Russell Kirk has been frequently hailed as the premier figure in the revival of reflective conservative intellectual thought in the post World War II era. While many critics and historians of contemporary thought have acknowledged his considerable influence upon the tenor and direction of modern conservatism, no analysis has dealt adequately with the ultimate moral inspiration of his work.

Fundamental to Kirk's conservatism is the recognition of the existence of an ethical universal beyond the economic calculus of private advantage. An indispensable guide to this principle is the imaginative absorption of the totality of man's experience. Man has, Kirk holds, a higher self of which the moral imagination is a part. Through the imagination man apprehends intuitively that which is the source of his enduring good and happiness. This awareness of the ultimate good common to all mankind forms the basis of true community—the final end of politics.

Kirk, further, is not at all confident that private rationality can alone account for the most important things in life. Ultimate values and spiritual activities cannot be dealt with, he feels, by a purely scientific, pragmatic, reifying reason. For him, the non-conceptual and non-definitional power of the moral imagination, not the faculty of reason, is the source of the ultimate norms by which soul and commonwealth are ordered.

By the late 1960's, as Kirk became more and more absorbed in literature and literary criticism he also became increasingly conscious of the importance of the moral imagination to conservative thought. The role of literature and poetry as a route to the re-awakening of normative consciousness came to play a larger role in his social and moral thought. No doubt his growing interest in the moral principles of T.S. Eliot opened this avenue to him. The idea first plays a central role in his literary and social criticism in The Enemies of the Permanent Things (1969). By 1971, when his book on T.S. Eliot was published, the idea of the moral imagination had become a centerpiece in Kirk's thought.

But of all Kirk's critics during the past thirty years of his most active writing, only one, Donald Atwell Zoll, has commented in print upon the emerging central importance of the moral imagination and its aesthetic components to Kirk's thought. Moreover, more than Kirk's previous critics, Zoll recognizes that Kirk's aesthetic orientation is not a literary affectation, but an integral part of his social and cultural criticism. For Kirk, ethical and normative truths are often best conveyed through a symbolic veil, such as the medium of great poetry, rather than by the means of discursive explication. The "heart of his social philosophy is ultimately aesthetic," Zoll notes, his "historical commentary, quite apart from his literary criticism, shows that his basic judgmental criterion is an aesthetic one; those whom he admires most in the history of social thought are those imbued with an intense aesthetic orientation and a corresponding artistic talent." Having made this observation, however, Zoll fails to define the moral imagination, or how Kirk employs it to counteract the narrow abstract utilitarian reasoning of both the left and right, or its importance as a means of ethical perception.

Kirk is not a technical philosopher. Because his priorities are literary and histori-
ical, and not philosophical (in the formal sense of that term), Kirk has consciously refrained from the development of a rigorous epistemological and philosophical base for his social and moral thought. While this decision is arguably legitimate, given his primary intentions, it has caused him certain difficulties in respect to the critical acceptance and understanding of his social and moral positions. Zoll, for example, legitimately complains about Kirk's "lack of philosophical precision." His speculations would benefit, Zoll suggests, "from an amplified philosophical rigor." This characteristic may account in part for the failure of his critics to give sufficient attention to the moral imagination, and, further, why in many intellectual circles he is regarded primarily as a popularizer of ideas or a historian of intellectual and literary history, rather than an exponent of a philosophically defensible position. The recurrent accusations that he is either a nostalgic, antiquarian romanticist or a mere stand-pat conservative, additionally, positions had been expressed with more philosophical clarity.

The resulting degree of philosophical imprecision, then, complicates the explication of his ideas. My intention here is to remedy in part some of those difficulties which have contributed significantly to a misunderstanding of Kirk's ethical position upon which his defense of order and authority depends, and, in conclusion, to assess both his approach to ethical perception and his lasting contribution toward developing an enduring moral basis for conservatism.

