Editors: John Brewer, Cairns Craig

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Cover portrait of John Macmurray by Robert Lyon, MA, ARCA, FRSE, 1951, courtesy of the University of Edinburgh. Lyon was Principal of Edinburgh College of Art, 1942–60.

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MacIver, Macmurray and the Scottish Idealists
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The first issue of *The Journal of Scottish Thought* is focused on two major Scottish thinkers whose work had an enormous impact on American and British intellectual life – and on public perceptions of intellectuals – in the middle years of the twentieth century. Robert Morrison MacIver, born April 17, 1882, in Stornoway, not only became President of the American Sociological Association in 1940 as a result of the influence of works such as *Community: A Sociological Study* (1917) and *Society: Its Structure and Changes* (1931), but was a major public figure because of his defence of academic freedom during the McCarthy years in the United States, and for his promotion of the notion of the United States as a multicultural society. He also vigorously challenged the international political system that he saw emerging from the Second World War because ‘the menace of war is endemic in a world of States not organized within an international system’.¹ John Macmurray, born February 16, 1891, at Maxweltown in Kirkudbrightshire, became an influential ‘public intellectual’ in the UK after a series of broadcasts he made for the BBC in 1930. His talks on ‘A Philosophy of Freedom’ in the summer of that year were to set the template for the BBC’s agenda on educational broadcasting for several years: as Charles Siepmann, head of the BBC’s Talks Department, recalled, ‘Few would have expected that at the height of a beguiling summer and at the unlikely hour of eight of the evening twelve broadcast talks on Philosophy would have produced a miniature renaissance among thousands of English listeners’.² Macmurray’s subsequent influence on British public life – both Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher claimed key ideas derived from his work – confirmed his ability to relate challenging philosophical positions to general social and political debate.

Both are thinkers whose work has been occasionally revived since their deaths (MacIver in 1970, Macmurray in 1976) but who have been largely ignored because they do not fall into the ‘mainstream’ of contemporary Anglo-American philosophical and sociological thought – and because, in Scotland, 

there has been so little effort to understand, engage with and promote the particular traditions of Scottish intellectual life. MacIver and Macmurray are, as the essays gathered in this volume indicate, both thinkers steeped in Scottish traditions; thinkers whose work ought not only to be the context for our understanding of past Scottish culture but whose writings ought to inform our current philosophical, social and political thought. That they do not do so is symptomatic of the failure of the Scottish educational system to maintain the record of the country’s past achievements and to ensure that its past continues to shape—and to critique—its present. It is to counteract such amnesia that the Journal of Scottish Thought has been founded—to recall, re-present and re-engage with Scottish thought across a wide range of disciplines, Scottish thought which can help explain our past and may, in turn, help shape our future. This may seem an unnecessary focus when scholars around the world are researching the achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment, when books on Hume, Smith, Ferguson, on eighteenth century Scottish science and on the eighteenth-century Scottish book trade, are pouring from the presses. However, it is the phenomenon of the Scottish Enlightenment that we need to set in historical perspective in order to see the need for a broader and more extensive engagement with Scottish thought.

I

In their Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment, published in 1982, R.H. Campbell and Andrew Skinner note in their introduction that ‘interest in the Scottish Enlightenment is comparatively recent’ and they date the inauguration of that interest to W.C. Lehmann’s Adam Ferguson and Modern Sociology, published in 1930, and to Gladys Bryson’s Man and Society: The Scottish Enquiry of the Eighteenth Century, which appeared in 1945. The interest of both these writers was in establishing that ‘social scientists of the twentieth century may properly regard them [the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers] as forerunners in the effort in which we are engaged’. More recently, John Robertson has assigned the commencement of the concept of the Scottish Enlightenment to the work of Duncan Forbes and Hugh Trevor-Roper in the 1960s, and particularly to the course on ‘Hume, Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment’ run by

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Forbes at Cambridge, and which was attended by many of the influential participants in Enlightenment studies in the following thirty or forty years—most notably, perhaps, by Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner.5

From such tentative beginnings the Scottish Enlightenment has become an institutional fixture in European cultural history, studied throughout the world as the foundational period in which ‘modernity’ was first brought into focus and in which the intellectual foundations of the modern world—confirmed by the collapse of communism and the contemporary dominance of the free-market economics of Adam Smith—were established. The centrality of the Scottish Enlightenment both to the history of the modern world and to the (re)construction of Scottish history is underlined by its promotion in works such as Arthur Herman’s *The Scottish Enlightenment* (2000)—originally subtitled in the US as ‘the true story of how Western Europe’s poorest nation created our world & everything in it’. Scotland, once regarded as marginal to the history of the world, has become the very birth-canal of modernity. T. M. Devine’s *The Scottish Nation* (1999), for instance, presents the Enlightenment as allowing Scotland to fulfil those transformations of agriculture and industry that English history used to claim was unique to English experience: while in England the ‘currently favoured view of English modernization, as a process characterized by cumulative, protracted and evolutionary development’, the case was very different in Scotland: ‘North of the border there truly was an Industrial and Agricultural Revolution’.6 The characteristics that had once justified England’s unique place among European nations and explained its nineteenth-century pre-eminence in economic development have been transferred to Scotland—Europe’s truly revolutionary society whatever its political quiescence throughout the modern era.

This vision of Scottish historical primacy has taken on significant political overtones in the aftermath of the establishment of the Scottish parliament in 1999. In the following years newspaper articles regularly asked whether there could be a ‘second Scottish Enlightenment’ or whether, indeed, in the light of major contemporary Scottish scientific achievements—such as the cloning of Dolly the sheep—we were already living through a second Scottish Enlightenment. And the Enlightenment—which for many years had been regarded as a movement that had betrayed Scottish identity by its anglicising tendencies—was rapidly adopted as the true foundation of Scottish identity. In

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2006, the then first minister, Jack McConnell, chose to make the Enlightenment the theme of his Tartan Day address at Princeton University, deliberately attempting to relocate Scotland’s national identity from ‘romantic tartan’ to ‘enlightened science’: Scots who migrated to the United States were ‘the shock troops of modernisation—ordinary people who helped make America what it is today’—because at their back stood the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers who ‘taught the world how to think scientifically; set out the laws of modern market economics; and helped create the modern, civilised values that the United States and the rest of the democratic world now upholds’. Despite the establishment of ‘Tartan Day’ as the iconic celebration of Scots in America, Scotland’s future identity, like its past, was to be focused on ‘enlightenment’ rather than ‘tartan’ because ‘there are some who think Scotland could become home to a second enlightenment’.7

The rapidity of this rise to prominence of the Scottish Enlightenment—and of the consequent rise of Scotland’s intellectual history to a new international significance—can be measured by the fact that a book entitled *The Story of Scottish Philosophy*, published in New York in 1961, and edited by Daniel Somner Robinson, tells the story of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish thought without making any mention of Enlightenment, and presents the climax of the story of Scottish thought as the work of James McCosh, President of Princeton College and author of *The Scottish Philosophy* (1875)—as well as being eulogised by McConnell in his Princeton address. For Robinson, the importance of the story of Scottish philosophy derives from its being the source of contemporary American pragmatism, a source which Americans both need to know and to acknowledge if they are to understand the presuppositions of their own tradition. The Enlightenment makes no appearance in his story because it makes no appearance in McCosh’s account of Scottish philosophy: for McCosh, Scottish philosophy is defined as a national continuity of which individual philosophers represent ‘family members’, so that though ‘by the close of the [eighteenth] century, the fathers and elder sons of the family have passed away from the scene’,8 the family business will inevitably be continued by the younger sons and their heirs. What is significant about this philosophical family, however, is that it does not include the figure who, by the twentieth-century, was to be central to the notion of the Enlightenment in Scotland. For Peter Gay, in his groundbreaking

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7 Quotations from http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/princeton
account of the Enlightenment in the 1960s as ‘the rise of modern paganism’, David Hume stood as the embodiment of ‘The Perfect Pagan’; for McCosh, on the other hand, what was Scottish about Scottish philosophy was defined precisely by its resistance to Hume. Hume might be part of the story but he was not part of the tradition of Scottish philosophy, for that tradition was defined by its ability to provide answers to Hume’s scepticism: ‘It has been the aim of the Scottish school, as modified and developed by Reid, to throw back the scepticism of Hume’ (146). While accepting that all later philosophy has been required to address the challenge of Hume’s philosophy, McCosh’s belief is that Scottish philosophy’s importance lies in the fact that it has found an adequate basis on which this ‘foe’, this outsider, ‘might be repelled’ (147). Clearly, as long as Hume—the Scottish thinker most central to the European conception of Enlightenment—remains outside of the Scottish tradition of philosophy, there can be no Scottish Enlightenment: Scottish philosophy is, in effect, defined as the refusal of Enlightenment values.

On the other hand, an influential book of the same period as Gay’s—Nicholas Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison’s Scotland in the Age of Improvement: Essays in Scottish History in the Eighteenth Century (Edinburgh: EUP, 1970) – reveals an equal hesitation about the appropriate terminology for describing the transformation of eighteenth-century Scotland. In the ‘Introduction’, the editors identify the second half of the century as ‘the time of the Scottish enlightenment, that remarkable outburst of intellectual life in which, almost overnight, Scotland was snatched from the relative cultural isolation in which she had passed the seventeenth century and placed in the centre of the thinking world’. What the passive grammar of this sentence emphasizes is how little was innately Scottish about this Enlightenment: Enlightenment snatched Scotland from its isolation rather than Scotland producing an Enlightenment. The causal uncertainty is compounded when, in a key chapter of the book, John Clive continues to use an older terminology: ‘The question of the origin of the “Scottish Renaissance”—that remarkable efflorescence of the mid-eighteenth century, with its roll call of the great names . . . .—is one of those historical problems which have hitherto stubbornly resisted a definite solution’. The difference in terminology can be ascribed to the fact that, as Clive acknowledges in a

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11 Ibid., 227, 225.
footnote, ‘This essay was first written some years ago, as a part, eventually not published—of the author’s Scotch Reviewers: The Edinburgh Review, 1802–1815 (London 1957)—in other words, it was produced before the notion of a Scottish Enlightenment had taken hold. The shift in terminology is, however, significant: the use of a ‘Scottish Renaissance’ in a context where the phrase cannot help but require comparison with the Scottish Renaissance movement of the 1920s, implies the revival of something implicitly Scottish, whereas a ‘Scottish Enlightenment’, in a mirror-image of McCosh’s tactics, insists that Enlightenment might have occurred in Scotland but was not rooted in Scotland, and was not fundamentally part of a Scottish tradition.

These denials, explicit or implicit, of the possibility of a Scottish Enlightenment—that is, of an Enlightenment arising from and being the expression of Scottish culture—have been matched in more recent accounts by the explanations of how Enlightenment in Scotland ended and what it left behind to later Scottish culture. For most, the Enlightenment in Scotland bequeathed nothing to its Scottish successors, and produced no Scottish succession. This is the burden of popular accounts such as Arthur Herman’s The Scottish Enlightenment: ‘As the nineteenth century waned, the intellectual capital of the Scottish Enlightenment waned with it’, he suggests, as though the capital had failed to be invested in an ongoing business: ‘Scotland’s days as the generator of Europe’s most innovative ideas were over’. More philosophically adept academic analyses concur: Gordon Graham’s version of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy in Alexander Broadie’s Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment, insists that ‘the nineteenth century . . . saw the unravelling of the great philosophical project that had animated the eighteenth’. It is a view supported by the most influential account of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy, George Davie’s The Democratic Intellect (1961), which charts how ‘the democratic intellectualism which had distinguished Scottish civilisation was being allowed to disappear’ because Scots were no longer concerned to maintain ‘national pretensions to intellectual independence’. For Davie, what produced this failure was the submission of Scottish philosophy, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to Kantianism and Hegelianism, a submission so total that the Scottish tradition effectively ends at the point at which

McCosh writes its history in 1875. There is no effective inheritance from the Scottish eighteenth century to the twentieth: in the ‘Introduction’ to The Scotch Metaphysics (published only in 2001 but written in the 1950s), Davie identifies ‘the English tradition in philosophy’ as ‘practical utilitarianism, Bentham, John Stuart Mill and his father, Russell, Ryle and Popper’. If the tradition of Hume, as represented by the Mills, is to be treated as not part of the tradition of Scottish thought then not only is Scottish philosophy itself radically truncated but the Scottish tradition is wilfully circumscribed to only one side of the debate which Hume’s work initiated. A striking version of this displacement of Scottish culture can be found in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, for whom Hume, the greatest of Scottish thinkers, is the one who brings the tradition of Scottish thought to an end. MacIntyre takes the linguistic argument traditionally levelled at Hume—his concern to avoid Scotticisms in his writing—and turns it into an argument about the social nature of Hume’s thought, a social nature which reflects not Scottish mores but English ones, with the consequence that the Scottish tradition abolishes itself from within.

The original accounts of the Scottish Enlightenment, in other words, propose that there is Enlightenment in Scotland but that it is not fundamentally Scottish; alternatively, for those who see in the ‘Common Sense’ school the only true Scottish philosophy, there is a surviving Scottish tradition but it is not the tradition of Enlightenment; or, recurrently in more recent accounts, there may be an Enlightenment which is Scottish in a more than geographical sense but it leaves nothing behind it in the texture of subsequent Scottish life. Nineteenth-century Scotland becomes the antithesis of Enlightenment, a country plunged again into the darkness from which it had (only too briefly) emerged. The history of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy thus becomes the account of its gradual ‘germanising’, beginning with Sir William Hamilton’s attempt to combine the positions of Reid and Kant, developing through J.F.Ferrier’s attempted rejection of the presuppositions of Common Sense in favour of a Hegelian mode of philosophy, and culminating in the neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism of the Scottish Idealists, led by Edward Caird. Because of Caird’s enormous influence in both Scotland and England,
the Idealism which he propounded has been treated as a crucial betrayal of the Scottish tradition. Symptomatically, George Davie sees J. F. Ferrier’s efforts to find a way of constructing a compromise between the new German philosophy and the Scottish tradition as leading to ‘the collapse of the Scottish Enlightenment after 1854’ and its ultimate ‘blackout’.17

The Scottish Enlightenment—which in Ferrier’s original form of ‘German philosophy refracted through a Scottish medium’ seems to be moving towards a new lease of life—suddenly collapses into a blackout expressed in a series of contradictions which are never overcome. 18

For Davie, ‘the kind of Hegelianism produced in such quantities by Caird and his group of disciples was heavy, imitative, and indeed bibliolatrous, the work of minds which made no secret of their belief that Hegel had more or less said the last word about everything’.19 Commitment to a Germanic style in philosophy is, for Davie, necessarily a refusal to acknowledge the relevance of the Common Sense tradition, which is ‘treated by Caird as lying absolutely outside “the main stream of intellectual culture”’ since ‘no Scottish name later than David Hume passed his lips’.20 Gordon Graham, too, accepts that Caird’s ‘indifference to the national tradition’ was ‘to signal the end of a philosophical project which had lasted the larger part of 200 years’.21 Whether it is the empiricism of Mill or the idealism of Caird, Scottish philosophy cannot be truly in the line of Scottish development if it follows the faithless and Anglicising implications of Hume or the Germanising of Carlyle and Caird.

Paradoxically, however, it was precisely in the period which commentators have identified as the end of the Scottish philosophical tradition, the period after 1870, that the Scottish Enlightenment was first identified and named by W. R. Scott in his study of Francis Hutcheson, published in 1900. That the concept should become possible at this specific point in time suggests that

20 Davie, Democratic Intellect, 330.
something significant was happening in Scottish intellectual life in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries to make possible such a clarification of the historical landscape. It is, in fact, a period in which Davie’s account of the Germanising of Scottish thought was given a very different interpretation. In the introduction to a selection of Carlyle’s essays published in 1909, Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison declared that: ‘Whatever else might be doubtful, Carlyle’s intense conviction of the moral foundations of the universe, vibrating in every page he wrote, communicated itself to his readers as a tonic force of the most powerful and beneficent kind’.\footnote{22 Thomas Carlyle, \textit{Selected Essays of Thomas Carlyle}, with an introduction by Prof A. Seth Pringle-Pattison (London: Andrew Melrose, 1909), ix.} Carlyle’s philosophical as well as literary importance is underscored by the fact that, for Seth, ‘Carlyle’s great histories are therefore as much philosophies of history as history pure and simple’.\footnote{23 Ibid., xii.} The most prominent of the Scottish idealists, Edward Caird, was no less certain of Carlyle’s importance: no writer ‘in this century has done more to elevate and purify our ideals of life’ than Carlyle, nor done more ‘to make us conscious that the things of the spirit are real, and that, in the last resort, there is no other reality’.\footnote{24 Edward Caird, \textit{Essays on Literature and Philosophy} (James Maclehose and Sons: Glasgow 1892), 267.} For Caird, no less than Pringle-Pattison, Carlyle’s Germanism was not a betrayal of Scottish traditions but, rather, the recovery through philosophy and history of the fundamental principles of the reformed tradition:

Yet this new ideal, when we came to look at it closely, was, after all, nothing new or strange. It was in new words, words suited to the new time, the expression of those religious and moral principles which all in this country—and especially we Scotsmen—had received into ourselves almost with our mother’s milk. It was Puritanism idealised, made cosmopolitan, freed from the narrowness which clung to its first expression, or with which time had encrusted it. . . . Carlyle seemed to change the old banner of the Covenant into a standard for the forward march of mankind towards a better ideal of human life.\footnote{25 Ibid., 235–6.}

Far from representing the Germanising of Scottish philosophy, works such as Edward Caird’s \textit{A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant} (1877) saw themselves as marching under the Covenanting banner of Carlyle’s ‘better ideal
of human life’ and did so because Idealist German philosophy was itself as response to and an attempt to transcend the dilemmas posed by Hume. In adopting the discourse of German philosophy in order to escape the implications of Humean scepticism, such thinkers saw themselves not as negating their Scottishness but as recovering an older Scottish sense of religious conviction and religious commitment in a modern philosophical discourse.

Hume, however, was not to be so easily suppressed. In 1885, James Hutchison Stirling published in the journal *Mind*—itself a major Scottish contribution to British intellectual life in the latter part of the nineteenth century—a series of articles in which he argued that ‘Kant has not answered Hume’.

Instead of, like Reid, abandoning ‘the ideal system’ [Kant] elaborately reconstructed it, endeavouring to give it a more rational and tenable form. Kant is, indeed, the very prince of Representationists, and the Representation of the present day has its roots almost entirely in the Kantian theory.

Kant, according to Stirling, sought to defeat Hume’s metaphysics by elaborating on them, but in the end the fundamental issue which inspired Kant’s response—the search for the necessity which we feel to exist between a cause and its effect—proves the undoing of his whole philosophical edifice: ‘Kant’s whole work (and what alone led to all the others, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) rose out of one consideration only. What was—whence was—that very strange and peculiar species of necessity to which Hume has drawn attention in the phenomena of cause and effect’. As a consequence, the whole edifice of the *Kritik of Pure Reason*, nay, German philosophy as a whole, has absolute foundation in the *whence or why of necessary connexion*, and on this crux of the issue Stirling finds Kant not only to have failed to answer Hume but to have realised, belatedly, the significance of his own failure.

Hutchison Stirling’s argument was to have a profound influence on the course of late nineteenth-century Scottish thought. It is acknowledged, for instance, by Andrew Seth (later Pringle-Pattison) in 1890 as the starting point

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27 Seth, *Scottish Philosophy*, 149.
29 Ibid.
of his book on *Scottish Philosophy*, subtitled *A Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume*. In the light of the recognition of the inadequacies of the Kantian response—and the inadequacies of the Hegelian completion of the Kantian project, outlined in Seth’s own *Hegelianism and Personality* (1887)—it had become possible to return both to the dilemmas posed by Hume and to the Reidian response to them as parts of a continuing—and a continuingly relevant—Scottish dialectic. Significantly, then, in 1898, there appeared in a series entitled ‘Famous Scots’ parallel studies of *David Hume* (by Henry Calderwood) and *Thomas Reid* (by Campbell Fraser). What the two books between them reveal is a transformation in the relation between the two philosophers.

For Campbell Fraser, the interest of Reid lies precisely in the fact that his philosophy provides a possible alternative, however limited, to a world in which scepticism and doubt has become pervasive:

> It should attract those who, in an age of sceptical criticism, seek to assure themselves of the final trustworthiness of the experience into which, at birth, they were admitted as strangers, ignorant of what the whole means, like the agnostic in Pascal. Who has sent me into this life I know not; nor what I am myself. I find myself chained to one little planet, but without understanding why I am here rather than there; and why this period of time was given me to live in rather than any other in the unbeginning and endless duration. Life with its memories and forecasts looks like a blind venture. The sum of my knowledge seems to be that I must die; but what I am most ignorant of is the meaning of death. One is drawn to Reid by an interest in final questions like these, which the agnostic spirit is now forcing upon us.\(^{30}\)

Against the weight of such agnosticism, in an era ‘when the fundamental questions of religious thought are at the roots of our doubts and perplexities’ (143), Reid’s philosophy offers ‘Common Sense [as] the final perception of a being who can know the universe of reality only in part, and is therefore needed by man in that indeterminate position in which an absolute beginning or end of things must be to him incomprehensible’ (135). The pragmatic basis of this limited acceptance of knowledge Campbell Fraser accepts: ‘the unjust as well as the just, so far as they live at all, he sees, live by faith in what cannot be either proved or disproved by direct demonstration’ (137).

\(^{30}\) Campbell Fraser, *Thomas Reid* (London: Famous Scots Series, 1898), 16–17.
For Calderwood, on the other hand, contemporary interest in Hume arises precisely from his struggle with doubt, a struggle whose conclusion is not atheism or scepticism but possible faith. Calderwood dwells on Hume’s *Dialogues on Natural Religion* as a key text for contemporary readers, because of its debate about scepticism and belief, and while modern readings of Hume’s work tend to see in the sceptic, Philo, the character who most closely represents Hume’s views, Calderwood emphasises the role of Cleanthes, the seeker after ‘a vision of truth in harmony with our fundamental faith in the Divine existence’ as ‘the hero of the Dialogue’ and Hume’s true representative. He gives space, therefore, to a footnote added to the second volume of the *History of England* in which Hume regrets his emphasis on ‘the mischief which arise from the abuses of religion’ as compared with the ‘salutary consequences which result from true and genuine piety’ because of religion’s ability ‘to reform men’s lives, to purify their hearts, to enforce moral duties and to secure obedience to the laws and civil magistrate’ (103). As a result, Hume can be seen as rendering a service to belief rather than to scepticism:

Now that the prejudices against him have in a considerable measure passed away, we can admit that his perplexities may be helpful to us who follow. Faith succeeds doubt, while preparing the way for better thought. A true service is rendered in the history of intellectual and religious development when the common difficulties of our position in the universe are stated with clearness and force. Pioneers, after enduring untold hardships, may have the gratitude of the people. (107)

As a consequence, Calderwood hopes that ‘readers may be willing to consider afresh the scepticism and the religious faith’, with the result that ‘they may even be able to find, in Hume, a witness for Christianity whose testimony is in some respects the more valuable since beset by so many and such grave doubts’. Or, at the least, that an understanding of Hume ‘may lead us to a fairer interpretation of the attitude of those, in our own day, whose avowed doubts have induced earnest men to classify them amongst the irreligious’ (6). A Hume who can save the irreligious from condemnation and who can lead the doubtful back to faith is a Hume who is no longer the ultimate ‘foe’ of the Scottish Tradition, but an integral part of it.

This reconciliation of Hume and Reid, this return to them as providing still,

the fundamental starting points of modern philosophy in the aftermath of the collapse of the German metaphysic, is what makes possible W.R. Scott’s study of Francis Hutcheson as ‘a philosopher of the Enlightenment in Scotland’. For Scott, Hume does not stand outside of the tradition of Scottish philosophy but completes one phase of it:

If then Scepticism be accepted as the close of an epoch of thought, and if Scepticism is generally preceded by an Enlightenment, this order holds good in Britain in the first half of the last century. The Realism and Empirical Idealism of the eighteenth century alike, had reached their final development. Hutcheson, with many others, constitute the “Enlightenment,” and the period rounds itself off in the Scepticism of Hume, who turns the arguments of either tendency against the other to disprove the presuppositions of both. (266)

Hutcheson is the subject of Scott’s work, but it is Hutcheson as the inspiration of an Enlightenment of which Hume will be the most significant product: ‘Is it not strange’, Scott asks, ‘that in Germany, Hume’s claim to have drawn a dividing line across the development of modern Philosophy is admitted, while, in his own country, it is practically ignored?’ (265). This rooting of Hume in the intellectual ground of Scotland as enriched by Hutcheson made it possible to identify what was ‘national’ to the Enlightenment that Hutcheson initiated in Scotland: ‘however thorough he imagined his revolt [against Puritanism] to be, it was still Puritanism modified from within, not revolutionised from without, and this fact probably explains the leverage that gave him his influence in Scotland’ (259).

This continuity of Hutcheson and Hume as Enlightenment thinkers was not finally to be completed until 1941, with the publication of Norman Kemp Smith’s *The Philosophy of David Hume*, which gave historical contextualization to the radical rereading of Hume that Kemp Smith had originally proposed in *Mind* in 1905–06. There, he had insisted that the important issue in Hume’s philosophy was not his scepticism but his naturalism, involving ‘a purely naturalistic conception of human nature by the thorough subordination of reason to feeling and instinct’. In the book, however, he showed how such an interpretation of Hume could be historically grounded in the influence of

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Hutcheson, because from Hutcheson ‘he was led to recognise that judgments of moral approval and disapproval, and indeed judgments of value of whatever type, are based not on insight or on evidence, but solely on feeling’. As a result, such fundamental—not to say ‘common sense’—beliefs as ‘the belief in the existence of the body is, Hume declares, a “natural” belief due to the ultimate instincts or propensities which constitute our human nature. It cannot be justified by reason’. Hume becomes part of a tradition which is founded on Hutcheson and is no longer fundamentally at odds with Reid, so that all of them can now be participants in that Scottish Enlightenment which W. R. Scott had as presciently described in the future as in the past.

The work of W. R. Scott and Kemp Smith made possible a Scottish tradition which could include both Hume and Reid and therefore made possible the notion of a Scottish ‘Enlightenment’: ironically, however, the adoption of the idea of the Scottish Enlightenment was to cast into eclipse the very period from which it was born. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Scottish intellectual culture was treated as, at best, an afterthought to Enlightenment or, at worst, as a betrayal of it. And yet this was the culture of the two greatest physicists of the nineteenth century, Kelvin and Clerk Maxwell, who challenged Newtonian physics and made possible the work of Einstein; it was the culture of the some of the most important and influential anthropologists of the nineteenth century, in the work of Robertson Smith and J. G. Frazer; it was the culture of the most influential empirical psychologist of the nineteenth century, Alexander Bain, of the University of Aberdeen; it was the culture of Patrick Geddes, whose theories on the environment and on urban planning were to shape the development of twentieth-century thinking about the city and its future. The Scottish Enlightenment, in other words, was the conceptual product of a period of Scottish intellectual life as vibrant and creative as the period which it named, and it was into this powerful Scottish intellectual environment that Robert Morrison MacIver and John Macmurray entered as students in the first decade of the twentieth century.

II

In the decade before the First World War, Scottish culture was at the apogee of its international influence. The great nineteenth-century journals, *The

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35 Ibid., 86.
Editorial

Edinburgh Review and, especially, Blackwood’s, continued to have a worldwide audience even if they were no longer the arbiters of public taste, and new specialist journals such as Mind had established themselves as the leading titles in their field. The Scottish universities were leading the way in the development of disciplines such as English Literature—David Masson, Regius Professor at Edinburgh is regularly cited as the first modern academic literary critic—and in the teaching of new disciplines such as sociology, which MacIver introduced at Aberdeen in 1907. Scottish intellectuals would take the high road to Oxford or to Germany for their postgraduate education but at colleges like Balliol they would find a Scottish tradition as deeply embedded as they would find a Protestant tradition in Germany. The attractions of the Scottish universities as centres of intellectual activity are clear from the biographies of philosophers such as James Seth, who held posts at Dalhousie, Brown and Cornell universities in North America before returning to a Professorship in Edinburgh, or John Laird, who returned from Dalhousie by way of Queen’s Belfast to the Professorship in philosophy at Aberdeen, or Norman Kemp Smith, who returned to Edinburgh from Princeton in 1919. Robert Morrison MacIver’s biography makes it appear that his progression from Aberdeen to Toronto and then to Columbia was a smooth transition into a fulfilling transatlantic career, but letters in the archives at Toronto reveal that in 1921–2 he was engaged in discussions with the Principals of both Aberdeen and Glasgow universities about taking up a chair back in Scotland, an outcome which was averted more by accident than design.38 When John Macmurray returned to Edinburgh in 1944, it was because Edinburgh University, in his view, ‘offers an almost ideal set of conditions’ for his philosophical project.39

As is clear from their continual efforts to engage their philosophical and sociological thinking with the practical requirements of their societies, MacIver and Macmurray were both ‘generalists’ in the sense suggested by G. E. Davie’s account of the Scottish philosophical tradition as that of the ‘democratic intellect’—thinkers for whom philosophy was the foundation for a general account

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36 Founded by Alexander Bain of the University of Aberdeen and actually printed in Aberdeen.
38 Correspondence with James Mavor, in the ‘Papers of James Mavor’ held by the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, boxes 35 and 53a.
39 Costello, John Macmurray, 303; letter of May 15 to Provost of University College London.
40 See also Davie’s The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986).
of all aspects of human experience and for a response to the particular historical circumstances in which they found themselves. The title of MacIver’s book of 1955, *The Pursuit of Happiness: A Philosophy for Modern Living*, might stand as the epigraph of both their lives’ work, and thus their constant need to find ways of communicating their philosophies to a general public in an accessible and non-specialist style. They both wanted to address an audience each individual of which would be able, as MacIver put it in that book, to ‘think of yourself, the you between the heels and the hair, as a person’, and not simply as part of a mass or as part of an elite. By the 1950s, however, this style of intellectual engagement was being replaced by an increasing specialisation—a specialisation within academic disciplines and in terms of a vocabulary which could not be immediately accessible to a ‘general’ audience. Meeting George Davie for the first time in 1946, when both had recently returned to Edinburgh from posts in London and Belfast, Macmurray declared that ‘the humanities are fighting for their life at Edinburgh, and they’re losing the battle’. The same battle was being lost in Sociology departments in North America as scientistic explanations based on what MacIver described as ‘crudely mechanistic assumptions’ sought, ‘in precise quantitative terms’ to identify ‘the role of various components of a causal complex’. The challenge to philosophy and sociology as humanistic disciplines concerned with the decisions and actions of persons, and not merely with the formal structure of arguments or the quantitative analysis of data, was one which would marginalize both MacIver and Macmurray as their disciplines were reduced from general accounts of the nature of human communities to specialist analyses of the workings of language or of the collection of statistical data.

Through the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the chairs in philosophy at the Scottish universities were still regularly held by philosophers who had been educated in those universities—even if they had done their postgraduate work in Oxford or in Germany, and even if they had spent time in North American institutions: Kemp Smith and then Macmurray in Edinburgh, A. A. Bowman in Glasgow, Laird in Aberdeen, for instance. But with the rapid expansion of higher education in the 1960s, the small scale of philosophy departments

42 Ibid., 16.
which made such continuity possible was overwhelmed by the growth of much larger departments, many members of which had no connection with the traditions of Scottish philosophy. As John E. Costello puts it in his biography of Macmurray, ‘analytic philosophy, well dug in at Oxford and Cambridge, was now sweeping across England’. As a result, it became increasingly the case that to study Scottish philosophy was judged as a failure to engage in philosophy as such—unless, of course, one was engaged in the study of the Scottish Enlightenment. As a consequence, the influence of Scottish philosophers such as Macmurray was much more pronounced in other disciplines than in philosophy itself—in psychology, in theology, in the practice of social work his ideas continued to have a relevance that they did not have within the ambit of ‘analytic’ philosophy. Similarly, as sociology in the United States became more ‘scientific’ and less ‘philosophical’, MacIver’s influence was to exert itself in areas of social concern such as academic freedom or teenage delinquency, rather than in the development of sociology itself.

Ironically, therefore, the generalism which made the Scottish Enlightenment such a productive area for international scholarship after the 1960s—Hume and Smith could attract the interest of metaphysicians, historians, sociologists, economists, (anti-)theologians, aesthetic theorists, moralists and political scientists—was precisely the reason why their Scottish successors were treated as marginal to the concerns of the modern disciplines of philosophy and sociology—they were not sufficiently specialised to be appropriate interlocutors in contemporary philosophical or sociological debate. The very lack of specialism which was applauded in their Enlightenment predecessors was the basis of their contemporary denigration—an irony which tells us a great deal about the divide between intellectual history and intellectual engagement in our contemporary academic environment, and a great deal about the falsity of the promotion of the Scottish Enlightenment as an epoch which has nothing to do with the development of Scottish thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is in part for these reasons that this journal is entitled the Journal of Scottish Thought—it seeks to understand the history of Scottish thought through a generalist commitment to understanding the relations between specialist disciplines, and to maintain Scottish thought’s refusal of those disciplinary boundaries which would isolate the social sciences from metaphysics, aesthetics from social history, or science from ethics. The traditions of Scottish thought to which MacIver and Macmurray belong have insisted on the need

46 Ibid., 307.
for an engagement between the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities, because all of these have their impact on the needs and development of contemporary society—a society defined not by the requirements of particular intellectual disciplines but by the total activity of all the human beings who participate within it—what MacIver describes as ‘all the changing systems of human values, all the institutions, and all the creative works of man’.\(^{47}\) It is this broad conception of ‘thought’ to which the *Journal of Scottish Thought* is committed. As it is committed to a no less broadly conceived conception of what is ‘Scottish’. Scotland, throughout its history, has been a country of immigrants and emigrants; as a nation, it has been a site of transit and transition. Such a nation does not exist within the fixed boundaries by which modern states are supposed to be defined: it is nation at once located in a specific geographical and social-historical space and a nation whose filiations reach across the globe. It is a nation of communicative connections which refuse to acknowledge the territorial boundaries which the state assigns to it: it is a nation-in-community, a nation-in-communication, defying the territorial compactness of its political geography. It is this nation to which MacIver and Macmurray belonged: a nation which allowed one man to return to Scotland to find the community in which he could best fulfil the needs of his philosophical enterprise and the other to adopt citizenship in another country as the most practical application of the conception of community he had brought with him from Scotland.

Macmurray conceived of the human individual as a ‘person in relation’; MacIver conceived of ‘community’ as an ‘ever-evolving system spreading beyond and only partially controlled within the definite framework of any state’\(^{48}\); this journal is devoted to examining, analysing and understanding Scottish thought along both these axes—the relations of Scottish thinkers in whatever disciplines they happen to work and the interaction of thinkers who are engaged with Scottish thought wherever they happen to work. Through such ‘relations’ we hope not only to uncover unexpected interactions between Scottish thinkers—like the relations between MacIver and Macmurray explored in the essays in this issue—but to continue to promote the underlying agenda of this Scottish tradition—resistance to forms of specialism which on the one hand prevent us looking at human experience as a whole, and on the other prevent acknowledgment of the power of national traditions, whose particularity is a lens through which the nature of our modern experience can be understood. Such national particularities are as important to the eco-system


of thought as particular environments are to the eco-systems of the planet: we need them and we need to be committed to them, because any of them might, at some point, provide us with appropriate answers to the problems with which the modern world confronts us. There is no global theory which is not located in some locale, no locale which does not have the potential of providing a new and better global theory. Only by exploring, maintaining and developing the local can we hope to grasp the global—indeed, ‘glocalisation’ is what the theories of ‘community’ presented by MacIver and Macmurray might be said to confirm, the development and application on the widest level of generality of ideas that are grounded in particular social and historical experiences.

MacIver and Macmurray are appropriate figures for this first issue of the *Journal of Scottish Thought* because they are indicative both of the continuities within Scottish thought and the ways in which it has been disseminated across disciplinary and national boundaries. Scottish thought of their kind is as interdisciplinary as it is international, and for the same reason: in a small country it is impossible to build barriers between intellectual endeavours which may, in larger cultures, seem to be entirely self-sustaining; just as, in a small country it is impossible to believe that one’s culture is entirely self-contained and self-generating. Not only persons-in-relation, but disciplines-in-relation and nations-in-relation is the burden of Scottish thought as it is evidenced in the lives and work of Robert Morrison MacIver and John Macmurray.

Cairns Craig

University of Aberdeen
“We must protest that our inheritance is within us”:
Robert Morrison MacIver as sociologist and Scotsman
John D. Brewer

My purpose in this paper is in part dictated by the setting in which it is delivered, a reassessment of the philosophical writings of John Macmurray, in that I intend to acquaint philosophers and historians of Scottish thought with the sociological work of Robert Morrison MacIver—one suspects for the very first time (he is a novelty to most sociologists too). I intend to use the contiguity of MacIver and Macmurray as an opportunity to reflect on the disengagement between Scottish sociology and philosophy. My primary concern however, is to offer a preliminary analysis of MacIver’s work that seeks to locate his sociology in the ‘spaces of selfhood’ in which he lived and wrote. Specifically the paper will suggest that his Scottish upbringing had an enduring impact on his conception of sociology, despite having spent all but four years as a sociologist living and working outside Scotland.

There is a broader relevance to these questions. Many Scottish intellectuals from diverse fields and disciplines migrated to distant parts and assisted in the circulation of intellectual elites, ideas and knowledge. The intellectual diaspora in Scotland is relatively neglected but in as much as it involved the movement of ideas as well as people, and was often a normal expectation amongst intellectual elites, diaspora networks were one of the key social networks by means of which ideas circulated across intellectual boundaries. It is likely that if Scottish intellectuals abroad kept a sense of place and identity with Scotland and formed a self-conscious community of Scots, the capacity will be enhanced for diaspora networks to assist in the globalization of ideas. It is also interesting to speculate on whether this sense of place in their work gave the writings special resonance back in Scotland, and the British Isles generally, to affect how their work was read and received there; ideas have spaces of reception as much as production (a point illustrated in Livingstone, 2003 with respect to various scientific ideas). However, these questions are for the future. This paper will begin to paint one tiny part of the bigger canvas, namely, the representation of place in the early work of MacIver.

MacIver is worthy of special attention because he became one of the world’s leading sociologists. Born in the Outer Hebrides in 1882, after studying
classics in Edinburgh and Oxford, MacIver joined Aberdeen University in 1907 as a lecturer in philosophy. Between 1911–15 he taught lectures under the title of sociology. Despite his classical training, MacIver was a very early and enthusiastic convert to the relatively new subject of sociology (which had been first introduced in Britain to the London School of Economics in 1904 and Liverpool in 1905). In his autobiography, he describes his ‘lone battles to get sociology established in Scotland and Canada’, a subject ‘regarded by pundits as outside the pale, a bastard, a quasi subject with a bastard name’ (1968: 65). He worked hard at trying to legitimize it in Aberdeen for he was publishing in Britain’s only specialist journal, The Sociological Review, as early as 1913 and 1914, and his first book in 1917 was on the central sociological idea of community. In 1915 he left to join the University of Toronto, moving to the University of Columbia in 1925. He retired in 1950 but was persuaded to become President of the New School of Social Research in New York between 1963–65 and its Chancellor for 1966–7.

On any measure he obtained the best of glittering prizes during his career. He has been accorded the honour of revitalising sociology at Columbia. One of the figures he was influential in appointing there, R. K. Merton, himself eventually to become a luminary in world sociology, once described MacIver as the ‘Dean of American sociologists’, and MacIver could count John Dewey amongst his closest friends. MacIver was President of the American Sociological Association in 1940 (for his presidential address see MacIver, 1941), received numerous prizes for his publications and was awarded eight honorary degrees. He was the author of nearly twenty books in a period when

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1 It seems germane at this early point to refer to the contradictions within MacIver (as in us all). The title As A Tale That Is Told is taken from Psalm 90 verse 9—’we spend our years as a tale that is told’—and his work is replete with Biblical references and metaphors, yet he detested religion, regaled against it, and saw himself as an atheist, although to make my point he died in the Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, May 1970, and his funeral was under the rites of his parents’ faith.

2 In ‘Reminiscences’ (MacIver, 1960: 2–3), a short manuscript in the MacIver Archive in Columbia University, dated 10 February 1960, he refers to sociology as being perceived as an ‘upstart modern’ subject, but in one sense not modern at all, since he dates it to Aristotle. I am grateful to Cairns Craig for providing me with some items from the archive.

3 His affection for the subject was clearly passed down the bloodline: his daughter went on to marry the famous sociologist Robert Bierstedt, who spent some of his own career this side of the Atlantic.

4 A draft of the speech, with MacIver’s handwritten corrections in the margin, is in the MacIver archive at Columbia University, dated 27 December 1940 under the title ‘Some reflections on sociology during a crisis’.
Robert Morrison MacIver as Sociologist and Scotsman

Publishing was not a full-time occupation in the academy. For a time these works became some of the standard texts in sociology. One text was being reprinted on almost a two-yearly basis over thirty years after its first publication; there are many senior sociologists still active who cut their teeth on his textbooks. His career took him to significantly different sorts of cultural milieux and social spaces. It is a challenging case to argue that Scotland left a permanent footprint throughout his sociological work because his autobiography denudes his Stornoway upbringing of any influence. Indeed, in a biographical note written in the mid-1930s on a visit back to Stornoway, he wrote tellingly, ‘we must protest that our inheritance is within us’ (MacIver, 1968: 263). Let us first dwell on Macmurray however.

The Macmurray-MacIver Disconnection

Scottish sociologists and philosophers have tended to live in separate worlds. This is surprising given that sociology emerged in eighteenth-century Scotland out of moral philosophy, and these philosophical roots gave the Scots’ proto-sociology a distinct edge over other possible precursors of the discipline, such as Mandeville, Vico, Montesquieu and Rousseau (with respect to the impact of civic humanist ideas on Ferguson’s anticipation of themes from nineteenth-century sociology see Brewer, 1986). The wide acclamation, by philosophers and sociologists alike, of that early generation of Scottish philosophers-come-sociologists, Ferguson and Millar in particular, disguises the professionalization of the disciplines since that has separated their interests into distinct fields. Fast forward to the very beginning of the twentieth century, when scholarly practices avoided the contemporary fashion for excessive citation and demonstrations of multi-disciplinarity, and Scottish sociologists and philosophers appear to occupy parallel universes. John Macmurray and Robert MacIver are cases in point.

Their dates are contiguous, Macmurray 1891–1976 and MacIver 1882–1970, both were born in rural Scotland (Maxwellton and Stornoway respectively) into moderate wealth rather than poverty, sharing a strict Presbyterian upbringing to which both reacted negatively (MacIver by rejecting God, Macmurray by rejecting institutionalized religion). And they had Aberdeen in common, both having lived in the city at the same time, Macmurray as a schoolboy at the local Grammar and Robert Gordon College, MacIver a lecturer in philosophy and then sociology at the University (see Costello, 2002 for an excellent biography
of Macmurray). But it is at the level of ideas that perhaps they come closest to one another, making their disconnection all the more evocative of disciplinary closure.

