imagination’] unfavorably, or at least as a faculty always to be held in proper restraint by the higher virtues.”⁷³ Crowe rightly observes that Burke believed the higher virtues should hold the imagination in check because it is liable to malformation, which the latter half of this chapter demonstrates. However, Burke believed the higher virtues should hold all of man’s faculties and powers in check, not just imagination, meaning that he did not view the imagination as such unfavorably. The issue is morals, not imagination, because imagination is an ever-present faculty of human nature that the person forms according either to virtue or to vice.

⁷¹ John Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure, 1789–1832: Aesthetics, Politics and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35.

⁷² Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, 68n24a.

⁷³ Ian Crowe, ed., “The Whig Imagination of Edmund Burke,” in *Imaginative Whig*, 2.

The Immoral Imagination and Vice

While Burke never formally used the expression “immoral imagination,” he demonstrated it throughout his writings and speeches. He discussed the imagination that is weak and juvenile, infected and strange, disordered and distempered, unbounded and wild, and finally, revolutionary. The immoral imagination often begins with inattention and neglect but over time grows into something truly unruly and vicious. If the moral imagination builds up people, society, and civilization, the immoral imagination tears them down. If the moral imagination begins with humility, the immoral imagination begins with vanity.

The Vain Imagination

Burke referred to the concept of a vain imagination (or an absurd imagination) on several occasions, whether in the context of Ireland, the Colonies, or France. Generally, it refers to a bad idea with the potential for genuine harm to society. Thus, the vain imagination is a dangerous imagination. Additionally, it results from the failure to form a moral imagination. Because it does not cultivate humility, it does not exhibit virtue or face circumstance; it looks ultimately to the self.

For instance, Burke wrote in his *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws* of the “vain imagination that superstition or enthusiasm holds forth,” referring to the “bigotry and fanaticism” that imposes penal laws against Irish Catholics.⁷⁴ Conjoined with fanaticism, the vain imagination becomes what Ross Carroll characterizes as the “inflamed imagination.”⁷⁵ It is not formed by virtues like justice and sympathy; it is not checked by reason. Similarly, approximately ten years later, during the American War for Independence, Burke criticized a plan for “dividing the colonies” as a “vain imagination”

⁷⁴ Edmund Burke, *Tracts Relating to Popery Laws* (1765), in *Writings*, 9:479–80.

⁷⁵ Ross Carroll, “Revisiting Burke’s Critique of Enthusiasm,” *History of Political Thought* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 333.

that would “protract the war” and “complicate its horrors and miseries.”⁷⁶ In this example, the vain imagination is a bad and dangerous idea that refuses to face concrete circumstance. Burke employed an analogous usage during the French Revolution when he considered the prospect of a defensive war with France as the “most absurd of all imaginations.”⁷⁷ Bad policy, whether with respect to Catholics, Colonists, or Jacobins, results from a vain imagination; more generally, bad ideas result from a vain imagination. Not every vain imagination is equally dangerous, but the vain imagination of a leader with the power to realize his ideas can be quite dangerous and deadly.

Closely related to Burke’s concept of the vain imagination is his reflection of the ethics of vanity in *National Assembly*. He began his explanation of this concept by reflecting on the passion of love, which shapes people and societies alike. He explains that love is so “powerful” that it “decides the character for ever,” and “the mode and the principles on which it engages the sympathy, and strikes the imagination, become of the utmost importance to the morals and manners of every society.”⁷⁸ Here, Burke demonstrated the reciprocal relationship of imagination and passion. The imagination gives rise to love, but the mode and principles of love also strike one’s imagination and engage his sympathy. Love reflecting virtue reinforces a moral imagination and engages true sympathy, whereas love reflecting vice augments an immoral imagination and perverts sympathy. That is, if the love of self, or vanity, strikes the imagination, it becomes a vain imagination; it does not humble itself to others but looks to the self. The stakes on such matters as character formation are nothing less than society itself because the individual imagination invariably impacts the social imagination.

⁷⁶ Edmund Burke, *Second Speech on Conciliation* (November 16, 1775), in *Writings*, 3:189–90.

⁷⁷ Edmund Burke to William Windham (August 18, 1793), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 4:133.

⁷⁸ Burke, *National Assembly*, 316–17.

Burke then illustrated the vain imagination by appealing to Jean-Jacques Rousseau who signified many of the French Enlightenment philosophers. Burke described him as the “great professor and founder of the philosophy of vanity” and “ethics of vanity.” Furthermore, he was “eccentric” and “deranged” and a “little short of madness . . . the insane Socrates.” Whereas the “real virtue” of humility leads to “sound reason,” the “new-invented virtue” of vanity leads to a “deranged understanding” and “madness.”⁷⁹ So, the vain imagination leads not simply to a disordered imagination but even to an insane imagination. In this way, Burke showed continuity with his earlier remarks on the connections between love, imagination, and madness from the *Enquiry* more than thirty years prior.

Burke’s critics have interpreted his evaluation of Rousseau as representing polemics. Hazlitt even accused Burke of having the vain imagination: “When he took a side, his vanity or his spleen more frequently gave the casting vote than his judgment; and the fieriness of his zeal was in exact proportion to the levity of his understanding, and the want of conscious sincerity.”⁸⁰ Such remarks demonstrate the profound disagreement resulting from an ethic based on the inheritance of a moral imagination, and its implications for human nature and human society, and an ethic that has torn off the decent drapery of a moral imagination.

An ethic of vanity may dismiss the religion of Christianity, but it does not dismiss religion; it only exchanges a true religion for a false one. Using religious language, Burke explained an ethic of vanity as pursuing the “regeneration of the moral constitution of man.”⁸¹ Disliking the given nature of man, the revolutionary seeks to reconstitute man after his own image but, in so doing, turns man into something unnatural

⁷⁹ Burke, *National Assembly*, 312–15 (italics removed).

⁸⁰ Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Burke,” 266.

⁸¹ Burke, *National Assembly*, 315.

and immoral. Specifically, an ethic of vanity attacks the principle of noble equality for what Daniel O’Neill calls “democratic equality.”⁸² Under this vision, as Burke explained it, no person has a “plain duty” to another person. Institutions, nobility, religion, and parents warrant suspicion not submission.⁸³ Youth do not owe a duty to parents or teachers. Not even parents owe a duty to children; instead, they should repudiate the “natural feelings” of love for a child. Certainly, spouses do not owe a duty to one another. All such notions offend the basic “rights of men.”⁸⁴

In place of duty to God, heritage, parent, spouse, and child, the revolutionary looks to self. An ethic of vanity may presume to work with others, but it is ultimately in service of the individual. Burke characterized this “selfish, flattering, seductive, ostentatious vice” by several names, including “pride,” “self-conceit,” and “vanity,” and when it is “full grown,” it is the “worst of vices,” being “omnivorous” and precipitating other “vulgar vices.”⁸⁵ It destroys both the person and society because it is anti-social, turning against the “order of civil society”⁸⁶ in the name of “unsocial independence.”⁸⁷

One of the vulgar vices to which an ethic of vanity leads is sexual vice. Burke wrote that it results in an “unfashioned, indelicate, sour, gloomy, ferocious medley of pedantry and lewdness; of metaphysical speculations, blended with the coarsest

⁸² Daniel I. O’Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 207. Burke did not discuss the concept of noble equality per se in *National Assembly* but rather the principle behind the concept, namely, the role of hierarchy in a society even down to the parent-child relationship.

⁸³ Burke, *National Assembly*, 313.

⁸⁴ Burke, *National Assembly*, 315–16.

⁸⁵ Burke, *National Assembly*, 312–14. Burke also characterized this vice as “presumption” (332). Cf. Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 109; and José Brunner, “From Rousseau to Totalitarian Democracy: The French Revolution in J. L. Talmon’s Historiography,” *History and Memory* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 76–80.

⁸⁶ Burke, *National Assembly*, 324.

⁸⁷ Burke, *National Assembly*, 314.

sensuality.”⁸⁸ When the person relies on metaphysical abstractionism rather than facing concrete reality, he may justify anything. Allan Bloom interpreted Burke to mean nothing less than “the sexual revolution accompanying the political revolution.” Beginning with Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, “oceans of novels and poems . . . educated the tastes.”⁸⁹

Burke commented on this point, saying, “Through this same instructor [Rousseau], by whom they [revolutionaries] corrupt the morals, they corrupt the taste.” For over forty years, Burke had reflected on the destructive power of immoral art and inordinate love. When bad morality is promoted and adopted, it destroys people, and it destroys societies. However, true moral taste is not based in metaphysical abstractionism, and it is not subject to the whims of the vain, deluded, and wild imagination. As Burke stated, “A moral taste is not of force to turn vice into virtue.”⁹⁰ Burke’s consideration of Rousseau illustrated his discussion from the *Enquiry* of the three “principal links” in the “great chain of society”: sympathy, imitation, and ambition.⁹¹ How people form their sympathies and who they imitate powerfully shape their ambitions. If people follow leaders like Rousseau, their ethics will reflect his ethic, and society will be remade.

J. S. Hoffman and Paul Levack explained the revolutionaries this way: “Not having made the world themselves, but being creatures of Him who made it and providentially sustained it, men became victims of a vain imagination when they fancied, as did the philosophers of the Enlightenment, that they could grasp the rationale of the

⁸⁸ Burke, *National Assembly*, 317.

⁸⁹ Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 39–40. Cf. Patrick Riley, *Civilizing Sex: On Chastity and the Common Good*, Bloomsbury Academic Collections: Religious Studies; Religion, Sexuality, and Gender (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000; repr., New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 141.

⁹⁰ Burke, *National Assembly*, 316. The references to the language of “vain,” “deluded,” and “wild” come from 315, 305, and 325, respectively.

⁹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 220.

created order, or history, and of the social and political composition of the human race.”⁹² The fundamental problem of the vain imagination is that it exchanges humility for hubris, which then blinds people to morality and reality.⁹³ Hence, Irving Babbitt contrasted Burke’s “moral imagination” that emphasizes “moral realism” from Rousseau’s “idyllic imagination” that emphasizes “political idealism.”⁹⁴ But such moral idealism is hubristic—to say nothing of the point that it is based on bad morals. In the end, the path of revolution (e.g., moral, social, sexual, political) against the inheritance of a moral imagination does not produce a better human. It produces, said Burke, a “monster.”⁹⁵

While Burke sympathized with the French monarchs and nobility, he clearly also faulted them, accusing them of a vain imagination. For example, approximately six months after *National Assembly*, he expressed in *Thoughts on French Affairs* that Louis XVI’s downfall resulted partly “because he could not bear the inconveniences which are attached to every thing human; because he found himself cooped up, and in durance by those limits which nature prescribes to desire and imagination; and was taught to consider as low and degrading, that mutual dependance which Providence has ordained that all men should have on one another.” Louis refused to endure inconvenience, confinement, limitation, and mutual dependence. The moral imagination humbles itself before the limits of nature and the designs of Providence; Louis demonstrated a vain imagination by rebelling against those limits and designs. His desire “deluded” him to “ruin,” and he

⁹² J. S. Hoffman and Paul Levack, eds., “Introduction: Burke’s Philosophy of Politics,” in *Burke’s Politics: Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke on Reform, Revolution, and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), xiv.

⁹³ See Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 179.

⁹⁴ Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 70–116. Cf. Daniel E. Ritchie, “Desire and Sympathy, Passion and Providence: The Moral Imaginations of Burke and Rousseau,” in *Burke and the French Revolution: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Steven Blakemore (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 120–44.

⁹⁵ Burke, *National Assembly*, 309.

effectively “pulled down the pillars which upheld his throne.”⁹⁶ Hence, Charles Parkin explained, Louis “unwittingly” contributed to his own downfall.⁹⁷ Man may repudiate the order of nature only so long before he suffers the consequences of nature’s law. The moral imagination accepts the responsibilities God has given the person. The vain imagination does not cultivate the faculty according to proper morals but reveals an imagination that is weak and juvenile.

The Weak and Juvenile Imagination

In addition to characterizing the immoral imagination as vain, Burke described it as weak and juvenile. For example, in his *Enquiry*, while discussing the causes of the sublime, he observed that a mob may overwhelm the imagination: the “shouting of multitudes . . . amazes and confounds the imagination.”⁹⁸ For this reason, the moral imagination cultivates mental fortitude to withstand the draw of the crowd. Again, against the backdrop of Colonial conflict, Burke stated, “Do not entertain so weak an imagination,” in reference to the idea that the “dead instruments” of bonds and other securities would ensure economic prosperity for England and the Colonies, pointing rather to economic freedom.⁹⁹ Just as the weak imagination may be overwhelmed by sense experience, it may also be overcome with bad ideas because it does not see the world rightly and refuses to face actual circumstance. Bad ideas may be popular, but the moral imagination cultivates the mental strength to stand up to them and to propose better, more realistic solutions to problems that may exist.

⁹⁶ Burke, *French Affairs*, 374. Burke mentioned only “nature” in this passage, but “law of nature” appears within the broader context (383).

⁹⁷ Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke’s Political Thought: An Essay* (Cambridge University Press, 1956; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 61.

⁹⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 250.

⁹⁹ Burke, *Conciliation with America*, 165.

Whereas Burke pointed to Rousseau as exemplifying a vain imagination, he pointed to Charles James Fox as exemplifying a weak imagination. Writing amid the French Revolution, Burke explained that “a new scheme of liberty and equality was produced in the world, which either dazzled his imagination, or was suited to some new walks of ambition, which were then opened to his view.”¹⁰⁰ Burke was deeply concerned about Fox adopting revolutionary ideas, and he believed that Fox’s weak imagination was dazzled by bad ideas as a gloss that covers ingenuous falsehoods but does not belong to the virtue of truth and that his moral judgment did not throw stumbling blocks in the way of a deceived imagination.¹⁰¹ The weak imagination may lead to dissolved friendships and destroyed societies. Tragically, Fox’s adoption of radical notions of liberty and equality led to the end of Burke’s friendship with him, and the people’s adoption of those ideas led to the end of a civilization. “But the age of chivalry is gone.”¹⁰²

Related to the weak imagination is the juvenile imagination. For a youth to have a juvenile imagination is natural; one must cultivate the virtues of strength and maturity. For an adult to have a juvenile imagination is unbefitting. Several years prior to the Revolution, Burke observed in a letter that Fox received applause “from those whose juvenile imagination is captivated with, a beautiful form of things.”¹⁰³ Burke thereby criticized the imagination that understands political ideas in an elementary manner rather than with depth and substance. The broader context of Burke’s remarks concerned liberty and other civic principles. All kinds of political leaders or political commentators may affirm ideas that sound good, but unless the person understands what they mean by the words they use—even good sounding words like “liberty” and “equality” and

¹⁰⁰ Edmund Burke, *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority* (1793), in *Writings*, 8:407.

¹⁰¹ See Burke, *Vindication*, 135; and Burke, *Enquiry*, 207–8, 268.

¹⁰² Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

¹⁰³ Edmund Burke to [Henry Homer] (November 1786), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 5:294.

“fraternity”—his imagination may become easily captivated or dazzled or enchanted by unworthy objects. The same principle applies to ideas of all sorts, not just political ones. The juvenile imagination is easily captured and swayed by a stronger influence.

Burke referred again to the juvenile imagination several years later in the immediate aftermath of revolutionaries storming the French palace and parading the decollated heads of two bodyguards through the streets. As previously argued, he was not unsympathetic toward the plight of the French people; he bemoaned the fact that they lived hungry and lacked “internal freedom, security, and good order.” However, he observed that an oppressive political and social state often creates the conditions for people to have an “irregular and juvenile imagination.”¹⁰⁴ Burke thus illustrated the important role that broader society plays in shaping the imaginations of its members. He was not suggesting the person cannot maintain a moral imagination during difficult social conditions, but he recognized it can be difficult.

Bromwich remarks, “Each individual is tested at every moment of a revolutionary age. Burke himself is on the line, and so is the reader.”¹⁰⁵ Opposition reveals what people are made of, imaginatively speaking. The moral imagination cultivates the virtue of fortitude, which together with moral judgment is strong enough to resist the crowd and to reject their bad ideas even when it is difficult to do so, whether because of social or political pressure. The moral imagination does not assent to ideas if the person has a superficial understanding of them; it seeks to comprehend them in a thoughtful manner. By contrast, the weak and juvenile imagination does not humble itself before proper authorities, and over time it becomes infected and strange.

¹⁰⁴ Burke to Mons. Dupont, 107–9.

¹⁰⁵ Bromwich, *Moral Imagination*, 8.

The Infected and Strange Imagination

Burke worried that the disease of French doctrine would spread beyond France's borders and infect the other European countries.¹⁰⁶ So, in *French Affairs*, he lamented that French doctrine had "infected" the German imagination. Rather than cultivating their minds by the "heterogeneous body of old principles," they looked to the "modern laws and liberties," representative of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which induced them "to think lightly of their governments, and to judge of grievances not by feeling, but by imagination."¹⁰⁷ Here, Burke criticized the revolutionaries for judging their grievances with an infected imagination rather than relying upon feelings reflective of the old principles. Hence, Leo Damrosch characterizes "imagination" as the "private extravagance by which consensus is threatened" and "feeling" as the "mechanism by which consensus is held together."¹⁰⁸ However, Burke's criticism was not with imagination per se but with the infected imagination particularly.

Whereas Burke had previously described the power of feeling as arising from the faculty of imagination in his *Enquiry*, he contrasted feeling and imagination in *French Affairs*. This variance may lead some interpreters to wonder whether he had shifted his understanding of the imagination-feeling relationship over the intervening decades. However, that conclusion is unwarranted because his engagement with these ideas in the *Enquiry* is distinct from his engagement with them in *French Affairs* because the *Enquiry* concerns anthropology and *French Affairs* concerns social ethics. Concepts like imagination and feeling, in Burke's view, simultaneously characterize individuals and societies and may represent virtue or vice, depending on how the individual imagination

¹⁰⁶ Incidentally, Thomas Paine also made this observation in a letter to Burke, except that he believed it was good rather than bad: "The Revolution in France is certainly a forerunner to other Revolutions in Europe" (Thomas Paine to EB, 17 January 1790, in *Correspondence*, 6:71, quoted in Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 616).

¹⁰⁷ Burke, *French Affairs*, 349.

¹⁰⁸ Leopold Damrosch, *Fictions of Reality in the Age of Hume and Johnson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 181–82.

or social imagination has cultivated them. Therefore, Burke's discussions of imagination and feeling in these two sources are not incongruous.

The adoption of the inheritance of a moral imagination engenders proper feeling, proper sentiments, about God, morals, society, and the like. However, the infected imagination may reject that inheritance and judge social grievances according to its own sickness. While feeling arises from imagination, imagination may also rebel against feeling. In the face of social grievances, the imagination may envision the possibility of sensible reform or senseless revolution; the former builds up society, but the latter tears it down. Again, Burke was not lacking in criticism toward leadership. Just as he blamed Louis XVI for his faults, he likewise blamed the German government for its faults, describing it as being "mild and indulgent" and holding a "loose rein" over "the people in these provinces."¹⁰⁹ However, a moral imagination does not give itself to revolution to right wrongs.

