



STUDIES IN

Burke
AND HIS TIME

AARON D. HOFFMAN

Joseph Ellis's Burkean Founding

ELIZABETH LAMBERT

The Scholarly Factories

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*Edmund Burke and Leo Strauss and
the Charge of 'Historicism'*

REVIEWS OF

IAN CROWE, *Patriotism and Public Spirit: Edmund Burke
and the Role of the Critic in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain*;

COREY ROBIN, *The Reactionary Mind*:

Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin;

ANDRÉ GUSHURST-MOORE, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society
and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*;

DAVID WILLETTS, *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their
Children's Future—and Why They Should Give It Back*;

JESSE NORMAN, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative*.

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IAN CROWE

Editor's Introduction



WITH THE APPEARANCE OF THIS, the fourth issue of the revived *Studies in Burke and His Time*, the editors welcome you to our new format. While true Burkeans among our readers will understandably regret the cessation of our print issues, we are convinced that this change will increase the accessibility of the journal and raise the profile of the Edmund Burke Society and its contribution to Burke scholarship.

Volume 23 contains rich and provocative analyses of Burke and history: Burke's profile in history, Burke as a writer of history, and the accessibility of Burke as a subject of historical research. We hope that this issue will attest to the continuing breadth and vibrancy of discussions about the relevance of Burke's thought today, and also (in the emphasis to be found in a number of the articles on the early, "pre-political" writings of Burke), the fresh material and perspectives still to be drawn from the archival collections and published works alike.

Aaron Hoffman explores the intriguing concept of a "Burkean" Founding from an unusual direction, assessing the concept as it appears in the writings of the famous historian of the Founding Era, Joseph Ellis. From the other side of the Atlantic, we see, in Jeffrey Nelson's innovative examination of the underutilized source *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, Burke's early interest in the history of the Americas and, through the medium of "character" in that and other of his early writings, his emerging critique of empire and the responsibilities of imperial rule.

Burke the historian has, for many years now, been overshadowed by Burke the pragmatist, or the philosopher of prudence, and Joseph

Pappin takes on the implications of this for our understanding of Burke's historical imagination by revisiting the charge of historicism as directed at Burke by Leo Strauss. In Elizabeth Lambert's highly original contribution, Burke becomes himself a subject of "historicization," as we are introduced to a vital and distinctive phase of eighteenth-century archival scholarship, and the history of the postwar "Burke Factory" of archival materials that proved to be such a key resource in the post-war Burke revival.

Our book reviewers offer comment on recent publications serving related themes: Lee Cheek considers a diverse group of studies that touch upon Burke's status in historical traditions of conservative and religious thought both in the United States and in Great Britain, while Frederick Whelan examines a recent study of Burke that attempts to seek out a more historically fixed Burke in the immediate commercial and intellectual contexts that surrounded him in his early years in mid-century London.

The editors are grateful indeed to the Earhart Foundation and the Educational Reviewer for supporting us in our move "online," and to the Russell Kirk Center for hosting the Edmund Burke Society website and providing for us a forum where we can continue to promote the latest thought in the study of Burke and his time.

We are also keen to receive submissions of articles for publication, books for review, and general comments on ways in which the new website might better serve its goals. Please send any submissions or communications to the executive editor, Ian Crowe, at: icrowe@bpc.edu, or 9628, Elizabeth Townes Lane, Charlotte, NC. 28277.

IAN CROWE

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Joseph Ellis's Burkean Founding



AARON D. HOFFMAN

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Abstract

A Burkean interpretation of the Founding has a strong but largely unacknowledged spokesman in one of the nation's most celebrated historians of the American Founding period, Joseph Ellis. This is at a time when the American public's fascination with its first generation of statesmen continues. One need only turn on the C-SPAN network or notice the popularity of the Emmy award-winning HBO television miniseries on John Adams, the same John Adams praised by Russell Kirk in his book *The Conservative Mind*, to see that the American Founders are still relevant to our greater political conversation.¹ These circumstances should give Burke scholars the impetus to continue to engage the greater scholarly and public conversations about the American Founding. If Joseph Ellis's success as both a popular and scholarly historian is any indicator, the scholarly community and the educated public should continue to be receptive to a Burkean understanding of the American Founding.

¹ See Chapter 3, "John Adams and Liberty Under Law," in Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7th rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1995), 71–113.

Introduction

Joseph Ellis is one of those rare authors who seamlessly spans the gap between publishing scholarly work and writing for a popular audience. Although his scholarship is not explicitly political, and he avoids being the type of historian who is simply using past events to push an agenda based in present political controversies, his writings have enormous political implications—that is, if we understand politics in the grand sense of the fundamental meaning of living together politically, as opposed to being about immediate policy controversies, opinion polls, and the next election.

Ellis is Professor Emeritus of History at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. He has written two informative, sober, and elegant books on the Founding Generation, along with specific studies of George Washington, John Adams, the Adams marriage, and Thomas Jefferson. As stated above, his writing is important beyond the academy, because he is a historian who has been able to combine careful scholarship with the ability to write for an educated public, and, unwittingly or not, has become that rare breed known as the public intellectual. Ellis has focused on the political history of the American Founding and has dared to celebrate the achievements of that period without either the hagiography of popular biography or the hostile deconstructionism that overemphasizes the faults and failures of the Founders at the expense of their remarkable political accomplishments.² Those with Burkean sympathies would do well to take heed of a historian like Ellis. His writings have influenced a wide audience, and their Burkean interpretation of the American Founding should be a welcome addition to those who wish to avoid an ideological rendering of past political events.

Edmund Burke and the American Founding

Even though Edmund Burke's influence on the American Founders is a topic of debate and controversy in the scholarly community, the influence of John Locke or natural rights philosophy usually gets much

² See also Gordon Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

more attention from historians and political scientists than does the question of Edmund Burke and the Founding. This could be explained by the indirect character of Burke's influence, as opposed to the Founders' direct references to Locke or Montesquieu. In his article "Edmund Burke and the American Constitution," Morton J. Frisch examined the question of Burke's relation to the Founding. Frisch addressed the question of why Burke never wrote about the creation of the American Constitution and concluded that the probable reason that Burke did not refer to the Constitution in his works was because "it had too much of a planned character to suit the practical bent of Burke's thought."³ Frisch's conclusion points to why Burke's influence on the Founding is often understood as more indirect than direct.

Burke being a more indirect influence on American constitutional thought can also be found in the writings of Burkean scholar Russell Kirk. Kirk wrote that "Burke's understanding of constitutions went formally unacknowledged at Philadelphia; nevertheless Burke's constitutionalism was pervasive there."⁴ For Kirk, it was important that the "Whiggish constitutional opinions" of men like Burke influenced the American revolutionaries.⁵ It was also important that the Constitution was formed "for a nation that had arisen out of British historical experience."⁶ Kirk also showed the distance of Burke's thought from some elements in the Founding when he noted that Burke was not in agreement with the thinking behind the Declaration of Independence which "had carried the American cause into the misty debatable land of abstract liberty, equality, and fraternity. Such reasoning was anathema to Burke the practical statesman."⁷ Today, the two most highlighted moments of the Founding are the creation of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. One is a revolutionary political text, and the other is a planned document for a new form of government. Both events would

3 Morton J. Frisch, "Edmund Burke and the American Constitution," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* vol. 17, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 66.

4 Russell Kirk, "Edmund Burke and the Chartered Rights of Englishmen" in *Rights and Duties: Reflections on Our Conservative Constitution*, ed. Mitchell S. Muncy (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company, 1997), 118.

5 Kirk, "Edmund Burke," 113.

6 *Ibid.*, 118.

7 *Ibid.*

seem to be most un-Burkean: thus the attention paid by historians and political scientists to the influence of revolutionary visionaries and/or constitution builders, as opposed to a statesman like Burke.

Therefore, it will probably be a surprise to many students and scholars of the Founding Era that a Pulitzer Prize-winning author such as Joseph Ellis, who is also one of the premier historians of the American Founding period, has concluded that the Founding owes its spirit and temperament to Edmund Burke. For Ellis, the key to the success of the United States is that it had a Burkean Founding. It is noteworthy for those who are interested in Burke's influence and legacy that Ellis, who is not considered a traditionalist conservative or a Burke scholar, maintains that the political thinking of Burke is an invaluable resource for understanding the mindset of the American Founders and the establishment of the American constitutional order.

For most historians or political scientists, a reading that labels the American Founders as "Burkeans" is not one of the standard schools of interpretation of the Founding Period; but Ellis's reading of the Founding places its ideas and events into a framework that makes the most sense for (1) understanding the history of the period on its own terms and (2) understanding its relevance for our contemporary political culture. The true lessons of the Founding end up being less about radical politics and the wholesale transformation of civilization and more about the things that were valued by Edmund Burke: responsible leadership from an elite group of statesmen, the need for stability amidst change, and the importance of laws and institutions for the development of a sound political order.

Ellis's framework goes a long way towards resolving the common dichotomy between the transformational political *ideas* of the Founding and the actual historical *practices* of the Founders. In his hands, their practical wisdom and statesmanship moderate and actually establish their ideas. When one looks for inspiration only in the Founders' political ideas, while bypassing or downplaying their practical achievements, one does a disservice to our shared history and politics: our past is thus forgotten. If we should place the Founders' ideas as their only true achievement and the real model for future generations, we relegate them to being only Enlightenment men of letters, philosophers with

little sense of the historical context or circumstances that are crucial for ideas to actually take hold in a culture.

Ellis demonstrates that the lesson of the Founding is that the United States established political institutions that could regulate the pace of change so as to build a political order where values such as justice, peace, safety, the common good, liberty, and equality could actually take root in a society. Although he is not a Burke scholar or traditionalist conservative, he is also not in favor of the type of interpretations of the Founding that would overemphasize the thinking of Locke, Thomas Paine, or any other explanation that would place too much emphasis on abstract political texts and ideas that are removed from the practical actions of historically situated statesmen. Rather than fully develop the relationship of Burke's entire political thought to the Founding, Ellis uses Burkean principles as a way to explain how the Founders were prudent statesmen who did not force an immediate implementation of abstract notions of rights upon their political order.

Ellis's approach is somewhat similar to that of George W. Carey, who criticized a teleological understanding of the American political tradition based solely upon the equality clause of the Declaration of Independence. Carey rejected this for a procedural understanding of American political thought that is based around the importance of "popular government, tempered by the need for ordered liberty and the rule of law."⁸ However, like Ellis, Carey did not entirely read the Declaration out of the Founding. While still opposing a teleological politics, Carey posited that the Declaration's goals can be implemented in a less expansive and more procedural way.⁹

No claim is made in this paper that Joseph Ellis's scholarly conclusions are the same as Kirk or Carey. Rather he seems to be more interested in how the Founders reconciled the revolutionary and the conservative aspects of their time. He writes:

8 George W. Carey, *A Student's Guide to American Political Thought* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2004), 63, see also 59–62.

9 Carey, *A Student's Guide*, 59–59. See also James McClellan, *Liberty, Order, and Justice: An Introduction to the Constitutional Principles of American Government*, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2000), 121–37.

There were really two founding moments: the first in 1776, which declared American independence, and the second in 1787–88, which declared American nationhood. The Declaration of Independence is the seminal document in the first instance, the Constitution in the second. The former is a radical document that locates sovereignty in the individual and depicts government as an alien force, making rebellion against it a natural act. The latter is a conservative document that locates sovereignty in that collective called “the people,” makes government an essential protector of liberty rather than its enemy, and values social balance over personal liberation. It is extremely rare for the same political elite to straddle both occasions. Or, to put it differently, it is uncommon for the same men who made a revolution to also secure it.¹⁰

Ellis appreciates how America won its independence and created a new national government, yet also preserved itself for posterity.

Although the intellectual and practical influences on the Founders were varied, and much scholarship has been dedicated to uncovering and analyzing those influences, we miss the meaning of the Founding if we ignore the Burkean nature of the entire endeavor. Ellis provides that larger framework for understanding the American Founding period and shows the continuing relevance of Edmund Burke to our politics, both past and present.

A Burkean Founding

In *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, Ellis sounds most un-Burkean when he writes that “the creation of a separate American nation occurred suddenly rather than gradually, in revolutionary rather than evolutionary fashion, the decisive events that shaped the political ideas and institutions of the emerging state all taking place with

¹⁰ Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 9.

dynamic intensity during the last quarter of the eighteenth century.”¹¹ This explanation of the period indicates why Burke’s influence is often overlooked. However, Ellis wants us to appreciate the dual nature of the Founding: revolution and preservation. The Constitution may have been a planned system of government, but within it there is also an evolutionary quality that contains a Burkean spirit.

In his later book on the Founding period, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic*, Ellis presents the intellectual framework for appreciating America’s Burkean Founding. The themes of the book as a whole are about how certain crucial narratives of early American politics show the actions of the Founders were improvisational rather than preordained, were closely related to the amount of land that was available to them on the continent, involved a desire for a gradual pace of change rather than a radical revolution, and failed in regards to the problems of race.¹² Through his telling of important stories about the political actions in the year 1776, the military endurance needed at Valley Forge, the creation and ratification of the Constitution, the new nation’s failed relationship with the Native Americans, the creation of the Jeffersonian Republican party, and the machinations involved in the Louisiana Purchase, Ellis has his readers follow the accomplishments, and also the mistakes, of the Founding Generation.

Though Ellis does not explicitly link the Founders directly to Burke, the relationship still comes through on every page. Ellis did, later, explicitly define the Founding as “Burkean” in a speech he gave at San Francisco’s Commonwealth Club in 2007. Speaking of his book *American Creation*, Ellis says:

[The Founders are] good at space and they’re good at pace. They use our isolation from Europe, they use our size as I suggested earlier, the war, and our spread out character to succeed in ways that would have been difficult, if we had been located in the middle of Europe we could’ve never succeeded. Pace, and this is controversial in the book, if you believe that justice

¹¹ Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 5.

¹² Ellis, *American Creation*, 18–19.

delayed is justice denied, you're not going to agree with me, but I think that the Revolutionary Generation is a bunch of conservative revolutionaries, they're kind of Burkean revolutionaries. They want to delay the full promise of the American Revolution over time, to let it be a seeping revolution. And over time, let's get rid of the property qualifications, over time let's give women the vote, over time let's end slavery, over time let's provide civil rights, but if you try to implement that whole thing immediately, it will implode. Now this is an interesting question, if you're teaching an undergraduate class this would be the question that we would want to argue about you know, and it's not, in my opinion, it's hardly authoritative, but that's what they thought. It's an interesting group of revolutionaries who are conservatives.¹³

Ellis is pointing out that there is a crucial aspect of the Founders' thinking that is either not often taken into account or is denounced when it is even addressed. The Founders believed that a gradual pace had to be followed in politics when implementing justice, for attempting to guarantee perfect justice immediately for every member of society could lead to a collapse of government and society. Ellis emphasizes that the Founders were afraid the country would break apart if they immediately tried to implement complete and total justice during the infancy of the nation. Thus, he labels them "Burkean revolutionaries."

Ellis suggests that the question of the proper pace of justice would be a good exercise for a classroom of undergraduates. He is definitely correct in this speculation, because the issues he raises in his books can serve as valuable lessons for students enrolled in classes that deal with issues of justice in the past and the present. Students should grapple with the actual choices involved in political decision-making, choices made when circumstances are far from ideal and when one has to confront the authentic human reality of the traditions, circumstances, and opinions of one's fellow citizens. This would be a welcome alternative

¹³ The entire speech is available at the C-SPAN Video Library website (where it is titled "Vision of the Constitutional Founders") at: <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/202110-1>. The portion of the speech quoted was transcribed by me (accessed January 9, 2013).

to discussions of social and political problems that can often degenerate into ideological battles that have little appreciation for the difficulty of changing political institutions, social mores, and social structures. When confronting the Founding, we are confronting basic questions about the nature of politics. The lessons that Ellis takes from the Founding are controversial, because he is bringing abstract questions of justice down from the heavens and dropping them into the actual political realm that we share with our fellow citizens.

The section of *American Creation* that Ellis summarized in his Commonwealth Club speech appears at the beginning of the book where the reoccurring themes of the study are explained. The relevant passage in the book, similar to the speech, is as follows:

Third, in terms of creativity, the control of pace was almost as impressive as the control of space. The founders opted for an evolutionary rather than revolutionary version of political and social change, preferring to delay delivery on the full promise of the American Revolution rather than risk implosion in the mode of the French Revolution. Although it is difficult for many modern-day critics to acknowledge the point, this deferral strategy, far from being a moral failure, was in fact a profound insight rooted in a realistic appraisal of how enduring social change best happens. But the exception to this rule, removing slavery from the political agenda on the grounds that it would die a natural death, proved a massive miscalculation.¹⁴

Ellis employs the language of Burkean political prudence when he writes that this deferred justice was not “a moral failure” but “was in fact a profound insight rooted in a realistic appraisal of how enduring social change best happens.” Though not using the actual name of Edmund Burke in the above passage as he did in the speech, Ellis points out how the American Founders believed in change, but, like Burke, they believed that change should be gradual and “evolutionary” rather than the radical type of change that caused so much political upheaval and suffering for France during and after the French Revolution.

¹⁴ Ellis, *American Creation*, 18.

Ellis praises the Founders' appreciation of the evolutionary character of true lasting social change as an insight that is based on a better understanding of human nature, even though he acknowledges that he is risking the wrath of radical critics. Being an honest appraiser of the Founding, Ellis does admit that this evolutionary view failed when dealing with the problems of slavery, an injustice that took a terrible bloody war to finally settle. This Burkean understanding infuses both *American Creation* and his previous book *Founding Brothers*. In both books, Ellis pushes his readers to appreciate the difference between our contemporary view of events long since passed and the more difficult choices available to statesman at the time.

Ellis seems to have performed a type of Hegelian synthesis of the classical liberal and the traditionalist conservative interpretations of the American Founding. In Ellis's synthesis, the American Founders were able to accept the liberal Enlightenment teachings about freedom and liberty, yet they also understood that the implementation of these freedoms could only be done in a gradual Burkean fashion that took into consideration human nature and the natural workings of society and history. That is why, later in the speech, Ellis can praise both the liberal and radical political principles of the Declaration of Independence and the stable framework of government established by the Constitution.

This stable framework was Burkean. In fact, the explicit mention of Edmund Burke in *American Creation* is when Ellis writes that:

At first glance, the founders' hostility to political parties seem strange, since the core idea that partisanship can serve the public interest was very much in the air throughout the late eighteenth century. Edmund Burke had written a much-discussed treatise on the subject in 1770, arguing that political parties not only were unavoidable products of representative government, but also performed valuable functions in orchestrating debate, much in the same way that the adversarial system worked in legal trials.¹⁵

This can also be seen as praise of Burke, considering that later in the book Ellis writes that the genius of the American system of gov-

¹⁵ Ibid., 166.

ernment was that the government was created as “a framework for ongoing argument.”¹⁶ Burke’s notion that parties orchestrated debate in an adversarial system was reflected in our very constitutional system. America established an institutional structure that could channel debate and discussion towards gradual change that could actually take root in a political culture. The Burkean nature of the American political order is a virtue, because it provides a way to ensure the lasting implementation of political ideas. It forces them to take hold in political reality.

The institutions that would allow political leaders to engage in debate about political ideas and the feasibility of their implementation were an important component of the legacy of the Founders. Intellectual diversity was welcomed within a shared framework. In discussing his previous book, *Founding Brothers*, Ellis summarizes this point by noting “that the success of the founders was partially attributable to their ideological and even temperamental diversity.”¹⁷ He goes on to say that “the American Founding was a collective enterprise with multiple players who harbored fundamentally different beliefs about what the American Revolution meant.”¹⁸ He then writes:

Political and personal diversity enhanced creativity by generating a dynamic chemistry that surfaced routinely in the form of competing convictions whenever a major crisis materialized. Every major decision—the ratification of the Constitution, the creation of the National Bank, the response to the French Revolution, the Jay Treaty—produced a bracing argument among founders of different persuasions about revolutionary principles. This not only enriched the intellectual ferment, but also replicated the checks and balances of the Constitution with a human version of the same principle.¹⁹

His earlier book *Founding Brothers* was an attempt to show how the major decisions listed above took place in a political system and social environment that provided checks and balances among the strong per-

¹⁶ Ibid., 243.

¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

sonalities of the Founders. The political system and social environment offered checks and balances against each other's excesses. Only a leadership of cultured and revolutionary, yet sober, men could have created and worked within such a system and environment.

However, even though Ellis plays up the fact that their different political orientations helped balance each other, he himself seems to favor John Adams's interpretation of American politics, as opposed to Jefferson's romantic idealism. Even the very methodology of his work is owed to Adams rather than Jefferson. Ellis writes that "in the Adams formulation, the true history was about chance, contingency, unintended consequences, about political leaders who were often improvising on the edge of catastrophe."²⁰ He may be writing about Adams, but this is clearly the meaning behind the historical stories that Ellis recounts in his two books. They were about leaders who were acting and creating history amidst the triumphs and follies of their own human nature.

