Defying Descartes: Michael Moore (1639-1726) and Aristotelian philosophy in France and Ireland

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Between 1692 and 1726, the Dublin-born Catholic scholar Michael Moore published three works of Scholastic philosophy in Paris attacking the increasingly popular theories of René Descartes. By the time Moore's final book appeared in the year of his death, 1726, Cartesianism had established itself as the new orthodoxy in French intellectual circles and was itself facing the ultimately mortal assault of Newtonianism. Moore was, perhaps, the outstanding Irish Scholastic philosopher of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. However, he has been relatively neglected by historians. This is hardly surprising: Moore's thought was based on a medieval inspired version of Aristotelianism. But his serious academic tomes, which appeared in Latin, were more than simple restatements of Scholastic doctrine. They were direct assaults on the theories of Descartes and his followers, in the realms of both metaphysics and natural philosophy (or what we would call physics). The fact that to modern eyes they appear outdated obscures their interest as sources for the intellectual history of Moore and his contemporary world. Etienne Gilson pointed out in 1930 that a complete understanding of the history of Cartesian thought is impossible without taking into consideration its Scholastic opponents.[1] More generally, an understanding of the relationships between the medieval and modern in Ireland cannot be undertaken without an examination of characters like Michael Moore.

The universities of medieval Europe had produced a remarkable body of thought, based on the known texts of ancient philosophers, which came to be known as Scholasticism. In an influential article published in 1978, Edward Grant pointed out that:

> Aristotelianism extended much beyond the works of Aristotle and became the dominant, and, for some centuries, the sole intellectual

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[1] É. Gilson, *Études sur le role de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du systéme Cartésien* (Paris 1930), pp 316-33. In particular he notes the importance of the writings of the French late Scholastic Jean du Hamel.

system in Western Europe. It was, as we all know, the basis of the curriculum of the medieval university, where it remained entrenched for centuries. From the time the works of Aristotle entered Western Europe in the late twelfth century until perhaps 1600, or 1650, Aristotelianism provided not only the mechanisms of explanation for natural phenomena, but served as a gigantic filter through which the world was viewed and pictured.[2]

René Descartes and his likeminded contemporaries provided the most significant, and ultimately successful, challenge to the dominance of Scholasticism. In early modern France in particular, the battle between Scholastics and Cartesians provided one of the most important interfaces between the medieval world and the modern mind. Descartes' personal antipathy towards the Scholastics has often been pointed out.[3] In the preface to the French edition of the *Principles of Philosophy* he wrote: 'the majority of those aspiring to be philosophers in the last few centuries have blindly followed Aristotle. Indeed they have often corrupted the sense of his writings and attributed to him various opinions which he would not recognise to be his, were he to return to this world.'[4]

While at times Descartes was prepared to indulge in Scholastic-like disputation to woo potential power interests, his project was ultimately aimed at the destruction of the Scholastic systems of thought.[5] His work reflected the perceived dichotomy between medieval and modern. For Moore, on the other hand, the theories of Aristotle remained the basis of the only sure intellectual system of thought. Indeed, it might be argued that Moore viewed the clash of ancients and moderns as one more in a series of battles between philosophical schools which had long characterised the far from monolithic Scholastics. In his major work, *De Existentia Dei*, he commented: 'all those whose minds are free of prior notions and prejudices will see clearly how great is the difference between that solid doctrine confirmed by the judgement of all the seculars ... and this truly imaginary inconsistent philosophy that is *reborn* in our own age'.[6] For Moore, the battle with the Cartesians was a re-run of the battle with the Greek atomism of Democritus and others.

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2 E. Grant, 'Aristotelianism and the longevity of the medieval world view', in *History of Science*, 16 (1978), pp 93-106, particularly p. 94.   3 On Descartes' aversion to Scholasticism, see R. Ariew, 'Descartes and Scholasticism: The Intellectual Background to Descartes' Thought', in J. Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* (Cambridge 1992), pp 58-90 and D. Garber, 'Descartes, the Aristotelians and the Revolution that did not happen in 1637,' in *The Monist*, 71 (1988), pp 471-86.   4 R. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (trans.), 2 vols (Cambridge 1985), vol. i, p. 182.   5 R. Ariew, 'Descartes and Scholasticism', pp 58-90.   6 M. Moore, *De Existentia Dei et Humanae*

It is important to bear in mind that Michael Moore continued to reflect what most educated people thought during the late seventeenth century, particularly within the world of French universities. The Aristotelian basis of the philosophy course was only very gradually overhauled at Paris and throughout France. The change to Cartesianism was in reality only completed in the physics element of the course by 1700.[7] Given the longevity of Aristotelian philosophy within the universities, two points should be borne in mind. Firstly, a student who wanted to study in one of the career oriented faculties of law, medicine or theology had to pass through the faculty of arts where he studied philosophy. Secondly, thousands of Irish students received their third-level education on continental Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[8] The prolonged life span of Aristotelian philosophy within the universities of early modern France had far reaching consequences for those who passed through them.