Just as people may demonstrate an infected imagination, they may also demonstrate a strange imagination. Burke used this expression in different ways. He used it in his *Speech on Fox's India Bill* to mean naive or unrealistic, such as the person who believes the injustice in India could be set right in a few years.¹¹⁰ Then, in his *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, he discussed some "French gentlemen" with a "strange imagination" who "would as gladly receive military rank from Russia, or Austria, or Prussia, as from the Regent of France."¹¹¹ Both the infected imagination and the strange imagination fail to cultivate certain characteristics of a moral imagination, including prudence, judgment, sensibility, and loyalty. It thinks of self rather than country or

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *French Affairs*, 349.

¹¹⁰ Burke, *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, 446.

¹¹¹ Burke, *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies* (1793), in *Writings*, 8:472–73.

inheritance. However, the vain imagination may not simply be infected and strange; it may also be disordered and distempered.

The Disordered and Distempered Imagination

Burke's interactions with the disordered and distempered imagination suggest a more egregious characterization than the previous designations. It is not balanced by proper reason, and it is not based on good morals. It presents the true as false and the false as true, and it leads to madness and fanaticism in life, religion, and politics. By contrast, the moral imagination is balanced by good reason and based on good morals. In addition, it guards against dangerous innovation and protects order and peace.

Burke illustrated the "disordered imagination" as early as the *Enquiry* amid his discussion of the sublime. There, he spoke of the "forsaken lover" who has "suffered" in his imagination¹¹² and the madman who has a "disordered imagination" that is "unrestrained by the curb of reason."¹¹³ Whereas Karen Swann argues that neither the forsaken lover nor the madman truly experiences the sublime, Henry Hart believes they experience the "pathological pitfalls" of the sublime and that they produce "incapacitating frenzies."¹¹⁴ Burke seems to argue that all kinds of people may experience the sublime, including forsaken lovers and madmen. The dispositive question is whether the experience reveals an ordered imagination or a disordered imagination, whether it reveals a "delightful horror" or madness.¹¹⁵

Burke was not thereby arguing that all people with a disordered imagination are raving lunatics. He was observing that the disordered imagination may lead to

¹¹² Burke, *Enquiry*, 217–18.

¹¹³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 244.

¹¹⁴ Karen Swann, "The Sublime and the Vulgar," *College English* 52, no. 1 (Jan 1990): 16–17; Henry Hart, *Robert Lowell and the Sublime* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 102–3.

¹¹⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 243, 288.

madness and that everyone who is mad has a disordered imagination. He gave the example of a person who hears a remark, complaint, or song. Because the imagination has the power of resemblance, it has the power of repetition so that the person may repeat the remark, complaint, or song in his mind. For most people the “repetitions decay” over time.¹¹⁶ However, the madman’s imagination remains *ad infinitum* in “constant repetition,” and “every repetition reinforces it with new strength.”¹¹⁷ The madman comes to view the world through the distorted lens of his obsession.¹¹⁸

As Burke’s career developed, he illustrated the disordered imagination in terms of revolutionary leaders who demonstrated a sort of madness. Their imaginations remained in constant repetition of their object to the point that revolutionary ideals malformed their epistemic outlooks. As people in positions of power, they sought to order the world after a false image but in so doing exemplified a disordered imagination because they pursued their object at any cost, even at the cost of civilization itself. As Adam Wasson explains, “The disordered imagination reveals its disorder through its very attempt to maintain order.”¹¹⁹ Hence, Burke issued severe warnings about the prospects of such people occupying positions of leadership.

Burke examined this point with respect to both religious and political leaders. For instance, in his Speech on Clerical Subscription, he explained he supported clerical subscription because he wanted to guard against unreasonable clergy filling pulpits: “Suffer men of distempered imaginations, who yet believe in scripture, to become

¹¹⁶ Tom Huhn, *Imitation and Society: The Persistence of Mimesis in the Aesthetics of Burke, Hogarth, and Kant* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 20–21.

¹¹⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 244.

¹¹⁸ Karl Axelsson describes the disordered imagination as being an “undisciplined” and an “unmanageable imagination” (*The Sublime: Precursors and British Eighteenth-Century Conceptions* [New York: Peter Lang, 2007], 203).

¹¹⁹ Adam Wasson, “Dying between the Lines: Infinite Blindness in Lessing’s ‘Laokoon’ and Burke’s ‘Enquiry,’” *Poetics Today* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 193–94.

preachers, and you may absolutely exterminate all rational Christianity, and bring disgrace upon the very name.” Just as the disordered imagination is unrestrained by reason, the distempered imagination is irrational.

However, though Burke criticized rationalism, he staunchly defended reason. He criticized rationalism by appeal to Isaiah 55:8, explaining that God’s ways are “inscrutable” and “incomprehensible”; reason has its limits. But Burke did not thereby discard reason: “We are not . . . to forget the use of that guide [reason] which God has given us for our direction.”¹²⁰ Ordered reason guards against a distempered imagination. Burke’s remarks here are consistent with his earlier statements in the *Enquiry* that God has given man reason, but that reason cannot unravel the “great chain of causes” linking back to the “throne of God.”¹²¹

In Burke’s view, clerical subscription protects people from the terrible spiritual and social consequences that follow from religious leaders with distempered imaginations. First, it protects people from “heterogeneous” interpretations of Scripture that threaten spiritual damnation. Second, clerical subscription safeguards “order and decorum, and public peace” by keeping people with distempered imaginations from inspiring people unto immoral action.¹²² Here, Burke demonstrated consistency with his earlier remarks that true religion bears both truth value and social value.¹²³ Burke was clearly not a Baptist (though he supported a form of religious liberty) because he knew the power of imagination to destroy both social fabrics and spiritual estates.

Just as Burke warned against religious leaders with disordered-distempered imaginations, he also warned against political leaders with poorly formed imaginations.

¹²⁰ Edmund Burke, Speech on Clerical Subscription (February 6, 1772), in *Writings*, 2:362–63.

¹²¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 283; cf. 268.

¹²² Burke, Speech on Clerical Subscription, 362–64.

¹²³ Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton (October 15, 1744), 56–57; Burke, “The Minute Book and Notes,” 252; Edmund Burke, *The Reformer* no. 11 (April 7, 1748), in *Writings*, 1:116–17

For this reason, he described Rousseau by words like “madman,” “deranged,” and “insane.”¹²⁴ Additionally, within a month of publishing *National Assembly*, Burke criticized the “most distempered imagination” of absurd and dangerous ministers and fanatics who have legitimized the Rights of Man.¹²⁵ He even clarified amid the Hastings impeachment proceedings that he, a political leader, did not have a “disordered imagination” concerning his charges against Debi Singh and could substantiate them by “authentic reports.”¹²⁶ That is, the disordered imagination is not simply unbalanced by reason but also unconcerned with morals, treating falsehood as truth.

Religious and political leaders with a disordered-distempered imagination are so dangerous because they lead entire societies astray. People whose minds are clothed with the inheritance of a moral imagination by virtue of the society in which they live but have not disciplined their minds are apt to listen to such leaders and tear off the decent drapery and take to the streets in a naked fit. A disordered imagination overwhelms them in sublime passion with the siren song of a mob, and they become mad.¹²⁷ Luke Gibbons bears out this connection between Burke’s madman and the revolutionary: “For Burke, the equivalent of this contagion [of madness] at a public level is to be found in the tumult of the mob during political unrest.”¹²⁸

Though the person with a disordered-distempered imagination sees the world falsely, he attacks the person who sees it truly. Burke made this point in the *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*. Describing his former House colleagues as “vulgar politicians,” he

¹²⁴ Burke, *On Education*, 244 (“madman”); Burke, *National Assembly*, 314 (“deranged,” “insane”).

¹²⁵ Edmund Burke to John King (May 1, 1791), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 9:436–37.

¹²⁶ Burke, *Trial of Warren Hastings: Speech on the Sixth Charge*, 31–32.

¹²⁷ Burke, *Enquiry*, 250.

¹²⁸ Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 162.

wrote, “They are out of themselves in any course of conduct recommended only by conscience and glory. A large, liberal and prospective view of the interests of States passes with them for romance; and the principles that recommend it for the wanderings of a disordered imagination.”¹²⁹ In other words, the “vulgar politician,” which Frans De Bruyn characterizes as a term of the “vilest opprobrium,” thinks that only a disordered imagination would follow principles that place others before self.¹³⁰ However, the vulgar politician sees the world wrongly.

Rhetorical prowess on full display, Burke stated, “Virtue is not their habit.”¹³¹ Because they have thrown off the inheritance of a moral imagination, they do not wear the habit of virtue, and consequently, they do not practice the habit of virtue. By contrast, the virtuous politician orders his imagination by selflessness rather than selfishness. The broader context for Burke’s remarks concerns the prospect of peace with a regicide France. Burke’s former colleagues believed England should make peace with France, but, says Norman, Burke believed this approach demonstrated “shallowness and short-termism.”¹³²

Burke believed that making peace with revolutionaries is akin to making peace with criminals or negotiating with terrorists. As he stated in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, “We are at war with a system . . . with an armed doctrine.”¹³³ Again, he explained, “This pretended Republic is founded in crimes, and exists by wrong and robbery. . . . To be at peace with robbery is to be an accomplice with it.”¹³⁴ The best response to public

¹²⁹ Burke, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 267.

¹³⁰ Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke*, 135.

¹³¹ Burke, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 267.

¹³² Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 160.

¹³³ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 199 (italics removed).

¹³⁴ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 253.

discontent and political robbery is not concession with robbers but demonstration of virtue.¹³⁵ Courageously pursuing the virtue of state interest above self-interest against the vice of political robbery does not signify a disordered imagination. Rather, the failure to stand against such vices reveals the disordered imagination.

The Unbounded and Wild Imagination

In addition to becoming disordered and distempered, the immoral imagination may become unbounded and wild. This sense of “unbounded” is different from that which Burke used to describe George Savile’s “unbounded,” or resourceful, imagination in the *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*.¹³⁶ Rather, this usage refers to the imagination that is not bound by morality or even reality. Thus, the unbounded imagination is also a disordered-distempered imagination.

The French Revolution provided Burke with ample evidence for this idea. In the *Appeal*, he wrote, “There is a boundary to men’s passions when they act from feeling; none when they are under the influence of imagination.”¹³⁷ Rousseau, of all people, stated something similar some thirty years prior in *Émile*: “The world of reality has its bounds, the world of imagination is boundless.”¹³⁸ However, Rousseau and Burke certainly meant different things by these expressions. Burke was not suggesting that imagination is literally unbounded, believing rather that it is limited by its capacity and experience. He was observing the potential for the imagination to traverse moral bounds. The “doctrines” promoted by the unbounded imagination “admit no limit, no qualification whatsoever.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Cf. David Craig, “Burke and the Constitution,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 112–14.

¹³⁶ Burke, *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election*, 644.

¹³⁷ Burke, *Appeal*, 460.

¹³⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (1911; repr., London: Dent, 1969), 45.

¹³⁹ Burke, *Appeal*, 469.

Several scholars interpret “imagination” from this passage to mean “reason” and consequently highlight the importance of moral feeling to limit the dangers and abuses of reason.¹⁴⁰ Certainly, as argued from Burke’s work in the *Enquiry*, he believed the imagining and reasoning faculties overlap.¹⁴¹ Even so, they are distinct, and here, Burke used the term “imagination” not “reason.” Nevertheless, the emphasis on feeling is right. The moral imagination balances itself not only with proper reason but also with proper feeling, which is nothing less than the inheritance of a moral imagination, which Harvey C. Mansfield describes as “manners.”¹⁴² When the person cuts the imagination off from his other faculties and the tradition, which safeguard it from vanity and immorality, it becomes exceedingly dangerous.¹⁴³

Other interpreters interacting with this passage comment on Burke’s usage of “imagination.” Ian David Newman posits that Burke envisioned the imagination as a “transgressive power capable of exceeding human intention” and a “riotous speculation ungrounded by moral sentiment” that “needs to be regulated.” He states further that the imagination is “wild, unpredictable, and lies dangerously outside of the control of the subject.”¹⁴⁴ Burke undoubtedly recognized the destructive potential for imagination and the need to regulate it by good morals. But Burke also believed that moral reason and a moral will may counteract the treacherous imagination. The person may cultivate a moral

¹⁴⁰ E.g., Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke’s Political Thought*, 106 (“uncontrolled reason”); Frohnen, *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism*, 43–44 (“philosophical [or speculative] reason”); and Greg Weiner, *Old Whigs: Burke, Lincoln, and the Politics of Prudence* (New York: Encounter, 2019), (“unbounded reason”).

¹⁴¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206.

¹⁴² Harvey C. Mansfield, *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (1965; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 216.

¹⁴³ See Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure*, 37.

¹⁴⁴ Ian David Newman, “Tavern Talk: Literature, Politics, and Conviviality” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), 135.

imagination, which has incredible power for good, or an immoral imagination, which has incredible power for bad.

God made imagination to work together with reason and feeling. However, each of these powers can become dangerous in different ways when they are divorced from the others and ungrounded by true morals. The imagination that is not curbed by moral reason and moral feeling becomes immoral and impacts not just persons but peoples. Thus, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, “Burke traced revolutionary fanaticism to an excess of ‘imagination’ . . . and to a deficiency in ‘feeling.’”¹⁴⁵ By contrast, a wise person cultivates a moral imagination that is not swept away by the “powerful imaginative appeal” of fanaticism and revolution. Similarly, the wise institution, including the state, encourages a moral imagination among its members because imaginative excess and revolutionary zeal threaten whole communities and civilizations.¹⁴⁶

In addition to losing touch with true morals, the unbounded imagination loses touch with reality; that is, its problems are axiological and epistemological. Burke remarked on this point in a letter to his son Richard: “Let us not make the malignant fictions of our own imaginations heated with factious controversies.” Such imaginations are not bound by reality but create fictions from the circumstances at hand. The context of this statement concerns the selective zeal of clergy who “cry out” when the “indigent and disorderly” populace riot about tithes but seem unconcerned about the people’s hunger and drunkenness. These religious leaders did not understand the true cause of such riots. “Alas!” declared Burke, “it is not about Popes, but about potatoes that the minds of this unhappy people are agitated. It is not from the spirit of zeal, but the spirit of

¹⁴⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 118.

¹⁴⁶ Frederick S. Troy, “Edmund Burke and the Break with Tradition: History vs Psychohistory,” *The Massachusetts Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 122. See also Zachary R. Goldsmith, *Fanaticism: A Political Philosophical History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 85.

whiskey, that these wretches act.”¹⁴⁷ Again, Burke was not unsympathetic toward the masses, and he was not uncritical toward its leaders.

While the inventive imagination may create good fictions, it may also create bad ones. In this case, the clergy failed to cultivate a sympathetic imagination toward the people, and they interpreted the circumstances in a manner that was not bound by circumstance. Burke explained that the failure of religious leaders to cultivate properly sympathetic and bounded imaginations is “equally dishonourable and unsafe to Religion, and to the State” because it creates a condition for false accusations, reciprocal abhorrence, and social disorder.¹⁴⁸ The unbounded or “undisciplined” imagination, said Parkin, “spins theories and speculations on the circumstances of things totally different from those in which we live and move,” leading to “universal discontent.”¹⁴⁹

Burke believed that political disorder should be punished but not always to the point of treason like some religious and political leaders were suggesting. Also, it should be understood. To address social problems effectively, the leader must discipline his imagination to be bound by concrete reality and specific circumstance so that it does not take flight to the realms of conjecture and speculation. When two parties do not understand each other, they effectively talk past each other, aggravating tensions rather than assuaging them.

Left undomesticated, the unbounded imagination becomes a wild imagination, which is a vicious monster that commits gross injustice and supports riot and revolution. Burke discussed the wild imagination during the events of the Hastings impeachment and French Revolution. For example, Burke described the East India Company’s idea that it had “intermediate arbitrary power” over the Indian people as a “monster that never

¹⁴⁷ Burke to Richard Burke (post February 19, 1792), 649.

¹⁴⁸ Burke to Richard Burke (post February 19, 1792), 649.

¹⁴⁹ Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke’s Political Thought*, 106.

existed except in the wild imagination of some theorist.” Intermediate arbitrary power is the idea that an intermediate authority has arbitrary power over its subjects without bearing accountability to its superiors. Burke believed this theory was a “perversion of the principle that that power which is given for the protection of the people below should be responsible to the power above.”¹⁵⁰

Burke criticized this idea not only as perverse but also as a “gross confusion” and “gross absurdity” resulting in “gross abuse” and “gross [] crimes.”¹⁵¹ Whereas the moral imagination may become a confused imagination in the face of injustice, the immoral imagination may exemplify a confused imagination at the propagation of injustice. Burke accused the Company of “fraud, rapine and violence” and characterized its abuses a “monstrous wickedness” against the Indian people.¹⁵² Burke had touched on similar points three years prior when he condemned creditors who committed usury and satisfied debts by corruption, collusion, and fraud “in the fond imaginations of a sanguine avarice.”¹⁵³

Burke did not criticize the principle of power as such but only the perversion of the power, which he described in the *Reflections* as being “noxious to mankind,” offending both British and Indian principles of power.¹⁵⁴ The perversion of otherwise good principles is an immoral monster of a wild imagination that may destroy entire civilizations. For this reason, Burke wrote, “History consists, for the greater part, of the miseries brought upon the world by pride, ambition, avarice, revenge, lust, sedition,

¹⁵⁰ Edmund Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 16, 1788), in *Writings*, 6:352.

¹⁵¹ Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 16, 1788), 316 (“gross abuse”), 351 (“gross confusion”), 352 (“gross absurdity”), 368 (“gross [] crimes”).

¹⁵² Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 16, 1788), 351–52.

¹⁵³ Burke, *Speech on Nabob of Arcot’s Debts*, 510–11.

¹⁵⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 58. See also Swati Srivastava, *Hybrid Sovereignty in World Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 161 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 109.

hypocrisy, ungoverned zeal, and all the train of disorderly appetites.”¹⁵⁵ By contrast, the moral imagination holds to good principles and cultivates virtue.

Burke also invoked “wild imagination” in his Speech on Quebec Bill amid the parliamentary debate about whether Canada should have a constitution like France. Part of the debate concerned whether the purchase of a fleeting constitution is worth the cost of a violent revolution when confronted with monarchical injustice. While Burke did not defend injustice, neither did he defend the realization of an end through whatever means possible to the utter disregard of historical circumstance and social consequence. He described the idea as the “child of [a] wild ungoverned imagination.”¹⁵⁶ Therefore, Burke characterized the wild imagination not only in terms of a wild monster but also in terms of a hysterical child.

Burke explained further in the speech that many British people supported the French Revolution because the Gordon Riots, which had occurred in London some eleven years prior, had whetted their appetites for it. These riots were anti-Catholic demonstrations in response to the Papists Act 1778, which aimed to reduce discrimination against Catholics. Although Burke was an Anglican, he did not support the riots. In fact, he did not even support the anti-Catholic cause because he employed a sympathetic imagination toward Catholics. But even if he had supported the anti-Catholic cause, he likely would not have supported the riots because riot and revolution, in Burke’s mind, typify a wild imagination.

Contrariwise, because the moral imagination is governed by the virtues of justice and wisdom it not only acknowledges the injustice of kings but also contemplates the most prudent path of correction, which includes considerations of timing and consequence. Burke examined the Gordon Riots to illustrate these principles. Being an

¹⁵⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 189.

¹⁵⁶ Burke, Speech on Quebec Bill, 360.