As noted above, Ellis writes that the Declaration of Independence "is a radical document that locates sovereignty in the individual and depicts government as an alien force, making rebellion against it a natural act."²¹ But, he acknowledges that government needs stability and order to truly protect freedom. For Ellis, the Constitution is the document that secures the revolution, because it "is a conservative document that locates sovereignty in that collective called 'the people,' makes government an essential protector of liberty rather than its enemy, and values social balance over personal liberation."²² He seems to favor the conservative document, because his histories of the Founding are also about how the different political beliefs and different political characters of the Founders helped create that "social balance" in the American political order. This social balance is a virtue, as opposed to a type of radical politics that emphasizes government as the enemy of society and individual liberty as individual license to do as one pleases.

For the radical and the conservative at the time of the Founding, there was also a difference as to how political transformation was to take place. The revolutionary spirit of John Adams was cautious and

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*

conservative, whereas the revolutionary spirit of Thomas Paine was radical and unconcerned with the pace required to truly secure the revolution. Contrasting the folly of Paine, the avowed enemy of Edmund Burke, with the wisdom of the Burke-like Adams further displays Ellis's Burkean reading of the Founding. In his review of a book on Thomas Paine, Ellis writes:

What separated Paine and Adams was not class so much as a classic disagreement over how to manage and secure a revolution. Adams believed in gradual change, in an evolutionary revolution. Paine believed that the revolutionary agenda, "the spirit of '76" need not be managed, only declared. Adams regarded the Revolution as the Big Bang in the American political universe, which should radiate its radical energies and implications only slowly into the future. The Paine approach was, in fact, the more radical course followed by the French Revolution. It ended up, as Adams predicted, in barrels of blood and Napoleonic despotism.²³

Adams's vision of a "managed" revolution that would "slowly" establish its revolutionary principles is posited by Ellis as the path towards lasting liberty and freedom instead of the type of revolution that will end in failure and tyranny.

Ellis's interpretation of the Founding clearly operates from the assumptions of John Adams. This is the same Adams who, Ellis reminds us, considered Edmund Burke one of the "great Men of the Age."²⁴ Adams also considered his critique of the wrong kind of revolution as a precursor to Edmund Burke's denunciation of the French Revolution. Ellis writes that "Adams went so far as to claim that the most scathing critique of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, was actually based on his own *Defence*."²⁵ The

²³ Joseph J. Ellis, "Founding Father of the American Left," review of Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005) in *New York Times Book Review*, 31 July 2005, 15.

²⁴ Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 57.

²⁵ Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, 146. Adams is referring to the three-volume *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*. For the full title see Ellis,

direct connection of Adams with Burke and with a conservative and evolutionary American Revolution could not be more explicit.

Different Foundings

The critics of Ellis further demonstrate Ellis's Burkean principles, as opposed to other interpretations of the Founding that deemphasize the importance of prudence, stability, and responsible leadership. Ellis has been criticized by Ray Raphael in his book *Founding Myths: Stories That Hide Our Patriotic Past* for overplaying the importance of the leadership of the Founding Fathers and underplaying the beliefs and actions of average citizens in the struggle of the Revolutionary Era.²⁶ Raphael takes Ellis to task for being too enamored of the Founding elite, rather than using his scholarship to support the cause of widespread democratic political participation. This type of criticism at least acknowledges that, in his methodology, Ellis is writing the type of political history that emphasizes the importance of leadership and the value of a natural aristocracy, instead of focusing on the potential for radical grassroots revolutionary action. However, this type of criticism is more than just part of a debate about historical methodology; it concerns the very nature of political leadership itself. Politics is always in need of some type of leadership, and the real question is: What kind of leadership does politics require?

Raphael's book is about history, but it is a history that calls for the celebration and reinvigoration of populist democratic action, as opposed to the sober revolutionary leaders who are presented to us by Ellis. By emphasizing this traditional notion of political leadership, Ellis is telling us that we should look for Burkean sentiments in our political leaders, rather than the radical political spirit of the French Revolution. An argument about historical methodology is thus an argument about politics in the most fundamental sense. In that argument, Ellis and his

Passionate Sage, 145.

²⁶ See Ray Raphael, *Founding Myths: Stories That Hide Our Patriotic Past* (New York: MJF Books, 2004). It should be noted that Raphael sees himself as an iconoclast rather than a mainstream historian. He does not even believe in a Founding in the same way that Ellis does.

Founders represent the notions of elite leadership guiding a revolution away from political chaos towards political success.

However, an interpretation that sees the Founding Period as containing the seeds of radical politics is not the only reading with which a Burkean understanding has to contend. Other readings of the Founding are less about democratic politics than about the numerous other influences on the American political order. This has led to many scholarly disputes about the political theory of the American Founding.²⁷

A well-established view among political scientists and historians is that classical liberalism was the overarching paradigm of the Founding Period, but that this paradigm needs to be superseded by a more positive view of the role of government. An expansive role for government, a view that would naturally develop along with American economic growth and world power status, is considered necessary in order to replace the beliefs of a bygone era about the limited role of the state. Classical liberalism, with its emphasis on limited government and the protection of individual and property rights, seems too restrictive in its very limited role for the state. For some modern liberals and progressives, a reevaluation of the Founding was part of the call for a more progressive and activist view of the role of government in the economy and society because of the developments of economic industrialization and the need to expand rights to segments of the population that had been excluded from political power and societal wealth. For others, classical liberalism left out the importance of government that a more Republican or Communitarian reading of the Founding could highlight.²⁸ Burke's practical statesmanship and prescience about the dangers of revolution are thus ignored.

At the other end of the political spectrum, scholars influenced by the political philosopher Leo Strauss interpret classical liberalism

²⁷ For a good overview of the methodological debates surrounding the Founding period see Alan Gibson, *Interpreting the Founding: Guide to the Enduring Debates over the Origins and Foundations of the American Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006). It should be noted, though, that Gibson does not acknowledge the importance of Burke to the Founding.

²⁸ There are also libertarian-leaning scholars who underscore the classical liberal foundations of the American Republic, but claim that these foundations needed to be preserved against the expansion of the state exemplified in the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the Great Society.

through a greater narrative about the vast differences between the classical teaching of certain ancient and medieval philosophers and the modern political teachings that follow Machiavelli's break with classical/medieval esotericism. These scholars emphasize the debt that the Founders' thinking owed to the political theory of John Locke, but they also conclude that this Lockean liberalism, which to them is modern and therefore flawed, needs to be improved by the classical philosophical teachings of civic virtue and the war-time examples of men such as Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill.²⁹ Following Strauss, for them, Edmund Burke represents the type of historicism that leads to relativism and nihilism.³⁰

A prominent student of Strauss, Walter Berns, presents this criticism of Burkean political thought when he writes:

What the traditionalists have done, and what Burke did before them, is to confuse the separate (but related) realms of theory and practice ... [I]t is ... an error for the traditionalists to suggest that theory follow practice, or that our history provides all the political guidance our practice needs. In the place of the criteria for the judgment of political right and wrong provided by political philosophy, these writers have substituted the criteria provided by ancestors, or in the case of the sophisticated, provided by History.³¹

Berns presents a Manichean choice between political philosophy and tradition/history. Burkean thought is presented by Berns as only concerning the specific political and legal institutions of Great Britain in the eighteenth century. Gary D. Glenn writes that Berns "objects to Burke (without identifying him) because many of the substantive insti-

²⁹ See "Part II: Straussians" in Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 197–259.

³⁰ See the section on Burke in Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 294–323.

³¹ Walter Berns, *Freedom, Virtue, and the First Amendment* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 17–18, quoted in Gary D. Glenn, "Walter Berns: The Constitution and American Liberal Democracy" in *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime*, eds. Kenneth L. Deutsch and John A. Murley (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 194.

tutions he had defended (primogeniture, entail, titles of nobility, a social class structure, and an established church) are prohibited by the Constitution.”³² The fault in this interpretation is that it understands the American Founding and the Constitution solely from the perspective of the history of political philosophy. The Founders are equivalent to a Strauss’s reading of Locke. Missing is the vivid historical context and an adequate appreciation for the political problems that will always be inherent in a revolutionary period. Burke’s writings and Ellis’s scholarship provide that perspective and cannot be characterized and reduced to the worship of a shallow tradition or history.

Although this paper cannot settle all these debates, and a proper sorting out of the validity of all the interpretations of the Founding is beyond the limited scope of this study, it is evident that the crucial influence of Burke on American political thought has not been the majority scholarly position. The scholars who have called attention to the Burkean conservatism of the American Founders, whose revolution they believe was not a wholesale transformation of government and society as embodied in the later French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, should appreciate the fact that a historian as respected and widely celebrated as Joseph Ellis concludes that America had a Burkean founding.

³² Gary D. Glenn, “Walter Berns,” 202, no. 8.

The Scholarly Factories



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They called them “factories,” these scholarly enterprises that focused on eighteenth-century British writers and that flourished after World War II. On this side of the Atlantic there were three on the east coast: the Horace Walpole factory at Framingham, Connecticut and the Samuel Johnson and James Boswell factories at Yale University. McGill University in Canada housed the Frances Burney factory, and for almost twenty years the Edmund Burke factory flourished in Sheffield, England. They were all in the business of producing multi-volume editions of a particular subject’s correspondence and work, and they were in it for the long haul.

They were also in it together. The various editors and scholars who worked on individual projects corresponded with each other concerning the matters they had in common, such as how to handle footnotes in preliminary and final stages of production as well as the kind of information in the notes that would be useful to future scholars. They also served on the advisory committees of the other projects. These enterprises were long-needed, complex, often frustrating in various ways, and demanded much of those who worked on them in the way of personal physical and intellectual resources. They all agreed on one thing: their work would only be done this one time, and the end product needed

to serve many future generations. While these scholarly factories have many things in common, each has its own creation story.

The place to begin is with the James Osborn collection. Although he did not collect the manuscripts, letters or the works of a specific author or artist, Osborn did contribute in significant ways to each of the enterprises discussed below. The Osborn collection began with the young James Osborn's desire to emulate Edmond Malone, an eighteenth-century book collector, Shakespeare scholar and the man who propped up James Boswell during the writing of the *Life of Johnson*. After Osborn married, his wife Marie-Louise joined her husband in collecting manuscript verse of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The acquisitions often contained large quantities of materials relating to Samuel Johnson and his circle, in particular a significant number of letters to and from Edmund Burke. By the end of the 1950s, the collection had outgrown the Osborn library so that the manuscripts were stored in liquor cartons that filled closets and lined the walls in the Osborn home. At this point, Osborn agreed to transfer the manuscripts to Yale's Sterling Library and then, in 1963, to the Beinecke Library, where they became one of its centerpieces.

A more specific collection, one that focused in large part on an individual writer, was that of Donald and Mary Hyde. This collection had its start when the newly-married Mary gave her husband first editions of Johnson's *Dictionary* and Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. The young couple began collecting Johnsoniana, and, as legend has it, when they acquired Johnson's silver tea pot in 1941, they gave a party in its honor. In 1943, the Osborns bought Oak Hill farm in Somerville, New Jersey, and established a library on the property for a (by now extensive) collection of Johnson manuscripts, letters, and first editions. The collection also includes corrected proofs for Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and much material by and relating to Johnson's friend Hester Thrale Piozzi. In 1958 the first volume of Johnson's complete works was published by Yale with significant contributions from the Hyde Collection. The Yale edition of Johnson's works includes everything except his *Dictionary* and his correspondence. Donald Hyde died in 1966, and in 1985 Mary, now Lady Viscountess Eccles, launched a new edition of Johnson's letters, edited by Bruce Redford. She also published two books relating to Johnson's

circle: *The Impossible Friendship: Boswell and Mrs. Thrale* (1972), and *The Thrales of Streatham Park* (1977). In 2003, those parts of the Hyde collection relating to Johnson and his circle were bequeathed to Houghton Library at Harvard.

While the Osborn and Hyde collections are wide-ranging, the Walpole factory in Framingham was the result of one man's obsession with an individual writer. In the 1920s, Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis, newly graduated from Yale, a young man of means, and one who had been a collector from childhood, bought several letters of Horace Walpole at a London sale and thereby began an obsession that arguably resulted in one of the most amazing collections focused on a single writer. As George E. Haggarty describes the situation in an article in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*: "... Lewis's vocation was collecting Walpole ... He gathered, cataloged, and read what he collected. He tried to make scholarly sense of its relation to what had come before. He collected various versions of the letters and other manuscripts. And he indexed everything meticulously."¹ When Lewis married Annie Burr Auchincloss, her wealth helped him continue to build the Walpole collection, but just collecting Walpoliana was not enough. Lewis needed a long-time project, and Walpole's extensive correspondence was exactly the one he needed. In 1937, the first two volumes of what would become forty-eight volumes of Walpole's letters were published. The last volumes appeared in 1979, four years after Lewis's death.

Working in the Framingham library in the 1980s was akin to time travel. The library was attached to the Lewis home, which was kept as it had been in the 1920s.² On the way into the library, a researcher passed the door to Horace Walpole's London house or the lamp from Strawberry Hill and then would spend the day working among the library's book collection that contains a significant number of volumes from Horace Walpole's own library at Strawberry Hill.

In some ways, the stories of the Johnson and Walpole factories have a fairy-tale quality to them: wealthy collectors generously will-

¹ George Haggarty, "Walpoliana," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2001): 229.

² The library was completely renovated in 2007. In addition to the Walpole collection, the library houses the largest collection of eighteenth-century British graphic art outside of the United Kingdom.

ing to donate their collections and to fund housing for them. Furthermore, James Osborn, Donald Hyde and Wilmarth Lewis were assisted by their wives in providing scholars with manuscripts of all kinds, first editions, and works of art.

On the other hand, it can be said that the Burney factory at McGill University in Canada was the work of one woman. Joyce Hemlow's lifelong fascination with Frances Burney began with her doctoral dissertation on Burney's novels under the direction of Harvard Professor George Sherburn. In 1948, as a faculty member at McGill University, she began in earnest to track down Burney's manuscript letters and journals. In 1960, she founded the McGill Burney Papers Project which was, and still is, dedicated to publishing the complete and unabridged scholarly editions of all of Burney's journals and letters. In terms of funding, from its inception the Burney factory at McGill has had support from the university. In this sense, there is a similarity among the Johnson, Walpole, and Burney enterprises—initial and sustained funding.

In her biography of Frances Burney, Hemlow acknowledges her debt to the owners and curators of Burney manuscripts, to individual collectors such as the Osborns, and to the many Burney descendants who welcomed her into their homes and gave access to their personal libraries.³ The graciousness of Hemlow's acknowledgments—when she speaks of “many pleasant hours in a library rich in Burneyana,” “many pleasant mornings in the house, gardens and grounds,” and “weeks of luxurious reading in your delightful home”—softens the reality of Hemlow's search. Like Thomas Copeland's work with the Burke correspondence, Hemlow spent many hours making phone calls, writing letters of request and inquiry, reading and transcribing manuscripts, and traveling to libraries, depositories, and record offices in England and Ireland. The story of the James Boswell papers and the Edmund Burke factory in Sheffield do not have a history of easy graciousness. In fact, just the opposite.

There are two books describing the discovery of, and the problems associated with, the Boswell papers: Frederick Pottle's *Pride and Negli-*

3 Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), x–xii.

gence and David Buchanan's *The Treasure of Auchinleck*.⁴ Both books are rich in details of manuscripts discovered in an ebony cabinet, a croquet box, and a hayloft, as well as the need to negotiate with and to placate the owners of Boswell's papers in Ireland and Scotland, who were adamant that certain of his journals would never be published. In addition, there were legal problems relating to the way the papers were transmitted at Boswell's death and the ownership of Boswell papers that had been scattered among other manuscripts in various places. Pottle and Buchanan also describe the primary role Ralph Hayward Isham played in discovering the Boswell papers and bringing them to the United States. Isham began the adventure as a successful book and manuscript collector; by the time the Boswell papers arrived at Yale he had sacrificed his marriage and his fortune in the process.

In 1928, Isham began working to privately publish *The Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle, in the Collection of Lt.-Colonel Ralph Heyward Isham*. The next year he commissioned Yale Professor Frederick Pottle to assist in the preparation of all the Boswell papers for publication. Eventually some fifteen thousand items came to Yale, with other papers coming to light as the project developed.

Pottle's wife Marion left her career in the Yale Law Library to assist him in sorting, listing and cataloging the Boswell papers. Then, when the project moved to Yale's Sterling Library, she became an essential member of the Boswell factory. More than one scholar had the privilege of meeting her: when there was a gap in the manuscript he or she was reading, and the notation in Boswell's hand referred to "a paper apart" or some extraneous source with a label such as "j," help was a short distance away—Marion Pottle's office in the Beinecke. Marion would not only find the item quickly, but was more than willing to share the story of the trunks and boxes that lined her office—all full of Boswell family papers. Her detailed and precise knowledge of the papers was an invaluable asset to the staff of the Boswell office and to the scholars who worked there.

In a strange way, the story of Edmund Burke's papers is apropos of Burke's life and work. There was no wealthy collector eager to search

4 Frederick Pottle, *Pride and Negligence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982); David Buchanan, *The Treasure of Auchinleck* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1974).

for and buy up Burke's papers and letters. There was no library with Yale's stature ready and willing to house them for the convenience of researchers. Furthermore, there was no mystery about the location of his papers—the scholarly world knew they were in the Fitzwilliam archives, but they were available only to a fortunate few, such as Dixon Wecter, Sir Philip Magnus, and Canon Robert Murray.

Burke scholars may be familiar with parts of the following story; however, the whole bears repeating. When Edmund Burke died in 1797, Dr. French Laurence and Dr. Walker King had intended to publish his letters, edit his works, and write his biography. In spite of the executors' best intentions, none of these things happened. Laurence noted after what he described as a "cursory search of the drawers in [Burke's study]" that the contents would have made good materials for "a quarto volume of mine ... they would have furnished Boswell with many volumes." (Knowing the nature of Boswell's biographical writing, that statement opens a world of possibilities to the imagination.) Laurence's quarto volume never appeared, and King, burdened by his own work as a bishop of the Church of England and then slowly going blind, managed only to finish an edition of the works. When King died, in 1827, the papers passed to the second Earl Fitzwilliam, who had been named by Jane Burke as an additional executor of her husband's papers.

In an interesting aside, Jane Burke's correspondence gives several examples of those who, presuming on the vulnerability of a grieving widow, claimed to have Burke letters and announced they would publish them. They did not know the sort of woman they were threatening. Less than a month after Burke died, Jane filed a bill in chancery to restrain William Swift, Charles M'Cormick and Vincent Griffiths from printing and publishing letters and writings that they had procured illegally.

Finally, in 1844, forty-seven years after Burke's death, a four-volume work entitled *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke* appeared under the editorship of the third Earl Fitzwilliam and Sir Richard Bourke. Then nothing more appeared, other than the Burke letters published in collections of writers and political figures that he knew. Obviously this was not a satisfactory situation. One such example is the three-volume *Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot to His Wife*. Unfortunately these volumes are

so poorly indexed that a researcher in search of Burke material has to go through them page by page.

All of this changed in 1948 when Wentworth Woodhouse, the Fitzwilliam estate, was leased by the authorities of West Riding for a teacher training school. Clearly, there was no longer room for the archives. At this point, the Sheffield Central Library agreed to take the collection and to provide the space—as soon as possible. Three furniture vans transported the archives to Sheffield where the boxes were stacked in halls until two strongrooms with 1,800 feet of shelving were made ready for their use. An initial examination of the manuscripts made it clear that a professional document repairer was needed and would require training at the Public Record Office in London.

But there was another problem: one box of the papers, a fifth of the letters, had somehow been separated from the main lot and were in the possession of Captain Thomas Fitzwilliam, a member of a collateral branch of the family living at Milton. The separation appears to have happened around 1857 when the property was split into two after the death of the fifth Earl Fitzwilliam. The Milton papers were loaned to the Northamptonshire Record Society at Lamport Hall. At last, by 1850, Burke's letters and papers were made available to researchers but in two different repositories one hundred miles apart. Unlike the Boswell papers or the Osborn, Hyde, and Lewis collections, the Fitzwilliam papers stayed in England. That situation distinguished the Burke factory from the others.

In 1949, Thomas Copeland, who became managing editor of Burke's correspondence, went to Sheffield for the first time. He had just published *Our Eminent Friend Edmund Burke*, a collection of six essays, and was working on another study which he had titled "A Portrait of Burke." When he went to Sheffield, he was working on that manuscript and was seeking funding from the Guggenheim Foundation. Little did he know that his current Burke project would not only take a back burner but would be in an unfinished state at the time of his death in 1979.⁵ As fate would have it, when Copeland began his Yale dissertation on Burke and the *Annual Register* so little was known about Edmund Burke that

⁵ That manuscript, in various stages of revision, is now in the Copeland papers at the University of Massachusetts Library.

he began his dissertation with a quote from Walter De la Mare's poem "The Listeners": "Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller ... " It would be Copeland's work in the Sheffield factory that would bring Burke out of the shadows, and not his "Portrait of Burke."