MacIver made the idea of community central to his sociological perspective, establishing in his first book, published in 1917 (a time when Macmurray was at Oxford and then the Somme, and MacIver in Toronto), that the notion of community was the ‘fundamental law of social life’, a phrase that provided the book’s subtitle (see MacIver, 1917). A review by ‘VVB’ (almost certainly Victor Veracis Branford), in the fledgling sociology journal in Britain, *The Sociological Review*, described it thus: ‘the author brings a comprehensiveness of knowledge, a depth of insight, a clarity of vision, a cogency of argument, a simplicity of language and a dignity of style, such as are not often found together. The combination of qualities bids fair to make his book a landmark in the development of sociological thought’ (VVB, 1917: 109). In his famous Gifford Lectures in 1953–54, delivered at the University of Glasgow but co-sponsored by the University of Aberdeen, Macmurray arrived at a similar conclusion about the importance of community (which has resulted in both authors being unfortunately associated posthumously with the controversial set of ideas known as communitarianism). This idea was taken considerably further in the two-volume treatise *The Form of the Personal*, volume 1 published in 1957 under the title *The Self as Agent* and the second in 1961 as *Persons in Relation*. Seen as his most mature and complete philosophical works, and written at an age when he was at the height of his reputation, Macmurray wrote in the first volume of the self as an agent both whose actions and sense of personhood were constituted intersubjectively by the relationships people have with others. These relationships occur within a framework whose parameters are clearly sociological, in that Macmurray argued in the second volume that persons relate within the context of community, society and religious communion.6

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5 I am grateful to John Scott for information on Branford, whose middle name was probably not a misspelling of the Latin *veracis*, giving Branford the illustrious name of Victor Veracis, ‘conqueror of truth’, but in honour of an Italian Count, who it was hoped might further his father’s social climbing via his interest in horse breeding and racing. Branford would almost certainly have known MacIver, who Scott informs me was external examiner at the London School of Economics during Branford’s time. Branford spent some time in Edinburgh and may have met MacIver there.

6 These ideas are familiar in sociology where they are associated with the philosophical traditions of American pragmatism, such as John Dewey, and the Symbolic Interactionism of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, all of which pre-date Macmurray’s formulation. This reinforces the argument about parallel universes
Writing in the Foreword to Conford’s (1997) study of Macmurray’s writings on self and society, Prime Minister Tony Blair paid Macmurray the immense tribute of describing him as a philosopher who dealt with ‘the critical political question of the twenty-first century: the relationship between individual and society’. It was at the beginning of his career in 1914, when still in Aberdeen (but by which time Macmurray was in Oxford), that MacIver made the first of many forays into explicating the same link between individuals and society. In a series of two articles (MacIver, 1913, 1914), in Britain’s new sociology journal, MacIver laid out what he saw as the intellectual terrain of the new subject in an attempt to establish it professionally. The first paper cleared away the grounds for confusion between sociology and social psychology, much as did the French sociologist Emile Durkheim only a few years earlier in his 1895 explication of the rules of sociological method and his famous depiction of ‘social facts’. Group minds or collective psyches are not the same entities as communities MacIver asserts (1913: 153), and such notions are incapable of explaining social life. This was a theme MacIver pursued elsewhere in the

but the paper does not explore the apparently even more surprising separation of Scottish and North American philosophy.

It has sometimes been thought that MacIver was dismissed from the University of Aberdeen in 1915 because his professor of moral philosophy and head of department took exception to his sociological writings, since he was after all in a department of political science and philosophy and came originally to teach political philosophy. MacIver addresses this incident in his autobiography (1968: 74–5) and explains his departure as the result of interpersonal difficulties arising from a negative review he wrote of a book on Hegel, which, although not written by the unnamed professor to whom MacIver was an assistant, was taken by him as a veiled personal attack since he was also a Hegelian. Clues elsewhere in the autobiography indicate that it was the then professor of moral philosophy, which the University Calendar for the year reveals to be James Black Baillie (later Sir James), who was professor in the University of Aberdeen between 1902–1924 before becoming Vice Chancellor of the University of Leeds. He died in 1940, years before the autobiography was written, but MacIver still protected his anonymity. It was another famous Scottish philosopher, James Seth, who recommended the post in Toronto to MacIver and wrote in support of his appointment. In ‘Reminiscences’ (1960: 5–6), MacIver is a tad more blunt, describing himself as ‘annexed’ to the chair of moral philosophy, for whom he did ‘chores’ as well as lecturing in political theory, with the occupant taking a ‘bitter dislike’ to him, being unwilling to provide MacIver with a ‘decent testimonial’, and not acknowledging his existence when passing in the quad. ‘I did not realise’, he wrote, ‘that you can seldom criticize doctrines without being offensive to those who hold them’ (1960: 6). The man still goes unnamed however.

There is no citation to Durkheim although MacIver did know his work and engages in debate with him only the following year about their different ways of representing the relationship between individuals and society (see MacIver, 1914: 60).
pages of *The Sociological Review* when reviewing books on psychology for the journal, writing in 1920 (in the non-gender neutral fashion of the day): ‘the life of men in society cannot be explained without relation to their environments, and a psychologist who relies purely on the psychological approach is utterly unable to explain the concrete reactions of men to specific situations in time and space’ (MacIver, 1920: 142). Nor are there intellectual grounds to argue that social psychology studies the individual and sociology the social, for MacIver argues there is nothing that is purely individual without social influence (1913: 155). This argument is the instigation for the second piece, entitled ‘Society and “the Individual”’ (MacIver, 1914), which constituted the very first published statement of MacIver’s enduring idea about the indivisibility of individuals and society and the essential sociability of the human personality. Its contents seem to epitomize that Scottish sociology and philosophy existed out of time and space with each other.

In the article MacIver disputes the idea that society is a system separate from its members, *sui generis* as Durkheim famously put it, or that, in terms of the famous organic analogy popularized by the English sociologist Herbert Spencer in the nineteenth-century, it has a life of its own; more peculiar still that it had a soul and thus was some kind of divine design or was the outworking of a now obsolete ‘social contract’ as argued by Rousseau and Locke in their different ways. Individuals never exist outside of society, so there can be no original state of nature where we might discover people unaffected by social processes; and society does not exist outside of individuals, so there can be no social process that is not dependent upon persons relating, to use Macmurray’s later terminology. Society is inside people; people are inside society. He begins his paper by saying, ‘there are no individuals who are not social individuals and society is nothing more and individuals associated and organised’ (1914: 58), and ends restating the same principle when concluding that ‘only in society is personality at home . . . society is nowhere but in its members’ (1914: 64).

This statement of principle still leaves the sociological task of investigating the forms of association and organization by which society is constituted through the actions of its members and makes essential also the job of charting

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9 That Adam Ferguson had already disabused sociology of all these false notions in his 1767 book *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, without acknowledgement by MacIver, opens up an interesting interrogation of the connections between MacIver’s sociology and that of his eighteenth-century Scottish sociological forebears that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.
both the social relations that occur between people and the balance of individual and communal interest that these relations display. For all his emphasis on community, MacIver makes plain right at the beginning of his sociological journey, that social life evinces ‘social disharmonies, social sacrifices and social tragedies’ (1914: 63) and that the discipline should never suppose that people will always conform to communal norms. There is, he writes, a ‘profound sense of final failure [that] accompanies all individuality which detaches itself from social service’ (1914: 63), for ‘only in a highly developed society can the social initiates, the children of society, develop their potentiality; only in serving society can the developed member attain the further fulfilment of life’ (1914: 64). However, MacIver does not romanticize communal life; he argues against the doctrine proposed by some nineteenth-century sociologists (such as Comte) and philosophers (such as Fichte) that people should subsume their individuality within the community. Nor does he reproduce the conservative and anti-modernist idea of much of late nineteenth-century sociology that close knit communal life is the most desirable social form (a notion described as one of the discipline’s five ‘unit ideas’, see Nisbet, 1967). ‘Society has no life but the life of its members’, MacIver writes (1914: 58), ‘no ends that are not their ends, and no fulfilment beyond theirs’, so individuality should not be suppressed by excessively oppressive and regulated communities; but neither should collective interest be made subservient to individual self-interest. Sociality and individuality develop pari passu, as ‘VVB’ (1917: 111) put it in the review of MacIver’s later book on community that expanded these notions, or in more modern phrasing, individuals express and fulfil themselves only in society but without individuality, society is oppressive to the point of instability and decline.10

MacIver took this basic sociological principle through to its inevitable end by exploring the various types of social formation and the diversity of social life. Formulation of the idea that the self is social took Macmurray on much the same task and in a similar direction but oblivious to MacIver. In Conditions of Freedom (1947), for example, Macmurray writes that ‘we become persons in community in virtue of our relations to others. Human life is inherently a common life’ (1947[1993]: 37). This led him naturally to seek to clarify the various forms of social organization, and he developed further the notion first expressed in the 1935 Reason and Emotion that ‘society’ and ‘community’ could be distinguished (whereas MacIver treats them as indistinguishable): as

10 Again it is remarkable that Ferguson is not acknowledged as a direct Scottish precursor of the same idea.
a form of human association society was constituted by a common purpose, community by a common life. He ventured further into sociology’s territory by claiming that politics was the vehicle by which common purpose was pursued, religion the source of the shared life that people had in common. He understood religion in a very sociological way, redolent of Durkheim’s famous 1912 study *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, wherein religion was socially constructed for the purpose of social solidarity—allowing society, in Durkheim’s infamous phrase, to worship itself. In Macmurray’s philosophy of personal relations, religion was both helpful in creating and cementing community life and was itself the social outcome of people’s need for sociality, of our need for communion with others; a sentiment one might have expected from the atheist MacIver not the Christian Macmurray. ‘We may define the function of religion’, Macmurray writes in *Persons in Relation*, ‘as being to create, maintain and deepen the community of persons and to extend it without limit’ (1961: 163); ideas developed in the 1965 Swarthmore Lectures published as *Search for Reality in Religion*.

The point I am sure is now laboured: Scottish philosophy and sociology meet in the modern era in the persons of Macmurray and MacIver but there is no evidence they knew of each other and they made no references to the other’s work. Beyond disciplinary closure, a further possible reason for this is the existence of the Atlantic Ocean; physical as well as disciplinary boundaries kept Macmurray and MacIver apart despite Macmurray being an indomitable Scot and MacIver being a very Scottish writer. It is to this claim that I now turn, beginning first with some basic biographical details.

**The Man, His Life and Work**

Robert Morrison MacIver was born in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides in 1882. The family was Gaelic speaking and strict Presbyterian but otherwise not conventional for the area. Stornoway was the largest urban settlement on the Island and the family were merchants of Harris Tweed and were thus moderately wealthy for the district and fully bilingual; in the unpublished ‘Reminiscences’ (1960: 1) MacIver refers to the family as petit bourgeois, with an atmosphere that combined a great belief in education with a fervent religiosity. His father was ‘country born’, his mother ‘town bred’ (MacIver, 1968: 2), the latter more sophisticated, less tradition bound and more liberal in her religion (MacIver, 1968: 4). It was his mother who encouraged his reading
of classic Victorian literature (1968: 4); he writes in one of his unpublished papers, ‘we had a respectable library and reading was encouraged, especially the classics of English literature’ (1960: 2). There were more material trappings of wealth too. The family had a servant, who also worked in the family shop, and a nursemaid, and they later acquired the first automobile on the Island, MacIver’s father adding car hire to his business establishment. He lived a close-knit family life, with two maternal aunts and a maternal uncle living next door. Robert was a studious and ambitious boy, considering himself ahead of his teachers, and easily won a bursary at the relatively tender age of sixteen to study classics at Edinburgh University. Looking back seventy years later in his autobiography, he puts into the youngster’s mouth the following reflection as he waited for the steamer to the mainland: ‘I was sure I would never make my home on that Island again’ (1968: 42). He was a prodigious scholar and succeeded easily. He was awarded his MA in 1903 and DPhil in 1905. He studied for a BA in Greats at Oriel College, Oxford, awarded in 1907, the year he joined Aberdeen University as a lecturer in philosophy. Between 1911–15 he taught lectures under the title of sociology before moving to North America where he stayed the rest of his life to pursue a very successful career in sociology.

It is necessary to point out here however, that MacIver remained a political philosopher as much as sociologist—the Lieber Chair he occupied at Columbia was jointly in Political Philosophy and Sociology—and he continued to greatly value the Greeks for their political ideas, reflecting his early training. In many ways he was a polymath, writing the entry on sociology in the very first *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences* in 1934, alongside studies of government, juvenile delinquency and International Relations, amongst many other things. He continued to write political treatises and on topical issues in a manner that today we would label ‘public sociology’,11 and he thought of himself as a social scientist rather than sociologist (1960: 4).

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A Scottish Intellectual Abroad?

At the time of his death, United States’ sociologists appropriated MacIver as one of their own. Biographical and encyclopaedia entries emphasize his contribution to North American sociology. An obituary in *The American Sociologist* by a former doctoral student never mentioned that he taught sociology in Aberdeen or Toronto (Komarovsky, 1971). Obituaries gave only passing comment to his Scottishness and none pondered whether Scotland had a lasting effect to connect his life and work. This idea has not been developed since because he was very quickly forgotten. Like many sociological figures whose reputation is rapidly put in perspective retrospectively, citations to MacIver’s work fell off almost immediately after his death and thus far he waits to be rediscovered anew by later generations. Elzbieta Halas (2001) has suggested that MacIver was forgotten precisely because of his placement firmly in US sociology, since its obsession with grand theory and abstract empiricism made the discipline develop in the United States in ways inimical to MacIver’s interests (MacIver complains about these trends in his autobiography, where he writes that he was ‘generally out of line with the prevailing notions and doctrines of American sociology’, see 1968: 110; also see the unpublished paper ‘Reminiscences’, 1960: 10-11). It was common amongst US sociologists at the time of his death to portray MacIver as a link between Europe and North American sociology and he is featured in the so-called Europeanization thesis, which points to the large number of émigrés in US sociology, although the concentration was on German and continental émigrés; Scotland did not figure in much of the debate. Today MacIver is neglected in sociology, although outside the academy environmental activists occasionally utilise his writings on community as part of their discourse on local sustainability and some defenders of the Gaelic language have appropriated his work on community to argue that vibrant languages require particular kinds of social relations.

It is interesting to speculate about the extent to which his *oeuvre* carried the imprint of Scotland and the Outer Hebrides in particular. There are at least two possible influences of Scotland on his intellectual work, one substantive, the other theoretical and methodological, which I can address here only at a very general level. With respect to substantive influences, MacIver’s sociological work shows a fascination with the relationship between individuals and society, between individual autonomy and tight-knit communities, or put another way, the compatibility of individualism and strong social organization. He portrayed societies as evolving from highly communal societies to states
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and saw that these higher forms of social organization needed to retain deep roots in the former. These were enduring themes in early sociology as observers wrestled with the nature of the social bond within the context of emerging individual freedoms and rights and as they sought to conceptualize the evident changes occurring in the nature of social organization. The proto-sociological work of the eighteenth-century Scots had the same problematic during the effervescence of Scotland’s Enlightenment a century and a half earlier, and MacIver’s work needs to be fully interrogated for the influence of his eighteenth-century forbears for how he conceptualized social progress. It may well be that MacIver’s sociological writings are shaped by Stornoway as mediated through urban Toronto and up-town New York, in that his personal acquaintance with close knit communal life in the Western Isles and the individualized living of an urban metropolis may have given him particular insights into the relationship between individuals and society.

With respect to theoretical and methodological influences, MacIver’s work straddled political philosophy and sociology and he could not separate the social from politics and power. His overall theoretical approach was inspired by classical liberal thought, as was common in the early twentieth century, but he gave his liberalism a pronounced eighteenth-century Scottish twist, in that he adopted the position of Ferguson, Millar and the early Smith in seeking to establish social restraints on the market, constraints that Ferguson called civil society and the early Smith moral sentiments. This is quite contrary to the way liberalism developed in nineteenth-century England and to the kind of liberalism that passed into early twentieth-century sociology in the United States via Herbert Spencer’s dominating influence. Shortly after moving to Toronto he was nearly dismissed as a ‘dangerous radical’ after speaking out against the ‘evils of unrestrained capitalism’, the campaign against him leading to the President of the University, Sir Robert Falconer, to mount his own defence of academic freedom, stating that universities should have ‘no prescribed or proscribed ideas’. At this time MacIver was being described as a political economist but one clearly in the mould of the Scots not the English. This suggests that his philosophical and sociological writings justify being analysed in great depth in order to gauge the extent to which his classic liberalism was drawn from eighteenth-century Scotland not nineteenth-century England.

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12 In his autobiography he refers to his affections for the ‘oppressed, the poorer classes, the powerless classes’ (1968: 131), and how in the United States, the ‘FBI-minded patriots would in their simplicity have labelled me a “pinko” for my pains’ (1968: 134).
In methodology he was opposed to abstract empiricism and general theorising. And in this regard he may have influenced a young sociology lecturer at Columbia at this time, Charles Wright Mills, who made these the twin motifs of his infamous criticism of mid-twentieth-century US sociology in *The Sociological Imagination* (see Mills, 1959, although the archive of Mills's letters in the public domain makes no mention of MacIver). MacIver’s approach—in political philosophy and sociology—was to focus on social problems (such as delinquency) and real world events (such as the installation of the United Nations, the changing nature of the state, and threats to academic freedom), and to locate them in a broader intellectual framework; this was also the approach adopted by eighteenth-century Scottish writers who used their proto-sociology to engage real issues around social change in commercial Scotland. ‘Real sociological investigation begins’, he wrote in his autobiography, ‘where the statistics end’ (1968: 129); and he discloses what was ‘real’ in the following remark: ‘society [is] an exceedingly complex structure but it is still beset by rending divisions…My urge to write took its direction and its major incentive from these considerations. I was eager to explore the problems of the social condition’ (1968: 177).13

I am deliberately couching these Scottish traces in very general and highly speculative terms, but the ground is firmer with respect to MacIver’s treatment of the notion of community, and this is worth deeper consideration because it is terrain shared with Macmurray. Writing his autobiography at age eighty, he was very critical all those years later of his upbringing, island life and the social structure of the Isle of Lewis generally. Yet he discloses in many subtle ways throughout his autobiographical narrative that he remained all his life very much a Scottish intellectual abroad, for his portrayal of his life’s work as the exploration of the nature of the social bond, and the way he conceived that bond, drew heavily on his Scottish roots. Stornoway proved a critical ‘space of selfhood’ to lasting effect. In so arguing one confronts an autobiographical conundrum since MacIver’s narrative denudes the Isle of Lewis of any positive influence. At one point he recognises that ‘every scholar bears the stamp of his time and environment’ (1968: 151), but assiduously avoids to write himself into this approach, save

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13 In one of his unpublished papers in the Columbia University archive, entitled ‘The Scholar in Society’ (MacIver, nd: 2), he notes with approval that ‘nowadays the scholar is drawn into the vortex of social debate and conflict. Even the philosopher escapes no more’, and that the true scholar ‘endeavours to apply the knowledge he acquires to the problems of human living, of human beliefs and human values’ (nd: 10).
perhaps as a negative when he writes, ‘we must protest that our inheritance is within us’ (1968: 263).

“We Must Protest That our Inheritance is Within Us”

The autobiography on which the following analysis is based is very traditional in its deployment of chronology to order events and achievements and in its neglect of reflexive narrative to make his own connection between his life and work. However, there are three levels at which this legacy operates: the attention he gave to the importance of community, for which the Isle of Lewis was positive; the way he came to conceive of community as carrying the dangers of moral oppressiveness and the crushing of individuality, resulting in him giving the Island a negative hue; and the enduring tokens of Island life and upbringing he carried with him that impacted on the diaspora intellectual networks he was part of.14

In the autobiography he writes on one occasion of how he envisages the social bond, views unchanged from the early articles in *The Sociological Review* a half century before:

> Society is about belongingness, community, interdependence, intra and inter-group relations; the individual is an individual only because society creates and shapes and informs his being…the fact that human beings belong together in groups, classes, nations, brotherhoods of all kinds means more than that they feel alike, behave alike. They have as unities a common feeling invoked by their togetherness. They are social animals…Community has always been the central theme of my work and thus the title of my first book was prophetic as a life interest (1968: 129–30).

It cannot be puzzling that he came to such a view of the centrality of communal life after experiencing island life as the quintessential communal upbringing.

At first sight thus it does appear strange that his autobiographical narrative is dominated by critique against the Isle of Lewis. Even though he was brought up in a more liberal religious setting than most Islanders and in

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14 The remarks about diaspora networks will be restricted in this paper to his time in Toronto. It is intended to consult further the MacIver archive in Columbia University to expand these arguments to his years in New York.
relative prosperity, MacIver regales against the rigidity and austerity of attitude he found in his home, leading him, he writes seventy or so years later, to a ‘painful struggle against these authoritarian pressures’ (1968: 33), a ‘feeling of moral oppressiveness in our home atmosphere’ (1968: 46). In ‘Reminiscences’ (1960: 1), MacIver states that the Island’s religious orthodoxy ‘became for me hopelessly at war with nature’. In his autobiography, he referred to his religious upbringing as indoctrination and to Christianity—and all religions—as ‘ancient myths bred on the union of Eastern mysticism and the ranker of Calvinist superstition’ (1968: 125). He was eager to leave home and move to cosmopolitan Edinburgh: ‘I longed for a freer air… I wanted to belong to this greater world, away from the inhibitions and prohibitions of home, I wanted new opportunities and challenges’ (1968: 33); ‘living at home had lost much of its appeal’ (1968: 36). Hence he puts into the nervous little youngster’s mouth while waiting with trepidation for the ferry to leave, the prophetic comment ‘of one thing I was sure, I would never make my home on that Island again’ (1968: 42). On arriving in the city he recalled, so many years later, ‘I felt emancipated, adult, independent… I could wander where and when I wanted’ (1968: 43).

Emphatic as they are, these views mellowed with age from those contained in Appendix 3 of the autobiography, which is a contemporary account of his feelings about visiting the Island again in the mid-1930s. MacIver made a trip home in 1921 and visited family on mainland Scotland as late as 1949, but Appendix 3 records his feelings at the time on making his last visit to the Island. By now his parents were dead, his siblings scattered, and he felt a stranger on the Island, ‘so much alone’ (1968: 255) in his experiencing of a ‘lost world of the smells of earth and sea’ (1968: 257). Nostalgia aside—and one can only imagine the intensity of emotion as he walked through his past like this—it was a crueller tongue that lashed. Such a land had bred its own people he recognised, ‘with little appreciation of human brotherhood’ (1968: 261). Social change was appearing on the Island—slate roofs were ousting thatch, the car banishing the jaunting car and the steam drifter had replaced the old wherry—but the people remained ‘gloomy, repressive, bitterly orthodox. There is no beauty in its holiness or gladness in its praise’ (1968: 261).

Instead it seeks to close every avenue of escape. It abhors dance and gaiety. It regards art and beauty as lures of the devil or at best as profane pursuits unworthy of the seriousness of life. It includes the most natural diversions under the formidable and unarguable name of sin. It is the enemy of youth, making men and women old before
their time... The association of the body with sin poisons the mental atmosphere... The countryman drowns his melancholy in liquor. He is the desperate drinker who drinks, not to enjoy himself but to feel free (1968: 261–2).

He says he would be sorry to overestimate the part played by repression and reaction in the life of this Island people, but, remembering 'here in my own youth', 'my spirit protested within me against these mighty and oppressive claims, I remember the growing sense of relief, of spiritual emancipation' from beliefs, habits and traditions 'bred in the darkness' of the Islanders' 'suffering and ignorance' (1968: 263). He announced himself someone who did not belong to those who always deplore the decline of the ancient spirits and superstitions; better that customs should pass and that institutions change 'than that a people should preserve them in its own decay' (1968: 260).15

It might reasonably be argued that MacIver’s anger was limited to the Island’s religion and that it was his atheism rather than his sociology that motivated this complaint. His diatribe at one level is mostly against the persistence of religion on the Island—the Isle of Lewis ‘more than most’ has preserved religion’s social hold—but ever much the sociologist, which by disciplinary nature reduces religion to the social purposes it fulfils and to the social structure that embeds it, MacIver ends his reflections in such a way as to make clear to himself (for the personal statement was not intended for any audience but himself, at least at the time) that religion on the Island was synonymous with the social structure that it upheld and through which it worked. In the final paragraphs he writes:

Now, looking backward, I perceive that the thing which was hard to struggle against was not the creed itself. As soon as one permits oneself to think freely, its hold relaxes. The difficulty was with that which checked one’s thought, the compulsion of the social influences which guard the creed... He who denies the faith is outcast, but he who deserts it is anathema... They are in truth, in their interests as in their thoughts,

15 I am very grateful to Geoff Payne for bringing to my attention an interesting vignette. Patrick Geddes’s son Arthur did fieldwork on the Isle of Lewis in 1919 and again some years later (Geddes, 1955). In personal correspondence with me, Payne describes Arthur Geddes adopting a stance deeply sympathetic to the Lewis people, their religion, traditional customs and the Gaelic language so unlike MacIver. This may be due to generational differences between the two as well as biographical differences, deriving from MacIver’s deeper and longer experience of the place.
still remarkably remote. The spirit of industrialism has never touched this island… to such a folk, what do the great names of capitalism and socialism matter? (1968: 264)

For all its evocation of communal living, of togetherness and interdependence, qualities that MacIver came to see as marking the social bond, the Isle of Lewis demonstrated another sociological truism. The dense social structure of the Island that gave people the compulsion to conform to the social bond, including to the social institution of religion, that effected the myriad of social influences that conditioned people’s thought and behaviour, could suppress individuality and lead to moral oppressiveness. Without directly acknowledging it his autobiographical narrative therefore, MacIver’s Stornoway upbringing was critical to the way he came to envisage sociology, both for the centrality he accorded the notion of community and also for the way that the social bond was conceptualized as requiring a balance of sociability and individuality, independence and interdependence, communal togetherness and individual autonomy. This does no more than restate the central concern of sociology down the centuries (and aligns him with Macmurray) but this age-old sociological paradox was lived by MacIver as a biographical experience. His life and his work were thus more closely related than his protestations against the ‘inheritance within him’ would suggest.

There is another sense in which MacIver remained Scottish, for his autobiographical narrative discloses the tokens of Scotland and his upbringing that he kept throughout the later ‘spaces of selfhood’ in Toronto and New York. I mean this in two senses—symbolic tokens of remembrance, and the diaspora networks of Scottish intellectuals he participated in. The symbolic tokens of remembrance were many and multifarious. He expressed no great affection for his parents but later named his twins after them. He was eager to collect items from his old home on the death of his parents, ‘including photographs, a few books, and particularly the great Bible containing our family records’ (1968: 215). He admits that it was his Scottishness that initially made Canada attractive—‘a Scot is not unlikely to feel more at ease migrating to Canada than living in England’ (1968: 78)–feeling more at home there clearly than in Oxford, and his family built a summer house on a lakeside that must have replicated the Isle of Lewis in scenery and remoteness (but not cultural oppressiveness), that they maintained well after moving to the US and only sold when a similar summer house was established on Cape Cod. They even had a maid imported from Scotland for their Canadian lakeside retreat.
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(1968: 91). And he describes Cape Cod—an interestingly another island fishing area (at least then)—in terms that replicate the Isle of Lewis. The distinctions of his upbringing between country-born and town bred Islanders that he refers to directly in his autobiography (1968: 2) were replicated in Cape Cod, whose residents were up-side Islanders or down-side (1968: 168), marking a social distance and a mental map that was reminiscent of his parents’ kinship network and which he obviously lived with happily for long summers for much of his later life. It is perhaps thus no surprise that in 1920, he wrote a letter to Graham Wallas, LSE professor of political philosopher and a fellow Scot, asking him to keep MacIver abreast of any appointments he knew to be forthcoming in Scotland; clearly he wanted to return.16

There is no hint of this in his autobiography but he does use the self-appellation of ‘Highlander’ on several occasions, including a selection of photographs in the book that are emblematic of his life, one of which has him in full Highland dress, with MacIver clan kilt. He notes that for all his travels he retained throughout a strong Scottish accent, refusing to adopt the intonation of North Americans. While at Aberdeen he joined the Gordon Highlander Territorials as first lieutenant (from which dates his possession of Highland dress and the photograph). This is indicative of the social networks he immersed himself in while in Aberdeen. While he came to consider the Territorials as too militaristic—‘a feeling of revulsion gradually came over me’ (1968: 69)—his intellectual networks at Aberdeen were Highland. At Aberdeen his circle of friends was restricted to a group of ‘Highland scholars’, as he calls them, a collection of ‘kindred scholars’ (1968: 245), people like himself in background, from places in the West of Scotland even remoter than Aberdeen was to become (he fails to see the irony of someone from the Outer Hebrides describing Aberdeen as remote, see 1968: 72). Within sociology he knew émigré Scots in England, such as Patrick Geddes, and through him Branford (‘VVB’), who had spent twenty-five years or so growing up in Edinburgh. He also knew James Seth, Professor at the University of Edinburgh, who assisted him in obtaining a position in Canada.

It is diaspora networks like this that took him to Toronto. There had been a general migration to Canada of dispossessed crofters during the nineteenth-century clearances but the intellectual diaspora was as dramatic, even if not on the same scale. With a concern to resist the Americanization of the University of Toronto, its early founders deliberately recruited from Britain (see Friedland, 16 The letter forms part of the Wallas papers at the LSE and I am grateful to John Scott for bringing it to my attention.)
2002); the first principal was an Irishman (John McCaul, formerly of Trinity College Dublin), and at the time of MacIver’s appointment the principal was Sir Robert Falconer, a Charlottesville-born Presbyterian clergyman and New Testament scholar, who has been described as scouting the ground in Britain on frequent hiring trips (Falconer, 2002: 120). The University of Toronto had a long tradition of Scots working on archaeology, anthropology and ethnology, dating from Sir Daniel Wilson, who had been a member of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland and had worked on Scotland’s prehistoric archaeology, a link taken further by Thomas McIlwraith, who followed Wilson some years later and who although was Canadian had spent the First World War in the King’s Own Scottish Borderers. It is unclear how well MacIver knew the Scottish ethnologists and anthropologists in Toronto—he was in a department of political economy—but MacIver’s first head of department in Toronto, James Mavor, was himself a Stranraer-born son of the manse, and much favoured hiring academics from Britain. Mavor returned to Scotland on retirement and was well known to the Scottish ex-patriots who dominated early British sociology. Patrick Geddes’s obituary of Mavor (Geddes, 1926: 155–6), described his department of political economy as ‘the most comprehensive and fully sociological in the world’, and it is clear from Mavor’s autobiography (Mavor, 1923) that he was conversant with the discipline. Together Mavor and MacIver were instrumental in appointing social scientists from Britain, such as the social geographer Patrick Dobbs, a nephew of the Webbs at the LSE, and the social philosopher Edward Johns Urwick, another LSE man with whom MacIver had a close relationship, and who helped found the department of social work in Toronto. When in England, Urwick had published a little in sociology and was an associate of Geddes and Branford in the early Sociological Society and went on to assist in the establishment of The Sociological Review, to which MacIver was an early contributor.17

17 I am grateful to John Scott for pointing out to me the friendship between MacIver and Urwick and that Urwick was appointed to the University of Toronto on the sponsorship of MacIver. I am grateful to David Livingstone for information on the Scottish connection with anthropology and ethnology in Toronto. MacIver describes in one of his unpublished papers that he took over ‘direction of a school of social work under the auspices of the University’ and that it was through this—as well as his own teaching—that he tried to establish sociology in Toronto (see MacIver, 1960: 9). Moffat (2001) has published an account of the history of social work in Toronto University. The Geddes-MacIver association also bears further investigation. In his autobiography MacIver mentions meeting Geddes, whom he describes as ‘the great pioneer in the planning of cities’ (1968: 58), spending two weeks with him on one occasion on holiday in Torquay, and later MacIver wrote an unpublished paper ‘The
These sorts of diaspora networks in Canada justify further interrogation. We are certain at this stage however, that MacIver felt Canada was attractive as a place to which to emigrate because of its Scottish links, its ease as a place to live compared to England (1968: 78) – ‘for a Highland Scot, England, in its most traditional enclave, was like a foreign country’ (1968: 58). On leaving for Canada he says in his autobiography that ‘I had no expectation of ever remigrating to my native land. It was a total renunciation of the associations I held dear, of the treasured home of all my memories…my natural optimism rebounded to thoughts of the new experiences, the adventures, the “fresh woods and pastures new” that Canada would hold for me’ (1968: 77), although the 1920 letter to Wallas expressing his wish to return shows how unreliable old people’s reflections on their youth can be. Yet paradoxically, in his autobiography MacIver implies that it was its Scottishness that alienated him from Canada. After ten years his diaspora experience ‘did not develop into a genuine belongingness’ (1968: 78), although such a comment reinforces the importance he placed both in sociology and his personal life on achieving belongingness somewhere. ‘I came gradually to recognize I was not only in a new land but among a different people, a conjuncture of heterogeneous migrations, unwelded by common traditions’ (1968: 78). He found a nation united only in antipathy to the United States and people who ‘looked across the ocean for their spiritual home’, seemingly thus too locked in the diaspora experience (he noted in passing that Ontario was dominated by Scots and Scots-Irish migrants), so much so that ‘although I enjoyed my life in Canada and made good friends, I never attained the warmth of a permanent attachment’ (1968: 79). At one point in his autobiography he describes ice-skating as the ‘one joy I owed to Canada alone’ (1968: 241).

This may represent a desire to escape his own diaspora experience by leaving Scotland further behind, as if it were its Scottishness that made Canada problematic, or an attempt to resolve it by seeking somewhere better to recreate the sense of permanence and belonging that he once had in Scotland. The move to the United States in 1925 only intensifies the paradox, for his work had little circulation in US sociology at the time; amidst a litany of glowing reviews of his first book *Community*, the leading US sociology journal carried an appraisal by Robert E. Park, by this time one of the country’s most famous sociologists, that damned it as thin, vague and insubstantial, adjectives wounding enough for MacIver to still feel their hurt in his autobiography fifty years
later (see 1968: 87). Nor was the department he moved then in great shape, for Columbia—‘that troublesome department’ (1968: 137)—was racked with factionalism and backbiting, and colleagues like Lynd and Lazarsfeld he later panned for their distortion of ‘real sociology’ and by implication their substitution of true scholarship for ‘fact-finding’ (see his unpublished paper, ‘The Scholar in Society’, nd: 4; these are criticisms familiar to followers of Columbia’s other sociological rebel, Charles Wright Mills, see Brewer, 2004). The autobiographical narrative makes no comment on New York as a space of selfhood and provides no clue to the attractiveness of the move to the US. Like the exit from Stornoway and then Aberdeen, the narrative is couched in the negative: it was what was wrong with Canada. The unpublished paper ‘Reminiscences’ (1960: 9) says only that he ‘had always a hankering for the intriguing but indeterminate subject of sociology, which in all the institutions of learning I had known had been regarded as a kind of bastard seeking recognition’. It was only on his move to the US that he found himself in a department bearing the bastard’s name; and yet he found the approach to sociology there unsatisfying. ‘I have often felt uneasy—I feel so today—concerning the way the subject of sociology was being pursued. It has been largely an American subject…it easily became the victim of a series of fads and fashions…I have a deep respect for sociology as a subject of inquiry, but much less for what is done in its name’ (1960: 11). Sociology he describes as ‘his primary love’, yet he lived with her ‘always uncomfortably’ (1960: 11).

The wish to consummate that passion may well be all that there is behind his move to the United States and while the relationship with sociology was painful he experienced none of the intellectual restlessness of his Columbia colleague C. Wright Mills, for MacIver notes in his autobiography, at a stage of his life which he captures in the chapter title as ‘mid career’, ‘nor was I disturbed by the sense of the unattained, the falling short of the mark, with the concomitant urge toward creative activity. I had become established as of some account in the profession. I seemed to be moving more or less contentedly’ (1968: 133). The one disruption to self-satisfaction was unhappiness over the backbiting in his sociology department (1968: 134). In the absence of a diaspora narrative (although this is said without yet consulting his private letters), one can only conjecture that he had at last found, despite his troublesome colleagues, the sense of belongingness that marked the fault with Canada and that his upbringing in Stornoway had placed within him. The New York intellectual

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18 Sociology at Columbia has generated a considerable literature, for a selection see Halas (2001) and Wallace (1991).
networks he was part of bear further study to explore whether they had the same character as those in Aberdeen and Toronto, so that we might more fully place MacIver as sociologist and Scotsman.

Conclusion

It is worth emphasizing that the puzzle MacIver presents us as a sociologist and Scotsman is of his own making. His autobiographical narrative is enigmatic. It denudes, vociferously, Stornoway of positive effects on his life and work, protesting at one point against any inheritance within him, yet he articulates fulsomely an approach to sociology and its substantive focus—one that he bases around community and the need for the social bond to manage the tension between individuality and sociability—that clearly bears the imprint of his upbringing. This suggests that Scotland remained a significant ‘space of selfhood’ that connects his life and work, a space of production—and perhaps also a space of reception—that mediated his biography and sociology. There are hints at this in the autobiographical narrative in the traces of remembrance of Scotland it reveals and in the disclosures about the diaspora intellectual networks he was integrated into during the early part of his career. Protestations about the inheritance within him may disguise his all-too-well awareness that he kept more of Scotland through his life than its accent. That the brogue was all he was prepared to admit to as Scotland’s footfall adds more dimensions to the paradox and justifies exploring further this exemplar of the Scottish intellectual diaspora. Ideas get universalized as they circulate amongst intellectual elites, adding to their globalization, yet in one sense we construct the globalization of ideas in local spaces and only thereafter strip them of their local production and reception. We elide the local and the global when it comes to ideas and MacIver’s case suggests we would profit from disentangling them.

University of Aberdeen

Bibliography


Like many sociologists of my generation, I first encountered the work of Robert Morrison MacIver when I was an undergraduate, and then again when I was a postgraduate tutor in Canada. However, it was not until a decade later when I working in the Aberdeen Sociology Department that I discovered, courtesy of Robert Moore, that MacIver was Scottish and had worked at the University. More significantly, he had been the first lecturer explicitly contracted to teach sociology. Having written about community myself in the form of ‘place communities’, and living as I now do in a small, rural settlement from which I can watch the ferry sailing across the Minch to MacIver’s birthplace in Stornaway in the Western Isles, I remain personally intrigued by the way that, growing up in an even more isolated setting, he came to produce his conception of community not as a small unit but as a wider collectivity. Therefore in this article, after I have set MacIver’s contribution in the context of his contemporaries’ writing, I intend to explore his work on community as a contribution to social theories of society, the state, and forms of human relationship, and consider how this evolved and some of its limitations. Finally, in the latter part of this paper, I would like to reflect briefly on how his ideas

1 Like many before and since, I first encountered MacIver’s work in the form of MacIver and Page’s introductory textbook, which I discovered while browsing in the Manchester University Library. In those far-off days of the early 1960s, before there were specially written introductory texts in Britain, and when student reading lists were somewhat basic, we were expected to find books and read them for ourselves. MacIver and Page was not on my official reading list and so for a short period it became a useful and admittedly sometimes under-acknowledged resource of ideas which in seminar discussions served to plump out my own limited grasp of the discipline. MacIver notes that a good university education (based on Oxford before the First World War) should ‘evoke initiative… We should teach our abler students to educate themselves’ (MacIver 1968, 63). This sentiment, perhaps best summed up by Frank Zappa’s frequently quoted (by librarians) remark ‘If you want to get laid, go to college. If you want an education, go to the library’, is one that the laws of nature seem to require to be re-iterated by successive generations of academics.

2 We should not forget that MacIver may have become a sociologist but he remained a political scientist, as later celebratory volumes edited by Berger et al (1954) and Bramson (1970) demonstrate.
may connect with MacIver’s background, and also on their limited influence in later writers’ work on (rural) place communities.

**MacIver as Scholar and ‘New Sociologist’**

Compared with his account of his childhood and student days, Robert MacIver says relatively little in his autobiography about his time in Aberdeen (see MacIver 1968). He joined the staff in 1907 in his mid-twenties, leaving in 1915 when he was 33. His first book, *Community: a sociological study (being an attempt to set out the nature and fundamental laws of social life)* was published in 1917 but as his preface to the first edition shows, was completed in Aberdeen by September 1914. Some parts of it had earlier appeared as articles in social science journals: *The Political Quarterly; The Philosophy Review; The International Journal of Ethics;* and *The Sociological Review* (MacIver, 1928, x). MacIver had contributed seven articles to these journals, plus two in the journal *Mind*, between 1909 and early 1914: (Bramson 1970, 311–12). The span of these journals reflects the range of disciplines that most concerned him both as an emerging scholar and later in his career.

Particularly in his early publications, MacIver, being initially a Classics scholar as well as a political philosopher, confidently covers a wide span of sources in a way which all too often leaves one—or at least, leaves me—less than comprehensively qualified to evaluate his conclusions. Producing a short

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3 Like most of MacIver’s subsequent works, his first book was reprinted and revised a confusing number of times. Its second edition, completed in 1919 was ‘revised throughout’, shifting the emphasis further away from biological and psychological models and towards a more integrated sociological perspective. The third edition appeared in 1924, with ‘some slight additions or changes made in the text’, and two small appendices added. It is this edition that I have used as a main source (in its second printing in 1928) for the simple practical reason that it was the oldest version of the text readily available to me. I have also drawn on *Society: its structure and changes* (1931). The latter was the basis for the later and most widely-known of MacIver’s sociology books, being re-worked to appear on many undergraduate reading lists as ‘MacIver and Page’ in various editions between 1949 and 1974. Surprisingly, although first published in 1931 as *Society: its structure and changes*, it is included in MacIver’s autobiography only under the title of its very considerably revised version dating from 1937, i.e. *Sociology—a Textbook of Sociology* (MacIver 1968, 250–1: Spitz 1969, reprinted in Bramson 1970, 309). Where I have used it, I have drawn on the 1931 edition, reprinted in 1933. MacIver’s list of his own publications in his autobiography (1968, 250–1) is much sparser than that in Bramson (1970, 309–16).

4 His tendency to quote original sources un-translated, i.e. in their original Greek, Latin,
and necessarily simplified account of MacIver’s conception of ‘community’ is therefore a doubly complicated task. His ideas understandably change and are re-worked in several versions, while the way in which he sets them out and the scope of their wide coverage present a challenge to today’s more specialist reader.

Although titled *Community*, substantial sections of his first book are a justification of sociology as a distinct new social science.\(^5\) The Preface to the second edition, asks rhetorically:

> Is sociology a real science or only a bundle of snippets hung on a thread of good intentions? I hold it to be a real science, still in its infancy…if [this book’s] contents can be divided up so that this part can be assigned to psychology, this to economics, this to politics, and so on, then the quest has been in vain (reprinted in the third edition, 1928, xi–xii).

His argument is largely based on examples from Ancient Greece, Rome, and the Old Testament, a framework typical of intellectuals of his era, reflecting their cultural assumptions and modes of discourse. In 2007, the scarcity of concrete reference in his work to other European societies of the time, to North America, or to anthropology beyond crude travellers’ tales, is disorienting (it should be remembered that the first reports of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown’s forays ‘into the field’ did not appear until 1913, so that MacIver’s first work effectively pre-dates them). His exposition and writing style remind one of Durkheim’s *Social Division of Labour* or *The Elementary Forms*, books which provide an element of indirect dialogue running throughout MacIver’s *Community*.