Anglican, he believed it is important to defend Protestantism, but because the timing was imprudent, he did not believe the riots were the “hour to stand up for Protestantism.” Because “infinite mischief” filled the air, such a stand “would have clapped a firebrand to the pile,” and “all England would have blazed.”¹⁵⁷ As it happens, Burke did not believe the anti-Catholic cause was a right one because a state ought to afford religious liberty to Catholics. Even so, right causes pursued at wrong times or in wrong ways or to wrong ends become wrong causes; they become the children of a wild ungoverned imagination.

Riot and revolution are like the temper tantrum of a child who refuses to work through his frustrations maturely and rationally, and they are a poor means for addressing even legitimate grievances. Solutions proposed amid this spirit lack wisdom and foresight, and they do not endure. Their end is destruction. Parliament would pass the Constitutional Act 1791 the month following the Quebec speech, but like the French Constitution of 1791, it would not last. The wild imagination may observe genuine injustices, but its manner of interpreting them and means of redressing them often serves to multiply injustices in the end. By contrast, the moral imagination observes genuine injustices and stable solutions.

On several occasions, Burke referred similarly to “wild imaginations” to mean an outlandish idea or an undisciplined mind. Speaking amid the impeachment proceedings against Hastings, he evaluated the suggestion that Rajah Chait Singh rebelled against the East India Company as revealing “loose, wild, improbable imaginations.” Such an idea, he said, lacked sufficient evidence: “What reason under heaven could he have to go and seek another Master?”¹⁵⁸ While this usage is distinct from the other two, it is not altogether different because wild imaginations (or wild ideas), insofar as they

¹⁵⁷ Burke, Speech on Quebec Bill, 360–62.

¹⁵⁸ Burke, Speech in Reply (May 30, 1794), 297. Whether Burke’s evaluation of Singh’s relationship to the East India Company was correct is beyond my purposes.

exculpate otherwise unjust people, can be exceedingly “dangerous” by leaving the guilty unpunished.¹⁵⁹ Hence, the wild idea may also demonstrate an imagination that is not bound by the available evidence, signifying an imprudent imagination. Or the wild idea may even demonstrate an imagination that is not bound by proper morals, signifying an immoral imagination.

Again, several years later, Burke invoked “wild imaginations” in a letter to French Laurence: “I wish you by degrees to become a central point to which Men of talents might be aggregated. It would prevent them from wandering without a guide according to their several wild imaginations.”¹⁶⁰ Sometimes people develop wild imaginations because they lack worthy guides. Burke had remarked on the value of mentorship nearly fifty years prior in his *Enquiry* when he wrote of imitation: “It is by imitation far more than by precept that we learn every thing,” including “our manners” and “our opinions.”¹⁶¹

J. J. Sack argues that Burke practically “anointed Laurence as his successor” yet observes that he and other members of the “Burkean coterie ended up within ten years of the master’s death in alliance with that Foxite whig party from which Burke had recoiled in horror in the early 1790s.”¹⁶² Still, the principle underlying Burke’s remark, which is simply an application of his view of the moral imagination, holds. People need mentors to bequeath to them the inheritance of tradition. The failure of protégés to learn from their mentors does not render mentorship a farce; if anything, it highlights the

¹⁵⁹ Burke connected the wild imagination to danger on several occasions, e.g., *Reflections*, 115; and *Speech on Quebec Bill*, 360.

¹⁶⁰ Edmund Burke to French Laurence (December 23, 1796), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 9:197. A note at the beginning of the letter reads, “This letter is not in Burke’s hand,” but then the letter ends with the transcription of “E B” (196–97).

¹⁶¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 224.

¹⁶² J. J. Sack, “The Memory of Burke and the Memory of Pitt: English Conservatism Confronts Its Past, 1806–1829,” *The Historical Journal* 30, no. 3 (September 1987): 625–26. Other protégés included William Windham, William Elliot, and Earl Fitzwilliam.

immense worth of mentorship because the bequeathal of tradition is so difficult. Without leadership from “men of talents,” juvenile and undisciplined imaginations come to embrace revolution.

The Revolutionary Imagination

Finally, the immoral imagination, being vain and disordered and unbounded, may become a revolutionary imagination. Burke articulated the revolutionary imagination most clearly in the *Reflections*: “Plots, massacres, assassinations, seem to some people a trivial price for obtaining a revolution. A cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouze the imagination, grown torpid with the lazy enjoyment of sixty years security, and the still unanimating repose of public prosperity.”¹⁶³ Because the revolutionary imagination is infected with boredom, it is uninterested in reasonable reform and looks rather to violent revolution.¹⁶⁴ “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop” because the faculty of imagination is so powerful.

Burke used hundreds of metaphors throughout his career. In this instance, he employed the figure of the theater: “change of scene,” “magnificent stage effect,” and “grand spectacle.”¹⁶⁵ Many interpreters have commented on this imagery, for example stating that Burke found the “theatre of revolution” to be detestable, extreme, and violent.¹⁶⁶ However, John Jones, not unlike Ian David Newman, states that Burke

¹⁶³ Burke, *Reflections*, 115.

¹⁶⁴ See Ferdinand Mount, *The Theatre of Politics* (New York: Schocken, 1973), 193; and Anne Mallory, “Burke, Boredom, and the Theater of Counterrevolution,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 118, no. 2 (March 2003): 226–29.

¹⁶⁵ Rousseau and Wollstonecraft also appealed to the theater motif, albeit differently. See Steven Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 64–65; and Lisa Plummer Crafton, *Transgressive Theatricality, Romanticism, and Mary Wollstonecraft* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 77–108.

¹⁶⁶ Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies*, 64–65. Cf. Mount, *The Theatre of Politics*, 193–94; Ray, “The Metaphors of Edmund Burke,” 78; Esther H. Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 85; and Yuval Levin,

believed man falls for the spectacle of revolution because he uses imagination rather than reason. According to him, Burke linked “energy and imagination with the fires of Hell and with evil, thus demonizing energy and imagination and excluding them from proper human conduct. . . . Burke [saw] energy and imagination as the result of laziness and sloth and claims that individuals not only have no right to them but also want the government to subdue them.”¹⁶⁷

Indeed, Burke believed the government has an interest in the epistemic virtue of its citizens or subjects. Additionally, as this presentation of the immoral imagination argues, Burke discussed the genuine dangers of imagination throughout his career. Yet also he talked about the genuine dangers of reason. He did not ultimately privilege one faculty over the other but rather saw them each as mutually challenging or reinforcing the other, whether for the cause of virtue or vice. Whereas the moral imagination encourages virtue, the immoral imagination encourages vice.

Still, Burke did not write as one without hope toward the revolutionary: “Virtue is not wholly extinguished in the heart.”¹⁶⁸ The revolutionary imagination is not inevitable; Burke invited even them to cultivate what Whale calls a “moral and reverent imagination.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Burke invited all people to cultivate an imagination that is formed by humility, truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom. By so doing, they may engage the issues of authority, rights, and change, which are the topics of the following chapter, in a manner that reflects virtue.

The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left (New York: Basic, 2014), 189.

¹⁶⁷ John H. Jones, *Blake on Language, Power, and Self-Annihilation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 70.

¹⁶⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 166; cf. 86.

¹⁶⁹ Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure*, 35. Cf. George Kateb, *Patriotism and Other Mistakes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 118, 138.

CHAPTER 7

AUTHORITY, RIGHTS, AND CHANGE

The moral imagination is not cultivated in a vacuum. It requires nourishment, support, and protection. Hence, Burke spoke to the importance of the person humbling himself before moral authorities, such as tradition and religion, in an age of “enlightenment” that challenged them. While he supported moral causes promulgated by good authorities, he did not support immoral causes promulgated by bad authorities. For this reason, Burke criticized the concept of natural rights as they were articulated by Enlightenment radicals because they appealed to them as pretexts to eliminate otherwise good authorities.

Even so, Burke did not dismiss natural rights outright. Rather, he distinguished natural rights from false rights, believing that natural rights are properly interpreted and applied within the context of sociohistorical circumstance so that they become prescriptions, whereas false rights are abstracted from such conditions. Therefore, Burke valued tradition, but he was not committed irrevocably to it. He recognized the past has its flaws and consequently valued appropriate social change. But he believed the form of change is paramount. Whereas revolution generally destroys both the good and the bad, reformation improves the bad without demolishing the good, making sensible reform the way to true progress.

The Moral Imagination and Authority

Because the imagination may produce new images or combine images in a new manner, as Burke explained in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, it may build cultures and

societies, and it may invest elements of these creations with authority.¹ All people submit to an authority of some kind, even if to the authority of self. The object of authority to which a person submits then comes by the power of imagination to assume a symbolic role.² Consequently, the moral imagination may create moral cultures and societies, which form the bedrock of what Paddy Bullard calls the “politics of the beautiful.”³

At the same time, the moral imagination is cultivated by humbly submitting to the moral authorities of the inheritance. For Burke, moral institutions are the “source of human well-being,” and they ground one’s “allegiance and identity.”⁴ The moral imagination is not a weak imagination; it has the courage and strength to submit to moral authorities and to resist immoral ones. By contrast, the immoral imagination is disordered and malformed, rejecting good authorities and replacing them with bad ones. Although Burke defended many symbols of moral authority throughout his career, this section considers only the authorities of tradition, prejudice, community, religion, and government as he relates them to the doctrine of imagination.

Tradition

The moral imagination is, first, cultivated in the soils of good tradition. Speaking to the French revolutionaries in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* who rejected their inheritance, Burke explained, “Under a pious predilection for those ancestors, your imaginations would have realized in them a standard of virtue and wisdom, beyond the vulgar practice of the hour: and you would have risen with the

¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 201–2.

² Paul Fussell refers to “imagination” as a “symbol-making power” (*The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1965], 5).

³ Paddy Bullard, “Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology,” in *Cambridge Companion to Edmund Burke*, ed. David Dwan and Christopher J. Insole (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 64.

⁴ Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative* (New York: Basic, 2015), 258.

example to whose imitation you aspired.”⁵ Broadly speaking, this passage demonstrates Burke’s deep value of history. Even from his days of legal education at the Middle Temple, he enjoyed learning the “history of the laws” more than “writs, case-law, and procedures.”⁶ Furthermore, explained Francis Canavan, he believed that history is the stage of divine Providence.⁷ Therefore, space-time history, which gives rise to a peoples’ traditions, has moral value.⁸ Not all traditions reflect God’s will, but good ones do.

By nature, practically all people are born into cultures with established traditions, except in the rarest of exceptions, and practically all imaginations are shaped by those traditions in both noticeable and imperceptible ways. Eventually, the person reaches a stage in his development wherein he may exercise his will and choose consciously to accept, reform, or reject those traditions. The French revolutionaries chose to reject otherwise good traditions. The moral imagination adopts good traditions and reforms bad ones, whereas the immoral imagination rejects good traditions and forms bad ones.

Good traditions provide a standard of virtue and wisdom and an authority to follow. They are not simply abstract ideas but embodied ideas. Virtuous ancestors provide models, says John Barrell, that enable people to “find [them]selves in others” and form a “sense of historical continuity.”⁹ Such standards, such examples, are not small things. Additionally, because imagination has the power of metamorphosis, Irving Babbit

⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 86.

⁶ McLoughlin and Boulton, eds., *Essay*, 333.

⁷ Francis Canavan, *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1987), 149. See also Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (1967; repr., Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009), 24.

⁸ R. R. Fennessey, *Burke, Paine, and the Rights of Man: A Difference of Political Opinion* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), 55.

⁹ John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793–1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

explained it may transform the “forms of the past” into “imaginative symbols” of the present.¹⁰ Therefore, history and tradition are powerful authorities for the imagination.

Several interpreters comment on Burke’s view of the relationship of history, tradition, and symbol. Anne Norton describes Burke’s view of history as the “art of exegesis” rather than the “activity of discovery” by which an interpreter creates “historical fictions.” While she concedes these fictions are not “mere mystifications,” she calls them “fictions.”¹¹ Burke recognized that history is interpretation, but he also believed it is based on historical events. R. J. Smith’s interpretation is closer to Burke’s meaning in which “history and legend” coalesce into “historical myth.”¹² It is not based simply in fancy and invention but in ancestry and history. Good traditions form a mythos by which the moral imagination is anchored, giving it stability and protection from the immoral will. The past draws the moral imagination to an ethical center.¹³ Because God is providential in history, it takes on a sublime quality so that good traditions are a pathway to Him. Hence, Burke described virtue and wisdom, which are based in the past, as the “passport of Heaven to human place and honour.”¹⁴

However, the person cannot receive the benefit of this good tradition amid the vulgar hour except by a pious predilection of imagination. In the honor of father and mother is the gain of virtue and wisdom. By following good models, the person may form virtuous faculties and habits. As William F. Byrne puts it, good traditions help the person

¹⁰ Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 103–4. Cf. Annie Marion Osborn, *Rousseau and Burke: A Study of the Idea of Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (1940; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 107.

¹¹ Anne Norton, *Bloodrites of the Post-Structuralists: Word, Flesh and Revolution* (2002; repr., New York: Routledge, 2011), 76.

¹² R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest: Medieval Institutions in British Thought, 1688–1863* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 122–23.

¹³ Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, 109. Cf. William F. Byrne, *Edmund Burke for Our Time: Moral Imagination, Meaning, and Politics* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 107.

¹⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 101.

“develop an ethical will,” cultivate a “moral imagination,” and “exercise better judgment.”¹⁵ Therefore, the moral imagination humbles itself before the good symbols of tradition.

Notably, the moral imagination is not an imperialist imagination. Different groups have different traditions. Thus, Burke referred the French to their own “ancient states” and “generations.”¹⁶ Likewise, he had previously defended the Indian traditions of an Indian people during the Hastings impeachment proceedings. Certainly, a people may learn from another people by the virtue of sympathy, but each group has its own traditions according to their unique experiences, which invariably shape them.

Even so, a peoples’ traditions are not unchangeable by that people. For this reason, Neill Randolph Joy explains that “tradition is not fixed, but organic and creative.”¹⁷ Burke desired for the French revolutionaries to humble themselves before their ancestors’ example, but he fully recognized that the past and present are distinct. Still, the present may learn from the past. When Burke (elsewhere) praised the “old fashioned imagination,” he was not upholding the outdated imagination but the moral imagination that sees past-present continuity and safeguards good tradition into the present and future.¹⁸ The authority of a moral imagination is received, says Byrne, yet also undergoes “ongoing reconstitution” in the face of new circumstances and new challenges.¹⁹ That is, the fit of the decent drapery of the inheritance of tradition is adapted.

¹⁵ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 115.

¹⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 86.

¹⁷ Neill Randolph Joy, “The Art of Political Satire in Five Works of Edmund Burke” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), 32.

¹⁸ Edmund Burke, Speech on North’s Budget (May 18, 1774), in *Writings*, 2:470. The larger context of this phrase concerns Prime Minister North’s remarks about the then new French monarch, Louis XVI.

¹⁹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 194.

Prejudice

Traditions are replete with prejudice, a concept that paradoxically generates much prejudice in the contemporary world owing to associations with bigotry, injustice, and racism. However, Burke did not use the idea in this way. Writing in the *Reflections*, he explained,

You see, Sir, that in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings; that instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would be better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages. Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek, and they seldom fail, they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason; prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature.²⁰

Burke's remarks on the moral imagination and the old prejudices appear in relative proximity and are linguistically and thematically linked. For example, in the passage on the moral imagination, the revolutionaries tear off the decent drapery and explode the superadded ideas of a moral imagination, exposing the "defects" of man's "naked shivering nature."²¹ In this passage, revolutionaries "cast away the coat of prejudice" while "exploding general prejudices," leaving "nothing but the naked reason."²² Because

²⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 138. The specific prejudices Burke had in mind include hereditary monarchy, hereditary aristocracy, primogeniture, and religious establishment. However, my focus concerns the principle of his argument, not the circumstances of it. Even so, Burke would likely not support the application of these prejudices beyond traditions that warrant them.

²¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 128.

²² Burke, *Reflections*, 138.

of these connections, some thinkers interpret the moral imagination in terms of prejudice.²³

Within months of publishing the *Reflections*, numerous people criticized Burke's emphasis on prejudice. Catharine Macaulay attacked Burke's claim that "prejudice" and "imagination" are the "safest grounds" on which the "wise and good [person] establish or continue the happiness of societies." She held rather that they produce "all that is vicious and foolish in man" and attend much "human misery."²⁴ Her interpretation of Burke's view does not reflect his full position. She associated it with vice and foolishness, but he explicitly defined it by virtue and wisdom. More specifically, Burke did not support the problems that Macaulay cited. In the words of Samuel Fleischacker, "Burke by no means defends any and all prejudices."²⁵

Likewise, Thomas Paine condemned Burke's remarks. In the *Rights of Man*, he associated prejudice with "rancour" and "ignorance" that have "blinded" people to man's rights.²⁶ "Prejudices which men have from education and habit," he writes, "have yet to stand the test of reason and reflection" and signify the failure of "men [to] think for themselves."²⁷ Again, in *The Age of Reason*, he referred to prejudice as "unfounded belief" that "degenerates into the prejudice of custom."²⁸

²³ E.g., Gerald W. Chapman, *Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 208; and David Mazella, *The Making of Modern Cynicism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 153.

²⁴ Catharine Macaulay, *Observations on the Reflections of Edmund Burke on the Revolution in France*, Cambridge Library Collection (1790; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 16 (italics removed, spelling updated).

²⁵ Samuel Fleischacker, *What Is Enlightenment?* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 48.

²⁶ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (1791), in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol. 2, 1779–1792, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 275 ("rancour," "ignorance"), 316 ("blinded").

²⁷ Paine, *Rights of Man*, 399.

²⁸ Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (1793–94), in *Writings*, 4:357.

Like Macaulay, Paine erected a straw man, at least in reference to Burke's views. Burke wrote explicitly that just prejudice previously engages the mind (i.e., the senses, imagination, and judgment) so that it is ratified by the understanding, meaning it is not based on ignorance but reflects careful consideration. For this reason, Richard Bourke explains that prejudice does not entail "a renunciation of reason, but a suspicion of its inordinate pretensions."²⁹ Also, contrary to the idea that just prejudice blinds people, Burke stated in a speech that it does not include "blind unmeaning prejudices."³⁰ Nevertheless, interpretations after the likeness of Macaulay and Paine have persisted that prejudice as such is immoral, irrational, and unreflective.³¹ However, such interpretations misrepresent Burke's meaning.

Reason, Feeling, and Habit

At root, a "prejudice" is a "prejudgment." It may be a prejudgment of the tradition or the self; it may be moral or immoral; it may be rational or irrational. But all people hold prejudices. The key question concerns the quality of the prejudice in question. Burke upheld the authority of prejudices that demonstrate wisdom, reason, virtue, and justice but not the authority of those that demonstrate foolishness, irrationality, vice, and injustice. The moral imagination does not blindly accept or reject prejudices of its tradition. It considers them and, if just and reasonable, is formed by them

²⁹ Richard Bourke, "Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism," in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 29.

³⁰ Burke, Speech on Parliamentary Reform, 219.

³¹ E.g., Mazella, *The Making of Modern Cynicism*, 153; Fleischacker, *What Is Enlightenment?* 47; and Adam Adatto Sandel, *The Place of Prejudice: A Case for Reasoning within the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 58–60

and builds on them so that they become superadded. A just prejudice exemplifies a mind that has reflected on the application of virtue to the circumstances of life.³²

Furthermore, a just prejudice instructs the affection and enlivens the will. Burke explained, “[W]e are generally men of untaught feelings.” The person has untaught feelings because he has an untaught imagination. However, just prejudice teaches man to imagine and feel morally. Rather than “casting away all [the] old prejudices,” the wise person will “cherish” them.³³ The thoughts and affections then prompt the will. Just prejudice translates reason, imagination, and feeling into action. Much of life does not afford a person the chance to reflect in the moment of decision but requires immediate response. The person’s instinctive reaction reveals his prejudice, his prejudgment, whether virtuous or vicious. A just prejudice is of ready application and renders a man’s virtue his habit so that his duty becomes part of his nature.