Much like the Boswell papers, the material from the Fitzwilliam collection that arrived in Sheffield and Northampton, was not in any particular order; mingled together were letters to and from Burke, notes on speeches, drafts of various kinds, and, "the sweepings of an untidy man's desk," as Ross J. S. Hoffman described them. A bird's eye view of the Northampton collection is indicative of the kind of sorting needed. In one batch there were letters from 1791, 1782, 1786, 1778, 1768, and 1794—in that order. Tom Copeland described it as a "chaotic situation."⁶ It took three years for Copeland and Milton Smith to sort through the material, arrange, compile and publish *A Checklist of the Correspondence of Edmund Burke*.

There was also the matter of funding for a complete edition of Burke's correspondence. The University of Chicago became the official sponsor of the project with Cambridge University Press in England co-sponsoring publication of the letters. Grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York sustained the project throughout, as did James Osborn who, Copeland acknowledged, helped "by permissions, by purchases, by advice and in other ways."⁷

It is not clear how Thomas Copeland was selected to be managing editor of the Burke correspondence. In the first place he was not an historian; he needed the help and advice of scholars whose expertise was in eighteenth-century English and Irish history. He was also an American with teaching duties, first at the University of Chicago and then at the University of Massachusetts, which made it more difficult for him to work full-time in Sheffield. In 1949, he presented a paper at the meeting of the American Historical Association enumerating the difficulties he was encountering, chiefly tracking down letters *by* Burke; the prepon-

6 Thomas W. Copeland, "Problems of Burke's Letters," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, XCIV (1950): 357–60.

7 Thomas Copeland in Edmund Burke, *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed Barbara Lowe, P. J. Marshall, John A. Woods (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), ix.

derance of letters in the Fitzwilliam Collection were *to* Burke. Copeland described the best of all possible worlds, in which a government

comprised of historians, by historians, for historians would make an immediate grant of funds for such a project. A competent editorial committee with nothing else to do would then go to work gathering together the scattered letters I have been describing, and in perhaps three years time we should have clear authoritative texts of all the letters within one set of covers and with one inclusive index.⁸

In that same talk, he made a brief aside comparing the Sheffield factory to the “scholarly showpiece as the Horace Walpole Correspondence being done at Yale.”

The on-the-spot centerpiece of the project was its secretary Valerie Jobling. She was not only the typist but the one who arranged accommodations for visiting scholars and oversaw the work of those who came to Sheffield in search of a fact relating to Burke’s period, or more substantial material for a work which may or may not have focused on Burke. Mrs. Jobling also kept track of Tom Copeland’s calendar, arranged for his stays in other parts of England, and worried about his health, which was problematic. In the summer of 1975, Copeland had to forgo the trip to Sheffield because of exhaustion and had applied for a leave without pay for the fall term so that he could get to England. Mrs. Jobling’s was not an idle worry; Tom Copeland suddenly died of a heart attack in 1979, a year after the final volume of the Burke correspondence was published.

When the last of the ten-volume Burke correspondence was published, Copeland left all the materials in the Sheffield Library. There is a note there regarding what is known as the “Copeland files.” These consist of transcripts of all known letters both to and from Burke from many different sources; most of the letters to Burke remain unpublished. The files are arranged chronologically. Going through them in that way, they tell the story of the Burke factory in what could be described as “mute detail.” There are the names and address of countless individuals who may have had letters or may have known of possible sources;

8 Copeland, “Problems of Burke’s Letters,” 359.

there are memos and suggestions from the various editors; there are letters from Joyce Hemlow, James Osborn, and others from the different factories and on the back of one envelope containing a letter from a prominent scholar, Copeland had written his grocery list. The picture that emerges from all of this varied material is that of a continuing exhaustive and exhausting search for manuscripts, frustrations when a query is unanswered, dead ends; but all of this is relieved by letters from those working in the other factories commiserating, voicing support as well as useful advice.

All in all, the Burke factory and those who worked there had a different sort of life from the other like enterprises.

The intense work of these factories can be said to have reached closure by the late 1980s after most of the works, the journals, and the letters were published. We take it all for granted now; few realize the generosity, the sacrifices, and the life's work that it took to bring it all together. It is not often in the historical universe that the stars so align as to bring together individuals and circumstances perfectly fitted to each other. That happened when archives and collections became factories.⁹

9 James Osborn died in 1976; Frederick Pottle in 1987; Marion Pottle in 1992; Ralph Isham in 1955; Joyce Hemlow in 2001; Donald Hyde in 1966; Mary Hyde Eccles in 2003; and Wilmarth Lewis in 1979.

Burke's American Characters

INDIVIDUAL LIVES AND THE HIDDEN CAUSES OF HISTORY IN
AN ACCOUNT OF THE EUROPEAN SETTLEMENTS IN AMERICA



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Burke's historical sense was narrative and strongly biographical. From his youthful debates at Trinity College, Burke developed an interest in "Characters." He found this genre particularly useful in his early historical writings which, like his future speeches, were peppered with a generous number of character sketches. Burke's appreciation for Characters was based on the many examples he found in classical literature. The Character genre was renewed by English writers in the seventeenth century, but Burke did not seem to model his literary portraiture after the more historically recent style of character sketch. His review of a collection of Samuel Butler's Character drawings, for instance, in the 1759 *Annual Register*, was not favorable: "A whole volume consists of Characters; the drawing of which was a sort of exercise of the wits of that time; but to say the truth, they are rather, for the greater part, monstrous caricatures than just and regular pictures. They are forced and unnatural, and tire by the repetition of the same thing in new, indeed, but often odd and extravagant lights."¹

¹ *Annual Register* (1759), 469.

Unlike Butler's "profusion of wit," Burke did not draw "fanciful" but real characters of the type found in the classical histories and literature. He admired Sallust's "beautiful painting of characters," and took Sallust as his model. Burke called him "one of the best Historians among the Romans."² And in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke referred to Sallust's characterizations of Caesar and Cato to illustrate a point of aesthetic theory: "It is worth observing, how we feel ourselves affected in reading the characters of Caesar, and Cato, as they are so finely drawn and contrasted in Sallust. In one, the *ignoscendo, largiundo*; in the other, *nil largiundo*. In one, the *miseris perfugium*; in the other, *malis perniciem*. In the latter we have much to admire, much to reverence, and perhaps something to fear; we respect him, but we respect him at a distance. The former makes us familiar with him; we love him, and he leads us whither he pleases."³

The focus of this essay will be on how Burke utilized the biographical sketch in a classically traditional way. It provided him with a technique to avoid the mechanistic implications of the Newtonian kind, in which history is studied with a view toward demonstrating the existence of general laws. For Burke, reading widely in the lives of great historical figures was an indispensable way to form the prudence and good judgment that comes from experience. Imitation and sympathy combine in the studying of exemplars, both noble and base, to communicate universal lessons from particular experiences for the purpose of instructing fresh generations.

The critical skills he developed in this regard were of life-long value to him. One of Burke's permanent sections in the *Annual Register* was to be called simply "Characters." When taken with the annual historical article and the collection of book reviews in the early volumes of the *Annual Register*, the "Characters" section provided an important gallery of Burke's anonymous historical writings at this early period of his life. In the 1758 inaugural volume, Burke introduced this section of his new

2 *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland, 10 vols. (Cambridge, Chicago, 1958–1978), 1:89.

3 Edmund Burke, *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–), 1:271. Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, 54.3 "In one the forgiving, dispensing largesse; in the other, no giving bribes. In one a refuge for the wretched, in the other, a scourge of the wicked." Translation by editors, 1:271n1.

annual as follows: "We have set apart this article, for some remarkable characters of those, whether in the political or literary world, whether living or dead, who have been distinguished by such talents as merit the public attention."⁴

Burke's view of the utility of such character studies—a view that is consistent with his understanding of the purposes of education—was evident in a 1758 review of Fernando Warner's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Thomas More*: "There are no sort of books more useful towards forming the mind and manners, than the lives of good and eminent men."⁵ For Burke, Characters were effective in shaping moral judgment and forming taste, as well as for entertaining the reader. In the preface to the *Annual Register* of 1759, Burke informed his readers that the "Characters" section "contains a very great variety of accounts of eminent persons, good and bad ... we know no kind of reading that can be at once more useful and more agreeable."⁶ Finally, his later speeches included a number of Character sketches, both of individuals who played a key role in American affairs, natives and colonial villains in speeches against Warren Hastings and the East India Company, and such generalized subjects as the Chatham ministry and the American colonists. In his 1774 *Speech on American Taxation*, Burke gave an account of the usefulness of this genre for his purposes and for the edification of his audience that articulates a method he first incorporated in his writings two decades earlier:

Great men are the guide-posts and land-marks in the state. The credit of such men at court, or in the nation, is the sole cause of all publick measures. It would be an invidious thing, ... to remark the errors into which the authority of great names has brought the nation, without doing justice at the same time

4 *Annual Register* (1758), 235.

5 Ibid., 468. Burke's favorable treatment of Thomas More in this review would have had crossover appeal to Protestants and Catholics alike. His life was considered a model for a virtuous life. Macaulay would later put More on the same "Enlightened" level as Socrates [Review of Leopold von Ranke's *The Ecclesiastical and Political History of the Popes*, *Edinburgh Review*, October 1840, included in *Miscellaneous Essays and Poems*, volume II, pp. 467–69]. Socrates and More are in fact linked as virtuous martyrs killed by intolerance in a judicial matter. Burke specifically cites "the Utopia of More" as a "rich treasury" in his *Speech on Conciliation with America, Writings and Speeches*, 3:145.

6 *Annual Register* (1759), v.

to the great qualities, whence that authority arose. The subject is instructive to those who wish to form themselves on whatever of excellence has gone before them.⁷

Compare that passage with the following excerpt from the first number of the *Annual Register*:

Perhaps the human mind can have no entertainment at once more congenial and more useful to it, than such ... stories of extraordinary distresses, and wonderful deliverances. In the former part our humanity is cultivated; in the latter is inspired a spirited hope and a trust in Providence, which may enable us to act with resolution in the trying emergencies of life. They have the effect which Aristotle attributes to good tragedy, in correcting the passions by terror and pity. They give us striking examples of the resources in which ingenious distress is fruitful; and instances as remarkable of magnanimity and virtue, sometimes even in rude minds, and where it might least be expected.⁸

His wide reading in classical letters had planted in him an awareness of the efficacy for contemporary instruction of studying historical actors to better illuminate fundamental and shared tendencies in human nature. Whereas his contemporary David Hume held that the mind or "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions," Burke did not.⁹ Burke believed that knowledge came through the senses and that the passions were largely formed by the data being absorbed by the mind. Hence the importance he placed on the content of art, drama, painting, poetry, and writing being always elevated and moral. He believed it was crucial they be so because the delicate process of conveying or securing cultural attachments was dependent on the success of each generation's ability to cultivate the manners, tastes, and capacity for sound judgment of the generation rising behind them. Character sketches of eminent historical figures served this purpose in an effective yet enjoyable way.

⁷ *Writings and Speeches*, 2:452–53.

⁸ *Annual Register* (1758) 278.

⁹ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Book 2.3.3.4, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford, 2005), 266.

When drafted with imagination and skill such concentrated portrait guides conveyed compelling instruction on the role right and wrong judgments, moral and immoral actions, play in the destinies of individuals as well as nations.

I.

Burke's personal and historical interest in Britain's American colonies was evident long before he began a career in politics, first as secretary to the statesman William Gerard Hamilton, and later as Lord Rockingham's secretary. His mature interest in America was rooted in his Irish youth and in the economic, educational, historical, political, and religious conditions of his extended family. After leaving Dublin for London in 1750, this interest deepened and manifested itself during a period in the mid-1750s and early 1760s as Burke seriously considered emigrating to the colonies. At this time, Burke aspired to become a writer, and, significantly, his first historical work was an extended study of the Spanish, French, and English New World: *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757).¹⁰ There are also hints of his image of America in his other early historical and philosophical writings, including "An Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History" (begun in the late 1750s). Moreover, his journalism in the first ten years of *The Annual Register* (1758–1767) included regular treatments of contemporary developments in the American colonies.

Burke began to attain his detailed knowledge of America while collaborating with his friend and "cousin," William Burke (1728–1798), on the two-volume *Account of the European Settlements in America*. Published anonymously by Dodsley in April of 1757, the *Settlements* was attributed initially to William, but has long been held substantially to represent the views and direct input of Edmund.¹¹ His mature ideas about imperial relations with the American colonies and his views on

¹⁰ *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, in Two Volumes, 6th ed. (London, 1777). This edition will be used throughout. It was reprinted by Arno Press (1972) as part of the "Research Library of Colonial America," eds., Richard C. Robey, Jack P. Greene, Edmund S. Morgan, and Alden T. Vaughn.

¹¹ See F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke*, Volume I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127, 130, 136, and 139; see also Lock's article "Burke and Religion," in Crowe, ed., *An*

the centrality of trade policy and traditions of freedom to the relations between the colonies and the mother country are already apparent in this work. A neglected text in the Burke corpus, this work, which contemporaries praised, developed lines of inquiry that anticipated more celebrated works by Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), Lord Kames (1696–1782), William Robertson (1721–1793), and Adam Smith (1723–1790). The *Settlements* is thus a pivotal text for establishing the nature and continuity of Burke's image of America with his later and more famous speeches on American affairs, as well as an important source for Burke's attempt to work out a hermeneutic to apply to his historical studies.

In the pages of the *Settlements*, Burke's image of America comes into view through a variety of character sketches that are a central element of his compact accounts of political history. His sense of both the contingency and the hidden causes of history works itself out through examinations of the character and motivations of individual human actors. Michael Bentley emphasized this traditional aspect of history by quoting a prominent nineteenth-century practitioner of the craft: "Thomas Carlyle wanted all history books to be ... the essence of innumerable biographies."¹² Burke's histories and his historical sense, particularly as evidenced in the *Settlements* and the "Abridgement," could not be more aptly and succinctly described.

The historical episodes that give Burke's histories their distinctiveness are developed around the lives of great—both in a positive and negative sense—individuals as well as the character analyses of groups or peoples. In a youthful *Note-Book* entry, he reflected that the usefulness of mastering the principles of a discipline was that it was the "means" by which mankind could "extend" its knowledge "more considerably," thereby opening minds and "preventing that littleness or narrowness" which is characteristic of "confined" minds.¹³ This was a concern he brought to bear on his developing image of America and the notion

Imaginative Whig: Reassessing the Life and Thought of Edmund Burke (Columbia: U. of Missouri Press, 2005), 30.

¹² Michael Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11.

¹³ "Several Scattered Hints Concerning Philosophy and Learning Collected Here From My Papers. [E.B.]," H. V. F. Somerset (ed.), *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 84.

of conquest and empire that follow from it. He unfolded a vision of a colonial empire through the particular example of persons and peoples, colonizers and the conquered that he chose for his "character" drawings. His confidence in the effectiveness of this genre was rooted in his belief that there existed a common human nature and tastes appropriate to it. Literary portraiture was especially effective in this regard. It allowed Burke to universalize a principle or theme of interest to him, as well as to subtly criticize contemporary policies and statesmanship.

Through his wide reading of classical literature at Ballitore and Trinity College, Burke came to believe that the character and conduct of great men are the indispensable agents of historical change. It was a lesson he would apply to his writing throughout his career. In *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), for instance, Burke dismissed Chatham's slogan "measures, not men" as destructive and false and, in 1789, he warned a French correspondent, "Never wholly separate in your Mind the merits of any Political Question from the Men who are concerned in it."¹⁴ This early lesson had particular relevance for Burke's image of America and his criticism of Britain's imperial policies related to the American colonies. For in time, Burke came to believe that men of character were wanting and imprudent measures proliferating during the turbulent years of imperial crisis from the 1760s to the 1780s.

The biographical sketch was, then, a particular medium through which Burke traced a universal characteristic that he deemed particularly admirable or useful. To his friend and Shakespeare scholar, Edmond Malone, he offered advice on the art of character drawing: "What you are to say of the Character, merely as the Character, of a man, must, to have any effect, consist rather of a few light marking touches than of a long discussion; unless it relates to some of those various and perplexed Characters, which inquire a long investigation to unfold. If without materials one is to attempt any thing of length and elaborate there is a great danger of growing into affectation."¹⁵

The "Character" was a vehicle by which Burke could highlight, through the examples of meritorious lives, concerns about contemporary politics. And he incorporated this method into his own philosophy

¹⁴ "Letter to Charles-Jean-Francois Depont, November 1789," *Correspondence*, 6:47.

¹⁵ Burke to Edmond Malone, 22 May 1795, *Correspondence*, 8:252.

of history, which in turn contributed to his early sense that philosophical generalizations were a necessary part of historical writing. It was also a “tactic” Burke used to convey larger philosophical insights, and to highlight a central aspect of his historical thinking: the role of chance, Providence, and the unintended consequences of human action. It is instructive to think that Burke’s discussion with Edmond Malone about such matters would have likely drawn Shakespeare into the question of Character drawing. In addition to Malone, Burke had life-long and very close relationships with the great Shakespeare authorities of his age—Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) and the actor/playwright David Garrick (1717–1779) being high on that list. Shakespeare was among Burke’s most enduring delights and influences. Indeed, one of the heretofore undetected sources of Burke’s Character art is Shakespeare. In the pages of his college newspaper, *The Reformer*, No. 2, Burke discussed at length the elements “which constitute and just Dramatick Performance,” and highlighted the “*Propriety* of Characters” and the form of such sketches as a key component of such works. He went on to laud Shakespeare as the greatest artist in this regard: “*Shakespear* had a Genius perhaps excelling anything that ever appeared in the World before him ... who found the Springs of Nature so copiously supply’d within him....”¹⁶ And so, in the spirit of such new approaches to criticism, the great poet’s “Character” plays demonstrated to Burke how one can make the popular Character writers of antiquity, such as Plutarch, relevant to yourself and your audience. Beyond serious data about largely forgotten people, Shakespeare’s art demonstrated how to draw multi-dimensional characters and incorporate religious and psychological insights into the dryer stuff of recorded history.¹⁷ The nexus between imagination, human nature, and individual and national history blossoms in Shakespeare. As it was for Shakespeare, historical causation for Burke was dramatically unpredictable; and so his focus was not only on the great lives of early

¹⁶ See also in the *Reformer*, no. 2, the fourth of February, 1747–48, such fulsome references as “my favourite Shakespeare” or “the divine Shakespear.” *Writings and Speeches*, 1:75–77.

¹⁷ See Burke to William Richardson, June 18, 1777, *Correspondence*, 3:354: “Shakespeare having entered most deeply of all the poets into human nature, it is clearly the best subject for criticism.”

American history but on the chance events and accidental persons that often determine the fortunes of empires.

The uses to which Burke put this genre of character drawing found effective expression in the *Account of the European Settlements in America*, which is peopled with a broad range of characters that veritably burst onto the stage of colonial history:

It is one of the most necessary ... parts of this design to do justice to the names of those men, who, by their greatness of mind, their wisdom and their goodness, have brought into the pale of civility and religion these rude and uncultivated parts of the globe; who could discern the rudiments of a future people, wanting only time to be unfolded in the seed; who could perceive, amidst the losses and the disappointments and expences of a beginning colony, the great advantages to be derived to their country from such undertakings; and who could pursue them in spite of the malignity and narrow wisdom of the world. The antient world had its Osiris and Erichthonius, who taught them the use of grain; their Bacchus, who instructed them in the culture of the vine; and their Orpheus and Linus, who first built towns and formed civil societies. The people of America will not fail, when time has made things venerable, and when an intermixture of fable has moulded useful truths into popular opinions, to mention with equal gratitude, and perhaps familiar heightening circumstances, her Columbus, her Castro, her Gasca¹⁸, her De Poincy¹⁹, her Delawar²⁰, her Baltimore, and her Penn.²¹

What is the reader to make of this last list of Characters? With the exception of Penn, they are all Catholics. The Quaker, William Penn, was perhaps the giveaway because it is in an indication of how much he is speaking from his own background. Edmund Burke was educated by Catholics and Quakers. Here we find the author singling out figures

¹⁸ Pedro de la Gasca (1485–1567), Spanish bishop and viceroy of Peru.

¹⁹ Phillippe de Longvilliers de Poincy (1583–1660), French nobleman who after being appointed governor of St. Kitt renounced the King and asserted his sole claim to rule.

²⁰ Thomas West, Baron De La Warr (1577–1618).

²¹ *An Account of the European Settlements in America*, vol. 2, part 7, 221–22.

who shared these same religious backgrounds and rather obviously omitting any mention of a New England Puritan: no Bradfords, no Smiths, no Standishes, and no Winthrops. This bias against the New England Puritans became pronounced in the later chapters of the *Settlements*.