It would be wrong, however, to give the impression that he was just a classicist, even though he later noted that he ‘never in his rather lengthy academic training had heard the word “sociology”’ (MacIver 1970, v).\(^6\) Among those whose work he quotes and debates in his discussion of community we

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\(^5\) ‘At the time it was written…the major figures in the development of the new subject were French and German, and it had not taken on the proportions of the great academic industry it has now reached…[The book] was meant to be a contribution to social theory—or, if you prefer, to the philosophy of society’ MacIver (1970, v).

\(^6\) I am grateful to Graham Crow for bringing MacIver’s Preface to the fourth and final edition of *Community*, and Gans’ article on sociological amnesia mentioned below, to my attention.
find Simmel and Durkheim in particular, but also Tönnies, Comte, Spencer, Hobhouse, Albion Small, Maine, Murdock, Frazer, Robertson, Ward, Le Play, and De Coulanges (but not of course Weber, whose work MacIver picks up later after its publication in German in the early 1920s, and through Parsons’ 1930 translation of *The Protestant Ethic*). MacIver engages with contemporary intellectuals like Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Harold Laski, and G. D. H. Cole. He ranges over the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Hobbes, Hegel, Kant, Mill, Hume, and Machiavelli. And he draws on a score of other writers whose names are now less familiar, at least to me: the psychologists McDougall, James, and Ribot; the economists Marshall and Gill; philosophers Gieke and Fourniére; sociologists Wallis, MacKenzie and Fouillée; political writers Bransford, Angell, Jaynes Hill, and of course Marx, and various other historians, eugenicists, biologists (including Patrick Geddes) and medical writers. While many of these exchanges are relatively brief, they demonstrate a scholar with a breadth of learning and vision that is seldom found in our more specialist, RAE-dominated age. MacIver was working at a time when one could be influenced by and influence an intellectual world in which ideas and exchanges moved more easily back and to across inter-disciplinary boundaries (Payne 2007).

Writing initially before the First World War, we find him concerned with understanding the basic elements of social life as he delineates sociology from psychology, philosophy and history. Here community is used as a rather abstract formulation. His later work, particularly in the text-book co-written with Page, has a little more to say about localities, and concrete manifestations of community in settlements, cities and regions, although less than a more empirical sociologist like myself might wish to see.

**Society and the State: a negative definition of community**

MacIver effectively defines community by distinguishing it from three other related concepts: society, the state, and associations. He reserves the word ‘society’ not for a unit of people, or a unit of shared culture, or for some notion of a social system, but rather for what might be described as the propensity of people to have social relationships with other people, and *all* products of that propensity. In this ‘universal or generic sense’ he wishes to ‘include every willed relationship of man to man’ (1928, 22). Thus MacIver’s ‘society’ is greater than any one country or nation-state, containing within it
states, associations and communities, which are each special types of social relationships.

*Whenever living beings enter into, or maintain willed relationships with one another, there society exists...* it is clear that society is an element or function of life itself, present wherever life is found (ibid., 5: original emphasis).

His term ‘willed’ relationship is preferred to ‘purposive’, ‘conscious’ or ‘instinctive’ social activity in order to be more inclusive, and is used to mark off relationships between physical objects that have no mutual awareness from the relationships between ‘social animals’. While the form and outward manifestation of ‘society’ is always changing, it is universal as a principle of human life.

However, having sketched this version of ‘society’ MacIver actually makes very little use of it in his first work on community, concentrating instead on society’s three constituent elements. It is not until 1931 with the publication of *Society: its structure and changes* that MacIver begins to talk more about society as ‘a system of social relationships’ (1933, x) or as ‘the organisation’ created by the expression of the nature of social beings, ‘the web of social relationships...which guides and controls their behaviour in a myriad ways’ (ibid., 6). Prior to moving towards this more conventional usage, he has seen the operation of association and community as the more organised and significant elements through which action is shaped.

This view is closely connected to MacIver’s interpretation of ‘the State’, a topic which looms larger in his work than ‘society’. Although he does sometimes discuss the State in terms of concrete offices, formal systems and particular forms of governance, his interest lies more in the political philosophy of the State either as the collective manifestation of the individuals and social relations it contains—a neo-Hegelian view which he rejects (1928, 28)—or in the relationship between the State and the associations which it imperfectly regulates, his own position. This has, of course, been much more an issue in philosophy and political science than in sociology, and part of MacIver’s reputation in those fields stems from his insistence, developed

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7 A phrase to be found repeated in late editions of his introductory text: (e.g. MacIver and Page 1965, 5).
8 MacIver sees his work on the State as central to his general purposes (in the Preface to a later edition, he identifies ‘the conception of what the state is and what its relation is to the other organizations’ of social life, as the first of the two main principles that form the centre of his book (1970, vi: original emphasis).
more fully in his *The Web of Government* (1947), that society, nation and State are conceptually separate. In his book on community, he rests his case on two main grounds.

First, there exist ‘primitive’ communities—referred to by later anthropologists as ‘stateless societies’ (Gluckman 1965, Ch. 3) or acephalous societies (Cohen 1969)—where there is no political law, this latter being a prerequisite of the existence of a state (1928, 31, 130). As Schapera (1957, 147) later noted, MacIver moderates this argument initially in his *Elements of Social Science* (1921) and then in *Sociology—a Textbook of Sociology* (1937) under the subsequent influence of Malinowski’s work on law and custom. His second argument is that the State is ‘exclusive and determinate. Where one state ends, another begins’ (1928, 29). Against this, he contends that communities extend beyond state boundaries, both in the form of trans-national bodies and relationships, and in the form of imposed state boundaries which divide natural communities.

The modern world, marked off into separate States, is not partitioned into a number of isolated communities... the State is neither coterminous nor synonymous with community (ibid., 29).

Thus for MacIver, ‘society’ contains nations, communities, associations and the State. The State is an association, albeit the most important one. Associations are components of community life, and therefore State and Community cannot be synonymous.

**Community defined**

Having roughly pruned away society and the State, we come to ‘community’ itself. MacIver uses the word community for (usually concrete) units of people who share multiple aspects of social life, whereas ‘association’ refers to the sub-units of specific, goal-oriented social activities through which a community is sustained and operates. A community is

any area of common life, village, or town, or district, or country, or even wider area... somehow distinguished from further areas... we distinguish the nuclei of intense common life, cities and nations and tribes and think of them as *par excellence* communities (1928, 22–3).
Thus the ‘near community’ may be local and small scale, but the ‘wider community’, such as the nation, is more important for MacIver. The ‘common life’ of a community arises from the tendency of those who live together to become, and be, more similar to each other, and consequently differentiated from those with whom they do not live. There are echoes here of Patrick Geddes’ evolutionary biology which John Scott mentions in his paper. The common life of the wider community (best thought of as something like a nation) is therefore likely to have some characteristic of its own such that the frontiers of the area have some meaning. All the laws of the cosmos, physical, biological and psychological, conspire to bring it about that beings who live together shall resemble one another. Wherever men live together they develop in some kind and degree distinctive common characteristics—manners, traditions, modes of speech, and so on. These are the signs and consequences of an effective common life. It will be seen that a community may be part of a wider community, and that all community is a question of degree (ibid., 23).

Without wishing to over-burden this short quotation, it illustrates several aspects of MacIver’s take on community, and indeed much of his sociology.

– He begins with moderated generalised statements that leave room for further elaboration: ‘some characteristic of its own such that the frontiers of the area have some meaning.’

– He writes at length to account for social outcomes not only as arising from social processes or human history, but also from evolutionary biology and physical environment: ‘All the laws of the cosmos, physical, biological and psychological, conspire.’

– He recognises from the start that one community may be nested within another, e.g. the village within a region within a country: ‘a community may be part of a wider community.’

– While he has started with a common life that has acknowledged boundaries, he does not treat community as an absolute. The common life and the boundaries can take different forms: ‘all community is a question of degree’.

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9 And indeed, Aristotle’s conception of the ‘polity’ as a natural phenomenon.
To these four features we can add three other central characteristics of MacIver’s idea of community which become clear later in his exposition.

– While community is an expression of a shared way of life, it does not follow that there is no conflict, disagreement, or competition within it. We shall return to this point below.

– Nor does a shared, intense social life imply that all members of a community are completely alike: he implicitly accepts Durkheim’s distinction between mechanical and organic solidarities (although without placing the social division of labour at its centre or wanting to use such analogies or terminology, ibid., 226). The emerging differentiation of the individual personality is a measure of how fully the sense of community is developing because the developed community depends on mutual tolerance and understanding of other people. This is the second of the main principles of his book (1970, vi). The differentiation of community is the process in which community ceases to be identified with or wholly subject to any single form of social life…each social relation grows more complex and each social being more closely bound to each in the interdependence of the whole (1928, 231).

A society is not more socialized because it has achieved a high technological level…High socialization means that the social relationships between the members of a society are many-sided, woven intimately into the pattern of their lives, expressive of and calculated to advance the variety of interests, cultural, educational, recreational, civic, economic, in all their aspects, that appeal to the many-sided nature of the diversity of human beings (1970, vi–vii).

– Third, as shown by this quotation and by MacIver’s three chapters documenting ‘communal development’ (1928, 169-248), he does not have a static view of community. Not only do the members live and die while ‘the community itself marches out of the past into the present’ (ibid., 87), but the forms of community life also change over time. Although by our own standards, his perspective has a dubious base in social evolution (and possibly even eugenics: ibid., 398–416), this acceptance of fluidity escapes later treatments of community that would be more static, as in some discussions of place communities (e.g. see Brody’s (1973) criticism of the work of Arensberg and Kimball (1940)).
This emphasis on the importance of differences within the community, and the community’s capacity to evolve, also helps to fuel MacIver’s long and sceptical discussion of analogy in the emerging sociological literature of his time. He differentiates his own recognition of the community as a ‘union of minds’ from Durkheim’s allusion to a ‘group mind’ (1928, 76) or the latter’s ‘society-greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts doctrine’ (ibid., 88–91) fallaciously based on the chemical transformation of elements when they enter into composition. Equally, he rejects the notion that the community can be thought of as an organism:

an organism is or has…a single centre, a unity of life, a purpose or consciousness…A community consists of myriad centres of life and consciousness…community is a matter of degree, with no set bounds, whereas organism is a closed system (ibid., 73; 75).

Community’s internal complexity lies not only in its individuals, but also in its associations.

**Associations as components of community**

MacIver’s use of ‘association’ and the ‘interests’ they serve helps to hold his ideas of society, state and community together. Within a community, people lead their lives through a series of joint activities. A community can (but does not necessarily) encompass the whole of a person’s life. In contrast, a single joint activity, an association can never do this.

A community is a *focus* for social life, the common living of social beings; an association is an *organisation* of social life, definitely established for the pursuit of one or more common interests. An association is partial, a community is integral (ibid., 24: emphasis added).

The phenomenon of people living together in a village or city community is something different from ‘the association of men in a church or trade union’ (Ibid.). Any one community will have many associations, and community members will belong to more than one, but normally not to all of them.
Community bubbles into associations permanent and transient, and no student of the actual social life of the present can help being struck by the enormous number of associations of every kind…within a community there may exist not only numerous associations but antagonistic associations (ibid., 23–4).

Whereas community is used to indicate wider areas of common life, and a more general sense of social life (in a way that sometimes blurs into MacIver’s use of the term ‘society’), ‘an association is an organisation of social beings…for the pursuit of some common interest’ (ibid., 23).

MacIver says that an ‘interest’ is the reason why individuals exercise willed relationships. An interest is the ‘object which determines activity’ (ibid., 98), or the outcomes that individuals seek to achieve through collective action.

It is because we seek, clearly or dimly, from prescience or instinct, some end, some fulfilment of ourselves or others, that we relate ourselves to one another in society… It is as men will in relation to one another that they create community, but it is by reason of, for the sake of, interests (ibid., 98–9).

MacIver prefers ‘interest’ to alternative terms such as ‘means and ends’ (which place the emphasis too much on the purely rational); ‘desire’ (which is too subjective and lacks connotations of stability and permanence); or ‘social forces’ (which suggest external mechanical or impersonal power rather than human consciousness and agency). This latter point is important: although his discussion of interests, as solutions to the problems of human survival and the regulation of social intercourse, is sometimes reminiscent of the language of structural functionalism (e.g. ibid., 99, 109; or his later discussion of the family (1933, 133–7), MacIver locates will and interest in the minds or ‘psychic existence’ of human beings. His sociology, although seeking to delineate core social forms, therefore retains a highly developed sense of the individual actor (1928, 112-13). It also means that his typology of interests (ibid., 102–8) recognises not only variety, but also that not every interest is mutually compatible, although he tends to locate incompatibility as between individuals rather than between associations (e.g. ibid., 117–27).

Some appreciation of his framework can be gained from Fig.1 which relates interests to types of association.
### Figure 1: MacIver’s Typology of Interests and Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERESTS</th>
<th>ASSOCIATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests of sociality, based on group or communal likenesses</td>
<td>Associations of camaraderie, clubs, social intercourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>a) Ultimate,</em> based on organic needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>Marriage, family, kinship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-sexual</td>
<td>Health associations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agriculture; industry; commerce; (also serving <em>psychical</em> interests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>b) Psychical</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural: Scientific, philosophical and educational</td>
<td>Scientific and philosophical associations; schools and colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural: Artistic and religious</td>
<td>Theatre; Art, music and literature associations; churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power and prestige</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclusive clubs; racist, militaristic and nationalist associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Derivative Specific</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial services; companies; trade unions; employers groups (plus ‘almost’ all associations listed above as general/ specific;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The state and its sub-divisions (i.e. communal level interests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal/judicial associations directly dependent on the state but not simply part of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political parties: Interest groups/social movements (i.e. sub-group level interests)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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10 Adapted from *Community* (1928, 115–16): ‘Specific’ interests give rise to ‘derivative specific’ interests, either as a distinct interest, or combined into group and/or communal interests. In *Society* (1933, 163–4) MacIver re-classifies the first six clusters of associations (excluding economic activities, and schools and colleges) as ‘primary’; education as ‘intermediate’; and the remainder as ‘secondary’, as the basis for the study of ‘the social structure’. MacIver regards this schema as a provisional exposition.
It is exceedingly difficult to classify, completely and without cross-
division, these specific interests and the associations which they
create...interests lie behind interests in the most perplexing ways (ibid.,
111).

Indeed a slightly modified form of this schema appears later in his text-book
(MacIver and Page 1965, 447). Any specific interest may be ‘derivative’, but
some are more derivative or secondary than others, hence the distinction
between ‘ultimate’ and ‘derivative’.

In this schema, there are several features to note. First, he is concerned
not with institutional forms but the underlying ‘principles’ that they embody.
While he recognises that institutions may be seen as arising directly from the
community (ibid., 156) he places greater importance on the capacity of asso-
ciations to generate particular organisational structures and practices.

An association is more than a form, it is the creator as well as the cre-
ated, it is a source of institutions...The association may modify its
institutions, may dissolve some and create others...So the association
outlives its institutions. Therefore if we are to be strict in our thinking,
we should speak of the family as an association and of marriage as an
institution, of the State as an association and of representative govern-
ment as an institution, of the church as an association and of baptism
as an institution. The association is a living thing, the institution is but
a form, a means (ibid., 155–6).

While this is a useful analytical distinction, it might be argued that MacIver
recognises but underestimates the capacity of institutional practices to take
on a life of their own (ibid., 157–65), and to exercise independent influence
over the people caught up in them, perhaps analogous to Michels’ iron law of
oligopoly (1911/1915).\footnote{MacIver appears not to have encountered Michels’ work, first published in
German in 1911 until later. He refers to it in its first translation, published as
Political Parties in 1915, in Society (1931, 169) apparently with some approval
as addressing individual conflicts within institutions, but without shifting
his focus of attention away from associations to institutions as a potentially
more significant sociological site.}

The last quotation also refers to the State as an association, a point
we earlier noted was central to MacIver’s political philosophy. The State
may be the greatest association of all, providing guidance, co-ordination and regulation over other associations (ibid., 28–47,110), but it is still an association.

Because the community pre-exists the State, the State cannot be other than an association. Here is MacIver engaged in a critique of social contract theory:

Community existed before any State. It was the slow-developing will of men in community to create the State which gradually brought the State into being. Community was there from the first, but the State has been constructed. The State is an association men as social beings have willed to create and now will to maintain. There is thus a will in community more fundamental than even the will of the State…community itself is prior to and the necessary precondition of all covenant. A social covenant to establish society (or community) is a contradiction. A social covenant to establish or maintain the State is a great reality (ibid., 130, 132).

MacIver’s schema also brings out the distinctiveness of where he draws the line between community and association. To those accustomed to Tönnies’ conceptualisation, we find association a little surprisingly being used in a more extensive way. Whereas Tönnies concentrates on contractual, commercial, mechanical, regulated or large scale activities as embodying association, MacIver extends this to embrace all forms of State affairs. Similarly, while Tönnies places the family and religious belief in the realm of community, MacIver sees them as associations. In his brief discussion of this point MacIver regards Tönnies’ differentiation as being one only of degree, rather than his own specification of a basic principle of distinction between community and association (1928, 24–5).

The evolution of MacIver’s ideas

It is an inconvenient if unremarkable fact that MacIver changed his conception of community during his life-time. And yet the shift is largely one of emphasis rather than a change of heart. One of MacIver’s strengths as a social theorist is an honest recognition of inconsistencies, marginal
differences, and ambiguities. His use of carefully elaborated ‘moderated propositions’ (Payne and Williams 2005) and conditional ‘social laws’ means that in the longer term his work could develop and evolve.

In later work, perhaps under the influence of Cooley’s *Social Organization*, MacIver seems to become more aware that face-to-face, primary relationships can be marked off from other less personal, secondary relationships in large organizations (1933, 172–90), but even here he sees the features of formal organization and interest which typify associations as grounds for retaining his original distinction. The term, ‘secondary relations’, begins to be used by MacIver at a still later point, in his text-book’s discussion of types of social group (e.g. MacIver and Page, 1965, 220–2).

In his early writing the closest he comes to elaborating the distinctive character of community (if we grant for the moment that such a thing exists) is in his discussion of locality, and the geographical dimension of community. We have already seen that he speaks of locality in terms of the village, city, region, and country, as exemplifying his areas of common life. Conversely, he does not include locality in his list of false perspectives of community (1928, 69–97). But locality does not feature as a significant source of common life, except as the basis for people becoming more alike each other when they live in the same place.

On the other hand, MacIver also has a lot to say in his initial treatment about the physical environment with respect to evolution and human history. This material focuses on the evolutionary importance of ‘intelligence’ and the capacity for individual development that indicate MacIver’s notion of ‘high socialization’. His discussion draws on the classic questions of why major civilisations took their particular political forms and sizes, on biological debates about natural selection and the survival of the fittest, and on patterns of economic advantage following from the accidents of climate, geographical location, juxtaposition, or victory in warfare (ibid., 273–416). MacIver’s interest lies in how these factors impinge on community maintenance and the origins of community formation.

Because he sees community as existing simultaneously at several levels and in different places, there are inevitable problems of ‘co-ordination’

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12 Although *Social Organization* was originally published in 1909, there is no reference to it in *Community*, completed five years later. *Social Organization* was reprinted several times around 1920, and is acknowledged by MacIver in 1931 in *Society*. In his later work, MacIver also begins to use the term ‘society’ in a more conventional sense to mean large-scale social organization or social structure.
between communities. These express themselves in economics as commercial competition, in political science as the tension between centre and periphery, or central and local government, and in sociology as a question of communication and spheres of interaction (ibid., 259–63). With regard to community, MacIver can be said to have a regard for the physical, but not a developed sense of locality.

This deficit is to some small extent addressed in MacIver’s 1931 publication, *Society*. We have already noted that he begins to make greater allowance for primary and secondary relationships in this book. He also elaborates on the territorial base of common life in three main ways, not least in acknowledging at a very early point in his exposition that territory is a problematic feature (1933, 10–11). He begins his chapter on community with a section on ‘the territorial basis of community’ (ibid., 57–60), insisting ‘on its territorial character. It implies a common soil as well as common living’ (ibid., 59), but this section actually adds little new to his earlier concerns.

Where we do find a new note is his recognition that proximity does not in all cases produce likeness. In re-stating his definition of community in his book *Society*, he acknowledges that there are local areas which seem to lack the other conditions of social coherence necessary to give them a community character. The residents of a ward or district of a large city may lack sufficient contacts or common interests to constitute a community, to possess a community spirit… locality, though a necessary condition, is not enough to create a community (ibid., 10–11).

But if some areas do not sustain community, and locality is insufficient to explain it (a point since made by Lee and Newby (1983, 57), where does this leave MacIver’s earlier assertion that co-residence breeds likeness, from which common life and community spring? How much more so does this apply to large nations seen as community? His additional assumption, that the failure in this respect of the ‘near community’ will in some way be compensated by the ‘wider community’, is one that also calls for empirical exploration.

In *Society* and later in his textbook, MacIver also shows some signs of coming to grips with the question of how individuals regard their community or communities in a brief discussion of ‘community sentiment’. This takes three forms:
– the sense of communion itself, in which people identify themselves with others as being an undivided ‘we’:

the sentiment which swells most strongly when the commonweal is threatened, so that men are ready to sacrifice all their private interests to save it (1933, 62).

– the sense of station and social place,

so that each has a role to play, his own part and duty to fulfil in the reciprocal exchanges of the social scene (ibid., 63).

– the sense of dependence on the community as a necessary condition for one’s own life:

a physical dependence, since all his material wants are satisfied within it, and a spiritual dependence, since it is his greater home, the nearer world which sustains his spirit, which embodies all that is familiar…to his life, his refuge from all the phantasms of solitude’ (ibid., 63).

On the basis of these feelings,

members of a community feel a peculiar interest in one another…they appreciate more vividly and with a warmer imagination what anyone in their own group does or suffer…Moreover, the development of specialization has transferred to associational groups some part of the alliance that was formerly bestowed on the local community (ibid., 63–4),

so that the nation increasingly become the predominant, largest effective unit of community. Even at this wider level of community, MacIver does not actually take his discussion of community, locality and sentiment very far, despite later highlighting locality and sentiment as two principles central to his conception of community (e.g. MacIver and Page 1965, 9).
Some limitations to MacIver’s idea of community

To sum up this middle section of the paper, MacIver’s conception of community offers logically consistent grounds for distinguishing between community and association, without undue dependence on the idea of primary relationships or locality. He retains a strong emphasis on the capacity of individual minds to make choices in how people live with together. He sees community as fluid and evolutionary: there is little hint of nostalgia for some lost, pre-industrial, small-scale way of living, or of community existing independently as a social force external to individual actors.

However, his conception of community as common life is problematic. While his dependence on the propensity for co-residents to grow more alike, and thus to build common life, may be sustainable if one takes a longer perspective, in the short-run MacIver has to concede exceptions in urban settlements. He does not deal with the challenge this empirical problem poses for his emphasis on likeness and common life.

Although he provides a logical basis for separating community from association, we might ask what practical advantages it gives us as sociologists beyond conceptual clarity (necessary though that is). By grouping together so much in the associational sphere, there is not a great deal left to be treated as community. Community is reduced to a generalised ‘common life’ which has vague boundaries and is constantly changing. Whereas community does give rise to associations, and to social solidarity through its accommodation to individual differences, one is left with doubts about what is there to be analysed, once that has been said. If the social relations of the family and kinship, the associations of camaraderie and direct mutual support are stripped away, there is not much to distinguish as ‘common life’ except social similarities of ‘likeness’ among people, and their physical proximity. As a result of his inclusive definition of association, MacIver can offer little description or analysis of the social life of actual villages or towns or countries, other than as associations. This outcome is also due to the fact that a more detailed account would involve concentrating on institutional forms rather than the principle of community or association.

Thus his treatment of community does not become fully elaborated because his analysis is not carried forward at the level of institutions. Instead, his writing at times retreats into an evangelistic fervour about the potential for growing ‘likeness’, an absolute faith that one level of conflict can be overcome by a higher level of over-arching cohesion, a belief that human evolution moves us towards a mutual toleration and closer social integration in which we
can accept that not all individuals are alike and recognise our deeper, underlying, shared ‘community’ (e.g. his ‘optimistic’ views on social class, capitalism, and democracy in the nation-state: 1928, 272–91).

It is tempting to place this optimism in the context of hopes for internationalism in the aftermath of the First World War, although it seems to me to draw also on a more fundamental philosophy of mutual forbearance and co-operation that shows itself in other parts of MacIver’s publications, such as in his autobiography, his work on public policy issues such as racial prejudice or delinquency (1948; 1949; 1966), or his quasi-religious writings (1960, 1962). In this, he was more at home in the America intellectual traditions of the mid-twentieth century than the narrower confines of both his childhood and undergraduate training. As Cook suggested in the 1954 festschrift,

> It has been MacIver’s special task to restate the problem of individual, group, and state in such a way as to avoid the empirical-idealist alternative, and to provide foundations for a democratic philosophy which shall use the insights of both while avoiding their errors and biases… It is also the great imperative of the Western, and more especially of the American, ethical and political tradition; it is the vital necessity for the security and progress of free society (1954, 179).

Despite this positive view of MacIver’s contribution as a philosopher of democracy, his work sits a little uneasily in a more recent British sociology schooled on the one hand in conflict theory and hostility to structural functionalism, and on the other in small-scale studies of micro-processes. While by no means a functionalist, MacIver is however essentially focussed, throughout his work, on integration and co-operation. He recognises tensions between individuals but offers little in the way of handling conflicts of interest between associations. His personal concerns for liberty and the freedom of the individual, and his hatred of war and authoritarian rulers (e.g. 1968, 131) do not result in a sociology which can confidently handle the stark evil of the abuse of power, the grim reality of continuing social inequalities, not least that of poverty, or the intense out-group hostility that is integral to closed systems of belief. Social division and social cohesion may be the two sides of one coin, but it is social inequality that remains a central issue for contemporary society, and for sociology, and here MacIver can offer us only limited insights. His lack of current impact is as much to do with this as to other features of what Gans has called ‘sociological amnesia’ (1998).
An Absence of Place Community

Given the nature of his ideas about community, it should not surprise us that MacIver has bequeathed strikingly little to the empirical study of communities, particularly to place communities, the mainstream field most relevant to the application of community, except perhaps for nationality and imagined communities (Anderson 1983). While I have not conducted an exhaustive search, there appears to be little reference to MacIver in most well-known British contributions to this literature. For example, there is none in Bell and Newby’s *Community Studies* (1971), or Crow and Allen’s *Community Life* (1994), and only one passing connection made, and that to his text-book, among the contributors to Cohen’s two books (1982, 172; 1986). Bulmer (1987, 118–19) refers briefly to MacIver, but in personal correspondence declines to cite him as a significant influence. A more recent survey of the history of community as a sociological concept completely ignores MacIver (Delanty 2003). While there are occasional references in some of the American literature of the early 1970s (e.g. Anderson 1971, 71, 388; Poplin 1972) these seem more ritualistic than inspirational.

Perhaps the only exception to this overall picture is Frankenberg’s *Communities in Britain*, where he tells us that:

As an operational definition of community I have followed MacIver and Page, who write that a community is ‘an area of social living marked by some degree of *social coherence*. The bases of community are *locality* and *community sentiment*’ (MacIver and Page 1961, 9)

However, although Frankenberg continues that this concept ‘is discussed more fully in Part Two’ of his book, he does not in fact mention MacIver again.16

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13 For example, neither Bauman (2001) nor Etzioni (1997) list MacIver in their indexes. Graham Crow writes in this context, ‘I did undertake a quick check to see if other scholars had been more thorough in their tracing of roots, and… I did also look in a few texts on the history of sociology (e.g. Ritzer, Duncan Mitchell) but sadly no mention of MacIver.’ (personal email, 29 April 2007).

14 While I am not intending to be ageist, the contributor in question was then a member of the older generation of sociological researchers.

15 E-mail, 03 May 2007. Bulmer (1977) also has two references to MacIver (one by Bierstadt) but neither is to community.

16 Although it could be argued that some elements of MacIver’s vision of community do have an *implicit* influence on Frankenberg’s work (e.g. Frankenberg 1966, 238).
This absence of a resonance between MacIver’s work and the study of small or near communities may be understandable in the light of his focus on the wider community, and his lack of interest in institutional forms. Nevertheless, it still strikes me as remarkable that someone growing up in the extreme isolation of the small fishing port of Stornaway in the latter part of the nineteenth century did not engage more closely with place community.

MacIver seems ambivalent, to say the least, about the small town in which he grew up, and his own origins. On the one hand many of the dynamics of small town and rural life are portrayed positively in his autobiography. He describes his childhood with enthusiasm, and waxes lyrical about his mother (1968, 2–17). He recounts the pleasure of summer visits to his relatives on their crofts, and the excitement of life on the fish quays. In a coda to his autobiography he reflects nostalgically on the sense of loss felt by the aging exile who can never ‘go home’.

On the other hand, he reports his sense of individual constraint during his growing up, and his discovery of alternatives as a young teenager: ‘I felt as though I were emerging from a thought-prison’ (ibid., 30). Although he does not discuss them, he would have also have been aware of the deep communal tensions over land tenure: e.g. the Napier Commission investigating the plight of small landholders had visited the island the year after he was born and the Lewis ‘land raids’ followed the First World War (Hutchinson 2003, 14–21). He also notes the social class divisions within Stornaway. This is not an idyllic near community. MacIver’s account is markedly different from that of Arthur Geddes (1955).18

Despite his elegiac comments about re-visiting the island in the mid-1930s, MacIver seems to have made few return visits to Lewis, distancing himself from his origins. In doing so, he left two false trails. First, while MacIver acknowledges that his grandparents were crofters, he portrays his own background as solidly middle class. In his autobiography he refers to his father as ‘a rather successful merchant’, one of the first to trade in Harris Tweed (1968,18) and belonging to ‘the more well-to do’ of the town (ibid., 32). On his wedding certificate, MacIver also enters his father’s occupation as ‘Tweed Manufacturer’.19

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17 Even today, it would take us more than seven hours to travel from Aberdeen to Stornaway by car and ferry, and over four hours using air travel.
18 Arthur, the son of MacIver’s friend Patrick Geddes, carried out a land survey in 1919 for the Leverhulme project and later produced a loving and uncritical ethnography of rural life in Lewis and Harris, ‘a study in British community’. Arthur Geddes, who became a leading social geographer, at no point refers to MacIver’s work.
19 Information from birth, marriage and death certificates, and households in the
I am grateful to Judy Payne for her recent documentary research which shows that these claims are suspect. All other official registration documents refer to his father as a shopman (aged 14) in a ‘drapers, grocers and spirit merchants’, or (later) as a ‘general merchant’: i.e. a small shop-keeper. He was the first generation of a crofting and fishing family to be literate. MacIver’s mother was the daughter of another shopkeeper, variously listed as a ‘grocer and draper’, or ‘general merchant’. She was a dressmaker and her sisters worked as dressmaker, milliner, ‘shopmaid’, or ‘saleswoman’. Being second generation petty bourgeois may partly account for her dominant role in her marriage.

Although the MacIvers moved into a ‘a more commodious stone house in a more agreeable setting’ in Bayhead Street, even more on the outskirts of the town, while MacIver was still young, this was not a life of affluence. Next door lived two elderly aunts and an uncle who appear to have been suffering from clinical depression and were cared for by MacIver’s mother (1968, 11). In 1891, the household also provided accommodation for an apprentice draper, as well as visiting kin from the crofts at Carloway. However, despite this domestic load, both in his mother’s childhood home and after marriage, they kept only one live-in servant. MacIver’s prospects of a university education were entirely dependent on not just getting a scholarship, but ‘a good one’, i.e. one that paid a larger bursary (ibid., 41). Perhaps as a result of studying at Oxford, MacIver became sufficiently defensive about his background that he felt a need to re-invent an enhanced social origin for himself.

The second false trail is more revealing about his psychology and his attitudes to his family origins. Census records show that his mother’s cousin from Glasgow, Barbara Shaw, lived with the family from an early age, working successively as a draper’s saleswoman and draper’s assistant, and moving into the new household formed when MacIver’s parents married. Two years after the death of MacIver’s mother in 1912, his father re-married: to Barbara Shaw, listed as his housekeeper. He died in 1923, Barbara in 1939, both still resident in the family home. At no point in his autobiography does MacIver record that he had a step-mother, mention Barbara by name, or say that she was a member of his household while he was growing up.

This may be connected with the very positive way that he talks about his

Censuses 1871–1901, have been collected from www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk and are copyright of the General Register Office, Edinburgh. Details of each reference are code numbered and somewhat repetitive and so have not been given here: they are however available from the author on request.
mother, and the more reserved tone of his fewer comments about his father (to whom he dedicates *Community*). It helps to explain the diaspora of his brothers, the quick sale of the family home and the dispersal of its contents in 1939 on the death of his step-mother, and MacIver’s reluctance to re-visit the island once he had moved to North America. If the family is removed, wider attachments to the community are also changed. MacIver’s general analysis suggests that ties to the near community can be replaced by ties to a wider community. As John Brewer notes, MacIver remained very much a Highland Scot throughout the rest of his life, despite distancing himself from Stornaway. This reflects his view of community as a wider social phenomenon than the narrower confines of the immediate locality.

I have called this paper ‘Edges to Middles’, a possibly obscure title that was intended to carry several meanings. First, I wanted to signal Robert MacIver’s own journey from the periphery of British society to the centre of American intellectual life. Second, his writing contributed to establishing sociology as a separate discipline, and moving it from the far edges of academic respectability into the middle ground. And third, he took the idea of community from a vague idea into a more precise, central concept for understanding social living.

But ‘edges to middle’ also has a more traditional meaning, referring to how, when a sheet or blanket wore thin, the respectable poor cut it down the middle, and joined the two outsides to make a new middle. In that sense it stands for the good intentions of a drapers’ son whose sense of community did not quite succeed in coming to terms with the basis of likeness between co-residents, when in fact at the institutional level this has resided so often in shared poverty and disadvantage. The poor have often huddled together because there was no other support, but the strength of the common bonds, of community, that came from this did not recompense the poor quality of their common life. As Robert MacIver himself wrote: ‘So long as great numbers are, through no fault of theirs, destitute and expropriated, they cannot…root themselves in community, for community means for them merely a system of driving outer forces to which they are subject’ (1928, 369). At one end of society, his optimistic hopes for amelioration have yet to be realised, while at the other end, affluence, mobility, new technology and personal choice have undermined any sense of wider common life, leaving a social world of fragmented associations and institutions, and weakened community sentiments, that would have disappointed MacIver and his hopes for community.
Bibliography


Who reads R. M. MacIver today? That may seem like a somewhat impertinent question, probably unthinkable 30 or 40 years ago. If one looks at the date-stamps on his books in university libraries, what one might call in terms of social research method an ‘unobtrusive measure’ (Webb, 1966), the answer is that fewer and fewer people seem to do so. Taken as a whole, his work might seem proto-sociological rather than in the mainstream of modern sociological thought, schematic rather than substantive, general rather than specific.

This chapter focuses on his ‘political’ sociology, and in particular his writings on nationality, as he called it, what we might these days refer to as nation-ness rather than citizenship, which is by and large its modern meaning. There is added interest for us in that MacIver was born and brought up in Stornoway, educated at Edinburgh University, began his academic career at Aberdeen before migrating to Canada, thence to the United States. He was one of the first to teach sociology at a Scottish university, and remarks in his autobiography: ‘I had become particularly interested in sociology, as the central study of society. It was regarded by the pundits as outside the pale, a bastard, quasi subject with a bastard name—the purists scorned its title derived half from Greek and half from a Latin word. It was the kind of subject that caught on in the woolly American Midwest.’ (1968: 65). If he had stayed at Aberdeen, indeed in Scotland, who knows what his impact would have been on the discipline, but it is fair to surmise that it would not have taken virtually another 50 years before becoming established.

In his autobiography MacIver described himself ‘as a social scientist—not as a sociologist or a political scientist or an economist’ (1968: 73), but there is little doubt that a sociologist is what he was. In this paper, I wish to explore his writings on nationality and political sociology, to argue that his work is remarkably relevant to conditions of today, and that his Scottishness was not something he left behind when he migrated to North America, but which in an implicit way he carried with him, providing a perspective which is distinctively Scottish, albeit unacknowledged. First of all, I will explore a remarkable essay he wrote for a special issue of *The Sociological Review* in 1915, an issue
devoted to understanding the Great War. In that essay he not only provides a schema for understanding individual states and their cultural and social composition, but develops an analysis of the concept of ‘nation’. I will then trace his account of nationality through his more mainstream works, notably his study of *Community* (1917), *The Elements of Social Science* (1921), *The Modern State* (1926), and *Society* (1931, and 1950). Finally, I will try and answer the question: to what extent is MacIver and his writings Scottish? Did his place of birth and upbringing figure much, if at all, in his sociology?

**What is Nationality?**

In his 1915 essay ‘The Foundations of Nationality’, MacIver writes ‘In the eyes of its early prophets Nationality was a principle either too holy to be analysed or too simple to require analysis’ (157). What has changed, one might ask? Almost a century on, are we any the wiser? It is a mark of MacIver’s contribution that so much sounds as if he lived through the events of the twentieth century as we have, and had the benefit of serious scholarship on nationalism since Hans Kohn wrote *The Idea of Nationalism* in 1945. Echoing (though as far as I can see not alluding to Renan’s classic essay, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’, written in 1882), and anticipating Benedict Anderson’s ubiquitous and telling definition of a nation as an imagined community, MacIver wrote: ‘No quality or interest, however common, can be a basis of nationality unless it is regarded as common by those who possess it, and any quality or interest whatever, if so regarded, can be a basis of nationality’ (157: my emphasis).

In other words, regard—or recognition—is all. He goes on: ‘For we may not only fail to recognise factors of community which really exist, we may also “recognise” factors of community which have no reality beyond the recognition’ (ibid.). He takes as his example ‘race’, or rather the consciousness of ‘race’, once thought of as the corner-stone of nationality, but subsequently proved ‘to be in nearly every case a delusion’. From our vantage point in the twenty-first century, that seems so much common-sense, but remember that we have the advantage, if that is what it is, of having passed through the rise and fall of fascism, as well as the academic critique of ‘race’ by writers like John Rex, Robert Miles and Michael Banton.

What is especially relevant is MacIver’s comment following that one: ‘…it is important to remember that the opposite error [by which he means the opposite of assuming that markers such as race are ‘real’], the failure to recognise
existing community is far more common, and that all actual consciousness of
community has some true basis, though it may not be that which it seems to
have’ (ibid.). Scotland, anyone? There is no evidence that the Scottish frame
of reference had anything much—explicitly—to do with MacIver’s theorising
about nationality, just as his predecessor Adam Ferguson did not have Scotland
directly in mind when he wrote his famous essay on civil society. Nevertheless,
what he had to say fits the Scottish case rather well. After all, over the past thirty
years, we became used to the assertion that Scotland did not have sufficient,
and sufficiently strong, distinctive cultural markers—language, religion, and
the like—to be considered ‘different’ from England. After all, even Benedict
Anderson said so in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983). Thankfully, we no
longer have to assert the opposite, or rather to point out, as MacIver did in his
own context, that ‘recognition’ of difference is what matters, or, in the famous
words of his contemporary, W. I. Thomas, the definition of situation (‘If men
define things as real, they are real in their consequences’, 1923) is what matters
in spurring to social action. MacIver also picks up another by now familiar
trope: ‘it is of the very essence of nationality that it rests on the consciousness
of difference no less than on that of likeness. For each nationality is determined
by contrast with others, and a nationality regards itself not only as distinct
from others, but nearly always as possessing some exclusive common qualities
[his emphasis], being thereby separated from others as well as united within
itself’ (157–8). The play between similarity and difference interested MacIver,
especially the way that, contra conventional wisdom, ‘Differences lie on the
surface; likenesses have to be sought deeper’ (158). One might have expected
him to say the opposite, that we are more likely to assume similarity *a priori*
than we are difference, but it is an important point nonetheless.

In the central part of this article, I want to spend time looking at MacIver’s
schema, what he calls the foundations of nationality. Remember that he pub-
lished this in 1915 in an issue on the First World War; his ‘national’ categories
only make sense in that frame. In particular, let us remember that in 1915 there
was no state of Israel, so his category of ‘Jews’ has a quite different meaning
than the one we have inherited. MacIver identifies a number of what he calls
‘the chief qualities or interests in the recognition of which, either as common
or exclusively common, the foundations of exclusive nationality lie’ (ibid.).
These are

1. Race
2. Language
3. Territory (‘as occupied effectively, not as politically owned’, which I take
to mean resulting from the practice of power rather than legitimacy, which makes a lot of sense if you think of the shape of Europe at the start of the Great War)

4. Economic Interests
5. Culture (‘characteristic standards and modes of life’)
6. Religion
7. Political Unity
7a. Political Tradition (‘outcome of political unity when long established’)
7b. Political Subjection
7c. Political Domination

These factors are not wholly independent of each other, and found combined and separated. They may be common but not exclusive to a particular nationality, or both common and exclusive. Nationalities where a factor, in this case, ‘race’, is both common and exclusive are Jews, Japanese, Poles, Czechs and Magyars; the British are deemed common and exclusive with regard to 7a, political tradition, and 7d, political domination, but more about the characteristics of ‘national groupings’ anon. MacIver gives the symbol ‘I’ to factors common and exclusive, and ‘X’ to those common but not exclusive (such as the English language, shared by a number of national groupings including Americans). Similarly, with regard to territory, when a nationality occupies the whole of a particular area and is not territorially intermingled with other nationalities, they are denoted by I (Japanese, Spaniards, Swiss, Poles, Czechs, Magyars) but not the British, Americans, Russians; the French, Italians, Germans are denoted by X+ to signify ‘nearly I’. Almost all ‘imperial nations’ are marked X, reflecting in the British case the Dominions, presumably, including Canada where MacIver migrated shortly after he wrote this article. Where ‘nation’ and ‘state’ coincide (interesting that he does not make the mistake of later writers in assuming they are synonyms), they are judged to be I (common and exclusive), under Political Unity (examples are Japanese, Spaniards and Swiss); whereas X (common but not exclusive) under Political Unity is used for instances where nationality and state (what I would call citizenship) do not correspond (e.g. British, Americans, Russians, Germans and the Magyars). The American case is interesting, in passing, ‘since they have admitted negroes to their political rights’ (159). He takes it as obvious that factors such as those relating to economic and cultural differences are differences of degree not of kind: ‘In the civilised world national differences, whatever they amount to, are not differences in “culture-stage”—they are differences in the subtler group-qualities, differences of moods and manners and temperaments, not in the universal character
of their standards and achievements’ (159). However, if a nation regards its own culture as unique, or is deeply conscious of ‘the severance of economic interests’ from its neighbours, then MacIver regards such cultural or economic interests as ‘pure determinants’. Thus, the establishment of tariff-walls can determine unity and separation (so much for Renan’s comments that a customs union—a zollverein—is not a patrie (Renan, 1882 (1996): 51). In passing, it is interesting that by and large MacIver is critical of Renan, even though, it seems to me, that they have much in common. For example, in *The Modern State* (1926) he addresses what he calls Renan’s famous definition of nationality, ‘what constitutes a nation is not speaking the same tongue or belonging to the same ethnic group, but having accomplished great things in common in the past and the wish to accomplish them in the future’. But, MacIver says, ‘this condition could be fulfilled by a family or a ship’s crew or a band of conspirators, but they do not on that account become a nation’ (1926: 123–4).

