

STUDIES IN

*Burke*  
AND HIS TIME

JOHN FAULKNER

*Thomas Copeland's Account of the Editing  
of Burke's Correspondence*

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2016 CONFERENCE MARKING THE COMPLETION OF THE  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS EDITION OF  
BURKE'S WRITINGS AND SPEECHES

**RICHARD BOURKE**

*P. J. Marshall and  
Burke Studies*

**ANNA PLASSART**

*Edmund Burke and France*

**B. W. YOUNG**

*Burke and Unitarianism*

**DAVID BROMWICH**

*Burke on the New  
and Old Whigs*

**P. J. MARSHALL**

*A Footnote to 24 June 2016*

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REVIEWS OF

**DANIEL I. O'NEILL**, *Edmund Burke and  
the Conservative Logic of Empire*

**MICHAEL BROWN**, *The Irish Enlightenment*

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## *Editor's Introduction*



TO ADAPT THE FAMOUS ADAGE attributed to Jacques Mallet du Pan: “History consumes its practitioners.” The proper attempt of every generation to find explicit meaning in the historical works of great thinkers inevitably casts critical light upon the interpretations of the preceding generation of commentators. Today, fresh analyses of Edmund Burke’s *corpus* by writers and scholars have, over the past two decades, marked a more scholarly and objective treatment of the earlier postwar revival of Burke studies in the United States and in Britain (a revival of which this journal is itself a child).

This natural process of reinterpretation, though, as we observe it now, contains a novel element: it has brought to attention as never before the accompanying expansion in the scope and accessibility of the historical source material upon which any such reinterpretations must rest—in this case, two massive editorial projects, the *Correspondence* and the *Writings and Speeches* of Edmund Burke, that stretch back some seven decades to the opening of the Fitzwilliam papers in Sheffield and Northampton, in the late 1940s. These dynamic scholarly operations deserve analysis in themselves, and, with the completion of the latter project, in 2015, an examination of the influence of editorial policies and functions on the interpretation of the content itself (and vice versa) becomes compelling. We hope this edition of *Studies in Burke and His Time* may serve as a stimulus to that exercise in historicizing history.

Indeed, this was a topic first broached in this journal three issues ago, with Elizabeth Lambert’s innovative study of “The Scholarly Factories”—“[those] scholarly enterprises that focused on eighteenth-cen-

tury British writers and that flourished after World War II.” In the present issue, John Faulkner furthers this work through a close exploration of the archival records bequeathed to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, by Thomas Copeland, general editor of *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*. Using that material to reconstruct Copeland’s ultimately triumphant (though personally exhausting) project, Faulkner’s essay provides a fascinating view of the evolution and praxis of historical editorship in Burke studies over twenty years. Just as valuable, through its careful reconstruction of the “Burke forces” at work—the network of scholars and researchers involved through that period, and the currents that brought them together and carried the task to its completion—this account lays out a path directly connecting the *Correspondence* with the succeeding *Writings and Speeches* project. In the process, we are made aware of the central contributions of figures such as Dame Lucy Sutherland and of her former pupil P. J. Marshall in that transition.

It is, indeed, highly appropriate that it was P. J. Marshall who brought the final volume of the latter series, *Volume IV: Party, Parliament, and the Dividing of the Whigs, 1780–1794*, to the press, over thirty-five years after the project itself was launched. (John Faulkner’s important review of that volume can be found in the 2015 issue of this journal.) It is a pleasure, then, to be able to include in this issue of *Studies in Burke and His Time* a collection of addresses and papers from a conference that was held in London, in June 2016, to mark the appearance of Volume IV and, with it, the completion of that massive editorial project. Richard Bourke, who organized and convened the event under the aegis of the Centre for the Study of Political Thought, Queen Mary University London, presented an opening address, reprinted here, which recognizes the central contribution of P. J. Marshall to the realization of both projects, and thus the debt owed to him by all who study Burke’s career and thought.

The three papers that follow each testify to the ways in which the edited materials of Volume IV may help scholars to take a fresh look at Burke’s anti-revolutionary thought in the early 1790s—providing “a more contextual picture,” in Anna Plassart’s words, by which to revise the “optics” of Burke’s response to the French Revolution. In her own contribution, Plassart illustrates this theme by showing how Burke’s absorption in issues that impacted parliamentary debate during the

period covered by the volume—his perception of a chronic desire of the French state to achieve “universal dominion,” the Regency crisis, and the issue of religious toleration and civil liberties—may richly inform and modify our appreciation of Burke’s response to the French Revolution. In a similar way, David Bromwich’s examination of “Burke on the New and Old Whigs” builds an illuminating account of Burke’s anti-revolutionary stance from the perspective, not of the *Reflections*, but of Burke’s slightly later *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, a work Bromwich considers “the second of Burke’s three sustained acts of self-vindication” (the others being the *Speech at the Bristol Guildhall* and the *Letter to a Noble Lord*). Bromwich shows how we may instructively coordinate our reading of the *Appeal* and the *Reflections*, two monumental tracts that “speak with one voice, yet . . . are written in distinct idioms.” In so doing, we may recover the complexity of the circumstances underlying Burke’s break with Fox and Sheridan, and thereby rescue his anti-revolutionary thought from the apparent nostalgia of the *Reflections*. In “Burke and Unitarianism,” Brian Young employs materials from this volume, particularly those concerning claims for greater religious liberty from nonconformists such as Priestley, in a revealing comparison of Burke’s “Anglican mentality” and his defense of the Established Church with the position of figures such as Edward Gibbon and Samuel Johnson. Young’s emphasis on the continuing significance of religiously-based controversy in the politics of this period carries with it the intriguing suggestion that we should consider the Burke–Priestley controversy to be quite as illuminating in understanding Burke’s counterrevolutionary position as the more famous debate he waged with Thomas Paine.

Our record of the London conference concludes with some words from Peter Marshall himself, who, in reminding us of the contribution of several late distinguished eighteenth-century scholars, emphasizes that this project has not established a canon but has been an evolving process throughout: “A new Burke has not come out of this edition.” While this is true, it does not diminish the achievement of Marshall or his co-editors in both projects. As John Faulkner stated in the review mentioned above, “Volume IV is a work of twenty-first century scholarship”: we can hope that, as such, it marks the starting point for tracing

that evolving process and analyzing how such a process is inextricable from the reception of the material itself.

The review essays included in this issue both concern aspects central to the wider milieu in which Burke moved. Steven Blakemore comments on a recent study of Burke's understanding of empire that challenges the progressive interpretation of his colonial arguments favored lately by academics. Ingrid Gregg comments on a groundbreaking study of intellectual history that delineates an "Irish Enlightenment" striving to reconcile denominational religious divisions through the lineaments of enlightened concepts of civilization and toleration with which Burke was intimately associated throughout his life.

Further to the Editor's Introduction in our previous issue, it was regretfully not possible to proceed with the conference on "Edmund Burke and the Conservative Mind" planned for 2016. A number of events, though, are in preparation to mark the centenary, in 2018, of the birth of Russell Kirk, one of America's most influential interpreters of Burke's thought, and readers of this journal should watch for more details on our website, [kirkcenter.org/burke](http://kirkcenter.org/burke).

**IAN CROWE**

## *Notes on Contributors*



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**JOHN FAULKNER**, now retired, taught English literature of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries at Ohio University–Lancaster. He has published articles on Edmund Burke and Richard Price, on Burke's conception of language, and on the editorial foundations of modern Burke scholarship. Currently, he is working on a reconsideration of Burke's speech on the Test and Corporation Acts.

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**ANNA PLASSART** holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge. She was a Junior Research Fellow at Christ Church, University of Oxford, before taking up a position as Lecturer in Modern British History at the Open University. She is the author of *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution* (CUP, 2015).