A study of the thought of Michael Moore therefore provides a unique perspective on the relationship between the medieval world and the modern mind. This essay examines the responses of an individual thinker to the emergence of modern philosophy; by and large an attempt to restate the importance of an essentially 'medieval world-view'. In so doing, the paper is not so much concerned with the detail of Moore's thought than with the reasons for his intellectual viewpoint. It provides an attempt to properly contextualise Moore, drawing on the changing interpretations of late Scholasticism in the work of historians of ideas and philosophy. The essay begins by briefly sketching out Moore's career, since he remains a relatively unknown figure (at least outside his connections with Trinity College, Dublin). This will be followed by an examination of Moore's Scholasticism and the reasons for it. Finally consideration will be given to the importance of Moore's 'Irishness', to his philosophical outlook and the extent to which we can posit tentative suggestions about the relationship between the medieval world and the modern mind in (Catholic) Ireland of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Mentis Immortalitate secundum Cartesii et Aristotelis Doctrinam Disputatio (Paris 1692), *epistola* (not paginated). Translation kindly provided by Dr John Cleary. Descartes sometimes suggested that his ideas were based on ancient theories. See his *Letter to Father Dinet*, in Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, vol. ii, pp 391-2. **7** L.W.B. Brockliss, 'Aristotle, Descartes and the New Sciences: Natural Philosophy at the University of Paris 1600-1740', in *Annals of Science*, 38 (1981), pp 33-69; D. Garber, 'Descartes, the Aristotelians and the Revolution', pp 471-86. **8** L.W.B. Brockliss and P. Ferté, 'Irish Clerics in France in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: a Statistical Study', in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 87C (1987), pp 527-72. Brockliss has extracted the names of 1764 Irish students from the records of the University of Paris. The actual number was obviously much greater.

I

Michael Moore was born in Dublin around 1639.[9] Through his parents and siblings he was related to a number of well-connected Pale families, particularly the Wogans of north Kildare. However, it is impossible to box Moore into a neat cultural category based on birth. He was also connected to the O'Moores, and could understand Irish; thus he straddled both the Old English and Gaelic Irish communities.[10] Details concerning his early life are particularly scarce. At some point during the 1650s he travelled to Nantes, where he was educated at the Oratorian Collège Saint-Clement (there was no Irish College in the town at the time).[11] He must have decided to pursue further studies at the University of Paris, where he graduated with a Master's degree in 1662. For the next two decades Moore carved out a career at one of the teaching colleges of the University of Paris, the Collège des Grassins, where he taught rhetoric and philosophy, and by the 1680s he had acquired the position of vice principal.[12]

During this period he maintained strong Irish links. During the popish plot scare, for instance, he was accused of attempting to negotiate a French invasion of Ireland with the archbishop of Dublin, Peter Talbot, in the early 1670s.[13] These Irish connections assisted Moore's return to Ireland late in 1686, during the reign of James II. His career in Ireland over the next few years illustrates how highly regarded he was in the country, as a cleric, philosopher and educationalist. He was appointed vicar general of the archdiocese of Dublin. Perhaps even more significantly (and most controversially), he was apparently appointed provost of Trinity College around October 1689. The sojourn in Ireland did not last long, however, but the circumstances in which Moore left the country are difficult to establish. The 'traditional' theory is that Moore quarrelled with James II following a sermon preached at Christchurch Cathedral, resulting in his subsequent banishment.

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9 Two interesting but brief biographies of Moore have been published this century: P. Boyle, 'Dr Michael Moore, sometime Provost of Trinity College and Rector of the University of Paris (AD 1640-1726)', in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 5 (1916), pp 7-16; C. Connellan, 'Michael Moore (1640-1726)', in F. O'Rourke (ed.), *At the Heart of the Real: Philosophical Essays in honour of the Most Reverend Desmond Connell, Archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin 1992), pp 261-70. My own PhD thesis will provide the fullest biography to date: L. Chambers, 'The Life and Writings of Michael Moore (1639-1726)' (PhD, NUI, Maynooth, in progress). **10** Genealogical information is available in Moore's testamentary documents: Moore's will, dated 11 April 1721 and codicils, dated 1 May 1721 and 7 December 1723 (Archives Nationales, Minutier Central, ET/XVII/632); 'Inventaire, Aoust 1726' (Archives Nationales, Minutier Central ET/XVII/647). **11** P.N. Desmolets (contin. A.H. de Salengre), *Continuation des memoires de litterature et d'histoire*, 11 vols (Paris 1726-1731), vol. ii (published 1727), p. 202. **12** Boyle, 'Dr Michael Moore', p. 7. **13** J. Brady, 'Dr Michael Moore', in *Reportorium Novum*, 2 (1958), pp 207-8.

In any case, Moore departed the country and returned to Paris before the defeat of Jacobite forces in Ireland.[14] In 1692, he published his first major study, *De Existentia Dei et Humanae Mentis Immortalitate secundum Cartesii et Aristotelis Doctrinam Disputatio* ('on the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul, disputed according to the doctrine of Descartes and Aristotle').