The Contributions of Burke and Babbitt

As Kirk notes, the principle of the moral imagination was "first clearly expressed by Edmund Burke." However, although Burke clearly had an intuitive grasp of its importance as a means of ethical insight, it was left to Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More to raise this intuition to the level of a philosophical concept which could be employed against the various competing modern naturalistic and reductionist doctrines. As Kirk rightly points out, it was "adapted by More and Babbitt to the twentieth-century discussion."

Burke had invoked the moral imagination to defend the moral and social order of Europe which he saw threatened by the armed revolutionary doctrines and the abstract morality of the disciples of Rousseau, the philosophes and the revolutionary Jacobins, all of whom he contemptuously dismissed as "sophisters, economists, and calculators." Civilized existence, Burke passionately believed, requires imagery and illusion which enrich our lives in community. By "evoking images," Kirk explains, "Burke sought to persuade by his appeal to the moral imagination—not by setting his own abstractions against the abstractions of the philosophes." It is not mere fantasy, but is validated by the accumulated experience of civilization. The imagination seizes upon certain climactic moments of human experience, previous efforts to attain man's highest moral purpose, to merge them into a compelling image. Man is thus able to draw upon his historical experience as a vast body of wisdom or lessons as a source of insight and standards.

No previous student of Burke had grasped the critical importance of the idea of moral imagination to Burke's political thought as well as did Irving Babbitt. Burke saw, perhaps more than anyone of his time, Babbitt observed, how much of "the wisdom of life consists in an imaginative assumption of the experience of the past in such a fashion as to bring it to bear as a living force upon the present." Man's private stock of wisdom and experience, contrary to the notions of the rationalists who possess an unbounded faith in the rational faculties of the individual, is an insufficient basis by which man can morally order his existence. By giving a generous respect to the "wisdom of our ancestors,"—that collective wisdom of the ages bound up in great literary works, sayings, axioms, morals, and customs—Babbitt wrote in praise of Burke, man will have at his disposal a considerable body of experience upon which he can imaginatively draw to provide moral guides to the changing circumstances of his existence. Prejudice,
habit, custom can be defended thus by the civilized man because “they are not arbitrary but are convenient summings up of a vast body of past experiences.”

Babbitt conceptualized the idea of the imagination as a check on the lower impulses. Against the utilitarian imagination, which is incapable of rising above the mundane, and the idyllic imagination of the Rousseauist, which evades the issue of moral conflict in man and leaves the lower appetites unchecked, Babbitt proposed an ethical imagination disciplined by the veto power of the inner check over the arbitrary will of man. The “inner check,” which is an awareness we have of a universal good which cannot be violated, can come to inspire the moral imagination, which provides man with concrete images of his true purpose. What distinguishes the truly ethically disciplined individual is his willingness to be governed in his actions by his higher self; that aspect of his soul which wills what is in conformity with the universal good. Since the universal good is the same for everyone, the inner check of moral doubt, supported by the moral imagination, pulls us into harmony with all others. When activated, the inner check enables the individual to pause before acting giving him a moment to deliberate with himself about what would be the most beneficial course for him to take. During this pause he is able to bring to bear upon a particular situation the totality of his experience. The doubts which arise in his mind and his considerations of possible alternatives can warn or encourage him about the possible consequences of an impulse before it results in action. Impulses which are judged to be detrimental to his ultimate spiritual purpose, his higher will, are eliminated while beneficial impulses are strengthened and allowed to result in activity. The point is that, during this entire process of deliberation, it is his intuitive sense of the good which is the supreme judge of what is the correct thing to do. Reason on its own cannot determine what the good is, hence cannot evaluate man’s impulses; rather its role is to analyze the situation and to anticipate the possible consequences of taking a particular action. When man’s inner check of moral doubt stops protesting, he proceeds with a sense that he is doing right. Babbitt felt the imagination when properly disciplined is both necessary and good. Only through it can man come to perceive what is abiding in his existence. The perception of the existence of ethical norms in an imaginative vision is indispensable to civilized existence. From these norms are derived the laws, the standards of justice, the customs, the moral beliefs which bind people into community. Central to the idea of the moral imagination is the principle of the duality of human nature, a recognition of the tension in the soul between two opposing wills. The inner check censures those selfish, arbitrary impulses which would create disharmony in soul and commonwealth. Man must “do an inner obeisance to something higher than his ordinary self, whether he calls this something God, or, like the man of the Far East, calls it his higher Self, or simply the Law,” proclaimed Babbitt, “Without this inner principle of restraint man can only oscillate violently between opposite extremes...”—from anarchical individualism to utopian collectivism. The moral imagination, then, draws man back to the “ethical center” which supplies a ‘standard with reference to which the individual may set bounds to the lawless expansion of his natural self (which includes his intellect as well as his emotions).”