More immediately, the purpose for introducing these figures early in the account was to raise the question for the reader: Where were such exemplars to be found on the contemporary British stage? And what are contemporary readers and leaders to learn from these examples? These questions form the very heart of the analysis in the *Settlements*. Four attributes characterized the list of Burke's American heroes. First, he believed that greatness in a person was most frequently characterized by the possession of what he called "comprehensive views," meaning a largeness of vision and a "greatness of mind" that was manifest in courageous and selfless acts, particularly ones aimed at advancing the common horizon of humanity and circumscribing ever further its ignorance.²² Second, was the quality Burke called "disinterestedness."²³ A third attribute was the possession of farsighted views on trade and commercial policy (meaning wisely regulated but generally free trade). And a fourth trait held by Burke's preferred exemplars was a view of man's social nature that allowed for peace and prosperity to flourish in the midst of religious diversity and the political toleration of sectarian differences. Thus, vast and comprehensive views that fostered a disinterested approach to colonizing the New World and resulted in beneficial commercial and religious practices was the model Burke constructed to judge the contemporary heirs of his characters' enlightened American legacy. Indeed, Burke repeatedly used these categories as criteria for judging his colonial actors, and by extension for evaluating policy and policymakers at home. In these sketches Burke developed a theory of conquest and colonialism that was at the foundation of his later "trustee"-based theory of empire. Long before his prospects for a political career blossomed, Burke's imperial theory was being worked out through studying and writing the history of the Atlantic peoples of Ireland, followed by America, and then England.

²² *Settlements*, 1:62.

²³ *Ibid.*; 2:234.

In what follows, Burke's great American lives are presented as they highlight one or another of these four characteristics. As a point of comparison, William Robertson's *History of America* (1777) will be considered as the product of a mind parallel to Burke's; a work by a great Enlightenment historian in which the subject matter, method, and analysis track closely with Burke's *Settlements* written two decades earlier. Considering that Robertson admired and drew upon Burke's *Settlements*, and that Burke admired and reviewed Robertson's books, this method of comparing contemporary and like-minded historians on specific historical events and persons will make clear that Edmund Burke deserves to be numbered among the most creative and cogent historical writers of the eighteenth century.

II.

For eighteenth-century thinkers such as Burke and Robertson, America was an inclusive term for all of North, Central, and South America, including the islands of the West Indies. Since Columbus's discovery, or rather uncovering, in 1492, European observers had studied America, its environment (meaning its physical properties and its habitats), and the character of its native peoples with great interest. America became a contested field, first figuratively and then literally, for competing notions of European manners and civilization. Throughout this early modern era, European power, prosperity, and prestige were in large part determined by New World colonial fortunes. At home, the primitive character of the New World and its inhabitants led to a new burst of political and philosophical speculations on the nature and origins of man and society. The discovery and settlement of the New World also triggered the development of political economy, as the great commercial possibilities of America and American trade became as apparent and real as the vastness of the new world landscape. And finally, sects of religious believers seeking to escape Old World persecution and build a new and shining "city on a hill" found the absence of established, conservative institutional forces in the New World wilderness sublimely conducive to their messianic aspirations: thus emigrating and, in so

doing, establishing the character of future generations of Americans. It was through this prism and by utilizing this map that Burke approached the study of America.

Bernard Bailyn describes the change in consciousness that so affected the Atlantic world at time as "essentially spatial."²⁴ Burke seemed to hold the same view. "General knowledge" was being gained through exploration of "an astonishing number" of islands and land masses in "the great sea which divides North and South America," and whose existence and separation from the European continent was hitherto unknown before Columbus's dramatic voyage.²⁵ Two centuries ago, Burke wrote in the opening pages of the *Settlements*, the events and persons surrounding the discovery of America "conspired to change the face of Europe entirely."²⁶

The *Settlements*, as he put it in a letter to William Robertson, charted the unfolding of "the Great Map of Mankind" on the two continents, and pointed to the significance of that momentous encounter or clash of civilizations for the future of Europe. The individual actors and the circumstances in which they found themselves would hold the key to the outcome. And so it was to a series of intriguing lives and their unprecedented and unpredictable decisions or "policies" that Burke turned for guidance. He looked to them for a demonstration of the virtues he would conclude were the cement of good policy, the glue of fair trade, and the bond of enlightenment. For Burke, as for every generation of historians of the Americas since, the character of first recourse was the "first adventurer" himself.

Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) was Burke's first Character interest in the *Settlements*. In the later half of the sixteenth and through much of the early seventeenth century, the image many Europeans had of Columbus was that of a modern empirical and experimental scientist, charting routes to the New World based on careful and original rational deduction with a predetermined and visionary end.²⁷ He was the great modern New Man. Burke inherited in broad outlines this view of

²⁴ Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, 55.

²⁵ *Settlements*, I:14.

²⁶ *Settlements*, I:3.

²⁷ See Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 89–115.

Columbus as the embodiment of the modern spirit given birth during the Renaissance. He praised the navigator's "extensive views," "manly courage," and "solid and rational policy."²⁸ But his Columbus was a bit more nuanced in that he was also an accidental hero. Burke opened the *Settlements* with an account of how the unintended consequence of Columbus's "just idea" about the "real form of the earth" was misled by "erroneous" maps that led him to "mistake the object" (which he believed was "to find a passage to China and India by the western ocean").²⁹ The "accident," of course, was his landing in what is now the Bahamas; and, significantly, modern history for Burke begins at this mistaken moment when "the two worlds ... were first introduced to each other; a meeting of an extraordinary nature, and which produced great changes in both."³⁰ And so Burke's Columbus was nevertheless a farsighted apostle for the modern scientific spirit who, while uncovering something quite unexpected, had prepared himself for such a discovery by the merit of his fundamental ambition "to extend the boundaries which ignorance had given to the world."³¹

Thinkers such as Bolingbroke and Hume also believed that the modern age was ushered into being by the discovery of America, that it was a "revolution" "in human affairs."³² Burke buttressed his support for this notion at the outset of the *Settlements* when he noted that "There was an extraordinary coincidence of events at the time that the discovery of America made one of the principal; the invention of printing, the making of gunpowder, the improvement of navigation, the revival of ancient learning, and the reformation; all of these conspired to change the face of Europe entirely."³³ Europe's achievements set the standard for what would be considered "advanced" civilization. Indeed, Burke's opening point was that when Columbus discovered America, Europe was already ahead of everyone else on earth in technology, science, meth-

²⁸ *Settlements*, 1:4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6

³² See, Hume, *The History of England* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1980), volume III:80–82; and Viscount Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and use of History*, in *Works of Lord Bolingbroke* (Philadelphia, 1841), 239–50.

³³ *Settlements*, 1:3.

ods of warfare, government administration, and so on. This was not true even four hundred years earlier when there was a comparative equality between civilizations in Europe and the East. This was one reason why both Burke and Robertson were so interested in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: during this period seeds were planted that brought commercial advances and cultural flowerings to Europe. It was also an important statement at the outset because then, as it often is now, thinkers generally attributed Western dominance to Enlightenment science; but in fact, as Burke pointed out, the West already had made a decisive turn by 1492, with on-the-ground technological changes that predated the Renaissance.³⁴ For both Burke and Robertson, then, the Middle Ages were the font of Western progress.

Beyond the seeming happenstance of his discovery and the good fortune of historical timing, Columbus's greatness was advanced in the context of suffering, which for Burke seemed to be a necessary condition of the prophet, who, as in Biblical literature, was seldom appreciated at home. "It was the fate of this great man," Burke noted, "to have his virtue continually exercised with troubles and distress."³⁵ As Burke knew so well, thanklessness, frustration, disappointment, lack of appreciation, and soft, if not always hard, forms of persecution often await the bold and prophetic "new men" of the new age. It was, however, in the character of such men to keep in mind the lofty nature of their endeavors, clinging always to their original "enthusiasm." From the standpoint of motivation in his great historical actors, a stubborn passion for adventure, even personal glory and wealth, was a necessary ingredient for success. It carried persons of ability through trying times in distant lands and in European courts. As Burke observed at the outset of the *Settlements*, "There is a sort of *enthusiasm in all projectors*, absolutely necessary for their affairs, which makes them proof against the most fatiguing delays, the most mortifying disappointments, the most shocking insults; and, what is severer than all, the presumptuous judgments of the ignorant upon their designs. Columbus had a sufficient

34 One example: both Burke and Robertson spoke about the impact the perfection of the sailor's compass in the early fourteenth century had on Western progress and superiority. For Burke see *Settlements*, *ibid.*, 8–10; for Robertson see William Robertson, *The History of the Discovery and Settlement of America* (New York, 1855), 32.

35 *Settlements*, 1:35.

share of this quality.”³⁶ Robertson echoed Burke in this regard when he noted that in Columbus he had found a man “in whose character the modesty and diffidence of true genius were united with the ardent *enthusiasm of a projector*....”³⁷

Throughout his Columbus story—indeed, throughout his study of Europe’s American settlements—Burke highlighted the narrow-minded obstinacy of jealous courts and ministries. Imprudent policy largely characterized Europe and the New World from the onset of their encounter. What Burke detested about imperial policy in the 1760s and 1770s had, by his own account, an unfortunately long pedigree. And yet, the advancement of mankind through the encounter and clash of these different worlds did occur. Character and genius would struggle to overcome ignorance and bad policy. But it would triumph. How it did was the basis for Burke’s heroic character sketches.

Columbus and his trials offered one such case study. According to Burke, his “whole time was spent in fruitless endeavors to enlighten ignorance, to remove prejudice, and to vanquish that obstinate incredulity, which is of all others the greatest enemy to improvement, rejecting everything as false and absurd, which is ever so little out of the track of common experience; and it is of the more dangerous consequence, as it carries a delusive air of coolness, of temper and wisdom.”³⁸ Burke’s Columbus overcame the temptation, natural to “common experience,” of petty ambitions to conquer a relatively helpless other for pelf and power. Instead, Burke’s Columbus rose above such ephemeral concerns for more noble and selfless work to “enlighten ignorance” and “remove prejudice.” To that end, as noted above, “Christopher Columbus ... undertook to *extend the boundaries which ignorance had given to the world*.”³⁹ William Robertson’s assessment compared to Burke’s; he observed that with Columbus’s “extraordinary event, *the boundaries of*

³⁶ *Settlements*, 1:7. Emphasis added.

³⁷ Robertson, *History of America*, Book II, 45. Emphasis added. “Projectors” was also a favorite word of Robertson’s. Like Burke, he used it often throughout his *History of America* to describe the effort to “project” Christian Europe’s civilization into the newly encountered civilizations in the Americas.

³⁸ *Settlements*, 1:8.

³⁹ *Settlements*, 1:5–6. Emphasis added.

human knowledge were so much extended...."⁴⁰ Extending the "boundaries" of "ignorance" and spreading knowledge more widely was, as has been argued, a central concern of Burke's Enlightenment, and his facility with the genre of "character" development was especially useful in this project. Burke thus found commendable in Columbus values that he cherished: a commitment to the diffusion of learning and truth and an ability to endure the trials of doubters and persecutors to disperse the "delusive air" of false wisdom for truth's sake. And, most important, Columbus shared Burke's underlying colonial objective: the disinterested pursuit of the advancement of humanity.⁴¹

At this young age, Burke may have seen himself in the Columbus story, and the adventurer himself as a fellow traveler and suffering servant of "enlightenment." After all, his calls for a renewed commitment to the cultivation of native Irish genius through his work on *The Reformer* fell largely on deaf ears; he was an outsider even among his own people. Newly arrived in England, he was even more of a stranger: an Irishman with a distinctive accent and a suspicious pedigree. His genius and abilities being a handicap in his new country, and not having been appreciated in his native land, at least not in ways that would allow him to flourish on his terms and according to his interests, America in the mid-1750s must have appeared a promising and welcoming destination. After all, as Burke himself would trace in his early American history, it is the "outsider" or "adventurer" who defined America's character and culture. It is likely this "enthusiasm" that Burke brought to his study of the European settlements in America and to his surveys of great American lives. It certainly was an "enthusiasm" for charting his own course in the world, whether in America or England, which animated

⁴⁰ Robertson, *History of America*, Book II, 64. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ The Columbus of recent times generally is viewed much differently than the Columbus of Burke's time. Today he is often characterized as a benighted and rapacious colonial imperialist for white, European civilization, with his only disinterest being the plight of the indigenous population and their natural environment. See in this regard, Kirkpatrick Sale, *Christopher Columbus and the Conquest of Paradise*, Second Edition (New York, 2006). Columbus certainly was not disinterested in the literal sense; rather for Burke this virtue was a comparative quality applied to persons who exhibited in an uncommon way a lesser degree of self-interest and a greater degree of other-interest or elevated interest put to the service of truth and the improvement of humanity.

this “projector” and was a source of irritable pride throughout his life.⁴² Columbus’s story, thus, had a personal appeal; but it also gave Burke an opportunity to measure contemporary English colonial efforts against Columbus’s great early example.

It was the belief in the lofty nature and responsibilities of this civilizing venture that dignified the American characters Burke commended as models; furthermore, it was this culturally evangelical or missionary belief that defined the disinterestedness of an adventurer such as Columbus and provided a reservoir of personal strength when adversity or narrow-minded opposition presented themselves. And so it was that Columbus’s project began, for Burke, “with an assiduity and firmness of mind, never enough to be admired and applauded, he at length overcame all difficulties; and to his inexpressible joy ... set sail on the third of August, 1492....”⁴³ Burke captured the extraordinary consequences that often follow from ordinary encounters: “They landed on one of the islands now called Lucayos, or Bahamas, which is remarkable for nothing but this event; and here it was, that the two worlds, if I may use the expression, were first introduced to one another; a meeting of extraordinary nature, and which produced great changes in both.”⁴⁴ It is the “changes” that this encounter produced in both worlds and for both peoples that interest Burke chiefly in the *Settlements*. By documenting how Europeans and Americans shaped each other prior to the “present war” Burke attempted to provide his readers with a useful resource, or map, for charting the course of Britain’s imperial future.

In successive pages, Burke considered the nature of that first encounter of the Christian Cross and European civilization with native “superstition” and culture. He details it thus:

The first thing Columbus did, after thanking God for the success of his important voyage, was to take possession of the island in the name of their Catholic majesties, by setting up

⁴² Recall his words: “I was obliged to shew my passport, and again and again to prove my sole title to the honour of being useful to my Country, by a proof that I was not wholly unacquainted with its laws, and the whole system of its interests both at home and abroad.” Burke in *A Letter to a Noble Lord, Writings and Speeches*, 9:160.

⁴³ *Settlements*, 1:8–9.

⁴⁴ *Settlements*, 1:10.

a cross upon the shore; great multitudes of the inhabitants looking on, ignorant and unconcerned at a ceremony which was to deprive them of their natural liberty.... He touched on several of the islands in the same cluster, enquiring everywhere for gold, which was the only object of commerce he thought worth his care, because the only thing that could give the court of Spain an high opinion of his discoveries.... [These islands] were inhabited by an humane and hospitable people, in a state of simplicity fit to be worked upon.... When the Spaniards first arrived in that country, they were taken for men come from heaven; and it is no wonder, considering the extreme novelty of their appearance, and the prodigious superiority they had in every respect over a people in all the nakedness of uncultivated nature.... On his return homewards, [Columbus] touched upon several islands ... and discovered the Caribbees, of the barbarity of whose inhabitants he had heard terrible accounts....⁴⁵

This passage evidenced Burke's attempt to produce coolly dispassionate and objective historical writing. His suppression of moralism certainly distinguished his narrative from, say, a *Las Casas*.⁴⁶

Burke's sweep through what he considered the initially innocent encounter between "barbarism ... and ... refinement," as he put it in a 1777 letter to Robertson, or between "the nakedness of uncultivated nature" and the "prodigious superiority" of "men taken from heaven" was noteworthy. In addition to the person of Columbus, Burke's sympathies were with the gentle and unsuspecting Taino Indians who were "unconcerned at a ceremony which was to deprive them of their natural liberty." It suggests, again, the way in which Burke had an ability to be in more than one place at the same time: he had a European versus native lens to look at America whereas he had an English versus native lens when looking at Ireland. In the former case, he drew from his Irish identity to appreciate the Amerindians, while in the latter case his European

⁴⁵ *Settlements*, I:10–11; II; 12; 13; 14.

⁴⁶ Bartolomé de las Casas, O.P. (1484–1566) was a Spanish priest and settler in Mexico who wrote influential and scathing denunciations of Spanish colonizers treatment of native Amerindians.

side gave him the tools to map the natives' place in the progress of civilization. In the American context, the Catholic side was the invader side. The opposite was true in Ireland, where the English conquered and often ruthlessly subdued the old natives of that Island. Burke's Irish background helped him to be sympathetic with America.

Burke's interest in the complexity of human nature and ambitions, however, was evidenced by the way in which he introduced into the Columbus-Indian encounter the specter of the Spanish court's narrow interests (gold) and the "terrible accounts" of the cannibal Carib natives. Native paradise thus had for Burke its own flaws to juxtapose with those of the Europeans. And he was quick to exempt Columbus from the larger flaws of European society. He made clear that gold was not Columbus's main object, but that of the Spanish policymakers. It was a pragmatic matter for Columbus, the only way to secure a "high opinion" of his venture at home.⁴⁷ More insidiously, it was the nature of court political pressure that stoked the flames of avarice in the hearts of Columbus's crew. Unfortunately, the "humane and hospitable" simplicity of the native Amerindians made them "fit to be worked upon"—meaning taken advantage of and exploited. And so in the nature of the American act of colonization, Burke located a dual characteristic of early European colonialism: on the positive side, a restless commitment courageously to "extend the boundaries of ignorance" and "vanquish" "obstinate incredulity;" on the negative side, an equally restless zeal of European man to extend himself commercially and territorially in ways that are often narrow, exploitive, and violent and which, paradoxically, are a poor basis for successful statecraft.

Along the way and in this regard, Burke briefly considered "mini-characters" who complement or reinforce the point he is making. An early example in this account is the tribute he paid to Queen Isabel of Castile. She was an enlightened monarch of "comprehensive views" in Burke's story, able, unlike Ferdinand, to see the value of colonies and set-

⁴⁷ William Robertson similarly argued that the need Columbus felt for departing "from his own system of administration" was due to the fact that he "saw that there was but one method of supporting his own credit, and of silencing all his adversaries. He must produce such a quantity of gold as would not only justify what he had reported with respect to the richness of the country, but encourage [the Spanish monarchs] to persevere in prosecuting his plans." *History of America*, Book II, 71, 72.

lements. As he put it: "It must not be omitted here, in honour of her sex, and in justice to Isabella, that this scheme was first countenanced, and the equipment made by the queen only; the king had no share in it; she even raised the money necessary for the design upon her own jewels."⁴⁸ Isabel, therefore, shared with Columbus the enthusiasms and sympathies of far-sighted colonial "projectors." Burke's view seems to be consistent with the historiography of his time and since.⁴⁹ For example, William Robertson's treatment of Isabel and Ferdinand paralleled Burke's.⁵⁰

For his part, Burke made an important distinction between acts of destruction and discovery in his chronicle of the admiral's return to Spain after his first voyage. Columbus, wrote Burke, "entered the city in a sort of triumph. And certainly there never was a more innocent triumph, nor one that formed a more new and pleasing spectacle. He had not destroyed, but discovered nations."⁵¹ Throughout the *Settlements*, Burke's negative colonial ideal was based on conquest that "destroys" peoples and cultures for the raw self-interest of another people or culture, which generally had the advantage of possessing the superiority of modern technology and thus could impose a collective will indiscriminately. Burke argued that discovery, by contrast, implies obligation, responsibility, justice, and respect for the discovered. Discovery does not give carte blanche for wholesale subjection by any means necessary. This observation might well have struck a contemporary chord for Burke's reader, as a war for colonial settlement was going on at the time this work was published. And Burke may well have hoped that his Columbus narrative would lead to reflection of that kind. He also probably had in mind the British "conquest" or "discovery" of Ireland, about which

48 *Settlements*, 1:9. Later, Burke again highlights Columbus's connection to his Queen in naming several islands he discovered in her honor: "These islands, Columbus, who had a grateful mind, in which the memory of his benefactions was always uppermost, called Jardin de la Reyna, of the queen's garden, in honour of queen Isabella." Ibid., 26. Burke is consistently praising of Isabel while disparaging the abilities and intelligence of Ferdinand. As he will do in contrasting Pope Alexander VI unfavorably to Isabel, so too Ferdinand provides Burke the cover to elevate the Catholic Queen by simultaneously deriding the King.

49 For our time, see Nancy Rubin, *Isabella of Castile: The First Renaissance Queen* (New York, 1992).

50 William Robertson, *History of America*, Book II, 50.

51 *Settlements*, 1:17.

he had a decidedly negative view. After all, his Irish experience was a current moving through his interpretation of the American conquest.