Subsequent events seem to support the idea that Moore and James II had disagreed in Ireland. Soon after James' arrival in France, Moore left for Italy. During the early 1690s he worked as a censor of books in Rome, before meeting another exile of sorts, Cardinal Marco Antonio Barbarigo. In 1696 Moore joined Barbarigo in his recently reformed seminary at Montefiascone, a small town near Viterbo, north of Rome, as rector and professor of theology. The seminary was a model of counter-reformation ideas and Moore published a short tract on the study of Greek and Hebrew there in 1700.[15] However, shortly after James II's death Moore returned to Paris and was elected rector of the University, a largely honorific post but nonetheless an important one. Moore was probably the only Irishman to hold the position between 1600 and 1800.[16]

Moore was quickly appointed principal of arts students at the Collège Royal de Navarre, one of the most prestigious colleges attached to the University. During his first five years in the post, Moore oversaw the systematic reform of the college, instituting a more tightly organised structure, no doubt influenced by his experiences in Montefiascone.[17] In 1703 Moore gained an extremely important teaching position at the autonomous Collège Royal de France, where he was appointed professor of physics (or Greek and Latin philosophy). For two decades Moore continued to lecture on the errors of the Cartesian system and the importance of Scholastic philosophy. Two publications were the result of Moore's teaching and they present an opportunity to examine that teaching directly. *Vera Sciendi Methodus* ('the true method of science/knowledge') appeared in 1716, and a remarkably late work on natural philosophy, *De Principiis Physicis seu Corporum Naturalium Disputatio* ('on the principles of physics or the natural body disputed') was published in 1726. Throughout the early eighteenth century Moore maintained

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14 J. Ware, *The Whole Works of Sir James Ware concerning Ireland, Revised and Improved*, W. Harris (ed.) 2 vols (Dublin 1739-45), vol. ii, p. 289.   **15** See A. Patrizi, *Storia del seminario di Montefiascone* (Bolsena 1990), pp 159-67.   **16** Conclusions de l'Université (1693-1708), *f.* 103v-109 (Archives de l'Université de Paris, registre 37).   **17** 'Memoire concernant la discipline du Collège de Navarre presenté par les principaux du dit Collège, Août 1704' (Archives Nationales, MM 243, Receuil des pièces concernant l'Université XVIIe à XVIIIe siècles, pièce 51). This is the first of a number of documents presenting the plans of Michael Moore and Arthur Artus for reform of the Collège de Navarre.

strong links with the Irish community in Paris. He was eighty years old when he retired from the Collège de Navarre and the Collège de France in 1720. He died in Paris six years later, in 1726.[18]

II

Moore's three philosophical studies were the product of his university/college career. *De Existentia Dei* was Moore's longest and most important book. It was a sustained attempt to rebut directly the metaphysical underpinnings of Cartesian philosophy. In doing so, Moore hoped to show that only the Scholastic system of thought was capable of providing a rational demonstration of two propositions central to Christianity: the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. Descartes himself had commented: 'I have always thought that two questions – that of God and that of the soul – are chief among those that ought to be demonstrated by the aid of philosophy rather than of theology.'[19] Moore's *magnum opus* was specifically focused on Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*.[20] Like Descartes half a century previously, Moore had dedicated his publication to the dean and doctors of the Sorbonne. *Vera Sciendi Methodus*, Moore's second publication, outlined the Scholastic method of philosophising, indicating that the use of sense experience was the way in which the human mind discovered knowledge, and then dealing with the way information should be marshalled into definitions and demonstrations. The final work, *De Principiis Physicis*, was a remarkably late statement of Scholastic natural philosophy, reiterating the fundamental division of substance into matter and form. Most of my comments will be based on Moore's 1692 work on God and the soul.

Moore's publications were ostensibly aimed at the writings of René Descartes, who had died in 1650, and his followers. But the division between Scholastics and Cartesians during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was not as categorical as either side suggested. For Moore the choice was clear; either to embrace Cartesianism or attempt a Scholastic based assault on its principles. The scholars of the late seventeenth century were also faced by a third option; to integrate Cartesian principles into the existing system. This was the prime method through which Cartesian ideas entered the university curriculum in France from the 1660s onwards. A number of university teachers hoped to integrate 'modern' ideas into their 'medieval world-view'. Edward Grant has persuasively argued that the

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18 Ware, *Whole Works*, vol. ii, p. 289.   **19** Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, vol. ii, p. 3.   **20** Ibid., vol. i, pp 131-200.

longevity of the latter (at least until 1650) was a result of the sheer eclecticism of 'Aristotelianism' and its attendant ability to absorb sometimes diverse opinions.[21] For example, Aristotelianism managed to absorb new observations and thinking in astronomy which until recently appeared to have sounded the death knell of Scholastic theories of how the heavens were constructed.[22] More than ever, historians and philosophers have begun to challenge the idea that all Scholastics were hopelessly out of touch with contemporary debates. In fact Christiana Mercer, Roy Porter and others have shown that Aristotelians were not automatically adverse to the 'new learning' and in fact made valuable contributions to it.[23]