Reason, Intuition and the Moral Imagination

The stress which Kirk in his work places on the importance of the role of imagination, understood as intuitive knowledge, as the primary means by which men come to apprehend moral and political principles seems to many to exclude the possibilities of reason. The late Frank Meyer, for example, argued that one of Kirk’s chief weaknesses is his “refusal to recognize the role of reason” as a means of distinguishing between possibilities. Ronald Lora, additionally, complains that Kirk contradicts himself because he “continues to attack the presumed rationality—the ‘metaphysic sophistry’—of contemporary liberals while at the same time
noting that man no longer has the capability for rational decision-making.’”

Kirk’s apparent hostility toward reason and the emphasis which he places upon intuition makes him an easy target for such criticism. He expresses little faith in the power of man’s rational faculties as a means to determine right from wrong and gain knowledge of immutable truths. The norms which should govern our lives are conveyed to us more reliably, appears to be his message, through the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors, the lessons of history, prescriptive institutions, religious dogmas, and the visions of poets.

In spite of his strong reliance on intuition as a surer guide to understanding of the ultimate values, Kirk has not, however, as some of his critics charge, wholly depreciated the role of reason. Rather the target of his attacks is a particular type or quality of reason, or, one may say, a misuse of reasoning, which he calls “defecated rationality.” This provocative term alludes to a type of reason which as a consequence of its boundless faith in the intellect and benevolent progress is “arrogantly severed from larger sources of wisdom” such as tradition, customs, religious faith, and the visions of great poets, prophets and philosophers, for example.13 His animadversions against reason are thus reserved for those modern examples of Cartesian reasoning which Babbitt had condemned. In Babbitt’s discussion of the distinction between “intuition” and “reason,” he explained that by “reason” Descartes meant “logical and mathematical reason.” The Cartesian system, he charged, was marked by the tendency to conceive truth and reality mathematically. Descartes “thus contradicts the universal experience of mankind which is that the truth on which life depends,” by which Babbitt was referring to the inner check and the dual nature of man, “are not clear in the logical or any other sense. These truths are rather a matter of elusive intuition.”

Intuition is that faculty which we all possess to varying degrees which enables us to perceive truths without logical proofs, or as The Century Dictionary (1948) puts it: “direct or immediate perception of truths, facts, etc., independently of any reasoning process.” It represents, for Kirk especially, certain insights or “leaps of being,” which men of special, remarkable vision possess.13 In this age, Kirk believes, that the poets are especially endowed with the power to intuit truths by which man may come “to redeem the time.” Poetry “roused the imagination and shapes our ends.” By means of the poet’s vision, such as that of Virgil, Dante and Eliot, for example, we gain knowledge of ourselves (our limits and potentialities) and of the realities of the world. Through the mental images which the poet evokes for us, we are better able to see norms.