Interestingly, and by comparison, Burke's reading of Columbus would find a parallel in another "Character" he wrote in the pages of his "Abridgement of the English History" in the years following the *Settlement's* publication: that of Julius Agricola (A.D. 40–93), the Roman governor of Britain. Agricola evidenced an ability Burke always admired: integrating and ordering clashing or competing customs, manners, and laws for the benefit of all: he was for Burke a person "by whom it was a happiness for the Britons to be conquered."⁵² Agricola possessed "bold and popular virtues" to which he joined "reserve" and "moderation." Immediately upon his arrival in Britain and conquest of the island of "Mona" (Anglesey), "Agricola observed a conduct very different from that of his predecessor ... the island, when he had reduced it, was treated with great lenity... [He] was a man of humanity and virtue; he pitied the condition and respected the prejudices of the conquered. This behaviour facilitated the progress of his arms; in so much that ... all the British nations ... yielded themselves to the Roman government, as soon as they found out that peace was no longer a dubious blessing."⁵³ This description of the virtues and policy of the conquering Agricola was strikingly similar to the sketch of Christopher Columbus and other of Burke's "American Characters" included in the *Settlements*. Like Burke's Columbus, "In the interval between his campaigns, Agricola was employed in the great labours of peace. He knew that the general must be perfected by the legislator; and that the conquest is neither permanent nor honourable, which is only an introduction of tyranny."⁵⁴ He also, Burke noted, "eased the tribute of the province ... by cutting off all those vexatious practices, which attended the levying of it, far more grievous than the imposition itself."⁵⁵ In this Agricola was likely to collect more revenue and encourage economic development in the process. Burke captured in a masterful summary the attributes he would apply to a far-sighted conqueror along with the right policies for a just conquest:

⁵² *Writings and Speeches*, I:366. Burke read and admired Tacitus's *The Agricola* (written likely between 97–98 A.D.). Agricola was Tacitus's father-in-law.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 366–67. Mona was the great center of Druids and of magical beings.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 366–67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 367–68.

Every step in securing the subjection of the conquered country was attended with the utmost care, in providing for its peace and internal order. Agricola reconciled the Britons to the Roman government, by reconciling them to the Roman manners. He moulded that fierce nation by degrees to soft and social customs; leading them imperceptibly into a fondness for bath, for gardens, for grand houses, and all the commodious elegancies of a cultivated life. He diffused a grace and dignity over this new luxury by the introduction of literature. He invited instructors in all the arts and sciences from Rome and he sent the principal youth of Britain to that city to be educated, at his own expense. In short he subdued the Britons by civilizing them; and made them exchange a savage liberty for a polite and easy subjection. His conduct is the most perfect model for those employed in the unhappy, but sometimes necessary task of subduing a rude and free people.⁵⁶

Agricola was a "perfect model" for Burke because his policy aimed for a true and lasting peace through toleration, assimilation, the encouragement of education and the diffusion of learning, and in encouraging commerce and exchange by easing the tribute. For Burke, Agricola's achievement was to "reconcile" the Britons to their conquest and their conquerors. Burke reinforced Tacitus's purposes in writing his *Agricola*, and celebrated the confident affirmation of the first Roman and then later British way of life fashioned in the early days of Britain's encounter with the Romans. He explicitly saw in the Amerindians a historical parallel to the early Britons, and, as he attributes to them the same virtues, he would have recognized in Columbus a proxy for Agricola. Burke noted in the "Abridgement of the English History" (penned in the years following publication of the *Settlements*), that "our British ancestors had no regular polity, with a standing coercive power. The ambassadors, which they sent to Caesar, laid all the blame of war, carried on by great armies, upon the rashness of their young men; and they declared that the ruling people had no share in these hostilities. This is exactly the excuse, which the savages of America, who have no regular government,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 368.

make at this day upon the like occasions; but it would be a strange apology from one of the modern states of Europe, that had employed armies against each other.”⁵⁷

Burke later observed that the native Britons abandoned their failed military methods and would not face the Romans in the open field. Rather, “they formed frequent ambuscades; they divided themselves into light flying parties; and continually harassed the enemy on his march. This plan, though in their circumstances the most judicious, was attended with no great success.” Indeed, he referred to the early Britons’ “dexterity of forming ambuscades (the art military of savages).”⁵⁸ In this regard, Burke then made an observation in the “Abridgement” that he had already made in the *Settlements*: namely that, “In all very uncultivated countries, as society is not close nor intricate, nor property very valuable, liberty subsists with few restraints.”⁵⁹

It is important to notice here that while Burke was moderately anti-colonial throughout both the “Abridgement” and the *Settlements*, he nevertheless conceded that the business of conquest often was an unavoidable necessity in history’s Providential march.⁶⁰ This was particularly true of the European encounter with the New World considered in the pages of the *Settlements*. In this sense Burke matured not so much into an anti-imperialist as into a cautious, prudent imperialist. His study of history taught him that nations cannot impose institutions on a whole people; rather policies need to respond to circumstances and particulars and address them humanely. History shaped Burke’s view of the statesman as one who is always appraising, adjusting, and evaluating. There is never one template; effective government requires eternal vigilance. At this time in his life, Burke saw Ireland behind him and America ahead.

Another suggestive example of the connection between Burke’s Irish and American interests is the manner in which he incorporated

⁵⁷ *Writings and Speeches*, 1:342–43.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 344; 349.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 349; and for the same point made about the Amerindians in the pages of the *Settlements*, see 1:175–76 as noted in *Writings and Speeches*, 1:349.

⁶⁰ Burke’s references to the role of “a wonderful disposition of a Divine Providence” as the direct or indirect “arm of God” in history are peppered through the “Abridgement” much as they are through the *Settlements*; see pages 347, 388, 393, 399, and 444 for just some examples.

elements of his aesthetic philosophy of the sublime. He began to sketch out a volume on the sublime and beautiful during his Trinity years. He had put the finishing touches on his treatise during the same time he was compiling the *Settlements*, and published it during the same year. Evidence of mingling his "Irish" aesthetic of the sublime with his American historical interests appears throughout the *Settlements*, especially with reference to his theory of the nature of "terror" and its relation to the sublime. Consider Burke's characterization of Indian "dread" and terror and the manner in which he uses his aesthetic philosophy to convey the nature of Columbus's conquest. On his second voyage, Burke noted, Columbus "made a great ostentation of his cavalry."

This was the first time the Indians of America had ever seen horses. Their dread of these animals and their riders were extreme; they thought both formed but one animal, and the impetuosity of their charge appeared irresistible to these naked and ill-armed people. Wherever they appeared, those Indians, who intended any hostility, immediately fled; not did they think the intervention of the deepest and most rapid rivers any security; they believed that the horses could fly, and that nothing was impossible to creatures so extraordinary.... But Columbus did not rely upon these prejudices, though he made all imaginable use of them; knowing that those things which appear most terrible at first, become every day less affecting by use, and that they even grow contemptible, when their real power is once well known. For which reason, he neglected none of his former methods of cultivating the affections of the natives....⁶¹

Burke's aesthetics of the sublime would become an important device for Burke himself in other contexts, during both the heat of the American and French revolutions. He would draw upon these early American lessons to invoke the terror he felt in the face of both revolutions. The incompetent handling of the war in the American colonies during the critical year 1777 was exposed in an especially effective way when Burke excoriated the ministry in the wake of the British loss at Saratoga

61 *Settlements*, 1:23–24.

for using Indians and Blacks to advance their misguided efforts and turn "a war of conquest, which had been found impracticable" into "a war of distress and intimidation." As he described it: "Whole nations of savages had been bribed to take up the hatchet, without a single regular officer or soldier amongst them," the Cherokees, for instance, having been "bribed and betrayed into war." The British betrayal of the Cherokees left them, according to Burke, "nearly exterminated," with the remaining natives abandoned to live "in a state of servitude" in the Carolinas.⁶² Incompetent policy and immoral leadership were the fundamental reasons why Britain was losing its American colonies. Burke's rhetorical abilities could make that point by going beyond the facts to arouse the passions of his listeners or readers to act in favor of what he believed were the just and prudent policies of his party.

In a more negative context, the "savagery" of the Amerindians was later compared to the aims of French Jacobins. Burke illustrated the point in his narration of the march of the royal family from Versailles to their violent end. It was the "most horrid, atrocious, and afflicting spectacle, that perhaps ever was exhibited to the pity and indignation of mankind.... It was (unless we have been strangely deceived) a spectacle more resembling a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga, after some of their murders called victories, and leading into hovels hung round with scalps, their captives, overpowered with the scoffs and buffets of women as ferocious as themselves, much more than it resembled the triumphal pomp of a civilized martial nation."⁶³ In writing this passage Burke would have had recourse to his reading of *The History of the Five Indian Nations* (1727) by Cadwallader Colden which he used as a source for the *Settlements*. The choice of the Iroquois at Onondaga was also suggestive in that the Iroquois were a potent mix of primitive and civilized. Their highly developed constitution famously attracted the interest and admiration of Benjamin Franklin, and yet they were the most cruel and merciless of the Indian nations. Burke was reminding his English readers how perilously close the primitive and the civilized can be; how they can exist at the same time within the same body. Keeping the brutal tendency at bay with man and polity was the chief aim of the civilized.

62 *Speech on Indians* (1777), *Writings and Speeches*, 3:355–56; 358–59.

63 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), *Writings and Speeches*, 7:159.

It was to this end, as Burke noted, that Columbus was concerned to cultivate the affections of the Spanish conquerors, and to order them rightly toward their natural surroundings and to the manners of the natives; for "this wise governor" knew that the Europeans' "difficulty" in conforming to the "Indian manner of living" was a potential source of both material and physical "evil" for "his people." A source of the greatness and wisdom of Burke's Columbus was that he knew that he needed to cultivate the respective affections of the Native Americans and Europeans, and thus attempted to reconcile their various difficulties and manners for the benefit of all. This was the kind of magnanimity in policy that Burke always admired, and would frequently find wanting in English imperial policy. As he would put it famously in his conciliation speech, "Magnanimity in politicks is not seldom the truest wisdom; and a great empire and small minds go ill together."⁶⁴ Burke specifically attributed this virtue to Columbus, whose "skill was as remarkable as his magnanimity."⁶⁵ Unfortunately, human nature was not so easily reconciled to disinterested, magnanimous, or mutually beneficial government. Magnanimity with respect to the "other" or the vulnerable was "unnatural" in Burke's view. It was rather an acquired virtue, the fruit of education, religion, and culture. It was thus a central element of Burke's biographical sketches that great figures in history put into practice what they knew to be the good.

Burke's belief in an intervening agent of Providence, as mentioned above, was evident throughout his early writings. One particularly great historical example for him of the existence of the "strong active principle" of Providence that favors individual actors, gives "life and energy to all designs," and thus affects the course of history, was provided by Columbus. Burke saw in that great explorer's often unexplainable good fortune the hand of "Providence, favouring his innocence and assisting his capacity..."⁶⁶ And Burke's view on the role of Providence in history was mixed into his appreciation for the practical and "scientific" Columbus. He did, as argued above, allow for the occasional direct intervention of God for the purposes of advancing humanity—

⁶⁴ *Writings and Speeches*, 3:166.

⁶⁵ *Settlements*, 1:35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 52–53.

even, or especially, against great resistance. Columbus himself was, in Burke's view, a vehicle for God's will, as "Heaven seemed to declare in his favour..."⁶⁷ When Burke summarized the unique "character of Columbus," he found "hardly ... any one of the components of a truly great man wanting":

The character of this first discoverer was extremely different from that of all with whom he dealt, and from that of most of those who pursued his discoveries and conquests; some with a vigour and conduct equal, but all with virtues very much inferior. In his character hardly is any one of the components of a truly great man wanting. For to the ideas of the most penetrating philosopher, and a scheme built upon them worthy of a great king, he joined a constancy and patience, which alone could carry it into execution, with the fortune of a private man. Continual storms at sea, continual rebellions of a turbulent people on shore, vexations, disappointments, and cabals at court, were his lot all his life; and these were the only reward of services, which no favours could have rewarded sufficiently. His magnanimity was proof against all these, and his genius surmounted all the difficulties they threw in his way, except that of his payment....⁶⁸

In addition to "magnanimity" and "genius," a key to all of Burke's American exemplars was highlighted in Columbus's "*disinterested behaviour*, his immoveable fidelity to the ungrateful crown he served, the just policy of his dealing with the Indians, his caution against giving them any offence, and his tender behaviour to them when conquered, which merited him the glorious title of their father, together with his zeal to have them instructed in the truths of religion, raise him to the elevated rank of those few men whom we ought to consider as examples to mankind, and ornaments to human nature."⁶⁹

Burke then proceeded to contrast the character and conduct of Columbus and the Spanish court, arguing that as "we saw all along" the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 61–62.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 62–63. Emphasis added.

conduct of the Spaniards "was ... unjust and impolitic." Having argued that Columbus is one of the great "ornaments" of mankind, Burke felt compelled to outline the antithesis of the "disinterested" navigator. Burke argued that after Columbus's death, as it was to a large degree even during life, he no longer was the model of settlement for the Spaniards. Whereas for Burke, Columbus's "designs were laid in Science and pursued with a benevolent heart and gentle measures," others had not followed his singular example, "but too often . . . show an enthusiastic avarice, urging men forward to every act of cruelty and horror."⁷⁰

Columbus was an example for progress; Spanish adventurers and courtiers were generally models of more mixed or deleterious approaches to "discovery" and conquest. As Burke noted, Spain's, as opposed to Columbus's, settlement of America "was in all respects as fortunate, as the measures pursued were ungrateful and imprudent."⁷¹ The ministers and the Spanish court represent Burke's negative example, killing with their "narrow" policies the spirit of true human "enterprise." Consequently, "things begin to stagnate and corrupt." It is easy to see in Burke's character sketch of Columbus how a modern historian such as Anthony Pagden could remark parenthetically that Burke "had a firmer grasp on the historical figure than most."⁷²

For Burke, and later Robertson, the long-term damage done by the court of Spain was in smothering creativity and initiative through bureaucratic and unenlightened policy, killing "the spirit of enterprise"⁷³ that for Burke, as it would be for Robertson, was such a natural and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁷¹ Ibid., 63.

⁷² Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, 102. Pagden is another example of a modern historian who attributes the *Settlements*' philosophical insights and better writing to Edmund. See also Pagden's *Lords of All the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁷³ This phrase occurs in both Burke and Robertson: See Burke: "After the discoveries of Columbus had enlarged the sphere of industry to active minds, such a *spirit of enterprise* went abroad, that not only those persons whose indigence might have driven them from their native country, but persons of the first rank went over to settle in America." [Emphasis added.] *Settlements*, 1:67; and Robertson: "Vast objects now presented themselves. The human mind, roused and interested by the prospect, engaged with ardour in pursuit of them, and exerted its active powers in a new direction. This *spirit of enterprise*, though but newly awakened in Spain, began soon to operate extensively." [Emphasis added.] *History of America*, Book II, 80.

powerful force in any colonial enterprise. Indeed, it was the foundation for the human and commercial benefits that Burke believed profited both the mother country and its colonial partner. Through “a coincidence of events at that time, which does not always happen so opportunely,” Spain secured the Americas and justified “an ungrateful and narrow policy.”⁷⁴ Thus, for Burke, a salutary and beneficial end may result even from unfortunate and reprehensible means. This outcome, in Burke’s mind, seemed due to a mixture of providential design and human agency.

III.

The human element was for both Burke and Robertson the prime focus of their respective historical accounts. They demonstrated that a rightly ordered “spirit of enterprise” was dependent upon “enlightened” individual actors animated by a sense of what we call the common good and fundamentally characterized by a commitment to the welfare and flourishing of all peoples. Their exemplars were able, by individual genius and an ability to persuade natives of their country as well as newly encountered lands, to cultivate the particular in a host culture while simultaneously seeking to embed the more universal concepts of Christian and European culture. The failure of courts and sovereigns to comprehend, or simply to be too impatient to appreciate, the complexities of nesting European virtues in non-Christian cultures ultimately accounted for, in both Burke’s and Robertson’s treatment of American history, the worst aspects (and even the failure) of a truly and mutually beneficial settlement of the Americas. The opposite of self-interested, consciously exploitive, and therefore “narrow policy” was crucial in such endeavors. It was Burke’s belief that the truly great “conquerors” possessed this capacity to varying degrees. The end, then, of Europe’s universal colonial objective to gain knowledge, expand trade, and enlarge the sphere of political influence was best accomplished by prudent adjustment to particular circumstances, cultural conditions, and group or individual norms. Through a policy of magnanimity all parties benefited and

⁷⁴ *Settlements*, I:63.

durable relationships fostered. This was a lesson Burke took from the Spanish example in South America, as well as the French and British experience in North America.

Indeed, Burke hoped at this stage of his career, as he demonstrated later in the *Settlements*, that the British would bring to America such an enlightened colonial model, and in so doing unleash the possibilities inherent in authentic freedom for all. Burke would, in time, be disappointed in this regard, eventually mounting a critique of British colonial taxation and trade policy in America during the 1760s and 1770s that paralleled his censure of the seventeenth-century Spanish court. And so it is not hard to see in the above quotation that the men Burke spoke of, "so possessed with their designs," prefigure his criticisms of the court of George III and his ministers regarding their "stagnate and corrupt" American policy. In the *Settlements*, the intuition in this regard is evident, if not yet the strength of analysis. Here, such men and their "designs" are "examples" that "terrify" other, more moderate, and thus more prudent, reformers.⁷⁵

Similarly, in the "Abridgement," Burke's treatment of the reign of John (1199–1216) anticipated his treatment of George III and the king's policy toward Britain's North American colonies. For, as Burke wrote: "Then came John to the Crown. The arbitrary taxes, which he opposed very early in his reign, which offended even more by the improper use made of them than their irregularity, irritated the people extremely, and joined with all the preceding causes to make this government contemptible." John, Burke observed, drew upon himself the hatred of the Church, its "bishops and ecclesiasticks," and engaged in struggles with the Pope that weakened him politically at home and abroad. He began to lose foreign territories as well, and with it, his reputation. For Burke, the king's character was chiefly responsible for his own and his country's discontents:

⁷⁵ Nor would he exempt from criticism the American colonists, in whose commitment to an extreme form of dissenting Protestantism Burke found much that concerned him, including the disenfranchisement and intolerant treatment of racial and religious minorities. This may have been one reason why he was not as appreciated by some of the founders of the eventual United States, particularly Jefferson.

Add to all these causes the personal character of the king, in which there was nothing uniform or sincere; and which introduced the like unsteadiness into all his government. He was indolent, yet restless in his disposition; fond of working by violent methods, without any vigour; boastful, but continually betraying his fears; shewing on all occasions such a desire for peace, as hindered him from ever enjoying it. Having no spirit of order, he never looked forward; content, by any temporary expedient, to extricate himself from a present difficulty. Rash, arrogant, perfidious, irreligious, unquiet, he made a tolerable head of party, but a bad king.

He left England weakened and dependent on the Pope and on his vassals.

Burke turned for an alternative model to John's contemporary, King Philip of France. Whereas John inherited a kingdom, territories, and strong royal prerogatives, Philip assumed the crown when the kingdom of France was disunited. Royal authority was at a low point. Yet he, through character and policy, resisted "Papal usurpation" and "reduced his subjects of all orders to stricter obedience." And yet, out of this condition created by John's "vices and weakness" came conditions that "produced the grand revolution in favour of liberty"—Magna Carta.⁷⁶

In Burke's historical writing, such "Characters" provided instruction in the ordinary and extraordinary circumstances of their lives. Just and unjust policies, prudent and imprudent handling of individuals and orders in society, strength and weakness of character combined to determine the progress or regress of peoples through time. Patterns emerge and consequences become somewhat more predictable. Burke's critical stance toward the colonial policies of his day was deeply rooted in the colonialism of ages and nations previous to his.

In his account of Columbus, Burke reinforced his "great man" theory. Namely, that people of capacity and genius, who are animated by a disinterested spirit, are often the agents of historical, or even providential, change. For, as he noted, "With regard to America, the conquest as well as the discovery was owing wholly to private men; the court

⁷⁶ *Writings and Speeches*, 1:550–52.

contributed nothing but pretensions and patents.”⁷⁷ Burke’s respect for talented “new men” and contempt for small-minded courtiers was evident in his transition from the character of Columbus and his conquest to successive colonial figures. In doing so he first referred to a classical image found in Plutarch: “An ancient painter drew a satirical picture of Cimon the Athenian. He represented this commander asleep, and Fortune drawing a net over cities to put them into his possession.”⁷⁸ Unfortunately, in this case Burke must have relied on memory, for while his author is correct, his subject is wrong. It is in his “life” of Sylla⁷⁹ that Plutarch makes the following point through the character not of Cimon,⁸⁰ but of Isocrates’ pupil,

Timotheus the son of Conon, the Athenian; who, when his adversaries ascribed his successes to his good luck, and had a painting made, representing him asleep, and Fortune by his side, casting her nets over the cities, was rough and violent in his indignation at those who did it, as if, by attributing all to Fortune, they had robbed him of his just honours; and said to the people on one occasion at his return from war, ‘In this, ye men of Athens, Fortune had no part.’ A piece of boyish petulance, which the deity, we are told, played back upon Timotheus; who from that time was never able to achieve anything that was great, but proving altogether unfortunate in his attempts, and falling into discredit with the people, was at last banished the city.