Even Michael Moore was unprepared to defend Aristotle *in toto*. He was willing to pursue the ideas of a fairly broad range of thinkers (though Aristotle, Plato and Cicero, as well as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas were obvious favourites). At the end of *De Existentia Dei* he commented:

> Although ... some good faithful men, perhaps deservedly criticised Aristotle and sometimes rejected him because of certain errors – *and I would not wish to defend Aristotle on these matters* – he was never totally despised by anyone except by someone who totally despised philosophy or, at least, was quite ignorant of it.[24]

While Moore's primary targets were the increasingly popular Cartesian ideas, he was prepared to digress at times to attack a fellow Parisian (though anonymous) Scholastic.[25] Most significantly, Moore devoted a considerable amount of space in *De Existentia Dei* to a rebuttal of the Renaissance Italian Aristotelian Pietro Pomponazzi. The latter had published a highly influential treatise on the soul in 1516, in which it was argued that it was not possible to establish the immortality of the human soul by reason alone. The only sure way of knowing that the soul existed, according to Pomponazzi, was through faith and revelation.[26] There is no need to repeat the intricacies of the argu-

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21 Grant, 'Aristotelianism', pp 93-106. 22 R. Ariew, 'Theory of Comets at Paris during the Seventeenth Century', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53 (1992), pp 355-69. 23 C. Mercer, 'The Vitality and Importance of Early Modern Aristotelianism', in T. Sorrell (ed.), *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibnitz* (Oxford 1993), pp 33-67; R. Porter, 'The Scientific Revolution and the Universities', in H. de Ridder-Symoens (ed.), *A History of the University in Europe, Volume Two: Universities in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800)* (Cambridge 1996), pp 531-62. See also the amount of space devoted to late Scholasticism in D. Garber and M. Ayers (eds), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, 2 vols (Cambridge 1998). 24 Translation by C. Connellan and A. Geraghty in S. Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 vols (Derry 1991), vol. i, p. 965. My italics. 25 Moore, *De Existentia Dei*, pp 90-1. 26 The Lateran Council (1513) had declared that the immortality of the soul was philosophically demonstrable. Pietro Pomponazzi, 'On the

ment here. The interesting point is that Moore's attack on Pomponazzi was partially based on his claim that the Italian was not a true Aristotelian.[27] This is one indication of the eclectic nature of contemporary Aristotelianism in Moore's context. Moreover, in Moore we can detect a search for the 'real' Aristotle (or perhaps more accurately the 'real' Thomas Aquinas), influenced no doubt by humanism as well as the sense of urgency created by the emergence of a competing alternative.

The Scholastic response to the increasing popularity of Cartesianism produced a deluge of publications in France during the late seventeenth century as both sides struggled for ultimate victory. Michael Moore was one of those to respond. Historians have neglected many of the Scholastic figures, including those who mixed some Cartesian ideas with their philosophy, and have simply written them off as outdated and reactionary. There was no monolithic Aristotelianism to which all Scholastics subscribed: there was room for some originality. Each Scholastic philosopher was forced to respond to the difficulties posed by the ambiguities in the writings of Aristotle. Moreover, they were faced with the problem of 'Christianising' Aristotle, as, for instance, in outlining their theories of the immortality of the human soul. The majority of philosophy professors during the late seventeenth century overwhelmingly rejected the 'new philosophy.' Michael Moore was therefore representative.

He was certainly a traditionalist, but to see him and his contemporaries as reactionary is anachronistic. The debate in which he involved himself in 1692 was ongoing. The fact that Moore was prepared to respond so robustly to the Cartesian challenge indicates the vitality of Scholastic philosophy or philosophies at the University of Paris.[28] Moore was prepared to promote educational advancement and institutional change in other spheres. He was certainly influenced by the humanist stress on a return to the sources, and his interest in Greek and Hebrew at Montefiascone was progressive. Hebrew was still very much a minority subject in Paris.[29] He was, as I have noted already, involved in the early stages of the widely admired seminary at Montefiascone. This indicates a willing engagement with the modernising trends present in Tridentine Catholicism. Moreover his counter-reformation style reforms at

Immortality of the Soul,' introduced by J. Herman Randall Jr. in E. Cassirer, P.O. Kristeller and J.H. Randall (eds), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Selections in Translation* (Chicago 1967), pp 257-381.   **27** Moore, *De Existentia Dei*, pp 411-52.   **28** For a discussion of contemporary Aristotelians and their eclecticism, see L. Cohen Rosenfield, 'Peripatetic Adversaries of Cartesianism in Seventeenth-Century France', in *Review of Religion*, 22 (1957), pp 14-40.   **29** M. Moore, *Hortatio ad Studium Linguae Graecae et Hebraicae, Recitata coram Eminentissimo D.D. Marco Antonio Barbadico ... a Michaele Moro Sacerdote Hiberno* (Montefiascone 1700). His library contained a smattering of prominent humanist authors, 'Inventaire, Aoust 1726' (Archives Nationales, Minutier Central, ET/XVII/647).