Burke’s usage of “habit” signifies clever wordplay. First, habit-as-religious-garment relates to his persistent sartorial imagery. The moral imagination is furnished by wearing the religious habit of the tradition; and it is molded by submitting to the just prejudices of Christianity. Burke correlated these ideas again in a letter several years later: “The people, who compose the four Grand divisions of Christianity, have now their religion as an habit, and upon authority.” Burke described this habit as being “derived from their parents” while also recognizing a person may “reconcile his faith to his own Reason.”³⁴ Hence, prejudice is simultaneously inherited, individual, and intelligent. Religious prejudice hailing from religious tradition is also sublime, which, John Grove

³² Still, James K. Chandler criticizes Burke’s treatment of the concept of prejudice for lacking a certain precision and sufficiency (*Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 66–67).

³³ Burke, *Reflections*, 138.

³⁴ Edmund Burke to William Smith (January 29, 1795), in *Writings*, 9:662. The editor notes that Burke’s “four Grand divisions” refer to Calvinist, Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox.

explains, “informs our imagination and allows us to apprehend things which our ‘naked reason’ alone cannot understand.”³⁵

Second, habit-as-conditioned-practice refers to Burke’s broader point about virtuous “action,” “application,” and “duty.” For this reason, Byrne interprets “prejudice” in Burke to refer to a “tendency toward the right kind of *willing*,” wherein, as if by “second nature,” one “wants to do the right thing” so that virtue becomes habitual.³⁶ In summary, the moral imagination is furnished by wearing a religious habit, and it is shaped by practicing virtuous habits.

David Bromwich combines these two notions of habit, writing that the “wardrobe furnishes *habitual* ideas that, item by item as they are picked out and worn, protect our shivering nature and make us know our duties.” The person then acts in a way that is “familiar and precedented” but not as a matter of “sheer reflex” because “it is a conscious choice, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies.” However, Bromwich proceeds to state that the prejudices of a moral imagination have nothing that is “original or individual.”³⁷ The drapery of the moral imagination is undoubtedly handed down, generation by generation; but it is also appropriately altered to fit its beneficiaries, while still retaining its basic form. These beneficiaries then use this inheritance in the circumstances of life so that the religious habit of prejudice is not a straitjacket. As examined in chapter 5, the moral imagination is both objective and subjective and singular and plural all at the same time.

The moral imagination thus bears continuity and discontinuity with the past. It is “familiar and precedented” but also recognizes that the precise circumstances of the

³⁵ John G. Grove, “The Consecrated State,” *Studies in Burke and His Time* 30 (2021): 28.

³⁶ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 29; cf. 38.

³⁷ David Bromwich, *Moral Imagination: Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 7. Bromwich also distinguishes Burke’s “orthodox account” of imagination from the accounts of Kantianism, utilitarianism, and high Romanticism.

past and present are distinct. To use Burke's language from his *Enquiry*, the imagination "traces resemblances" between the past and the present yet also "produces new images" to account for new circumstances and challenges, illustrating that the interplay of prejudice, imagination, and circumstance is dynamic.³⁸ No matter how helpful the past is, it cannot account for every new contingency. Therefore, the "coat of prejudice" teaches the person to wear virtue like a habit and to practice virtue as a habit. However, the revolutionary strips the imagination of its virtuous habit as if it is a ridiculous, antiquated fashion, exposing only the defects of man's naked nature, including his naked reason.³⁹

Naked Reason and New Manners

"To cast away the coat of prejudice," explained Burke in the *Reflections*, is "to leave nothing but the naked reason." Burke had also used the phrase "naked reason" in the *Enquiry*. In that context, he argued that man cannot cultivate good artistic and moral taste by reason alone but only by the interrelationship of sense, imagination, and reason, as well as passions, manners, and actions.⁴⁰ Burke carried this sense forward in the *Reflections*, pitting the inheritance of the moral imagination against the presumption of naked reason. Whereas the moral imagination clothes reason with good prejudice, including the habit of the Christian religion, naked reason tears off the decent drapery of just prejudice so that, says Byrne, "one's imaginative framework becomes compromised and deformed."⁴¹

Approximately four years after the *Reflections*, Burke articulated Jacobinism in terms of atheism, describing it as the desire to "eradicate prejudice out of the minds of men." He continued, "As the grand prejudice, and that which holds all the other

³⁸ Burke, *Enquiry*, 202. Cf. Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 115, 182.

³⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 128, 138.

⁴⁰ Burke, *Enquiry*, 206–9.

⁴¹ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 78.

prejudices together, the first, last, and middle object of their hostility is religion. . . . A Christian as such, is to them an Enemy.”⁴² The revolutionary imagination asserts itself as the atheistic imagination. At stake in the debate concerning the age of chivalry, the moral imagination, and the old prejudices is nothing less than the authority of Christianity. For this reason, the moral imagination honors the chivalrous age and good prejudice but distrusts unadorned reason. As Burke declared, “We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would be better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages.”⁴³ Whereas individual speculations are untested, traditional wisdom is “painfully fathered.”⁴⁴ However, the revolutionary rejects the prejudice of Christianity and the manners that accompany it.

Burke also criticized the idea of naked reason in his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, referring to it there as “perverted reason.” Because it rejects the old prejudices, it also rejects the old manners, or social customs, thereby provoking the imagination unto gross immorality. Burke observed that the “new French Legislators” rejected traditional, religious manners and adopted their own “system of manners,” which he characterized as “wickedness,” as well as “licentious, prostitute, and abandoned,” and “coarse, rude, savage, and ferocious.”⁴⁵ Just as Burke had employed the motif of theater in *Reflections*, he did the same in *Regicide Peace*, portraying the French Revolution as an “intricate plot, which saddens and perplexes the awful drama of Providence, now acting on the moral

⁴² Burke to William Smith, 661. Daniel Irvin O’Neill describes this letter as having a “truly apocalyptic tone” (“A Revolution in Morals and Manners: The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate” [PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1999], 339).

⁴³ Burke, *Reflections*, 138. He had expressed the same point earlier: “The individual is foolish,” and even, “The multitude for the moment is foolish, when they act without deliberation,” but also that “the species is wise,” given enough time and reflection (Speech on Parliamentary Reform, 219–20).

⁴⁴ Joy, “The Art of Political Satire in Five Works of Edmund Burke,” 32.

⁴⁵ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 241–42 (italics removed).

theatre of the world.”⁴⁶ In place of religion, the revolutionaries instituted “impious, blasphemous, indecent theatric rites, in honour of their vitiated, perverted reason, and erect[ed] altars to the personification of their own corrupted and bloody Republic.”⁴⁷ Rather than honoring father and mother, the revolutionary honors a vitiated, perverted reason.

Burke then considered the cost of new manners on the imagination: “All sorts of shews and exhibitions calculated to inflame and vitiate the imagination, and pervert the moral sense, have been contrived.”⁴⁸ Burke thus commented on the close relationship between reason, imagination, and morality. Vitiated, perverted reason leads to and reinforces a vitiated imagination and perverted morality. Rather than exemplifying an imagination that shows a pious predilection for one’s ancestors, the revolutionary exemplifies an imagination that embodies impious rites before perverted reason. Consequently, says E. Anthony James, Burke had “radical misgivings about reason and its works.”⁴⁹ In short, the destruction of old manners and the elevation of naked reason seriously malform the imagination.

The French revolutionaries promoted all kinds of new social customs, including public displays of lewd and blasphemous behavior, through theaters, opera houses, gaming houses, and brothels.⁵⁰ Eileen Hunt Botting points out that they even

⁴⁶ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 188. Numerous authors consider Burke’s motif of theater: e.g., James T. Boulton, *The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 144; Ray, “The Metaphors of Edmund Burke,” 91; and Frans De Bruyn, *The Literary Genres of Edmund Burke: The Political Uses of Literary Form* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 165–208.

⁴⁷ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 241.

⁴⁸ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 242.

⁴⁹ E. Anthony James, “Swift and Burke and the Attack on Enlightenment Science and Rationalism,” *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Academy of Science* 53, no. 1 (1979): 23. James argues that Burke’s imagery recalls Swift’s.

⁵⁰ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 202, 246–47, 251. Cf. Daniel I. O’Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 214.

promoted the denouncement of one's family as an act of supreme loyalty to the state. The French state viewed the family "as a rival and threat to its sovereignty, rather than as its moral foundation" that is the "original source of patriotic love for the state." It sought to destroy the "natural affections" and "natural bonds of family and replace them with an unnatural and all-consuming patriotic devotion to the state."⁵¹ Like the Marxists who would follow them some fifty years later, the French revolutionaries were threatened even by the institution of family.⁵²

Therefore, issues of tradition, prejudice, religion, and manners impact not only the individual imagination but also the social imagination. Dermot Ryan characterizes these tactics as a form of "reprogramming" and "social engineering."⁵³ Public displays of immoral manners powerfully impact onlookers' imaginations. Burke explained they replaced the "temperate, natural majesty" of civilization with the "insolence" of

⁵¹ Eileen Hunt Botting, *Family Feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Rousseau on the Transformation of the Family* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 93–94.

⁵² Numerous scholars have traced varying connections—for example, historical, literary, or thematic—at times agreeing and at times disagreeing, between the Revolution, or people of the Revolution, and Karl Marx/Marxism, e.g., George C. Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (1987; repr. London: Verso, 1990); François Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution*, trans. Deborah Kan Furet (1984; repr., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Raphael Hörmann, *Writing the Revolution: German and English Radical Literature, 1819–1848/49* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), 308; Conor Cruise O'Brien, ed., Introduction to *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, by Edmund Burke (1982; repr., London: Penguin, 2004), 9; and O'Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate*, 3, 121n103, 128; cf. 200–01. However, it is beyond my purpose to analyze these instances closely. Concerning the theme of the disintegration of family particularly, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), trans. Samuel Moore (1964; repr., New York: Washington Square, 1970), 87–88; and Richard Weikart, "Marx, Engels, and the Abolition of the Family," *History of European Ideas* 18, no. 5 (1994): 657–72.

⁵³ Dermot Ryan, "Writing, Imagination, and the Production of Empire from Adam Smith to William Wordsworth" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2007), 67–68. Cf. Ryan, "A New Description of Empire," 10; and Dermot Ryan, *Technologies of Empire: Writing, Imagination, and the Making of Imperial Networks, 1750–1820* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), ch. 2.

barbarism⁵⁴ and the “Christian Religion” of “Divine Wisdom” with the “Synagogue of Anti-Christ.”⁵⁵ As Burke had stated, “[T]he age of chivalry is gone.”⁵⁶

Manners profoundly shape the person and his morals. Burke expounded, “Manners are what vex or sooth, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in. They give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them.”⁵⁷ The proper manners of good prejudices build up the moral imagination and preserve a moral civilization. Such traditions are so precious because they are so labor- and time-intensive to build. As Nathanael Alan Blake remarks, “Manners, the thousand restraints that soften daily interactions, cannot be constructed *ex nihilo*, and so the moral imagination looks to custom, tradition and the wisdom of the past.”⁵⁸ However, good manners do not emerge from nothing; they are conveyed through the authority of the communities to which people belong.

Community

The moral imagination is shaped within the context of the small social bodies to which the person belongs. In a much-discussed passage from *Reflections*, Burke wrote, “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by

⁵⁴ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 202.

⁵⁵ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 243; cf. 242, 246, 255.

⁵⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 127. Or as Daniel I. O’Neill expressed it, “The result of all this was the end of civilization” (“Burke on Democracy as the Death of Western Civilization,” *Polity* 36, no. 2 [January 2004]: 220).

⁵⁷ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 242.

⁵⁸ Nathanael Alan Blake, “Natural Law and History: The Use and Abuse of Practical Reason” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2015), 259; cf. 219.

which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.”⁵⁹ Little platoons include exemplars of wisdom and virtue, and they teach the person love. Yet even if they do not include such examples, they provide opportunities to love difficult people. Yuval Levin rightly observes that the immediate context of Burke’s “little platoons” concerns social class.⁶⁰ More specifically, it concerns not despising one’s class. If the person cannot love the people near unto him, he will not love the people far from him. Even so, Burke’s little platoons are bigger than class; they also include families, friends, churches, and clubs—all the miscellaneous subdivisions of society.

The moral imagination begins with the reality of little platoons. The little platoons contribute a variegated quality to human society because histories and peoples and geographies are distinct so that no one group is the same. However, the revolutionary imagination begins with the idealism of abstraction. Jesse Norman argues that this approach makes men “turn to their own limited knowledge and unchecked imagination, instead of looking to history, experience and social wisdom for guidance.”⁶¹ Rather than moving from the bottom up, they move from the top down. Consequently, the revolutionary imposes abstract ideas onto preexisting circumstances.

The critic of Burke’s little platoons cites xenophobia and similar phenomena to argue against the idea. However, these prospects represent perversions of Burke’s ideal. He explicitly states that little platoons properly teach the person to “love” community, country, and mankind. Oliver O’Donovan rightly captures Burke’s nuance: “Small and well-defined groups . . . have a positive role in evoking binding political loyalties; but those loyalties are constructive only as they succeed in mediating larger and more comprehensive identities.” He illustrates, “To be from Yorkshire must be a way of being

⁵⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 97–98.

⁶⁰ Yuval Levin, *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left* (New York: Basic, 2014), 86.

⁶¹ Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 213.

English; to be Scottish must be a way of being British.”⁶² That is, local group identity plays an important role in the cultivation of a moral imagination, protecting people from the extremes of (a) radical atomism whereby the individual is supreme and the community is lost and (b) radical collectivism whereby the community is supreme and the individual is lost. In Burke’s “version of the imagination,” says John Whale, which exists individually within the person’s nature but also exists as an inheritance of ancestral community, “the dangers of individual caprice and collective ennui are both avoided.”⁶³ Therefore, the authority of a little platoon preserves the person’s place in society by protecting him from himself and from the collective, and the moral imagination is individual and sociohistorical without being individualist or collectivist.

Burke proceeded to describe society as a “partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection.”⁶⁴ The reference in this passage to science and art recalls Burke’s earlier remarks from the *Enquiry* about reason and imagination.⁶⁵ Just as the mind has a nature, so also society has a nature. Just as the mind includes distinct yet overlapping faculties, so also society includes distinct yet overlapping communities. Just as the mind is a marriage of imagination and reason, so also society is a partnership of imagination and reason. Little platoons may have local pride, but they are not insular. While these communities may provoke one another unto vice, they may also encourage one another unto virtue.

⁶² Oliver O’Donovan, *Entering Into Rest*, Ethics as Theology, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 147–48.

⁶³ John Whale, *Imagination Under Pressure, 1789–1832: Aesthetics, Politics and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35.

⁶⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 147. Cf. W. P. Ker, “Imagination and Judgment,” *International Journal of Ethics* 11, no. 4 (July 1901): 474–75. Ker characterizes this broader passage as the “prose version” of William Wordsworth’s “Ode to Duty,” which is representative of his later, less Romantic work.

⁶⁵ Burke, *Enquiry*, 191.

In addition to linking people across space, little platoons link people across time. Burke described society as a partnership between the living, the dead, and the unborn; it is, he stated in his *Reflections*, a “contract of eternal society.”⁶⁶ The inheritance of a moral imagination is built on ancestry and prepared for posterity. Burke explained, “[T]he idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement.”⁶⁷ He thereby joined respect of elders, love of children, and improvement of morals. His contract of eternal society, which is based in sociohistorical circumstance, distinguishes itself considerably from a hypothetical social contract that is based in an abstract state of nature (e.g., Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau).⁶⁸ Accordingly, Levin contrasts Burke’s “historical society” from Paine’s “natural society.”⁶⁹ Burke did not pretend the past is perfect, but the past is gone, and the future has not yet come. Hence, the present must steward this partnership in a manner that corrects past mistakes without destroying the good the past has built.

However, the revolutionary dismisses the stewardship of little platoons and historical society. Rather than cultivating a spirit of respect and reform, he cultivates a “spirit of innovation,” which, wrote Burke, is “generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views.” In other words, the revolutionary imagination adopts the ethics of vanity. It thinks neither of the past nor of the future: “People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors.”⁷⁰ It sacrifices the past and future

⁶⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 147.

⁶⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 83–84.

⁶⁸ See Peter J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958), 207; and Iain Hampsher-Monk, “*Reflections on the Revolution in France*,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 202; and Levin, *The Great Debate*, 52–68.

⁶⁹ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 43–68.

⁷⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 83–84. Cf. Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 30.

on the altar of the present and, in the end, also loses the present as the world it knows burns. The revolutionary imagination liquidates the partnership of society with blood.

Conversely, the moral imagination avoids such terrible prospects. Burke described the end of this partnership as perfection in virtue. Being the contract of eternal society, it transcends the bounds of time and space, and its origins and ends are divine. Burke's "teleological perspective," comments John Milbank, realizes its "final end in God."⁷¹ Virtue is not ultimately a creation of the community; it is the inheritance of a moral imagination that the people of a little platoon receive, steward, and bequeath.⁷² Significantly, therefore, the little platoon is also properly a religious platoon.

Religion

Man forms religious platoons because, said Burke, he is a "religious creature"⁷³ or a "religious animal."⁷⁴ Moreover, Burke demonstrated the connection between religion and imagination throughout his career. Or, as Bourke explains it, Burke viewed "imagination [as being] integral to the religious nature of man."⁷⁵ Burke esteemed true religion because of both its truth value and its social value. Hence, it is simultaneously oriented inward (self), outward (society), and upward (God), and its purposes include cultivating virtue, preventing vice, building good societies, and preparing people for eternity. Religions that are not so oriented and purposed represent a

⁷¹ John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People*, Illuminations: Theory & Religion (West Sussex, GB: Wiley, 2013), 182.

⁷² Louis Gottschalk, "Reflections on Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 100, no. 5 (October 15, 1956): 419.

⁷³ Edmund Burke, Speech on the Second Reading of a Bill for the Relief of Protestants Dissenters (1773), in *Works and Correspondence*, 6:99.

⁷⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 142. "Religious animal" is Burke's phrase and recalls Aristotle's "political animal" (*Aristotle's Politics*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Carnes Lord [1984; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013], 4).

⁷⁵ Bourke, "Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism," 31.

perversion of Burke's ideal. This section considers these claims by examining selections from his early writings, *Reflections*, and *Regicide Peace*.