Timotheus was a good anti-model for Burke in that he “pursued an individualist and short-sighted policy with outstanding ability.”⁸¹

Burke’s purpose here was to implicate the Spanish court in the same way, unmerited acquisition combined with imprudent policy: “There never were princes to whom this representation could be applied with more justice, than to king Ferdinand and his successor the emperor Charles [V]. Without forming any plan to the cabinet, without issuing a

⁷⁷ *Settlements*, 1:65–66.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:66–67.

⁷⁹ *Plutarch’s Lives*, volume I, the Dryden translation (New York, 2001), “Sylla,” 611.

⁸⁰ Cimon was a fifth century B.C. Athenian general and the subject of a “life” by Plutarch.

⁸¹ *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1077.

penny out of their treasury, without sending a regiment from their troops, private adventurers amongst their subjects put them into possession of a greater, and a more wealthy territory, than ever the most celebrated conquerors had acquired by their valour, or their wisdom....”⁸² Burke’s assessment of the Spanish court and its courtiers might have been a proxy for the Dublin Castle officials he criticized in the pages of *The Reformer*. They certainly presaged his criticisms of King George III and a succession of the king’s ministers and “friends.” In the latter case, what Fortune had given England, stubborn pride and ignorance could lose.

The second wave of conquerors would, for Burke, mingle the best and worst lessons of Columbus and the Spanish model of conquest. The great navigator had unwittingly unleashed a spirit into the modern world that others would pursue with good or ill, large or narrow, intentions. Either way, however, the conquests would be conducted in spite of any plan of court or cabinet, and carried forward by “private” men, not agents of the court. It was the ultimate legacy of Columbus that his discoveries “had enlarged the sphere of industry to active minds,” and that “such a spirit of enterprise went abroad that not only those persons whose indigence might have driven them from their native country, but persons of the first rank went over to settle in America.”⁸³ Burke’s first sketch of this next wave of explorers and conquerors is a short one on Balboa (1475–1517); and it usefully highlights the attributes that Burke finds most ennobling in his American heroes. “Vasco Nunez de Balboa,” Burke began, “was a man of a graceful presence, a liberal education, a hardy constitution, and that kind of popular bravery, which recommends a man who engages in desperate expeditions....”

This man ... followed the tracks of Columbus to Darien, gained the friendship of some of the Caziques, and conquered others. He was the first who discovered the South-Sea [Pacific Ocean]. He settled a colony upon that coast, and built the city of Panama. But according to the fate of all the first adventurers in this new world, indeed according to the fate of most who engage in new undertakings, he never lived to reap

82 *Settlements*, 1:66–67.

83 *Ibid.*

the fruit of his labours. He found himself superceded by one [Pedrarias Davila] who had only discernment enough of his merit to raise his jealousy and envy, and who could make no other use of the discoveries of this great man, than to increase his own private fortune. This man was a politician and a courtier, and having in several instances basely injured Balboa, he was too wise too stop there, but under a pretended form of justice cut off his head, and confiscated his estate.⁸⁴

Here, in microcosm, is an ideal Burkean character set in relief against a representative anti-hero: Balboa is presented as a man of grace, of "liberal education," hardy and brave, a man of more than "moderate ambition," a founder of cities who, while motivated in part by the prospects of lucre, nevertheless colonized in the disinterested spirit of Columbus, seeking to extend the horizon of mankind, and like the other "first adventurers" did not live to "reap the fruit of his labours." Balboa was a martyred character for Burke, the victim of the stubborn resistance and prejudicial opposition of "all such persons, who, unconscious of any merit of their own, are puffed up with any little portion of delegated power."⁸⁵ This was a sentiment that demonstrated Burke's contempt for any abuse of power; and also for his sensitivity to "new men" wrongfully persecuted by small-minded, self-interested ministers, courtiers, or place men.⁸⁶

Another of Burke's American characters did overcome official hostility and resistance—Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618), an Englishman of "comprehensive views." In his *Speech on Conciliation with America*, Burke referred to Raleigh as "one excellent individual."⁸⁷ This opinion of Raleigh was first developed in the pages of the *Settlements*.

Sir Walter Raleigh, the most extraordinary genius of his own or perhaps any other time, a penetrating statesman, an accomplished courtier, a deep scholar, a fine writer, a great soldier,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 68–69.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 33–34.

⁸⁶ William Robertson penned a comparatively fuller portrait of Balboa and the treachery of Pedrarias, but his essential assessment of Balboa's character and contribution "to future progress" paralleled Burke's. *History of America*, Book III, 102–107.

⁸⁷ *Writings and Speeches*, 3:132.

and one of the ablest seamen in the world; this vast genius, that pierced so far and ran through so many things, was of a fiery eccentric kind, which led him into daring expeditions and uncommon projects, which, not being understood by a timid prince, and envied and hated by the rivals he had in so many ways of life, ruined him at last.... He was the first man in England who had a right conception of the advantages of settlements abroad; he was then the only person who had a thorough insight into trade, and who saw clearly the proper methods of promoting it....⁸⁸

Burke found a commendable successor to Raleigh's efforts in the Virginia colonial governor William Berkeley's (1606–1677) deft handling of the principal agitators in the failed Bacon's Rebellion (1676) which is put forward as an example of just, moderate, and prudential governance.⁸⁹ "It must be remarked," Burke noted, "in honour of the moderation of the government, that no person suffered, in his life or estate, for this rebellion, which was the more extraordinary as many people, at that time, were very earnest in soliciting grants of land in Virginia."⁹⁰ Other, more notable, Englishmen Burke put forward as disinterested models of colonial settlement included Lord De La Warr (1577–1618), of whom Burke wrote, "Regardless of his life, and inattentive to his fortune, he entered upon this long and dangerous voyage, and accepted this barren province, which had nothing of a government but its anxieties and its cares, merely for the service of his country...."⁹¹

Similarly, Burke praised James Oglethorpe's (1696–1785) settlement of Georgia. Oglethorpe, he stated, "very generously bestowed his own time and pains, without any reward, for the advancement of the settle-

88 *Settlements*, 2:218–19. William Robertson, by comparison, portrayed Raleigh as a more nuanced "projector" of the Old World and, ultimately, as a failure. *History of America*, Book IX, 400.

89 *Settlements*, 2:222–25.

90 *Ibid.*, 225.

91 *Ibid.*, 219–20. Thomas West, 3rd (or 12th) Baron De La Warr, generally known as Lord Delaware, was the Englishman for whom the state, Amerindian tribe, and river called "Delaware" were named. William Robertson held a similarly high opinion of De La Warr, *History of America*, Book IX, 409.

ment.”⁹² General Oglethorpe was the only one of America’s colonial “founders” that Burke came to know personally. As common “friends” of America, Oglethorpe and Burke became themselves friends in the 1760s after the Governor’s retirement and his frequent presence in Samuel Johnson’s and the Club’s circle. Burke’s esteem for the General did not suffer from personal acquaintance. There is only one surviving letter between the two, but it indicates that they shared an ongoing passion and interest in, and by implication an extended discussion of, the fate of Britain’s North American subjects as well as shared ideas of the nature of the British Empire. In a 1777 letter from Oglethorpe to Burke, the General called Burke’s recent letter to the Bristol sheriffs “excellent” and wrote that he hoped Burke’s counsels “will be followed.” He praised Burke’s conciliation efforts at “saving the Kingdom, and us All from Destruction.” Burke, in turn, responded to the eighty-one-year-old Oglethorpe, and in a spirit of great respect and humility referred to himself as “the weakest defender of the colonies” in contrast to Oglethorpe’s role “as one of the most distinguished of their founders.” In a burst of affection for Oglethorpe, the Colonies, the ideal of a federated British empire, and the British Constitution, Burke toasted his correspondent: “May you see the Colony, planned by your Sagacity, and planted by your care, become once more a free and flourishing Member of a free and flourishing Empire! But if this be too much a hope from a Country, which seems to have forgot the true source of its dignity and greatness, may you never have the misfortune of having led Englishmen into servitude and misery in a strange land!”⁹³ This letter is significant in that it connected Burke’s earliest interest in the American settlements with his contemporary mission to find some political way to preserve colonial British America in a federated, constitutionally bound empire. His understanding of the history of his subject formed the foundation of his current arguments in favor of conciliation. Oglethorpe must have kindled in Burke a longing for the kind of “Characters” he wrote approvingly of in the *Settlements*; a type of farsighted colonial leadership he found more common in the General’s days than his own.

⁹² *Settlements*, 2:264–65.

⁹³ General James Oglethorpe to Burke, 30 May 1777, and Burke to Oglethorpe, 2 June 1777, *Correspondence*, 3:343–44.

Another "bold and judicious navigator" put forward as a model in the *Settlements* was Henry Hudson (1565–1611). It was, however, a model with a twist: failure may lay the seeds of ultimate success. For while Hudson and his companions were lost in an "empire of winter and world of frost and snow," "his fate so calamitous cannot so much discourage a generous mind from such undertakings, as the immortality of this name, which he has secured by having given it to so great a sea, will be a spur to others to expect an equal honour, and perhaps with better success."⁹⁴ Similarly, in the person of Martin Frobisher (1535–1594), Burke paradoxically found success in the failed attempt to find a passage to India and to settle Nova Scotia: "From the first voyage of Frobisher (1576) an hundred and ten years ago ... notwithstanding so many disappointments, the rational hopes of this grand discovery have grown greater by every attempt, and seem to spring even out of our very failure.... But though we have hitherto failed in the original purpose for which we navigated this bay, yet such great designs even in their failures bestow a sufficient reward for whatever has been expended on them."⁹⁵ As Burke made plain throughout the pages of the *Settlements*, extending the frontiers of mankind for disinterested and "rational purposes" was always an end to be sought, and a source of hope for authentic human and national progress.

The largeness of Burke's own spirit in this regard was evidenced in the *Settlements* by the fact that even while generally critical of French efforts to colonize the New World, he was able to separate, as he did with Columbus and the Spanish court, the meritorious example of great individuals from "narrow" court minds. As one example, Burke briefly provided the sketch of the French role in the settlement of the Carolinas. In it we find a representative Burkean hero of "comprehensive views," namely: "The celebrated leader of the Protestants in that king-

⁹⁴ *Settlements*, 2:286–87.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 287. William Robertson made a similar point. Frobisher was, according to Robertson, "an officer of experience and reputation. In three successive voyages ... he explored the inhospitable coast of Labrador, and that of Greenland ... , without discovering any probable appearance of that passage to India for which he sought. This new disappointment was sensibly felt, and might have damped the spirit of naval enterprise among the English, if it had not resumed fresh vigour, amidst the general exultation of the nation, upon the successful expedition of Francis Drake." *History of America*, Book IX, 395. For Robertson as for Burke, failure was often a prelude to success.

dom [France], the admiral [Gaspard de] Chastillon [1519–1572],⁹⁶ who was not only a great commander, but an able statesman, was a man of too comprehensive views not to see the advantages of a settlement in America.”⁹⁷ After the Huguenot Chastillon, a French Catholic representative of Burke’s ideal or virtuous colonizer was Monsieur Philippe de Lonvilliers de Poincy (1583–1660), governor of France’s American settlements on the island of Saint-Christophe. In this case, Burke captured for his readers all of the virtues embodied in his ideal colonial governor: (a) disinterestedness—“he excelled not more to his own honour, than to the benefit of the colonies”; (b) sound or “prudent management”; (c) status and integrity—“of a good family; of an unblemished reputation for probity”; (d) broad learning—“of great reading”—and applied learning—“a genius variously exercised”; (e) science—“he was a master in mechanical learning”; (f) inventiveness—“He first taught ... He improved the methods ...”; (g) common good—“he kept a watchful eye and a severe hand upon all, who were for making hasty fortunes without adding to the publick stock”; (h) justice—“he made admirable regulations for the speedy and impartial administration of justice”; (i) the indispensability of religion to social order—“knowing that all order must depend for its blessing above, and its effect here upon an attention to religion”; (j) moderation—“[he] settled priests in them with a competent, but not superfluous provision.” The result: A settlement that “began to flourish, and that with very little help from home.” “A plain proof,” as Burke observed in words fit to bring this section to a close, “that almost everything depends ... on chusing proper men to command.”⁹⁸

In an age when factors such as climate were thought to be determinative of behavior (Montesquieu), and others, soon anyway, would sketch a tableau of progress based principally on material things (Smith), Burke seems rather traditional in his emphasis on character

96 Chastillon, also Count of Coligny and thus often called Admiral de Coligny, was the Huguenot leader killed with 50,000 other Huguenots in the Massacre of St. Bartholomew’s Day.

97 *Settlements*, 2:234. See page 235 for Burke’s account of the fate of the admiral, “destroyed at the infamous massacre of St. Bartholomew.”

98 *Settlements*, 2:6–8.

and the virtues (however inchoately he understood them). While he would also approve of and incorporate some of these Montesquieuan and Smithian emphases, he was not limited by them. Later in life, Burke wrote that "Admiration" was the "first sort of obedience."⁹⁹ It was, for him, true as it related to individuals and forms of government. Like Plutarch or Polybius before him, and like Robertson shortly after him, Burke understood the relationship between character and fortune in the making of ancient and contemporary history. Choice and chance provided pivotal opportunities that were ultimately history making. As everything depended on correct and prudent judgments in such a circumstance, everything also relied on a person's character formation. Imitation in this sense was a key factor in this formation process, and by extension in securing social bonds through generations.

Exemplary lives "proved instructive," as he would write in his *Speech on American Taxation*, "to those who wish to form themselves on whatever excellence has gone before them." His philosophical view of the crucial role custom plays in linking society over time presupposed a living engagement with a shared past. Eminent lives were one crucial way to make those connections. And while figures such as Gibbon and Voltaire were both traditional in their historiography and, like Burke, produced pen-sketches of Characters, the age, the trend, was headed elsewhere—either with Romantic theories or Rationalist ones. In the long run, though, it is hard to dismiss the effectiveness, freshness, and perennial appeal of Burke's approach. He is still worth reading long after many of his contemporaries have ceased to be.

99 *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), *Writings and Speeches*, 9:600.

Edmund Burke and Leo Strauss and the Charge of ‘Historicism’



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Abstract

In *Natural Right and History*, Leo Strauss finds reason to place Edmund Burke among both the classical political philosophers, owing to Burke's emphasis on the virtue of prudence, and yet as a precursor of Hegel. Burke's emphasis on circumstances, customs, and habits and the prevailing political order is sufficient, according to Strauss, to locate his thought within the pale of "historicism." There is an appreciation of Burke by Strauss, and yet at a fundamental level, he finds an anticipation of the plight of modernism mired in "historicism," rendering references by Burke to "natural law" suspect, if not specious. In this paper I wish to give a nuanced reading of Strauss on Burke, and yet challenge his claim that Burke succumbs to "historicism," basing my defense of Burke on a sustained reading of his understanding of "prudence" and "political reason" as succeeding in maintaining a classical reading of "natural law" as prudentially applied to changing historical circumstances.

Introduction

Edmund Burke's politics are grounded in nature, dealing with concrete situations, effected by changing circumstances within a social order in large shaped by the habits, prejudices, and common opinion and manners of a people. The "nature" grounding the principles underlying his politics is not amorphous, certainly regarding its essence, although the traditions and habits structuring common life help shape a second nature. Out of a specific human nature arises morality, reflecting a natural law, itself shaped by what Burke termed an "eternal, immutable law" whose ultimate source is the supreme being itself. Thus for Burke, not unlike Aristotle or Aquinas, "the principles of true politics are those of morality enlarged." For humans to flourish requires a state, to maintain order, but, most importantly, the state has for its ultimate aim not only the defense of the realm, the upholding of laws and the institutions helping to structure civil society—it has for its goal the perfection of our nature through virtue. Thus it is that Burke proclaims: "He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the means of its perfection—He willed therefore the state."

This cursory overview of the principles governing Burke's political thought is a matter of controversy, embracing a variety of interpretations. Is Burke most fundamentally a utilitarian, stressing the preeminence of the status quo, governed by expediency and convenience? Are his politics based primarily on a type of emotionalism, emphasizing natural sentiments, a moral sense, affected by an aesthetics which provides the instrument necessary to understand the sway of politics? Is he primarily a rhetorician, using a common discourse, shaped in large by Lockean psychology and the Scottish Enlightenment, again to sustain the prevailing order of a threatened, hierarchical, aristocratic society? Or is his political thought in the balance a type of historicism, shaped by the epoch in which civil society finds itself, responding to the peculiar circumstances and traditions molding the social order? It is to the "historicist" interpretation we turn by way of Leo Strauss.

Strauss's Critique of Burke
in 'Natural Right and History' in Brief

Leo Strauss offers a multi-faceted interpretation of Burke, in fact. As Frederick Dreyer remarks, "Leo Strauss's Burke is part Thomist and part Hegelian."¹ The context for Strauss's Thomistic Burke revolves around his conclusion that it was the "practical character of ... thought" that led Burke "to use the language of modern natural right," among other concepts, and "to integrate these notions into a classical or Thomistic framework."² On the other hand, the "Hegelian" Burke emerges in the context especially of Burke's controversial statement in *Speech on the Representation of Commons in Parliament*, cited by Strauss. Here Burke states that "our constitution is a prescriptive constitution; it is a constitution whose sole authority is that it has existed time out of mind."³ If time, reflecting historical process, is the standard of "prescriptive constitution" such as Britain's, then, Strauss tellingly notes, "Transcendent standards can be dispensed with if the standard is inherent in the process." Strauss continues in this vein, claiming that, "What could appear as a return to the primeval equation of the good [presumably this would be within the framework of the "Thomistic" Burke] with the ancestral is, in fact a preparation for Hegel."⁴ Now, if Burke's thought is indeed a "preparation for Hegel," as Strauss asserts, would not this render Burke's understanding of history incapable of providing transcendent moral standards for the political order? Strauss does ascribe a "secularized" understanding of Providence" to Burke, with "secularization" taken to mean "the 'temporalization' of the spiritual in the eternal."⁵ Yet in the end, even though Burke's thought may be a "preparation for Hegel," still, "Burke himself," Strauss concludes, "was still too deeply imbued with the spirit of 'sound antiquity' to allow the concern with individuality to

¹ Frederick A. Dreyer, *Burke's Politics: A Study in Whig Orthodoxy* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1979), 3.

² Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago University Press, 1953), 296.

³ Burke, *Speech on the Representation of the Commons in Parliament*, (1782), in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Bohn's British Classics, 8 vols. (London, 1854-1889), 6:146. Hereafter listed as *Works*.

⁴ *Ibid.* 319.

⁵ *Ibid.* 317.

overpower the concern with virtue.” And this is particularly significant for Strauss, as it is “the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns [that] concerns eventually, and perhaps from the beginning, the status of ‘individuality.’”

What follows is an attempt, in part a response to Strauss’s critique, to set forward in outline a Burkean understanding, or perhaps a philosophy, of history.

Burke’s Philosophy of History

Burke offers a very rich and profound philosophy of history, the understanding of which is essential to the comprehension of his political philosophy. This is not to imply that his political philosophy reduces to an elaboration of a causal relationship between historical events and the subsequent rise and fall of regimes and even civilizations on the way to a utopian culmination resulting in the end of history. Even if there is a causal relationship between the acts of individuals, or collectives, or nations, it transcends the intellect of humans and looms before us as an impenetrable mystery. Reflecting on the enormity of the French Revolution, and struggling as Burke was near the end of his life to grasp the full import of its unfolding descent into anarchy and tyranny, Burke marveled at the inscrutability of human events in the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796): “I doubt whether the history of mankind is yet complete enough, if ever it can be so, to furnish grounds for a sure theory on the fortune of a state. I am far from denying the operation of such causes: but they are infinitely uncertain, and much more obscure, and much more difficult to trace, than the foreign causes which tend to raise, to depress, and sometimes to overwhelm a community.”⁶

If the phrase “philosophy of history” conjures up the idea of a strict, universal science of history then Burke lacks such a thing. But if by such a phrase we mean the effort on the part of the “philosopher in action,” a term Burke used of himself, to gain at least a partial insight into the meaning of history, set as it is for him within the context of a theisti-

6 Edmund Burke, *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–), 9:188–89. Hereafter referred to as *Writings and Speeches*.

cally governed universe with a human destiny beyond the confines of temporality and matter, then Burke provides insights and contemplates the mysterious workings of Providence as it manifests itself within the universe of God's own creation.

For Burke, understanding history includes the role of Divine Providence, and the place of human nature, the individual, the state, tradition, and the possibility of human progress and reason's comprehension of the totality of history. What is the purpose of history for Burke's teleological political philosophy as opposed to a purely utilitarian or positivistic politics? What place do prudence and prescription have, given that history bears directly on our prudential judgments, and the role of prescription plays an important, though not final, part in the normative dimension of human existence?

