

to try to revive the past in its pristine form. The past remains with us as a living moment of the present where we must seek nourishment in our striving to shape the future. To try, however, to revive what has been in its original, pristine form would only result in an utterly impotent—and rather dangerous—Romanticism.

The Buchanan memoir is delightful reading for anyone who would like to get a closer look at the *Zeitgeist*, but as a serious political manifesto aiming to change the course of this nation, it falls far short of its assumed goal. As Pat Buchanan was undoubtedly told by the good Sisters who once taught him many years ago, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.” The road to Paradise, for nations as well as for individuals, requires a rigor of thought and a determination of will which far surpasses anything yet manifested by Pat Buchanan—or by his Conservative Movement.

## The philosophical roots of liberalism

by Peter M. Schuller

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### Whose Justice? Which Rationality?

by Alasdair MacIntyre

University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1988

410 pages, \$22.95 hardbound

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In our anti-philosophical age, few books in academic philosophy have much impact on the larger world. This one portends, however, to have some degree of real effect.

The overall organization of the book is to contrast what MacIntyre calls the rationality and morality of tradition-informed inquiry with the abstract, formal reason of the Enlightenment and its social embodiment: modernity's liberalism.

A rational tradition is defined as a historically developed and developing set of social institutions and forms of activity. Rationality so understood postulates that persons are members of a social order (one which itself is embedded in a larger cosmic order). Thus, tradition-informed inquiry acknowledges the socially and historically shaped nature of its theories and practices. It recognizes that how one thinks and acts determines the material for further thinking and acting; it holds that there are no pure “data.”

The Enlightenment proposed to overthrow tradition entirely as part of its scheme of liberation. It postulated the philosophical construct of The Individual, someone essen-

tially self-sufficient in rationality and morality, and whose relations in society are mere adjuncts to his inner self. Such an individual is supposed to be able to rigorously and correctly generate true conclusions by working on “data,” with a mind uninfluenced by his circumstances and no matter how he otherwise lives his life. This view has been embodied in a way of life which MacIntyre identifies as liberalism, which comes in three main varieties: conservative, liberal, and radical liberalism.

It is MacIntyre's thesis that liberalism has become a kind of tradition, although recognized as such by very few. Thus, its claims that it is the ultimate and purely neutral rationality are false. Further, MacIntyre believes that this ideal of abstract and pure reason is a false ideal. He holds that we must consciously return to a rationality of traditions. But liberalism is not the tradition which MacIntyre thinks suffices. In fact, he is concerned to show the incoherence and irrationality of liberalism.

He organizes the book by first narrating three different traditions of rationality and morality: the Aristotelian, the Thomist, and the 17th-century Scottish. MacIntyre gives a feel of the differences among them and also the sharper differences they collectively have with liberalism.

He then gives an account of the Enlightenment, stressing its concept of the pure individual—what in an earlier work (*After Virtue*, 1981) he called “the empty self.” This concept meshed with free market practices and in that conjunction constituted, contrary to its own self-conception, the tradition of liberalism.

The founding of the liberal social order, he argues, was in part motivated by a desire to enable those who espouse widely different and incompatible conceptions of the good life to live together peaceably and to advocate and live by whatever conception of the good each one pleases, unless that conception involves reshaping the life of the rest of the community in accordance with it. But this means that liberalism has its own broad conception of the good, which it imposes wherever it has the power to do so, and that its toleration of rival conceptions in the public arena is definitely limited. This broad view of the good (usually the satisfaction of the largest number of individual preferences, whatever they are and insofar as liberalism can tolerate them) entails that there is no one overriding good which orders subsidiary goods. Instead, life is compartmentalized, and in each compartment some one type of good is pursued.

### Pretense of coherency

From this two things follow. The first is that a single person may not have an overall, coherent ordering of preferences, but, to bargain successfully in the public domain, one must engage in the pretense that one does. This pretense tends to become a pathological self-deception. Second, among individuals there are conflicting preferences, but these cannot be resolved on the basis of one overall conception of the

good—a possibility liberalism necessarily denies—so non-rational persuasion displaces rational argument. Thus the endless proliferation of arguments which themselves never resolve issues. This is the opposite of what the Enlightenment promised.