Early Writings

Burke's earliest writings explicitly connect virtue to Christian doctrine. For example, in a letter to Richard Shackleton, he based virtuous living in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ and the special indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Burke pointed to the "true and pure doctrine of Christ . . . who suffered the punishments of our sins to justify us" and the "saving and enlightening assistance of His Holy Spirit," which offers "to direct us in the slippery paths of the world" so that we may "walk piously and godlily in the path our Great Redeemer has showed us."⁷⁶ Burke thus grounded the capacity for the highest moral living in Christian orthodoxy. Consequently, the person may develop a moral imagination by humbly submitting to its teachings. Burke recognized the person may practice morality without religion but held that such moral development is limited in a way that morality with religion is not.⁷⁷

However, Burke did not look to religion only because of its truth propositions; he also valued religion because of its social utility. Several years later, after hearing an address on the Sermon on the Mount, he wrote in his minute book that man stands "in

⁷⁶ Edmund Burke to Richard Shackleton (October 15, 1744), in *The Early Life Correspondence and Writings of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, ed. Arthur P. I. Samuels (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), 56–57. He also alluded to the doctrine of imputation when he referred to unbelievers' "ignorance [being] justly imputed to themselves" (57). This passage positively discredits Michael W. McConnell's claim that a belief in the "vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ and redemption through faith in Him" is "notably lacking" from "Burke's personal theology" ("Establishment and Toleration in Edmund Burke's 'Constitution of Freedom,'" *The Supreme Court Review* [1995]: 400). McConnell argues further that Burke "articulates a theology of works righteousness" in "Religion of No Efficacy" when he says, "our Performance of our duty here must make our fate afterwards" (400n31). However, Burke made that statement within the broader context of saying that religion includes morality, not that morality grounds religion. Additionally, as Burke stated in this letter to Shackleton, man's salvation is "not merited by our own good deeds but by His sufferings, which atone for our crimes" (56). Again, in "Minute Book and Notes," Burke referred to the "divine physician" who heals man's inward sores according to "faith" (in *Early Life Correspondence*, 252).

⁷⁷ E.g., Burke, "The Minute Book and Notes," 252; and Edmund Burke, "Religion of No Efficacy," in *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke: Poems, Characters, Essays and Other Sketches in the Hands of Edmund and William Burke Now Printed for the First Time in Their Entirety*, ed. H. V. F. Somerset (1957; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 67–68.

two grand relations, one to society the other to our Creator.”⁷⁸ People are oriented outward and upward. Ian Harris argues from this passage that, while Burke “presumed the truth of Christianity,” he recommended “Christian morality firstly” because of its social utility and not because of its truth. That is, “he recommended it in terms that were independent of its truth.”⁷⁹

To Harris’s point, Burke looked to Christian morality because of its social value. However, he also looked to its truth value; that he also esteemed the truth value is evident by how he proceeded to contrast Christian morality and heathen morality. Each may work toward the “improvement of society.” But whereas “heathen” morality may heal man’s “outward sores,” it cannot heal his inward sores. By contrast, Christianity offers a “divine physician” who “heals the corrupted source” by “faith.”⁸⁰ Therefore, in this passage Burke recommended society first and God second because it characterizes one’s common experience. The person is born into a society before he is conscious of his own thoughts. Consequently, the quality of that society is exceedingly relevant for how his thoughts develop, including his thoughts concerning divinity, religion, and morality.

Additionally, Christian morality is distinctive from other moralities because it improves not just man’s actions but also his soul, including his imagination. Generic religion may improve society but only to a certain point. True religion achieves still greater social utility because it also improves the soul. Even so, wrote Burke, man will not achieve “heaven upon earth” but must look toward a “better place.”⁸¹ Thus, he believed that true religion has social value, yet he did not take its truth value for granted because he referred to the doctrines of faith and eternal life.

⁷⁸ Burke, “The Minute Book and Notes,” 252.

⁷⁹ Harris, “Burke and Religion,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 94. Cf. Fennessy, *Burke, Paine, and the Rights of Man*, 54.

⁸⁰ Burke, “The Minute Book and Notes,” 252.

⁸¹ Burke, “The Minute Book and Notes,” 252.

Similarly, in *The Reformer* the following year, Burke linked the “Practice of Virtue and Religion” to the incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus: “[W]e commemorate the Time our Creator became our Redeemer, and for our sake manifested in the highest manner the highest attributes of his Divinity, his *Love* and his *Power*, the one in dying for us, and the other in conquering Death, by giving that glorious Proof of our Immortality, and being himself the first Fruits of the Resurrection.”⁸² Again, Burke connected Christian orthodoxy and virtuous living; the moral imagination is formed according to truth propositions. Again, he grounded the moral life in the substitutionary atonement of Christ: “for our sake.” Additionally, his description of the Creator-Redeemer anticipates his discussion in the *Enquiry* of the sublime and beautiful, which he associated with power and love.⁸³ The “superior Power of Religion towards a Moral Life,” the power of the divine sublime, disciplines the person who has cultivated a moral imagination with a strength of character not only to bear his difficulties but also to rejoice in them, Burke explained, “by fastening our Thoughts on something indeed past our Comprehension, but not our Hopes.”⁸⁴ The sublime focuses man’s imaginings beyond himself in times of misfortune.

By contrast, Burke criticized those who “cry down reveal’d Religion,” explaining, “They are not true friends to Virtue, who would deprive it of any thing which serves to enforce or strengthen it.”⁸⁵ While his discussion from the minute book showed that he believed even generic religion is better than atheism, his discussion from this passage emphasizes “revealed religion” specifically, thereby distinguishing true religion from false religion. They are not true friends to virtue who would attack the revelation of

⁸² Burke, *The Reformer* no. 11, 116–17. Burke wrote this edition of *The Reformer* about a week prior to Easter, which would occur on April 14, 1748.

⁸³ Burke, *Enquiry*, 241.

⁸⁴ Burke, *The Reformer* no. 11, 116.

⁸⁵ Burke, *The Reformer* no. 11, 115.

true religion because true religion enforces and strengthens a moral imagination. His reference to those who cry down revealed religion anticipates his discussions of the rebel, the Jacobin, and the atheist. Bourke explains that Burke was deeply “concerned lest our imaginative responses become unmoored from consequential and moral reasoning, thereby reducing human preferences to mere matters of taste.”⁸⁶ Rather, the person should submit his tastes to the virtues of the revelation of true religion.

Several years after *The Reformer*, Burke recalled the twofold relation of religion. Having considered its social utility, he recognized a danger in people isolating its social value from its truth value. If people confine the “end of Religion” to its “Utility to human society” in “this world,” they “change its principle of Operation” or even “annihilate its Operation.” By its nature, religion is not confined to this world but rather “consists on Views beyond this Life.” Social utility, as important as it is, has less final importance than “eternal rewards and Punishments.” Still, a view toward eternal life prompts a better temporal life because it assists man in forming a moral imagination as he acts “with all the Powers of [his] Soul.”⁸⁷

Here, Burke’s ethic defies simple categorizations of natural law or utilitarianism and contains rather both deontological and teleological components. As David Dwan explains, this passage ranks among Burke’s “scattered descriptions of humanity’s ultimate ends, and, however incomplete, they say important things about the nature of happiness and virtue and the role these ends should possess in public decision-making.”⁸⁸ Personal happiness results from the virtuous ordering of the soul, which includes imagination, according to ultimate ends.

⁸⁶ Bourke, “Burke, Enlightenment and Romanticism,” 31.

⁸⁷ Burke, “Religion of No Efficacy,” 67–68.

⁸⁸ David Dwan, “Burke and Utility,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 132.

However, although man is naturally religious, he is not naturally good. Because “humans have no immediate impulse towards that which is morally good,” Bullard observes, “divine providence has ordered it so that religion (the Bible, the church) chivvies us towards virtue by the carrot of future rewards in heaven, and with the stick of future punishments in hell.”⁸⁹ The prospect of eternal bliss or eternal damnation influences the person’s decisions in the present. True religion has a telos according to its divine design to motivate moral living. However, virtuous habits cannot develop except that the person’s imaginative framework supports them.

The virtuous ordering of the soul then contributes to for the virtuous ordering of society. Burke affirmed universals, and he believed they have utility. Whereas Burke had written previously that heathen morality may lead to social improvement, he explicated here that the public servant cannot force it against its nature. He wrote that “by forcing it [religion] against its Nature to become a Political Engine, You make it an Engine of no efficacy at all. . . . Men never gain anything, by forcing Nature to conform to their Politicks.”⁹⁰ These two statements may suggest development in Burke’s thinking. Or they may reflect different nuances of an otherwise consistent outlook, whereby in the first instance, Burke was not speaking of people aiming to use religion merely for utilitarian purposes, but in this instance, he was. Throughout his career, Burke would hold that the nature of an object undergirds its purpose, for example warning in the *Enquiry* against “circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own notions.”⁹¹ Well, here in “Religion of No Efficacy,” he warned against using religion against its nature. However, he was not stating that religion literally has no efficacy and that men literally gain nothing when public servants employ religion only for its social utility; he clarified

⁸⁹ Bullard, “Burke’s Aesthetic Psychology,” 61. Bullard makes this statement while discussing the *Enquiry*.

⁹⁰ Burke, “Religion of No Efficacy,” 67–68.

⁹¹ Burke, *Enquiry*, 197.

this point by observing that an appeal to religion for such reasons may result in social gain “of an inferiour kind.”⁹² Burke’s rhetorical point is that, in doing so, the public servant cheapens religion by violating its nature.

Burke also connected religion and virtue in *A Vindication of Natural Society*, except that there he discussed government specifically rather than society generally. Writing as the “editor,” he expressed concern that readers of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke’s *Philosophical Works* were receiving them with “great Pomp,” even while “seeing every Mode of Religion attacked in a lively Manner, and the Foundation of every Virtue, and of all Government, sapped with great Art and much Ingenuity.”⁹³ Religion supports moral imagination, and together they support good government. Religion thus has great social utility, leading Levin to state that “Burke’s view of the appropriate place of religion in public life” is “strikingly utilitarian.”⁹⁴ But it is not crudely utilitarian.

Burke followed this statement in his *Vindication* with a series of rhetorical questions to deists and rationalists about the afterlife and God’s nature: “Do they think to enforce the Practice of Virtue, by denying that Vice and Virtue are distinguished by good or ill Fortune here, or by Happiness or Misery hereafter? Do they imagine they shall increase our Piety, and our Reliance on God, by exploding his Providence, and insisting that he is neither just nor good.”⁹⁵ Burke’s understanding of divine providence contrasts vividly with deistic belief of the doctrine.⁹⁶ Like his previous remarks, Burke tied the practice of virtue to good fortune in this life and happiness in the next, and the practice of vice to bad fortune in this life and misery in the next. People do not increase their piety

⁹² Burke, “Religion of No Efficacy,” 67.

⁹³ Burke, *Vindication*, 133.

⁹⁴ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 74.

⁹⁵ Burke, *Vindication*, 134.

⁹⁶ Fennessey, *Burke, Paine, and the Rights of Man*, 55.

and virtue by denying God's providence and character. Consequently, forming a moral imagination is premised partly on the person's beliefs, and in this case, theology proper props up true virtue.

However, Bolingbroke, like those who "cry down revealed religion," purposed to destroy religion and subvert government.⁹⁷ He pointed to the so-called state of nature, says Levin, supporting natural religion over artificial religion and natural society over historical society.⁹⁸ Again, not unlike the Jacobins three decades later, Bolingbroke gave precedence to reason over tradition and abstraction over circumstance. However, these emphases do not sufficiently account for the full nature of man or reality and tend toward the destruction of the social inheritance.⁹⁹ An attack on religion and sociohistorical inheritance, both of which undergird the sociopolitical order, is an attack on the moral imagination.

Reflections

As the remainder of Burke's career bore out, especially after entering formal politics, he spoke much more of the social utility of religion, including its role in creating an orderly and virtuous body politic, than of the metaphysical truth of religion.¹⁰⁰ After all, he was a statesman and therefore concerned about the public function of religion; he was not a philosopher or theologian in the professional sense. Even so, he did not support utility for the mere sake of utility, and he continued to speak at times to the metaphysical truths of religion. For example, in his *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies* just a few years prior to his death, Burke, after commenting on the good policy that religion would

⁹⁷ Burke, *Vindication*, 134.

⁹⁸ Levin, *The Great Debate*, 5, 52–53, 74.

⁹⁹ Joseph Pappin III observes that "religion feeds Burke's anti-rationalism" (*The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke* [New York: Fordham University Press, 1993], 43).

¹⁰⁰ See John Dinwiddy, "Interpretations of Anti-Jacobinism," in *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*, ed. Mark Philip (1991; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45.

provide to French society amid the Revolution, clarified that he did not think of religion as “nothing but policy” and that the idea was “far from [his] thoughts,” before adding, “I hope it is not to be inferred from my expressions.”¹⁰¹ As a result, interpreters should not judge Burke’s focus on social utility as a shift to utilitarianism, nor doubt what Ian McBride calls his “theological rectitude.”¹⁰²

Having appealed to the concept of the moral imagination in his *Reflections*, Burke wrote powerfully about both the social value and truth value of religion, thereby demonstrating a connection between the moral imagination and religion. He explained that the preservation of proper manners and good civilization has depended on and resulted from two principles: “the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion.”¹⁰³ The spirit of religion, in addition to that of the gentleman, has been useful for the purpose of producing and preserving the inheritance of a moral imagination, for building orderly, virtuous societies. As before, he wrote that “religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort.”¹⁰⁴ Religion thus has social value.

Even so, Burke’s interests exceeded social utility.¹⁰⁵ Continuing in the same passage, Burke, speaking of man’s progressive sanctification and God-given purpose, stated that moral, civil, and politic institutions aid the “rational and natural ties that connect the human understanding and affections to the divine . . . in order to build up that wonderful structure, Man . . . who, when made as he ought to be made, is destined to hold

¹⁰¹ Burke, *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, 486.

¹⁰² Ian McBride, “Burke and Ireland,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 192.

¹⁰³ Burke, *Reflections*, 130. Burke also discussed the utility of religion for society and state elsewhere, e.g., *Sheriffs of Bristol*, 317–18; and *Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief*, 492–93.

¹⁰⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 141.

¹⁰⁵ Pappin, *The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke*, 43.

no trivial place in the creation.”¹⁰⁶ Religion generally and church specifically aids in the cultivation of right thinking, right feeling, and right acting. In the words of Paul Fussell, “[I]magination enables [the person] to conceive ideas of himself as potentially noble,” which is aided by “traditional institutions devoted to the interpretation of man as potentially dignified.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, religion serves social utility but not mere social utility because social utility serves the still higher purpose of man’s moral development before God. Additionally, traditional virtues have functional value but not “purely functional value,” says Dwan, because they are “valuable in themselves.”¹⁰⁸

For such reasons, Burke identified “church establishment” as the “first of our prejudices. . . . It is first, and last, and midst in our minds.”¹⁰⁹ Of course, interpreters who affirm legal disestablishment would articulate this point differently.¹¹⁰ Yet even Burke acknowledged that the “principle” of “ancient chivalry” has “varied in its appearance by the varying state of human affairs.”¹¹¹ Hence, the underlying principle does not concern religious establishment per se; it concerns the reverence of the “Christian religion” according to the customs of its inheritance because Christianity is the “one great source of civilization amongst us, and among many other nations.”¹¹² Related, Fussell argued that Burke located the “essence of European imagination and polity in the institution of

¹⁰⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 143. Peter J. Stanlis observed, “Church and State have for Burke a Divine origins” (“The Basis of Burke’s Political Conservatism,” *Modern Age* 5, no. 3 [Summer 1961]: 273).

¹⁰⁷ Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 39.

¹⁰⁸ Dwan, “Burke and Utility,” 134.

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 142.

¹¹⁰ Incidentally, Oliver O’Donovan identifies the Establishment Clause of the Constitution of the United States as being, “from a theological point of view, quite strictly heretical” (*Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 244–46). However, this paragraph argues that Burke believed the application of principles varies according to the sociohistorical circumstance of different traditions.

¹¹¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 127.

¹¹² Burke, *Reflections*, 142; cf. 160, 197.

hereditary chivalry.”¹¹³ Burke certainly praised ancient chivalry, but the principles he espoused do not require hereditary chivalry. Additionally, while chivalry is important to the European imagination, it is not its essence; Christianity is its essence.¹¹⁴ It is the first prejudice, the one great source of civilization among the diverse nations.

Again, prejudice is not absent of reason. As Burke put it plainly, Christianity is “not a prejudice destitute of reason” but rather includes “profound and extensive wisdom.” He supported this claim by observing that a prejudice for Christianity “hath built up the august fabric of states,” which preserves the “structure from prophanation and ruin” and purges it “from all the impurities of fraud, and violence, and injustice, and tyranny.” Christianity has built majestic, virtuous societies and nations. Additionally, it teaches public servants to have “high and worthy notions of their function and destination” that heed the solid and the permanent, not the vulgar, temporary, and transient.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, a prejudice for Christianity cultivates a moral imagination within the person and within society.

However, a prejudice against Christianity exposes man’s defects and leads to an immoral imagination. Recalling the imagery of nakedness, Burke criticized the notion that “we should uncover our nakedness by throwing off that Christian religion which has hitherto been our boast and comfort.” He then described the rejection of Christianity as signifying a “drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembick of hell.”¹¹⁶ In other words, rejection of Christianity reveals a lack of sober-mindedness, and its

¹¹³ Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 227. Cf. Levin, *The Great Debate*, 60–61.

¹¹⁴ Numerous interpreters have made this point, from Stanlis referring to Christianity as the “ultimate basis” of Burke’s ethic (“The Basis of Burke’s Political Conservatism,” 272) to Byrne saying that “Burke gives religion the greatest importance among the many factors that contribute to a sound moral imagination” (*Burke for Our Time*, 100). Cf. Dwan and Insole, “Introduction: Philosophy in Action,” 8.

¹¹⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 142–43.

¹¹⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 142.

origins are Satanic. By contrast, the moral imagination looks to divine revelation and Christian virtue: “The body of all true religion consists, to be sure, in obedience to the will of the sovereign of the world; in a confidence in his declarations; and an imitation of his perfections.”¹¹⁷ Thus, even in the *Reflections*, Burke emphasized personal sanctification alongside social utility.

Just as the Christian religion aids the person in the cultivation of virtue, it helps him in the prevention of vice. Burke observed that the “consolations of religion” comfort people as a “sovereign balm under their gnawing cares and anxieties, which . . . range without limit, and are diversified by infinite combinations in the wild and unbounded regions of imagination.” The faculty of imagination carries with it the prospects of virtue and vice. Burke recognized that people suffer: “They feel personal pain and domestic sorrow.” The question is whether they will submit their anxieties to the “hope” of religious consolation or to the despair (“gloomy void”) of abstract speculation.¹¹⁸ The former path demonstrates a moral imagination; the latter path, said Parkin, an “undisciplined imagination.”¹¹⁹ Religious authority and consolation helps the person to cultivate a moral imagination.

Regicide Peace

Burke also commented on the role religion plays in the cultivation of a moral imagination in his letters on a regicide peace. For instance, in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, he extolled religion for creating circumstances that enrich the imagination. After commenting that the European nations have historically followed similar laws, religion, policies, economics, government, manners, and education, he

¹¹⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 208. Burke’s sentiments are consistent with those he wrote approximately forty years prior (“Religion of No Efficacy,” 67–69).

¹¹⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 152.