It must be recalled that history and the writing of an account of English History were one of the initial interests of Burke. Early in his career, he contracted to write a one-volume history of England, but the project was finally abandoned after Burke realized that David Hume's *A History of England* was, to his mind, not to be surpassed. Burke's own history, published posthumously, ran through the reign of King John, taking up well over two hundred pages in the new Oxford edition of his *Writings and Speeches*, and is titled "Essay towards an Abridgement of the English History." In it Burke discloses that nature and history are integral to one another and not in opposition. For example, on the one hand Burke writes of the prudent, even deliberate, "change of religion" that occurred at the time of the initial conversion of England from paganism to Christianity. In the year 600 A.D. Pope Gregory sent Augustine, as Burke records, "a monk from Rheims, and a man of distinguished piety," to undertake the "arduous enterprise" of converting pagan England. As Burke describes the matter, "care was taken to render the transition from falsehood to truth as little violent as possible ... in order that the prejudices of the people might not be too rudely shocked by a declared profanation of what they had so long held sacred, and that, everywhere beholding the same places to which they had formerly resorted to the new doctrines and ceremonies which were introduced." Describing the method of transition, Burke declares: "Whatever popular customs of

heathenism were found to be absolutely not incompatible with Christianity were retained.”⁷

This prudent adaptation of heathen practices to Christianity allowed for the graduated assimilation of heathenism into the Church, and it demonstrated, to Burke’s mind, “a perfect understanding of human nature.” But custom and the accretions added on through the flow of time and the rust of tradition result in a modification, or, better, a realization of one’s nature, amounting to a second nature. Returning to Burke’s “Abridgment,” he reasons that “If people so barbarous as the Germans have no laws they have yet customs that serve in their room; and these customs operate amongst them better than laws, because they become a sort of Nature both to the governors and the governed.”⁸ This reciprocity of nature and history is crucial to the understanding of all of Burke’s political thought, but not without the horizon of transcendence expressed through Divine Providence. To treat Burke as the harbinger of German historicism, reducing nature to history, as the renowned twentieth-century political philosopher Leo Strauss apparently conceives the overriding thrust of Burke’s thought, is in direct opposition to the proper understanding of Burke. Strauss writes in *Natural Right and History* that, “Burke paves the way for ‘the historical school.’”⁹ Strauss holds that Burke’s thought is a “preparation for Hegel.”¹⁰ In contrast, Francis Canavan clearly expressed in his important work *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* that “Burke saw history as the expression and actualization of nature.”¹¹ Not only is this the case in terms of the history of nations and civilizations, it is true of the single individual, as nations, quite obviously, exist through the incorporation of individuals in some degree of solidarity with one another.

Too easily overlooked in the larger landscape of Burke’s breadth of mind is the importance of the single individual, but not in atomistic isolation, and certainly not as one would regard the individual in Lockean liberalism, or in some presocietal existence. For it is true that Burke’s conception of the individual is that of a corporate being, social by nature.

7 *Writings and Speeches*, 1:395.

8 *Ibid.* 1:430.

9 Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 316.

10 *Ibid.* 319.

11 Francis Canavan, S.J., *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (Durham, 1960), 86.

Yet there is an existential dimension to Burke's thought, not Sartrean or Nietzschean in type—estranged, angst-ridden, inauthentic, and iconoclastic. Rather, Burke's existential dimension allows for the force of even a single individual, in part a creature of his own making, but fully human when, as Burke avows, made "as he ought to be made." Writing in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, he avers that, "Every sort of moral, every sort of civil, every sort of politick institution, aiding the rational and natural ties that connect the human understanding and affections to the divine, are not more than necessary, in order to build up that wonderful structure, Man: whose prerogative it is, to be in a great degree a creature of his own making; and who when made as he ought to be made, is destined to hold no trivial place in the creation."¹² We must note the balanced nature of this statement. Man is indeed "a creature of his own making," but only to a "degree," however great that may be, for we are creatures and there are "ties" both "rational and natural." Burke held that the human intellect, albeit with considerable effort, can have rational knowledge of God's existence. Yet there is a pattern or order of things which our partial "self-creation" ought to conform to if we are to be fully realized in our finite, creaturely existence. We are not "self-created" as if starting *de novo*. Nonetheless, we are creatures of our "own making."

Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist, calls this "making" our "project."¹³ For Sartre, we do, indeed, make our own quasi-nature through the choices we freely make; but the ends of those choices, their purpose, are of our own making as well, for our values are humanly constructed. As Charles Taylor characterizes it, the search for identity in modern society takes the form of the attempted realization of absolute freedom, either on the individual plane, as in the atomistic individualism of Locke, or on the state level, as in the realization of the General Will for Rousseau. And yet such a search is a necessarily arbitrary, groundless, alienating search, doomed to failure.¹⁴ This is not the thrust of a Burkean theistic existentialism. Rather, for Burke, "He who gave

¹² Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 257. Hereafter, *Reflections* refers to the Clark edition.

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage Press, 1963), 91.

¹⁴ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 405 & 411.

our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means to its perfection: He willed therefore the state: He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection.”¹⁵ In fact, in making and sustaining the state we are simultaneously making ourselves. Our ends and purposes are not, in their ultimate form, of our own making. It is God who has willed our perfection as achieved by our virtuous actions. In words Burke wrote to Lord Fitzwilliam near his life’s end, we are summoned to “perform a present duty-and as to the future it must be committed to the disposal of Providence.”¹⁶ We cannot be certain of the results of our actions, or of the reactions to our acts, but we can be certain that God’s providential design for mankind will prevail over time, however much the text of history will be suffused with the inhumanity of people to one another, both singularly and en masse. Even against all odds, Burke recognizes the efficacy of individual action before the seeming avalanche of history. He states: “The death of a man at a critical juncture, his disgust, his retreat, his disgrace, have brought innumerable calamities on a whole nation. A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an Inn, have changed the face of fortune.”¹⁷ Even in Burke’s most despondent times, after the death of his son in 1794, and the ongoing advance of the French Revolution, he exclaimed, fighting against all despair, that “There is still a God; and that is a consolation,”¹⁸ for it is God who is “the sovereign reason of the world.”¹⁹

This description of Burke’s character and determination even in the face of apparent defeat seems undermined by Burke’s own statement in *Thoughts on French Affairs*, when Burke writes of the French Revolution: “I have done with this subject, I believe for ever. . . . If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it; the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope, will forward it; and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but

¹⁵ *Reflections*, 262.

¹⁶ *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland, 10 vols. (Cambridge, Chicago, 1958–1978), 9:317. Hereafter listed as *Correspondence*.

¹⁷ *Writings and Speeches*, 9:189.

¹⁸ *Correspondence*, 7:523.

¹⁹ *Works* 3:77.

perverse and obstinate.”²⁰ Leo Strauss takes from this statement, which is matched by no other statement in all of Burke’s corpus, that “Burke comes close to suggesting that to oppose a thoroughly evil current in human affairs is perverse if that current is sufficiently powerful;” Strauss continues: “he is oblivious of the nobility of last-ditch resistance.”²¹

What is to be made of this statement by Burke? Is it a sign of his resignation in the face of Providence’s ineluctable and inscrutable march down the road of history, in such a manner as to justify any resultant turn of fate through the decrees of history? In truth, Burke sees Providence itself as being mysterious, as he writes in the *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*: “But it is probable, that providence did not make even this distinction, but with a view of some great end, though we cannot perceive distinctly what it is, as his wisdom is not our wisdom, nor our ways his ways.”²² Elsewhere, in the *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace* Burke remarks of the “known march of the ordinary Providence of God.” He refers to “the all-wise but mysterious Governour of the world,” a Governour who “sometimes interposes, to snatch nations from ruin.” Yet Burke continues by declaring that it would be “mad and impious presumption” if anyone were to act in “defiance of the rules of prudence,” rules “which are formed upon the known march of the ordinary Providence of God.”²³ It is this “known march” through history that reveals the “ordinary Providence of God.” Moreover, God does not appear as a petulant heavenly tyrant, willfully acting against his own eternal, immutable law. Instead, as stated above, Burke refers to God as “the sovereign reason of the world.”²⁴ Furthermore, Burke declares that “it may be doubted whether Omnipotence itself is competent to alter the essential constitution of right and wrong.”²⁵ This is entirely consistent with the scholastic position that God’s Reason has precedence over his Will. Better yet, Reason and Will in God are one, and the Divine Will cannot contradict the Divine Reason. It is Burke, after all, who asserted that there is one thing only that will defy

²⁰ *Writings and Speeches*, 8:386.

²¹ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 318.

²² *Writings and Speeches*, 1:219–20.

²³ *Writings and Speeches*, 9:269.

²⁴ *Works*, 3:77.

²⁵ *Writings and Speeches*, 3:662.

all changes in the course of history, and “which existed before the world, and will survive after the fabrick of the world itself; I mean justice; that justice,” Burke continues, “which emanating from the Divinity, has a place in the breast of every one of us, given us for a guide with regard to ourselves, and with regards to others.”²⁶ If, in fact, God is the “awful Author our being,” and has indeed placed us “in the order of existence” in which we find ourselves, and if he has assigned us to “act the part which belongs to the place assigned us,” then it follows that God’s Providence cannot be inconsistent with his own reason, and that, since his justice is everywhere and always the same, our actions cannot be futile, and God cannot will that which is inconsistent with virtue and justice to be in fact good and virtuous.²⁷ True enough, Providence may for reasons which remain mysterious to us permit some evil, or revolutionary evil to prevail, but we can be certain that it is God’s will that evil be overcome. As Burke states in his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, “A particular order of things may be altered; order itself cannot lose its value. As to the particulars they are variable by time and by circumstances. The universal and eternal principles of justice and the constitution of right and wrong cannot be altered even by Omnipotence itself, which is not a limitation on the omnipotence of God, for it is not a limitation, but a figure of speech, for God not to be less than perfect.”

While God’s Providence is mysterious, we are not without an indication of his existence. In fact, Burke’s basic conformity with Aristotelian-Thomistic realism is evident in the very work that so many incorrectly characterize as equivalent to Lockean epistemology, viz., the *Philosophical Enquiry*. After all, it is in this work that Burke affirms the fundamental principles of non-contradiction and causality, and the knowability of substances. Further, he offers, albeit in brief, a cosmological argument for God’s existence, which is not to be found in Locke. Burke states, “It is by a long deduction and much study, that we discover the adorable wisdom of God in his works.” He also refers to that “great chain of causes which, link ... one to another, even to the throne of God himself,” a throne we can ascend to through reason, and faith, even though the nature of God remains a mystery to us. Underscoring

²⁶ *Works*, 8:440.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:79.

his position, Burke argues that "the more accurately we search into the human mind, the stronger traces we everywhere find of His wisdom who made it." These arguments for God's existence fit firmly within the tradition of philosophical realism, not British empiricism, which clearly confirms the ability of the human intellect to reach the meta-empirical realm through the unaided light of human reason. This use of reason by Burke undermines J. G. A. Pocock's claim that Burke is an anti-rationalist, at least in the sense of Aristotelian rationalism. As such, Burke does not contradict the mysterious nature of God's providence. As Aquinas argues in *Summa Theologica* I, q. 12, we can know that God exists without knowing what God is in Himself. Hence, in one sense we comprehend God's existence through reason reflecting upon reality, and yet in another sense God is incomprehensible.

To be able to argue from the contingent realm of finite existence to the existence of God, by use of the principle of causality, places Burke squarely and irrevocably in the classical realist tradition, occurring in the very work that many scholars reference to underscore Burke as a skeptic in the tradition of Lockean empiricism. This is further confirmed in his *Reflections*, in which he chastises the French *philosophes* for using only two of the traditional ten categories, namely those of substance and quantity. Instead, Burke concludes, "the troll of their [i.e., the *philosophes*] table might have informed them that there was something else besides *substance* and *quantity*. They might learn from the catechism of metaphysics that there were eight heads more in every complex deliberation which they have never thought of."²⁸ This is the same Burke who declares: "I do not vilify theory and speculation—no, because that would be to vilify reason itself ... No; whenever I speak against theory I mean always a weak erroneous fallacious unfounded or imperfect theory; and one of the ways of discovering that it is a false theory is by comparing it with practice."²⁹

²⁸ *Reflections*, 358.

²⁹ *Works*, 6:148.

Conclusion

The history of human society appears for Burke to be a cyclical movement rather than demonstrating inexorable progress. We have seen how, in his *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, Burke forthrightly denies a science of history, holding that it is impossible to determine the “internal causes which necessarily affect the fortune of a state.” There may be such causes, but they escape the comprehension of the human mind, and they do not preclude the efficacy of human agency or action. While we are in important respects creatures of our own making, providence calls us to a high standard: “We ought to elevate our minds,” Burke ascertains, “to the greatness of that trust to which the order of Providence has called us.”³⁰ To this end, God ordains the existence of the state in order to aid in the perfection of our nature through virtue. Burke’s teleological view of the state reflects Aristotle’s teleological conception of politics. Yet history is not determined apart from man’s free actions; nor can man be certain of the immediate efficacy of his actions. While Burke concludes that we would be wise to “conform ourselves to that State of things which providence is pleased to direct or to permit,” we must nonetheless do our best in whatever situation we find ourselves, “and leave the rest to the disposer of Events.”³¹ As Burke states in a letter to Earl Fitzwilliam towards the end of his life in 1797, “You perform a present Duty—and as to the future it must be committed to the disposal of Providence.”³²

³⁰ *Writings and Speeches*, 3:166.

³¹ *Correspondence* 6:439, 7:17.

³² *Correspondence* 9:317.

Book Reviews



Ian Crowe, *Patriotism and Public Spirit: Edmund Burke and the Role of the Critic in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. 288 pp.

THIS BOOK IS AN ERUDITE and original study of Burke's "missing" but presumably formative years between his arrival in London in 1750 and his emergence as a published author later in the decade, before he put literature aside to embark on his political career. The title accurately indicates a combination of political theory and literary criticism, although the book is best described as a study in literary history, focusing on Burke's entry into one important corner of what Crowe calls the British Republic of Letters (avoiding controversies over the meaning of the "Enlightenment" and whether Burke belongs to it). Regardless of discipline, this book will be of interest to any student of Burke's thought and its sources.

Crowe's argument rests on the conjecture that the newly arrived Burke soon gravitated to the Tully's Head bookshop and publishing house in the literary district of London, where he came under the influence of a number of writers in the orbit of its proprietor, Robert Dodsley, who soon recognized Burke's talent and eventually commissioned and published Burke's first three books (*A Vindication of Natural Society*, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and*

Beautiful, and *An Account of the European Settlements in America*) and recruited him to edit one of the house journals, the *Annual Register*. It is not made clear when and under what circumstances Burke quit his legal studies at the Middle Temple. It does seem clear that Tully's Head was Burke's literary (and by extension, his political) launching pad. More important to this study, however, are the ideas that Burke would have encountered—and in Crowe's interpretation, absorbed—under Dodsley's patronage. Chapter 1 offers a lengthy and detailed account of the intellectual atmosphere and the writers (mostly not well known today) who contributed to it.

The central theme here and throughout the book is Patriotism, an idea that derives from the program originally developed in several writings of the 1730s by Bolingbroke in opposition to what he viewed as the venal and corrupt Whig government of Walpole. Patriotism centered on advocacy of public-spirited statesmen and citizens and a call to defend constitutional liberty against the dangers posed by official corruption. This political stance was shared by Bolingbroke's friend Alexander Pope, who constituted a direct link to Dodsley, who published some of Pope's poetry and a number of favorable critical works about him. With Pope and his admirers another theme emerges: the idea that Walpolean Whiggism was not only corrupt but "dull," and that improvements in literary taste must accompany and support the growth of public spirit and a healthier political (and polite) culture. Hence literary and political criticism—the *Essay on Man* and political theory, so to speak—went hand in hand. Pope died a few years before Burke's arrival, and Bolingbroke just after, but their ideas and legacy in various forms permeated the Tully's Head group and shaped Burke's outlook, not only at this time but (Crowe suggests) throughout his career.

Three critical remarks may be offered at this stage. First, Crowe usually refers to Patriotism as political "rhetoric" rather than as a theory or doctrine. No doubt it was deployed rhetorically, but what was its substance? Crowe for example does not provide a summary or analysis of *The Idea of a Patriot King*, which was published by Pope and must have been known to the Tully's Head group as adherents of Patriotism. Crowe regularly mentions public spirit and liberty as the two central concepts of Patriotism, but these ideas are not analyzed along with the arguments

in which they occur. Second, we are not told how Patriotism differs from the republicanism or commonwealth tradition that also persisted among the Country opposition, and that also endorsed public spirit, liberty, and the constitution. Crowe does not mention this other, perhaps parallel discourse, but it may be worth noting that Bolingbroke's writings were later read and appreciated by the American revolutionaries as a source of republican values. One way Patriotism may have differed was in its literary dimension—its concern with the cultivation of good taste. This raises a third question, however, in that Crowe does not fully explain, with reference to the writers he examines, exactly what the causal connection or other links between literature and politics were supposed to be. Presumably good taste was assumed to facilitate the development of sound morals and virtue. We may note that Hume, also in the 1750s, was writing about politics and the constitution as well as the “standard of taste” and politeness in modern society, but he did not suggest any close connection between the two. Crowe does point out, however, that the political-literary linkage is a theme in some of Patriotism's classical sources, such as Longinus and Quintilian (p. 47).

Returning to the main argument, readers may have felt some doubts as they recalled Burke's famous denunciation of Bolingbroke (“Who now reads Bolingbroke ... ?”) later in his *Reflections*. This indicates a complication in the Tully's Head story. Bolingbroke and Pope shared the Patriot outlook, but their friendship was strained toward the end as Bolingbroke moved increasingly toward Voltairean irreligion and deism, perhaps even atheism, while Pope died a Catholic. (Bolingbroke was also notorious for his erratic political career and dissolute lifestyle.) In carrying on the legacy of Pope, some of the Dodsley group were evidently deists but many, including Burke (and the influential future bishop Warburton), were committed Christians. Crowe shows how this background was the context for Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society*, in which he attacks the radical simplicity of Bolingbroke's later ideas about natural society and natural religion, endorsing by implication a much more complex understanding of human nature and the blend of natural and artificial elements in social life. Crowe interprets this work in the traditional manner as a satire, although he acknowledges that some passages are so convincing as to suggest a suppressed streak of radicalism

in Burke himself. On the much-discussed question of Burke's religion, Crowe concludes that he was consistently neither a deist nor a crypto-Catholic, but "that hardest of creatures for us to understand today, a committed, enthusiastic Latitudinarian" (p. 223).

In Chapter 3 Crowe backtracks to Burke's Irish youth, education, and juvenile writings—and hence the currently popular issue of Burke's Irishness. Here, he claims, Burke was influenced by a similar Irish Patriot movement that prepared him for entry into the Tully's Head circle. (Swift, who once had political ties to Bolingbroke, stands in the background here and provided a model of satire as a critical weapon.) The young Burke and his friends were interested in promoting literature as a means to civic improvement, especially through Thomas Sheridan's theater in Dublin. Politically, public-spiritedness in Ireland addressed Irish concerns, including opposition to absentee landlordism—a cause Burke had to abandon when he joined the marquis of Rockingham, a major absentee! Otherwise Irish Patriotism divided between support for Irish legislative independence and a defense of the liberties enjoyed under the British constitution and empire as a whole; and though it was a predominantly Protestant movement, there were differences of opinion over whether and how far the anti-Catholic penal laws should be relaxed (especially as Catholics failed to embrace Jacobite rebellions). Crowe observes that hardline Protestant Patriotism was an "enemy within" (in contrast to British colonial rule) through its "narrowing of Irish civic identity and ... religious bigotry" (p. 136). Burke as a student at Trinity College was in the (moderate) Protestant camp (his "Tracts on the Popery Laws" came later, when he returned to Ireland in an official capacity), and the version of Irish Patriotism that he adopted was decidedly non-nationalist, as one could infer from his move to England soon after graduating.

The remaining chapters include an analysis of Burke's second Doddsley book, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* against the Patriot background (Chapter 4). Taking its cue from the criticism of Longinus, the *Enquiry* is related to the movement's concern with taste, but it also continues the critique of the kind of philosophical radicalism expressed by Bolingbroke by exploring a psychologically richer and sentiment-based view of human nature.

Most interesting is Chapter 5 on Burke's early historical writings. Here Crowe concentrates on the understudied, posthumously published "Abridgment of the English History," another work commissioned by Dodsley but left unfinished—it extends from the Roman invasion through the Middle Ages to Magna Carta—when Burke signed on with William Gerard Hamilton and began his political career. Crowe claims not only that this work involved a novel historicization of Patriot themes, but that the historical research, insights, and plan of the "Abridgment" are such that, had it been completed, Burke would have achieved a status as a historian comparable to that of Hume (who was composing a comparable history at the same time) or Robertson. Historiography for a Patriot, as for Hume, was a valuable vehicle for exhibiting the gradual growth of British liberties and the hard-won constitution. Like Hume, Burke rejects any idea of an "ancient constitution" and describes a complex process in which political and civilizational advances were the unforeseen and even paradoxical outcomes of diverse conflicts and disorder. In contrast to Hume, however, Burke gives more credit to the civilizing influence of Christianity and interprets the overall pattern in providential terms. "Burke argues that the true critic and citizen learns through history that rightly ordered public spirit is fundamentally religious, since religion has effected the transition from a rude to a civilized liberty" (p. 201). Unlike Hume's, in addition, Burke's story is organized around the three invasions of Britain by the Romans, Saxons, and Normans, each of which is shown to have wrought great destruction on the previous social order and yet also brought new contributions to an ultimately creative process. Near the end Burke narrates the Norman invasion of Ireland under Henry II, with the presumable implication that English rule over Ireland should be accepted in a similar perspective.