Nevertheless, MacIver wishes to stress the consciousness of common quality or interest, rather than its ‘objective’ status. So to the matrix:

Reading across his table for ourselves, we see that the British, in his view, are only recognised as distinctive in terms of their political traditions and political domination, presumably imperial. Like the Americans (who, perhaps remarkably, are judged to have no distinctive feature compared with other nationalities, not even political ones like the British), and the Swiss, they are not racially distinct in the sense that community does not align with nationality. The French, Russians, Italians and Germans are recognised as having common but not exclusive features (X). The Czechs have the largest number of exclusively common factors (I)—race, law, territory, economy, but their culture is deemed to be common but not exclusive (X). One can quibble with MacIver’s characterisations of individual ‘nationalities’—and it is clearly influenced by the characteristics of the world of 1915—but the fact that he is able to produce such a matrix describing key factors is remarkable.

MacIver himself draws what he calls ‘significant conclusions’ from his table:

1. There is no single factor present in *all* cases of the consciousness of nationality;
2. In no two cases are the factors on which this consciousness is based exactly the same;
3. It is not necessary for nationality that there should be any ‘pure determinant’ whatever.
4. Nor do nationalities need to represent distinct types (he observes that
## TABLE SHOWING THE FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONALITY

(MacIver 'The Foundations of Nationality', The Sociological Review, 8, 1915, p.160)

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I = factor recognised as exclusively common;
X = factor recognised as common but not exclusive;
O = no community co-extensive with nationality;
X+ = near approach to I

1. Race
2. Language
3. Territory
4. Economic Interests
5. Culture

6. Religion
7. Political Unity
   7a. Political Tradition
   7b. Political Subjection
   7c. Political Domination
American nationality undoubtedly exists, although there is no exclusive basis for it in a specific common quality or interest).

5. On the other hand, nationality, though not identified with any or all of its foundations, is something essentially ‘psychical’ (his word) and necessarily indefinite, ‘being a certain consciousness of likemindedness which may be developed in a great variety of ways and under a great variety of conditions’ (160)

What is it, then, which makes nationality if it is varied in origin and expression? Sounding very modern, he observes: ‘It can only be in the desire of a group for political unity, for a common (not necessarily exclusive) political organisation. The criterion is by its very nature imperfect, but no other seems available’ (161). Other forms of group consciousness are also available even if they do not share in a common political life. Thus, he says (remember that he wrote this in 1915), the Jews ‘have lost the desire for political union’ and with it ‘national self-consciousness’, but retaining a racial sense of unity. He was not to foresee twentieth century history unfolding. Again, where a self-governing colony lacks desire to be at least federated to the mother-country, then it has lost its original nationality and becomes a new nation (in passing, one wonders how he judges Canada and Australia in this regard, for by then they were formally independent though retaining dominion status).

So, why, he wonders, does the sense of nationality expand, contract, or become transformed? He starts from a premise which we would call ‘modernist’ as opposed to ‘primordialist’ (he was not privy to later, sometimes tedious, debates about the extent to which nationalism is a feature of modernity or of times more ancient). With much common-sense, he observes that ‘the sentiment of nationality’ as he calls it is quite a modern phenomenon; ‘it would perhaps be more accurate to say that this sentiment has in modern days revealed itself in new and decisive forms’ (161). He does, however, identify different stages of societal evolution—quite Durkheimian, in fact. First, society is held together by ‘an intense and exclusive communal spirit, the spirit of the clan, or even the tribe, the former less common than the latter’. In these, community consciousness depends on a number of factors common and exclusive. In terms of his schema, all factors are represented by ‘I’. The second stage is where conformity is institutionalised into loyalty to ruler or chief, though allegiance to sub-groups, notably classes, breaks tribal homogeneity. MacIver alludes in passing to what we have learned to call civil society (though he doesn’t use the term) insofar as different associations come to be distinctive from the State, ‘in the name of the specific interest for which each stood, to make claims
contradictory to those of the State—or rather of the actual governments of existing states—on the common members of both’ (163). Only in the third stage did the sentiment of nationality proper emerge, whereby people could distinguish diversity of loyalties from ‘the claims of the complete community to which they felt themselves to belong’. This occurred under the historical circumstances of the two main, and linked, political movements: the growth of nationality, and the growth of democracy. Nationalism develops as the spirit of protest against political domination, but nationality ‘can be a true ideal only so long as and in so far as nationality is itself unrealised’ (164); that is, as an aspiration. Once achieved, it is no longer an ideal. Once met, there is a danger of a move to chauvinism if no other ideal is put in its place. In the fourth stage, inter-dependence develops, and with it a shift to supranationality: ‘It has been making modern nations, almost against their will, or at any rate the wills of their governments, parts of a greater society, partners in a common interest’ (165). Inter-state coordination is necessary and desirable. Writing in 1915, MacIver makes the prescient comment:

The future of the nations of Europe, for a long time to come, will be decided by their ability to see past the accumulated hatreds and losses, tragedies and errors, of this almost universal war, to the necessity of establishing some saner system, some international organisation as permanent and as extensive as the common interests of the nations. (ibid.)

Intellectual Affinities

I have alluded to the Durkheimian quality of much of MacIver’s thought: his social evolutionism, notably the shift from tribal community consciousness to civic consciousness—from ‘organic’ to ‘mechanical’ solidarity in Durkheim’s terms. There is also a strong similarity between them as regards their social liberalism, and, indeed, with Ernest Renan who predated both of them. Renan’s famous essay, ‘What is a nation?’, had a deliberate political purpose. His comment about nationality requiring a daily plebiscite, the everyday affirmation of national identity, has entered the canon of nationalism studies. It is important however to bear in mind that Renan was making a political point, that Alsace-Lorraine had been annexed by Prussia in 1871 on the grounds that it was ‘objectively’ part of the Reich. By invoking the ‘daily plebiscite’,
Renan was saying that the inhabitants had to give their continuous—hence, daily—affirmation for this to be so. Over forty years later, Renan’s compatriot, Emile Durkheim was making the same point. At exactly the same time as MacIver—1915—he wrote a trenchant piece entitled ‘Germany above all’ which took issue with the dominant German view that the State has absolute power (der Staat ist Macht).\(^1\) Observe the similarities between Durkheim and MacIver on nationality:

Durkheim writes:

A nationality is a group of human beings, who for ethnical (sic) or perhaps merely for historical reasons desire to live under the same laws, or to form a single state, large or small, as it may be; and it is now a recognised principle among civilised peoples that, when this common desire has been persistently affirmed, it commands respect, and is indeed the only solid basis of a state. (1915: 40)

We cannot really fault MacIver (or Durkheim, for that matter) for failing to predict later twentieth century events, but what does seem to me remarkable is how prescient he was in picking out the key variables and processes which make up what he calls ‘nationality’ (in passing, it is obvious that he was not adopting the later usage of the term as ‘citizenship’, revealing in itself, for that helps to account for the common failure to distinguish between nation and state which has bedevilled the study of nations and nationalism since 1945).

**Nation and State**

MacIver, on the other hand, is well aware of the distinction nation and state. In *Community*, published in 1917, and the preface for which he wrote at King’s College, Aberdeen, in 1914, he observes: ‘The completest type of community [community being defined as ‘a social unity whose members recognise as common a sufficiency of interests to allow of the interactivities of common life’—my comment] is the nation, and when a nation is allowed free expression it creates an autonomous state’ (107). He stresses that ‘nation’ is not coterminous with ‘locality’ (he alludes in passing to the organisation of students at Aberdeen and Glasgow into ‘nations’ or localities, ‘a relic of the times when universities, in the poverty

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\(^1\) I am indebted to David Inglis for bringing this to my attention, and for pointing out the similarities in the views of Durkheim and MacIver.
and uniformity of their studies, were organised according to local divisions’ (258), and goes on to say that when barriers of locality and class are broken across by recognition of wider common interests, then ‘nation’ or ‘people’ emerges as an integral community (261). ‘Nationality’ then is the affirmation of the superiority of common interests over differences of locality and class, and in his scheme of things, a higher order of social development. The state becomes the ‘ministering association’ of the nation. Most sociologists would take issue with attributing higher order to issues of nationality over those of social class (and presumably other social dimensions such as gender), but it is interesting to me that he doesn’t conflate nation and state. Nation, he says, is a community, not a hypothetical structure like race, but ‘a concrete living reality’ (265). These are strong statements, and somewhat at odds with the Gellnerian notion that nation is a social construct, which is undoubtedly the conventional wisdom of most scholars of nationalism today. MacIver’s prioritising of nation seems to reflect his developmentalist model, fulfilling a double function—to resist superior claims from supra-national bodies (such as ‘political Rome over the world’, or ‘ecclesiastical Rome over the world’), and to provide ground for uniting localities and social classes. ‘The idea of nationality is thus… an expression of the widened social thoughts of men’ (267). And more strongly, ‘The fact of common nationality is definite and determinative, not to be denied or renounced, a real basis of unity and condition of common action’ (ibid.). MacIver is at pains to distinguish between the fact, and the ideal, of nationality. Somewhat surprisingly, he claims that the ideal of nationality (rather than the fact) is vague and confused. ‘Nationality, in a word, is properly the ground and not the inspiration of common action’ (267). He quite accepts that nationality is aspirational, hence an ideal, that the nation should govern itself and become, through the state, an autonomous unit for the achievement of intrinsic interests. Once this has been achieved, nationality, \textit{per se}, ceases to be an ideal, and instead ‘is a way of being human, a common individuality’ (268). Thus, in his example, Factory Acts were passed not because workers are ‘national’ (he gives the examples of German, and English (sic) workers), but because workers need protection, not because they are German or English. Basic, human, civilised values are pursued through ‘nationality’ because they are general, not specific to a nation, though expressed by its political agency, the state: ‘it is the protector and maintainer of each concrete nation, the

\footnote{In his later book, \textit{The Elements of Social Science} (1921), MacIver spells out the stages of society: the village community, the city community, the feudal community, the nation community—the highest form.}
community of nationality is, as it were, the colour . . . ’ (272). Inter-state action is necessary and inevitable, as states come to share certain problems and solutions. This is especially so with regard to war which he calls ‘a relation of hostility between peoples as organised by States’ (275). So, ‘as intercommunity extends, war becomes more and more irrational’ (ibid.)—clearly a cri de coeur in his times.

In his political sociology, MacIver comments that the life of the community is endangered when government extends its functions beyond a certain range. ‘When government becomes the arbiter of the arts, of the faiths, of the philosophies, of the morals, and of the attitudes of the people it cuts the heart out of all these activities, the activities by and for which men live’ (1921: 80). The state does have a universality which no other association can claim. It alone has territorial boundaries such that all living within them are subject to its laws and jurisdiction. It has a ‘unique investment with the coercive force of the community’ (1921: 82). Nevertheless, ‘force can command only the external, the formal. It cannot enjoin a spirit, a belief, or a form of culture’ (ibid., 84).

Evolving Ideas

Let us return to his comments on nation and nationality. In The Elements of Social Science (1921) he reiterates his views which appeared in his 1915 article in The Sociological Review. To reprise:

When we realize that nations are not racially distinct entities, it becomes apparent that there remains no single outward criterion of any kind to mark off nation from nation. Take language. A nation may be one though its members, like the Swiss, speak several languages; and a single language, like English or Spanish, may be common to diverse nations. Take religion. The day of the national God is past, and the God of denationalized race (but of course not a pure race) holds the at least nominal allegiance of the divided nations of the western world’ (1921: 99–100)

Nationality, he comments, must be a subtler thing than these and other external signs. The criterion of nationhood ‘is the desire for self-government surging out of a sense of likeness and of difference’ (ibid., 101). The world, however,
‘is now ripe, and never was ripe before, for an international or more precisely an inter-political system’ (ibid., 105).

How did MacIver’s view of nationality change over his career? His book *Society: an introductory analysis* was co-authored with Charles Page, and first published in 1950, when MacIver was professor of political philosophy and sociology at Columbia, though actually a revised reprint of his 1931 book *Society: its structure and changes*. Written as it was in revised form just five years after the Second World War, it provides a useful ‘book-end’ to the 1915 article in *The Sociological Review*. The fundamentals do not appear to have changed, although he uses new materials, such as Hans Kohn’s work published in the 1940s, notably *The Idea of Nationalism* (1945), which was the basis for Kohn’s *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry of that year, in which he distinguished between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ forms of nationalism. For MacIver, the nation remains the largest effective community insofar as it is the largest group permeated by a consciousness of comprehensive solidarity. *Pace* the United Nations, there is no international community to any effective degree. Nations are in essence territorially based, despite, he acknowledges, the enormous problems faced by post-war designers of the new Europe in both 1919 and 1945; which is not to say that plotting nations on a map is straightforward (1964 [1950], 296 ff). Nationality has distinctive features:

1. Its democratic nature: ‘Like all communal sentiments…nationality feeling is essentially democratic. In other words, it admits no grades, no hierarchy of membership’ (1964:297). It does not depend on peculiar interests or specific attributes of all members of a nation.

2. The basic criterion of nationality is this: it is ‘a type of community sentiment, created by historical circumstances and supported by common psychological factors, of such an extent and so strong that those who feel it desire to have a common government peculiarly or exclusively their own’ (ibid., 298; his emphasis). He draws on Kohn to make the point. Communities such as nations are not merely objective entities, but ‘sociopsychological realities’. The sentiment of nationality has different grounds: (a) national likenesses and stereotypes—resting on what members have in common. Thus, national stereotypes and caricatures such as Uncle Sam, John Bull, the Russian bear aid in constructing solidarity from without and within; (b) as a result, symbols of nationality sentiment are attached to the group as a whole—the flag, the anthem: fatherland, mother-country, homeland—and can be mobilised as and when. National sentiment assumes diverse forms: patriotism—which he defines as deep, communal
feeling based on altruistic devotion—has to be distinguished from nationalism—which demands that the nation is the object of supreme and exclusive loyalty. In extreme forms, ‘it becomes chauvinism, which is intolerant and boastful, or imperialism, which seeks economic or political domination over others’ (ibid., 301).

3. It follows that nationality may express a beneficial ideal of unity or it may be a cause of serious division. There seems to be greater emphasis on this latter, negative, aspect in his later work, not surprising given the mid-century context (note too the shift to ‘nationalism’). Thus, ‘In the modern world, as a limit to the range of community, nationalism is disastrous. Nationalism first became a potent force in Europe, but there is no better area in which to observe its harmful aspects, not only among the “troublesome” smaller nations of eastern Europe but also among the greater nations. European nationalism has disrupted the economic interest that might be shared, and has fostered the deadly mutual distrust leading to war’ (ibid., 302).

4. How are these destructive effects to be overcome? The obvious answer is through developing the international community, which, for MacIver, must be based on national cooperation. The world is plainly a more dangerous place in 1950, given ‘the possibility of destruction hitherto undreamed’ (304).

Is MacIver Scottish?

This is the final question I want to address. By the question I mean to ask whether or not he was influenced by the country which bred him. At one level the answer is plainly no. One looks in vain for references. But should one bother? After all, MacIver was writing generic social science which, especially at that time, was seeking out what was general not what was specific. He was interested in models of social development, and once societies had reached the level of what he calls ‘national community’, they had far more in common than separated them. So why bother with Scotland? England is there (‘Britain’ figures as empire), but largely as a trope for what we more carefully call these days the UK. And yet. I am struck by this similarity with Adam Ferguson, in whose work one also searches in vain for explicit evidence of roots. On the other hand, both were to my mind crucially influenced by the societies they grew up in. Just as ‘civil society’ seemed a natural thing to write about
for Ferguson, so ‘nation’—especially in contradistinction to ‘state’—comes naturally to MacIver. From the outset, he makes the distinction, and I would argue that his work is suffused with an understanding that nation and state should not be confused.

We have one advantage, if that is what it is, in that MacIver wrote an autobiography, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1968. Having such a thing at our disposal carries health warnings. On the one hand, it is an account, written by the author late in life, with all the caveats such accounts carry. On the other hand, it invites those writing about MacIver to relate what he wrote back to his life story, and at worst runs the risk of amateur psychologising. Given that most writers do not write autobiographies, then the temptation to do this when they are available is sometimes irresistible. Whether we would learn anything significant about the social thought of the three great founders of modern sociology—Marx, Weber and Durkheim—if they had written autobiographies is a moot point. In MacIver’s case it does allow us to see how much or how little he alluded to his native land, and the answer is not much. The bare bones are these. Born in Stornoway on Lewis in 1882, he went to Edinburgh University and graduated in 1903 and 1905, to Oxford for two years, before returning to Aberdeen in 1907 where he remained until 1915 whence he migrated to Canada. He remained there, at the University of Toronto, until 1927 when he went to Columbia in the United States where he taught until 1950. Thereafter he directed various public policy projects, and was president then chancellor of the New School for Social Research until 1966.

His autobiography gives us the following insights: his family did not speak Gaelic at home, though he gleaned enough as a child to follow adult conversation between visitors and kin; he found the religious culture of Lewis oppressive and stifling, even though his family belonged to the big kirk. He said: ‘I am an agnostic, which is very different from being an atheist’ (1968: 126). In short, we might describe him as a secular presbyterian, someone who inculcated particular values rather than an active churchgoer. Indeed, he entitles his autobiography ‘As a tale that is told’, an explicit allusion to Psalm 90 (verse 9). Despite joining the Territorials while at Aberdeen (at the behest of a friend), he left after a year or two, ‘a feeling of revulsion gradually came over me…we were intended to be defenders of our country, but the conception of “our country” entertained by most army men I met was wholly different from mine’—he didn’t say what it was. He retained a sense of his own identity as a Highland Scot (his term) in the context of the three countries furth of Scotland in which he lived. Thus
at Oxford: ‘For a Highland Scot, England, in its most traditional enclave, was like a foreign country. Attitudes, codes, manners, showed distinctive differences—I found them [‘English public schoolmen’] all courteous and ostensibly friendly. But it was the kind of courtesy you extend to foreigners.’ (58). His sense of not being English goes with him to Canada: ‘A Scot is not unlikely to feel more at ease migrating to Canada than living in England’ (78). Finally, he moved to the United States:

I felt like a semi-foreigner at first among my new colleagues. With my different background and training, and not knowing the folk they gossiped about or the situations they discussed, I was a listener more than a participant in their company—a role I was not used to. I retained and have always kept a bit of a Scottish Highland accent that seemed more conspicuous against the characteristic American intonation of the majority of my colleagues. But the feeling of being an outsider was dissipated soon enough in a society where ‘standing on ceremony’ is rare and hospitality is warm and pervasive. (97)

This brief dip into MacIver’s autobiography simply allows us to see that he took much of his Scottish and Highland background with him, and applied it to new social experiences, in England, Canada and the United States. He does not seem to have been in any way a ‘professional Scot’, an émigré of caricature, but someone who made an intellectual and public contribution to the societies in which he found himself. No ivory towered intellectual, he. In later life, he took on studies of Jewish Community Relations agencies, the New York public school system, academic freedom, Juvenile Delinquency Evaluation project in New York, as well as presiding over the New School for Social Research in New York, a body with a long history of studying and contributing to the society in which it was embedded. All were informed by his sociological commitment not only to understand the social world but to help to change it.

We can perhaps take his Scottishness further, into his academic work in terms of the assumptions he employs, or indeed doesn’t. It is the implicit insight rather than the explicit model which strikes one about his writings, the frame of reference, as it were. He does not have to be told that state, nation, society are different, though his understanding of nation is far closer to society, it must be said, in the sense that the reality of social governance is what constitutes the nation, and not simply some set of emotions. Contrast that with much British and American sociology which simply assumes that
the so-called nation-state is the ‘natural’ entity for social and cultural analysis: an implicit parochialism masquerading as universalism. See, for example, his comment in *Community* (1917) that the most complete form of community is the ‘nation’, and where the nation is allowed free expression, it creates an autonomous state. Nation ‘is a community, a concrete living reality, not a hypothetical structure like race’ (p.266).

Secondly, MacIver observes that the basis of ‘nationality’ is that people regard it so—‘there is no reality beyond recognition’. In other words, there is no pure determinant of nationality. Nationality is in his word ‘psychical’, ‘being a certain consciousness of likemindedness which may be developed in a great variety of ways and under a great variety of conditions’. He observes that the failure to recognise an existing community is far more common than its opposite, something which echoes down more recent debates as to whether Scotland is sufficiently distinctive in cultural terms to warrant being called a nation.

While it would be wrong to assume that MacIver was explicitly aware that his general observations were either derived from or could be applied to the Scottish experience is not the point. Tracing theoretical assumptions from individual’s biographical details is a hazardous even pointless exercise. Suffice it to say that MacIver was less likely to make the common errors about nations and nationality than writers from other, bigger countries where assumptions about nations=states are more common, even *de rigueur*.

I like to think that if he were here today, he would have little problem relating to twenty-first century Scotland, the growth in understated nations, of global and inter-governmental forces, the one not negating the other. He might even comment that this is where he came in, and, indeed, where he came from.

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**Bibliography**


Though produced in the 1930s and 1940s Robert MacIver’s writings on causation can be seen as an allegory for the divisions in scientific approaches to sociology apparent to this day. His work is often associated with a more ‘subjective’, ‘humanistic’ approach to the discipline, but what he represented was actually an alternative conception of science in social science to that of the dominant positivism of his day. This was recognised some years ago by Martyn Hammersley in his book on Herbert Blumer and the Chicago tradition. Hammersley describes MacIver as a ‘realist’ (Hammersley 1989: 106–7) and indeed in hindsight we can see that MacIver’s greatest methodological contribution was to champion a realist formulation of causation in a climate of positivism that denied the legitimacy of causal explanation.

Though influential in the golden age of US sociology, alongside other ‘anti’ positivists such as Znaniecki, Lynd, Blumer and Sorokin his methodological prescriptions were not mainstream and he himself, in the introduction to Social Causation, anticipated ‘hot and angry comments’ on his work (MacIver 1964 [1942]). He was seen by some, at least, to embody the very different ‘British’ version of sociology antipathetic to the US one. The attempt to appoint MacIver to the Chair of sociology at Minnesota, in 1921, was apparently seen by Luther Bernard ‘as a plot to dissolve sociology into the humanities’ (Bannister 1987: 130) Though there were clearly humanistic elements to MacIver’s sociology, Bernard’s assessment was wide of the mark. Furthermore later simplifications of sociological methodology into apparently antagonistic quantitative (‘positivist’) and qualitative (‘interpretivist’) camps resulted in a loss of important methodological nuance in, what might be better called the ‘anti-scientific’ tradition in American sociology. In hindsight we can fairly safely speculate that the aforementioned sociologists and specifically MacIver, would be no more sympathetic to the relativist, post critique humanism of much of current qualitative sociology than would Lundberg, Dodd or Lazarsfeld. MacIver, long before it was fashionable (or perhaps now becoming fashionable again) occupied a position in sociology that, like Durkheim, saw social phenomena as real things, but like Weber saw causal explanation as emergent and not manifest.
MacIver’s position today would be recognisable at the level of methodology and method. In the first case he advocates a thoroughgoing realist version of causation of the kind proposed by critical realists, such as Roy Bhaskar (1978; 1998) and Andrew Sayer (1992) or analytic realists such as Peter Hedstrom (2005) or Ray Pawson (1989; 2000). In the second case he favoured a pluralist approach to methods that does not fetishise either quantitative or qualitative methods to the exclusion of either, but embraces method for its ability to provide rigorous sociological explanation (Payne et al 2004). For sure, he often seemed to favour case studies over statistics, but he most certainly did not denigrate the importance of the latter (MacIver 1933: 34).

However my task here is not to rescue MacIver and his contemporaries from misunderstandings of the subtleties of twentieth-century US sociological methodology. Martyn Hammersley (1989), Robert Bannister (1987) and Jennifer Platt (1996) have already done this job superbly well. My aim is more limited: it is to locate MacIver’s writings on causation in a more general methodological history of causation in sociology and to ask if they are useful to us now, or best left as an interesting curiosity in the history of the discipline. As did MacIver himself, I need to begin this task by reviewing what we might mean by causation and the difficulties of its application in explaining the social and physical world.

Causes, Causal Reasoning and Causes in the Social World

MacIver’s own review of the problem, in his 1942 book *Social Causation*, has hardly been bettered for its clarity. Critical accounts of causal reasoning often begin with Hume, or at least the paradox of the need to reason causally in everyday life, but the difficulty in attributing specific causes and effects. Sociologists study change and, as MacIver (1964: 9) points out by experiencing change we ‘summon the concept of causation’. Change is always relative to something that did not change, so we assume that which did change is caused, that is ‘made to happen by something else’. ‘Change and the unchanging are correlative, and we cannot think of the one without the other we cannot think of either except in the light of the principle of causation’ (1964: 10). Yet, equally, Hume’s scepticism is hard to deny. To witness one event following another requires us to draw on experiential psychological resources to make the causal connection. In making a statement such as ‘the arrest caused the riot’ no amount of observational evidence will demonstrate the causal connection. It
inevitably depends on linguistic and conceptual links being made between the events. It calls upon our common sense or sociological theorising to attribute causal connections between conjoining events.

In science, but particularly social science, the observational evidence is rarely first hand and to make causal connections in numeric data requires statistical and, many would add, conceptual reasoning. The story often presented as apocryphal but actually true, of the rise in both the stork and human populations in Oldenburg in Germany in 1936 (Glass 1984) has been offered to generations of statistics students as a cautionary story about not making causal assumptions from correlative data. A further and related problem, as MacIver points out, is that in causation we have something like a version of Zeno’s paradox: wherever we intervene in a ‘causal chain’, the sufficient condition for the effect is forever postponed by a moment (1964: 44), and whilst necessary and sufficient conditions together can be said to produce effects, each necessary or sufficient condition is but a ‘factor’ in the description (1964: 28–29). If we say something like ‘the arrest caused the riot’, where in the chain of events from the making of the law under which the arrest was made to the moment the arrestee was led away by the police, do we identify the precise necessary or sufficient conditions? It is of no comfort that precisely the same problem exists in identifying conditions in physical processes. To attempt to identify the conditions, to say x caused y, is to pick out and privilege some component of the process as necessary or sufficient. Such practice has led critics of causal reasoning to accuse its proponents of vitalism, and indeed Bergson claimed the concept of the *élan vital* as an explanatory life force.

Even before one moves to the particular difficulties of social causation there is enough that would not have been seen as ‘scientific’ in the first half of the twentieth century to rule out the possibility of causal explanation. Bertrand Russell had claimed that causation, like royalty, was harmless, but had no purpose (Russell 1992 [1912]). Nevertheless he noted that modern physics and by this he meant quantum physics, had no need for causation. Undoubtedly the fashion in physics in the first forty years or so of the twentieth century, would have played well with the sociological warriors of science such as Lundberg (1939); Dodd (1942) and Lazarsfeld (Lazarsfeld and Rosenberg 1955), yet equally there was a long standing tradition in statistical analysis, going back to Karl Pearson, that saw causal thinking as ‘pre-scientific’ (Goldthorpe 2000). Certainly this was the view of the US positivists. Instead they proposed a version of theory testing which relied on an extreme form of inductivism based on survey data. Though there were variations
in the analysis strategies, in the extent to which theory was ‘tested’ and in the nature of data gathering, the approaches were all characterised by a reliance on regularity, association and phenomenalism. Jennifer Platt (1996: 86) describes its apotheosis in Dodd’s ‘pan sample’ which proposed hundreds or thousands of observations of the same phenomenon to demonstrate all of the conditions under which a generalisation would hold. Dodd’s view was that if correlations of all variables under all conditions could be known, then rather like in Laplace’s ‘clockwork universe’ (Williams 2000: 30) we could generalise to future states.

Undoubtedly such analyses produced useful empirical results (though Dodd’s research question seemed pretty banal to begin with – Platt 1996: 85–6) and they certainly helped us to develop the kind of analyses used today that are built on data matrices, but a criticism made by MacIver and later more famously by Gouldner (1968), was that the reasoning basis underlying this analysis approach was far from objective and relied quite often on narrow normative conceptions of what was an appropriate programme for sociology. The complaint of the positivists that causal thinking was unscientific, was compromised by their subjectivity in accepting initial conditions as givens and deriving normative hypotheses from these. It is perhaps rather ironic, given the foregoing, that the behaviourism popular in psychology around this time and supported by Bernard and others in US sociology (Bannister 1989), cited the inaccessibility of human mental processes, notably reasoning and self-reflection, as grounds for rejecting causation as subjective.

Nevertheless they had some good points about the philosophical difficulties and the added difficulty for causal reasoning in the social world. Whilst feedback mechanisms have long been known in biology, human self-consciousness adds an extra difficulty – particularly that both agents and sociologists will frequently cite reasons as causes (Papineau 1978:52–5). Indeed if there is to be any concept of causation in the human sciences, it seems hard to avoid confronting the idea of reasons as causes.

In sociology there have been two common strategies to avoid this problem: the first is the aforementioned anti-causal behaviourist (or at least phenomenalist) approach which measures only outcome states, or possibly correlates attitude statements (such as those recorded in scales) with outcome states.¹

¹ I am guilty of some simplification here. Though much of the early US positivist tradition was, as I indicate, openly anti-causal (Abbott 1998), later work aimed to produce causal inference through correlative methods. This approach evolved into what is sometimes referred to as ‘causal analysis’, and nowadays uses devices such
The other strategy is to abandon a quantitative or even analytic approach in favour of a search for meaning or an emphasis on narrative approaches. It is the latter that has come to dominate qualitative research in recent decades (see for example Lawler 2002) and whilst there has been a return to causal analysis in quantitative research (particularly in the US), this is still underpinned strongly by the same positivist principles that informed the work of the ‘anti-causalists’ such as Lazrasfeld. MacIver was in neither camp and we can see him as prefiguring the contemporary realist analytic approach.

MacIver’s defence of the principle of causation

Though he sets out the case for causal reasoning in its most complete form in Social Causation, this was not his first word on the matter and his 1930 American Sociological Association (ASA) presidential address, entitled ‘Is Sociology a Natural Science’ (MacIver 1933), was both a rebuttal of the dominance of the ‘statistical’ method and a plea for a return to causal thinking in sociology. The growth of the use of the statistical method and associational reasoning paralleled the emergence of the survey method in the United States. Whilst not opposed to the use of either, MacIver nevertheless was an adherent of the earlier ‘case study’ approach. Though he would have not used terms such as ‘ant-realist’ or ‘phenomenalist’ as a description of the new methods, this was certainly the tone of his attack on the statistical method. In bemoaning the abandonment of a concept of natural necessity and its replacement by ‘logical necessity’, he says

And should we be baffled by the question how logical necessity can hold for an order that lacks any inherent or existential necessity, then we must resort to the position of Karl Pearson, who tells us, in true Humean fashion, that the necessity is merely that of the order of our sense impressions, and that the word ‘cause’ is properly used to mark a ‘stage in a routine experience’. (MacIver 1964: 49–50, emphasis in original)

as the Generalised Linear Model (GLM), which seeks the relationship between one continuous dependent variable and one or more continuous or categorical variables. More sophisticated ‘causal’ models may use multi level modelling (Snijders and Bosker 1999). Nevertheless, the reasoning in even the most sophisticated of these models remains probabilistic and would not (I suspect) satisfied MacIver.
Thus MacIver, in his denunciation of the abandonment of ontological necessity, commits himself to it as a cornerstone of his own version of causation, which following G. H. Mead he states very simply as ‘[an] event is dependent on the conditions, that without the conditions the event would not occur’ (ibid., 69). This position is a deceptively simple one, but one that is hard to actualise in a methodological programme. MacIver attempts to do this and from a realist perspective he can be interpreted as having some success. I will argue later that he does not entirely succeed, but that is because versions of realism that espouse a natural or ontological necessity cannot move beyond the metaphysical.

In what he terms his ‘analytic approach’, in *Social Causation*, he describes causal factors, characteristics of causal explanation that we need to take into account in developing a causal methodology in the social world: They are: ‘Cause as Precipitant’, ‘Cause as Incentive’, ‘Cause as Responsible Agent’.

*Cause as Precipitant*
Sociology and other social sciences are in the business of identifying the specific ‘why’ of change, or indeed stasis, in order to recommend a course of action to bring about improvement. In economics, in particular, there is a desire to know what monetary intervention can be made to improve a situation, thus the economist needs to identify the causal agent of change, what MacIver terms the ‘precipitant cause’, the ‘factor that is introduced from the outside, or else emerges from within, so that it evokes a series of repercussions or reactions significantly changing the total situation’ (ibid., 163). He provides examples in history of wars or revolutions that are triggered by a precipitant cause. However, this is often hard to identify and what we often find are ‘causal chains’, chains of events in which A produces G through identifiable links in the chain, such that G would not have occurred but for A. But, as MacIver points out, we could not say that G was in any sense determined before hand.

One may approach the precipitant as a disturbing factor within an equilibrium, thus the various causal chains, whilst making an apparent difference, ultimately do not change the nature of the tendency toward equilibrium. In this he cites the economic models of Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall and the equally deterministic impetus toward revolution in Marxist economics. In these models we can say x causes y, but only on the basis of all things being equal, the let out or *ceteris paribus* clause. These kinds of theoretical models do not convince him of their verisimilitude and he approvingly cites Barbara
Wootton as saying ‘the possibility that our economic mechanism is so kinetic that the rate at which new disturbances occur is habitually greater than the rate of adjustment to such circumstances’. This turns equilibrium on its head in favour of constant flux and presents a difficulty in identifying those precipitant causes.

MacIver has two suggestions, which both find their echo in later methodological approaches to causation. First he suggests that Weberian ideal types may give us an intuitive model with which to compare. Ideal types, MacIver maintains, are not fixed or immutable, but allow for violation and historical change, but nevertheless if the actuality is to resemble the ideal types individuals will ultimately conform to identifiable norms, which become reflected in the institutional structure of the system. These in turn produce laws and through observation the law becomes understandable in terms of the motives and meaningful intentions of the individual. For MacIver ideal types help us to reveal and understand the sustaining features of a social situation and thus more readily identify its agents of change. To some extent this use of ideal types does at least partially resemble the realist conception of a mechanism, though elsewhere MacIver hints at a closer resemblance in his thinking to this (I shall return to this below).

His second suggestion in seeking a precipitant cause is to ask what could have alternatively happened. This is what he terms an ‘anti-precipitant’, ‘in assigning the decisive role of precipitant to any act or event we are in substance claiming to know, not only what actually happened, but what would have happened had this act or event not occurred’ (ibid., 180). This, as he points out, is fine in a situation whereby one says a person would not have died had he not been shot, but quoting Tolstoy at length he problematises the idea of ‘anti-precipitants’ in the example of the War of 1812. Whilst the historian might say that had Napoleon not taken offence when requested to withdraw beyond the Vistula there would have been no war, was this in fact the necessary or sufficient condition? We can discern other counterfactuals, such as the refusal of sergeants to lead their troops, or intrigues in the enemy camp. There are chains we can follow to seek the ‘anti-precipitant’, but there may be more than one chain. This approach is indeed one that is followed today through causal counterfactual analysis (associated with Donald Rubin, 1990), but in order to establish counterfactuals phenomena need be defined, operationalised

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2 Weberian ideal types are nominalist in character (though arguably their use by Mannheim later is less so), though ontologically they can be neutral and equally feature as a heuristic element in realism.
and measured (in say an experiment), quite a different proposition to naming and suggesting counterfactuals to historic events. Indeed all counterfactual reasoning depends on the subjective identification of not just the causal agents, but the alternatives.

*Cause as Incentive*

In the physical world it is commonly held that teleological causal explanation is fallacious, but in the social world this may not be the case. Conscious agents formulate actions based upon beliefs and this changes both the social and physical world. In his chapter (in *Social Causation*) on cause as incentive, MacIver attempts to set out the problem of purposive action, what he terms ‘cause as incentive’. The main problem for this kind of cause is, as MacIver notes, to what extent are we justified in picking out subjective attributes in explanations of individual or group action? If we could be content with describing every individual cause-effect process in a person’s actions quite separately, then no real problem arises, but this would not take us far in causal explanation, it would be just description. Rather, we want to subsume subjective individual actions under some explanatory principle, perhaps grounded in rationality, norms, rules and so on. We may seek psychological typologies (MacIver suggests Jung, ibid., 199), ‘instinct’, or utilitarian universals, such as ‘satisfaction’ or happiness. Yet MacIver doesn’t reach any firm methodological conclusions in this chapter, other than in a somewhat Presbyterian warning about the dangers of ignoring motivations and or citing subjectivities as causes. Nevertheless, in this alone he does prefigure a debate that took place in the philosophy of the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s (see for example Papineau 1978), about whether beliefs and desires can count as causes. I’m not sure this issue is now, or will ever be resolved, but it remains a factor that cannot be ignored in any theory of causation in the social world.

*Cause as Responsible Agent*

MacIver’s third factor can be seen as somewhat similar to his second, except that it also has a moral dimension of responsibility. It is similar in that the effects arise from conscious acts. Similarly the cause-effect is teleological, but the moral dimension arises in attribution and definition of cause-effect. In

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3 He does explore this in more depth in a 1940 paper entitled The Imputation of Motives, but the paper does not go much further than to defend such imputation as scientific, likening the task to the imputation of weather conditions in meteorology (MacIver 1940).
his examples of criminal activity we can say that the criminal was responsible, that is s/he caused the outcome. Similarly if a third person knowingly aids a criminal through their actions they are ‘bound to the teleological nexus relative to the act’ (MacIver 1964: 227).

The reason there is a moral dimension to responsibility is that others will judge whether or not, or to what extent an agent is responsible for an action. This raises questions of free will and determinism. For example, to what extent do we say a person is responsible for a criminal act, or to what extent do we blame their socialisation, or the circumstances in which they found themselves? Furthermore, the ‘criminal act’ itself is subject to social definition. Legal responsibility is socially constructed.

Causal attribution and context

Having set out the characteristics and limitations of causal inference in the social world, MacIver introduces a seemingly straightforward concept, which he terms the ‘universal formula’. By way of examples from medicine and nutrition (ibid., 262) he returns to the notion of an adequate causal explanation as that in which we can identify those conditions that make a difference, either historically or in a contemporary situation. The site of this kind of reasoning is the classic laboratory experiment, where ‘the $x$ manifesting $C$, by the removal, modification, or addition of factors until the particular nexus relating to $x$, to its immediate causal context can be located (ibid., 256). So, in the manner of the Grand Old Duke of York, he led us to the top of the [causal] hill and he led us back down again! And on the way down he rehearses once again the difficulties of the violations of assumptions that the social world imposes on such reasoning and he adds a new one, what Goldthorpe (1997) calls the ‘small N problem’. This is the problem of not enough units of analysis (wars, revolutions, countries etc) to allow the formulation of an explanatory law or generalising statement arising from the causal nexus.

However, having weaved a tortuous path through causal inference and its limitations and pretty much brought us back to where he started, he then suggests some analytic devices that move his notion of social causation into (what was for the time) new territories. First he sets out three ‘realms’ of causation, the physical (characterised he claims by invariance), the organic and that of the conscious being. He then further divides the latter into the cultural order,
the technological order and the social order. Perhaps anticipating the obvious point that the technological and the cultural may each be subsumed under the social, he assigns a particular meaning to the social in this classification. In our normative use of the term ‘social’ in social science we tend to mean every manifestation of human interaction, consequently the term social ceases to have meaning and could be replaced by that of ‘human’ (ibid., 274 ff). In MacIver’s developing schema of causation the three realms play an important role. The first, the cultural, is the interrelationship of values and goals within a particular milieu. The second, the technological, is the development and application of technological skills, both material and political that advance and shape the values and goals in the cultural order. Finally, the social order has the special meaning of ‘the patterns, and trends of the modes of relationship between social beings as revealed in their group formations and in their multifarious modes and conditions of association and disassociation’ (ibid., 273). What we would today call social structure.

MacIver does not see these orders as existing in isolation or separation, but dynamically linked. Indeed he spends some while discussing the difficulty of separating the first two in ‘primitive’ societies. Though he does not pursue the issue, other than speaking of modes of production, his technological order has an implicit materialism that would permit the kinds of linkages to the physical and organic realms.

At this point in his work takes on something of a Parsonian timbre. He spends some time discussing the integration, or its absence, of the three orders, how social change arises from their disruption through conflict and indeed how conflict then changes the nature of the relationship between the orders as a result of changed goals, limitations and possibilities. Particularly reminiscent of Parsons’ ‘unit act’ (Parsons 1949: 43) he then spends two chapters discussing how individuals make dynamic assessments of their situations and act upon them to bring about conscious or unconscious change. Often these changes, at the micro level, will serve to sustain and develop a social order, but in other cases changes may be brought about that make society x different to society y, or time $t1$ different to time $t2$ in the same society. His examples of marriage, divorce rates, births and crime emphasise the importance of the location of effects in particular social and historical milieu and the impossibility of seeking generalisations or laws which transcend these. His message is at last clear: ‘When we begin with a postulated cause there is a peculiar temptation to insulate this causal factor as though it operated independently’ (ibid., 366). The dynamic nature of the interrelationship between the three orders and
the individual dynamic assessment and subsequent action which changes them does not permit the isolation of a simple cause–effect relationship as one would bring about in a laboratory experiment in the physical or organic realm.

MacIver’s causation is multi layered and complex. The $x \rightarrow y$ causal nexus is not simply a straightforward push-pull relationship between two variables, but a nested matrix of relationships between the physical and social world, psychological dispositions and the particular manifestation of the social (in the sense meant by MacIver). In a response to his critics after the publication of the first edition of *Social Causation*, he sums his view up as ‘The investigation of causes is always the pursuit of the specific linkage of a differentiating phenomena.’ (MacIver 1943: 57).

### Realism and Causation

Before going on to discuss my claim that MacIver was advocating a realist version of causation I will briefly outline the contemporary critical / analytic realist version of causation.

As a philosophy realism pre-dates empiricism, but as an explicit methodology in the social sciences its history goes back no further than Russell Keat and John Urry’s *Social Theory as Science*, published in 1975 (Keat and Urry 1975). A number of classic sociologists, particularly Marx and Durkheim, have been since claimed for realism, but for all practical purposes realism is a relatively new challenger to the dichotomies of empiricism/idealism, positivism/interpretivism that have dominated throughout the history of sociology. In the social sciences the terms ‘realist’ and ‘realism’ would have been unknown in MacIver’s day, so as in the case of Marx and Durkheim I am similarly claiming him as prefigurative realist.

The most influential figure in the development of social science realism

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4 Critical realist versions of causation and what I’ve termed ‘analytic’ are similar in many respects. Indeed the realism of ‘analytic’ realists such as Pawson (1989; 2000) or Byrne (2000) accepts many of the foundational arguments of Bhaskar and his followers, but develop rather differently. What I term ‘analytic realism’ does not embrace the moral presuppositions of critical realist philosophy (see Hammersley 2002).