¹¹⁹ Charles Parkin, *The Moral Basis of Burke’s Political Thought: An Essay* (Cambridge University Press, 1956; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 106.

wrote, “From this resemblance in the modes of intercourse . . . no citizen of Europe could be altogether an exile in any part of it. There was nothing more than a pleasing variety to recreate and instruct the mind; to enrich the imagination; and to meliorate the heart.”¹²⁰ Because this passage lexically separates the “mind” and the “imagination,” it may cause some interpreters to question whether Burke still understood the imagination to be a part of the mind. However, usages from the same period suggest he still held to that understanding, meaning that this instance signifies a lexical emphasis not an anthropological distinction.¹²¹

This passage also represents an application of Burke’s little platoons from which the person learns to love his country and species. Crucially, these “modes of intercourse” included the “Christian Religion,” which he described as the unparalleled expression of “Divine Wisdom” that has contributed to the “peace, happiness, settlement, and civilization of the world.”¹²² Religion improves the imagination and hence increases virtue according to God’s design. However, atheism impairs the imagination and induces vice. Burke described the atheism he saw arising in France as “atheism by establishment,” which contrasted with the doctrine of church establishment.¹²³ Burke’s discussion of atheism by establishment is preceded by a discussion also of “regicide by establishment” and “Jacobinism by establishment.” He went on to characterize atheism by establishment as a state that denies God governs the world, withholds worship from Him, abolishes Christianity, persecutes ministers, demolishes churches, uses remaining churches for the worst vices, founds schools to teach impiety, and finally, permits

¹²⁰ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 249.

¹²¹ For evidence of the fact that Burke still held that the imagination is a part of the mind, see how he orients them in representative instances from the same general period, e.g., *Reflections*, 91, 152, 180; and *National Assembly*, 305.

¹²² Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 243.

¹²³ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 241; *Reflections*, 142, 149–50.

religion “only as a tolerated evil.”¹²⁴ But because man is religious by nature, Burke referred to atheism as going against “not only our reason but our instincts.”¹²⁵

Burke also articulated his beliefs concerning religion in the *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*. Concerning its social value, he wrote, “The social nature of man impels him to propagate his [religious] principles.” Man’s nature is not only religious but also social. He learns true principles from true religion, and because he is social, he disseminates those principles into society, which provide a framework by which imaginations are formed. “Religion is among the most powerful causes of enthusiasm,” Burke continued. “When any thing concerning it becomes an object of much meditation, it cannot be indifferent to the mind.”¹²⁶ Whereas the moral imagination responds positively to religion, the immoral imagination responds negatively to it.

In fact, Burke proceeded to explain that the immoral imagination hates not simply religion but God Himself: “The rebels to God perfectly abhor the Author of their being.” Here, Burke referred to the doctrine of God as Creator. God has made them, yet they hate Him, not unlike those who cry down revealed religion. Quoting Jesus, Burke continued: “They hate him ‘with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their soul, and with all their strength.’ He never presents himself to their thoughts, but to menace and alarm them.”¹²⁷ Rebels viewed God as a threat to their autonomy, and consequently, they sought to extinguish Him from their sight and thought.

¹²⁴ Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 241–42. Burke had written on some of these themes four decades prior in his *Vindication* (140, 183). Additionally, for such reasons, Burke did not support religious toleration for atheists, although he upheld it for Catholics, Presbyterians, Jews, and Muslims (Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 92).

¹²⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 142.

¹²⁶ Burke, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 278.

¹²⁷ Burke, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 278. See Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27; cf. Deut 6:5 and Matt 22:37.

But, said Burke, the rebel cannot extinguish Him from the world: “They cannot strike the Sun out of Heaven, but they are able to raise a smouldering smoke that obscures him from their own eyes.” The immoral imagination willingly blinds itself. In addition to hating God, the rebels also hate God’s image in man: “Not being able to revenge themselves on God, they have a delight in vicariously defacing, degrading, torturing, and tearing in pieces his image in man.”¹²⁸ Again, Burke was concerned with social utility but not mere social utility because, as this passage shows, Burke’s reflections were based on affirmations of metaphysical truths about the nature of God (Creator) and nature of man (divine image-bearer).

In the *Fourth Letter on the Regicide Peace*, Burke also demonstrated the connection between religion and imagination, this time in relation to personal happiness. He explained that true liberty consists in “humanity, morals and religion” and that therefore true liberty consists in freedom from vice. To seek happiness by “other roads,” to define liberty as freedom from the “restraints” of virtue, is to pervert those principles.¹²⁹ Happiness is the condition of a person living by nature, morals, and religion and cultivating his imagination by them. As Dwan correctly remarks, “happiness,” or “the good,” is a “form of well-being that [is] not reducible to hedonic feelings.” Rather, it “presuppose[s] other intrinsic values,” which are “traditional” and “irreducible moral values,” such as “benevolence, prudence, or courage,” that serve to “perfect” man’s nature.¹³⁰ In short, Burke linked happiness to virtue, which he linked to religion. Therefore, the road to happiness is paved by the moral imagination.

¹²⁸ Burke, *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 278–79.

¹²⁹ Burke, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 110. Burke did not invoke the apostle Paul in this passage, but his remarks are reminiscent of Paul’s: freedom from the restraint of virtue is slavery to sin, whereas restraint of virtue signifies freedom from sin (Rom 6:15–21).

¹³⁰ Dwan, “Burke and Utility,” 134–35. Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 297; and Pappin, *The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke*, 43.

In fact, Burke linked happiness and virtue on various occasions.¹³¹ For example, he stated in the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* that government is “made for the happiness of mankind” and that it is supported by “all equity and justice, religion and order.”¹³² Similarly, fifteen years later in his Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief, Burke wrote that the “object of the state is (as far as may be) the happiness of the whole” and that religion may repair a peoples’ unhappiness: “We find the Society divided. Religion the great bond.”¹³³ Burke thus illustrated the social utility of religion. Religion supports government, and government exists to secure happiness for its citizenry. Significantly though, happiness consists in virtue, which is a religious habit that adorns the moral imagination.

Burke also discussed happiness and virtue in relation to one’s station in life. In a letter to John Barrow, he remarked that the misguided imagination may lead someone away from “happiness” and “virtue.” Barrow, who apparently felt contempt for his “humble but honest” station, wanted to “abandon” a “respectable trade” to pursue painting. But Burke advised him not to yield to the “guidance of [his] imagination” because happiness and virtue do not depend on circumstance. Rather, the person who would be happy and know virtue submits himself to the “order of Providence.”¹³⁴ Burke made the same point in his *Reflections*, saying that the “true moral equality of mankind,” as opposed to socioeconomic equality, consists in people recognizing that “happiness [is]

¹³¹ The next few paragraphs represent only a small sampling of Burke’s discussion of happiness and are intended to demonstrate Burke’s understanding of the connection between happiness, virtue, and religion.

¹³² Burke, *Sheriffs of Bristol*, 317–18.

¹³³ Burke, Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief, 492–93.

¹³⁴ Burke to John S. Barrow, 19–20.

found by virtue in all conditions.”¹³⁵ True happiness, true human flourishing, consists in virtue, whatever one’s circumstances.

In summary, Burke deeply valued the authority of Christianity and its role in the conveyance and cultivation of a moral imagination. Undoubtedly, it has social utility. Because man is both religious and social by nature, he promotes religious principles in society, which contribute to the inheritance of a moral imagination. As Norman explains, true religion is a “source of huge social value,”¹³⁶ prompting man to “reenchant” the world with virtues like humility, truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom.¹³⁷ True religion not only builds up civilization and manners but also preserves them. Then, as the person is born into a virtuous society, he forms a moral imagination and learns happiness by submitting himself to its inheritance.

However, Burke did not esteem Christianity only for its social value. In fact, social utility alone can be counterproductive. Rather, he also esteemed Christianity because of its truth value. He advocated for a virtuous body politic not simply because it is good but also because it is true. Throughout his writings, he affirmed numerous church doctrines, including teachings about eternal life. Virtue leads to happiness in this life and bliss in the next. Christianity improves societies and souls alike by purging vice and by cultivating virtue. For these reasons, Burke identified the church as his first prejudice because it is a vital institution for the person and for a people.

The immoral imagination rejects this good authority. Burke identified the immoral imagination in different ways: the person who cries down revealed religion, the Jacobin, the atheist, and the rebel. At times he even named them, such as Bolingbroke or

¹³⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 87–88. Cf. F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke: 1784–1797*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 140.

¹³⁶ Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 258.

¹³⁷ Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 289. Cf. John MacCunn, *The Political Philosophy of Burke* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), 89–90, 122–143; and Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law*; and Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, 73–74.

Rousseau. The immoral imagination rejects the authority of the religious symbol to the person's shame. However, the moral imagination accepts this good authority, and rather than exposing man's shame, it reveals his dignity.

Government

A fifth symbol of authority that aids the moral imagination is good government. Burke scholarship has examined his views of government and the law.¹³⁸ Some scholars have focused on his understanding of the English Constitution, whereas others have focused on his understanding of party politics.¹³⁹ Burke scholarship also has highlighted his emphasis of principles like justice and honor in the law.¹⁴⁰ Seán Patrick Donlan explains that Burke viewed law against the broader backdrop of “morals, manners, and history,” which relate to themes heretofore analyzed.¹⁴¹ As Burke remarked in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, “Manners are of more importance than laws.”¹⁴² Even so, he demonstrated the importance of good government and its connection to imagination.

¹³⁸ E.g., Bernard Schwartz, “Edmund Burke and the Law,” *Law Quarterly Review* 95 (1979): 355–75; Seán Patrick Donlan, “Beneficence Acting by a Rule: Edmund Burke on Law, History, and Manners,” *Irish Jurist* 36 (2001): 227–64; R. B. McDowell, “Edmund Burke and the Law,” in *Mysteries and Solutions in Irish Legal History: Irish Legal History Society and Other Papers, 1996–1999*, ed. D. S. Greer and N. M. Dawson (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001); Seán Patrick Donlan, “‘A Very Mixed and Heterogeneous Mass’: Edmund Burke and English Jurisprudence, 1757–62,” *University of Limerick Law Review* 4 (2003): 79–88; and Seán Patrick Donlan, “Law and Lawyers in Edmund Burke’s Scottish Enlightenment,” *Studies in Burke and His Time* 20 (2005): 38–59.

¹³⁹ E.g., J. G. A. Pocock, “Burke and the Ancient Constitution – A Problem in the History of Ideas,” *Historical Journal* 3 (1960): 125–43; Brian W. Hill, “Fox and Burke: The Whig Party and the Question of Principles, 1784–1789,” *English Historical Review* 89 (1974): 1–24; John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); and James Conniff, “Burke, Bristol and the Concept of Representation,” *Western Political Quarterly* 30 (1977): 329–41.

¹⁴⁰ E.g., Abraham D. Kriegel, “Edmund Burke and the Quality of Honor,” *Albion* 12 (1980): 337–49; and Richard Bourke, “Edmund Burke and Enlightenment Sociability: Justice, Honour and the Principles of Government,” *History of Political Thought* 21, no. 4 (2000): 632–55.

¹⁴¹ Seán Patrick Donlan, “Burke on Law and Legal Theory,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 67.

¹⁴² Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 242.

Law reflects imagination, since it is a constructive, synthetic power, and law shapes imagination, whether for good or bad. Byrne comments on this sociological phenomenon: “The people and their governmental structures have grown together and are suited to one another. Laws and political customs form one part of a greater moral-imaginative complex, which shapes the behavior of individuals within government and without.”¹⁴³ Some laws are bad because they are outdated or even wrong and need to be reformed or updated. However, other laws are good and, like these other sources of authority, display the inheritance of a moral imagination.

Burke illustrated these principles throughout his writings and speeches. For instance, in the *Vindication* Burke wrote that, according to “warm imaginations,” the “civil Government” is a “Protector from natural Evils” and a “Nurse and Increaser of Blessings.”¹⁴⁴ Francis Anthony Avila Jr. describes this passage as Burke’s “explication of law.”¹⁴⁵ Just as Burke spoke about the teleology of religion, he spoke also about the teleology of government. Its purpose is to starve evil and to nourish blessing or happiness.

However, just as the imagination may precede good government, it may also precede bad government when the abettors of artificial society form “their Plans upon what seems most eligible to their Imaginations.” Hence, imagination may be used unto good purposes or bad purposes for government. Burke mentioned also that they had “inlisted Reason to fight against itself,” which is an “insufficient Guide,” increasing the “Follies and Miseries of Mankind.”¹⁴⁶ This passage provides a counterexample to

¹⁴³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 152.

¹⁴⁴ Burke, *Vindication*, 140.

¹⁴⁵ Francis Anthony Avila Jr., “Prudence in the Statecraft of Edmund Burke” (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1989), 124.

¹⁴⁶ Burke, *Vindication*, 172.

Canavan's claim that Burke's metaphysics "assume the superiority of reason."¹⁴⁷ Certainly, Burke honored reason, but he was not overconfident in it. Avila rightly notes, "The great problem with reason, and the application of it to the affairs of men, is that it has been unable to predict accurately the consequences of its schemes."¹⁴⁸ Human reason lacks sufficient foreknowledge. Instead, the inheritance of a moral imagination, revealed in good government and good law, counterbalances the presumptions of reason and the exaggerations of imagination.

Burke also considered the connection between imagination and government nearly twenty years later in his Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll. In it, Burke exemplified how some people do not submit their imaginations to the existing laws when it does not suit their unjust ends. Although Burke won the Parliament seat, his challenger, Matthew Brickdale, objected to his defeat.¹⁴⁹ Burke asserted that Brickdale would deny some of the electors their votes, even though voting was their right, freedom, and privilege. Referring to Brickdale's counsel, Burke declared, "He fixes a standard period of time in his own imagination, not what the law defines, but merely what the convenience of his Client suggests."¹⁵⁰ When people agree to submit to the same rules of a contest, and those rules are just and the contest is fair, the moral imagination accepts the results of the contest. However, the party that demurs from the results when it does not go his way exhibits an unlawful and disordered imagination. The immoral imagination follows law only as a matter of personal convenience; it is a vain imagination.

¹⁴⁷ Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, 112.

¹⁴⁸ Avila, "Prudence in the Statecraft of Edmund Burke," 126.

¹⁴⁹ For a fuller accounting of this election, see P. T. Underdown, "Henry Cruger and Edmund Burke: Colleagues and Rivals at the Bristol Election of 1774," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (January 1958): 14–34.

¹⁵⁰ Edmund Burke, Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll (November 3, 1774), in *Writings*, 3:65.

Although people may construct bad governmental orders or disregard otherwise fair processes, Burke had a high view of the ideal of the state. As he wrote in the *Reflections*, “He [Providence] who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection—He willed therefore the state—He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection.”¹⁵¹ Burke thereby argued that the state’s origins are divine and that its purpose is to aid people in the growth of virtue. Significantly, Burke’s reference to “our nature” encompasses imagination, meaning that the state’s purpose includes incentivizing people to form a moral imagination. William Hazlitt interpreted Burke’s meaning rightly when he said that, as a result, the state should govern men according to their nature as “moral beings” to “lift their imagination” and “strengthen their virtue.”¹⁵² For these reasons, the state bears similarities to religion, though it is distinct from religion.

Burke’s reference to “perfection” demonstrates his teleological focus. Canavan expounded, “The end of the state, for Burke, is divinely set and in its highest reach is nothing less than the perfection of human nature by its virtue.”¹⁵³ Of course, Burke disavowed any notion of modern utopianism. He recognized that states move “through the varied tenour of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression” so that “in what we improve we are never wholly new” and “in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete.”¹⁵⁴ Burke’s point rather was more straightforward: God has given the state to encourage development in virtue. The state is neither the origin nor the end of virtue, and it will not ultimately realize the perfection of its constituency. After all, the contract of society is eternal not temporal. Even so, within the messiness of life, the circumstances of

¹⁵¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 148.

¹⁵² William Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Burke” (1807), in *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*, 2nd ed. (London: Simkin and Marshall, 1822), 369.

¹⁵³ Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, 108; cf. 112, 117.

¹⁵⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 84.

society and state may legitimately improve over “many generations” toward a greater perfection.¹⁵⁵ At the same time, they may also worsen, like the circumstances in France during this time.

Burke’s writings on government demonstrate a dynamic relationship between the state and its people. The state may rightly rule according to its God-given purpose. It may properly coerce people according to true morals. However, it steps beyond its established delegation when it does not rule according to its designs. To use Burke’s language from the Hastings impeachment proceedings, the state is an intermediate power whose authority exists under a still higher absolute power; it does not have arbitrary power to do whatever it wills.¹⁵⁶ As Joseph Pappin III explains, “[M]oral principles” are “embedded in our human nature” and “remain constant, regardless of changing circumstances or historical epochs.”¹⁵⁷

Consequently, the people also have a right to challenge the state when it becomes unbounded. Just as the imagination and reason properly function like a system of checks and balances, the state and its people properly operate likewise. In this way, Burke bears similarities to Montesquieu.¹⁵⁸ Fussell interpreted Burke’s position this way: “So gross indeed is the depravity of man that—as Burke would have it—only a polity assuming mutual checks between numerous depraved estates can guarantee the common

¹⁵⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 147. Cf. Carl B. Cone, *Burke and the Nature of Politics: The Age of the American Revolution* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 322–23.

¹⁵⁶ See Burke, Speech on Opening of Impeachment (February 16, 1788), 352.

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Pappin III, “Edmund Burke and John Locke on the Metaphysics of Substance,” in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Koen Vermeir and Michal Funk Deckard, International Archives of the History of Ideas (New York: Springer, 2012), 121.

¹⁵⁸ Numerous Burke scholars have explored the connections between these two men, e.g., Thomas Chaimowicz, *Antiquity as the Source for Modernity: Freedom and Balance in the Thought of Montesquieu and Burke* (Transaction, 2008; repr., New York: Routledge, 2017).

safety against the common enemy, man's 'lust of dominion.'"¹⁵⁹ The moral state protects people from themselves, and a moral people protects a state from itself.

This section has examined various symbols of authority that Burke valued, including tradition, prejudice, community, religion, and government. Admittedly, each of these sources can become compromised and perverted by bad actors. However, such prospects are accidental properties and do not accord with God's design for them. When these symbols function in the way God has given them to operate, they are, says Byrne, "important touchstones for a moral imagination."¹⁶⁰ Burke invoked the language of beatitude when he said in the *Reflections*, blessed is the man who submits to them, but "woe" to him who "madly and impiously" rejects them.¹⁶¹ The moral imagination disciplines itself by such symbols and realizes happiness by them. The immoral imagination rejects them in the name of something better that cannot deliver on its promises: "You set up your trade without a capital."¹⁶² Humble submission to good authorities can be hard, but it is good because it forms the person according to virtue and wisdom.

The Moral Imagination and Rights

The radicals of Burke's day argued that authorities like tradition, prejudice, community, religion, and government violated the natural rights of man and consequently warranted revolution. Burke certainly recognized that these authorities do not always live up to their ideals. But he also held that not every claimed right is a true right and that, when it is a true right, the moral imagination improves injustices through reform. By

¹⁵⁹ Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 75–76. Cf. Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 153.

¹⁶⁰ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 171.

¹⁶¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 101.

¹⁶² Burke, *Reflections*, 86.

contrast, the immoral imagination invents false rights and seeks to impose them by revolution.

As this section considers, individual passages from Burke's corpus may suggest he rejected rights, but those instances generally refer to the idea of rights as propagated by the radical, not to rights themselves. Burke believed that true rights exist in nature but are known only within sociohistorical circumstances. So, although they are given by God and grounded in nature, they should be established through prescription, especially if a society would accept them as such. The imposition of law, even good law, on a social imagination that will not support it will not succeed except as a retrograde measure. The moral imagination recognizes that good prescriptions guard against false rights and that bad prescriptions are usually best addressed through reform rather than revolution.