the Collège de Navarre during the early eighteenth century were made *in the face* of entrenched opposition from powerful interests within the university system.[30]

Despite his entanglement with the long departed Pomponazzi, Moore was certainly at the centre of academic debate during the 1690s, when *De Existentia Dei* was published. Debate raged at a general level about the role of philosophy in a 'proper education'.[31] Fundamentally, Moore was a teacher. During his life he held a series of administrative posts at educational institutions: the Collège des Grassins, Trinity College, Dublin, the seminary at Montefiascone and the Collège de Navarre. His work in this context contributed to the debate concerning the way in which a well-rounded Christian member of society should be educated. As he noted himself when reforming the educational structures of the Collège de Navarre: 'Science is [*etant*] a vain ornament, if it is not accompanied by a solid piety.'[32]

The key point is that while Moore's arguments and ideas were rarely novel or radical, as a representation of a wider mindset they are themselves important in their contemporary context. Charles Alan Kors, in his study of French atheism, has commented:

> Textbooks and historians of philosophy focus, on the whole, on the sets of objections and replies concerning [Descartes'] proofs published in the very first edition of the *Meditations*. In fact, however, it was the two generations that followed Descartes' death that the *historically* most significant contestations occurred.[33]

While a minority of professors of philosophy at the University of Paris had effected 'a working compromise between Aristotle and the moderns' from the 1660s onwards, by the 1690s the threat posed by Cartesianism, particularly in the realm of physics, was much stronger and elicited a growing response and a stronger level of debate.[34] Moore was certainly writing *De Existentia Dei* at a critical moment in the debate; at a point, it should be stressed, when the outcome to the contemporary observer may not have been clear (Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* never became the university text its

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30 'Memoire concernant la discipline du Collège de Navarre presenté par les principaux du dit Collège, Août 1704' (Archives Nationales, MM 243, Receuil des pièces concernant l'Université XVIIe à XVIIIe siècles, pièce 51). **31** Mercer, 'Early Modern Aristotelianism', pp 33-67, particularly pp 52-6. **32** Untitled document concerning reform of the Collège de Navarre, written by Michael Moore, July 1705 (Archives Nationales, MM 243, Receuil des pièces concernant l'Université XVIIe à XVIIIe siècles, pièce 54). **33** C.A. Kors, *Atheism in France 1650-1729 Volume One: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (Princeton 1990), pp 301-2. Italics in the original. **34** L.W.B. Brockliss, 'Philosophy Teaching in France 1600-1740', in *History of Universities*, 1 (1981), pp 131-68; particularly pp 148-9.

author hoped). *De Existentia Dei* in particular was intended as a positive contribution to the arguments for retaining essentially Aristotelian philosophy at the University of Paris.

Michael Moore reflected the longevity of the medieval world-view (mutated by the changes necessitated by the humanist challenge) in the face of the emergence of the modern mind. The real question is 'Why?' For Moore, God remained an object of physics as much as metaphysics, underlining the threat posed by the Cartesian theory of natural things. Moore's *De Existentia Dei* rejected Descartes' proofs of the existence of God and forcefully restated the proofs based on Aquinas' 'five ways'; proofs which depended on the Aristotelian understanding of natural philosophy.[35] Cartesian mechanism undermined not only Aristotelian physics but also its metaphysics, and this is something Moore grasped fully. Indeed, Moore's 1692 work had been published in the aftermath of a fresh attempt to ban the teaching of Cartesian ideas at the University of Paris. This had involved the signing of a ban on eleven specific propositions that not only mixed Cartesian and Jansenist maxims, but also presented the Cartesian principles as dangerously heterodox.[36] In a way, Moore's *De Existentia Dei* was a kind of unofficial treatise condemning these eleven propositions. Moore's arguments for the retention of a medieval inspired world-view was rooted in a belief that Catholic Christianity was in danger – that for instance, as he remarks at the start of *De Existentia Dei*, Cartesianism was little more than a revived atheistic atomism of the ancient Greeks. However, it should be noted that Moore attempted to destroy Cartesian thinking at the level of argumentation and avoided a repetition of the lengthy and endless bans on Descartes' philosophy produced elsewhere.[37]

Charles Alan Kors has neatly summarised what was beneath these, at times obscure, arguments:

> If the debates did not turn on matters of such extraordinary substance as how the human mind ought to understand, structure and transmit its experience of the world in which it found itself, it might be tempting to see the great Aristotelian-Cartesian contest of early modern France simply as a struggle for eminence, influence and institutional power among clerks and philosophers of competing schools. In its