Kirk’s most extensive discussion of the distinction between the “abstract reasoning,” of the Benthamite variety, which he condemns, and the “intuitive reasoning” of the genuine conservative, is found in his summary of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s views. Whereas Jeremy Bentham, Kirk writes, “believed that certitudes may be secured by scientific analysis and statistical methods,” Coleridge denied “that truth could ever be settled on abstract grounds.” Truths which are concerned with our ultimate ends require us to employ our powers of faith and intuition, Coleridge believed, “the organ of the supersensuous.”14 When a civilization opts for the supremacy of abstract reason as opposed to reason illuminated by intuition, Kirk adds it will “lose any standard for determining what is good to people, or how to seek their own good.”15 Reason then plays a subordinate role to intuition in Kirk’s thought, determining for us only the most efficient and economic means for reaching a particular end. It cannot, by its very nature, determine the moral value of that end. Intuition must be guided in turn by the authority of long-established wisdom and institutions.16

The most important things in life being beyond the powers of private rationality to apprehend them, according to Kirk, finally, are not susceptible to understanding by reason alone. In terms of anticipating future possibilities, we should place, Kirk advises, “only a limited trust in the power of human reason” because “our future depends in considerable part upon Providence, or
chance, or that infinite combination of tiny causes which we call chance."

The Moral Imagination and the Natural Law

In reaction to the moral relativism perceived in such modern ideological movements as liberalism, socialism, and Marxism, many conservatives sought a doctrine which would posit the existence of an objective moral order from which a body of ethical absolutes could fix forever man’s moral obligations. For many, the natural law tradition of Cicero, St. Thomas Aquinas and Richard Hooker appeared to provide the ideal solution. Many argued that the natural law tradition was fundamental to the conservative position. The leaders of the new conservatism, Stephen Tonsor, for example, argued over twenty years ago, "are clearly identified with natural law philosophy and revealed religion." And, first among Kirk’s six canons of conservative thought which he listed in The Conservative Mind is the belief “in a transcendent order or a body of natural law which rules society as well as conscience.”

Even though Kirk has held that the genuine conservative subscribes to the natural law tradition, he has not explicitly defined that tradition nor accounted for the process by which man apprehends natural law. Rather, he appears satisfied that the moral principles embodied in the natural law tradition are compatible with and supportive of what he calls “the permanent things.”

To place Kirk completely within the natural law tradition, though, immediately produces some puzzling difficulties. Zoll, for one, expresses his uneasiness with such efforts. Neither Burke nor Kirk, he states emphatically, are advocates “of an orthodox conception of natural law.” To deduce “a corpus of theological orthodoxy as a philosophical foundation” for their social and ethical positions would, he concludes, be an inadequate approach. Kirk’s views are “only in part the logical offspring of his Catholic or neo-Thomist metaphysics.” Even so, he points out that one of the major themes in Kirk’s ethical convictions, which has “remained relatively constant” throughout all of his works, is his “preference for a natural law orientation.” Kirk, though, he adds, has never precisely stated “the deontological features of such a persuasion.” He “devotes little time to the ontological character of value, with its obligatory aspects, but, rather, provides a historicistic defense; like Burke, he is a teleologist who assumes that moral models emerge as representative of the underlying valuational character of existence.” For Kirk, he maintains, the “revelation of the ethical mandate emerges from moral actions of notable men in which a certain consistency and continuity can be witnessed.” In other words, moral values are derived from the unfolding of history which provides certain images or models of perfection which give evidence of what Zoll calls variously a “moral tradition,” “historical ‘decorum,’” or a “pattern in the civilized experience.” But Kirk would not likely be satisfied with his interpretation of his moral position. History by itself cannot be the final arbiter of good and bad values. How does one distinguish between good and bad traditions? As Burke wrote, “History is a preceptor of prudence, not of principles.” History, as Vigen Guroian points out, “instructs us in the relativities and contingencies of political life.” It serves as a guide, or authority to our conscience, but it cannot, if severed from the sources of higher knowledge (intuitively perceived), reveal to us with any final certainty ethical ultimates. History “is the record of human existence under God,” Kirk writes, “meaningful only so far as it reflects and explains and illustrates the order in character and society which emanates from divine purpose.” The “ends of man and society,” he affirms, “are not to be found in history: those ends are transcendent, attaining fruition only beyond the limits of time and space.” Further, as we shall see below, a historicistic defense of values is incompatible with a natural law position. So, at best, Zoll offers only a partial explanation of the moral basis of Kirk’s thought.