5 Indeed one could argue that there is more to unite positivism with interpretivism than either with realism. The former two positions are nominalist, the first in its insistence that observation is the only means of discriminating between phenomena and the second in the similar prioritisation of ideas.
has been Roy Bhaskar (1978; 1998), who coined the term ‘critical realism’. A theory of causation is central to critical realism. Critical realism is an avowedly naturalistic philosophy and it aims to provide a rival philosophy of science and social science to that of empiricism. Yet whilst it and empiricism both lay claim to science, critical realism (and its ensuing theory of causation) might be seen as opposed to the concept of probability, or at least (as in the case of MacIver) this is seen only as a partial explanation (Sayer 1992: 191–2).

A cornerstone for all versions of realism is that there is a reality existing independently of our perceptions of it. However scientific realism (and critical realism as a sub set of this) contains a stronger claim and it is broadly that science must begin from the principle of ontological realism and therefore permits the postulation of unobservables that are not directly testable. Its challenge is then to devise a methodology to show how we can obtain knowledge of the reality it assumes, what is sometimes described as ‘realist closure’ (Pawson 1989: 198–207)

Once we accept the starting premise of ontological realism it is but a small step to accept that there are hidden structures (or as critical realists would have it - mechanisms) producing those things which we can observe, but the difficulty is that we do not know that what we know of specific structures or mechanisms is sufficient to explain their observable effects. As Bhaskar put it:

things exist and act independently of our descriptions, but we can only know them under particular descriptions. Descriptions belong to the world of society and of men; objects belong to the world of nature...Science, then, is the systematic attempt to express in thought the structures and ways of acting of things that exist and act independently of thought. (Bhaskar 1978: 250)

In empiricism probability stands in for knowledge of structures. In the empiricist/behaviorist social science MacIver criticised, some knowledge of structures can be inferred from the relationship between three or more variables, but the variable to variable relationship, even within a nesting of variables, remains probabilistic and associative. Crucially it rarely captures the process of association (Hedstrom 2005: 105–6) and just describes its existence. Critical realists are, however, more optimistic and believe in the existence of processual mechanisms, which must necessarily exist but may not be observationally available.
This view is philosophically justified by them through reference to not just one ontological ‘level’, that of experience, but three: experience, events and reality. Events can occur without being experienced (Outhwaite 1987: 22), which would indicate that there must be something beyond the veil of experience. That which we experience is contingent upon either our selection through theories, or by accident. The aim of the scientist (and by extension the social scientist or sociologist) then, is to make clear the connections between these levels. A full explanation is one that shows how experiences are produced by events and the relationship of these events to structures. In order to do this the sociologist must propose theories, which if they were correct, would explain those underlying structures. The theories are described by Bhaskar as the ‘transitive’ objects of science. The world itself consists of ‘intransitive’ objects, that is things exist and act independently of our descriptions (Bhaskar 1978: 250) and prior to investigation (and indeed possibly after) are not known to science. The aim of investigation is to achieve a correspondence between the two. Events are caused, not simply conjoined and therefore a probabilistic explanation can at best be seen just as a provisional one.

Critical realism has given rise to variants, what I have termed ‘analytic realism’. Perhaps the one closest to MacIver work is that of Ray Pawson (1989; 2000). Though there are similarities between critical realism and Pawson’s version, the latter is also strongly influenced by Merton’s ‘middle range theory’ (Merton 1968). Thus he provides the outline of a methodological programme that combines Merton’s middle range theorising with a realist approach to research. Indeed he maintains that to realise the utility of middle range theory, realism is necessary (Pawson 2000: 291–3).

Echoing MacIver’s critique of empiricist reasoning, Pawson (2000: 301) suggests that the underlying theory of most survey analysis is ‘flattened’, taking the form X→ Y, or in Merton’s words, ‘isolated propositions between two or more variables’ (Merton 1968: 41). Yet Pawson maintains that whilst Merton took us beyond descriptive generalisations from variables, he nevertheless ‘flattened ‘ middle range concepts so that they do not discriminate between different layers of social reality. Furthermore he was more concerned to stretch concepts (for example anomie) to see how far they would go in accounting for a range of behaviour, or to integrate them into more general typologies. For instance anomie becomes just one feature of a general typology of adaptation to society (Pawson 2000: 290–1). In doing this Merton provides a description of an end state of a ‘generic network of theories with which to confederate enquiry’ (op cit: 293), but he fails to
provide ontological depth, or practical help to the researcher in providing the means to these end states.

Pawson’s revision of Merton centres on a deeper ontological understanding of what he terms context and mechanism. Events (or outcomes) of the form $X \rightarrow Y$ do not occur in social isolation, nor are they determined. Rather, they are outcomes of context + mechanism. A mechanism needs certain conditions to be realised and they are provided by the context. The outcome $O$ is therefore the result not just of a ‘push-pull’ causal process, but the actualisation of a mechanism as a result of a contextual stimuli. This $C+M=O$ model is multidimensional. What serves as a context in one instance will be evidence of a mechanism in another.

**MacIver the Realist**

To fully grasp MacIver’s realist agenda on causation\(^6\) it is perhaps necessary to go back to his earlier writings, in particular his address to the ASA in 1930 (MacIver 1933). It is here that he first clearly sets out his agenda that is developed twelve years later in *Social Causation*. The latter work fleshes out his methodology and links it to his social theory. This makes the latter chapters, in that book, on causal attribution and context much more explicable. In his ASA address he succinctly promotes sociology as not simply a science of the gathering and statistical manipulation of facts, but rather one of a science of facts as theorised. Indeed his argument is that the positivists were themselves being unscientific in claiming that facts spoke for themselves and that theories were metaphysical entities. Rather, for MacIver, facts must be interpreted and theories, though tested, cannot ever be inductively proven and rarely refuted (certainly by single instances). MacIver brings theory back in. This was his epistemological starting point, but he also has an ontological one (later developed as the Dynamic Assessment) that social reality unlike physical reality has two dimensions:

> Every social situation consists in an adjustment of an inner to an outer system of reality. The inner system is a complex of desires and motivations; the outer is a complex of environmental factors, in so far as these

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\(^6\) It is important to notes that MacIver (to my knowledge) did not use the term ‘realist’ to describe himself or his methodology. He does, however, use the term ‘reality’ on several occasions.
constitute the means, opportunities, obstacles, and conditions to which the inner system is adjusted. It is this relationship between an inner and an outer which constitutes, in respect to the problem of causation, the essential difference between the social and the physical sciences. The latter are concerned with an outer order alone. (MacIver 1933: 35)

MacIver’s version of causation incorporates two realist principles. First that ‘facts’ interpreted simply as observations do not adequately describe any world. Observations may be evidence, but evidence of what? Without interpretation we cannot make sense of the ‘facts’, or even begin to know which facts to ‘gather’. Furthermore our interpretations will constitute an imperfect knowledge, but one that will hopefully be an improving knowledge. As with Bhaskar he suggests that things act independently of us and that we discover them contingently, or as a result of our theorising. The job of sociology is to produce theories, which if they were true, would explain the phenomenon in question.

Second his concept of realms of reality, in which there is an interconnectedness between the physical, psychological and social injects the naturalism that is usually associated with scientific realism. This is less developed than in modern forms of realism, but it remains a principle.

MacIver’s aim is to produce a version of causation that is a better basis for a scientific social science than the correlational method of the positivists. The science he defends is a falsibilistic and interpretive exercise and a science of the social must take into account the particular nature of the social world. Thus his defence of the causal imputation of motives is entirely consistent with his defence of science, though in a 1940 paper is moved to specifically defend this position (MacIver 1940) from charges of animism and subjectivity. A causal imputation of the social must consider the possible counterfactuals of agency and the social motivations for such agency (though, of course, he problematises this in Social Causation). It must consider aims and intended states and the moral attribution of motives. This last moves him into the anti-value freedom position later adopted by Gouldner (1968) and Becker (1967) and is arguably more humanistic than realist. Though it may, nevertheless, also be

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7 Intriguingly, there are prefigurations of Karl Popper’s falsibilism here, and even Imre Lakatos’s more sophisticated version of falsification. Though there is no suggestion that either philosopher knew of MacIver’s work.

8 Logically realism does not have to be naturalistic. One could posit mental ‘kinds’ as separate entities to physical kinds, but this leaves the old philosophical problem of dualism unresolved.
regarded as prefiguring the ‘emancipatory’ claims of critical realism (Bhasker 1986). In MacIver’s case the moral position you begin with or attribute to a social situation will make a difference to your causal imputation. In the case of critical realism the revelation of the real structures of the social world, from a perspective, will provide a more authentic knowledge upon which to act.

MacIver’s realism, put into the language of modern realism, can be summarised as the claim that humans make their reality through the interaction of agency and structure within the realms of the cultural, technological and social. Second that the descriptions of the manifestations of these in any given society is a theoretical construction of the social scientist, but the aim of the social scientist is to uncover that reality. This requires both the strategy of observation and correlation, but also the strategies of interpretation and imputation.

Consequently his version of causation is an inferential, rather than a deterministic one. But it is not probabilistically inferential in that causal claims cannot be made on the basis of multiple statistical association (though such associations may form the basis for the commencement of inference). Rather, the social scientist infers from the best available evidence what the cause of a phenomenon might be. This requires the social scientist specifically to contextualise the phenomenon in its contemporary and historical setting, but also take into account agent motives and goals. We can see here the relevance of ideal types as a heuristic, but also a more recently identified inferential device known as ‘inference to the best explanation’ (Lipton 1991). This requires the scientist to review evidence for the causal explanation of a phenomenon on the basis of the most likely reasons for the outcome. In light of further evidence the inference can be modified. MacIver’s own example of the fluctuation in divorce rates serves as an example. US divorce rates between 1920 and 1936 apparently had a greater fluctuation than the marriage rate in relation to levels of business activity. In times of economic hardship divorce rates fell and the inference was that this was due to the high cost of divorce. However in a seemingly similar economic climate in England there was no such fluctuation and indeed the divorce rate was comparatively low. MacIver’s causal inference was that in the latter case this was explained by the relative strength of family attachments as compared to the United States. In this example we see a version of Pawson’s C+M=O model. Marriage can be seen as a mechanism that contains ‘causal powers’, which are realised through context. The context may be territorial (the UK or US) or the result of events such as economic change, or a combination of these.
MacIver would undoubtedly have acknowledged that this was not the final word, but more of a causal hypothesis. Indeed, one could have introduced other explanatory factors such as differences in the laws relating to divorce, the role of different religions (or their absence) and so on. Of course, MacIver is not simply saying that causal attribution is by inference alone, but would necessitate empirical verification or falsification.

In this approach the inference to non-observables is the inference to context and it is this inference to context along with empirical investigation that firmly places MacIver in the modern realist camp.

**Conclusion**

MacIver’s version of causation is realist because it postulates the existence of real underlying social structures that have ‘causal powers’. As with the self-proclaimed realists that followed him, he maintained that a full account of causes can only be known through a knowledge of these structures and the context within which they operate. In my view realist causation has two positive features that should be retained in any theory of causation. First, that the selection of a model and the variables that go into that model can never be free of normative assumptions. Normative assumptions are not the same as subjective ones (Williams 2005), but they are the result of selection processes that are psychological and social. MacIver was right to stress this in his categorisation of Cause as incentive and modern realists are right (to use Bhaskar’s language) to distinguish between the ‘transitive’ objects of science (our theories) and the ‘intransitive objects’, the real structures of the world that our theories and research seek to uncover (Bhaskar 1978). Second, variables themselves are, as Dave Byrne argues (Byrne 2002: 29–31), actually ‘variate traces’. Rather like the exhaust fumes that provide evidence of the proximity of a car, they can only provide evidence of the existence of something deeper and broader.

The weakness of MacIver’s theory of causation (and realist versions more generally) is that they rely on a concept of natural necessity. MacIver, as I noted, denounces logical necessity and his version of causation implies a natural necessity even if this can only be heuristically imputed. From the beginning of Social Causation this principle is clear. We note change or its absence and it is inconceivable that change does not come about as a result of something else happening. With this it is easy to agree, but whilst we can see
that in the general sense causes are necessary, the ability to show such necessity is constrained. At a metaphysical level it seems right to assume that effects have a necessity, because at some point they become inevitable and a cause is realised. But unfortunately our empirical grasp of such events is limited to the single case and is *a posteriori*. For example, many US states claim to punish first degree murder by the death penalty. But there is no necessity in any individual convicted of murder being executed until the execution has taken place. Before that there is only a changing probability for that individual. Moreover, to say (something like) the legislation operating in a particular state causes increased executions, is by its nature a probabilistic not a deterministic statement simply because not all those convicted will be executed and those executed may have suffered this fate in spite of the legislation. Necessity cannot be demonstrated *a priori* and neither can causation, if it is taken to imply necessity. Finding the ‘thing that makes the difference’, or the counterfactual, as MacIver advocated is all but impossible, except as a matter of inference. Thus his use of ideal types (or as I attributed to him) inference to the best explanation is the best we can do. As MacIver succinctly put it, in his 1940 paper:

> The assertion of any relationship, no matter how simple or obvious, involves the appeal to reason, and its establishment is a scientific construction. We do not perceive the relationship of the earth to the sun or of a child to its mother, we only infer it. (MacIver 1940: 1)

Methodologically this brings us to the conclusion Hubert Blalock reached some years later, that we can assume and theorise a reality, but we can only model it. Our models are not real, they could never incorporate the complexity of reality and if they did they would not be models but reality itself. This does not imply an abandonment of realism, or a rejection of realist causation, including the MacIver version, but it sets limits on the extent to which we can demonstrate necessity.

We can theorise social structures as real and impute to them causal ‘powers’. We can then demonstrate the likelihood, perhaps expressed as probability, of the operation of the emergent causation in the specific context. But the way in which we do this is, as Blalock insisted, is through a model. It is a heuristic device. MacIver’s critics (see MacIver 1943b for his response to criticisms of *Social Causation*) were wrong to dismiss his theory as metaphysical. In so far as it was a heuristic to show how we can demonstrate empirically the causes of social reality it was practical and much more sophisticated than anything on
offer from the positivists. If it is an ‘historical curiosity’ that is only because it failed to substantially influence the course of scientific sociology in the United States or beyond and consequently there is no line of succession to contemporary theories of causation. However in any kind of project to construct a realist theory of causation in sociology, MacIver may repay renewed attention.

Bibliography


The Edinburgh School of Sociology

John Scott

The Edinburgh School of Sociology was formed in the late 1890s in order to promote the establishment of a particular vision of sociology in the British educational scene. Its key movers were Patrick Geddes and his disciple and associate Victor Branford. As an organisation it was short-lived, being a nominal rather than a real entity, yet it was crucially important as a focus for the activities that eventually gave rise to the establishment of the Sociological Society and the Sociological Review in London. The members of the Edinburgh School were central to this venture, and its whole development was shaped by the concerns of the founding Scots. Though the label largely fell into disuse, their identity as the Edinburgh School was an important factor in the collective identity of emergent British sociology. In later life, Branford claimed that the Edinburgh School had been the basis for all the intellectual work that he had completed over thirty years (Branford 1926: Appendix B).

The School was officially launched as the ‘Edinburgh School for Promoting the Study of Ethical, Social, and Economic Subjects’ and was an offshoot of the popular Summer Schools organised by Patrick Geddes in Edinburgh Old Town and around the Outlook Tower. Geddes was the intellectual inspiration, while Branford was the organiser and coordinator. Geddes himself was incapable of organising anything — even the day-to-day matters of his own life — and it was Branford, together with fellow Geddes disciple John Ross, who undertook the main tasks involved in founding and running the School and its successors.

The initial base for the School was at 11 Dudley Gardens in Leith, but it shortly moved to 31 Royal Park Terrace in the more salubrious Meadowbank.
district of the City. Geddes was made President and two prominent Edinburgh academics—political economist Joseph Shield Nicholson and ethical philosopher James Seth—were recruited as Honorary Presidents. Organising roles in the committee were taken by former students and associates of Geddes, including Edward McGegan, his assistant at the Outlook Tower.

The aim of the school seems to have been to make a base within the Edinburgh academic community for the establishment of a strong sociological presence within the University. Geddes had been unsuccessful in an attempt to secure appointment to the Professorship financed by Martin White at the London School of Economics, and the Edinburgh School became the springboard for the establishment of the Geddes Lectureship Fund in 1906. Through this fund, Branford and Ross hoped to finance a lectureship in sociology for Geddes at Edinburgh University. Although some money was raised, this was insufficient for a case to be made to the University, and the focus of the activities of both Geddes and Branford had, in any case, now become firmly based in London. The Sociological Society had been formed in London in 1903, Branford was by then working almost exclusively in London, and Geddes barely visited Edinburgh after 1900.

**Geddes and Branford**

Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) was born on Deeside, but spent most of his childhood in Perthshire and close to Dundee, where he met Martin White who was later to finance a number of his intellectual ventures. Geddes was largely self-educated in biology and botany, and after a period in Huxley’s laboratory in London and an assistantship in a marine laboratory in Brittany he was appointed as an assistant in botany and zoology at Edinburgh University. Inspired by the sociological studies of Frédéric Le Play, Geddes began to construct an evolutionary ecology that encompassed both biology and sociology. In 1884 he was appointed to a Chair of Botany at Dundee, a post especially created for him by Martin White that allowed him to continue to spend much of his time in Edinburgh.

While lecturing in Edinburgh he inspired many students to follow his intellectual approach to evolutionary social science. Most notable among these students was Victor Branford (1863–1930). Born in Northamptonshire, Branford spent much of his childhood and adolescence in Edinburgh. His father had a rather chequered career as professor of veterinary surgery at the
Veterinary College in Edinburgh, and family problems, including the death of his mother and the imprisonment and bankruptcy of his father, ensured that Branford and his brothers focused their attention on educational success. Branford graduated in natural science in 1886, by which time he was firmly under the spell of Geddes.

Geddes began his Summer Schools in Edinburgh in 1887, intending them to be a means of drawing into intellectual activity those people—women as well as men—who were outside the conventional University system. Many of those attending the Summer Schools were school teachers, in a variety of subjects. An array of international speakers from the sciences, history, geography, and sociology were brought to lecture in Edinburgh, and Branford himself became a lecturer in history and science from 1893. The Summer Schools, which were to run successfully until 1899, were the institutional basis through which Geddes and Branford began to develop their encyclopaedic conception of sociology. It was through the work of the Summer Schools that Geddes and Branford devised the project for the Edinburgh School of Sociology.

The failure to establish a strong base for sociology in Scotland led Geddes and Branford to focus their attention on London. Having persuaded Martin White to finance the first posts in sociology at the London School of Economics, they formed the Sociological Society. The membership of the Society came from the political establishment, the nascent social sciences, and the social services, together with international sociologists such as Durkheim and Tönnies. Prominent Scots drawn into the Society as founding members included the geographer (Sir) John Scott Keltie, the philosopher Robert Latta, the political historian D.P. Heatley, the economists David H. Macgregor and James Mavor (recently moved to Toronto), the biologist J. Arthur Thompson, the philosopher and Liberal MP Charles Mackinnon Douglas, other Liberal MPs such as Munro Ferguson, Geddes’ friend and business associate Henry Beveridge of Pitreavie, and numerous fellow Scottish migrants such as sociologist John Mackinnon Robertson. The Society launched a series of Sociological Papers that soon became the Sociological Review, and from this base they launched a series of papers and books under the general title Papers for the Present. These publications presented a view of the role of sociology in social reconstruction. The Society organised a number of discussion meetings and conferences, some of which were attended by the young Robert MacIver on his visits to London from Oxford.

Geddes’ grand ideas for the promotion of social science led to his involvement in a diverse range of activities with little overall focus. During
his travels in the United States he met William James, Stanley Hall, and Jane Addams, all of whom became friends and whose work in education he sought to promote through his own involvement in progressive schooling and University Settlements. He also had a long-standing involvement in University Residences, and in 1907 he became involved in the establishment of a University of London Residence at the relocated Crosby Hall in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. He became particularly heavily involved in town planning, working on plans for Pittencrief Park for Andrew Carnegie and setting up a roaming international Cities and Town Planning Exhibition. In 1919 he retired from his Chair of Botany at Dundee and took a post as Professor of Civics and Sociology in Bombay, though he spent much of his time after 1923 at a new Hall of Residence for Scottish students at the University of Montpelier.

Branford began his working life as a journalist, a move that was unsuccessful until he met and married the wealthy widow of the editor of the *Dundee Advertiser*. On the basis of his new-found security he decided on a career in business, though hoping that he might eventually secure an academic post. With his fellow student John Ross he formed an accountancy partnership and established his main office in London. By 1905 he had begun to be heavily involved in railway promotion and travelled frequently to New York and Buenos Aires. In South America he became closely involved in the management of the Paraguay Central Railway Company, and the business of the railway, which collapsed in the wake of the attempt by Percival Farquhar to build a trans-American railway network, was to dominate his life for more than a decade.

Branford’s first marriage did not last and in 1910 he was divorced and remarried to Sybella Gurney, a pioneer of housing co-partnership and an active member of the Sociological Society. When, after the First World War, the affairs of the Paraguay Railway were more settled, Victor and Sybella Branford spent more time in Britain and Branford renewed his active involvement in the Sociological Society, the *Sociological Review*, and the work of the Le Play House ‘Cities Committee’. Throughout the 1920s he combined a partnership in the accountancy firm of Binder Hamlyn with his sociological work at Le Play House.

The Sociological Framework

The sociological approach that Branford and Geddes set out had its roots in Auguste Comte and Frédéric Le Play. From Comte they took a broadly
positivist methodology — they were active in the London Positivist Society and in the associated South Place Ethical Society — and a view of societies as systems of spiritual and temporal power. From Le Play they took the basics of the survey method for investigating the relationship between the natural environment, the mode of production, and the way of life of a people.

They held that the material environment in which people live shapes their patterns of work and hence their way of life. The crucial idea that they developed to explore this was the ‘region’. A geographical region has to be seen as the product of a particular physical environment and landscape as the people who live in the region undertake their work tasks and pursue their cultural activities. Geddes and Branford stressed the importance of physical geography, botany, and biology in studying the ecology of a region, and they argued that any regional survey must begin with such a description of ‘place’ before moving on to an investigation of the occupations and work activities of the people living in the region. These work activities are shaped by the natural resources, soil, and vegetation of the place, and the variations between hunting, pastoral, and fishing regions were seen as distinct economic structures. These economic patterns condition and constrain the way of life followed by a people and the region becomes the basis from which is fostered the cultural tradition of a people and that embodies the spirit of place. The customs, practices, and habits of action of a people are distinctive of their region. There is, therefore, a determinate relationship between ‘place’, ‘work’, and ‘folk’ (Geddes 1904; 1905).

They saw the development of industry as having led to massive transformations in the scale and structure of human societies. The predominantly rural pattern of pre-industrial societies is supplemented and over-whelmed by the urban patterns of residence found in an industrial society. Increasingly, the city becomes the basis of human existence and the focus of social life. People increasingly live in city regions and the life of the city shapes the structure of the whole society. The nature of the city and its influence in its society depends upon the patterns of power that have evolved within the society.

Any society, Branford and Geddes argued, could be seen as organised around two interrelated systems of power, the temporal and the spiritual (Branford and Geddes 1919a; 1919b). The dynamics of a social system results from the interrelationships between these two systems and the state of equilibrium or disequilibrium that they show.

Temporal power comprises both economic and political power and has been the driving force in the social development of industrialism. The
'organisers' of temporal power comprise the dominant social elite, and in the contemporary world Branford and Geddes document the successive rise of entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, and financiers. Echoing the ideas of their friends and associates John Hobson (1906) and Thorstein Veblen (1899; 1904), they saw the contemporary era as one of finance capitalism in which the control and mobilisation of credit has become the central factor in economic and political power.

Spiritual power is exercised by intellectual and 'emotional' specialists rooted in the cultural systems associated with religion, education, and family. In the pre-industrial societies of the medieval and earlier periods the Church had been central to the mobilisation and exercise of spiritual power. The development of capitalist industry, however, had gradually undermined the autonomy of spiritual power and the organising elite in the economy had usurped the power formerly held by Church leaders and intellectuals. Financiers now controlled the spread of ideas, and spiritual power was increasingly subordinated to their interests. Financiers control newspapers through ownership and through advertising revenue, and they are able to determine the content of the press. They control the schools and universities through endowments and finance and so are able to shape the content of the curriculum.

The dominant cultural form is that of a pecuniary utilitarianism in which all matters are reduced to monetary calculation. Financiers shape public opinion and are able to ensure that prevailing cultural forms legitimate their power. The acquisitiveness of a consumer culture becomes the basis through which 'Mammonism' is established as the dominant cultural outlook. This debasement of culture produces a 'disciplined docility' in the mass of the population, strengthening the influence of the 'herd instinct' in social life. These ideas fore-shadowed the later development of sociological theories of 'mass society'.

Financiers have their base in the contemporary city, for which Geddes invented the term 'conurbation' (Geddes 1915). Contemporary conurbations are largely based around coalfields, as 'paleotechnic' industrialism is the age of coal and steam. The conurbations are increasingly marked by a polarisation between the private affluence of a leisure class and the increasingly impoverished life of the masses. This polarisation within the cities is matched by a wider political polarisation between the political agencies of 'order' and 'progress'.

The 'party of order' comprises the political wing of the ruling elite, and Geddes and Branford note a drift towards a greater reliance on coercion and force, epitomised in Prussian statecraft but found in all industrialised societies.
The Edinburgh School of Sociology

The masses who are excluded from temporal power and whose debasement and impoverishment drives them into an ‘insurgent’ role are increasingly formed into a ‘party of progress’ that pursues nihilistic opposition to the forces of order. Thus, in political terms, Geddes and Branford saw contemporary societies as drifting towards a revolutionary struggle between the forces of order and progress. Externally, modern states are engaged in an imperialistic struggle that produces a drift towards warfare between their respective ruling elites.

Towards the Third Alternative

The pessimistic vision that Branford and Geddes held of the drift towards war and revolution — inherent in a society oriented to ‘wardom’ — was countered by optimism that there were certain social tendencies pointing in an alternative direction. They hoped that Britain and other industrial societies could avoid social disintegration by following a ‘Third Way’ or ‘Third Alternative’ between the parties of order and progress. Branford was the originator of the term ‘Third Way’, which he used to describe this political strategy (Branford 1914a: 341). The agencies of this third alternative are the intellectuals whose spiritual power has been usurped. Predominant among these are the sociologists, who are able to spearhead the task of social reconstruction.

The conception of the third alternative reflected a wider movement of political thought that emerged after the consolidation of Fabianism into the new Labour Party. Many of those on the political left felt that Fabian collectivism provided no real alternative to the centralised collectivism of the bureaucratic nation state, and they sought a more pluralistic and democratic alternative.

The heart of this alternative was initially provided by guild socialism, which saw the reestablishment of the medieval guild idea as offering the possibility for social renewal organised around more creative forms of work. These ideas were promoted through the political journal *The New Age* and were particularly associated with the political ideas of Arthur Penty (1906), G.D.H. Cole (1913; 1917), and Maurice Reckitt (Bechhofer and Reckitt 1918). These writers proposed a pluralist politics formed around the organisation of the economy into ‘functional’ political chambers that could be brought together in a corporatist polity.
A further strand in the third alternative came from the ‘distributism’ of Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton (Belloc 1912; Chesterton 1910; Chesterton 1926). Their argument was that a wider distribution of property was necessary if greater political equality was to be established. In order to achieve this, they argued, the credit and taxation system had to be reformed. By taxing large-scale property ownership and subsidising small savings, there would be a gradual shift towards a more egalitarian structure organised around independent shopkeepers, craft workers, and farmers.

Branford and Geddes shared much of this complex of ideas, but they added to it an emphasis on cooperation as a principle of social organisation and the promotion of a system of ‘social credit’. Both Branford and Geddes had been involved in the cooperative movement from their earliest days in Edinburgh. Sybella Gurney had been an activist and official in the Labour Co-partnership housing organisation and had helped to set up a number of rural and urban housing schemes. After her marriage to Victor Branford she exercised a considerable influence over this particular aspect of the Third Alternative. Victor Branford (1901a; 1901b) had begun to develop his ideas for a new system of national credit on a cooperative basis in 1901 and he saw the agricultural credit unions and the savings banks of Germany as exemplars for a larger restructurings of the financial system. Such a reorganisation of credit, he held, would promote small-scale enterprise and provide the basis for the pluralism that both the guild socialists and the distributists sought to achieve (Branford 1914b). Sociologists were to play a key role in the mobilisation of national credit. As members of national and regional investment boards they would join the ‘technicians’ of the capitalist system—the bankers, engineers, and accountants—as a counterbalance to the financiers who controlled the existing system of credit (Branford 1921).

These ideas were developed more radically and systematically by Clifford Douglas (1921a; 1921b; 1924) and were to become the basis for a small Social Credit Party in Britain and for the far more influential Alberta Social Credit Party in Canada (Macpherson 1953). They were, however, marginal to British party politics and the Third Alternative failed to establish itself in the political mainstream. Branford and Geddes were, however, associated with a number of organisations promoting the pluralist and corporatist structures that became a significant feature of politics in the 1930s and, especially, following the Second World War.
Social Renewal and Social Reconstruction

The political and economic reforms aimed at by the Third Alternative were seen as conditions for the social reconstruction of the system of temporal power. Branford and Geddes believed that this reconstruction could be achieved only if there was a parallel ‘renewal’ of spiritual power. This social renewal of the machinery of cultural production would allow the intellectuals and emotionals to regain their autonomy and so to shape the direction of social development. The key planks of this social renewal were reforms in schooling and education, a regeneration of community solidarity, and reforms in the university system.

Education is the means through which a cultural tradition is passed from generation to generation (Branford 1914a: 22; 1923: 20) and both Geddes and Branford were involved in the development of progressive schooling and teaching methods. Both men were members of the Advisory Council at Abbotsholme, the first of the new progressive schools, founded in 1889. Branford sent one of his adopted sons to Bembridge School, founded explicitly on Ruskinian lines and Geddesian ideals. They were both particularly involved with the youth movement founded by Ernest Westlake at Godshill, which became the basis for the Forest School.

The educational ideas that they promoted were rooted in the novel and innovative psychological theories of G. Stanley Hall (Hall 1904), which had themselves taken much from Geddes’ advocacy of evolutionism. According to this view, the psychology of the child and the adolescent had to be seen developmentally, with the kinds of education and activity undertaken at each stage of development being appropriate to their maturing skills and instincts. This was controversially linked to a ‘recapitulationist’ view of personality development, which gave the argument an eccentric character, but the underlying developmentalism was, in fact, a pioneering recognition of ideas that were later popularised by Freud and Piaget. Indeed, Branford and Geddes were among the active advocates of psychoanalytic ideas, especially as they developed in the works of Adler and Jung. A key figure and associate in this area was Theodore Faithfull (1927; 1933), a psychoanalyst and sex therapist who ran the progressive Priory Gate School.

These ideas were central to the Woodcraft scouting movements that were set up in connection with some of the pioneering progressive schools. Westlake’s Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, in particular, was based closely on these ideas, and both Geddes and Branford were involved in its governing
body. Through scouting, they held, children were exposed to ways of developing the woodcraft skills of the hunter and agriculturalist that were appropriate to the particular stage of development of their instincts. They could then move on to more adult concerns and so contribute to a fully rounded citizenship. A failure to develop these skills, on the other hand, leads to problems in later life, as aggressive skills are un-channelled and so reinforce the societal tendency towards wardom. An integration of woodcraft scouting with schooling was, therefore, an essential precondition for healthy mental development.

The Order of Woodcraft Chivalry at Godshill was also seen as an experiment in community renewal. The scouting camps and labour camps for the unemployed, together with a residential teaching staff, were seen as models for what schools could achieve in the rebuilding of rural communities. Through the advocacy of the housing cooperatives pioneered by Sybella Branford, they saw yet further means to this end, and the principles of community renewal were set out by their associate at Godshill George Sandeman (1913; 1919; 1929). Their involvement in Third Alternative politics brought them into contact with those such as John Macmurray, who was later to become recognised as a leading pioneer of the communitarian strand in contemporary Third Way thought.

Local communities were the building blocks for the civic regeneration of the large cities and conurbations, and it was here that Branford and Geddes saw an important role for renewed universities. Universities can be the bases for a reconstruction of the city conurbations, establishing a new form of spiritual power appropriate to the emerging ‘neotechnic’ economic stage. A town becomes a city when a strongly developed spiritual life unites its citizens into a ‘polity’. The focus of civic spiritual life in the medieval period had been the Church and this was to be replaced in the modern world by reformed and renewed universities (Branford and Geddes 1919a: 145). These reformed universities, following the model of the new German and American research-led universities, but avoiding excessive specialisation, would promote citizenship, community, and collective welfare through a moral commitment to the humanities and ‘Humanity’ itself. At the heart of the universities would be the sociologists, acting as the integrative focus for the human disciplines and guiding the application of technical knowledge. The role of sociologists in social reconstruction was to be enhanced by outreach activities in the local community and by the involvement of citizens in their survey work. In these ways, it was held, a truly public sociology could be established as the vehicle for reconstruction and renewal.
True to their global view of humanity, Branford and Geddes saw the regional city universities as needing to federate themselves into national and international bodies. A world university with international students and staff, the staff circulating through exchanges with constituent universities, would stand at the heart of this system. Branford’s brother Benchara draw up comprehensive plans for such an independent and self-sufficient university on the island of Cyprus (B. Branford 1916), Geddes sought to encourage international work through his planning work for the University at Jerusalem and his Residence at Montpelier, and Victor Branford sought, throughout the 1920s, to involve the League of Nations in international scholarly associations and publication activity.

Conclusion

The sociological ideas of Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes had little influence in their lifetimes and were virtually forgotten after their deaths. Only in the sphere of town planning was there any significant impact. The reasons for this are various. Their aims and aspirations were grand and remarkably prescient, yet the details through which they sought to develop these aims were often naïve and sketchy. As a result, their work combined striking insights and powerful proposals with eccentric illustrations and discussions. The style of writing through which they developed their ideas was, furthermore, dense, rambling, and not infrequently pretentious. Their self-conscious literary and all-encompassing presentation became a barrier rather than a vehicle of understanding. In the struggle to establish sociology in the British universities they were outpaced by Hobhouse and his protégé Morris Ginsberg. Geddes’ failure to secure the Martin White chair at the LSE left the field open for Hobhouse’s more philosophical — and more sophisticated — evolutionism. British sociology remained largely confined to the LSE, and Ginsberg ensured that the Hobhouse approach prevailed there and, after the Second World War, within the Departments of Sociology that grew up under its wing. Only in the applied social science departments of the inter-war years, where local and regional surveys were undertaken, did the Branford and Geddes view have any significant influence.

Despite their organisational efforts with the Sociological Society and Le Play House, they did not successfully translate their political ideas into a viable political programme. Neither Branford nor Geddes were temperamentally
suited to practical party politics and their political engagements were confined to small and — it must be said — eccentric debating societies. They remained outside the mainstream of political debate, having eschewed the centralism and collectivism of the Labour Party, and their optimistic humanitarian internationalism was rapidly eclipsed by the growth of the more parochial and repressive ‘middle way’ solutions aligned with Italian and German fascism. The corporatist and planning regimes of the period following the Second World War embodied some of their ideas, though without any significant borrowing. The rediscovery in the 1990s of ‘Third Way’ solutions involving sociological contributions to social reconstruction (Giddens 1994; Giddens 1998) — again without any recognition of the contribution of Branford and Geddes — provides a context within which their ideas might, at last, be reconsidered.

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Bibliography


John Macmurray’s psychotherapeutic Christianity: the influence of Alfred Adler and Fritz Künkel

Gavin Miller

The likely impact of John Macmurray’s philosophy upon the theory and practice of both psychoanalysis and psychotherapy has been recognised by commentators such as the present author, Colin Kirkwood, and most substantially by Graham S. Clarke, whose monograph *Personal Relations Theory: Fairbairn, Macmurray and Suttie* argues for a synthesis of Macmurray’s work with that of two other Scots, the object-relations psychoanalyst W. R. D. Fairbairn (1889–1964), and the psychoanalytically-oriented psychiatrist Iain D. Suttie (1889–1935). Macmurray’s affinity with these two figures suggests an interesting corollary. Could Macmurray have been informed and influenced in some way by psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic ideas? To some extent, this hypothesis is partially confirmed by Macmurray’s acknowledgement in *Persons in Relation* (1961) of Ian Suttie’s work, where he describes the latter’s monograph, *The Origins of Love and Hate* (1935), as an ‘important contribution to psychotherapeutic theory’.

Macmurray’s tendency to eschew reference to thinkers other than the leading lights of the Western tradition (Descartes, Kant, Hegel) means that his explicit mention of Suttie is very much a one-off. Yet, despite this paucity of straightforward acknowledgement, there is in his work significant evidence for the influence of psychoanalytic ideas. The undated typescript ‘Religion in the Modern World’ (which may be periodised by its references to Hitler as a contemporary) sets out some of Macmurray’s seemingly idiosyncratic views on what psychoanalysis can teach theologians and philosophers. Freud had, of course, argued that religious experience could be explained as one might any other psychopathological symptom—as, for instance, a regression

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to early relations of dependency,\textsuperscript{5} or as an expiatory ritual with somewhat murky Oedipal origins.\textsuperscript{6} Macmurray, however, uses the logic of psychoanalytic explanation against its founding father. The elements of religion that interest Freud, such as wish-fulfilment or irrational guilt, are to Macmurray merely ‘the religious phenomena of our familiar world’.\textsuperscript{7} Such phenomena are indeed \textit{prima facie} evidence for the illusoriness of religious belief, and for the propriety of its analysis as a symptom. Yet, while conceding that our religious life is typically irrational, Macmurray argues that such illusory religiosity arises from the repression and dissociation of a genuine religious impulse:

the conscious life of Europe is inimical to religion and contains a powerful inhibition which forces its natural religious impulses into the unconscious. The form of our conscious life is determined by this inability to bring our religious nature into consciousness. So all our European religions have been ‘unconscious’—phantasy fulfilments of suppressed wishes, childish and illusory; while our \textit{conscious} efforts in the field of religion are efforts to prevent our religious nature finding a real expression.\textsuperscript{8}

By adopting a theory of the unconscious mind that avoids Freud’s sexual monism, Macmurray can contend that just as there are ‘people who adopt a mode of life which has no place for any natural expression of sexual impulses’,\textsuperscript{9} so too there is ‘a religious impulse in us, which the form of our social life prevents from expressing itself in a real and actual form’.\textsuperscript{10}

For Freud, as is well known, the dissociation of the sexual impulse from consciousness leads to a variety of symbolic substitutions of a more or less compulsive nature, the archetype of which is the imagery found in dreams. Macmurray, with his broader account of the unconscious mind, argues that the philosopher of religion therefore has to ‘do what the psycho-analyst has to

\textsuperscript{7} Edinburgh University Library, John Macmurray Papers, John Macmurray, ‘Religion in the Modern World’, t.s., Gen 2162.2.40.1 3.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 7.
do in the interpretation of dreams. For all European religion is dream religion. It is a highly disguised expression of the real substance which lies behind it'.¹¹ The nature of our repressed Christianity may, Macmurray argues, be understood by interpreting psychoanalytically the Christian doctrine of salvation: the other-worldly community of the afterlife presented by organized Christianity displaces, and substitutes for, a universal Christian community in this world. As Macmurray has it in *Reason and Emotion*, Jesus’s task was not ‘the creation of the Kingdom of Heaven in Heaven. […] It was the task of creating conscious community among all men everywhere’.¹² That we are not seeking more vigorously a real universal congregation can be explained by the dominance of institutional religion, which Macmurray characterises in ‘Religion in the Modern World’ as ‘the main social organization for side-tracking our religious impulses’.¹³

Macmurray’s 1938 article, ‘A Philosopher Looks at Psychotherapy’,¹⁴ further explains what he sees as the connections between religion and psychotherapy. In order to ground his claim that there may be a repressed intersubjectivity analogous to, or perhaps ultimately replacing, the repressed sexuality of Freudian theory, Macmurray draws explicitly upon Suttie’s *The Origins of Love and Hate*, arguing that

> the essence of love is to be found not in sexuality but in the inherent mutuality of the original relation of mother and child. The breaking of that relation in its original organic form sets the problem which is the general problem of human life. For it produces inevitably an anxiety reaction.¹⁵

Thereafter, the ego is directed towards securing itself in a world perceived as inhospitable and dangerous: ‘No situation and no person can be trusted. The available energy is all directed towards security and defence’.¹⁶ But, although institutional religion may suppress our intersubjective life, Jesus himself was trying to overcome our anxiety, and to restore our original capacity for love. Christian faith is not the fideistic adherence to a creed; it is instead an

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¹¹ Ibid., 3.
¹⁵ Ibid., 21.
¹⁶ Ibid., 19.
emotional attitude—‘Jesus [...] means by “faith” an attitude to life in which anxiety is overcome’.17

Macmurray’s transformation of the psychoanalytic hermeneutic of suspicion may seem arbitrary and idiosyncratic—the act, perhaps, of an isolated and peripheral thinker unable to abandon the culture and traditions in which he was raised, and willing, therefore, to perjure his intellect by the wilful transformation of what was (at the time) a dominant movement in Western thought. But such an interpretation of Macmurray’s place in European ideas would proceed from both an impoverished understanding of Scottish intellectual history, and a quite defective account of the history of psychoanalysis and related movements. If we think of the history of psychoanalysis as a narrative that begins with Freud, and then moves through metropolitan centres such as London, New York, and Paris, then this presumption will entirely obscure Macmurray’s vital position in a vigorous tradition of psychotherapeutic thought. Macmurray’s influences are hard to perceive because he does not rely upon Freudian or Jungian ideas. Instead, he owes a significant debt to the psychotherapeutic tradition established by Alfred Adler (1870–1937). The invisibility of this connection owes as much to Adler’s relative obscurity as to Macmurray’s. Paul E. Stepansky argues that

[it] is a revealing oversight in the history of modern psychiatry that Alfred Adler has yet to be accorded his just due. Despite Adler’s important role in the history of psychoanalysis and his obvious stature as the founder of Individual Psychology, the study of his thought and the explication of his system have remained the preserve of committed partisans. In the course of the continuing polemical exchanges between ‘Freudians’ and ‘Adlerians’, Adler’s thought has been deprived of the critical and contextual examination it warrants.18

One aspect of this unexamined context—as this article will demonstrate—is the impact of Adlerian ideas upon Macmurray’s philosophy.

Even though the precise circumstances are as yet unclear, the evidence for Macmurray’s involvement with the Adlerian tradition is compelling. ‘A Philosopher looks at Psychotherapy’ (see above), was published by the Individual Psychology Association (IPA), a society dedicated to the furtherance of Adlerian therapy. Macmurray also met the New Zealand-born psychothera-

17 Ibid., 17.
pist Maurice Bevan-Brown (1886–1967) in April 1939 when the former spoke at a conference in the village of Jordans, near London. Bevan-Brown was closely associated with the IPA, and was for some time its chairman. Further evidence (and perhaps a reference to the same occasion) is provided by Phyllis Bottome in her biography of Adler, where she describes how ‘Professor John Macmurray made an after-dinner speech at the Individual Psychological Medical Society in the early spring of 1939’. According to Bottome’s informant, a friend of Adler’s who was present at the event, Macmurray ‘was the only one who mentioned Adler. He said that we should think of Adler as one whose work is greater than that of any other psychologist’. Indeed, Macmurray was not alone in his admiration for Adler; the latter was becoming a significant intellectual and personal presence in Scotland. Adler was invited to Aberdeen University in 1937 to give a series of lectures; these were attended, according to D.G. Boyle, ‘not just [by] medical students and staff, but students from arts and divinity, and even members of the local aristocracy’. Bottome also records that, during his stay, Adler visited the village of Corgarff, to meet the ‘Rev. John Linton […] who was translating Adler’s Social Interest: A Challenge to Mankind [this translation was published in 1938–GM]’. In fact, Adler died during this visit to Aberdeen, struck down in Union Street by a heart attack on 28 May 1937, not long before he was due to give his final lecture in Marischal College.