**BRIAN YOUNG** is University Lecturer in History and Senior Censor of Christ Church, Oxford. He is the author of *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998) and *The Victorian Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2007) and has co-edited a number of volumes dedicated to the study of intellectual history. He has written widely on the intellectual, religious, and cultural history of England, from 1660 into the twentieth century.



# *Thomas Copeland's Account of the Editing of Burke's Correspondence*



JOHN FAULKNER  
*Ohio University–Lancaster*

In Oxford on December 1, 1973, Thomas Copeland, the General Editor of the acclaimed Chicago–Cambridge edition of Edmund Burke's correspondence, began writing a journal by admitting he was temperamentally unsuited to that literary form. Fully aware he lacked any affinity with a Pepys or Boswell, he was giving it a try to help him consider his "present state." That state was one of editorial crisis, which had arisen just as the *Correspondence* project was approaching its conclusion and planning for the edition of Burke's *Writings and Speeches* to succeed it was about to begin. After having overseen the publication of nine volumes in seventeen years up to 1970, the *Correspondence's* editor found himself in a situation in which, through no fault of his own, its general index volume was seriously behind schedule. Ultimately, it would not appear until 1978. The crisis was partly budgetary, since the delay was draining the project's financial resources close to the point of exhaustion. To a conscientious person like Professor Copeland it was also a humiliation since he had in good faith made assurances to the project's institutional supporters about the *Correspondence's* conclusion and the

impetus the project could give to the forthcoming *Writings and Speeches* that it was now his duty to retract. Further, he was aware that, since he was already sixty-six years old, a protracted winding down of the *Correspondence* would curtail contributions he might make to the *Writings and Speeches*. Within six months he would arrive at the decision to withdraw as an editor of the new series.

Professor Copeland's journal survives among his papers in the Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Written for his own eyes, it occasionally includes paragraphs which take the trouble to explain things for which he needed no explanation. Although they suggest that, at least on some days, he may have expected that others might eventually read what he was typing, many passages are clearly private, and in a few places pages appear to have been removed. The anxieties raised by the index volume's long delay make portions of the journal additionally interesting to students of Burke by their having stimulated Professor Copeland's recollections of the beginnings of the *Correspondence* project. Burke's papers, including a large majority of his surviving drafts and letters to him, had become available only in 1949, considerably later than those of many figures of comparable stature. The editing of Burke's correspondence was the indispensable first step in laying the new foundations of Burke scholarship, and Copeland was the central figure in that editing project. In the spring of 1976, then under less strain, he sought perspective in a journal sequence which includes many autobiographical details about the edition's origins. My essay, written mainly from Professor Copeland's own point-of-view and quoting from him profusely, assembles his recollections into a more nearly linear account.<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 1948, the ninth Earl Fitzwilliam agreed to transfer to the Sheffield Central Library what amounted the following year

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1 All quotations documented only by CJ followed by a date are from Professor Copeland's unpaginated journal, Box 6, Folder 49 of the Thomas W. Copeland Papers (FS 050), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Without page numbers to cite, I have resorted to entry dates where they exist. When a month and day are given but no year, I have placed a question mark after the probable year to indicate that the year, though likely, is my conjecture. The website for the Copeland Collection, which includes a good catalogue, is: <http://scua.library.umass.edu/umarmot/copeland-thomas-w/>

to three moving vans filled with valuable historical manuscripts. They included the largest collection anywhere of papers relating to Burke (and added to important papers in Northamptonshire donated by a different branch of the family in 1946). At that time, on another continent, Thomas Copeland had been under great pressure. He had returned to Yale at the end of World War Two to face a tenure decision which ultimately would be unfavorable. It may not be accurate to write that he was *denied* tenure. Yale's English Department, notably deep in eighteenth-century scholars, simply bracketed him and William Wimsatt, Jr.: one would be tenured, the other would not. That set the bar very high for Copeland since Wimsatt had managed to publish his first book, the well-regarded *Prose Style of Samuel Johnson*, in 1941, just before the war's intrusion into academic life, and was completing his second, *Philosophic Words* (1948). Besides, in English departments Johnson was understandably a writer of greater centrality than Burke. At Yale both the graduate course in later-eighteenth-century literature and the collection of essays presented to the retired Chauncey Brewster Tinker, to which both Copeland and Wimsatt contributed, bore the name *The Age of Johnson*. In an era ceded to Johnson, Burke, although respected by discerning readers, occupied a place which was not clearly defined and was consequently peripheral.<sup>2</sup>

Copeland, too, had been working on a manuscript. He envisioned what he called a "portrait" of Burke for both scholars and educated general readers, but, ever-conscious of the thinness and uncertainty of biographical information about Burke, he'd had difficulty writing it. In near desperation, he drew instead on previous work in assembling a quite different book—a collection of essays addressing several significant problems then facing Burke scholars. Its publication in 1949 as *Our Eminent Friend Edmund Burke: Six Essays*, although too late to help him with the tenure decision, would prove timely for other purposes. Its essays included expanded versions of three pieces already published: one on James Boswell's depiction of Burke and two others on Burke's editing of the *Annual Register*. Of the three new essays, one with scholarly care laid out reasons for identifying the "Monsieur Dupont" to whom Burke addressed *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as someone other

2 CJ March 29, 1976?

than Charles DePont, the young man later discovered to be Burke's correspondent. The remaining two, however, were among the best essays yet written about Burke. "The Little Dogs and All," an interpretive profile of Burke, was an ambitious account of his public life which emphasized the social and financial strain that continually threatened to make it unupportable. At once intense and judicious, it carried conviction and left a strong impression of the writer's authority. The other new essay was a scholarly investigation of the letter from Thomas Paine Burke had received within a week of reading Richard Price's sermon, important for influencing his reading of it and possibly for provoking him to write *Reflections*. Copeland established that the source of much of Paine's information was the American Ambassador to France, Thomas Jefferson. This had been primarily an archival study because both the Philip Foner edition of Paine and the 1904 edition of Jefferson's letters, upon which scholars were then forced to rely, were seriously defective. Copeland identified some of the former's failings in a cautionary appendix likely to have interested anyone weighing his qualifications as an editor of correspondence. His book was favorably reviewed when it was published in 1949. Better still for Copeland, it was the newest publication on Burke at the time the Burke papers were becoming available at Sheffield, and Copeland recalled that he'd "made the first page of the *Times Literary Supplement*."

After learning of the transfer of the papers, Copeland set out for the UK as quickly as he could. Something of the sense of discovery at Sheffield that summer may be caught from an account in Richard Altick's *The Scholar Adventurers*. In Sheffield, Copeland met Professor George Potter, an historian at the University of Sheffield who was supervising the opening of the collection and who would become a valuable friend to the *Correspondence* project. One day, an assistant of Copeland's arrived from the United States (probably Robert Smith, later co-editor of Volume Six), and Professor Potter took him to the basement to show him the state of the papers. At this point Altick quotes directly from Copeland:

"This is the way these things looked when we first opened them up," Potter said, lighting on a box which had not yet

been opened and was covered with a century's dust. "You see, the contents are tied up in dozens of little packets thrown in in no kind of order." He picked out a packet, wiped the dust off it, and undid the ribbon around it. By chance it was a packet of letters to Burke. He took out another packet—and then it turned out that the entire box was filled with packets just like it: about seven or eight hundred letters that had been overlooked in all previous hunts for Burke materials, some of them by Johnson, Boswell, Garrick, Reynolds, and other notables!<sup>3</sup>

The contents merit Copeland's exclamation point, and it is also worth noticing that they are typical of the Sheffield papers in being letters more often to than from Burke.