35 Moore, *De Existentia Dei*, pp 161-96 and pp 331-44. 36 C. Jourdain, *Histoire de l'Université de Paris au XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles* (Paris 1862), pp 269-70. 37 Moore did briefly note that the Aristotelian basis of the philosophy course had been guaranteed by the reformed statutes of the University of Paris in 1601. Moore, *De Existentia Dei*, pp 458-9. The most spectacular instance of multiple condemnations was produced in J. du Hamel, *Quaedam Recentiorum Philosophorum ac Praesertim Cartesii Propositiones Damnatae ac Prohibitae* (Paris 1705).

deepest terms, however, it was nothing less than a contest for status in which the highest ideal aspirations and the rawest ambitions touched and reinforced each other: the right to teach others in the name of Christendom ... Aristotelians and Cartesians in short, struggled for nothing less than the soul and mind of France, and for the satisfactions and rewards of winning that struggle.[38]

Of course, Moore was not French. When he wrote *De Existentia Dei* he had just returned from his Jacobite sojourn in Ireland and was shortly to depart for the Italian peninsula, where he would spend the next decade. How important a contributory factor was Moore's Irishness to his general philosophical outlook? Moreover, what can he tell us about the relationship between the medieval world and the modern mind in Ireland?

III

A short translated excerpt from *De Existentia Dei* was published in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1991, where the editors of the relevant section, Andrew Carpenter and Seamus Deane, made an interesting, if rather tongue in cheek, comment on Moore's work:

> On the continent the Irish exiles in Louvain, Paris and other centres were still inclined to believe that it was possible to launch a kind of counter-reformation against the onset of the modern world that had dispersed them so widely. Michael Moore, for example, tried to save the world from Cartesianism. Like many exiles, he wished to re-establish what once was and to deny the basic assumptions which legitimised the world that had replaced it. Yet he and his compatriots were fighting an intellectual battle that had long been lost. They could no more heal the Cartesian split than they could restore either the power of Catholicism or the prestige of the Gaelic culture.[39]

The above quotation reflects the tendency to simplistically write-off Moore and his *confreres* on the continent as backward and unimportant. Certainly Moore was incapable of healing the 'Cartesian split', but if the work of Laurence Brockliss on the French higher education system is correct, then at the time *De Existentia Dei* was written in 1692, the 'intellectual battle' had not

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38 Kors, *Atheism*, pp 265-6. 39 A. Carpenter and S. Deane (eds), 'The Shifting Perspective (1690-1830)', in S. Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 vols (Derry 1991), vol. i, pp 961-4, particularly p. 961.

been long lost and the war was very much alive, even though it was in its final stages.[40] Therefore, one cannot conclude that Moore's thought was outmoded. His defence of a 'medieval world-view' in the face of the emergence of the 'modern mind' in philosophical terms requires a more extensive explanation. Part of the impetus, as hinted in the quotation above, lies, in Moore's case, in his Irish background. This, in turn, has significant implications for our understanding of the relationship between the medieval and modern in Ireland.

The importance of the French context to Michael Moore's philosophy has already been pointed out, not only through the religious implications of Cartesianism and the condemnations of the eleven propositions at the University of Paris in 1691, but in the increasing centralisation of the French state. However, Moore had just returned from Ireland when he composed *De Existentia Dei*. The context of his experience in Jacobite Ireland is crucial to understanding why he wrote his defensive Scholastic works. His experiences of education in Ireland between 1686 and 1690 form the immediate backdrop to the publication of his first Scholastic tome. Moore's possible appointment as provost of Trinity College is probably the most controversial element of his career, and certainly the one which earns him a footnote in Irish history. However, detailing the appointment is extremely difficult as any relevant documentation that existed was probably destroyed. An eighteenth-century commentator believed he was appointed on the advice of the viceroy, the earl of Tyrconnell, on 'the unanimous recommendation of the then prevailing Roman Catholic Bishops.'[41] The only solid evidence is contained in the writings of William King. In his prison diary he recorded on 22 October 1689: 'Mass was s[ai]d in the College chapel & the College & Library delivered to Dr Moore, & some fryers & priests.'[42] In any case, if Moore did receive the appointment, he inherited little more than a military-run shell; nor is it surprising that he was ignored by the college authorities during the eighteenth-century Protestant ascendancy.

Despite such a high profile appointment, Moore's Jacobite career ended in disaster. The standard version of his premature departure from Ireland locates Moore's downfall in a sermon preached at Christchurch Cathedral before James II, when he commented on the Gospel text: 'If the blind lead

40 L.W.B. Brockliss, *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Cultural History* (Oxford 1987), pp 185-227 and pp 337-90.   **41** Ware, *Whole Works*, vol. ii, p. 289. Harris provided the best near contemporary account of Moore's role in the affairs of Trinity College, Dublin.   **42** H. Jackson Lawlor (ed.), 'Diary of William King, D.D., Archbishop of Dublin, during his Imprisonment in Dublin Castle', in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 33 (1903), pp 119-52, pp 255-83, pp 389-415, and pp 439-41, particularly p. 397. See also W. King, *The State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James's Government* (London 1691), pp 193-4.

the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.' If this negative commentary on the Jacobite administration was not enough to engage James II's wrath, the fact that his closest religious advisor and confessor, the English Jesuit Father Petre, had a serious eye defect ensured Moore's banishment.[43] This is a rather curious story but seems to suggest an underlying disagreement between Moore and James on the best way to govern and reform Ireland. It is quite probable that Moore was articulating the ideas of Richard Talbot, the viceroy, and that he opposed the growing Jesuit influence in educational matters.