Some more specific sense of Macmurray’s debt to Adler is provided in the 1930 pamphlet, Today and Tomorrow: A Philosophy of Freedom, written to accompany Macmurray’s radio broadcasts on ‘Reality and Freedom’ from the same year. Among the texts given as further reading to listeners is Adler’s Understanding Human Nature (1928). Adler’s book, first published as Menschenkenntnis in 1927, clearly informs at least some of Macmurray’s ideas. Adler refers to the inferiority complex—that ‘mechanism of the striving for compensation with which the soul attempts to neutralize the tortured feeling of inferiority’. Just as Macmurray argues that those without faith strive anxiously

21 Ibid., 239.
23 Bottome, Alfred Adler, 256.
24 Boyle, Aberdeen Connection, 68.
for power in the midst of communal life, so Adler argues that a psyche beset by such a ‘pathological power-drive’ participates only superficially in that inescapable ‘logic of communal existence’ which he terms ‘social feeling’ (in Adler’s original German, the term is *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*—a better translation would be ‘community feeling’). Adler’s likely influence upon Suttie, and so indirectly upon Macmurray, is also apparent in *Understanding Human Nature.* Suttie argues in *The Origins of Love and Hate* that the original social relation between mother and child is repressed and distorted into a power relation by a ‘taboo on tenderness’ that prohibits harmless expression of love and affection. Similarly, for Adler, at least one of the contexts that might provoke an inferiority response is that in which the child’s attitude becomes so fixed that he cannot recognize love nor make the proper use of it, because his instincts for tenderness have never been developed. It will be difficult to mobilize a child who has grown up in a family where there has never been a proper development of the feeling of tenderness, to the expression of any kind of tenderness. His whole attitude in life will be a gesture of escape, an evasion of all love and all tenderness.

An appreciation of such connections with Adlerian thought is essential to an understanding of the way in which Macmurray’s work incorporates psychotherapeutic ideas. Take, for instance, the concept of ‘egocentrism’ as it appears in Macmurray’s pre-war publications such as *Reason and Emotion* (1935) and *Freedom in the Modern World* (1932; 2nd edn, 1935). The first chapter of *Reason and Emotion* argues that the central obstacle to emotional and intellectual development is egocentrism (or its various rough synonyms, such as ‘subjectivity’, ‘immaturity’, ‘irrationality’, and ‘self-concern’). Although egocentrism does have a moral aspect (Macmurray implies that the morally egocentric act in terms of their ‘subjective inclinations and private sympathies’), the phenomenon is clearly something more than the selfishness

27 Ibid., 76.
28 Ibid., 167.
29 For the suggestion that Suttie’s thinking might owe something to Adler’s concept of ‘social feeling’, I am indebted to Dr Nathan Kravis, Associate Director to the Institute for the History of Psychiatry, University of Cornell.
that might be traditionally opposed to a sense of duty. There is, for instance, an egocentrism in science, namely ‘the desire to retain beliefs to which we are emotionally attached for some reason or other. It is the tendency to make the wish father to the thought’. Egocentrism also has artistic and religious aspects, apparent when we ‘try to distinguish good art from bad by the kind of pleasurable effect it has on the spectator or the listener’, or when we ‘think of religion as giving us something; as consoling us in trouble; helping us in difficulties, strengthening us in the face of death, and so on’. There can also be an egocentrism in emotions such as love:

In feeling love for another person, I can either experience a pleasurable emotion which he stimulates in me, or I can love him. We have, therefore, to ask ourselves, is it really the other person that I love, or is it myself? Do I enjoy him or do I enjoy myself in being with him? Is he just an instrument for keeping me pleased with myself, or do I feel his existence and his reality to be important in themselves?

The snares of egocentrism are legion: even those who feel keen guilt, and so seem to possess a properly altruistic morality, may be using duty to cloak their own unconscious egocentrism. Macmurray considers the example of a woman who has wronged her friends, and who revels in her guilt, rather than feeling concern for those she has injured:

self-abasement is just as unreasonable, perhaps even more unreasonable, than her previous state of mind. It is a compensation which still enables her to be concerned with herself. It is still childish, immature and egocentric. Self-pity and self-disgust are just as irrational as self-assertion.

Even good actions can be corrupted by self-concern: Macmurray explains in Freedom in the Modern World that ‘[b]y being good and unselfish we can feel good and important and kind, and we can make other people feel how good and kind we are’. In summary, egocentric or ‘unreal’ people, as Macmurray calls them, are

33 Ibid., 21.
34 Ibid., 52.
35 Ibid., 53.
36 Ibid., 32–3.
37 Ibid., 30.
out of touch with the world outside them and turned in upon themselves [...]. What they demand of the outside world is that it should stimulate them and be agreeable to them and satisfy them. [...] They are not interested in other people; they want other people to minister to their self-esteem, to recognize them, think highly of them, respect them and love them.39

To understand the centrality of egocentrism in Macmurray’s thought requires an investigation of his relation to Adlerian psychotherapy, and in particular to the work of the German therapist, Fritz Künkel (1889–1956). Künkel trained as a medical doctor, before fighting in the First World War, and—like Macmurray—being seriously wounded by shrapnel.40 Künkel’s injury was so serious (the loss of an arm) that he abandoned work as a physician, and retrained as a psychotherapist. After close involvement with the Adlerian group in Berlin during the 1920s, Künkel began to establish himself as a theorist and populariser of psychotherapy, developing and disseminating a psychotherapy in which the practitioner’s main goal was, in the words of Martha Deed, ‘to help his patients to give up their egocentricity and to become more and more able to participate in the process of creation’.41 Whether by accident or design, Künkel was working in the US when the Second World War broke out, and there he decided to stay, living and working in Los Angeles until his death.42

As ever with Macmurray, there is little in the way of explicit reference that might reveal Künkel’s influence: Macmurray’s only direct statement is apparent in the bibliography to Today and Tomorrow, where he refers to Künkel’s Let’s be Normal! (1929)—albeit as ‘Let’s be Moral’.43 But this lack of explicit acknowledgement has no bearing on the extent of Künkel’s influence upon Macmurray. Examination of Künkel’s Let’s be Normal!, the English translation of which precedes Reason and Emotion by six years, convincingly reveals at least one source for Macmurray’s vocabulary of ‘egocentrism’ (and, as set out in Reason and Emotion, its antonym, ‘objectivity’). In his book, Künkel gives

39 Ibid., 159.
43 Macmurray, Today and Tomorrow, 28.
44 See, for instance, the different kinds of objectivity in science and art, as proposed in
several very similar examples of the egocentric attitude corrupting an apparently ‘objective’ interest. For instance, ‘When a man takes a trip for egocentric reasons, to be able to say, for instance “I have been there and there”, he has no pleasure in the trip itself. He wishes it were over before he starts’.45 Or, if a student studies for an examination egocentrically, he ‘uses the examination to quiet his need of recognition, or, what amounts to the same thing psychologically, he needs it to lessen his feeling of inferiority’.46 In both these examples, the acquisition of knowledge (by acquaintance, or propositionally formed) is in the service of one’s self-image. Something similar is proposed by Künkel for egocentrically motivated moral behaviour:

Let us imagine that an old man has fallen on the street, and that a young man hurries to help him up. Such assistance can serve one of two purposes. Either the purpose is to help the person hurt, or the helper performs his good deed for a reward. If the first purpose outweighs the second, we call the man’s behavior ‘objective’; if the latter purpose is determinant, we call his behavior ‘egocentric’.47

Indeed, egocentrism is to Künkel the central psychopathology. In What it Means to Grow Up (first published in English in 1936) he asserts:

The most important of the distinctions which occur in the more recent books analyzing character is that indicated by the two words Egocentricity and Objectivity. The words designate the two opposed attitudes, the two different kinds of behaviour, or we might even say, the two different sets of purposes that prevail generally, in ourselves and in others. A boy who makes an electric bell because he enjoys working with his hands, or because the bell is a necessity, is acting objectively. But a boy who installs a bell with the one idea of earning the admiration of his parents, or his uncles and aunts, or his schoolfellows, is acting egocentrically.48

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45 Fritz Künkel, Let’s Be Normal!: The Psychologist Comes to His Senses, trans. by Eleanore Jensen (New York, 1929), 92.
46 Ibid., 91.
For the egocentric personality, claims Künkel (and Macmurray agrees), an objective relation to the world is a means to some other end—namely, the ‘ego-ideal’:

the egocentric, whether he knows it or not, always acts according to self-evaluation. He has an ego-ideal which he strives to attain, a guiding image by which he measures his worth or worthlessness. He judges everything that happens on the basis of whether it brings him nearer this guiding image or not.49

In Künkel’s words, ‘[t]he purpose of every objective function is service to the world. The purpose of every egocentric function is service to the ego’.50

Künkel’s vocabulary of the ‘ego-ideal’ and the ‘guiding image’ develops Adler’s account of the way in which a fictional self-image may act as a goal for the personality. According to Adler, the child ‘obtain[s] security by striving towards a fixed point where he sees himself greater and stronger, where he finds himself rid of the helplessness of infancy’.51 For the healthy personality, this fictional goal is merely a crutch, which may be given up when one actually reaches the powers and privileges of maturity, and no longer feels so acutely one’s weakness and incapacity before the world. Rather as an architect might erase the guidelines on a drawing, so the healthy individual is ‘able at all times to free himself from the bonds of his fiction, to eliminate his projections (Kant) from his calculations, and to make use only of the impetus which is given him by this guiding line’.52 An everyday example of my own may prove helpful: the child who is told that eating spinach will make him as strong as Popeye uses this fantastic ego-ideal in order to force down an unfamiliar and unappetizing food. But, as the child develops, the fictional goal of being like Popeye disappears, to be replaced—in the ideal case—by a realistic appreciation of a wholesome food, both as a pleasure in itself, and as a means to health. However, the neurotic personality (and for Adler this particularly means that created in the constitutionally inferior child),

49 Künkel, *Let’s Be Normal!*, 32.
50 Ibid., 31–2.
52 Ibid., 54.
keeps before his eye his God, his idol, his ideal of personality and clings to his guiding principle, losing sight in the meanwhile of reality, whereas the normal personality is always ready to dispense with this crutch, this aid, and reckon unhampered with reality.  

The neurotic, in other words, clings to the ideal or fiction of future power and potency, hypostatizing it into a reality, albeit an unconscious one. Somewhere at the back of his mind, the neurotic is still eating his spinach in the hope that he will (eventually, one day) turn into Popeye—or, as Adler puts it, that he will ‘escape from the feeling of inferiority in order to ascend to the full height of the ego-consciousness, to complete manliness, to attain the ideal of being “above.”’

The ego-ideal or guiding fiction, in Adler’s system, provides a fictional end that eventually is dispensable to the mature, healthy personality; the accomplishments once imagined as a means to the fictional goal of security and power come to be valued as ends-in-themselves. To be egocentric in the sense developed by Künkel’s appropriation of Adler, and then adopted by Macmurray, is therefore not essentially to be self-interested, or whimsical, or merely subjective in one’s attitudes: it is instead to treat any relation to the world as in fact a means to the (illusory) imago of security and power. Even the most moral and realistically minded of individuals may be egocentric if these attitudes are in the service of such a guiding image. As Stepansky points out,

Adler did not contend that the neurotic character was incapable of altruistic behaviour, but he did argue that such behaviour only became manifest when it could be incorporated into the neurotic’s ‘search for significance’ […]—when it served to promote interpersonal superiority in contexts where the display of overt ambition would be a liability.

But where Adler frequently uses constitutional inferiority to explain the hypostatisation of the ego-ideal, Künkel emphasises instead problems in the early relationship between mother and child in order to explain why the latter should feel so acutely its own weakness, and so cling, in neurotic compensation, to a guiding image. Künkel’s account of the origins of egocentricity is provided in Character, Growth, Education (first published in English in 1938).

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53 Ibid., 66.
54 Ibid., 37.
55 Stepansky, In Freud’s Shadow, 123.
The scenes described in it are strikingly familiar to anyone acquainted with Macmurray’s account of the mother-child relation in post-war publications such as *Persons in Relation* (1961), based on his Gifford Lectures of 1954. Egocentrism, says Künkel, is a sign of ‘previous disturbance of the Primal-We’—this curious phrase indicates, says Künkel, that in early life, ‘The acting subject is not the child himself, but the community of mother and child, the Primal-We in its entirety’. For Macmurray, too, ‘the mother-child relation is the original unit of personal existence’, ‘a “You and I” with a common life’. In normal development, claims Künkel, the primal community is maintained by a relationship of faith between child and mother. He gives the example of a mother who must leave the room in order to prepare some food for her infant, and so appears to abandon her child, and to break the norms of feeding that ruled their Primal-We:

> With her voice and her expression she affirmed unequivocally her loyalty to their community. Nevertheless her departure was felt to be a denial of the We-subject, and hence a betrayal. Yet not a complete betrayal. Should one trust that reassuring look in her eye more than the evidence of one’s own eyes which said ‘she has gone’? Was it perhaps possible that she had gone away without breaking up the We? The child is unable to arrive at any clear understanding. His tension capacity is not yet sufficient. He cannot yet recognize in his mother’s absence the contribution of service to the We. His tension capacity is, however, already sufficiently great for him not to forget the oath of fidelity that lay in her eyes.

> Amidst all this uncertainty his mother returns. That decides everything.

The comparisons with Macmurray are again clear, for the Scottish philosopher refers to what he calls a ‘rhythm of withdrawal and return’. If the child is to become a competent agent, he must endure the ‘deliberate refusal on her [the mother’s] part to continue to show the child those expressions of her care

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57 Künkel, *Character, Growth, Education*, 21.
59 Ibid., 60.
60 Künkel, *Character, Growth, Education*, p. 47.
61 Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, p. 87.
for him that he expects’. However, since ‘the child’s stock of knowledge is too exiguous, the span of his anticipation too short’, he can only appreciate that ‘[t]his refusal is […] an expression of the mother’s care for him’ if he maintains a ‘positive attitude of confidence that the expected response will come in due time’. Indeed, Macmurray merely generalizes Künkel’s concrete example of withdrawal and return in which the mother ‘goes into the kitchen and comes back again’.

For the non-egocentric personality, claims Künkel, ‘all kinds of unpleasantness will be borne in the consciousness that, when all is said and done, the world-order merits confidence’. However, there are also primal communities in which such restoration of the ‘We’ does not occur. For whatever reason—be it the child’s anxious nature, the length of the withdrawal, the mother’s inability to reassure, and so forth—the child is ‘led astray by anxiety for the ego’, and concludes, in effect, that ‘however small one may be, one must look after oneself’. Macmurray, too, describes such egocentrism as what ensues when the child loses faith in the meaning of the mother’s withdrawal: ‘activity becomes egocentric, concerned with the defence of himself in a world which is indifferent to his needs’. Egocentrism, for Macmurray, is not strictly self-love, but is rather a ‘fear of the Other’ that involves ‘a concentration of interest and activity upon the defence of the self’.

Künkel describes two modes of egocentric response: in the first, ‘the child will try to master his surroundings, and external dialectical processes will play the chief part in the development of his character’; in the other, ‘the child’s behavior will be more passive’—he ‘inclines toward dreaminess or contemplativeness, and seeks to subdue the external world “from afar.”’ ‘This contrast’, claims Künkel, ‘corresponds […] exactly to the differentiation introduced by C. G. Jung […] under the names “Extrovert” and “Introvert.”’ As Künkel makes clear, these two responses, the assertive and the submissive, may mingle in one personality—one egocentric child, for instance, manifested

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62 Ibid., 89.
63 Ibid., 89.
64 Ibid., 87–8.
65 Künkel, Character, Growth, Education, 46.
66 Ibid., 47.
67 Ibid., 38.
68 Ibid., 38.
69 Macmurray, Persons in Relation, 89.
70 Ibid.
71 Künkel, Character, Growth, Education, 67.
72 Ibid., 67.
a ‘good deal of naughtiness and obstinacy, but also a certain amount of affectionate behavior and cajolery [...] for reasons of “policy.”’ This twofold taxonomy of the egocentric personality is echoed by Macmurray. If the child fails to ‘overcome the negative motivation’, then one of ‘two courses will tend to become habitual’,

there will be produced an individual who is either characteristically submissive or characteristically aggressive in his active relation with the Other. This contrast of types of disposition corresponds to the distinction drawn by psychologists between the ‘introvert’ and the ‘extravert’ [sic.].

Macmurray even repeats Künkel’s characterization of the submissive, introverted response as one of ‘policy’: the child ‘remains egocentric and on the defensive; he conforms in behaviour to what is expected of him, but, as it were, as a matter of policy’.

It is therefore Künkel’s theory which lies behind Macmurray’s psychotherapeutic re-interpretation of the Gospels, a project which continues from the inter-war period to post-war work, such as the 1964 radio broadcasts for Lent given under the general title ‘To Save from Fear’. In these talks, Macmurray explicitly casts Jesus as a psychotherapist who ‘diagnosed the mortal sickness from which people suffer as fear’. The fear in question is not everyday rational fear towards some conscious object or possibility; rather ‘the fears that matter are the deep fears, which we have suppressed so that we are unconscious of them’. The fear, of course, is that which may arise in the rhythm of withdrawal and return. An individual possessed by such unconscious fear of the other, ‘will constantly act as if the world is a dangerous place, and live on the defensive’, and so will display two characteristic emotional attitudes—‘he hides himself from you behind a facade of pretence or formality, or else he tries to dominate you. He is either submissive or aggressive’. In either

73 Ibid., 50.
74 Macmurray, Persons in Relation, 104.
75 Ibid., 102.
78 Ibid., 3.
79 Ibid., 4.
case, the genuinely intersubjective self is obscured by an ego-ideal built upon unconscious fear and anxiety. As Macmurray explains in *Persons in Relation*,

Both dispositions are egocentric, and motivate action which is for the sake of oneself, and not for the sake of the Other [...]. Such action is implicitly a refusal of mutuality, and an effort to constrain the Other to do what we want. By conforming submissively to his wishes we put him under an obligation to care for us. By aggressive behaviour we seek to make him afraid not to care for us.80

The Adlerian lineage of Macmurray’s psychotherapeutic Christianity should now be clear: indeed, these two egocentric responses of aggression and submission can be traced back, via Künkel, to Adler’s account of ‘[d]efiance and obedience, *Trotz* and *Gehorsam*’ as ‘the two basic routes that the neurotic safeguarding tendencies could follow’.81

For those who think of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy within Freudian or post-Freudian parameters, Macmurray’s conclusions will seem to be merely *non sequiturs*. However, if Macmurray’s work is related to Adlerian concepts, particularly those developed by Künkel, then the psychotherapeutic conceptual scheme in Macmurray’s Christianity is clarified. The suppressed impulse that appears in disguised form in organized religion, and which Macmurray hopes to liberate, is the striving towards mature community rather than towards egocentric mastery. Where Freud’s motto was ‘*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*’ (traditionally translated as ‘Where Id was, Ego shall be’), Macmurray supposes that the real therapeutic aim is to replace the compulsive and deadening ego with the emotionally mature and genuinely other-centred self: ‘Where Ego was, We shall be’ would be a fair summary of Macmurray’s position. Without such liberation of genuine mutuality, Macmurray believes, we shall remain egocentric in the specific psychotherapeutic sense developed by Adler and Künkel.

For the egocentric personality, the fundamental relation to the world is one of mastery, rather than knowledge, enjoyment, appreciation, or love. It is therefore important to note that Macmurray, Künkel, and Adler concede the validity of a Nietzschean hermeneutic of suspicion in which the ‘will to power’ works, more or less latently, in all our accomplishments, from the most obviously aggressive to the seemingly most civilized (art, morality, science). This is why Macmurray’s use of ‘egocentrism’ is as elastic as Künkel’s: it covers such

81 Stepansky, *In Freud’s Shadow*, 121.
phenomena as selfishness, wishful thinking, hedonistic aesthetic response, consolatory theology, emotional indulgence, the vanity of good deeds, and pride in one’s knowledge and expertise. It includes both the corruption of ‘objectivity’ by self-interest, and the replacement of objectivity with illusions that are (narrowly conceived) ‘life-enhancing’. But, while conceding the potential validity of such suspicions, Macmurray argues—with recourse to the ideas of Adler and Künkel—that they are illuminating only for those individuals who have fallen into an egocentric way of life. He therefore turns the hermeneutic of suspicion against itself, and produces a hermeneutic of charity and confidence in which the will-to-power and the will-to-illusion conceal our original altruism and objectivity.

Macmurray’s response to a hermeneutic of suspicion that ferrets out the will to power means that he is still our contemporary, at least for an age in which ‘critical theory’ in the humanities is besotted with thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan, and many others, all of whom develop, or at least extend, arguments more concisely and elegantly expressed by Nietzsche. It is, for instance, both instructive and amusing to note that, within an Adlerian conceptual scheme, the hierarchical binary oppositions so relentlessly pursued by post-structuralist thinking are merely the contingent by-product of the neurotic personality. According to Adler, only the neurotic (or the egocentric, in the Künkel-Macmurray vocabulary) is so enmeshed in a world structured according to superiority and inferiority that he or she projects upon it an ‘antithesis’ which ‘resolves itself in accordance with [...] “man—woman”, so that the feeling of inferiority, uncertainty, lowliness, effeminacy, falls on one side of the table, the antithesis of certainty, superiority, self-esteem, manliness on the other’.82

Macmurray’s relation to the Adlerian tradition also helps with a more local project—the recovery of Scottish intellectual history. The Adlerian connection provides, for instance, a useful counterweight to narratives which relate Scottish psychoanalytic ideas to the ‘object relations’ tradition associated with Melanie Klein (1882–1960). It is tempting to see the work of Macmurray, Suttie and Fairbairn as innovations within a Kleinian framework: one might say that instead of an infant relating to Kleinian ‘part objects’ such as the breast, these three theorists postulate an original relation to the ‘whole object’, \( \ni \), a person. Yet perhaps only Fairbairn really sees himself as responding to and developing Klein’s work (a relation he makes apparent in articles such as

‘Steps in the Development of an Object-Relations Theory of the Personality’ (1949)). Macmurray and Suttie for their part seem to have been more significantly informed by the Adlerian tradition. Such connections may also prove of interest to scholars of Adler, since as Stepansky notes, ‘[i]n the decades following Freud’s death, only two theorists of any psychoanalytic stature have expressed indebtedness to work of Adler’. Suttie and Macmurray are another two theorists who are undoubtedly indebted to Adler; but, for their own somewhat unclear reasons, they are reticent about expressing this allegiance.

It is also worth noting, as a final caveat, that the extent to which Künkel may himself be indebted to Macmurray is uncertain. Since Künkel’s arguments generally appear before Macmurray’s publication of similar ideas, Macmurray seems to be following in the German’s footsteps. Yet it is also possible that there may have been some unrecorded dialogue between the two. Künkel had clearly come into contact with Macmurray’s thought by the 1940s, when he was living in the US. In the foreword to In Search of Maturity (1943), he explicitly names Macmurray in his acknowledgements:

The conclusions of the following presentation are largely based on well-known facts as discussed in psychotherapeutic literature. Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and C. G. Jung should be mentioned as the teachers to whom I owe most. In the religious field, Reinhold Niebuhr, John Macmurray, and Gerald Heard have contributed considerably to the clarification of my thinking.

There may, then, have been a greater degree of interdependence between Macmurray and Künkel than is apparent in the materials that I have drawn upon. Further research may yet reveal the existence and extent of such a dialogue.

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84 Stepansky, In Freud’s Shadow, 2.
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Macmurray’s philosophy is eclectic and has found sympathizers in a number of disciplines; Frank Kirkpatrick’s published monographs draw on Macmurray’s ethics, while Julian Stern and Michael Fielding are concerned with the application of Macmurray’s account of persons in community in State education. In addition Macmurray is influential in the field of politics; Kirkpatrick’s most recent work on Macmurray focuses on political philosophy, while reference to Macmurray in the public domain stems largely from claims made by the former British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, that Macmurray’s work has influenced him. Hence, this paper aims primarily to tease out the extent to which Macmurray’s philosophy of community is or is not evident in Blairite politics; secondarily, to introduce the philosophical notion of supervenience to explain the relation between religious reasons and secular reasons in public debate; and finally to provide an example of a contemporary ‘community’ that satisfies the essential criteria of Macmurray’s definition. In addition to revealing the contemporary relevance of Macmurray’s work, this paper engages with an ongoing international conversation on the ethics of religious voices in public places.

In Religion in the Public Square Robert Audi states that ‘the ethics appropriate to a liberal democracy constrains religious considerations . . . because of
its commitment to preserving the liberty of all’.\(^5\) On the contrary, Nicholas Wolterstorff states: ‘I see no reason to suppose that the ethic of the citizen in a liberal democracy includes a restraint on the use of religious reasons in deciding and discussing political issues’.\(^6\) Audi’s position rests on the assumption that virtuous citizens ‘try to contribute in some way to the welfare of others’\(^7\) and that in a religiously diverse society this means having secular (non-religious) arguments for supporting public policy. In other words, Audi maintains that religious justification for public policy restricts the freedom of those who do not hold to that religion, whereas secular reasons are available to all citizens. Wolterstorff, on the other hand, argues for the inclusion of religious reasons in public debate on two grounds: first, he maintains that respecting the freedom and equality of other citizens rests on genuine debate rather than religious constraint; secondly, he argues that persons with religious reasons cannot leave them out of the debate, since ‘we cannot leap out of our perspectives’.\(^8\) Consequently, there is something of an impasse between Audi and Wolterstorff concerning the use of religious reasons in public debate.

It is my contention that we can find a middle ground between the positions espoused by Wolterstorff and Audi by considering Macmurray’s account of Church-State relations and, further, I propose that religious reasons supervene on secular reasons.\(^9\) Through the use of Macmurray’s work and the notion of supervenience, in addition to carrying on the Wolterstorff-Audi debate and the conversations of the aforementioned colloquia, I will put forward an objective response to the recent media frenzy occasioned by Tony Blair’s remark that God will judge his decision to go to war with Iraq; a comment made when he appeared on the talk show *Parkinson* in March 2006,\(^10\) ending with a practical example of community-building amongst religiously and culturally diverse citizens.

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\(^6\) Ibid., 111–112.

\(^7\) Ibid., 16.

\(^8\) Ibid., 113.

\(^9\) I am using the term supervenience to mean that where there is a difference in religious reasons there must be a difference in the secular reasons.

Macmurray’s philosophy

Macmurray’s influence in philosophy can be harder to detect than his influence in other subjects. The 1998 Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy does not have an entry on Macmurray (although Macmurray is mentioned in the entry on Norman Kemp Smith); nevertheless, the 2005 Thoemmes/Continuum Dictionary of Twentieth-Century British Philosophers does contain an entry on Macmurray. According to Macmurray, his thesis is ‘that the Self is constituted by its relation to the Other; that it has its being in its relationship; and that this relationship is necessarily personal’. A personal relationship is one in which persons are related as equals, rather than on the basis of their roles; it is then a friendship. In accordance with the central tenet of Macmurray’s thesis, he states that, ‘Friendship is the supreme value in life and the source of all other values’. For Macmurray, therefore, friendship (characterized by love, care and trust) operates both as a description of person-to-person relations and a prescription for the way in which we ought (morally) to relate to our fellow human beings. In addition, as Macmurray unpacks his thesis he reveals that his interest in the moral aspect of the relations of persons is intimately related to his concern with justice. He states:

Justice is that negative aspect of morality which is necessary to the constitution of the positive, though subordinate within it. Morality can only be defined through its positive aspect, yet it can only be realized through its own negative. Without justice, morality becomes illusory and sentimental, the mere appearance of morality.

Hence, Macmurray’s moral philosophy is a political philosophy also.

Moreover, Macmurray’s work on the relationship between justice and love turns out to be an account of his view of the proper connection and space between political institutions and religious ones. He defines religion in such a way as to render his work on the relations of persons a religious as well as a moral and a political philosophy. It is Macmurray’s contention that ‘religion has its ground and origin in the problematic of the relation of persons, and reflects that problem’; in short, ‘religion is about the community

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13 Macmurray, Persons in Relation, 188–9.
of persons. We might expect, therefore, to find that Macmurray’s work is influential amongst theologians, religious studies scholars and religious philosophers. Indeed, according to Tony Blair, ‘it is easy to see his [Macmurray’s] influence in a whole generation of Christian philosophers’. Blair does not state which philosophers he has in mind here, but it is clear that he is referring to the Macmurrian emphasis on a spirituality that is embedded in this-world, as opposed to being merely abstract or implying withdrawal from reason. Whether this-worldly spirituality owes anything to Macmurray or not, Blair has been partly responsible for the revived and expanding interest in Macmurray scholarship.

Macmurray and Blair

However, we must be cautious about the connection between Blair and Macmurray lest this distort Macmurray’s political philosophy. At first glance it might be reasonable to assume that Macmurray’s alleged influence on Blair is to be found in the notion of community; this is both a primary topic in government rhetoric and a key theme in Macmurray’s writings. For example, in reference to Macmurray Blair writes:

he [Macmurray] confronted what will be the critical political question of the twenty-first century: the relationship between the individual and society … he [Macmurray] places the individual firmly within a social setting—we are what we are, in part, because of the other, the “You and I”. We cannot ignore our obligations to others as well as ourselves. This is where the modern political notions of community begin.

Then in his 2000 Speech to the Women’s Institute, Blair states that ‘our fulfilment as individuals lies in a decent society of others … the renewal of community is the answer to the challenge of a changing world’. These (and other similar) statements made by Tony Blair have led to the assumption that Macmurray is

14 Ibid., 157.
16 Ibid., 9.
a communitarian; however, what Macmurray means by community and what Blair means by community are not one and the same thing. In fact, Sarah Hale argues that ‘Blair’s “philosophy” …is markedly different from Macmurray’s and frequently in stark opposition to it’.18

In the Blairite quotes cited above the terms society and community are used interchangeably, and yet Macmurray deliberately distinguishes between these terms, only using the term community to apply to a specific sort of relationship that is much more than a social relation. At other times the government is guilty of the fallacy of equivocation using the term community in two different senses. For example, as Hale notes, in Blair’s speech to the Women’s Institute he uses the term community to refer both to ‘villages, towns and cities’ and to our ‘fulfilment as individuals’, and in Gordon Brown’s Speech to the National Council for Voluntary Organization he uses the term community to refer to ‘common needs, mutual interests, shared objectives, related goals’ and to the fact that ‘we depend upon each other’.19 Yet in Macmurrian thought, while personal growth and fulfilment are possible only in communities, groups identified as villages or defined primarily as having shared objectives are societies, not communities.

The focus on community in New Labour policy is similar to the contemporary communitarianism that Amitai Etzioni expounds, where self-fulfilment is tied closely to social responsibility.20 In particular, Hale argues that it is Blair’s emphasis on rights and duties or responsibilities that render him a communitarian. However, as Samuel Brittan explains, Macmurray is not a communitarian in this sense; that is, Macmurray does not render community exclusive in this way.21 In a Blairite community covenants and contracts are central; such that duties and responsibilities have to be fulfilled in order for rights to be granted. (For example, the ‘right’ to unemployment benefit is granted only if the duties to train for, apply for and take jobs are fulfilled.) Macmurray, on the other hand, uses the term community to refer to unconditional relationships of care and concern for the welfare of others, including their economic welfare.22 Within a Macmurrian community, responsibility is not something you owe or are required to perform in order to access benefits, rather, responsibility is

18 Ibid., 192–3.
22 See John Macmurray, Constructive Democracy (London, 1943), 21 where Macmurray insists that material resources are essential for community to flourish.
exercised when persons recognize the extent to which their actions affect and limit the actions of others and, therefore, avoid acting so as to curtail another’s freedom to act. Furthermore, New Labour seeks to promote community by encouraging service. A Cabinet Office paper, Hale reveals, states that by the year 2010 community work should be both part of the criteria for university entrance and part of the undergraduate degree programme.

In a number of places Macmurray does write about the idealization of servitude (especially as it appears within traditional Christianity), but he is severely critical of it. In his first monograph, *Freedom in the Modern World*, Macmurray sets out three kinds of morality, which he refers to as mechanical, social and personal morality. He defines mechanical morality as ‘obedience to law’ and claims that this is false morality, since it treats humans as ‘automaton’ rather than free agents. Social morality, he explains, ‘talks always of service … duty … to serve others, to serve our country, to serve humanity’ and, as with mechanical morality, Macmurray insists that social morality is a false morality, because it ‘subordinates human beings to organization’. Macmurray contends that true morality is found where persons exist in communities of friendship, such that each is free to express her or his nature and grow as a person; hence, he calls this ‘personal morality’. Clearly then Blairite policy reflects what Macmurray defines as social morality rather than what he refers to as personal morality or community. Thus, Hale states: ‘Far from providing the philosophical basis for New Labour’s “communitarianism”, Macmurray’s writings constitute a very plausible philosophical ground from which to condemn it’.

Nevertheless, Bevir and O’Brien offer a more sympathetic reading of the relationship between Macmurray’s thought and Blairite communitarianism along the lines of social humanism. In their paper ‘From Idealism to Communitarianism: The Inheritance and Legacy of John Macmurray’, they state:

This tradition [social humanism] unfolds from the Victorian and Edwardian idealists, including Edward Caird and T.H. Green, through

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24 Hale, ‘Professor Macmurray and Mr. Blair’, 196.
26 Ibid., 193.
27 Ibid., 195.
28 Ibid., 199.
29 Hale, ‘Professor Macmurray and Mr. Blair’, 197.
intermediaries, such as Macmurray, to contemporary communitarians, whether politicians such as Blair or philosophers such as Ronald Beiner, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer.  

They make the plausible claim that Macmurray’s emphasis on community in action, in response to his experience of the First World War, is a development of the notion of community of Spirit found in idealists such as G.W.F. Hegel and T.H. Green. Moreover, they argue, Blairite communitarianism is a further development of Macmurray’s concept of community, in response to contemporary multiculturalism and a loss of solidarity. Consequently, and more contentiously, Bevir and O’Brien suggest that, if we see liberalism and communitarianism as growing out of social humanism (and thus both being concerned primarily with communities of fellows), the antagonism between them is reduced.  

In contrast to Hale, Bevir and O’Brien argue that Macmurray is not entirely opposed to liberal institutions. This is a valid claim, since, for Macmurray, indirect relations and, therefore, covenants and contracts, are a necessary component of the personal relations that constitute community. Moreover, as Bevir and O’Brien point out, contemporary communitarianism has to respond to the challenge of multiculturalism; that is, it has to account for cultural difference, whereas Macmurray assumes a ‘Christian’ community, albeit with severe criticism of its institutionalized forms. Hence, while Macmurray may have an over-optimistic view of unity along Christian lines (which fails to address competing accounts of human fulfilment), contemporary communitarianism may well have stressed difference at the expense of a coherent concept of community. 

Nevertheless, while Hale suggests that this leads Blair to abandon the commitment to a welfare state found in Macmurray’s work, Bevir and O’Brien maintain that Blair has had to rework welfare in response to an increased lack of solidarity. That is, since British society is less willing to pay higher taxes in order to fund welfare than previously, New Labour has had to introduce the notion of New Right, whereby state provision is closely tied to an individual’s


31 Ibid., 322–3.

32 Ibid., 327.
responsibility and duty of self-improvement. Thus, rather than having the overriding principles of inclusion, shared experience and care for all others, which Macmurray held to underpin the community of persons, Bevir and O’Brien claim that community under New Labour holds the needy individual responsible for accessing benefits and avoiding exclusion.

In agreement with Hale, we can accept that Blair diluted Macmurray’s notion of community and over-emphasized the duties of the individual, seeing covenants as the end rather than a means to an end. However, in reply to Hale’s negative reading of the Macmurray-Blair relation and in agreement with Bevir and O’Brien, we can see that contemporary multiculturalism presents the concept of community with a challenge that Macmurray did not face, requiring a more nuanced understanding of difference than Macmurray provides. Moreover, Macmurray insists that politics cannot create community, although it can provide the conditions necessary for community to flourish.33 Perhaps, then, if New Labour paid more attention to the creation of a just society, through covenants and contracts, and left the language of community out of their speeches, it might have more in common with Macmurray’s enterprise than is suggested by Hale.

On the other hand, Macmurray also makes the point that, if religion does not rise to the task of creating and sustaining community, politics will outstep its proper boundaries and seek to enforce it.34 While true community cannot be created by force, we could interpret the lack of solidarity to which Bevir and O’Brien refer as an indication that the State is having to attempt the creation and sustenance of fragile communities. Consequently, the diluted form of community to which government speeches refer, while at odds with Macmurray’s vision of a personal community and unlikely to succeed, may be an example of the political attempts at a community that Macmurray’s theory warns us about. It is then to Macmurray’s account of Church-State relations that we now turn.

**Macmurray on Church-State relations**

As we have mentioned, Macmurray makes a distinction between the definition of a society and the definition of a community. He states:

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34 Ibid., 14.
There are groups which consist of people co-operating for certain specific purposes, like trade unions, or cricket clubs, or co-operative societies. There are, on the other hand, groups which are bound together by something deeper than any purpose—by the sharing of a common life.35

For Macmurray only the latter type is properly referred to as a community. In his Gifford lectures he states that ‘The members of a community are in communion with one another, and their association is a fellowship’.36 Nonetheless, society and community are not to be understood in mutually exclusive terms, but rather as ‘two elements of unity which enter into all groups’.37 A society therefore may exhibit differing degrees of community at any given time, just as every community will also require the functional relation of its members to deal with practical matters. (Thus, we may enter into friendships with our work colleagues and we may need a dish-washing rota in the family home.)

However, according to Macmurray, individualism and the break down of communal bonds leads to an over-emphasis on the functional aspects of life.38 On the contrary, Macmurray argues that life is ‘more-than-functional’; he illustrates this point with the example of eating; while we eat for nourishment, eating is often a social occasion and an opportunity for fellowship.39 Hence, Macmurray states that ‘The functional life is for the personal life; the personal life is through the functional life’.40 In today’s language of work-life balance then, Macmurray is insisting that we work to live and not live to work, because, he states, ‘it is through our personal relationships that we become individual persons’.41

According to Macmurray, the personal or more-than-functional aspect of life ‘is the life of community’.42 Moreover, he maintains that ‘Religion is

35 Ibid., 22.
36 Macmurray, Persons in Relation, 146.
37 Macmurray, A Challenge to the Churches, 22.
41 Macmurray, ‘Fellowship in a Common Life’.
concerned with community. Politics is concerned with society’.\textsuperscript{43} On a broader scale, it is apparent that the organization of the functional aspect of human life, the relation of humans as citizens, is the arena of politics, but Macmurray contends that ‘community can only be properly expressed and nourished by religious institutions’.\textsuperscript{44} Nevertheless, Macmurray is highly critical of the otherworldly institutionalized religion with which he is familiar and of the associated prevalent perception of religion as an individual and private affair. He states that ‘individualism is incompatible with religion because it is incompatible with social unity’.\textsuperscript{45} For Macmurray, ‘Religion is concerned with the relations of people as persons, in their character as human beings’.\textsuperscript{46} Thus, when Macmurray argues that community is created and sustained by religion, he is referring to a ‘reflective activity which expresses the consciousness of community’.\textsuperscript{47} In brief, he states that ‘religion is the celebration of communion’.\textsuperscript{48}

If, then, the religious aspect of life is synonymous with the personal aspect of life and the political is synonymous with the functional, on the basis of Macmurray’s principle for proper work-life balance, we can assert that politics ought to serve religion and not vice-versa. As Macmurray argues, ‘the State is for the community; the community is through the State’.\textsuperscript{49} Consequently, Church and State have distinct but interdependent roles. Church and State do not exist independently because the functional and personal aspects of life are not separate lives; they can be separated at the theoretical level, but not at the practical level.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, the Church’s communal bonds are imaginary without co-operation for a common purpose and provision for one another’s needs, and the State’s sense of common purpose is minimal without some degree of communal life making co-operation possible. Hence, Macmurray states that ‘A good political and economic system is one which provides as fully as possible for the personal life of its citizens, and for all of them equally’.\textsuperscript{51}

In addition, Macmurray is arguing that the proper limits of political control are set by religion; he suggests that ‘in a sane world, religion will control

\textsuperscript{43} Macmurray, \textit{A Challenge to the Churches}, 24.
\textsuperscript{44} Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’.
\textsuperscript{45} Macmurray, \textit{A Challenge to the Churches}, 16.
\textsuperscript{47} Macmurray, \textit{Persons in Relation}, 162.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’ (original italics).
\textsuperscript{50} Macmurray, ‘Two Lives in One’.
\textsuperscript{51} Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’.
The subordination of religion to politics is the extension of Macmurray’s principle concerning work-life balance and the means by which the good life; that is, the life of community and therefore the development of persons as persons, is safeguarded. He states: ‘If the inequalities of the functional life are not subordinated to the deeper equality of human fellowship, they become absolute, and community perishes’. Moreover, Macmurray warns us that where religion is too weak to create and maintain the internal bonds of fellowship, politics will be expected to impose external bonds of unity. However, when politics controls religion, totalitarianism results, making ‘the State the arbiter of spiritual values’. In essence, then, Macmurray is arguing that religion is essential to democracy. In fact, Macmurray claims:

So long as religion is excluded from the competence of political authority, everything is excluded which democracy requires. And religion could of itself enforce the limitation of political authority which democracy demands. Indeed, in the long run, only religion is capable of doing this.

For Macmurray, then, democracy is closely bound up with community, since democracy operates on a principle of equality, and it is communities of fellowship that override functional inequalities. Politics can provide the conditions required for societies to develop into communities of equals by creating systems of co-operation, which seek justice through law, but communities cannot be created by force.

**Religious voices in public places**

Thus, Macmurray does have a liberal democratic policy, viewing religion and politics as having different, but interdependent roles. Hence, he reminds us not to expect politicians to administer to every area of life. In relation to New Labour rhetoric, Macmurray’s theory implies that government ought to concern itself with society, leaving the creation and sustenance of community

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53 Macmurray, ‘Two Lives in One’.
54 Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’.
to religion. Nonetheless, Macmurray’s account of religion is based on the presumption that Britain is essentially Christian. Contemporary politics, however, is grappling with the reality of religious pluralism and the decreased sense of community bound-up with both secularization and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, when Macmurray states that ‘The proper relation of religion and politics is the unsolved problem of our civilization’, this is a statement with which Nick Wolterstorff agrees.

In a forthcoming paper, Wolterstorff states:

“political liberalism” is that now-familiar version of political theory, articulating and defending the liberal democratic polity, which holds that it belongs to the role of citizen in such a polity to appeal to “public” or “secular” reason for conducting debates in public on political matters and for making political decisions. John Rawls, Robert Audi, and Charles Lamore, are prominent examples of such theorists.