By 1949, it was arguable that Copeland and his colleague Milton Smith were the two scholars most expert on Burke's correspondence. For a dozen years they had worked on a listing of letters to and from Burke. Neither had begun with any special professional competence for such work, Copeland recalled:

but we liked working together and we were both patient and by a great deal of trial and error we had given it about the right shape. . . . By 1949 we had a large percentage of the letters that were *not* in the Fitzwilliam collections recorded on our cards. Once the Fitzwilliam collections were opened, our course was clear: we had only to complete the big job by adding them to our lists.<sup>4</sup>

Their *Checklist of the Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, published in 1955 by the Index Society with the assistance of James Osborn, was indispensable to the *Correspondence* series. It would be of great assistance to the editors of the individual volumes, and in turn almost everyone connected with the editorial team would contribute to the *Checklist's*

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3 Richard Altick, *The Scholar Adventurers* (New York: Macmillan, 1950; reprint, Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1987), 93 (page citation is from the reprint edition).

4 CJ March 17, 1976? An isolated phrase in an outline for a talk Copeland gave in the late 1970s to the University of Massachusetts English Department may indicate that the checklist originated as a "WPA project in scholarship." Box 12, Folder 97.

expanded successor, the section of the Volume Ten index titled "A Full Listing of Burke's Correspondence."

Although he and his wife were later thanked in the acknowledgements preceding Volume One for their assistance in organizing the "Burke Factory" in Sheffield, it is not clear from Professor Copeland's recollections in what role Milton Smith may have envisioned himself should an edition of Burke's correspondence be attempted. There was someone else, however, who aspired to direct such a project, Professor Ross Hoffman of Fordham University who had learned of the Sheffield situation from Copeland. For a time in 1949 the two joined forces in seeking a publisher for the letters. Since Hoffman's former mentor was then librarian at the American Philosophical Society, he hoped it might publish them. "But first," Copeland recalled:

there must be a general clamor from scholars, to make it clear that all the world was waiting impatiently for that particular sunrise. Ross proposed that he and I organize a Burke meeting at the American Historical Society, meeting that year in Boston. We did. Each of us wrote a paper describing some aspect of the newly opened collections. The papers were delivered at the Christmas meetings; sheets were passed around in the question period to get as many signatures as possible from Scholars Interested. We had quite a harvest, and I'm sure it was presented to Professor Lingelbach (Ross's contact) of the American Philosophical. No results.<sup>5</sup>

At Hoffman's urging, Copeland, who had just arrived at the University of Chicago, then contacted the director and assistant director of that university's press, but his proposal was also rejected.

Hoffman's next suggestion, however, brought their cooperation to an end. The papers deposited in Sheffield had brought to light two extended correspondences: copies of Burke's letters to his employers in the New York Assembly and a large cache of letters to him from Charles O'Hara, an older Irish friend. His own letters to O'Hara had survived in possession of the latter's family. As Copeland recorded, Hoffman "proposed that the two of us divide up the responsibilities of

<sup>5</sup> CJ March 17, 1976?

editing the New York Letter Book and editing the O'Hara letters: he to do the first, I to do the second." However Copeland was to discover that, "behind my back" Hoffman had gone "to Mr. O'Hara and secured his permission to edit the O'Hara letters himself."<sup>6</sup> As Hoffman may have belatedly discovered, the O'Hara correspondence is the more important of the two. While there is possibly more to the story than Copeland set down in a few sentences and maybe more than he ever knew, it is understandable that his distrust ruled out any subsequent collaboration. When it was published in 1956, Hoffman's volume bore the elongated title *Edmund Burke, New York Agent with his letters to the New York Assembly and intimate correspondence with Charles O'Hara 1761-1776*. Its covers bind together two books organized on different plans. The first is a monograph on Burke's employment as agent by the assembly of New York in which his letter-book constitutes the final chapter. The second and longer book collects Burke's entire correspondence with O'Hara. There is some advantage in having both sides of the O'Hara correspondence gathered together: in the Chicago-Cambridge edition they would be dispersed through three volumes and would not include all O'Hara's letters. Hoffman, however, modernized the spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of the letters, a decision possibly affected by his having learned that a more scholarly edition would be edited.

Copeland, meanwhile, still had his *Portrait* of Burke to advance and had been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for work in the UK on it. "At the last possible moment" in the spring of 1951, however, an official of the University of Chicago Press asked him over breakfast "if the Press were to attempt an edition of Burke's *Correspondence*—how do you think it ought to be organized?" When Copeland started to answer him, the official stopped him with the instruction "write me a letter." He went home and returned with a lengthy response. He continues:

I didn't guess what would happen next. He gave it to a typist at the Press, who couldn't have been more than half literate. She typed it up, apparently no one proofread it; it was sent out to about forty prominent 18th-Century scholars to ask whether they approved or disapproved of the plan. Some must have

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6 CJ July 24, 1975.

been horrified by the numerous typos (R. W. Chapman went over the whole letter with a blue pencil, making corrections), but the majority of them liked the plan. The Press therefore encouraged me to explore around while I was in England: try to find scholars interested in editing volumes; try to find influential people who would give us their names for an Advisory Committee.<sup>7</sup>

Once in England, Copeland's attention turned to planning and promoting an edition, and later he felt with good reason that he'd had very good luck in the help he received:

That year I lived with the Potters, and George was an ideal person to steer my steps toward the edition. He knew which British scholars I ought to look up, and in what order. And he had very useful ideas about the edition. Toward the end of the year he prepared me for the most testing experience: that of going over to Manchester to talk with Professor Namier. As George made clear to me, Namier was the one man who could make or break the whole project. As it turned out, he was very friendly. True, the very first thing he said to me was: "Your plan is mistaken." I had suggested to Chicago that one might organize the *Correspondence* in the way the Yale Walpole and the Yale Boswell correspondences were organized: that is, as a series of complete interchanges—Burke and O'Hara, letters on both sides; Burke and Rockingham; Burke and Portland; and so on. This I think appealed to the Press: they saw that if the thing didn't work out very well, they could bring out a volume or two and stop, without any particular shame about it. But Namier pointed out that this series of two-way correspondences would not work for Burke's career. He was always dealing with political affairs that involved *several* people; it would be hopelessly inefficient and wasteful to start the annotation of a complex affair in one correspondence but for its continuation send the reader to another correspondence, for its third stage to still another, and so on. I could see that Pro-

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7 CJ March 17–18 1976?



fessor Namier was right. It took me several weeks, however, to bring the Press around to his view. But they did finally agree to it. Even I did not agree with one of his views: that we ought to publish *all* the letters that survive, in a chronological order. That would have meant that a letter was sometimes removed from its answer by anything from one or two to a couple dozen other items. What we finally decided to do was print all of Edmund Burke's letters and then other letters *if* they made the whole sequence of events more comprehensible. We did not print in-letters for their own inherent importance, but as annotation of his letters.<sup>8</sup>

The arrangement of letters Copeland abandoned had made sense for Walpole's letters since he had associated many of his correspondents with their own distinctive subjects, but—apart from those with O'Hara—there were only a few such self-contained exchanges of letters within Burke's correspondence. There had been some connections between the Walpole and Burke editions. Copeland's valuable assistant Robert Smith had acquired useful experience on the Walpole project before coming to Burke. And Walpole's editor, W. S. Lewis had given financial assistance to a search through autograph dealers' catalogues in the British Museum for additional Burke letters. Yale's great editor of Boswell, Frederick Pottle, would be a member of Copeland's advisory committee, and so would L. F. Powell, the editor of the *Life of Johnson*, from whom Copeland continued to receive sound editorial advice throughout the entire course of the project. Still, Namier, "whose advice determined the main features of our editorial plan," led the list of Advisory Committee members whose help Copeland acknowledged in Volume One. The minutely detailed study of parliamentary history which he had influenced, moreover, had made possible much more thorough annotation of Burke's letters than would have been possible a generation before. Namier's colleague John Brooke, then engaged on the Eighteenth-Century segment of the *History of Parliament*, wrote many of the political notes for Copeland's own Volume One and gave him "invalu-

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8 CJ March 18–19, 1976? According to Peter Marshall, by the time he arrived at the Burke project letters to Burke had begun to be admitted for their inherent interest.

able counsel.”<sup>9</sup> In his journal, Copeland went so far as to write “our *Correspondence* owes more to Namier than to any other single influence.” But the influence he meant referred only to Namier’s methods and good advice, not to his perspective. His next sentence proceeds “but I hope it used the Namier methods to begin the job of resisting the Namier bias.” That bias was Namier’s suspicion of ideas in politics, or, as Copeland put it, the view that “politics (at bottom) should always mean politics as seen by the Duke of Newcastle.”<sup>10</sup> Not all Namier’s followers shared his bias, of course, and one who regarded Burke highly, Ian Christie, would later serve on the smaller Advisory Committee of the *Writings and Speeches*.