In any case, Moore's sojourn in Ireland had ended abruptly. His hopes of staying in Dublin were scuppered, and meanwhile his employment in France had disappeared. It must have looked like his world was falling apart, both personally and culturally. During 1691-2, when Moore composed and published *De Existentia Dei*, he was undoubtedly in a vulnerable position personally, a political refugee probably deprived of the full support network of emigrant Jacobites because of his quarrel with James II. By going to Ireland in 1686 he had effectively surrendered the French entitlements and benefits accorded to him by his recently received letter of naturalisation as a French person.[44] In this context, it might be plausible to view the publication of *De Existentia Dei* as an attempt by Moore to re-establish his position within the University of Paris – and indeed it should be remembered that this was Moore's *first* major publication. Perhaps he had finally decided to abandon any hopes of returning to Ireland and therefore hoped to carve out a polemical role for himself in France.

Moreover, in Moore one can see the problems faced by hundreds of Irish educationalists on the continent – could they ensure that the strength and the unity of Catholicism were imparted to future generations and thus perpetuate the existence of an increasingly pressurised Irish Catholic culture. In Michael Moore we find a striking example of an Irish exile who illustrates the difficulties faced by, and the strategies adopted by, those who maintained their Irish Catholicism against the background of the Irish Protestant ascendancy.

This sets Moore and his Irish colleagues apart from other exiled groups. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes had created an exodus of Huguenot refugees from France. One of their responses was to campaign for increased toleration for minorities (Pierre Bayle provides a striking example). Indeed some of the earliest proto-Cartesians within the University of Paris were non-French, such as the Turk, Edmond Pourchot, who taught with Moore at the Collège des Grassins.[45]

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43 Ware, *Whole Works*, vol. ii, 289. The Gospel text is from Matt. 15:14. 44 'Lettre de naturalité … pour Michael Morus, natif de Dublin en Irlande, a Versailles au mois d'Aout 1686' (Archives Nationales, Le secretariat d'état de la maison du Roi, O1 30, f. 298). 45 Brockliss,

The Irish situation was rather different. Irish Catholics were not merely a small minority. They were a majority within Ireland and had just witnessed the end of their brief hold on political and religious power. To someone like Moore the battle between Scholastics and Cartesians in philosophical terms must have seemed doubly destructive, affecting both the university education system and its (Irish) students. His willingness to take up the pen in support of a medieval inspired system of thought based on Aristotle was in some senses a response to the events in Ireland during the reign of James II. The fact that he had probably received some kind of appointment to the post of provost of Trinity College reveals his academic standing in Ireland (though family connections probably also played their part). In this context, we can conceive of Michael Moore as an Irish Scholastic. So what does this suggest about the medieval and modern in Ireland?

Basically, it *suggests* that if one of Ireland's most prominent Catholic *savants* was such a staunch Aristotelian, in whom there was no room for an attempt at accommodation with Cartesianism, then the medieval world assumed a large place in the emerging modern Irish Catholic mind during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Of course, this remains just a suggestion, since documenting such a conclusion is both beyond the scope of this work and in any case extremely difficult. It might be retorted, for instance, that despite the 'crippling' Aristotelianism of Trinity College, Dublin, the new learning was able to develop in Ireland through the Dublin Philosophical Society, about half of whose members are known to have been Trinity graduates, although only one is identifiable as a Catholic.[46] Given the conditions faced by most Catholics in the immediate post-Jacobite period in Ireland, it is hardly surprising that an influential body of new learning did not emerge. This is not to suggest that one can conclude from the evidence of one man's life that Catholic Ireland in the early eighteenth century was a medieval Scholastic monolith.

However, the experience of the Irish Catholic elite in the seventeenth century left them unable to engage fully with the emerging ideas of the modern world. There is a parallel here with the overwhelming Irish rejection of the theological heresy, Jansenism. Despite their introduction to it in France, Irish clerics as a group simply did not have the luxury of engaging with this potentially destructive collection of ideas.[47] Brockliss has noted that Catholic educa-