Natural Rights Not False Rights

Notwithstanding utilitarian interpretations of Burke's position, Burke defended natural rights. For example, in his *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, he wrote, "The rights of men, that is to say, the natural rights of mankind, are indeed sacred things" but clarifies that, if they would be socially secured, they must also be socially accepted: "[I]f any public measure is proved mischievously to affect them, the objection ought to be fatal to that measure."¹⁶³ Burke was not thereby denying the existence of natural rights but was recognizing the significance of sociohistorical circumstance for how those rights are secured. Again, in the *Reflections*, Burke affirmed that "virtue and natural rights" exist in "abstract perfection" but explained that "their abstract perfection is their practical defect" because even true rights exist necessarily within a particular context.¹⁶⁴ Foolish people do

¹⁶³ Burke, *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, 383 (italics removed).

¹⁶⁴ Burke, *Reflections*, 110. People began criticizing Burke's notion of rights, in terms of what they are and how they are realized, almost immediately upon the publication of *Reflections*, e.g., Catharine Macaulay, *Observations on the Reflections of Edmund Burke on the Revolution in France*, Cambridge

not understand this point and, in the name of rights, lead a society into revolution that results in even more aggregate harm. Immoral people do not care about this point and appeal to rights to justify their vices: “Religion, morals, laws, prerogatives, privileges, liberties, rights of men, are the pretexts.”¹⁶⁵ That is, not everything going by the name “right” is truly a right.

Burke strongly criticized the French abstraction of rights because it disregarded circumstance and the body politic.¹⁶⁶ Prescription, in contrast to abstraction, helps to “internalize” rights, says Byrne, so that they are “firmly established in the moral imaginations of the public.”¹⁶⁷ However, Burke’s doctrine of prescription should not be confused with historicism.¹⁶⁸ The past does not determine the present or the future. The present generation may receive past prescriptions, but it may also adapt them if they are wrong or if circumstances have changed. Burke demonstrated this idea in a letter to Lord Kenmare in which he criticized the “truly barbarous System”¹⁶⁹ of legal discriminations against Irish Catholics because they signified a “deprivation of all the rights of human nature”¹⁷⁰ and “almost all the parts were outrages on the rights of humanity and the Laws of Nature.”¹⁷¹ Hence, Burke clearly recognized that historical prescription alone does not justify a given practice.

Library Collection [1790; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 93–94; and Paine, *Rights of Man*.

¹⁶⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 190 (italics removed).

¹⁶⁶ Christopher J. Insole, “Burke and the Natural Law,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 117–30.

¹⁶⁷ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 167.

¹⁶⁸ Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, xiii, 149.

¹⁶⁹ Edmund Burke to Lord Kenmare (February 21, 1782), in *Writings*, 9:577.

¹⁷⁰ Burke to Lord Kenmare, 572.

¹⁷¹ Burke to Lord Kenmare, 578. This passage provides a counterexample to Byrne’s claim that “Burke does not invoke natural law very explicitly” (*Burke for Our Time*, 158). Byrne prefers to talk instead of Burke and “natural rights” (167).

Although Burke upheld natural rights and good prescriptions, he opposed false rights and abstractions. For instance, during the conflict with the American Colonies, House members justified taxation on their “right” to do so, but, said Burke, those “rights” were not supported by circumstance and prescription. The Parliamentarians had forgotten the “old principles” of peace, which Burke justified by appeal to Psalm 34:14, and the “good old mode” of their common ancestry. He then said of rights: “I am not here going into the distinctions of rights, nor attempting to mark their boundaries. I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions; I hate the very sound of them.”¹⁷²

Some interpreters take this statement to mean that Burke denied rights or metaphysics. For example, Richard M. Weaver commented that Burke had “obsessive dislike of metaphysics and the methods of the metaphysician.” Burke undoubtedly criticized metaphysicians presuming over sociohistorical circumstance throughout his writings. But his point in this passage was not that metaphysics do not exist, only that he would not discuss them for purposes of practical politics when they are abstracted from the sociohistorical imagination and used to justify false rights. Weaver painted Burke as a situationist because he appealed to the argument of circumstance.¹⁷³ While Burke stressed circumstance, he did not stress mere circumstance because he was not a situationist. Instead, he balanced nature and circumstance with prudence to chart the best path forward of the available options. In the case of the Colonies, he wrote, “Leave the Americans as they antiently stood.”¹⁷⁴ Burke could foresee the prospect of war and hoped to avoid it.

Burke spoke to the same point nearly two decades later during the French Revolution: “Nothing universal can be rationally affirmed on any moral, or any political

¹⁷² Burke, *American Taxation*, 458.

¹⁷³ Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), 72–73.

¹⁷⁴ Burke, *American Taxation*, 458.

subject. Pure metaphysical abstraction does not belong to these matters. The lines of morality are not like the ideal lines of mathematics.”¹⁷⁵ Again, Burke did not deny metaphysical abstraction as such; he qualified it with “pure” or as he stated in the *Reflections*, “naked.”¹⁷⁶ Rather, he criticized metaphysical abstraction when it is detached from and inconsistent with nature, circumstance, and prescription. He also criticized “rights” that are false, imaginary, and pretended.¹⁷⁷ Hans Morgenthau correctly interpreted Burke to mean that “universal moral principles” cannot be applied in their “abstract universal formulation” but “must be, as it were, filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place,” which are created and comprehended by imagination. Such recognitions guard against “utopianism” and encourage a “realism” that may nonetheless still judge actions by universals.¹⁷⁸

The reason for Burke’s nuance of circumstance is that the lines of morality, unlike the lines of mathematics, “admit of exceptions” and “demand modifications” according to the “rules of prudence,” which is “cautious how she defines.”¹⁷⁹ Hence, Burke denounced the doctrines of Charles James Fox and William Pitt the Younger because they “admit no limit, no qualification whatsoever.”¹⁸⁰ Morality is not math. Throughout his writings and speeches, whether concerning American Colonists or Irish Catholics or Indian subjects or French metaphysicians, Burke acknowledged laws of nature and rights of nature, but he also knew that man does not live in a vacuum of

¹⁷⁵ Burke, *Appeal*, 383. Burke had previously stated that “mathematical knowledge [has] a greater certainty than any other” (*Enquiry*, 205).

¹⁷⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 58.

¹⁷⁷ E.g., Burke, *Appeal*, 469–70.

¹⁷⁸ Hans J. Morgenthau, “Another ‘Great Debate’: The National Interest of the United States,” *The American Political Science Review* 46, no. 4 (December 1952): 985–86. Cf. Yoram Hazony, *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 2022), 27.

¹⁷⁹ Burke, *Appeal*, 383.

¹⁸⁰ Burke, *Appeal*, 469.

abstraction, that the real world is circumstanced and complicated, and that the precise application of nature's laws and rights depends on ever-changing specifics. In short, he recognized that the human imagination necessarily exists within a social imagination.

Rights and Society

Whereas Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau began with a hypothetical state of nature, Burke began with the actual state of society.¹⁸¹ Even still, he accounted for nature. Writing in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, he explained, "In a state of *rude* nature there is no such thing as a people." Yet individual persons come to comprise "a people" with "corporate form" and "collective capacity" by "common agreement." From the human imagination emerges a social imagination. The person as such is singular but not solitary because he is social. Persons become a people with their own history, traditions, and customs, and with a "true politic personality."¹⁸² Burke guarded against the tyranny of the state by emphasizing the individual and the tyranny of the individual by emphasizing society. Any discussion of rights, if it would relate to the world in which people really live, must consider their sociohistorical circumstances.

To disregard this background is to disregard the people. When rights are promulgated in a manner that is not in keeping with the "form into which the particular society has been cast," they "break up" the people, and "they are no longer a people" but simply a "number of vague loose individuals, and nothing more."¹⁸³ Additionally, they are the pretended rights: "The pretended rights of man, which have made this havock, cannot be the rights of the people. For to be a people, and to have these rights, are things

¹⁸¹ Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 198.

¹⁸² Burke, *Appeal*, 445. Burke used a similar expression in the *Reflections*: "the civil social man, and no other" (110).

¹⁸³ Burke, *Appeal*, 445.

incompatible.”¹⁸⁴ The pretended rights of man cannot be the rights of the people because they are imagined and imposed absent the people.

Iain Hampsher-Monk, who adopts a utilitarian view of Burke’s ethic, interprets Burke’s remarks as denying natural rights altogether: “The very concept of natural right logically presupposes the absence of all aspects of political society.” He refers to the “utter contradiction between natural right and political society” in Burke’s thinking because the doctrine of natural right teaches individuals “to act as though they were true” and “break the ties that bind them.”¹⁸⁵ However, Burke did not deny natural rights as such; rather, he criticized the utter rejection of intermediary associations in the promulgation of such rights. In the words of Luke C. Sheahan, Burke criticized pretended rights because they presume “to cut straight through intermediate associations to the individual,” before adding, “Rights for the French revolutionaries were a form of power, part of the monist conception of state as society.”¹⁸⁶ In contrast, Burke resisted such monism, holding that the person belongs to a people, and thereby denounced the irresponsible and immoral promulgation of rights.

Occurrences of Burke rebutting natural rights are rebuttals only of the presumption of rights within a particular set of sociohistorical circumstances that do not support them. For instance, in a speech on parliamentary reform, Burke condemned the individualist appeal to “absolute right” as if “all *natural* rights must be the rights of individuals” without reference to the people to whom the individual belongs. Such appeals to natural rights wrongly make the social imagination subservient to the individual imagination. However, Burke qualified his meaning, referring to “*this* claim of

¹⁸⁴ Burke, *Appeal*, 457 (italics removed).

¹⁸⁵ Iain Hampsher-Monk, “Burke’s Counter-Revolutionary Writings,” in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. Dwan and Insole, 212–13.

¹⁸⁶ Luke C. Sheahan, “Edmund Burke and Pluralism in the Historical, Political, and Sociological Thought of Robert Nisbet,” *Studies in Burke and His Time* 30 (2021): 146.

right.”¹⁸⁷ That is, he was not making a universal claim against natural rights. As Canavan put it, the person may uphold “natural rights without believing in a pre-political state of nature.”¹⁸⁸ The dispositive issue is not whether natural rights exist but how the person may know them and apply them.

Hence, Leo Strauss rightly interpreted Burke to measure prescription “by a standard transcending it in order to recognize it as wise.” Furthermore, said Strauss, Burke did not “tire of speaking of natural right,” which is “anterior” to prescription. Strauss illustrated the point by discussing the British constitution: “Prescription cannot be the sole authority for a constitution, and therefore recourse to rights anterior to the constitution, i.e., to natural rights, cannot be superfluous unless prescription by itself is a sufficient guaranty of goodness.” Prescription may establish historical legitimacy and authority but cannot alone establish moral legitimacy.¹⁸⁹ Just as the social imagination is not properly subservient to the individual imagination (of the innovator or rationalist), neither is it an unqualified superior against the individual. Again, Burke honored both the individual and society. Consequently, in the *Appeal*, he described his own position as being “laid in an opposition to extremes.” He criticized abstracted principles that “always go to the extreme,”¹⁹⁰ and he supported the “old principles.”¹⁹¹

Byrne interprets the nuance of Burke’s position by the concept of “moral imagination.” Burke did not support rights-talk when it “disrupts or deforms a moral imagination” or lacks sufficient “historical-cultural ties.” However, he supported rights

¹⁸⁷ Burke, *Speech on Parliamentary Reform*, 218 (italics added).

¹⁸⁸ Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, 144.

¹⁸⁹ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 319. Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 299; and Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 157.

¹⁹⁰ Burke, *Appeal*, 470.

¹⁹¹ Burke, *Appeal*, 377. Burke spoke of “old principles” in numerous places, e.g., *American Taxation*, 458; and *French Affairs*, 349, 351.

that “contribute to a sound moral imagination” and are grounded in the “proper imaginative context” because they are “historically anchored and culturally compatible.” Because man’s view of the world “derives from the imaginative wholes that [people] have built up,” the “meaning of a ‘right’” within their epistemic and axiological framework “is dependent upon these wholes.”¹⁹² Hence, for rights to become “firmly established in the moral imaginations of the public,” they must become “internalized” and form a peoples’ epistemic “landscape.”¹⁹³ Sociohistorical circumstance then helps to “define” and “delimit” true rights so that innovators do not make up false and arbitrary ones. Thus, although Burke believed rights have “specific, fairly precise meanings in real-world contexts,” he did not deny they have an objective basis.¹⁹⁴

Byrne’s interpretation rightly reflects Burke’s view. As he explained in the *Reflections*: “Far am I from denying in theory . . . the *real* rights of men. In denying their false claims of right, I do not mean to injure those which are real, and are such as their pretended rights would totally destroy.”¹⁹⁵ Russell Kirk described this passage as “Burke’s best description of true natural right.”¹⁹⁶ The key purpose of civil society is to protect man’s real rights, which may be prescribed through custom and convention. Such rights, said Burke, include justice, ordered liberty, the fruit of industry, inheritance of parents, and education of children, among others.¹⁹⁷ Still, Burke recognized that “real rights” may exist “in theory” that do not exist in civil society. The question then arises as

¹⁹² Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 163–64.

¹⁹³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 167–68.

¹⁹⁴ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 163–64; cf. 168.

¹⁹⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 109. Burke also spoke elsewhere of “pretended rights” (e.g., *Reflections*, 112; and *Appeal*, 378, 457).

¹⁹⁶ Russell Kirk, “Burke and Natural Rights,” *The Review of Politics* 13, no. 4 (October 1951): 446.

¹⁹⁷ Burke, *Reflections*, 109–10.

to the best means by which to improve the social imagination when it imagines the world wrongly.

The Moral Imagination and Change

Although the sociohistorical imagination is temporally prior to the individual imagination, the individual imagination comes to evaluate the inheritance of the sociohistorical imagination that has formed it, assessing its moral quality or lack thereof. While the moral imagination humbly submits to good authorities, it does not submit to bad ones. It seeks rather to reform them in a manner that is just, sympathetic, and wise rather than destroying them altogether. By contrast, revolution, even in the name of good, malforms the imagination and tends to compound injustice in a society.

Reformation

Burke deeply respected good traditions and authorities. Yet he also recognized that states and institutions must have the ability to change: “A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation.”¹⁹⁸ States must be able to change, whether because an injustice has occurred or because circumstances have changed. First, sometimes a state should change because injustice has endured. Just because a position has precedent does not mean it is just. The objects of prescription, stated Canavan, may have an “antecedent claim upon the obedience of the people,” but they do not have an absolute claim on them.¹⁹⁹ For this reason, for instance, Burke sought to reform anti-Catholic legislation in Ireland. However, he did not take to the streets in a riotous rage.

¹⁹⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 72. Cf. Kirk, *The Prudence of Prudence*, 25.

¹⁹⁹ Canavan, *Edmund Burke*, 144–45.

He used his words, not his fists. When the sociohistorical context invites the person to accept immoral ideas, the moral imagination courageously stands athwart that history.²⁰⁰

Second, other times a state should change not because an injustice has endured but because circumstances have changed. For example, in his *Speech on Economical Reform*, Burke observed,

But when the reason of old establishments is gone, it is absurd to preserve nothing but the burthen of them. This is superstitiously to embalm a carcass not worth an ounce of the gums that are used to preserve it. It is to burn precious oils in the tomb; it is to offer meat and drink to the dead,—not so much an honour to the deceased, as a disgrace to the survivors. Our palaces are vast inhospitable halls. There the bleak winds . . . appal the imagination, and conjure up the grim spectres of departed tyrants.²⁰¹

Burke did not support tradition for tradition's sake. He knew the past can be a burden and a disgrace and consequently wanted to reform it. Edna Healey interprets Burke from this passage as one of the “new radicals.”²⁰² While Burke believed in sensible progress, he was no radical. His concern was about fiscal responsibility and “corrupt influence,” not radicalism.²⁰³

Drew Maciag argues from this speech that Burke assigned a “higher value to reason than to tradition.”²⁰⁴ But the faculty of reason is not in view here; Burke's reference is to imagination. While the moral imagination supports a living tradition, it is properly shocked at a dead tradition that still walks about like the undead. More broadly,

²⁰⁰ This expression comes from William F. Buckley Jr., “Standing Athwart History” (November 19, 1955), in *Athwart History: Half a Century of Polemics, Animadversions, and Illuminations*, ed. Linda Bridges and Roger Kimball (New York: Encounter, 2010), 6–8.

²⁰¹ Burke, *Speech on Economical Reform* (February 11, 1780), 510.

²⁰² Edna Healey, *The Queen's House: A Social History of Buckingham Palace* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 64.

²⁰³ The phrase “corrupt influence” appears throughout Burke's *Speech on Economical Reform* (February 11, 1780), 483, 493, 496, 534.

²⁰⁴ Drew Maciag, “Edmund Burke and American Civilization” (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2005), 85. Maciag later published this dissertation, but this passage does not seem to occur in it (*Edmund Burke in America: The Contested Career of the Father of Modern Conservatism* [New York: Cornell University Press, 2013]).

this passage does not demonstrate that Burke assigned a higher value to reason than to tradition but rather that he evaluated some traditions may outlive their usefulness because, in other instances, as this dissertation has argued, Burke argued that reason should defer to tradition. The dispositive issue between reason and tradition concerns the moral value of the object(s) in question.

Some interpreters have noted an apparent contrast, even inconsistency, between Burke's language in this speech versus his language in the *Reflections*.²⁰⁵ In this passage, he criticized the burden of "old establishments,"²⁰⁶ including the "office of the great wardrobe" with its "furniture" and "naked walls."²⁰⁷ In the *Reflections*, Burke praised the "decent drapery" that is "furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination" to cover man's "naked shivering nature."²⁰⁸ Accordingly, the imagination that is appalled at tradition (*Economical Reform*) appears to run counter to the moral imagination that embraces tradition (*Reflections*).

However, these two passages are not contradictory; they are simply distinct. They are not two sides of the same coin; they are different coins altogether. The first passage concerns reform; the second, revolution. The first would eliminate waste in the royal residences for the sake of budget but still preserve civilization and morality; the second would destroy civilization and expose gross immorality. Burke was not appalled at all tradition, only dead tradition, and he was very much for living tradition. He was not

²⁰⁵ E.g., Isaac Kramnick, *The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative* (New York: Basic, 1977), 161; Yoon Sun Lee, "Counter-Revolutionary Fictions: Burke, Scott, Carlyle" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1994), 100; and Maciag, "Edmund Burke and American Civilization," 85–86. Lee later published her dissertation, but this passage does not seem to appear in it; see Yoon Sun Lee, *Nationalism and Irony: Burke, Scott, Carlyle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁰⁶ Burke, *Speech on Economical Reform* (February 11, 1780), 510.

²⁰⁷ Burke, *Speech on Economical Reform* (February 11, 1780), 515 (italics removed).

²⁰⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 127–28.

against sensible change and reform even in the *Reflections*.²⁰⁹ Significantly, the cultivation of a moral imagination helps the person discern when to reform tradition and when to defend tradition. Or, as Daniel E. Ritchie puts it, it helps to “distinguish valid reforms from foolish innovations.”²¹⁰ The moral imagination distinguishes between different circumstances so that the appalled imagination is an application of the moral imagination rather than a counterexample to it.

Burke also illustrated the connection between imagination and reform in his discussion of Poland in the *Appeal*. The state of Poland was in utter disarray and confusion, and it seemed to “invite” and even “justify bold enterprize and desperate experiment.” It seemed poised for revolution. But then it pursued reformation: “The means were as striking to the imagination, as satisfactory to the reason, and soothing to the moral sentiments.”²¹¹ The Polish reforms struck people’s imaginations because it defied their expectations.