It would be 1953 before Copeland was confirmed as General Editor. He recalled that in that year:

I had promised to finish the whole *Correspondence* in as brief a time as possible; neither I nor the Carnegie Corporation had enough experience to realize that that couldn’t be a very brief time; we talked of five years! We had in fact kept a pretty creditable pace, as big editions go, so I didn’t feel very apologetic about having taken seventeen years to bring out nine volumes.<sup>11</sup>

Nor should he have. He was writing, of course, before the Index was completed. Still, the *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, founded two years afterward in 1955, originally was to consist in nine volumes and was projected to take *two* years. Six decades later, in a considerably expanded form, it is now approaching its conclusion.<sup>12</sup> In England, Copeland had found the establishing of principles for an edition both interesting and important. He was apparently a good listener and good, too, at making people feel that their advice was valued. Back in Chicago he was aided by another advisory committee which usefully included historians and a representative from the University of Chicago Press, but the two members who seem to have been most actively supportive

9 *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland et al., 10 vols (Cambridge and Chicago: Cambridge UP and U of Chicago P, 1958–70), 1:xii–xiii. Hereafter designated *Correspondence*.

10 CJ Dec. 7, 1973.

11 CJ July 19, 1975.

12 *The Yale Digital Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*: <http://www.yalejohnson.com>

were the eminent Chicago literary critic, Ronald Crane, and the political philosopher, Leo Strauss. Crane not only was greatly interested in Burke but turned out to be, Copeland considered, "about as good a man as I could have found in America for straightening out details of procedure." One of the committee's accomplishments that winter was that, by the time the project's grant was approved in the spring of 1953, it had "worked out an excellent style book, which in fact we hardly had to alter at all" in the next fifteen years.<sup>13</sup>

Before work on Volume One of the *Correspondence* could advance very far there had been a good deal of manuscript repair to do and a great deal of transcription. The volume editors needed a completed *Checklist*, and it was published in 1955. In the course of assessing his own Volume One, published in 1958, Copeland again singled out Professor Crane's counsel. That had been, he thought, "an entirely creditable but still not brilliant" first volume, "in which we put into use the excellent preliminary advice I had had from Ronald Crane and the rest, and settled the pattern of our annotation, our style, our way of dealing with Burke's career."<sup>14</sup> First among the scholars whose contributions Professor Copeland had acknowledged was John Brooke, then working on the *History of Parliament*, for his valuable contributions to the notes on political figures and issues. Robert Smith was credited in the same paragraph for major research and editorial assistance, but, having relinquished his position as Copeland's assistant, he was listed now as a member of the Editorial Committee. With Alfred Cobban, he would edit Volume Six's letters from the months surrounding the publication of *Reflections*. Assignments may have shifted, but the person who seems to have most nearly taken over Smith's position was John Woods who had joined the edition in 1955 as a research assistant and is identified in the Volume One preface as "permanent consultant." In 1961, he would become Associate Editor and also take a position in the History Department at the University of Leeds. Dr. Woods's arrival was an event of great importance to the *Correspondence* project for the mastery of the Burke papers he would drive himself to acquire. Already in Volume One Copeland had written of him that "it is hard to imagine a

<sup>13</sup> CJ March 19, 1976?

<sup>14</sup> CJ March 22, 1976?

scholar who would be either keener or more patient in the hunt for the buried facts of Burke's career."<sup>15</sup>

## II

Volume One of the *Correspondence* had been satisfactory, Professor Copeland thought, and had confirmed the soundness of the editorial policies he had with so much effort and consultation developed. All the succeeding volumes would be edited by political historians, the first of whom was Lucy Sutherland, whose volume, he wrote, "by the greatest good fortune, came second in line." "She probably did more to establish us than any other person." She had, he continued, almost everything "that a great scholar at the top of her career could have." He'd found that, having done "an incredibly thorough job of research," she—perhaps pressed by demands of her administrative duties—had written it up hastily. "I did an immense amount of rewriting for her," he records in his journal. His detailed work on her manuscript, if anything, intensified his awareness of the lift she was giving, beyond an excellent Volume Two, to the project itself:

She had made herself one of the most skillful and determined of eighteenth-century researchers: had been teaching the same to the best Oxford candidates for decades. Now she could use all her own skills in one master task. Research is a passion with her; she was delighted with the job. And she must also have seen what she was doing for the rest of us. By struggling for her own perfect volume she was showing how the thing should be done by all subsequent editors in the series. Her

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<sup>15</sup> *Correspondence*, 1:xii–xiii. Another noteworthy item in the front matter of Volume One occurs on page ii, where Copeland is identified as "Professor of English, University of Massachusetts." The University of Massachusetts, seeking to strengthen its faculty in the humanities, hired him in 1957 as a full professor. By 1961 he was regarded as sufficiently distinguished to become one of the first faculty members there to receive the new designation Commonwealth Professor. [Robert S. Cox], "Background on Thomas W. Copeland," *Thomas W. Copeland Papers*, Special Collections and University Archives, U. of Massachusetts–Amherst Libraries. <http://scua.library.umass.edu/umarmot/copeland-thomas-w/>

greatest single influence was no doubt on John. Whatever his other deficiencies, he was as passionate as she was about high-level research. Having seen how it was done, he held all the later editors up to her standard, but especially held himself up to it. . . . Until some time about 1970 when he finished his work on Volume Nine, he was our scholarly conscience.<sup>16</sup>

Dame Lucy (Copeland almost always refers to her by the title she received in 1970) continued on as a highly influential member of the Editorial Committee, and her former students Paul Langford and Peter Marshall would become the central figures in the *Writings and Speeches* edition which succeeded the *Correspondence*.

Like an obituary page, the acknowledgement section of a book is not written under oath. Still, by 1961, when the third volume was published, its editor George Guttridge, whom Copeland regarded as a thorough professional, singled out John Woods for praise closely corroborating Copeland's words quoted above:

The highest praise is due to Dr. John Woods . . . whose extraordinary flair for critical investigation, matched by an extensive knowledge of archives and by infinite capacity for taking pains, has made it possible to elucidate many obscure matters.<sup>17</sup>

The three terms of Guttridge's praise are those of everyone who worked with Woods whose impressions I have been able to gather. An independent British scholar of American History, who had previously had a research interest in Granville Sharp but not Burke, and who had been unknown to Professor Copeland in the early planning for the edition, Dr. Woods would himself edit Volume Four and later co-edit Volumes Seven and Nine. If Dame Lucy had shown him what was possible, driven by his own exacting standards he would acquire over the following decade the most detailed knowledge of Edmund Burke's life

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<sup>16</sup> CJ March 22–23, 1976?

<sup>17</sup> *Correspondence*, 3:x. Professor Guttridge seems to have considered Volume Three his best and most satisfying work of scholarship. R. Brentano, T. G. Barnes, H. F. May, "George Herbert Guttridge, History: Berkeley," *In Memoriam* (December 1970): 45–47. <http://texts.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb629006wb&doc.view=frames&chunk.id=div00020&toc.depth=1&toc.id>

and circumstances anyone had had since the deaths of Jane Burke and French Laurence, and this he would then put at the disposal of the *Correspondence's* readers.