Kirk’s attraction to the natural law tradition can perhaps be attributed to three primary factors. First, there is what Zoll calls Kirk’s “unabashed theism.” Kirk,
remarks Zoll, is "often content to defend a premise by reference to its compatibility with Christian principles or concepts."28 Kirk's well-known regard for the historic role of the Catholic Church as an ordering force in civilization certainly explains in part his tendency to accept neo-Thomistic natural law formulations. Secondly, Peter J. Stanlis' book, Edmund Burke and the Natural Law (1965), for which Kirk wrote the foreword, probably encouraged this already strong leaning. Kirk's inclination to place Burke's political convictions within the natural law tradition seemed confirmed by Stanlis' arguments.29 Lastly, Kirk's assumption that the moral imagination and the natural law are virtually indistinguishable in addition accounts for his strong sympathy for the natural law approach. The last two factors deserve further comment.

To counteract the view that Burke worshipped only the expedient and denied the existence of abiding ethical norms, Stanlis placed Burke firmly in the natural law tradition of Cicero, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Hooker. From "at least 1857–1861, when Buckle's The History of Civilization in England appeared, until the present, it has been the almost universal conviction of utilitarian and positivist scholars and critics that Burke had a strong contempt for the Natural Law," wrote Stanlis, "and that the ultimate basis of his political philosophy was to be found in a conservative utilitarianism."30 Stanlis, on the other hand, argued that "Burke regarded the Natural Law as a divinely ordained imperative ethical norm which, without consulting man, fixed forever his moral duties in civil society."31 Against the charge that he was a relativistic defender of the status quo, Stanlis defended Burke as "one of the most eloquent and profound defenders of Natural Law morality and politics in Western Civilization."32 Kirk strongly endorsed this thesis.33

One indicator of the impact which Stanlis' book had upon Kirk's understanding of the moral basis of Burke's thought is suggested by the fact that Kirk had not identified Burke at all with Thomistic natural law principles in his The Conservative Mind, which was written before Stanlis' book appeared.34 Moreover, in the first edition of The Conservative Mind (1953), the first canon of conservative thought reads: "Belief that a divine intent rules society as well as conscience."35 In the later editions which appeared after the publication of Stanlis' book, this principle was revised to read: "Belief in a transcendent order, or body of natural law, which rules society as well as conscience."36

In his discussion of Cicero's natural law doctrines in The Roots of American Order (1974), Kirk flatly states that the natural law is the moral imagination. The natural law, he explains, "is not a fixed code in opposition to the laws of the state," but is rather an "ethical principle interpreting the rules by which men live together in society." He also maintains that in part it is derived "from the long experience of mankind in community."37 But as we shall see below, the proponents of natural law see it as body of immutable truths of which experience can only give evidence of its existence.