Whereas the *Reflections* had highlighted “moral imagination,” the *Appeal* highlighted “moral sentiments.” Burke thus contrasted the principles, characters, and dispositions of the “late foreign revolutions” in France and Poland. Whereas the French Revolution was characterized by rebellion, violence, and loss, the Polish “revolution” was characterized by reform, peace, and improvement: “[N]ot one drop of blood was spilled . . . no studied insults on religion, morals, or manners.” The “true and genuine

²⁰⁹ Burke, *Reflections*, 72, 81.

²¹⁰ Daniel E. Ritchie, *The Fullness of Knowing: Modernity and Post-Modernity from Defoe to Gadamer* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 214. Kirk stated similarly, “[I]nnovation is not reform” (*Edmund Burke*, 91, 166). Cf. Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 165.

²¹¹ Burke, *Appeal*, 462–63.

rights and interests of men”²¹² were protected in contrast to the “imaginary rights of men.”²¹³

Interpreters have explained Burke’s support for Poland in different ways. Conor Cruise O’Brien argues that Burke’s background as an Irishman whose mother was Catholic predisposed him to support certain causes, whereas Brian Earls contends he needed to justify his break with Fox.²¹⁴ Both reasons may have contributed to Burke’s support, but the immediate reason was that Poland’s reforms demonstrated an example of the moral imagination that Burke encouraged. As he explained, Poland’s means of change struck the imagination because it occurred in an age that incited violent revolution. It also satisfied reason and was true to moral sentiments (feelings).

Notwithstanding his support in the *Appeal*, Burke criticized Poland again in his *Thoughts on French Affairs* because the reforms were “extremely short-lived.”²¹⁵ Not all reform endures, but at least it is not deadly (so long as it is reform). Then a half-year later, Burke mentioned Poland again in a letter to his son in which he expressed concern that the tyranny in France was taking hold throughout Europe. Tyranny “tends to put a stop to that spirit of progressive improvement which, more or less, every state of Europe has been proceeding in, and to plunge them headlong into that condition of wretchedness, ferocity, impiety, and savageness, into which the parricides of France have sunk their own degenerate country.”²¹⁶ Burke believed in the possibility of genuine progress, but it

²¹² Burke, *Appeal*, 463.

²¹³ Burke, *Appeal*, 470. Burke had criticized Poland less than a year prior (*Reflections*, 273).

²¹⁴ Even Charles James Fox and Thomas Paine, each of whom supported the French Revolution, commended Poland at this moment. See Róisín Healy, *Poland in the Irish Nationalist Imagination, 1772–1992: Anti-Colonialism within Europe* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 43–44; Brian Earls, “By Reason of Past History: Poland through Irish Eyes,” *Dublin Review of Books* 8 (Winter 2008), <https://drb.ie/articles/by-reason-of-past-history/>; and David Freeman Hawke, *Paine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 216.

²¹⁵ Burke, *French Affairs*, 359. Cf. Thomas McLean, *The Other East and Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Imagining Poland and the Russian Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 24.

²¹⁶ Edmund Burke to Richard Burke (July 29, 1792), in *Works and Correspondence*, 2:106.

is hard fought and hard won, and it occurs by a reformation that preserves the good inheritance, not a revolution that presumes to correct the bad but loses more good than its gains.

Revolution

With few exceptions, Burke criticized revolution as a poor means for social change. Frequently, revolutionaries despise the virtue and wisdom of the past so that their desired social change is immoral. In Blake's words, they "distort" the imagination into something "diabolical."²¹⁷ A malformed imagination then responds to an age of chivalry with a cry to revolution and a call to arms. In the case of France, this trajectory resulted in the Storming of the Bastille, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the Reign of Terror. Burke strongly condemned such fanaticism as the poisonous fruit of an immoral imagination.

Revolution destabilizes true progress. Burke discussed the concept of progress and its relationship to imagination in a letter to Comte de Mercy. He decried the "present evil of our time" because it subverted the order "under which [Europe] has so long flourished, and indeed, been in a progressive state of improvement; the limits of which, if it had not been thus rudely stopped, it would not have been easy for the imagination to fix."²¹⁸ Just as the revolutionary rudely tears off the decent drapery of life, he also rudely stops meaningful progress. True progress in society is certainly possible, but it does not occur by destroying the good inheritance. The moral imagination may realize progress by fixing the limits of the inheritance without destroying the "order, law, and religion"

²¹⁷ Blake, "Natural Law and History," 256.

²¹⁸ Edmund Burke to Comte de Mercy (August 1793), in *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 4:138.

theretofore established.²¹⁹ However, in the words of Bourke, the revolutionaries seriously “undermined” religion, thereby “enfeebling moral habits.”²²⁰

Burke knew the French Revolution posed a serious challenge to true progress but held it was the symptom of a still deeper sickness: “We are at war with a principle, and with an example, which there is no shutting out by fortresses, or excluding by territorial limits.” Ideas, whether for good or for ill, are powerful because imagination is powerful. People disagree about the meaning and means of progress because they have fundamentally distinct ideas about what they are. Hence, Burke referred to the “erroneous doctrines” of the revolutionary.²²¹

Revolutionaries believe they can achieve perfection by applying metaphysical principles to the disregard of sociohistorical circumstance and prescription. Burke defended the prospect of progress but not perfection, and he held that such progress is realized through the inheritance of a moral imagination. But the revolutionary explodes the inheritance in the pursuit of perfection and does not rest with his little platoon. Burke explained that the Revolution was not limited either to France or to government: it was “to make an entire revolution in the whole of the social order in every country,”²²² and it was the “common enemy of the human Race.”²²³ Consequently, Canavan explained, it was “thoroughly evil.”²²⁴

²¹⁹ Burke to Comte de Mercy, 143.

²²⁰ Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 924.

²²¹ Burke to Comte de Mercy, 139–40 (italics removed).

²²² Burke, *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority*, 421.

²²³ Edmund Burke to Richard Burke Jr. (post November 21, 1792), in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 7:298.

²²⁴ Francis Canavan, *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke: The Role of Property in His Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1995), 168.

Even so, Burke acknowledged that people may pursue revolution for good reasons, namely, exchanging vice for virtue rather than virtue for vice. In fact, he considered in his *Appeal* when the case for “revolution in government” might be justified: “[T]his, I think, may be safely affirmed, that a sore and pressing evil is to be removed, and that a good, great in its amount, and unequivocal in its nature, must be probable almost to certainty, before the inestimable price of our own morals, and the well-being of a number of our fellow-citizens, is paid for a revolution.” To say then that Burke was absolutely against revolution is an overstatement. After all, he supported the bloodless “revolution” in Poland. Likewise, he believed the Glorious Revolution (sometimes called the Bloodless Revolution) was just. However, the French Revolution was hardly bloodless. Still, Burke continued, even a “just” revolution is not an unqualified good because it exacts a price on the moral imagination: “Every revolution contains in it something of evil.”²²⁵ Perhaps revolution is the best price considering the circumstances, but it is not an easy one, and in that case, the circumstances are truly and irrevocably dire.

Owing to Burke’s general disapproval of revolution, Abraham Kuyper, nearly a century later, praised him as “an excellent Antirevolutionary”²²⁶ who favored reform and evaluated him as being “*for* freedom but *against* the total overturning of all natural order.”²²⁷ That is, Burke favored liberty but not license. He supported genuine progress but knew the process must be carefully stewarded to be achieved. Whereas reform gains support by a steady but sure headway, revolution imposes its will impetuously and

²²⁵ Burke, *Appeal*, 383. Unlike Burke, Fox saw continuity between the Glorious and French Revolutions (*Speech on the Army Estimates* [February 9, 1790], in *Writings*, 4:292; and *Reflections*, 54, 98–99).

²²⁶ Abraham Kuyper, “Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties” (1874), in *A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 289.

²²⁷ Kuyper, “Calvinism: Source and Stronghold of Our Constitutional Liberties,” 315.

implacably. Whereas reform improves the moral imagination, revolution damages the moral imagination. Whereas reform spills ink, revolution spills blood.

Furthermore, revolution does not result in justice but in judgment. Writing in the *Reflections*, Burke exclaimed: “Troops again—Massacre, torture, hanging! These are your rights of men! These are the fruits of metaphysic declarations wantonly made, and shamefully retracted!”²²⁸ Pretended rights invented from abstracted metaphysics that neglect nature, circumstance, and prescription precipitate the war and terror of revolution.²²⁹ Just as the English had imagined rights against the Colonists, the Jacobins imagined rights against the clergy, aristocracy, and monarchy.

Burke explained that revolution is so bad because it is so destructive: “Rage and phrenzy will pull down more in half an hour, than prudence, deliberation, and foresight can build up in an hundred years.” Innovation destroys more than its proponents realize. Nevertheless, innovators claim a peculiar advantage: whereas the “errors and defects of old establishments are visible and palpable . . . criticism is almost baffled in discovering the defects of what has not existed” so that “eager enthusiasm, and cheating hope, have all the wide field of imagination in which they may expatiate with little or no opposition.”²³⁰ However, the inventive imagination is not always a good imagination. That the past is imperfect does not mean the future is preferred; that untested ideas escape certain criticisms does not make them less dangerous—it may make them more dangerous.

²²⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 268. Additionally, Burke referred to the Revolution as a “digest of anarchy” (*Army Estimates*, 289) that is full of “abominations” (To Henry Grattan [March 20, 1795], in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 8:206).

²²⁹ Norman, *Edmund Burke*, 213.

²³⁰ Burke, *Reflections*, 216. C. S. Lewis appears to have echoed Burke in his statement that the “errors” of the past are “open and palpable” (“On the Reading of Old Books,” in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], 202).

Burke recognized the past has problems but held that hurried, violent revolution is not the answer. Past problems are known and manageable; future problems are neither. Burke argued for keeping the “useful” and “superadded” parts of the tradition while reforming the “vices.” The revolutionary may judge reform as “slow,” but time increases “circumspection” and “wisdom” so that the “multitudes” are not rendered more “miserable.”²³¹ Thus, the moral imagination actualizes ideas only cautiously, recognizing that bad ideas have the potential for profound danger and misery, which Burke had observed in everything from Britain’s manner of governing the Colonies to the National Assembly’s manner of governing the French.

Owing to these principles, many scholars have interpreted Burke’s position as one of gradualism or incrementalism.²³² Others have placed an asterisk on this interpretation, though. For example, Byrne remarks, “Sometimes the preservation and fostering of a proper moral imagination may require changes—perhaps quite radical changes—in public policy.”²³³ Similarly, Yoram Hazony observes, “Where an institution has already fallen into ruin, Burke has no interest in repairing it only in a gradual manner.”²³⁴ To this point, the critic of the gradualist interpretation could argue that Burke’s policy positions toward Irish Catholics or the English palaces lack a certain gradualism. So, while reform is often incremental, it may also proceed with a steady or quickening tempo.

However, such analysis is sometimes a question of perspective. What appears sudden to one person may appear gradual to another person. In some cases, the person

²³¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 216–17.

²³² E.g., Russell Kirk, *The Portable Conservative Reader* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1982), xvi; Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence*, 2nd ed. (1993; repr., Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2004), 18; Hampsher-Monk, “*Reflections on the Revolution in France*,” 199–200; and Levin, *The Great Debate*, 67.

²³³ Byrne, *Burke for Our Time*, 39.

²³⁴ Hazony, *Conservatism*, 27.

may interpret a change as sudden because he has only just become aware of an issue that has occupied other imaginations for a prolonged period. In other cases, the person may interpret a change as sudden because he simply disagrees with it and resists it until the bitter end. Furthermore, the person advocating for a change often pushes the pace, believing that society can handle it, while the person resisting it often obstructs it, arguing that society cannot handle it. Thus, so much of the question of whether social change is gradual depends on the person's imaginative outlook.

The moral imagination turns the wheel of time fast enough to correct legitimate problems as quickly as it can but not so fast that it causes the ship of state to capsize. In fact, Burke concluded his *Reflections* on that very point. Reform must preserve the "equipoise of the vessel." To keep from "overloading it upon one side," the state must balance the "two principles of conservation and correction" so that it does not sink the good with the bad.²³⁵ Hence, social change requires great care and great prudence because at every point the moral imagination weighs the cost of conservation against the cost of correction.

In summary, Burke supported good authorities because moral imaginations are formed by them. Tradition, prejudice, community, religion, and government properly discipline a peoples' imaginations according to virtue and wisdom. However, human institutions are imperfect and sometimes fail to honor true rights. In such cases, the best means of change is reform not revolution. Reform ameliorates vices without destroying virtues, whereas revolution multiplies vices without retaining virtues. The unwise imagination may pursue revolution for good reasons, but the immoral imagination pursues revolution for bad reasons, not to reform its vices but to explode its virtues. Burke did not believe in leaving legitimate problems unaddressed, but he wanted to avoid the utter destruction of people and civilization. The inheritance of a moral imagination is

²³⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 293.

precious because it is not easily gained or kept, and consequently, the wise person defends it with thoughtfulness and passion.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Edmund Burke's doctrine of the moral imagination is a multi-faceted concept that a systematic examination of the term "imagination(s)" elucidates. Burke viewed imagination as a unique epistemic faculty that interrelates and mediates the faculties of sense and reason, gives rise to the passions, and influences the will. It is thus crucial to the ethical enterprise. The imagination is an active and *a priori* faculty with the powers of creation, representation, wit, fancy, and invention. It also gives shape to the form, whether representational or non-representational, content, and expression of the person's thoughts. Hence, imagination undergirds memory, possibility, and belief, as well as language and rhetoric, whether true, false, or exaggerated.

The imagination also gives rise to the feelings of the sublime and beautiful. The sublime may overwhelm the imagination in bad and good ways alike. For such reasons, the cultivation of a moral imagination is exceedingly important so that the person is not swept away by unworthy objects. Unlike the sublime, the beautiful may be comprehended, which Burke defined by the concept of loveliness rather than that of proportion or fitness.

Burke's enquiry into the sublime and beautiful formed the background for his reflections on morals, the arts, and broader society. He believed in universals, holding that truth and falsehood are fixed and that all people have the powers of sense, imagination, reason, and passion. Yet he also believed the person inescapably interprets phenomena subjectively. Consequently, he saw points of both uniformity and difference in people's artistic and moral tastes. Additionally, differences in knowledge and attention, morals and manners, and exercise and labor account for differences in taste. Burke cared

deeply about the arts not simply because they shape people but because they shape societies.

Thus, the revolution of morals and manners leads to the revolution of society and government. Burke eulogized the death of a civilization in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In rejecting good authority, literature, philosophy, and theology, the immoral imagination exposes man's nakedness, confusing its shame for dignity. In contrast, the moral imagination gladly receives the good inheritance of a Christian tradition, both esteeming its sublimity and loving its beauty, and it carefully balances universals and circumstance.

The moral imagination is formed according to the cultivation of virtue, including humility, truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom. Conversely, the immoral imagination is malformed by vice. To avoid such prospects, the moral imagination humbles itself before good authorities, such as tradition, prejudice, community, religion, and government, but not before bad authorities in which the law of man conflicts with the law of nature. The prospect of achieving true natural rights (cf. false rights) within a society that has historically disregarded them must be carefully stewarded if they would be realized. Hence, Burke believed in standing athwart authorities that are wrong, but he believed that overwhelmingly the best method of change is reform not revolution. In summary, the study of Burke's usage of "imagination(s)" throughout his corpus demonstrates the crucial role of imagination for his view of man, the sublime and beautiful, the arts, morality, society, and politics and, therefore, the crucial role likewise of a moral imagination for his ethic.

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ABSTRACT

EDMUND BURKE'S MORAL IMAGINATION: INTERPRETATION AND CULTIVATION

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This dissertation argues that the faculty of imagination is crucial to Burke's view of man, the sublime and beautiful, the arts, morality, society, and politics and that, therefore, the cultivation of a moral imagination is likewise crucial to his ethic. It accomplishes its thesis by systematically examining (nearly) every usage of the term "imagination(s)" in Burke's corpus.

Chapters 2–3 focus on Burke's view of the imagination as a creative mental faculty with the powers of representation, wit, fancy, and invention. Imagination reflects the senses, interacts with reason, gives rise to emotions, and shapes the will, thereby mediating the person's faculties and powers. Although Burke lived in the shadow of British empiricism, he affirmed *a priori* truths of imagination. Additionally, imagination gives form to thought, both representational and non-representational (e.g., memories, plans, and beliefs), and undergirds the expression of one's thought (e.g., language). The imagination may be deceived, and it may deceive.

Chapter 4 introduces Burke's enquiry into the sublime, the beautiful, and the arts. The imagination experiences the sublime and beautiful, giving rise to corresponding feelings of terror and love. Whereas the sublime results from causes such as divinity, infinity, and eternity, the beautiful results from loveliness; significantly, Burke rejected proportion and fitness in themselves as causes of beauty, though he recognized that beauty may bear those qualities. These reflections undergird his view of the arts. By

imagination, the person observes and produces artifacts, and by the arts, people and societies are formed, making the arts exceedingly important for both the individual imagination and the social imagination. Finally, by imagination, man cultivates taste, which he develops by improving his sensibility and judgment, knowledge and attention, morals and manners, and exercise and labor.

Chapter 5 examines Burke's articulation of the "moral imagination," or the sociohistorical inheritance of Christianity, which extols noble equality and chivalry and balances restraint and liberty. Burke characterized the moral imagination as the pleasing illusions, the decent drapery, and the superadded ideas of private and public life that cover man's nakedness and dignify his nature. While the moral imagination is socially received, it is also individually cultivated in the mind and heart; additionally, it bridges the sublime and beautiful, and it balances universals, circumstance, and perfection. However, Enlightenment liberalism destroys the moral imagination.

Finally, chapters 6–7 evaluate Burke's integration of the doctrine of moral imagination with the topics of virtue, vice, authority, rights, and social change. The moral imagination is cultivated by the virtues of humility, truth, justice, sympathy, and wisdom. However, the immoral imagination is vain, revealing a faculty that is weak and juvenile, infected and strange, disordered and distempered, unbounded and wild, and revolutionary. Whereas the moral imagination submits to good authorities, such as good tradition, prejudice, community, religion, and government, the immoral imagination does not so submit to them but rather subverts them. Authorities should reflect true natural rights, not false abstracted rights. To the extent they do not, they should be changed, but the method of change should be reform not revolution. In conclusion, the faculty of imagination is crucial to Burke's view of man, the sublime and beautiful, the arts, morality, society, and politics so that the cultivation of a moral imagination is likewise crucial to his ethic.

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- Conclusion to *Teacher, Scholar, Shepherd: Essays in Honor of Robert E. Picirilli*, 271–74. Nashville: Randall House, 2024.
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- “Should We Defend Our Rights or Surrender Them? Reflections on Rights.” *The Brink Magazine* 16, no. 1 (September/October 2024): 29–33.
- “The Difficulty and Responsibility of Voting in a Post-Christian America.” *ONE Magazine* 20, no. 6 (October-November 2024): 42–45.

ORGANIZATIONS

Association for Biblical Higher Education
Evangelical Theological Society

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Registrar, Welch College, 2013–17
Faculty, Assistant Professor of Theology and Culture, Welch College, 2013–
Managing Editor, Welch College Press, 2016–
Vice Provost for Academic Administration, Welch College, 2017–
Evaluator and Chair, Association of Biblical Higher Education, 2018–
Commissioner, Association of Biblical Higher Education, 2023–