A third member of the inner group of four which, along with Professor Copeland himself, was chiefly responsible for the *Correspondence's* great merit was his secretary Valerie Jobling. She managed the Burke office, assisted distant editors, helped scholars visiting the Sheffield collection, and carried out tasks too numerous and diverse for any job description to encompass. Recognizing her importance in print, Copeland wrote among his acknowledgements in Volume One: "on her all editors have joined in making the most unreasonable demands and have never been disappointed."<sup>18</sup> When he wrote "unreasonable demands" he could not have foreseen that one editor would actually prevail on her to do much of the research for his volume under his direction. Although appalled that an editor would go that far, Copeland admitted that she had been "delighted to be used and trusted, and did an excellent job." John Woods had carried out his checking superlatively, and the volume had turned out well. In the privacy of his journal, when Copeland recalls being introduced to Ms. Jobling, he remembers her as:

a person who had raised her daughter to the age of thirteen and was now looking for a new interest in life. She was absolutely ready for an interest like Burke. Why a reasonably prosperous family had not given her a university education is one of the mysteries of British life. But she needed one [such interest], and as soon as she made out what work on Burke involved, knew that it was just what she wanted. It took her two years to realize how good Burke was, but when she did realize it, she was fully active and fully used.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Correspondence*, 1:xxiii.

<sup>19</sup> CJ March 24, 1976? Valerie's daughter, Dr. Sally Jobling, suggests that, rather than "looking for a new interest in life," her mother (b. 1916) had sought a job at the Sheffield City Library because she loved books. She had worked there for the Ministry of Information during World War Two, and the Head Librarian thought that the Burke Factory might suit her well. She had left school at sixteen during the depression because her father could no longer afford its expense at a time, in any case, when very few women in the UK or elsewhere attended universities.

Elsewhere in the journal he puts it more succinctly, praising her for being intelligent and “infinitely hard-working,” “an almost perfect secretary.”<sup>20</sup>

Eventually, Ms. Jobling acquired a degree of authority beyond that. After leaving the *Correspondence* office, she would give “invaluable” assistance in deciphering Burke manuscripts, at which she had become highly skilled, to Peter Marshall as he edited his India volumes of Burke’s *Writings and Speeches*. And among his acknowledgements in *The Great Melody*, Conor Cruise O’Brien thanked her for reading the preface, introduction, and first chapter of his book and for supplying useful criticism of his footnotes: “They are still not up to her exigent standards, but they are a lot better than when she found them.” Her standards, he added, had influenced the annotation of the entire book.<sup>21</sup>

This may be a good place to notice that important contributions to the *Correspondence* edition were made by women. In addition to Lucy Sutherland and Valerie Jobling, the expert and resourceful indexer Barbara Lowe would arrive late on the scene to play a decisive role in ending the crisis which had impelled Copeland to begin his journal and in bringing the *Correspondence* to a successful conclusion. Each of the women in her distinctive capacity was outstandingly effective, and the contributions of all three were essential.

The fourth member of the core group, Peter Marshall, was the last to arrive. Having studied as an undergraduate with Lucy Sutherland at Oxford, who then had supervised his graduate research, Marshall published, in 1965, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, a book ever since indispensable to students of Burke. But his work on that book, and perhaps on the dissertation preceding it, had brought him into earlier contact with the some of the other *Correspondence* editors. Professor Copeland had read and commented upon a draft of his book. And, as early as 1963 in his Volume Four, John Woods recorded his debt to Marshall for reading the letters relating to Indian affairs and “contributing substantially to their annotation.”<sup>22</sup> Although Marshall seems quickly

20 CJ November 8, 1977; March 19, 1976?

21 Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–2015), 6:ix and 7:viii. Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1992), xiv.

22 *Correspondence*, 4:ix.

to have become the project's authority on Indian matters, his expertise on Burke extended well beyond them. He would co-edit Volume Seven, in which his concentration was on continental European issues, and, as Copeland makes clear, the phrase "with the assistance of" on Volume Five's title page does not adequately convey the extent of his contributions to that volume.<sup>23</sup>

In the first phase of the project, which to Copeland had extended through the publication of Volume One, he appears to have had good fortune in the assistance he attracted and to have skillfully set up and tested out procedures. With a self-effacement which seems characteristic even when writing to himself, he attributed his success to following good advice (which he had assiduously sought out) and to having a large capacity for patience, even with people who failed to keep commitments. Unlike Frederick Pottle, the editor of the Boswell papers and a member of his Advisory Committee, whom he regarded as both a conventional and an exemplary general editor, Copeland did not consider either adjective to apply to himself:

I don't think I underrate what I had been able to do, but my methods had been original not to say eccentric. My achievement had been to find other people . . . who were both more energetic and better trained than myself, but who hadn't a very clear of what they wanted to do. I had a clearer idea and a better sense of direction and could move them into an area where they did better work than I could do.<sup>24</sup>

However, if one is engaged in team scholarship—which the diversity of Burke's concerns within the confines of chronologically ordered volumes encouraged—such leadership does not seem particularly eccentric. The contributions of members of his inner team enabled Copeland to get good results even from the editor who had shifted his work to Valerie Jobling. Once the inner group had begun to coalesce in the wake of Volume Two, five of the last seven volumes would have two or more names on their title pages, and on four of those five title pages at least one of those names would be that of John Woods or Peter Marshall.

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<sup>23</sup> CJ July 24, 1975.

<sup>24</sup> CJ July 24, 1975.



Additionally, in all those last seven volumes the assistance of an editor of another volume would be acknowledged. The excellence of the *Correspondence* was achieved by the way learned people with differing sets of knowledge and experience were able to collaborate.

The second phase of the project began with the arrival of Dame Lucy Sutherland and presumably continued on through the publication of Volume Nine. "Once she had shown us that it was possible to do the whole series at or close to her level," Copeland records, "it was perfectly certain that the main work had to be done by John, Peter, and Valerie."<sup>25</sup> It meant, for example, that in the apportioning of duties between himself and the associate director John Woods, in order to maximize the benefits of Woods's exacting scholarship Copeland took on tasks that might otherwise have been left to his associate. Among the responsibilities he had assumed all along, Copeland and Valerie Jobling had "leaned over backward" to help scholars who made contact with them. And he continued to give talks explaining the work of the *Correspondence* project at universities throughout the UK and at professional meetings on both sides of the Atlantic. One he had given in 1955, to the London Johnsonians, had been especially memorable since in his audience had been several "daunting" eighteenth-century scholars including the eminent editors L. F. Powell and R. W. Chapman. Unknown to Copeland until later, so had been the editor of the *Times*, Sir William Hayley, who had a strong interest in Burke, and "saw ways of helping us along." One way, at a time when *TLS* reviews were unsigned, was by reserving to himself the reviews of the first four volumes.<sup>26</sup> This is interesting to learn. However, Professor Copeland is silent about something one would prefer to know: his own continuing service to the edition as a scholarly reader of the manuscripts. This omission and his pervasive consciousness of his depleting energy in his journal entries, make it somewhat difficult to judge the extent of his contribution to the attainment of the *Correspondence's* acknowledged merit.

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<sup>25</sup> CJ March 30, 1976? This should not be misunderstood as derogatory to any of the other volume editors. Professor Copeland respected, especially, George Guttridge and Alfred Cobban. The inner team at Sheffield, however, both in the assistance it gave to the other editors and in Woods's and Marshall's own volumes, would be essential in upholding consistently the high editorial standards Volume Two had shown to be possible.

<sup>26</sup> CJ March 25, 1976?