Despite the Toryism of its founders (Bolingbroke, Swift, Pope), Crowe tells us that the Patriotism of Tully's Head was politically and religiously amorphous (p. 4), embracing Whigs as well as Tories. A final question about Burke's early development during these years is how he emerged from what was originally a Tory milieu and ended up as secretary to the Whig leader Rockingham—and for that matter, why Rockingham should have chosen someone from that circle. Had Whiggism

changed sufficiently since the time of Walpole that the party—or at least Rockingham's faction—now embodied Patriot values? The record that Crowe brings to light is rich on Burke's ideas about philosophy, criticism, and history, but the precise evolution of his political views during these (now somewhat less "missing") years remains a matter of conjecture.

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Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, xiv + 304 pp.

André Gushurst-Moore, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*. Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2013, viii + 264 pp.

David Willetts, *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their Children's Future—and Why They Should Give It Back*. London: Atlantic Books, 2010, xxii + 314 pp.

AMIDST THE RECURRING QUESTION of whether Edmund Burke is relevant to contemporary politics, we are presented with three volumes that approach this vital issue in different ways, and with varying levels of scholarly and popular perceptiveness. All the books under review attempt to connect the witness and insights of the great statesman to ongoing conflicts in society and politics. Perhaps the disparate assessments of Burke alone could suggest the resiliency of his legacy; however, the importance of Burke the political theorist demands a closer examination of these critical works.

Corey Robin's ambitious effort to reassess the historical development of conservatism is the least satisfying of the books under review. Rather than offering an integrated study of conservatism as one would

anticipate, the collection comprises eleven previously published essays, a disconnected introductory essay, and an overly succinct conclusion. Robin has a solitary goal: to dismiss conservatism and conservative thinkers as models of political thought. It is a mission that fails due to his ideological bias and lack of scholarly circumspection (p. 34). However, Robin excels as a prooftexter of a wide and interesting variety of tomes. In this enterprise, he provides a *mélange* of conservative views, always without appropriate academic synthesis or clarity of thought. For example, against the Burkean idea of prejudice as a form of philosophical discernment, Robin's book is a statement of contemporary prejudice, or the inability to engage in the pursuit of higher criticism or philosophical exposition. In other words, Robin fails to adequately access the conservative tradition. Stylistically, Robin's prose often regresses into the use of colloquial language, frequently employing the first person pronoun "I" to denote his alleged ability to discover the hidden tenets of contemporary conservative thought that were apparently not available to other observers. More generally, the text is often repetitive and misleading.

At the heart of the book is an attempt to define conservatism as political resistance to the "challenge from below," the purported disenfranchised mass of society (p. 28). Conservatives want unequal power (p. 4) and submission to their ideological objectives (p. 7). The entirety of his eleven vignettes against conservative personages, ideas, or movements, with a special focus on Edmund Burke, is devoted to this myopic pursuit. Robin's mode of reflection is consistent throughout the book, although his emphases change without contributing to the logical progression of his argument. For Burke, the French Revolution was a civilizational tumult, but for Robin it was "an inversion of deference and command," as conservatives always seek "liberty for the higher orders and constraint for the lower orders" (p. 8). Robin's Burke is not only the progenitor of class-based repression, but also of the radical right (p. 20). Instead, Burke defended a tradition of ordered liberty, opposing overly abstract notions of natural goodness, society, and government. Burke hoped for the continued development of the higher potentialities of humankind. Change was possible, indeed inevitable, but not always immediate or even plausible at a given historical juncture. Humans were capable of transferring the rudiments of a humane social and political

order as a compact shared between the ages, and all citizens were permanently subject to the law and civil authority. The proper role of the state was to restrain the citizen only to such a degree as to promote such a society.

Robin's disdain for religion, especially the role of faith in the life of Burke, and in many theories of conservatism, also suggests the limits of the author's ability to accurately interpret theories of conservatism. For Burke, in contradistinction to Robin's depiction of him, the great questions of existence could be answered by the "Church of England's catechism," suggesting the fundamental and enduring importance of his personal faith and the role of religion in his life. To Robin's credit, he does emphasize those thinkers on his alleged "right" who dismiss Christianity and other manifestations of faith, although his reliance on the anti-religionist Ayn Rand, and his misinterpretation of contemporary television personality Glenn Beck, demonstrates the limitations of his approach (pp. 92–96).

The book convincingly evinces the author's disdain for conservatism in all forms, but his purported effort at critical scholarly amalgamation does not work. Many other important conservative figures besides Burke are assessed, including John Adams, John C. Calhoun, William F. Buckley, Joseph de Maistre, Antonin Scalia, and more; however, Robin's critiques never allow the thinkers to be viewed in their historical context or with the felicity of thought that a proposed study of the "reactionary mind" would require.

As a palliative to Robin's rather imprecise criticism of Burke and others, André Gushurst-Moore's *The Common Mind* provides an elegantly written and philosophically convincing survey of the worldview Burke inherited and that he helped transmit to posterity. The common mind, or Christian humanism, is understood from both the perspective of a philosophical inheritance and as a perpetual challenge to contemporary life as well; as a social and political tradition dependent on the ennobling of the good, the true, and the beautiful; and, the exhibition of personal restraint, and an affirmation of the transcendent nature of existence. Gushurst-Moore begins his defense of this tradition by engaging in a process of retrospection, examining the central figures who affirmed the common mind, beginning with Thomas More and concluding with

Russell Kirk. Six central elements in the common mind are identified: the inheritance of the humane, self-government and law, common sense in the classical form, literature that encourages the imagination, education with a moral basis, and politics and religion (pp. 14–18). Even though six of the fourteen essays that comprise this volume were originally published in journals of opinion, the book is thematically coherent and the essays possess a lucidity atypical in such collections.

In each essay, the thoughtful reader is introduced to new and erudite insights about key figures who have contributed to the common mind tradition, or Christian humanism. The commentaries on Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, and Russell Kirk deserve special commendation. Instead of a rather normative survey of Swift the satirist, the faith-based and enduring insights of the writer, and his “underlying religious assumptions,” and “distrust of intellectualism, rationalism and enthusiasm” are brilliantly outlined by Gushurst-Moore (p. 46). Swift, as a contributor to the larger patrimony of the common mind and advocate of self-restraint, becomes comprehensible, including the Swift “who anticipates Burke in asserting that if liberty is anything to be valued at all, it exists as a consequence of authority rather than in spite of it” (p. 60). In similar vein, the essay on Johnson forces a reconsideration of the writer as a more thoroughgoing defender of the inherited tradition. The essays on Burke and Russell Kirk extol their respective contributions to Christian humanism. In effect, the essay on Burke refutes the arguments promoted by Robin by demonstrating that Burke was a defender of “traditional Christian humanism” (p. 82) premised upon a proper conception of the natural law. With Russell Kirk, Gushurst-Moore’s exegesis concentrates upon the thinker’s under-appreciated fiction as a defense of the common mind.

Overall, Gushurst-Moore has advanced our understanding of Burke and the inherited tradition. The only weaknesses that would deserve emendation concern his criticisms of Luther, with an emphasis upon Luther’s view of transubstantiation (p. 33), and Gushurst-Moore’s neglect of important Protestant contributors to Christian humanism beyond T. S. Eliot and C. S. Lewis. In the first instance, his characterization of Luther (pp. 26, 28, 33, 34, and 37) is contradicted by recent scholarship. A closer examination of Luther’s sacramental theology suggests

that while he criticized the prevailing view of transubstantiation, he always believed in a real presence, and later Lutheran confessional statements also demonstrate support for an eucharistic theology that proximates transubstantiation. Secondly, the addition of essays on eminent Protestant philosophers of the common mind like Lynn Harold Hough and Bernard Iddings Bell would have enhanced the volume by presenting a more complete survey of twentieth-century contributors to Christian humanism.

The last volume under review, *The Pinch*, authored by David Willetts, a British Member of Parliament, and Minister for Universities and Science, seeks to apply the contributions of Burke and others to current socio-economic issues. In assuming a distinctly Burkean approach to problems of generational nurture and obligation, Willetts cites Burke's depiction of society as being contractual in nature, with each generation becoming part of a "partnership" among those members who "are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born" (pp. 262–63). The myriad of ills that plague society are interconnected Willett asserts, and require a stable "nationhood and family," and ultimately community and inter-generational commitment, to resolve these issues. Willetts offers a practical guide to overcoming the limits resulting from the lingering impact of the social contract, including a criticism of the social contract's reinvention by John Rawls. He also provides a sophisticated and readable account of how, by Burkean standards, we have departed from a tradition of social and political life that sustained the West for many generations.

These works suggest the enduring nature of Edmund Burke's insights on the nature of social and political life. While scholars will dispute the philosophical trajectory and practical wisdom Burke offers, there should be little disagreement over the need to confront Burke's commentaries on the nature of politics. The ongoing struggle with Burke's legacy exemplified in these tomes is an indicator of the continuing richness of Burke studies today.

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Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: The First Conservative*. New York: Basic Books, 2013, 325 pp.

IN *EDMUND BURKE: The First Conservative*, Jesse Norman, a British Conservative party MP and doctoral graduate in philosophy, lays out a bold and engaging case for his subject as “one of the seminal thinkers of the present age” (5). Owing in part, no doubt, to the author’s profile in British politics (he is a committed supporter of prime minister David Cameron’s “Big Society” and of the British strain of “Compassionate Conservatism”), but also, perhaps, to periodic references to a shared Anglo-American tradition of representative government, Norman’s study has attracted broad and largely approving notices in Great Britain and the United States. Although Burke has hardly been “all but ignored in recent years” (Norman’s assertion to that effect is a stretch, even allowing for authorial license), the growing perception of moral and cultural crisis in Western society in recent decades makes revisiting Burke’s life and thought a valuable exercise. To a lucid exposition of that thought, Norman profitably adds his own practical experience in the House of Commons, shaping thereby a powerful argument for Burke’s crucial historical significance in the development of party government and the constitutional principles underpinning modern Western representative democracy. He is equally cogent, but less successful, in explaining how, philosophically, the “deeper coherence” (4) of Burke’s thought might help us address the broader social and cultural anxieties of the West today. The reasons for this shortfall, however, are themselves highly instructive.

The book comprises two complementary parts, "Life" and "Thought." The former, the author readily acknowledges, draws largely upon secondary sources, and, indeed, it conveys the broad spirit and strengths of a judicious blend of the biographies of Conor Cruise O'Brien and F. P. Lock, in particular. There is a passing reference to Russell Kirk and to Carl Cone, but the most prominent work of American scholarship is Harvey Mansfield Jr.'s *Statesmanship and Party Government*. Interpreted through the lens of his own parliamentary experience, Norman fits Burke's early writings on faction and party in parliament onto a picture of his strengths and weaknesses as a politician to provide a persuasive argument for crediting him with a consistent, progressive concept of party as, potentially, "a source of good government" (182) against the corrosiveness of "faction." This, indeed, Norman sees as one of the most distinguished aspects of Burke's legacy. It is that same parliamentary experience, perhaps (incorporating, in three short years, steeply rising status within Conservative and government policy offices, and one episode of rebellious dissent from the party whip over House of Lords reform), that makes Norman so open to the great irony that Burke could be considered both "the first great theorist of political parties" (1) and emphatically not a party man himself.

Norman's willingness to let such ironies, or untidiness, stand has the advantage of loosening up his narrative of Burke's parliamentary career for the insertion of refreshingly vivid historical background. Indeed, it is notable that Norman subtitles his study "the first conservative" rather than "the founder of modern conservatism," for the difference provides the space where those particular contexts can prepare us better for the composition and shaping of Burke's political dispositions. While we clearly hear the familiar leitmotifs of the "Great Melody" of Burke's four famous campaigns (Ireland, America, India, and France), Norman's deliberately even and skillfully modulated treatment of those campaigns militates against the tendency to consider the first three only as a prelude to the defining fourth, the campaign against Jacobinism.

All this augurs well for the second, shorter, part of the book, which addresses Burke's posthumous reputation and historical legacy and the relevance of his thought for politics today. Norman's claims for Burke's status as a politician and thinker are certainly ambitious, and they rest

largely upon a robust fleshing out of the concept of the “social self” in Burke’s thought—the simple but compelling point that “Burke begins ... with the fact of human society itself” (198). Entirely appropriately, this analytical theme serves as a bridge to connect an introduction tracing Burke’s posthumous reputation within and beyond the “Enlightenment” to a conclusion relating his particular strain of “Enlightened” thought to those of contemporary, postmodern critiques. Raised upon this conceptual bridge are chapters discussing divergent ideas of “self,” “society,” and social contract theory; the emergence of constitutional concepts of ordered liberty and political representation; the threat to morality and social cohesion of “extreme individualism” in the West since the end of the Cold War; and moral and ethical perceptions of “value” related to strengthening the bands of civil society in an age of globalization. The whole structure sits neatly with Norman’s broader investment in a “Big Society” of reduced state-fostered dependency and revitalized “horizontal” links between citizen-grown, independent institutions.

The Burkean “mind” that Norman unfolds is vivid and subtle. As befits a student of Michael Oakeshott, it is a tapestry of related dispositions rather than a chiseled checklist of principles. The term “post-modern,” the definition of which Norman leaves judiciously ambiguous, is used, perhaps, too liberally to add much to the content of the ideas discussed, but it helpfully reinforces a sense of dynamism in Burke’s thought, of its inbuilt resistance to ideological labeling, and the analysis as a whole is supported from an impressively broad range of Burke’s writings.

But the most compelling aspect of Norman’s analysis appears at those points in the book where politician and philosopher combine to highlight the central role institutions perform in Burke’s thought. This role is vital in explaining how Burke’s commitment to tradition and the wisdom of the ages is at the same time, and necessarily, a commitment to the progress and expansion of ordered liberty. Norman argues that civic institutions such as Burke imagined them, independent of the state—that is, with organic roots that have been set “time out of mind”—and ranging from the local and parochial to the national and imperial, serve as the essential reservoirs and conveyors of social wisdom. To do so, however, they must also be animated by a moral quality, mediated through a

rightly oriented *imaginative* faculty that demands their members' respect for their operation in trust and across the generations. This, at least, is what I take from Norman's impressively rousing reference to an "extraordinary and distinctively Burkean imaginative engagement," which he describes as "a balance between ego and circumstance, between ambition and constraint, between individuality and society" (277).

This Burkean imagination is also really what cements Norman's analytical bridge: "For Burke, what ultimately gives meaning to the world, what enchants it, is that it is a providential gift from God. But this in turn fires and feeds off the extraordinary human capacity for re-creative and empathetic imagination. It is through imagination that we understand not merely what is but what could be, not merely the constraints but the potential, not merely limitation but aspiration" (276). Of course, that trio of phrases raises more questions than it answers, and, whether this enlargement of the *politikon zoon* amounts to "a profound political achievement" (275) on Burke's part or not, Norman's project now stands or falls on how convincingly he can capture and transmit the force of that imagination between the "postmodern" present and the world that Burke understood.

Ultimately, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Norman's presentation of the Burkean imagination, impassioned and informed as it is, falls short in convincing us of its postmodern significance. To some degree, this is a consequence of style. An accumulation of claims upon Burke—"the hinge of Anglo-American, and indeed the world's, political modernity" (228); "the finest and greatest critic of many aspects of modernity itself" (240)—jars increasingly with the established untidiness and ironies of Burke's career. On a more fundamental level, however, Norman does not quite work his way round the (very British) problem that it is just extremely difficult to *preach* people into Burke, with his "lost language of ... honour, loyalty, duty, and wisdom" (289), however starkly the false lights to the Right and Left are exposed. At least, the task demands an accompanying, well-stocked arsenal of practical examples and illustrations that can serve as familiar contemporary coordinates for that crucial act of imaginative transference to which Burke's rhetoric invites us. Rather, Norman musters an impressive range of data from social science research to expose the insufficiency of either

liberal individualism or “social capital” to sustain a cohesive and free society, suggesting consequentially that the missing ingredient is just that Burkean moral imagination we have met above. The first maneuver is executed effectively; but it doesn’t, in itself, accomplish the latter. We still lack the fresh coordinates, rooted in the practical realities of people’s lives, without which Burke’s imaginative lexicon is unlikely to make much headway against the same skepticism or general indifference that has greeted successive Tocquevillian or “little-platoon-centered” initiatives to push back the frontiers of the State.

None of this is to deny that Norman has done conservatives a great service in committing himself as far as he has along the road less traveled; but what more might he have done to close the loop on an authentic imaginative Burkean option? In the first part of the book, he acknowledges—a little gingerly, perhaps—the importance of religion and providence in Burke’s thought. In the second part, a bolder investigation was needed into how the connection between religion, providence, and morality fixes that “extraordinary and distinctively Burkean imagination,” for it was surely out of the nature of this connection that Burke derived both the rhetoric and the conviction necessary to embrace the paradox that individual identity achieves its realization only in realizing its social nature—that the *mystery* or inscrutability of the origins of political society will not only always be there but *will always matter* in the calculation and execution of public policy.

Instead, if we seek direction, for instance, over how to view the development of those independent civic institutions of the “Big Society” within an increasingly multicultural (and “multiculturalist”) society, we find Norman floating Burke’s famous support for religious toleration (Ireland) and respect for foreign cultures (India) alongside contemporary cultural psychologist Richard Shweder’s categories of ethical systems, the end being to reassert, as a priority of modern government, “the importance of moderate religious observance and moral community as a source of shared aims” (289). We are compelled to note the bathetic effect of that word “moderate,” and to ask what Burke has to offer once a secularized, albeit benevolent, State has become arbiter of the ethical conscience of the community *precisely because* diverse religious and cultural communities adhering to different assumptions about moral

authority are no longer able to engage harmoniously across or within the nexus of intermediary institutions.

At such a point, Norman might have led us to a more direct examination of Burke's understanding of natural law, drawing out collaterally the diversity and flexibility of that concept in considering, for instance, whether it contains the potential to address the evident crisis of multiculturalism through a radically new rhetoric and political perspective that avoids further resort to the mediation of the State. Even more important for the broader thrust of his analysis, he might have developed that aspect of Burke's thought in pursuing the matter of what qualities and virtues—what moral or ethical sensibilities—citizens would need to steer those freshly empowered and liberated institutions. Would *conscience* and *character* not be vital to the functioning of this "Big Society"? And how would we proceed then? Better education in "Citizenship"? Perhaps more unelected bishops in the House of Lords. If we want to speculate where Burke would have stood among such options, this much is certain: he did not consider the laws of morality to be either "universal" or "natural" because they were thrown up by the accidents of history, climate, and geography. It was never the intention of this committed Anglican to turn human nature inside out.

A second unexploited opportunity concerns the Anglo-American dimension of this analysis, of which Norman appears to make both much and little. On the one hand, occasional references to an Anglo-American tradition of representative government seem designed to elevate Burke's significance as a thinker considerably. Aspects of his constitutional thought are compared with that of Jefferson and Adams in the early Republic, and later related to the principles of Abraham Lincoln. Despite which, this remains a resolutely Anglocentric study. Norman mentions William Blackstone's *Commentaries*, once in discussing the transmission of the Common Law tradition, and once to support his claim that Lincoln was "the very model of a Burkean political leader" (233–34); but if the Anglo-American political tradition is to mean anything of substance in this discussion, it should at least lead us more deeply into shared, transatlantic juridical and cultural territories that may help in that imaginative transference from the world of the eighteenth century to the present.

In his short but rich study *Compassionate Conservatism* (a term he stresses is “entirely different from the conservatism of George W. Bush”), Norman argues that the genius of a Burkean conservative tradition lies in its capacity to hold the central political aspirations of individual liberty and community in a kind of paradoxical tension. This observation carries two corollaries: the untidy appearance, historically, of conservative principles in action (Norman illustrates this through Disraeli’s political career and legislative record); and the fact that, “What ultimately distinguishes conservatism from its rival creeds ... is not so much the views it holds ... as the way it holds them.” These are insights that rightly illuminate Norman’s perceptions of Burke and of his status and enduring significance as a political thinker. They also indicate a necessary stage in any argument on Burke’s intellectual legacy that remains unanswered: “How can a study of Burke’s thought bring about a real shift in the language of politics sufficient to make that paradox of conservatism both intelligible and sensible to citizens, thereby equipping them better to negotiate and participate in the untidy institutional and civic relations that foster ordered liberty?” With this stimulating contribution by Jesse Norman in hand, a serious response to that question should not be too ambitious or arcane a challenge for today.

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