In other words, it is a commonly held principle of political liberalism that political principles should be underpinned by secular rather than religious reasons. The purpose of this principle is to ensure that reasons cited are accessible by all, through the human capacity for reason, and do not require agreement with a set of religious beliefs. Moreover, according to Rorty, Derrida, Kant and others, if religious reasons were given for political legislation, not all citizens would be able to accept them and violence would result. In short, peace requires that religious resources should not be appealed to in public debate on political issues.

However, Wolterstorff contends that it is absurd to think that all citizens will agree with a piece of legislation because religious reasons have been left out of

57 Macmurray, ‘Explanatory Statement’ from series ‘Persons and Functions’.
58 Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Why Can’t We All Just Get Along With Each Other?’, forthcoming paper delivered at ‘Religion and Political Liberalism I: Religious Voices in Public Places’ colloquium, Institute for Advanced Research in Religion, Ethics and Public Life, School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds (2 – 4 June 2003), typescript, 24 pp at 1. The views expressed in this paper are found also in Audi and Wolterstorff, Religion in the Public Square.
the debate. In addition, he states that ‘there is no prospect whatsoever...of all adherents of particular religions refraining from using the resources of their own religion in making political decisions’. Thus, while disputing the theory behind political liberalism, in support of liberal democracy Wolterstorff sets out the principles that he holds are necessary for a liberal democratic polity to maintain peace in a religiously diverse society. His first principle concerns the separation of Church and State. He maintains that Church and State are distinct powers with distinct areas of authority; such as excommunication and incarceration. Secondly, he argues that all citizens should be treated equally, regardless of their religion. Hence the State should not be expected to create or sustain any religion and should accept that not all citizens will agree with legislation, but that legislation will be shaped by the votes of the religious and the secular. According to Wolterstorff, peace is not maintained by appealing to secular reasons in support of legislation, rather, he suggests that ‘stability depends on the great majority having reasons based on their own perspectives for accepting the principles [above] of social organization’.

Hence, Wolterstorff argues that religious reasons should enter public debate. While we can agree that religions will appeal to their own resources in consideration of legislation and so it may be more honest to appeal to those reasons than to leave them out, in Macmurrian terms this is another example, albeit a weaker one perhaps, of politics out-stepping its proper limits. It seems that Wolterstorff is assuming that politics, if it includes religious reasons, can sustain peace. In effect, Wolterstorff has subsumed the personal life in the functional life; rather than subordinating the latter to the former. Hence, Wolterstorff’s account looks like the modern communitarianism that is at odds with Macmurray’s account. Thus, it seems that Wolterstorff could offer a more complete picture of human relations by incorporating Macmurray’s work. As Kirkpatrick notes, Macmurray ‘was trying, in effect...to provide the “something else” or “something more” beyond political principles that is needed to sustain human unity’. Macmurray is certain that democracy cannot exist if it excludes religion, but he also maintains that peace requires more than politics.

60 Ibid., 3.  
61 Ibid., 11–12.  
62 Ibid., 18.  
63 Ibid., 20.  
64 Ibid., 24.  
65 Kirkpatrick, John Macmurray: Community Beyond Political Philosophy, 3.
Nevertheless, the political liberal theory that Wolterstorff critiques for leaving out religion is predominant in Britain. As we mentioned at the beginning, Blair’s brief reference to God in the Parkinson interview was seized on by the media. Similarly, at the start of the war with Iraq there were several media reports (including *The Telegraph*, BBC News and *The Independent*) regarding the silencing of religious rhetoric. Alistair Campbell is widely reported to have intervened in an interview to prevent Blair answering a question about his religious beliefs; according to the reports Campbell stated, “we don’t do God”. Likewise, at the same time, the media claimed that Blair’s aides had intervened to prevent him from ending his address to the nation with the words “God bless you”; Blair was persuaded to say “thank you” instead, on the grounds that the British public would be alienated by and do not want to hear politicians making religious statements.

Moreover, the avoidance of giving religious reasons in public extends beyond politicians and even includes religious leaders. Earlier this year, in an interview with Alan Rusbridger, when questioned about his surprising lack of public pronouncements on moral issues, Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, claimed that society is missing the point by expecting the Church to provide moral leadership. Williams holds that using religion to pass moral judgements is ‘part of what he terms being “comic vicar to the nation”’. It is also Williams’ view that the public see religion ‘as a very alien, very mysterious, rather malign force, which gives people ideas above their station’.

However, there are at least two problems inherent in the attempt to shy away from religious statements. First, as we have mentioned, religious persons have religious reasons, so it is dishonest not to include these. Secondly, as Macmurray points out, the religious or personal life is intimately related to the functional or political life; hence, omitting religious reasons assumes a false and impracticable division of aspects of life into separate spheres.

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66 Colin Brown, ‘Campbell interrupted Blair as he spoke of his faith: “We don’t do God”’, *The Telegraph*, 4 May 2003.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Moreover, the intentional exclusion of religion would be undemocratic and illiberal.
Appraisal

In brief, if we are to maintain an integrated life, which supports the development of the human person in a community of persons, personal and functional lives need to be integrated in the manner Macmurray suggests. As Kirkpatrick maintains, Macmurray ‘is neither a strict liberal nor, despite his emphasis on community, a communitarian’. As we have seen, contemporary communitarians use the term community too broadly and in a sense that confines the individual to her or his social ties. Macmurray, however, insists on personal relations within community, while ensuring that the individual retains the space to challenge society and tradition. He argues that the person ‘discovers himself as an individual by contrasting himself, and indeed by wilfully opposing himself to the family to which he belongs’. Liberalism, on the other hand, emphasizes freedom of choice over community, whereas Macmurray insists that the use of individual freedom is accompanied by moral responsibility to other persons.

Similarly, if Church and State are interrelated in the way Macmurray describes, we can establish an ethical place for religious reasons in public debate. Macmurray’s argument suggests that politicians should have non-religious reasons for legislation, while religious leaders ought to have religious reasons informing moral judgements, because of their roles in society and because of the proper relation of the personal and functional aspects of life. Nonetheless, as we have seen, Macmurray defines religion as community, rather than a particular set of creedal statements; morality, therefore, is bound up with the promotion of community. In addition, in sympathy with Wolterstorff, we have to accept that politicians may have religious reasons, but, in accordance with Macmurray’s theory, we should expect religious leaders rather than politicians to concern themselves with the creation and sustenance of community. If Macmurray were able to converse with Blair and Williams then, perhaps he would advise Tony Blair to leave the language of community to Williams, while he would encourage Williams to address the perception of religion in Britain, by focusing on community.

In my opinion, the relationship between secular and religious reasons is like

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72 Kirkpatrick, John Macmurray: Community Beyond Political Philosophy, 121.
73 Macmurray, Persons in Relation, 91 (original italics) where ‘family’ represents any society or community.
74 He states that ‘a morally right action is an action which intends community’, Persons in Relation, 119.
the relationship between religion and morality. While we can have a morality without a religion, religion may operate as an extra element in moral arguments for those who are religious. Similarly, I would argue that politicians must have secular reasons for legislation, but, if they are religious, their religion may operate as an extra dimension in their reasons. In short, I want to claim that religious reasons supervene on secular reasons.\(^7\) I do not think that religious reasons should be included alongside secular reasons in the way that Wolterstorff suggests, but I accept that religious persons cannot avoid having them. Politicians must put forward honest, shared non-religious reasons for their legislation, if they seek to convince others. Politicians ought not to cite God as a reason for action then; however, neither do aides need to prevent Prime Ministers from ever mentioning their religious faith, so long as it is understood to supervene on, rather than stand-in for, secular discourse. In my opinion, the notion of supervenience is compatible with Macmurray’s account of the role of politics, given that it is meant to be concerned with society rather than community.

Finally, if we agree with Macmurray that community is necessary for human flourishing, but that the State cannot create community, we need to consider how community will be created and sustained. As we have seen, Macmurray expects the Church to fulfil this function, but acknowledges that institutionalized Christianity is failing in this respect. Moreover, Britain is both more secular and more religiously diverse now than it was in Macmurray’s era. We have already mentioned the fact that Macmurray presupposes a predominantly Christian as opposed to a thoroughly religiously diverse Britain; in addition, contemporary Britain is the result of a growing secularity with which Macmurray is equally unfamiliar. It is both religious diversity and secularity that challenge Macmurray’s notion of community. He states that ‘religion is, in intention, inclusive of all members of the society to which it refers, and depends on their active co-operation to constitute it’.\(^7\) While Christian and other religious communities are common in Britain, religious adherence marks exclusive divisions between groups and excludes the non-religious. Moreover, ‘active co-operation’ in a

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\(^7\) In other words, if two persons have different religious reasons, there must be some difference in their secular reasons (even though they may be able to argue for the same public policy). For some religious persons, religious reasons will be viewed as foundational; for others, religious reasons will be viewed as adding an extra element to and increasing the persuasive force of the secular reasons for those who share their religious views. In either case, I am claiming that the religious reasons supervene on the secular reasons.

\(^7\) Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 156.
non-religious community requires alternative opportunities to those provided by religious rituals. We have to consider, then, whether it is possible to promote genuine community in contemporary Britain.

In my opinion, contemporary Britain does provide examples of Macmurrayian communities and, moreover, ones that are not tied to a particular religion. Despite Macmurray’s assumption in favour of Christian communities, I contend that he would approve of non-religious communities, on the grounds that he defines religion as the celebration of communion rather than the acceptance of a specific set of beliefs. One example of a contemporary non-religious community is the occurrence of and regular meetings working towards the annual celebration of ‘unity day’ in Leeds.

Hyde Park is an area in Leeds encompassing both affluence and poverty; it is culturally and religiously diverse containing several Mosques, Christian Churches and a Hindu temple; it houses a large number of students alongside families, the elderly and young offenders. Local residents set up unity day after the 1995 riots, with the aim of celebrating the ‘talent and diversity’ of residents in the Leeds 6 postcode area.

Unity Day is an annual celebration of all that is positive in the community, organized entirely by volunteers; it sources local bands, artists and entertainers, packing the park with activities for people of all ages. The success of unity day demonstrates that, while the State was failing to establish community in the Leeds 6 area, as we might expect, grass roots action is proving more effective and avoiding the New Labour dilution of community into society. Moreover, unity day has established community across religious boundaries; it is a secular community which contains diverse religious voices, thus fitting Macmurray’s definition of community as fellowship and the sharing of a common life, while overcoming the problems of religious diversity with which Macmurray was largely unfamiliar. In addition, the role of the State in providing the conditions necessary for this community to flourish is that of granting licenses for the

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77 With the rise in secularity, it is frequently suggested that football is the new religion. (See BBC News, Stephen Tomkins, ‘Matches Made in Heaven’, 22 June 2004; Alan Edge, Faith of Our Fathers: Football as a Religion (Edinburgh, 1999)). In Macmurrayian terms, membership of a football club is potentially inclusive and it clearly provides the ritualistic element that Macmurray’s community requires; nevertheless, it is limited as a Macmurrayian community, since it presupposes antagonism with others who are not members, as opposed to encouraging their membership.

78 There are many similar community groups across the UK. Unity Day is a particularly fitting example however, since it has unity as its focus and it is a non-exclusive community (in the sense that all residents and others are welcome participants), unlike an artistic or music-based community.

79 See www.unityday.org.uk
use of the park, confirming Macmurray’s statement that ‘the State is for the community; the community is through the State’.

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80 Macmurray, ‘The Community of Mankind’ (original italics).
The Influence of Macmurray on Scottish Theology

David Fergusson

Several constant themes in the writings of John Macmurray resonate with the preoccupations of Scottish theologians in the twentieth century. These might be listed under four headings all of which merit attention and provide ways of exploring his influence upon a generation of theologians in his native land. Nevertheless, I shall argue that despite the resonances between Macmurray’s thought and that of mid-twentieth century Scottish theologians there is a surprising lack of direct influence which requires some explanation. In turn, this may shed light on the overall significance of Macmurray’s work.

The four distinctive emphases of Macmurray’s philosophy might be summarised as follows.

1. The attack on the Cartesian dualist doctrine of the self leads to a more holistic account of the human being as a psychosomatic unity set within a social and physical world.

2. The stress on the human self as a person generates an account of identity as constituted by relations with other persons. These relations are properly marked by freedom, action and love.

3. The importance of a community of friendship is to be understood not in terms of its instrumental value but as an end in itself.

4. Religion must be represented as a vital element of community life, particularly the Hebraic religion as taught by Jesus. At its best, it is this-worldly, political and international.

Each of these themes was central to Macmurray’s philosophy as it took shape from the 1920s onwards and was expounded for about half a century of teaching and writing in Oxford, London and Edinburgh. During the same period, we find Scottish theologians with matching concerns and convictions.

The dissatisfaction with Cartesianism and its influence upon the Christian tradition can be found in several writers, perhaps most notably in John Baillie who returned from New York to the Chair of Divinity in Edinburgh in 1934. In *Our Knowledge of God* (1939), Baillie claims that the self is always situated within the world of material things and human society. It does not precede
or transcend the world, nor can it be abstracted from it. Recalling William Temple’s famous remark that the assertion of the *cogito ergo sum* was perhaps the most disastrous moment in the history of Europe, Baillie states that ‘Only in the knowledge of what is other than myself am I able to rise to the knowledge of my existence at all’.¹

An interest in personalism is also a marked concern of several other Scottish theological writers. Ronald Gregor Smith, SCM secretary and later Divinity Professor in Glasgow, produced the English translation of Martin Buber’s *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*) in 1937. In the preface, he notes that already in independence from continental writers, ‘Professor John Macmurray has developed the thesis of the ultimate reality of personal relation in its application to theories of the State, of marriage, of family life, and of economics’.² Gregor Smith’s own writings display an interest in an account of the human being that is personal, existential and historical. To cite another example, John Macquarrie, a colleague of Gregor Smith in Glasgow before his translation to chairs in New York and then Oxford, devoted a section to personalism in his discussion of *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought*. In this context, Macquarrie claims that Macmurray was the one personalist who had sought to provide a proper philosophical account of the person unlike the more poetic and prophetic utterances of thinkers like Buber and Berdyaev.³

A concern with community is also apparent in much mid-twentieth century Scottish theology. In large measure, this may be a result of the ecumenical enthusiasm that stimulated much greater concentration on the subject of the church than had been the case in previous generations. From the Edinburgh conference of 1910 onwards, the modern ecumenical movement aspired towards a union of the major confessional bodies. Within this context, ecclesiology became a stronger focus of theological study. Donald Baillie, brother of John, held the chair of systematic theology in St Andrews. His study *God Was in Christ* (1946) is probably the most widely discussed work by any Scottish theologian of the last century. In the epilogue dedicated to ecclesiology, Baillie offers the image of the church as a dancing community gathered in a circle facing inwards to a common centre. Macmurray, who believed ritual to be more important to the community of faith than doctrine, must surely have approved of this image.

The importance of religion to politics is also a feature of much Scottish theological thought from the late 1930s onwards, although one can find this already in the work of the Scottish idealists and others in the late Victorian period. Donald Smith in his study *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest* tells of how the Scottish churches shifted from political and economic quietism in the early nineteenth century to a more critical, engaged form of social theology after about 1870. In this respect, both Macmurray and his theological contemporaries drank from the same well. Nevertheless in the years following the Great War, Scottish church life largely turned away from wider socio-political issues. The drive towards Presbyterian church reunion expended large amounts of energy. This was accompanied by a campaign to build churches in areas of new housing, and more negatively by a hostile and misguided campaign against Irish Catholic immigration. There was little here of the radicalism of Macmurray’s vision. However, by the late 1930s a new generation of thinkers including John Baillie, Archie Craig, J.H. Oldham and George Macleod had emerged. The Oxford ecumenical conference of 1937 on ‘Church, Community and State’, which Macmurray attended, had called for a more active Christian role in the struggle for economic and social justice, particularly with reference to racial minorities. This was also the most significant time for the Christian Left, a movement in which Macmurray played a leading role. Later he would become involved with George Macleod in the founding of the Iona Community.

All this suggests the consonance of Macmurray’s philosophical work with the concerns of the Scottish churches and their theologians by the late 1930s. Yet it is somewhat surprising in light of this not to find more evidence of a stronger and more direct influence. Given the baleful effect of logical positivism and linguistic philosophy upon theological pursuits, one might expect a British philosopher more favourably disposed towards religious thought, organisation and activity to have had more devoted theological followers than Macmurray gathered. His active involvement in the SCM auxiliary in the 1930s, moreover, would have brought him into contact with a whole generation of Scottish church leaders and theologians. Why then did his work not create a greater impact than appears to have been the case?

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While there are scattered references to his writings in several places, there is little evidence of sustained engagement let alone intellectual discipleship. For example, although John Baillie dutifully records in his later books his significant measure of agreement with Macmurray one is left with the impression that they have arrived at similar conclusions by different routes.\(^6\) There is always a qualification in almost everything Baillie states about Macmurray which makes one wonder how close they were despite their intellectual affinities and professional proximity in Edinburgh. Was Macmurray too fierce a critic of the institutional church for the comfort of Scottish divines? Did Baillie find Macmurray frustratingly elusive and lacking conviction on the question of God? Was there an anxiety about theology being reduced only to a set of ethical and political commitments? Baillie considers Macmurray’s famous dictum that ‘all meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship’.\(^7\) He comments, ‘All this is very like what I myself have been saying; and I agree with it all, if by action is meant…the total response of our spirits…to the universal reality with which we are confronted, human and divine. Perhaps this is what Professor Macmurray has in mind, although I do not think it is what Marx had in mind’.\(^8\) Even while acknowledging this convergence, Baillie is curiously cautious in his endorsement of Macmurray. He puzzles over the intention of this dictum, but there is little hint of any actual conversation or exchange between these two Edinburgh professors that might have resolved the issue.

In his biography of Macmurray, Costello registers his surprise that Macmurray never become a member of the Moot, a think-tank of leading Christian intellectuals organised by J. H. Oldham in 1938. The Moot included some of Macmurray’s associates such as Karl Mannheim, the aforementioned John Baillie and latterly Donald MacKinnon; it would have been a natural habitat for Macmurray, especially given the consonance of its agenda with many of his preoccupations. Although, according to Costello, Macmurray’s absence from the Moot is difficult to explain, it is consistent at any rate with his tendency to remain outside all institutional groupings of an ecclesiastical sort.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber, 1957), 15.

\(^8\) *The Sense of the Presence of God*, op. cit., 152.

\(^9\) See John E. Costello, *John Macmurray: A Biography* (Edinburgh: Floris, 2002), 286. Discussions with Keith Clements, biographer of J. H. Oldham, suggest that Macmurray was never invited to join although he exercised some influence on the group’s deliberations. There is no record in the hitherto unpublished papers of the
The consequent lack of sustained interaction with theologians and church leaders may have limited his influence.

In assessing Macmurray’s impact, moreover, one is also struck by his intellectual isolation even within the academy. Dorothy Emmet remarks upon this from her experience of studying under Macmurray in Oxford in the 1920s. It seems also to have marked his later work in Edinburgh. His philosophy appeared too angular, definite and yet lacking in sustained interaction with classical sources and contemporary trends to be easily mapped within the discipline. Peter Heath, one of his Edinburgh colleagues, comments upon the absence in Macmurray of any clear-cut philosophical ancestry and obvious allegiances in the subject.10

A further possible cause of Macmurray’s failure to influence younger scholars may have been the lack of dialogical interaction with his students. This seems to have become more marked in his later years, as Costello also notes. ‘When queried or challenged, Macmurray would usually just restate his view. This feature of his seminar style added a slightly cynical dimension to the impression of him being more of a religious prophet proclaiming eternal truth than a university teacher for whom the truth was something to be worked out collaboratively and by approximations’.11 This also resonates with the views of John Hick in his personal reminiscences of Macmurray as a teacher and philosopher.12

One might also attribute a failure on the part of some Scottish theologians to interact more fully with local thinkers and movements. As a consequence of education at one or more of the leading centres in Europe (Göttingen, Marburg, Tübingen, Basel or Zürich), there was a preoccupation with German-language theology in mid-twentieth century Scottish theology. The work of Barth, Bultmann and Bonhoeffer receives far more attention in their writings than does that of British writers, perhaps also creating some detachment from the socio-political context in which they worked. Only Donald Baillie with his interest in Anglican theology may be regarded as a partial exception, although his writings too seldom register the historical setting in which they were produced.

In view of all this, it is striking to note that the most marked influence of

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Moot of any invitation being extended to Macmurray. The papers are held in the New College Library, Edinburgh.

10 Costello, 311.
11 Costello, 310.
John Macmurray is to be found in the work of T.F. Torrance, who held the Chair of Christian Dogmatics in Edinburgh from 1952–79. Torrance is widely regarded as a leading exponent of Karl Barth in the English-speaking world. His early study of Barth and supervision of the translation of the *Church Dogmatics* place him among the foremost interpreters of Barth’s work. Noted for his Reformed stress on the sovereign grace of God and his reinvigoration of the classical Christian doctrines, together with a tendency to political conservatism, Torrance seems an unlikely ally of Macmurray. Yet his writings from the 1960s onwards are replete with references to his older philosophical colleague. These reveal a borrowing from Macmurray’s work that has seldom been properly recognised by recent studies of Torrance. (This applies also to the teaching of his brother James B. Torrance who had studied as an undergraduate philosophy student under Macmurray in Edinburgh and later held the Chair of Systematic Theology in Aberdeen from 1976–89.) How is this to be explained?

Although a follower of Barth, Torrance sought to position theology in relation to other disciplines, particularly the natural sciences. In recent scientific advances, he discerned a methodology that resonated with that of classical Christian thought. The mediating influences here are John Macmurray and Michael Polanyi. This is particularly evident in his 1969 publication on *Theological Science*. The constant tilting at the deleterious patterns of dualist thought is redolent of Macmurray’s work, particularly the subject-object split. The claim, presented tirelessly, that the mode of knowledge must be appropriate to the nature of the object as it discloses itself to us, is again drawn largely from Macmurray. He writes, ‘It is Professor Macmurray’s contention that knowledge in action is our primary knowledge, for the knowing Self is an agent having his existence in time where he is active both in pre-scientific and in scientific knowledge’.13 Torrance goes on to assert that a new logical form of personal activity ‘may be developed in which the theory of knowledge occupies a subordinate place within actual knowledge, and in which verification involves commitment in action’.14 In theological terms, what this means for Torrance is that the knowledge of God is always and only shaped in a life of faith and obedience to the divine Word that becomes incarnate. The strongly realist cast of this theology is here reinforced by epistemological arguments that derive from Macmurray. It is also linked to an anthropological that insists upon the embodiedness and

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14 Ibid., 4.
sociality of human life, themes that are strongly Hebraic and that also find support in Macmurray’s writings.

Commentators on Torrance have often stressed the influence upon his thought of patristic writers, especially Athanasius, of John Calvin and the other Reformers, and of modern scientific thinkers such as Clerk Maxwell and Einstein. But if this reading of his writings on theological science is correct then we have to reckon with more local influences, particularly that of John Macmurray. Torrance himself offered a glowing eulogy to Macmurray after his death in 1975, describing him as the ‘quiet giant of modern philosophy, the most original and creative of savants and social thinkers in the English-speaking world’. We do not have to agree with these sentiments to recognise Torrance’s indebtedness to and affection for his philosophical colleague.

On the other hand, Macmurray would hardly have endorsed the uses to which Torrance put his work. He was generally critical of Karl Barth’s theology with its dialectical shape. The defence of classical Christian doctrine was never high on his agenda. Writing about God, particularly towards the end of his Gifford Lectures, Macmurray became elusive, almost agnostic. Living out-with any institutional religion, he had decisively abandoned the Calvinism of his upbringing in the north east of Scotland. His intellectual world generally seems far removed from that of Torrance.

All this may provide confirmation of a more general thesis about Macmurray. The force and enduring value of his work lie in its suggestive rather than its systematic quality. He is a writer who stimulates ideas and fresh vision for scholars in a variety of fields. His influence is more apparent outside than inside the professional guild of philosophers. Attempts to develop his philosophy can often be frustrating but his work yields arresting insights, conceptual resources, and important connections that continue to be valuable in several disciplines. This should be recognised as applying to theology in Scotland even if an identifiable group of Macmurrrians can nowhere be discerned.

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15 Quoted by Jack Costello in David Fergusson & Nigel Dower (eds), *John Macmurray: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 34.
In several of his discussions on science and art Macmurray refers to the role of the ‘second person’ in the grammatical sense of that term. One claim in particular that he makes on art and the second person is on the face of it plain false. Here I shall expound the claim, say why it looks wrong, and then seek to defend it, at least the spirit of it if not the precise wording. Macmurray’s claim is presented by him in the context of a contrast that he maintains throughout his writings between science and art and my approach will therefore be by way of a consideration of that contrast.

Science first. Properly written scientific papers have a distinctive rhetoric, one element of which is their impersonality. The paper should reveal nothing about what kind of person the scientist is, what he feels about anything, what his particular likes and dislikes are, not even whether he loves the science he writes about or enjoyed performing the experiments that underpin his paper. He is therefore present in the paper as an impersonal person. All that matters is that he has performed the experiments he claims to have performed, has done the extrapolations according to due procedures, and has drawn appropriate conclusions. Since the scientist is an impersonal person it is fitting that the rhetoric of his papers should be marked by an ‘un-self-consciousness’. The presence of the self in the paper would be an intrusion, a rhetorical impropriety.

It might be thought that sometimes scientists should have an explicit presence in their papers for they are observers and in some scientific contexts the question of the effect of an observer’s observation on the behaviour of what he is observing is a serious one. Surely then it is appropriate for the paper to include reference to the scientific observer if his observing makes a difference to the experimental result. Nevertheless even in such cases the self is not given space. What is reported in the paper is the effect of observational apparatus on the things to be observed, and that is to say nothing about the scientist himself, only about the effect of the measuring instrument on what is to be measured. What affects the behaviour of molecules in a gas chamber is not after all the visual perception of the scientist but the instrumentation he has deployed to
measure that behaviour. Furthermore, even if there were contexts in which the scientist’s visual perception had an effect on the behaviour of what was being observed it is only as observer and not as a person, an individual with intellect and will and feelings, that the scientific observer is relevant to his paper. And in any case, it would be as an observer tout court, not as that observer in particular, that he would be relevant. For any observer would do equally well. That individual scientist in respect of his individuality is irrelevant. The rationale for the rhetoric of impersonality in scientific papers is quite plain. It is based on what goes on in the real world of scientific research. It is a rhetorical feature of scientific papers that precisely matches the actual performance of the scientist, that element in his performance that counts as doing science.

Another aspect of the rhetorical performance of the scientist should here be noted. Not only is his paper impersonal, so also is the readership at which it is aimed. The scientist must have a readership in mind, for why else publish if not to make his work available to a reader? But to whom in particular? The short answer is that it does not matter who the intended reader is; the scientist has not written the paper for some person in particular, even if the paper is a response to one written by some other scientist and even if he expects to prompt a responding scientific paper from that other scientist. Such exchanges happen often enough in the scientific literature, but they do not turn the exchange into a personal exchange. Impersonality is maintained on both sides. The situation is comparable to an exchange between two people, utter strangers to each other, each of whom is seeking information from the other and nothing more. That the interchange is between two persons does not of itself imply that it is personal. For that, they would have to be responding to each other in a personal way, such that for each the significance of the interchange is a product not only of what is being said but also of the personal relations between the persons who are saying it. If the traveller informs the booking clerk of his intended destination and the clerk informs the traveller of the best way to reach that destination, their exchange, though significant for each, is not in the least significant because of the personal relations between the speakers. The traveller does not care who the clerk is, for the clerk matters to him solely as a source of information that he wants to receive; and likewise the clerk does not care who the traveller is; he has received information from the traveller and it is his job to supply information in return. That is all that the relation amounts to. Scientists engaged in exchanges in the pages of a scientific journal are similarly engaged in communicating impersonally with an impersonal recipient. There is, then, a sense in which scientific rhetoric rejects
both the first person and the second, and recognises the reality only of the third person, the ‘it’ which is the subject matter of the scientific research. That is, it is of no significance who the scientist is, nor who the reader is, and solely of significance what scientific proposition is being propounded and how it is being defended.

How does the scientist’s performance in respect of first and second person compare with the artist’s? I might be talking to a friend about a joyous occasion. I speak lyrically about the event and as the purple phrases roll out, I start to relive the occasion in my imagination. By this point I could be speaking to anyone. The identity of the audience has lost significance because I am entranced by what I recollect. I am disclosing my feelings, my likes and dislikes, to my friend; but by this point the listener is a cypher – anyone could have been the recipient of my disclosures. In this sense my audience is impersonal, as is the readership of the scientific paper. But I am not impersonal as the scientist is; quite the contrary, my feelings about the world are to the fore in my narration. My narration is an exercise in self-revelation. It is directed to whomsoever will listen and is in no way part of an exercise in mutuality by which my self-revelation is matched by that of the person to whom I am communicating.

This kind of discourse is, according to Macmurray, a model for the artistic performance. The artist pours himself into his work, discloses himself in his products. But for whom? What to say about the second person? Macmurray replies:

[T]he second person is generalised to a listener, negative and receptive, and tends to fade out of the picture and become hypothetical and imaginary. The artist can write his description for anyone to read, or paint his picture for anyone to see. He gives himself, not to anyone in particular, but to the world at large.\(^1\)

Elsewhere Macmurray presents a position that seems hardly if at all different:

In aesthetic reflection, we may say, the second person is intentionally excluded. The “you” cannot, of course, be excluded as a matter of fact, for the “I” is constituted by his relation to the “You”, but he can

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\(^1\) Reason and Emotion (London: Faber and Faber 1962), 154
be excluded by a limitation of attention. The second person, excluded from attention, is not abolished, but he is not individualized. He is, as it were, treated as a negligible constant. The artist’s activity is one of expression; it is not complete until its product is exhibited, or at least externalized in a form which can be exhibited, to other people. Expression implies exhibition, and exhibition implies communication. But the communication is not to another person to whom the artist stands in a personal relation. It is to a public; to anyone who has the interest to accept and the ability to understand it.2

On this account the scientist is both unlike the artist and also like him; unlike him insofar as the scientist does not in the least represent his own feelings and like him insofar as both communicate to an impersonal recipient. Scientist and artist are citizens in the Republic of Letters, putting their ideas into the public domain to be taken up by whomsoever has the intellect and will to make something of them. Precisely who takes up the ideas is not part of the story about the scientific or artistic performance and the second person to whom scientist and artist direct their product is therefore in that sense an impersonal person.

From the foregoing there follows a consequence of the greatest importance to Macmurray, namely that artist and scientist, qua artist and scientist, lead incomplete lives. As Macmurray affirms: ‘the “I” is constituted by his relation to the “You”’. What is required to complete their lives are other selves, persons with whom they are in personal relations, and with whom they are bound in fellowship or communion. To re-activate the model of a conversation, communion is expressed in two people for whom the conversation they are having has significance not only on account of its ideational content but also on account of the fact of communion, friends each of whom is enjoying the conversation partly because it is with this friend that he is having it. Of course the content of the conversation is significant for each. They attend to what is being said and respond appropriately. But something else is in play, namely the friendship of which the conversation is in part an expression. For each, then, to deploy Macmurray’s terminology, the second person is not ‘generalised to a listener, negative and receptive’; he is not, in respect of his individuality, ‘excluded by a limitation of attention’. Macmurray’s contention is that an artist giving a performance, whether painting a picture, writing

2 Persons in Relation (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 179
a novel, or giving a musical performance, and so on, is not like someone in conversation with a friend, for the latter case exemplifies communion and in the former, artistic case there is no role for communion.

Though I agree with Macmurray’s position, I also think that it needs to be protected against possible lines of argument that Macmurray does not explicitly consider. In short there are what might be construed as counter-examples, cases of artistic performance in which communion enters in a significant way into their nature. As an approach-route to these cases I should like to emphasise the point that there are cases, manifestly compatible with Macmurray’s doctrine, in which artistic performances are also expressive of communion or fellowship.

Two people performing a duet are not, qua duo, simply playing to an audience; each of the players is also an audience, listening to the other performer and responding, in respect of timbre, speed, expression, and so on. This has to happen if there is to be any sense of ensemble in the performance. As such they are behaving exactly like friends having a conversation. The music is a vehicle for communication, indeed for communion, with each duetist playing with the other and to the other, to enjoy each other’s friendship and also to enjoy the music. Since the performance of each is an act of self-disclosure, both of intellect and feeling, seeking and securing a corresponding act by another friendly spirit, this situation, which is the norm in performances by chamber groups, is surely not to be understood as in conflict with Macmurray’s affirmation that the artist’s communication ‘is not to another person to whom the artist stands in a personal relation’.

A plausible way forward is to say that in a sense there is here really just a single performer, namely the duo. For though each duetist is performing it is not true that each is giving a performance; there is only one performance being given and that is by the two players who are conjointly playing the one piece of music. In that case if the performance has an audience, the listeners to (or for) whom the duo are playing are a ‘second person’ in relation to the duo which is the first person. This latter audience is what Macmurray identifies as a ‘second person, excluded from attention, not abolished, but not individualized’. It would be disastrous if each duetist, in Macmurray’s words, ‘gives himself, not to anyone in particular, but to the world at large’, ‘disastrous’ because each duetist has in reality to give himself to the other duetist. But the sense of ensemble is unaffected if the duo as a unitary music-maker ‘gives itself, not to anyone in particular, but to the world at large’, so that ‘the second person (viz. the audience) is generalised to a listener, negative and receptive,
and tends to fade out of the picture and become hypothetical and imaginary'. Macmurray’s statement: ‘The artist can write his description for anyone to read, or paint his picture for anyone to see’ applies equally well if the artist at issue is a musical duo, making that sound for anyone to hear, ‘anyone who has the interest to accept and the ability to understand it’. It is evident therefore that a given kind of case can involve mutuality while at the same time involving an impersonal second person.

Macmurray pays close attention to the role of conversation in our lives; it is at the heart of fellowship. There is hardly any better way of expressing or enjoying communion than through conversation in which two people reveal themselves to each other in friendship; not in enmity for then people tend to concealment not disclosure, but in friendship. I think it appropriate to see musical ensemble playing as a kind of conversation, the best kind, in which persons in relation express intellect, feeling and will in mutual giving and receiving. Nevertheless, as we now see, that is compatible with Macmurray’s account of an audience as generalised and not considered in its individuality. Do we have to tell a different story about a soloist in relation to an audience? Where is the mutuality there? Macmurray writes plainly about this: ‘The artist wants to give, not to receive; so that mutuality is lost, and his experience, though it remains intensely personal, is one-sided, has lost part of the fullness of personal experience. Knowledge there is, and the pouring out of knowledge, which is self-expression, but not mutuality’. And yet this does not seem quite right. For while audiences do of course respond to a performer, a performer responds to the audiences; as is well-known, performances in the presence of audiences tend to have a vivacity and intensity less easily achieved in recording sessions when there is no audience. In this sense there is a giving by the performer but there is also a receiving from the audience that enhances the aesthetic merit of the performance. In such a case the audience is not to be classed as ‘not abolished but not individualised’. The performer is responding, not to an abstraction, but to that audience, an individual whose appreciation, whose values and expectations the artist senses and to which he responds in his performance.

A related kind of case concerns the art of the orator. Classical writings on the art attend to the orator’s need to know his audience, know both what he has to say and also how he has to say it in order to secure the main effect that he is aiming at. As soon as he starts to speak he must respond to his audience

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3 *Reason and Emotion*, 154
and throughout his speech he takes account of its response to him (even where they are not heckling). There is therefore a kind of mutuality here, a giving and a receiving by each side, orator and audience. If this mutuality is lost then so is the orator’s prospect of speaking effectively. On the other hand, as quoted earlier, Macmurray affirms: ‘The artist can write his description for anyone to read, or paint his picture for anyone to see. He gives himself, not to anyone in particular, but to the world at large’. This surely cannot be a correct account of the art practised by the orator. He has a job to do. He faces an audience in all its individuality, with its likes and dislikes, its prejudices, its grasp of affairs, and there is something of which he has to persuade it. If he talks to his audience as if it were the world at large, talks to this audience as if it were just any audience, he is incompetent at the art he seeks to practise.

I turn now to the art of musical composition. Is it of the nature of the art that the composer is creating for an audience qua ‘second person, excluded from attention, not abolished, but not individualized’? Perhaps there are many cases where this is exactly what happens but there are also cases where arguably it is not. For example, Wagner wrote the *Siegfried Idyll* for his wife Cosima, and to be performed for her on the morning of her birthday. *Siegfried Idyll* was not written for publication. It was written for her as the audience and was therefore to be a piece he knew she would love. Of course in this case the audience is not really present since the audience for whom Wagner wrote the piece was not listening to the piece while it was being composed and was therefore an intentional object, not a real one. But arguably the audience was not the less individual for having intentional rather than real existence. It was after all the individual Cosima who was intended both as the audience and in other ways also as the recipient of the work. By the same token there is not in this case the mutuality that often characterises the relation between a performer, whether instrumentalist, actor, dancer or orator, and so on, and the audience; yet there is a sort of mutuality, even if only an intentional one, existing in the mind of the composer, who is being responsive to the known likes and dislikes of the intended audience.

These disparate cases have at least this much in common, that the second person is not ‘generalised to a listener, negative and receptive’, but on the contrary is in one way or another in a relation of mutuality with the artist, where the response of the audience to the artist’s performance affects the

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4 It was written in 1870 and first performed on Christmas day of that year, Cosima’s thirty third birthday. Wagner sold the score in 1877 when he was under financial pressure. The work was published in the following year.
content of the performance. This is mutuality of a quite strong kind. This fact is surely in conflict with Macmurray's affirmation – I quote once more: 'the second person is generalised to a listener, negative and receptive, and tends to fade out of the picture and become hypothetical and imaginary. The artist can write his description for anyone to read, or paint his picture for anyone to see. He gives himself, not to anyone in particular, but to the world at large'. Hence, despite Macmurray's claim that for both the artist and the scientist the second person is impersonal, it seems that while for the scientist the second person is indeed impersonal this is not necessarily true as regards the artist. Nevertheless, though it is possible to interpret Macmurray's words in such a way that he is simply wrong in his claim about the artist's performance in relation to the second person, it is also possible to deflect from him the kind of criticism that I have just been developing. I should like now to show how.

I hazard a guess that in most cases painters produce works for a generalised spectatorship. Perhaps sometimes they have in mind someone in particular who they hope will be pleased with the work. But even if they have no such person in mind their work will not necessarily suffer from this fact. And even if a painter does have such a person in mind and even if the thought of that person's likes and dislikes regarding painting has an effect on the painter's performance this does not imply mutuality of the kind that Macmurray has in mind. He is writing about two people who are equally real to each other, present to each other, and are responding to each other. In the case of the painter affected by a particular person's feelings, it is the painter's imagination that is doing all the work. He paints according to what he imagines the person's response will be to the finished product. The person the painter has in mind is not really responding to anything because he is not really there. Here we recall Macmurray's phrase concerning the second person, that he 'tends to fade out of the picture and become hypothetical and imaginary'. Thus, to employ medieval terminology, this spectator has esse intentionale rather than esse naturale – existence as an object of thought rather than as an object in the real world. This point applies to the case of the Siegfried Idyll, for though there is mutuality of a sort, it is intentional and not real, since Wagner was responding to what he imagined Cosima's response would be if she heard what he was composing. He is responding to her and she is responding to him, but this mutuality is taking place only in Wagner's head, and is therefore not a counter-example to Macmurray's position.

The case of the orator is different and demands a different sort of response. For where the orator is responding to the audience's response to him there is a
real mutuality in the performance and in this case the situation is similar to that of the members of a duo. The product of the mutuality is a speech to which the audience made a contribution. If they did not make a contribution, then they might as well not have been there. We have to say in this case that even if the orator was doing most of the work, perhaps almost all of it, it is not quite true that he is the sole begetter of the product. This is not of course to ascribe rhetorical skill to the audience as well as to the speaker—the audience after all may not have said anything. It is merely to say that we are here dealing with a case of real mutuality. Suppose that the orator had not attended to what he believed to be the feelings of the audience, so that there was no real mutuality, the orator might all the same have made a speech and it might have been a good one, though perhaps less good as a work of art—for the artistic merit of a speech is to be judged at least in part in terms of its appropriateness with regard to the audience at whom it is directed. It follows that a speech does not need to be the product of mutuality to be a work of art, even if the speech might have been a better work of art if mutuality had contributed something to it. Likewise with other works of art, such as a violinist’s performance to an empty recording studio. The performance might have been better if there had been an audience, but the performance is not any the less a work of art for the audience being a ‘second person’ which is ‘hypothetical and imaginary’.

It follows that where the artist is being responsive to his audience a distinction can be made between that in the performance which goes to make it an artistic performance and that in it which goes to compose the mutuality of the relation between performer and audience. The actual performance is a synthesis of these things and we identify them by a process of analysis. In cases where there is no real audience to whom the performer is responding, the performer, as Macmurray says, has in mind no more than a ‘hypothetical and imaginary’ audience. That is all that is needed by the artist. In this respect he is just like the scientist, who directs his papers at a ‘hypothetical and imaginary’ readership. The scientist has in mind readers who can understand and evaluate his papers—that is all he needs to know about the readership—just as a violinist plays for an audience who can understand and evaluate his performance. That is all he needs from his audience. Hence, in describing the scientific and the artistic performance there is no need to invoke the mutuality of fellowship or communion. That is Macmurray’s claim and I hope to have shown here that certain cases that appear to be counter-examples to the claim are after all no such thing.
In this paper I am going to look at the views of one of John Macmurray’s contemporaries, Maurice O’Connor Drury, an Englishman born of Irish parents who spent nearly half his natural life and most of his professional life in Ireland (where he worked as a psychiatrist) and whose interests and concerns overlap in several suggestive and instructive ways with those of Macmurray. Both are concerned about what we may call the ‘mental science project’—that is, with the attempt to give a scientific account of the mind and mental illness, with a view to developing scientifically validated classifications, explanations and therapies. There are also suggestive and instructive differences between these two thinkers. At a turning point in the paper I will draw attention to what seems to me a particular difficulty—a conceptual conundrum, indeed—in Drury’s work, but one that can, I believe, be resolved with the aid of an illuminating idea from the thought of John Macmurray.

Maurice O’Connor Drury: Wittgenstein’s Protégé

Maurice O’Connor Drury was born of Irish parents in Marlborough, in Wiltshire, on 3 July 1907. He attended Grammar School in Exeter and seems to have become interested in philosophy while still at school. After finishing at Exeter, he went to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1926, where he took the Moral Science Tripos; his tutors included G.E. Moore and C.D. Broad, and most notably Wittgenstein, whom he first encountered in 1929, through the Moral Science Club. Wittgenstein’s influence on Drury was strong enough to warrant his being called Drury’s mentor, and Wittgenstein would later remark that it was his influence on Drury that gave him most satisfaction. He advised Drury against pursuing a career in either the church or the academy, and was successful on both counts, though Drury showed more independence of mind than one might expect from a Wittgensteinian protégé. After taking his degree at Cambridge in 1931, Drury told Wittgenstein that he was thinking of going to Westcott House, the Church of England Theological College in Cambridge,
with a view to taking Anglican orders. Wittgenstein immediately warned him against this course of action, telling him that the clerical collar would choke him. (See Rush Rhees, 1981: 116). Initially, Drury ignored Wittgenstein’s counsel, and went to Westcott House. After a year there, however, he changed his mind and decided that a clerical career was not for him after all. Following a further piece of advice from Wittgenstein—that he should put himself for a while among ordinary people—he went off and did voluntary work with unemployed groups in Tyneside and Merthyr Tydfil. It was during this period of voluntary work that Drury had his first thoughts of a career in psychiatry. When he wrote to Wittgenstein to tell him of this development in his thinking, Wittgenstein immediately sent him a telegram, more or less ordering him back to Cambridge to begin his medical studies immediately. When Drury arrived back in Cambridge, he found that Wittgenstein had already organized a loan from friends of his for the financing of Drury’s medical education. Wittgenstein and Drury together decided, after reading prospectuses from a number of medical schools, that Drury should study at Trinity College, Dublin. This Drury did. He enrolled at Trinity in 1933, beginning a professional career in medicine and later in psychiatry. He qualified as a doctor in 1939 and, following the declaration of war, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps, and was first posted to Egypt. He later took part in the Normandy landings.