The difficulty arises from the journal's corresponding so little to the elaborate expressions of respect by the editors in their individual volumes. Almost all emphasized how *detailed* their indebtedness had been to Copeland. In Volume Six, Alfred Cobban and Robert Smith wrote: "The General Editor, Professor Thomas W. Copeland, the creator and sustainer of the whole edition, has been our continual support and guide. His experience, knowledge and cautious scholarship have left their mark on every page." In Volume Eight, R. B. McDowell testified that Copeland "has worked over all the material, texts and notes, with scrupulous care, and by his insight and patience has made an immeasurable contribution to the volume." Marshall and Woods, in Volume Seven, acknowledged Copeland for having "set the standards for the edition, and guided the editors of this volume at every stage of their work, which has greatly benefited from his acute and perceptive criticism." And earlier, in Volume Four, John Woods had written so effusively that Copeland had asked him to tone down his expression of gratitude.<sup>27</sup> Copeland's early decision that, after his own Volume One, all subsequent volumes needed the kind of annotation a political historian could provide, had necessarily limited his participation in their editing. However, the qualities of an outstanding general editor differ from—though they should also complement—those of an outstanding volume editor. Copeland surely knew that, but in a difficult time may not have always felt it.

Because Copeland's journal provides little detail concerning his own role in the editorial process, in the following three paragraphs I shall be relying on an account of the editorial process by which the *Correspondence* was assembled sent me with great kindness by Peter Marshall.<sup>28</sup> Professor Marshall believes that Copeland's greatest achievement was in designing the model for Volume One:

It was a model that needed no further changes or even much modification. The format for volume one became the format for all the volumes: there would be headnotes setting out the

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<sup>27</sup> *Correspondence*, 6:ix; 8:viii; 7:ix; and 4:ix.

<sup>28</sup> This and all subsequent recollections and opinions attributed to Professor Peter Marshall have their source in an e-mail correspondence with the author in February through April 2016.

context of the letter and, when necessary, tailnotes, explaining the consequences that followed. In the annotation, there would be further explanations and, whenever possible, every person mentioned would be identified, and the same applied to every literary or other sort of allusion.

Those intentions ensured, and Copeland accepted, that political historians would have to be dominant. To supply those explanations and make those identifications, as Marshall points out, also “meant that each volume became a research project.” Copeland did not do the political research. In his own Volume One, John Brooke had contributed political notes. Although he had done significant archival research for *Our Eminent Friend* in the Library of Congress, Copeland seems to have gone rarely to the British Museum, and not at all “to places like the Public Records Office.” The research was, above all, done by John Woods who his colleagues knew was setting “standards of close investigation that nobody could match.” The volume editors were themselves doing research for their annotation within the areas of their scholarly experience, and, when letters concerning Indian matters beyond that experience turned up within their volume’s coverage, they could rely on Peter Marshall for assistance and even annotation.

The close attention and guidance for which Copeland was thanked in the volumes’ acknowledgements occurred in other phases of the process. A volume editor was given texts of letters typed by Valerie Jobling. Almost all those letters had been identified by Copeland and Milton Smith in their *Checklist*. Professor Marshall continues:

Much work would have gone into producing these typescripts, in which Tom was, I am sure, involved. Valerie typed up the letters, in most cases, from MSS. I need hardly say that this was more difficult than it might sound. Transcribing a fair copy of a Burke letter is not usually too difficult; making sense of a draft can be fiendishly hard. Valerie and John became very talented decipherers of Burke drafts. I am sure Tom was good too and would have been fully involved.

The editor then annotated the letters with headnotes, tailnotes, and footnotes on separate sheets and returned them to Valerie to be retyped and passed on to Copeland. "Tom read them with the utmost care," Marshall continues: "and would have many comments to offer . . . He would rarely enter into questions of historical interpretation, but his stylistic comments were invaluable."

Copeland's supervision was, then, as close and conscientious as the editors' acknowledgements suggest, but Marshall locates his achievement primarily in qualities of leadership:

Ultimately, I think his great gift was not so much in the work he did himself, but his ability to bring out the capacity of others to work for him by his unfailing consideration, courtesy and the encouragement he gave one, and the admiration that it was impossible not to feel for his own high standards, which one had to emulate.

### III

In the talks Professor Copeland gave promoting the *Correspondence* edition, he readily adopted the phrase "Burke factory." In a draft surviving in his papers from the early years of the project (possibly for that 1955 address to the London Johnsonians) he wrote this:

We have what amounts to a production line. Our central "plant" is a room in the Public Library of the City of Sheffield, where we have files, photostats, microfilms, a microfilm reader, a permanent secretary, a part-time associate manager—pretty much what one would expect in the Main Office of a small business concern. Our nine editors . . . are normally at long distances from the Sheffield "plant." Four are Americans, four English (in other cities than Sheffield) and one Irish. Our plan of operations is to bring out roughly one volume a year—each volume being the responsibility of a separate editor. But as each volume really takes three or four years to prepare, there has to be elaborate provision for staggering the activi-

ties of the editors and the Sheffield staff. Typically the scheme requires that when the editor of Volume Five is in the first, most intensive phase of preparing his typescript for the Press, the editor of Volume Four is in his second phase (that is, he has received galleys back from the Press, is reading proof and checking). But the editor of Volume Three is also at work, in his third phase (page-proofs and the preparation of an index). All three editors call upon the Sheffield staff for help, so that it is quite normal for the staff to be involved with the different stages of three volumes at a time. It's like that remorseless production line in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. It can't be stopped; the next unit is coming along. . . . We can't escape our series of advancing deadlines. We can't even slow them down very much. We're caught in what the business people call "full utilization of plant." The secretary's salary and the use of our room are a kind of "continuing overhead." We can't afford to stop other operations, because these would not stop and would soon wreck our budget.<sup>29</sup>

What ensued when the volumes began to be appear, however, was that, with one exception, the first six volumes of the *Correspondence* came out every second year. At that point the pace quickened. Volumes Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine arrived in successive years from 1967 through 1970. Then, with only the general index remaining and at a point where the editors could begin looking ahead to the *Writings and Speeches*, the momentum ceased.

Volume Ten, the final volume of the *Correspondence*, was to be a general index. John Woods had volunteered to edit it, Copeland wrote in his journal, having "accepted that as his responsibility" and pondered its dimensions. In many respects, Copeland continues:

John was ideally suited to doing the job. He knew the material of the nine volumes more thoroughly than anyone else. Half of them he had either done himself or superintended so closely that quite literally he knew more about the contents

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas W. Copeland, "Team Scholarship," Copeland Papers, Box 20, Folder 167, pp. 18-19.

than the nominal volume-editor. He was also quite incredibly meticulous about detail. He had never spared himself when it was a matter of exactitude. He had also a passionate belief in the value of large indexes.<sup>30</sup>

Woods, moreover, had already compiled the name indexes for some of the volumes. Still, although his reliability was a matter of record and his interest in compiling the index beyond doubt, there had been some danger signals.

With R. B. McDowell, Woods was co-editor of Volume Nine. That volume consisted in two parts: the first completed the correspondence; the second collected together texts of letters that had become available too late to be included in their chronological sequence. If Woods's primary task had been the preparation of Part Two, he may have been accumulating such texts well in advance. Since the volume did not appear until 1970, however, it was somewhat strange that he arranged to take off the 1968–69 academic year from the University of Leeds to do what was understood to be the bulk of the work on his index. Copeland believed his timing had more to do with his situation at Leeds than with the compiling. When Copeland subsequently talked with L. F. Powell about the index, Powell asked "whether Volume Nine had reached the stage of page-proof. When he found that it had not, he warned me that it was not practical to start John's index year before the page-proof was ready."<sup>31</sup> By then, however, the arrangements had been made. In a seven-page single-spaced memorandum, written for a meeting on May 3, 1974 at the deepest point of the index crisis, Copeland made clear the time constraints which governed the compiling of the index:

Before I left England in the late summer of 1968 [John] and I had a talk about his index plans. I had a distinct feeling that they were over-ambitious and tried to restrain him a little, but he said 'I must do it my own way'. . . . We had spoken of an index which could be finished in twelve months or not much over that. When we had paid him his full Leeds salary for the index-year, our funds would be less than £1,000 from com-

<sup>30</sup> CJ March 31, 1976?