Higher Education, p. 350. **46** K.T. Hoppen, *The Common Scientist in the Seventeenth Century: A Study of the Dublin Philosophical Society 1683-1708* (London 1970), pp 53-72. **47** J. O'Leary, 'The Irish and Jansenism in the Seventeenth Century', in L. Swords (ed.), *The Irish-French Connection 1178-1978* (Paris 1978), pp 21-43. In fact, Irish students were willing to face the wrath of Gallican forces in Paris for their pronouncement of anti-Jansenist convictions. See the recent work of P. O'Connor, 'Irish Students in the Paris Faculty of Theology: Aspects of Doctrinal

tional systems were particularly tardy in their abandonment of Aristotle; Louvain in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, Paris and Padua around 1700 and Spanish centres only by 1750, so late that many actually escaped the so-called 'Cartesian interlude' which preceded the hegemony of Newtonianism.[48] If the great medieval-modern battle in philosophy was about the 'soul and mind of France' as Kors suggests, for Moore it was also clearly about the 'soul and mind of Ireland', and moreover the survival of Irish Catholicism. The general evidence suggests that Moore reflected what most Irish Catholics were taught around the late seventeenth century. A generation of Irish Catholics received an education inspired by the medieval, and bear in mind, as noted earlier, that to progress to the higher degrees of theology, law and medicine, one invariably had to complete an arts degree which included philosophy.

IV

Perhaps this longevity of Catholic Scholasticism in Ireland is hardly surprising. As K.T. Hoppen has noted, those attracted to the 'new learning' in Ireland were naturally composed of 'a small social caste made up of those who had settled or whose ancestors had settled in Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'.[49] There was an important Cartesian influence at the heart of the Dublin Philosophical Society, most noticeably in William Molyneux's 1680 translation of Descartes' *Meditations* under the title *Six Metaphysical Meditations Wherein it is Proved that there is a God*.[50] A sort of 'golden era' of Irish philosophy followed the publication of John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* in 1696, producing a series of influential and important works which indicate both the conservatism and originality of thought at work within Protestant Ireland.[51]

This appears to contrast with Moore and his championing of a theory inspired by a medieval view of the way in which the world was experienced and understood, but he reflected how the majority of the Irish Catholic elite were educated. There is a danger that the Irish Catholic intelligentsia in exile, a group which contained many conservative thinkers (though by no means exclusively), may be lost entirely behind the innovations of the Irish philosophers

Controversy in the *Ancien Régime*, 1730-60', in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 52 (1998), pp 85-97. **48** L.W.B. Brockliss, 'Curricula', in H. de Ridder-Symoens (ed.), *Universities in Early Modern Europe* (cited in n. 23), pp 563-620; particularly p. 584. **49** K.T. Hoppen, 'The Papers of the Dublin Philosophical Society, 1683-1708: Introductory Material and Index', in *Analecta Hibernica*, 30 (1982), pp 151-248, particularly p. 161. **50** W. Molyneux, *Six metaphysical meditations wherein it is proved that there is a God* (1680). See also K.T. Hoppen, 'Dublin Philosophical Society', p. 167.

who split over Toland. In this context, contemporary Scholasticism was derided as an anachronism. Toland himself, for example, commented in *Christianity not Mysterious*: 'What is unpardonable, the Holy Scripture is put to the torture to countenance this Scholastic jargon and all the metaphysical chimeras of its authors. But the weakness of the greatest part of these prejudices is so notorious, that to mention them is sufficient confutation.'[52] However, the historian needs to ensure that he or she does not fall into the 'Whiggish' trap of selecting for examination a few remarkable and highly original thinkers in the pursuit of understanding the past. In purely philosophical terms this may well be justified, but for the historian it is the equivalent of studying past monarchs and officials to the exclusion of the great mass of people.

In conclusion, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the 'medieval world' was present within the emerging 'modern mind' of much of the Irish Catholic elite. Michael Moore, given his position, status and erudition, simply provides an example of this interface between the medieval and modern worlds. Other Irish scholars, particularly the Franciscans in exile centred on Luke Wadding in Rome, had spearheaded the revival of the Scholastic philosophy of John Duns Scotus during the first half of the seventeenth century.[53] During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Irish exiles on continental Europe involved themselves in a huge variety of intellectual debates. Michael Moore was one such *savant* and is representative of a much wider mindset. It is important to realise that distinguishing the medieval world from the modern mind is impossible in the context of Irish Catholics and their education in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, although a lot more work on the subject is required before we can draw strong conclusions about the influence of Irish exiles (especially Scholastics) on Ireland during this period.

51 See D. Berman and A. Carpenter (eds), 'Eighteenth-century Irish Philosophy', in S. Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 vols (Derry 1991), vol. i, pp 760-4. It should be pointed out that the Irish political system also produced an anti-enlightenment intellectual atmosphere within the eighteenth-century Protestant ascendancy. See D. Berman, 'The Irish Counter-enlightenment', in R. Kearney (ed.), *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions* (Dublin 1985), pp 119-40. 52 *John Toland's Christianity not Mysterious: Text, Associated Works and Critical Essays*, P. McGuinness, A. Harrison and R. Kearney (eds) (Dublin 1997), pp 7-8. 53 See for example B. Millet, 'Irish Scotists at St Isodore's College, Rome, in the Seventeenth Century', in *De Doctrina Ioannis Duns Scoti*, 4 (1968), pp 399-419.