Kirk's self-proclaimed identification with the natural law tradition muddles rather than clarifies an understanding of the moral basis of his thought because he overlooks two fundamental issues which distinguish these approaches. The first involves the role of reason. For St. Thomas Aquinas, who is regarded as the preeminent authoritative source on Christian natural law, natural law was defined as "the rational creature's participation of eternal law." Man apprehends, in other words, the precepts of natural law through his faculty of reason, which all men possess, but not in equal proportions.38 Reason for St. Thomas, as A. P. d'Entrèves argues, "is the essence of man, the divine spark which makes for his greatness. It is the 'light of natural reason' which enables us to discern good from evil."39 Since the universe is governed by rational laws, it follows then that "it also exhibits a moral law," according to Eliseo Vivas, "which men are expected or, more precisely, are commanded, to use as a guide for their conduct."40 Vivas argues persuasively that this principle, however, is based upon a misconception of the status of moral law. Physical laws and moral laws are entirely different entities. Physical laws re-
fer, he points out, "to aspects of that which is." Moral laws, on the other hand, refer "to what ought to be." Therefore, he concludes, it is impossible to "conceive of the natural law of the moralist as we conceive of the laws of the physicists." Based upon the eternal verities which are arrived at through rationalization, Vivas points out that the natural law theorist presumes to "know quite clearly and adequately what man is, what his virtues and vices are, and what the principles or laws that can guide him safely through life." Vivas rejects this approach because it "presupposes a paternalistic misconception of moral experience." The good is conceived of as static and predefined because the precepts of natural law are viewed as unchanging and universal. A rigid adherence to the prescriptions of natural law can itself become a form of abstract morality, especially if it is divorced from immediate circumstances which, Burke wrote, "give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discerning effect." Thus, the second characteristic of natural law is that it attempts to predefine the good for all time and formulate a code which transcends all other codes. The advocates of natural law take a legalistic and intellectualistic view of morality because they assume that the moral ultimate is a precept of reason which can be applied to particular cases in a casuistic manner. But, as Vivas points out, "moral law cannot be enacted in advance of experience, enacted into law by decree prior to specific human action." Man's finite knowledge is incapable of grasping all the infinite possibilities which will emerge. Man, then, must be given the freedom, which natural law apparently denies him, to adjust moral prescriptions creatively to emerging unique situations.

The moral imagination, on the other hand, as Burke understood it, as Babbitt defined it, and as Kirk uses it, is based on a very different conception of the moral experience. The good is seen as dynamic, living, organic, the particulars of which cannot be conceptually predefined but are grasped by an intuitive vision. This conforms to what Kirk takes to be more nearly the actual experience of moral decision-making. As was demonstrated above in the discussion of reason and intuition, reason plays a secondary role in Kirk's moral thought to that of intuition. Through intuition we can grasp the universal good. We have an intuition of what life ought to be like. Through the aid of the imagination we are able to have some grasp of the potential reactions and effects of our actions in various situations. Therefore "a genuine moral decision," as Vivas points out, "is creative in its nature." Its parallels to aesthetics are apparent: moral judgment is an art, the ability to apply creatively the universal good (which is permanent), the One, to the ever-changing flux of existence, the Many. Reason cannot instruct as to whether our values are correct; it can only give us evidence of what the likely consequences of a particular act will be.

As a proponent of ethical dualism, Kirk asks us then to act in a particular spirit: to put our expansive, lower selves under the disciplining influence of the inner check. In an intuitive way, the moral imagination brings to bear upon a particular moral problem all the accumulated wisdom and experience of civilization. Here the natural law tradition is but a component. The precepts of the natural law tradition are part of the vast body of traditional moral wisdom which Kirk calls the "wisdom of the ages." While there exists a certain presumption in favor of these natural law precepts—based on what Zoll calls Kirk's "historistic defense" of value—they are discovered or inspired not by reason, but by the imagination. These precepts serve as aids to the imagination. By bringing to bear on a particular situation the "wisdom of the ages" which the individual has worked up into intuitive ethical wholes, he is able to check his immediate impulses, his expansive self, with reference to his essential destiny as perceived by their inspiration. While the good is eternal, it is not in the form of a singular precept or definition. It cannot be pre-defined since it is always emerging. Each new situation presents a unique set of circumstances. The individual, hence, must be open to what it would entail in particular circumstances.

Similarly, the ideal society cannot be
pre-defined. Neither Burke nor Kirk ever attempted to outline what was the best possible society. All forms of government must be adjusted to particular situations. A democratic form may not, for example, be the best possible regime for a people who, because they are incapable of exercising inner control over their passions, lack the maturity which would qualify them for freedom. A monarchy may be the ideal form of government for a society in which that institution has worked tolerably well for many generations. A good society, then, can never be a design of deliberate creation, but must be, as Burke and Kirk maintain, a product of organic growth—the passing down of culture, mores, traditions, and institutions through the generations. Because the good cannot be pre-defined for all time, any effort to freeze a society into some sort of a preconceived mold is doomed. Therefore, given man’s passionate and fluctuating nature, the particular applications of the good must be altered with changing, emerging circumstances. The good emerges in society when individuals are restrained by healthy traditions which embody the inherited norms of their civilization. An ethically ordered society is preserved by the successive creative acts of statesmen who take the moral norms as they have been transmitted down through the generations and apply them creatively to present circumstances. The end result is then a genuinely civilized society in which there exists a healthy balance between the necessity for change and the obligation of individuals to live in accordance with “the permanent things.”