<sup>31</sup> CJ March 31, 1976?

plete exhaustion. Though he argued against my cautions, he promised to discuss the whole subject of the size and style of his index with me when I returned to England the following spring.<sup>32</sup>

But in 1969 when Copland returned, Woods repeatedly postponed the promised discussion.

In their 1968 conversation about the index Copland had made suggestions that Woods had resisted. One was that he should stage a “trial run”:

that is, have him index completely a short sample, using all his indexing principles on, say, 100 pages of Volume Four which he knew very well, so that the rest of us and also some expert dealers in indexes could see what he was planning. This would have been very useful before committing himself to 4,500 pages of texts and notes. But he wouldn't hear of it.<sup>33</sup>

Such trials seem to have been a procedure that Copland favored to identify difficulties in advance. Another procedure that seemed to him practical was to begin the general index with indexing already done, the name indexes of the individual volumes accurately compiled by Carl Newton and Woods himself:

My own guess was that in the final version two-thirds of the entries at least would be entries for persons. . . . By making use of these to start a set of cards for persons, we could be well into the total index—in a far better position to estimate bulk, etc.—fairly promptly. . . . John began by objecting to the whole idea. He ultimately *allowed* me to commission the job . . . but made no promise to use [the cards] and in fact went off into place entries and subject entries and didn't begin on persons till nearly four years had passed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas W. Copland, “Finishing an Index and Beginning an Edition,” Copland Papers, Box 12, Folder 97, 1.

<sup>33</sup> CJ April 1, 1976?

<sup>34</sup> CJ April 1, 1976?

Copeland learned of that delay only in retrospect. Woods put in a great deal of work on other segments, but, once he had returned to his departmental duties at Leeds, his pace had inevitably slowed. An index that had, according to their conversation, taken a little more than one year would have been ready late in 1969 or in 1970. As long as he could, Woods put his colleagues off with statements that he wasn't ready yet to discuss his index's situation and then began to give projections for its completion which had little chance of being met. An issue had developed in which Copeland's resourceful patience would not be much help.

In the summer of 1975, after decisive measures had been taken to design a more achievable index, Copeland wrote down in his journal what he inferred had happened to Woods in an account which began by granting him, initially at least, good intentions:

He wanted his index to be an extraordinary volume: a fine demonstration of the quality of his own work and a worthy successor to the nine volumes that had preceded it. He was less competent than he supposed to calculate what it would cost him in time and effort and expertise, but I'm sure he was ready to do far more than his share. We had only one year's complete leisure to give him—that being the entire balance still remaining from our Carnegie funds. But he was willing to do a five-year job on his one-year subsidy. There was much generosity as well as some arrogance in his original state of mind. That state of mind probably lasted through the year 1968–69 when he had all his time off. But when he came back on to the job at Leeds and began to see what was involved in doing his huge index as an extra assignment on top of his very heavy departmental duties—his feelings began to change. He realized that he was months and probably years from the end. Then I don't doubt that he began to realize that he might never get to the end: that he had taken on a task that was not even a very congenial one. He had made a mistake. For most people the thought of having made a mistake is not particularly dire; they have always accepted the idea that one does make mistakes. But here is just where John was peculiar. He had long



since sold himself the idea that he *didn't* make mistakes. . . .  
 He couldn't at first believe that he had made it. But when it  
 began to look as if he really had—then he had to cover it up.<sup>35</sup>

In the first year, when Woods had been able to do at his own pace the kind of work he liked, he had stepped into a trap he himself had set by his overly-ambitious planning. This, it needs stressing, is the understanding of Copeland, whom Woods had tried to keep in the dark, but it is the inference of an observer who had worked with him for over fifteen years.

In 1971, when Copeland returned to Sheffield, he was no more successful in inducing Woods to discuss the progress of the index than he had been the year before. He did learn that Woods had suffered a physical breakdown of some kind early in the summer of 1971 "which I gathered was largely caused by an extraordinary effort to get on top of the index. It failed, and his condition must have been serious, for a doctor scared him into giving up smoking for good."<sup>36</sup> In 1972 he finally got Woods to give him an estimated delivery date of the manuscript to the Cambridge University Press of October 1, 1973. Copeland had to rely on this date when submitting his proposal for the *Writings and Speeches* to the Clarendon Press and later, seeking support for it in the United States, from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It did not prove realistic.

The consequences of not having the index volume out within a manageable time were many, and most of them contributed to the stress under which Copeland was now working. The uncertainty when the *Correspondence* project would conclude affected for the worse planning sessions for the *Writings and Speeches* to come. Participants were reluctant to make commitments. Nor were they in a position to apply for leaves to do research until they could fix suitable dates. In relation to himself, Copeland began to write about Woods's continued evasion as a betrayal and a humiliation. What he felt as humiliating was that assurances he had given in good faith to financial supporters of the project about its completion and about the team of editors at its center were

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35 CJ July 17, 1975.

36 "Finishing an Index," 2.

now being undermined. Woods had put him in a false position, and he was consequently duty-bound to offer explanations concerning both the conclusion of the *Correspondence* and the transition to the *Writings and Speeches* the accuracy of which he could not be certain. Copeland had to admit to himself now that his inner team could not carry over its excellent work to the *Writings and Speeches* edition. While John Woods might edit a volume of his own, Copeland doubted he could be counted upon to contribute the kind of editorial work on other volumes he had been doing as associate editor. Moreover, after her husband had left his employment in Sheffield, Valerie Jobling had taken a position in Oxford on the staff of *The History of the University of Oxford*, where she was working with, among others, Dame Lucy Sutherland. She had given assurances that she would return once the *Writings and Speeches* was begun, but in 1973 Copeland learned she had decided to stay in Oxford. At best, she would pitch in during crucial times, but the project would not have her services on a settled basis. Copeland believed her assurances had been sincere and could infer some plausible reasons for her change of mind. But still he seems to have felt somewhat abandoned. A recurring word in my reading about the *Correspondence* team has been “devoted.” Members of the inner editorial team have used it in reference not only to their work but to their regard for certain colleagues as well. That their professional relationship seems to have had a nearly familial dimension likely sharpened Copeland’s sense of loss.

Furthermore, the delay was affecting Copeland financially. His contract with the University of Massachusetts provided him with unpaid leave every second year. In those years his pay came from the project’s budget. However, John Woods’s payment for his year of leave had depleted its balance to a point where it could not cover Copeland’s. He had not been paid in the 1969–70 academic year, nor in that of 1971–72. In the memorandum mentioned above, written during his stay in England in 1973–74, he complained reasonably that “money is not everything, but each visit to England on a leave without pay meant sacrificing a gross salary of roughly £10,000. To make a sacrifice in a good and useful cause was one thing. To do it for just another round of futile postponements was another.” Moreover, a recent change in his English Department’s procedures had prevented him from receiving a

sabbatical year for which he had qualified under the old system. And he had learned from the University of Massachusetts Personnel Office that during his absence he could not make payments on his insurance and thus would have no coverage for hospitalization until he came back on the payroll in September 1974.<sup>37</sup> Such accumulating anxieties leave their mark on a man in his mid-sixties.

The index crisis came to a head in 1973–74. Soon after arriving exhausted in the UK in June, Copeland visited John Woods in Leeds: “he was under all the end-of-the-term pressures and couldn’t possibly take time out to explore big Burke problems. But by almost accidental comments he gave away our real situation. He was not anywhere near ready to send index copy to the Press or the typist.” Woods left an additional impression just as dismaying: “he completed my disenchantment by taking a third double Martini before lunch, saying that it helped him to unwind.”<sup>38</sup> Without sufficient evidence to convince his colleagues, Copeland guessed “what turned out to be the truth—that in fact the index was years behind and John saw almost no chance on finishing it.”<sup>39</sup> By the time Copeland began writing his journal on December 1, Woods had held out a new and later date, the summer of 1974, to Dame Lucy Sutherland, who understandably wished not to put the services of so able an editor in jeopardy for the *Writings and Speeches*. Copeland had no confidence in that date, but having only suspicions, knew that he’d have to acquire detailed information about the current state of the index. Early in January 1974 he met with Woods in London and did force a discussion: “I asked him very urgently to give me a brief written statement of what still needed to be done on the index—how many thousands of cards were still to do, etc. And a similar brief statement of his normal responsibilities at Leeds.” Although Woods agreed, and promised in writing to send both statements, he had not done so in the

37 “Finishing an Index,” 1–5.