It is in the feeble attempt to escape from this incoherence and from the despair of making this a harmonious order, that people come to deal with public life pragmatically, instead of rationally and with philosophical reflection.

Another strange characteristic of liberalism is that practical (moral) reasoning results not in actions, but in the mere cognitive conclusion of the form: "Such and such ought to be done." But from that conclusion, it often is the case that no action follows. This is so for several reasons. One is that the person's ephemeral preferences may change on the spot. Another is that it is held that preferences, not reasons, are the ultimate movers. A third is that reasons are thought to be mere tools of manipulation, and not themselves practical grounds for ordering life.

Liberalism takes pure preferences to be ultimate givens. Although preferences or desires have always been recognized as possible motives for action, in liberalism they are taken as absolutes, not to be judged, evaluated, and assigned a subordinate place in the order of life as a whole. Rather, the liberal self has only the task of maximizing the satisfaction of as many preferences as possible. Thus, "effectiveness" in achieving, in whatever manner, whatever preferences one has is counted as a high value.

If a person orders his or her own preferences and fulfills them, then that person is held, in liberalism, to have achieved practical rationality. But unlike other Western traditions, this means that one can be rational without yet being just.

Like many traditions, liberalism excludes from serious consideration any position outside its own orthodoxy. But liberalism pretends that it excludes nothing. It does this either by twisting other positions into variations of itself, or it labels what cannot be so transformed as mad and, therefore, outside legitimate consideration. But it promises to listen to every legitimate voice. Thus, liberalism promises that an adjustment within itself will be found in the near future, which will install perfect justice. But that is a future which comes—and necessarily so. In these ways, all debates allowed within liberalism are merely ways of preserving the liberal social order.

MacIntyre also attacks two spawns of liberalism: relativism and perspectivism. The relativist claims that between basically different theories and modes of life, there can be no rational judgment. Perspectivism, despairing of the actualization of Enlightenment norms of formal rationalism while refusing to give them up, declares that there is no truth or falsity, there are just different, co-equal perspectives on reality. MacIntyre argues that traditions, on their own criteria, can recognize deficiencies in themselves, even to the point of accepting a different tradition as entirely better.

It is his insightful analysis (not all the points of which can be reviewed here) of the basics of liberalism in its various guises which makes this book powerful. In presenting this virtual autopsy, MacIntyre hopes to start a process of self-knowledge of those living in a liberal order which can begin to be transformative. It is, in fact, likely that some philosophers, followed by literary theorists and then artists (as well as a few interested laymen) will see this portrait of modernism's pathology and begin seeking alternatives.

However, MacIntyre offers us no positive vision to get us out of what he identifies as another dark age, except to wait for a "new, doubtless very different, St. Benedict," as he had written previously.

## No way to win the peace

by Mary McCourt Burdman

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### **Troubled days of peace: Mountbatten and South East Asia Command 1945-46**

by Peter Dennis

Manchester University Press, United Kingdom  
War, Armed Forces and Society series, 1987  
270 pages with index, £27.95 hardbound

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Although the scope of this book is limited to the period of Lord Mountbatten's control of the British-led South East Asian Command (SEAC) in the months following the Japanese surrender in 1945, such a well-researched book contributes to understanding the current situation in Asian-U.S.-European relations.

The author, Lecturer in History at the Australian Defence Force Academy at the University of New South Wales, ultimately endorses the role played by Mountbatten and his commanders in the extremely difficult military and political situation in postwar Southeast Asia—but it is sober praise. The stupidity and viciousness of the Dutch and French in the area defies belief, leaving the British to "succeed" only in comparison.

Dennis details a wealth of information on the roles of all the concerned Allies—the United States, Britain, France, and the Netherlands—in making it extremely difficult for SEAC to carry out its primary tasks of demobilizing and disarming the Japanese troops, rescuing prisoners of war and internees, and restoring law and order. The men, equipment, and shipping provided were insufficient to deal with these tasks—when Japan surrendered, there were about 600,000