Kirk’s identification with the natural law tradition, we can say in conclusion, is unsatisfactory and confusing because he overlooks that for a natural law theorist, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, natural law is the law of reason, discovered by rational cogitation. Kirk’s moral imagination, by contrast, is the power of intuition which is nonconceptual and nondefinitional. Intuition and reason are distinctive modes of apprehending the good which cannot be collapsed. The moral imagination is a direct, concrete perception of a standard of life, of moral experience, which is not arrived at through discursive reason-
both a strength and a weakness in his conservatism. As a consequence of his emphasis on the moral imagination as an immediate, intuitive grasp of the good, he appears to unduly depreciate the role of reason in preference to ultimately relying upon the intuition to provide a compelling confirmation of the good. This is especially annoying to many of his critics who regard this position as arrogant—after all how can you argue with an intuition?—or as proof of Kirk's anti-intellectualism.

There are further intrinsic difficulties with an ethical position which expresses an apparently one-sided faith in intuition. As Folke Leander points out in his criticism of Paul Elmer More, if morality is purely intuitional knowledge, then it can be taught to no one. Based on this approach, conceptual philosophy would appear almost useless. More's tendency to rely on pure intuitionism was rooted, Leander argues, in his "strong and legitimate feeling that the scientific, pragmatic, reifying reason is incapable of dealing with values and spiritual activities." So too it is with Kirk. Like More, Kirk does not discriminate clearly between narrow scientific reason, of the reifying, abstract variety, which he deplores, and its rivals, but rather tends to eliminate reason altogether as a means of attaining knowledge of the ultimate things in life.50

In his analysis of an identical weakness in Peter Viereck's moral thought, Claes Ryn draws some important distinctions between various types of reason. His analysis, while admittedly merely suggestive, offers some promising possibilities for averting the tendency of some conservative intellectuals to fall back too readily on pure intuitionism as the only legitimate means for confirming ultimate values. The conservatives appear to be unaware, Ryn notes, that the formalistic reason of the logical positivists, pragmatists, and the sciences has a "rival and superior." There exists "a more genuinely philosophical logic which does not have to violate concrete reality in order to speak about it." Kirk and other conservatives like him, argues Ryn, use this logic without being aware of it. Their arguments against the rationalistic formulations of the ideologies are based upon "a more truthful, philosophical examination of the material of experience." Through philosophic reason, Ryn hints, "the intuitive knowledge of immediate experience" is raised "into conceptual awareness. Its concepts are scrupulously faithful to the actuality of life. In other words, they reflect the dualistic tension of our existence. Philosophic logic is dialectical." Ryn's arguments adumbrate what may very well be the next stage in the development of conservative ideas. "It needs to become much more widely understood among conservatively oriented intellectuals," he argues persuasively, "that there is a type of dialectical logic which is equipped to speak in a compelling, scientific manner about the enduring structure of existence including man's moral destiny."51 The insights which are incorporated in tradition, religion, the wisdom of our ancestors, the lessons of history and "the permanent things," we can conclude, cannot be convincingly dealt with solely as intuitions, but must be seen as things which are capable of being argued about on the conceptual level. Abstract, pragmatic types of reasoning, because they could not account for the facts of moral experience, have led to moral confusion. While Kirk has been convincing in his analysis of the deficiencies of its proponents, he has not elaborated upon a logic which makes it possible to discuss philosophically the intuitions of "the permanent things" which he offers as an alternative.*

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