After demobilization, Drury worked for a while as a house physician in a hospital in Taunton, before finally, in 1947, taking up a position as Resident Psychiatrist in St. Patrick’s Hospital in Dublin, eventually becoming Senior Consultant Psychiatrist. This was the same year in which Wittgenstein gave up his post at Cambridge and came to Ireland to write. Wittgenstein was no stranger to Ireland, having first visited there when Drury was a medical student. As early as 1934, we find Wittgenstein travelling across Ireland to live for a while in a cottage in Rosro, near Killary Harbour in Connemara—a holiday cottage that belonged to Drury’s brother, Miles. When Wittgenstein came to Ireland again in the late forties, he depended largely on Drury to find him places of residence, and also relied on him for companionship. It was through Drury, for example, that he found accommodation in the village of Redcross in Co. Wicklow. He wanted a quiet place in which to do intensive work, having brought with him the draft typescripts of both the Philosophical Investigations and the first volume of the Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, and it looked at first sight as if this farmhouse would be ideal. When the Wicklow farmhouse didn’t prove entirely to Wittgenstein’s liking, it was Drury again who arranged for him to return to the Rosro cottage, which
he found more satisfactory, and where he stayed for several months. Later in the year, Drury advised him against spending the winter in Connemara, and we find Wittgenstein booking himself into a room at the top of Ross’s Hotel in Dublin, now the Ashling Hotel. He spent the winter of 1948 there, meeting Drury almost every day—they often had lunch together at Bewley’s Café in Grafton St.—and he stayed on at the hotel until June of the following year. He was not very well during these months of 1949, and one has the impression that by the time he comes to leave the hotel—and Dublin and Ireland—that he has come to the end of his last active period as a philosopher. A diagnosis of prostate cancer was made later that year and he would die two years later, in 1951. In that same year, Drury married the matron of St Patrick’s Hospital, Eileen Stewart. In 1969 he was promoted to senior Consultant Psychiatrist at St Patrick’s. Among the projects he worked on in his later career was a book on hypnosis—he had come to believe that hypnosis could be useful in treating phobic disorders—but the book was never published. He died in Dublin on 25 December 1976.

**Against Method: Drury and the Mental Science Project**

Given the length of time that Drury spent in Wittgenstein’s company, given the esteem in which he held Wittgenstein, and given the notoriously dominating nature of Wittgenstein’s personality, it is to be expected that he would leave his mark on Drury’s thinking, including Drury’s thinking about his own profession, psychiatry. Despite his behaviouristic conception of the relationship between mind and body, Wittgenstein had raised serious doubts over the possibility of a psychological science. We find this doubt expressed every-where in Drury’s writing, especially in *The Danger of Words*. This book has been described by Ray Monk in *The Duty of Genius* (1990) as ‘the most truly Wittgensteinian book published by any of Wittgenstein’s students’ (264). I will be suggesting, however, that, despite the impact that Wittgenstein had on his life and mind, Drury’s perspective is not consistently Wittgensteinian and that in one important respect it could be said to be anti-Wittgensteinian.

Drury’s guiding intuition is that psychology is not and cannot be a science like physics or chemistry. The reason for this difference between the subject-matter of psychology and that of the sciences does not have to do with the greater complexity of the human psyche or personality but with something altogether more significant. Those areas and aspects of experience that make
up the psychological life of an individual are, by their very nature, not available for exact observation or, indeed, observation of any kind. Psychology and psychiatry, insofar as they purport to treat the individual in all her uniqueness and peculiarity, cannot hope to arrive at a universal method, since such a method is not designed to detect or register those very features that make individuals peculiarly themselves. The more one attempts to apply general categories—such as ‘introvert’ or ‘extrovert’—to human beings, the more their individuality is ignored and diminished. What is of the deepest concern to the therapist especially is not universals but particulars—not general categories of classification but particular persons with particular personalities and particular problems arising out of particular personal, social, and historical circumstances (1973: 35). The closer the therapist gets to the person-as-patient the less methodic or ‘scientific’ will be her understanding of him. The more indeed she will tend to find the patient to be enigmatic and in a certain sense ‘un-understandable’. This sense of the ‘un-understandable’ does not indicate some kind of failure on the part of the therapist but rather a kind of success—an effective recognition and appreciation of the irreducible and inalienable individuality of the patient-as-person.

The mentally ill person should be seen, on Drury’s view, as even more of an enigma than the ‘normal’ individual. No advance in treatment or theory can alter the fact that there will always be a mystery about mental ill-health that will make it different from any disease of the body (1973: 89). This hidden inwardness is the rock on which a scientific and objective psychology will come to grief: ‘The truth is that we human beings are not meant to study each other as objects of scientific scrutiny, but to see each other as an individual subject that evolves according to its own laws’ (1973: 43). If a scientific approach cannot enable us to ‘know’ each other when we are in good mental health, neither can it help us to ‘know’ each other when mental ill-health befalls one or other of us. Every mentally ill person is indeed ‘an individual enigma’, and should not be approached as anything less. In other words, he or she should not be approached with a reductive, objectifying, de-personalizing technical terminology. Method in such circumstances is anathema. One of the dangers of words, especially technical, objective, methodical words, is that they can all too easily be pressed into service as a way of homogenising the peculiarities they are supposed to identify and explain—as a way of ‘glossing over’ the very elusive features to which the therapist should be most attentive. For all the information the therapist may have, he still has to come to terms with the patient in a way that is not reducible to the terms of the psychological
The sort of propositional knowledge that is available to the scientist is different from the kind of ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ that the therapist must be prepared to engage in.

In an effort to clarify his position Drury introduces a distinction between ‘psychology A’ and ‘psychology B’ (1973: 37–50). Psychology A is practiced to some extent by everyone in the course of interacting with other people, and is sometimes practiced to a gifted extent by those whose long experience enables them to make insightful observations, and to have insightful responses to, the behaviour of other people. Psychology B, on the other hand, is the outcome of the effort to develop a scientific, experimental and objective psychology, to introduce standards of measurement into the observation of human behaviour. For Drury, the mental science project should not be allowed to replace psychology A, as if the latter were simply a pre-scientific, folksy, primitive version of the former. Psychology A and psychology B are incommensurable. Psychology A deals with the immeasurable, with ‘the hidden inwardness’ that is never going to be available to the practitioners of psychology B. It is erroneous to suppose that psychological science is perfecting a method that will eventually render unnecessary the clinical insight gained by long experience and informed intuition.

So determined is Drury to protect the primacy of a pre-scientific, intuitive, interpersonal psychology that he tends to mystify the individual psyche. He discusses the relationship between mind and body as an ethical as well as a metaphysical or scientific question. To make mind too understandable or too transparent, as if it could be ‘read off’ from physical behaviour or brain activity, is a morally suspect move. It is to play into the hands of those who would generally wish to objectify human beings and calculate their ratio or degree of ‘humanity’ on that objective basis. The morally preferable view here is the Socratic view that the soul is in some meaningful sense imprisoned within the body and that the individual mental life is therefore never fully available to observers, especially not to scientific observers. Even brain damage does not reduce the enigmatic nature of the individual psyche. There is in fact even more enigma in the case of brain-damaged persons. The proper Socratic view of those whose brains have been damaged should be that ‘they are shut off from us by barriers that neither we nor they can break’ (1973: 88). Drury presents the Socratic picture of the mentally handicapped person, for example, not as a hypothesis ‘but as a decision of the will, a decision of ethics where neither physiology nor any other science can come to our aid’ (89). Even to say that someone is mentally handicapped becomes problematic on such
a view. The leap from the physical to the mental will always remain—should always remain—a leap into the realm of the enigmatic, the irreducible, the inexplicable.

**Enigma and Therapy: Drury’s Problem, Macmurray’s Solution**

A problem emerges at this point in Drury’s approach. He is so determined to respect, even revere, the uniquely individual patient that he seems close to undermining his own role as professional therapist, as well as undermining the role of the psychological sciences in general. He undermines the psychological sciences by speaking as negatively as he does about the dangers of the methodic approach and the technical, scientific vocabulary. By privileging psychology A as much as he does, it is hard to see what useful information or insight can be retrieved from the methodic studies undertaken by psychology B. It is difficult to see how he can rebuild a bridge between the two psychologies, and yet it seems unreasonable to suggest that such a bridge should not exist. Clearly, as a psychiatrist, Drury did make use of therapeutic procedures that were considered ‘best practice’ among the community of psychiatrists of his era. But in his reflective or philosophical work it is hard to see where he has made a case for such procedures, so great is his antipathy to anything that objectifies or depersonalizes the patient. Drury’s motivation is commendable—he wants to protect the interiority and privacy of the patient by putting a deeply respectful distance between therapist and patient, and also between how the patient appears to the therapist and how he is, inwardly, in himself. By doing so, however, he ends up with a paradoxical result; he ends up protecting the patient from the therapist who is supposed to heal him, and so reduces the therapist, in theory at least, to revering rather than treating the patient. A theory of respect and reverence has replaced a theory of therapy and treatment.

This is where Macmurray, working with a different model of the relationship between the physical and psychological sciences, and also a different model of the internal relationships between self and body, can be interpreted as offering a solution to the conundrum posed by Drury’s approach. Significantly, Macmurray’s concept of the self-as-agent is more Wittgensteinian than Drury’s reverential, Socratic conception of the person. For Macmurray, the self is best thought of as a dynamically embodied, socially engaged agent that discovers itself from the beginning in the company of others. The defining feature of the person is not the ability to think but the ability to act intentionally, always with
reference to, and in the company of, others. This interpersonal relationship is
the primary formative human relationship, from which all others are derived.
The personal precedes the impersonal, as far as our original perception of
the world is concerned. Even our concept of a thing or object is relative and
secondary to our experience of the personal. As children we learn that a thing
is that which is not a person, that which will not come to us, that which resists
us passively, that which cannot move by itself, that which can on the other
hand serve as a means or instrument. Historically, we have had to learn to
see the world less personally, to see impersonal objects and processes where
before we saw intentional beings, such as gods and spirits, at work in nature
and the cosmos. We can also learn to see and understand ourselves and others
impersonally, and this is perfectly in order,—provided that our scientific,
impersonal knowledge is always subordinated to the norms and requirements
of our personal relationships.

Macmurray uses the example of a teacher of psychology who is visited by
a student (1970: 29–37). The encounter begins as a simple personal conver-
sation in which the teacher adopts a normal personal attitude to the student.
But as the conversation develops, the teacher notices that something is wrong,
that the student is in an abnormal state of mind, and is showing symptoms
of hysteria. At once the relationship changes. The teacher becomes a profes-
sional therapist, observing and diagnosing a case of mental disorder. In other
words, the relationship has switched from a personal to an impersonal one;
the teacher’s attitude has become impersonal, objective, scientific. The student
has ceased to be a fully intentional agent and is now being treated as ‘a prob-
lematic case’. The psychologist in the teacher is now observing the student
and asking himself, ‘What is the matter with him?’ The student’s abnormal
behaviour has itself triggered what is an abnormal attitude in the teacher.
The departure from the personal and normal is not an arbitrary change of
mind on the part of the teacher but has been necessitated by the abnormal
behaviour of the student. The abnormality in the student’s behaviour makes
the personal attitude difficult, if not impossible, to sustain. The abnormality
in question has effectively depersonalized the student, limiting his freedom,
his ability to act freely and intentionally, compromising his ability to control
certain aspects of his life and behaviour and personal relationships with oth-
ers. Behaviour that should be under rational, conscious control has become
neurotic or compulsive—has become something caused rather than something
intended. What now justifies the adoption of an impersonal attitude on the
part of the psychologist is the determination of the psychologist to restore
the student to normal health, to restore intentional control, so that once more he can enter fully into normal personal relationships. ‘The activity directed by the impersonal attitude is justified only if it falls within and is subordinated to an intention to restore the other person to normal health’ (36)—that is, ‘if it falls within and is subordinated to a personal norm’ (37). What this means is that the impersonal attitude is not an alternative to the personal one, but is the means by which the personal can be protected or restored. The personal remains primary.

The notion that the personal could be supplanted by the impersonal is mistaken; equally mistaken, though, is the notion that the impersonal attitude, as articulated in the psychological sciences, is a mortal threat to the personal attitude or the personal norm. Drury’s mistake is to assume that because the personal attitude is primary then it is always desirable and possible in every human encounter. But this is not so. Where there is mental illness, the personal attitude, including the capacity to enter into full personal relationships, may be seriously compromised. In that event, the personal is not what is natural or normal but is precisely what has been lost or distorted and that has to be achieved or restored through therapy. The kind of knowledge acquired in the psychological sciences may help in the treatment of the conditions that are threatening someone’s autonomy as a person and intentional agent. On this view, it is not science, or the use of an objective method, that necessarily depersonalizes the patient but rather the very condition that has brought the patient to the therapist in the first place. The very thing that Drury’s wants to celebrate—the enigma or mystery of the individual patient—is just what is thrown into jeopardy by illness. While the defender of Drury’s position will object that the impersonal approach always threatens the preciously unique inwardness and individuality of the patient, the defender of Macmurray’s position can claim that the real threat to inwardness, individuality, and enigmatic self-possession comes not from the impersonal approach of the therapist but from the mental illness itself. It is the mental illness that threatens the very self-possession and self-conscious agency that fortifies the inner life and gives every person the power to remain enigmatic to others.

Drury’s reverence for the enigma of the personal may be based on the conflation of two kinds of enigmatic personality—on the one hand, the kind of enigma that is the result of self-possessed intentional action, and, on the other, the kind of enigma that has involuntary causes. It is difficult, for example, to enjoy a normal personal relationship with the person who is involuntarily enigmatic due to psychosis. Such enigma is problematic for
the patient because—or at least partly because—it is problematic for those who come into contact with the patient. The same difficulty does not necessarily arise with the person who makes himself voluntarily enigmatic (by, for example, insisting on keeping certain feelings and thoughts completely private.) There is, we might say, a world of difference—a mental world of difference—between the two sorts of personal enigma. The mentally ill person is like the player at the card table who has a compulsion to show his hand, whereas the mentally healthy person is like the player who is able to keep his cards to himself, keep his intentions to himself, keep himself to himself, thus rendering himself rightly and rightfully enigmatic to others. The point of therapy, of adopting the impersonal but sympathetic method of psychological science, is (on Macmurray’s perspective) to restore to the patient the quality of self-control, self-possession, and self-conscious agency that will help preserve and promote precisely the sort—the right sort—of inwardness and individuality that Drury values so highly.

I am going to conclude with a warning, one that might be issued by a defender of Drury, a warning about the dangers of the impersonal attitude. When Macmurray writes about therapy, he does so optimistically, as if it is always successful, as if the patient is always restored to full mental health, full rational agency, and full self-control. But Drury, as a practicing psychiatrist, would have known that this is not always so, that too often people with mental illness are not cured, that their conditions are at best managed or mitigated. There is always a danger, given the intractability of some mental disorders, that some long-term patients, or people with long-term problems, will be subjected to long periods of impersonal treatment or symptom management. When this happens we get the worst kinds of institutionalization or medicalization, in which people lose all agency and autonomy. The defender of Drury’s Socratic philosophy of respect and reverence, and his suspicion of the impersonal approach, is warranted in the historical context of a profession that has not always understood the important difference between short-term therapies, in which patients are restored to full health after a limited period of impersonal treatment, and long-term treatments in which the patient is not restored to full health but rather suffers the worst consequences of a failed impersonal regime.

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Bibliography


In the threatening days of 1940, with Europe already engulfed in war, American philosopher Ruth Nanda Anshen decided that the times required a restatement of the value of freedom and she organised and edited a collection entitled *Freedom: Its Meaning*, which was published by Harcourt Brace in New York. ‘The passionate concern’ of the book was with ‘the freedom of Man, the autonomy of the rational being developing to ripe maturity and achieving self-fulfilment’.¹ And its aim was ‘to bring about a correlation of those contemporary ideas which are concerned not with sense data and logical universals, but with the status of values and the bearing of these values on conduct’.² To these ends Anshen had assembled a list of contributors that is a roll-call of the major figures of the arts and sciences of the first half of the twentieth century, including Albert Einstein, Henri Bergson, Thomas Mann, Jacques Maritain, Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell.

It is indicative of the status of Robert Morrison MacIver and John Macmurray that they too were invited to be contributors to the collection, and their inclusion is acknowledgment that they were at the forefront of what Anshen describes as the ‘synthetic clarification of modern knowledge’, one that required ‘a reinterpretation of the fundamental values of mankind’.³ The fact that these two thinkers appear in the same book indicates that they must have known something of each other’s work—though this was to be disguised from readers of the British edition, published two years later, because it has fewer than half of the contributors to the American edition and does not include MacIver’s essay. How the selection for the British edition was made is not clear, but MacIver’s omission could not have been the result of the editor’s lack of enthusiasm for his work: in 1961 Anshen not only invited him to be part of the editorial board for a new set of publications called ‘The Credo Series’—along with W. H. Aduen, Werner Heisenberg, Paul Tillich, C. P. Snow and Michael Polanyi—but also insisted, in a letter to him of April 15, 1961,

² Ibid., 2.
³ Ibid.
that ‘yours will be one of the first nine volumes to be published in the Series, the others being by Kenneth Galbraith, Erich Fromm, Werner Heisenberg, C. P. Snow, James Sweeney, Paul Tillich, René Dobos, Fred Hoyle’.4

This brief intersection of the work of two migrant Scottish thinkers—one based in London, at University College, the other at Columbia in New York—is indicative not only of the prominence of both in the Anglophone intellectual world in the mid-twentieth century, but also of how closely related are their concerns with issues of agency and moral responsibility, especially in the relation of the individual to the organisation of the modern state. For both the concept of ‘community’ provides a crucial counterpoise to the structure and power of the state. In his contribution to Freedom: Its Meaning, Macmurray insists that,

The exact difference between society and community and the proper relation between them are best recognized by reference to the intentions involved. The intention involved in society lies beyond the nexus of relation which it establishes. In community it does not. It follows that society is a means to an end, while community is an end in itself.5

This is illustrated by ‘two types of association’, the ‘partnership’, which is underpinned by a single common end and which finishes when that end is achieved or fails, and ‘friendship’, which generates new ends out of the mutual commitment of individuals to one another. The language of ‘association’ directly mirrors MacIver’s distinction in his first book, Community, first published in 1917, which proposed that ‘an association is an organisation of social beings (or a body of social beings as organised) for the pursuit of some common interest’.6 For MacIver, the distinction between society and community is based on the fact that community has no end or purpose but the development of the individuals which constitute it: ‘Community is simply common life, and that common life is more or less adequate according as it more or less completely fulfils in a social harmony the needs and personalities of its members’.7 Similarly, for Macmurray, ‘freedom can only be maintained in this nexus of human relationships by maintaining the primacy

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4 Robert Morrison MacIver, Correspondence, Box 8, Butler Library, University of Columbia.
7 Ibid., 171.
of the personal nexus of community over the functional nexus of organised society’.8

The ‘personal’, and the development of ‘personality’, is thus the fundamental ground on which the philosophies of both thinkers are built. For MacIver, community and the personal are simply two aspects of the way in which humanity has developed in history: ‘the laws of community are laws revealing the connection between the evolution of social forms and the increase of human life or personality’.9 As a consequence, the development of the communal is also the development of the personal:

Individuality and sociality are aspects of the unity of personality. The living whole is the individual person or the union of persons as community, to both of which we attribute individuality and sociality. Our thesis, therefore, takes the form that as personality develops, for each and for all, it reveals the twofold development of individuality and sociality.10

For Macmurray, too, this relation of the personal and the communal is fundamental:

...personal equality is the structural principle of relations which are communal in type, while the experience of freedom in relations is their characteristic expression. What throws the personal nexus out of gear, and so introduces constraint and limits or destroys freedom, is always a failure to achieve or maintain personal equality.11

The communal, for both thinkers, is the realm of the personal, in which people engage in relations which have no end but that of their mutual engagement, while the ‘social’ or the realm of the state is the world of instrumentality, in which people are used for ends other than that of their own ‘personality’ and the richness of its development. As MacIver puts it, ‘All values are finally personal, values of personality, and in the service of personality alone are the laws and institutions justified’.12 For both thinkers, the relationship between ‘community’ and ‘personality’ is such that ‘the widening of community is itself

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9 MacIver, *Community*, 177.
10 Ibid., 224.
12 MacIver, *Community*, 95.
one result of the growth of personality’,\textsuperscript{13} and the development of ‘personality’ is the end by which any form of state organisation has to be judged: ‘the only justification of any individualism or any socialism is the furtherance of personality which its adoption would ensure’.\textsuperscript{14} The development of the community and the person represent, for both, a single process, one which is to be distinguished from the development of the ‘individual’ and the ‘state-society’, in which relationships are based on a utilitarian identification of shared ends rather than on a mutual recognition of shared value: ‘It is in the attainment of personality, the progressive union of sociality and individuality, that community is fulfilled’.\textsuperscript{15}

Since the ‘personal’ is for both MacIver and Macmurray the realm of freedom, both are deeply concerned with the issue of agency. For MacIver, the business of sociology is defined by the fact that, ‘There is an essential difference, from the standpoint of causation, between a paper flying before the wind and a man flying from a pursuing crowd. The paper knows no fear and the wind no hate, but without fear and hate the man would not fly nor the crowd pursue’.\textsuperscript{16} MacIver’s account of the nature of the social sciences emphasises two different forms of knowledge, facts which ‘we know only from the outside’ and facts which ‘we know, in some degree at least, from the inside’:

Why did the citizens turn against the government? Why did the union call a strike? To answer these questions we must project ourselves into the situations we are investigating. We must learn the values and the aims and the hopes of human beings as they operate within a particular situation. There is no inside story of why a meteor falls or why liquid freezes.\textsuperscript{17}

The difference between the two forms of knowledge is that of agency, an agency which we understand precisely because each of us is an agent, and agents differ from physical events in having intentions: as Macmurray puts it,

The association of persons in a unity is constituted by practical relations; by the ways in which the associates \textit{act} in relation to one another.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 208.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 223.
\textsuperscript{15} MacIver, \textit{Community}, 333.
A relation of agents can never be mere matter of fact. It must be a matter of intention.\(^{18}\)

And for both the interaction of intentions and agencies requires that we distinguish the world of the personal, a world of persons, from a world of objects and events. ‘Person’, for both, designates the human being treated not as an instrument in the world but as end in itself: ‘If the whole’, MacIver insists in relation to society, ‘be such as to have an end which is realized otherwise than as the fulfilment of the ends of its parts or persons, then personality is in so far an illusion; for it rests on the being of each an end in itself, and all its striving is understandable only on the supposition that each person and the other persons for whom also he strives are ends in themselves’.\(^{19}\) For both this is the basis of the distinction between the state and the community: in society as constituted by the state, people ‘co-operate to achieve a purpose which each of them, in his own interest, desires to achieve, and which can only be achieved by co-operation’. In such a situation, however,

the relations of its members are functional; each plays his allotted part in the achievement of the common end. The society then has an organic form: it is an organization of functions; and each member is a function of the group. A community, however, is a unity of persons as persons. It cannot be defined in functional terms, by relation to a common purpose. It is not organic in structure, and cannot be constituted or maintained by organization, but only by the motives which sustain the personal relations of its members.\(^{20}\)

For MacIver, the difference between the State and the community rests on a similar distinction:

The State must, therefore, be clearly distinguished from the community which creates it. Community is the common life of beings who are guided essentially from within, actively, spontaneously, and freely (under the conditions prescribed by the laws they make) relating

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themselves to one another, weaving for themselves the complex web of social unity.\textsuperscript{21}

This is why, unlike the State, ‘community is not an organic, it is a spiritual unity’;\textsuperscript{22} just as, for Macmurray, ‘the inherent ideal of the personal . . . is a universal community of persons in which each cares for all the others’,\textsuperscript{23} and which, if achieved, would mean that ‘religion would then be simply the celebration of communion’.\textsuperscript{24}

The spiritual underpinnings of both these accounts of human societies is indicative of thinkers whose background is steeped in the religion of Calvin, even if both were in revolt against the narrowness and repressiveness of their childhood experiences of that religion.\textsuperscript{25} But they are also both steeped in the spiritual ethos of the Scottish philosophy to which they were introduced at Edinburgh and Glasgow universities—the philosophy of what is often described as ‘British’ idealism, though it was a Britishness consisting of a disproportionate number of Scottish contributors.\textsuperscript{26} MacIver and Macmurray both exhibit typical characteristics of their predecessors in their commitment to linking academic knowledge with action to reshape the world, and their commitment to finding a contemporary justification for the traditional ‘spiritual’ values of their Christian past.

Interestingly, both took degrees in classics as undergraduates, though, because of the traditional Scottish university system, philosophy was a compulsory part of their programmes. When MacIver applied for a post at Toronto after his spell teaching in Aberdeen his referee was James Seth, who had been appointed as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh in 1898.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{23} Macmurray, \textit{Persons in Relation}, 159.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{26} See David Boucher (ed.), \textit{The British Idealists} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xxxiv–xliii for brief biographies of the leading figures: no less than six of the nine listed were born in Scotland and one, Henry Jones, born in Wales, was professor at St. Andrews and Glasgow.
after periods at Dalhousie, Brown and Cornell universities in North America. Seth’s emphasis in his essays is on harnessing Christianity to the solution of the new problems of modern industrial society: ‘All this belongs to the education of the modern Christian conscience’, he writes in ‘The Christian Ethic’, ‘to the new sense of social responsibility of the individual, as a member of the community, as a citizen of the State, for the economic, social, and political conditions which mean so much for the moral as well as the material well-being of mankind’. 27 Sociology, as the understanding of modern societies, is, in effect, a Christian duty in the modern world, as is Socialism, because it is a politics dedicated to ‘social and political reforms, in the rectification of economic injustice’. 28

While it seems to me that the application of the Christian ideal to the modern social conditions was undreamt of by the Founder of Christianity, this social and practical application is implied in that ideal, as the consummation of the aspirations of the Old Testament Prophets for the reign of social righteousness, in the concern of Christ for the material needs of suffering humanity, and in his making social service the criterion of discipleship. The changed conditions of modern life demand new applications of the Christian ideal. Thus modernised—that is, interpreted in the light of modern conditions—the Christian ideal, on its human side, is identical with the ideal of contemporary Socialism’. 29

The emphasis on ‘community’, and on the necessity of addressing economic inequality if spiritual equality is to be a reality, is equally evident in the philosophy of Henry Jones, who was professor at Glasgow when Macmurray was a student. For Jones, the conflict between the Individualist and the Socialist is a false antithesis:

The contention that ‘Socialism is already upon us’ is true, if by that is meant that the method of organised communal enterprise is more in use; but it is not true if it means that individual’s sphere of action, or his power to extract utilities, that is, wealth, out of his material environment has been limited. It is being overlooked that the displacement

28 Ibid., ‘Christianity and Socialism’, 114.
29 Ibid., ‘Christianity and Socialism’, 115.
of the individual is but the first step in his reinstalment; and that what is represented as the ‘Coming of Socialism’ may, with equal truth, be called the ‘Coming of Individualism’. The functions of the State and City on the one side and those of the individual on the other, have grown together. Hence it is possible that here, once more, the principle is illustrated according to which the realisation of the self, whether on the part of the individual or of the State, is at the same time the realisation of the self’s opposite. It is possible that the State as a single organism grows in power, even as its citizens acquire freedom; and that the more free and enterprising the citizens, the more sure the order and the more extensive the operations of the State.  

It is characteristic of the Idealists of this period to resolve apparent oppositions—self and society, individualism and socialism—by showing that both develop in relation to each other: that the development of the social—even to the extent of socialism—is in fact the environment in which the self can flourish, and that the ultimate test of such developments is the test of ‘personality’: ‘It follows’, Jones argues, ‘that this social problem is material and economical only on the surface. In its deeper bearings it is ethical: it is the question of the rights of personality’. It is on the development of ‘personality’ that the judgment has to be made between individualism and socialism:

Private property may, as is alleged, give occasion for cupidity, competition, aggression, and untold miseries of extreme poverty, and the no less tragedy of unjust, profligate, and irresponsible wealth. Nevertheless it is the condition of the opposite virtues—of loyal service, of justice, of generosity, of manhood itself. The means of doing right are the same as the means of doing wrong. There must be choice between them, and the choice must be real: and that is not possible unless personality has its own sphere and inalienable station in the outer world.

The significance of ‘personality’ as the ground which allows us to resolve the apparent conflict between the social and the individual into a relationship of mutuality within community is fundamental: the ‘rights of personality’ are, in

31 Ibid., 198.
32 Ibid., 200.
the end, the fundamental rights on which all community and society are based, and that form of social organisation is best which best encourages the development of ‘personality’.

Thus, in his *Study of Ethical Principles* (which went through sixteen editions between 1894 and 1926), Seth focuses on ‘personality’ as the key distinction of human from organic life:

> When we wish to describe the characteristic and peculiar end of human life, we must either use a more specific term than self-realisation, or we must explain the meaning of the human self-realisation by defining the self which is to be realised. And since man alone is, in the proper sense, a self or person, we are led to ask, What is it that constitutes his personality and distinguishes man, as a person, from the so-called animal or impersonal self? The basis of his nature being animal, how is it lifted up into the higher sphere of human personality?33

The answer lies in the fact that it is ‘self-consciousness, this power of turning back upon the chameleon-like, impulsive, instinctive, sentient or individual self, and gathering up all the scattered threads of its life in the single skein of a rational whole, that constitutes the true selfhood of man. This higher and peculiarly human selfhood we shall call “personality”, as distinguished from the lower or animal selfhood of mere “individuality”’.34 Seth’s ethical ground—the human characteristic of ‘personality’—is the foundation of MacIver’s sociology, which starts from the ‘axiom that ultimate value can attach to persons alone—“persons” being here employed as inclusive of all conscious beings that in any degree can strive toward what they conceive as good and so become ends in themselves’,35 just as it prefigures Macmurray’s assertion that ‘the Self is neither a substance nor an organism, but a person’.36

It was not James Seth, however, who made the ‘personal’ the key concept of late-nineteenth century Scottish idealism, but his brother Andrew, later known, for family reasons, as A.S. Pringle-Pattison.37 In *Hegelianism and

34 Ibid., 200.
36 Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 37.
37 A distant family relative left Seth an estate in the borders as long as he continued the name of the Pringle-Pattisons. I will refer to him throughout as Pringle-Pattison,
Personality, published in 1887, Pringle-Pattison (then mere Andrew Seth, and Professor in St Andrews) argued against the idealist tradition’s answer to the problems set by Hume, insofar as the logical outcome of Kantianism was Hegel’s metaphysics, a metaphysics which had no place for the ‘personality’ either of God or of human beings. The ‘radical error both of Hegelianism and of the allied English doctrine’, is, for Pringle-Pattison, ‘the identification of the human and the divine self-consciousness, or, to put it more broadly, the unification of consciousness in a single Self’. 38 Hegel’s conception of a universal spirit manifesting itself through the individual denied, for Pringle-Pattison, the existential reality of individual selfhood: ‘Each of us is a Self: that is to say, in the technical language of recent philosophy, we exist for ourselves or are objects to ourselves. We are not mere objects existing only for others’. 39 The ‘Self is a unique existence, which is perfectly impervious... to other selves’, 40 and must be if the relation of human being to divine creator is to be a relationship of individuals and not merely a mirroring of identities:

I have a centre of my own—a will of my own—which no one shares with me or can share—a centre which I maintain even in my dealings with God Himself. For it is eminently false to say that I put off, or can put off, my personality here. The religious consciousness lends no countenance whatever to the representation of the human soul as a mere mode or efflux of the divine. On the contrary, only in a person, in a relatively independent self-centred being is religious approach to God possible. Religion is the self-surrender of the human will to the divine. “Our wills are ours to make them Thine.” But this is a self-surrender, a surrender which only self, only will, can make. 41

This is precisely the argument that MacIver will remake, citing Pringle-Pattison, in ‘Personality and the Suprapersonal’, in 1915:

Hegel was on the whole willing to sacrifice personality to his Absolute, but his successors have latterly been evincing the desire both to have

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38 Andrew Seth, Hegelianism and Personality (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1887), 215.
39 Ibid., 215.
40 Ibid., 216.
41 Ibid., 217–18.
and eat their cake. The world is spoken of as a place where personality manifests itself, where souls are made, but the making is unreal after all; for nothing remains in the Absolute save that mysteriously detached ‘content’ with which the self was filled, the ‘content’ of timeless being…

It is on this basis that MacIver continually insists that there is no transcendent spirit or superior willpower that is over and above the wills of the individual human beings who make up a community: the ‘fundamental fallacy’ of all such views is that ‘we think of a system of persons as a person, a system of organisms as an organism, a system of minds as a mind; but the identification is in every case fallacious’. All such identifications are ‘really a disguised form of an absolute-idea theory’, which suggests that ‘it is possible to work for humanity otherwise than by working for men, to serve nationality otherwise than by serving the members of a nation’, and in so doing treats ‘the end and value of society…as other than the ends and values of its members taken as a whole’, with the consequence that the individual is reduced to a ‘means to an end which is beyond, not merely each as individual, but all as collective’. Against such negations of the personal, MacIver proposes that we have to acknowledge that,

Persons or selves are bound up in contemporaneous no less than in historic interdependence, and here we reach the facts which most of all reveal the nature of superindividual unity. For the relations we are now to consider, unlike those already considered, are reciprocal relations. Herein persons are united in common dependence upon one another…For whose is the wider, greater welfare that we seek, if not that of a whole of persons, and how can we seek their welfare unless we conceive it as of like nature to our own?

Persons in Relation is the title of Macmurray’s second volume of Gifford lectures, but the notion that persons in reciprocal relation constitutes the fundamental ground of human experience is not only already present in

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43 Ibid., 153.
44 Ibid., 155.
MacIver’s essay of 1915 but in Pringle-Pattison’s account of the relation of the human and divine. His critique of Hegelianism underlines that the human and the divine can only be in a relation if it is an encounter between different personalities, and if God is to have a personality, and so be capable of a personal relation, it can only be in relation with a human being as a person and not as a mere reflection of the divine mind: Hegel’s theory denies the relation of human and divine because it ‘deprives man of his proper self, by reducing him, as it were, to an object of a universal Thinker’ and ‘leaves this universal Thinker also without any personality’. The realm of the personal is necessarily the realm of relations of difference rather than of unities of the same.

Exactly that argument, though directed at Kant rather than at Hegel, is the foundation of Macmurray’s effort to overthrow the western tradition since Descartes by making the ‘self as agent’ primary and the ‘self as thinker’ secondary in our construction of the subject:

…the adoption of the ‘I think’ as the centre of reference and starting-point of [Kant’s] philosophy makes it formally impossible to do justice to religious experience. For thought is inherently private; and any philosophy which takes its stand on the primacy of thought, which defines the self as Thinker, is committed formally to an extreme logical individualism. It is necessarily egocentric…in recognizing the existence of a multiplicity of persons, it must treat them all as identical instances of the ‘I think’, whose differentiation is, for theoretical purposes, accidental.

Macmurray’s argument repeats Pringle-Pattison’s: a real relation is necessarily a relation of differences; the ‘I think’ reduces all persons to duplications of one another, ‘who must be represented as a multiplicity of “I”s’. Such a system violates what Macmurray takes to be fundamental to the very nature of the ‘I’—that it requires a ‘you’: ‘any philosophy which takes the “I think” as its first principle, must remain formally a philosophy without a second person; a philosophy which is debarred from thinking the “You and I”’. A world of persons no less than a theology of persons requires relations, requires differ-

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46 Pringle-Pattision, Hegelianism and Personality, 222.
47 Macmurray, The Self as Agent, 71.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 72.
ence, requires a ‘You’ who is not identical with, who has a different personality from but is capable of a personal relation with, the ‘I’.

Macmurray’s alternative account of the self—of the self conceived first of all as an agent and only secondarily as a thinker—is equally rooted in Pringle-Pattison’s critique of his predecessors. In “The “New” Psychology and Automatism”, for instance, one of the essays in his collection *Man’s Place in the Cosmos*, first published in 1897, Pringle-Pattison challenges recent developments in German psychology for returning us to the same conception of the mind as that proposed by David Hume, one in which the subject becomes a mere spectator of its own ideas: “The individual self is reduced, as with Hume, to groups and sequences of ideas; it is an object in consciousness—an object, presumably, for this impersonal spectator-subject”. Such a spectatorial conception of the self fails to acknowledge that “ideas in themselves are pale and ineffective as the shades of Homeric mythology; they are dynamic only as they pass through the needle’s eye of the subject. It is the subject which acts upon its appreciation of the stimulus, and the emotional attitude of welcome or repulse is what is meant by feeling”. Feeling, in such an analysis, is not a passive response to the environment but the very ‘driving-power in all life’, stimulating the organism to action, such that ‘feeling-prompted action—i.e. action which is germinally purposive, germinally voluntary,—is... the first in the order of nature’. In Hume as in the German psychologists, ‘All real action, all real causality, is eliminated’, and that reduction means that they fail to realise that ‘it is not in knowledge... but in feeling and action, that reality is given’.

As we have seen, MacIver acknowledges Pringle-Pattison’s account of Hegel and, in an essay written when he was at Oxford (though not published until 1969), it seems that MacIver is also drawing on Pringle-Pattison’s account of feeling and action. ‘Emotion’, he writes, is not simply feeling, but at the least a feeling-activity, a reaction or response borne to its object, so that ‘our emotions are ourselves in action’, and he criticises those of the Humean tradition, like Alexander Bain, for failing to recognise ‘the great role of the emotions in

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50 A.S. Pringle-Pattison, “The “New” Psychology and Automatism”, *Man’s Place in the Cosmos and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1902; 1897), 68.

51 Ibid., 73.

52 Ibid., 74.

53 Ibid., 75.

54 Ibid., 82.

55 Ibid., 87.

the formation of all primary ends of action’.\textsuperscript{57} MacIver’s tentative definition of emotion is that it is ‘the spontaneous reaction of the self toward an object realized as significant’ because emotions are ‘activities which, in so far as they produce further activities, are called motives’.\textsuperscript{58} This conception of the self-in-action underlies MacIver’s account of the nature of sociology: sociology is the study of the relations which selves form through their actions, relations which derive directly from ‘personality’: ‘Understand individuals as concrete beings whose relations to one another constitute factors of their personality, and you realise that these are society, these and these alone—and the metaphysical confusion which leads you to look for something beyond this, something beyond these unsummable social individuals, passes away’.\textsuperscript{59} The discipline of sociology is the study of community, and community ‘is nothing but wills in relation, if we understand by will no abstract faculty but mind as active’.\textsuperscript{60}

These active ‘wills in relation’ clearly prefigure Macmurray’s ‘persons in relation’ but they do so by recuperating Pringle-Pattison’s account of the falsity of a metaphysical tradition which ‘laid stress, designedly or not, upon the intellectual; and the result was, that the real activity of the subject was discarded’.\textsuperscript{61} In \textit{The Self as Agent}, Macmurray’s argument against post-Cartesian philosophy is precisely against the privacy of its intellectual source, its emphasis on the self-as-thinker:

\begin{quote}
It is that any philosophy which takes the ‘Cogito’ as its starting point and centre of reference institutes a formal dualism of theory and practice; and that this dualism makes it formally impossible to give any account, and indeed to conceive the possibility of persons in relation, whether the relation be theoretical—as knowledge, or practical—as co-operation. For thought is essentially private. Formally, it is the contrary of action; excluding any causal operation upon the object which is known through its activity, that is to say, upon the Real. If we make the ‘I think’ the primary postulate of philosophy, then not merely do we institute a dualism between theoretical and practical experience, but we make action logically inconceivable.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 128, 127.
\textsuperscript{59} MacIver, \textit{Community}, 91.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{61} Pringle-Pattison, ‘The “New” Psychology and Automatism’, \textit{Man’s Place in the Cosmos and Other Essays}, 89.
\textsuperscript{62} Macmurray, \textit{Self as Agent}, 73.
Overturning this logical inconceivability of action within the Cartesian tradition, understanding the self as agent and agency as a necessary relatedness between self and object, between self and self, makes it possible to envisage a community of persons (or ‘wills’) in relation which, for both MacIver and Macmurray, constitutes the true terrain of social understanding and social improvement.

Macmurray has often been portrayed as a ‘revolutionary’ thinker, even as the first truly ‘postmodernist’ thinker in his overturning of the ‘modernism’ of the Cartesian-Kantian tradition. To this end, a comment by the Scottish theologian, Thomas Torrance, is regularly invoked: ‘John Macmurray is the quiet giant of modern philosophy, the most original and creative of savants and social thinkers in the English speaking world. If his thought is revolutionary, as it certainly is, the kind of revolution he has in view is not revolt but the reconstruction of the foundation of life and knowledge with a view to a genuinely open and creative society for the future’. Macmurray might have been ‘revolutionary’ in virtue of the radical nature of his challenge to the organisation of the modern world, but as the parallels with MacIver make clear, he was building on a philosophical foundation in which his thought was far from revolutionary, in which the key concepts—selves in relation, community, the self as agent—had already been developed in the work of Pringle-Pattison and the other Scottish idealists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. ‘Ideas in themselves are nothing’, Pringle-Pattison writes,

and the analysis of knowledge as knowledge can never give us reality. If we were to recast Descartes’s formula, in the light of all that has come and gone in philosophy since his day, not Cogito ergo sum, but Ago ergo sum is the form his maxim would take.

‘I act therefore I am’ is the principle upon which MacIver and Macmurray both build their philosophies of community. The have often been presented as isolated figures, standing alone in their intellectual environments, but it is

64 Pringle-Pattison, ‘The “New” Psychology and Automatism’, *Man’s Place in the Cosmos and Other Essays*, 89.
65 John E. Costello says that Macmurray’s ‘philosophical enterprise was light
an isolation produced not by the uniqueness of their philosophies but by the fact that we have failed to grasp the intellectual context—the context of nineteenth-century Scottish thought—by which their work was shaped and from which their key ideas were developed. In this sense, their thought is far more Scottish than existing accounts of them suggest.

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years apart from the interest of the vast majority of Macmurray’s fellow-philosophers in Britain’, *John Macmurray: A Biography*, 15; while Leon Brason suggests that, ‘In some respects Robert MacIver might properly be regarded as the last of the Scottish moralists’, *Robert Morrison MacIver on Community, Society and Power: Selected Writings*, 23.