38 CJ December 2, 1973. The third double martini was a manifestation of a previously existing problem. John Woods had been raised as a non-drinker by his Methodist parents. Fellow-editor Peter Marshall recalls that Woods had begun drinking socially at the end of the day with Professor Copeland and other colleagues at Sheffield—which in retrospect distressed Copeland with “needless self-blame.” It is not clear that the unfinished index *caused* Woods’s excessive drinking, but it likely intensified it and that, in turn, may have further slowed his progress.

39 CJ July 11, 1975.

two months before the necessary information was acquired in another way.<sup>40</sup>

Late in the winter Professor Copeland learned from a source at Cambridge University Press of a “particularly resourceful indexer at Cambridge who had proved herself a remarkable trouble-shooter, having finished one index that had been delayed for fifteen years and tried four times.”<sup>41</sup> Barbara Lowe “sounded like just the person who could give us the most realistic judgment of our index.” Copeland continues:

This time I almost had a fight with John when I insisted on taking his cards away from Leeds for about ten days so that Barbara could go over them carefully in Cambridge. When she did that her verdict was that *if* John’s index were ever completed, it would run to over a thousand pages; but she was almost certain it could never be completed. She came over to Oxford to present this situation to Dame Lucy, Peter and me. Peter and I had then the touchy assignment of going to Leeds and telling John that we would have to start a new index. He might cooperate with it, and some of his cards might be used, but Barbara would have a principal part of the responsibility for it. John consented reluctantly.<sup>42</sup>

John Woods had done a good deal of accurate work but, in his relatively unselective accumulation of material, had lost his sense of proportion. Although other sections of the index volume as finally published, including the Additional Letters and the Errata and Addenda, are entirely his, Ms. Lowe could not make very much use of his cards. In particular, he had made little headway in the category which required far the largest number of entries, the names of persons.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> CJ July 14, 1975.

<sup>41</sup> “Finishing an Index,” 3. That index, completed only in 1970, was for *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, ed. Piero Sraffa with the assistance of M. H. Dobb (Cambridge U. P., 1951). See also: Christian Gehrke, “Bringing the Edition of Ricardo’s Works to Completion: The Making of the General Index, 1951–73,” *Piero Sraffa: The Man and the Scholar: Exploring His Unpublished Papers*, ed. Heinz D. Kurz, Luigi L. Pasinetti, and Neri Salvadori (Routledge, 2008), 295–97.

<sup>42</sup> CJ July 14, 1975; April 6–7, 1976?

<sup>43</sup> *Correspondence*, 10, vii; CJ April 6, 1976?

It was not certain that the new, less ambitious index would, as Copeland writes, “get us to the end.” At least this time he got the trial run Woods had refused to consider in 1968: “I did not commit myself at once, but insisted that we wait about six months and then make a judgment of Barbara’s performance. Peter and Jack Brooke agreed to serve as the jury—since I would be back in the States. When the time came, both were convinced that a sound if fairly modest index was under way and we ought to go on.” That they were able to proceed was in part the result of financial support from John Woods’s mother “to the extent of £2,000.”<sup>44</sup>

By the time he returned to the University of Massachusetts, as Copeland records, “I was really tottering.” “It’s no use pretending that I am an unflappable person. Going through this long job of proving that my most essential colleague was in fact deliberately deceiving me was a hideous experience.” In a letter to Peter Marshall, of which a draft dated May 20, 1974 survives, he broke the news that he had just mailed Dame Lucy Sutherland his resignation as editor of the *Writings and Speeches*. Among his colleagues she had been waging something like a campaign to persuade him to stay. (Without him, for one thing, it would be difficult to characterize the new project as an Anglo-American collaboration for fund-raising purposes.) He, however, could no longer “see the means at my disposal to do the editor’s job well or to raise any respectable grant without pretending a lot of things that are no longer so.”<sup>45</sup> He believed that the *Writings and Speeches* would be launched under conditions less favorable than those from which the *Correspondence* had benefited and felt that, in his late sixties, he would be less able to deal with them. He remained as General Editor of the *Correspondence*, and as late as the spring of 1976 he thought he might have a part in what he called “the *Annual Register* volume” of the *Writings and Speeches*. At some later point the *Annual Register* was excluded from the series, but one wonders whether he might yet have had something to contribute to Volume One, particularly in the choice of material for inclusion.

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44 CJ April 7, 1976?

45 CJ July 14, 1975; draft of letter to Peter Marshall, May 20, 1974. Copeland Papers, Box 4, Folder 31.

Having to pretend things “that are no longer so” was something Professor Copeland resisted on the western side of the Atlantic too. In the early seventies he was dismayed by faculty concessions to student pressure concerning teaching at the University of Massachusetts—and elsewhere—that led students to expect such things as optional attendance at classes and take-home final examinations. Apart from confiding his frustration to his journal, venting it was not his manner. The “background” paragraphs introducing the Copeland Papers depict him on campus as well known for “his wit and sharp memory, and he was often described with the words civilized, erudite, scholarly, and unpretentious.”<sup>46</sup> Still, the circumstances to which he returned added additional stress to that he had brought back with him. In both semesters of the 1974–75 academic year he was unable to finish his courses, which were taken over by colleagues whose kindness he greatly appreciated. He had been so oppressed by a fatigue not solely physical that after a point even forcing himself for hours to prepare for class did not get the preparation done. On both his doctors’ advice he also postponed his planned trip to England until August.

The month he eventually spent there, however, went well. Although Barbara Lowe needed guidance from a Burke scholar (and was getting it from Peter Marshall), she was doing expert work on the index. Of his weeks on the scene, Copeland was able to write “I also won her confidence and gave her assistance.”<sup>47</sup> If “won her confidence” sounds a little poignant, still it appears that actually working on the index meant a good deal to him. Moreover, his month in England enabled him to take the view that if the index had been his way into trouble, thanks to Lowe and Marshall it was becoming his way out. It was now apparent that the *Correspondence* would have a respectable index which would arrive close to its new schedule. Once he had retired from teaching in the winter of 1976 at the age of sixty-nine, much of the remaining stress lifted. By then he had regained the twenty pounds he had lost, was again sleeping well, and so far as he could determine had been fully restored to health. He continued the journal as an exercise in which he would

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46 “Background on Thomas W. Copeland.” <http://scua.library.umass.edu/umarmot/copeland-thomas-w/>

47 CJ January 27, 1976.

write at least one page a day, and he had a short list of smaller writing projects he intended to address, behind which loomed the long-delayed portrait of Burke. That manuscript he would not be able to finish; drafts of its chapters in multiple versions survive among his papers. His last published writing seems to have been the carefully composed Preface to Volume Ten of the *Correspondence*, dated September 1977. The volume with its index was published in 1978, and Professor Copeland lived long enough to hold its satisfying weight in his hands and to receive congratulations from one of the most helpful members of his advisory committee, John Brooke:

So the edition is finished at last, and you can look back with pride on your achievement. Without you it would never have got off the ground. You have led a distinguished team of scholars, some of whom were not always easy to keep in harness; and I have admired the skill and tact with which you have handled them. How much it has cost you in time and money and patience I do not know, but the result is a work which will last as long as we can foresee and will be used by scholars as yet unborn. I am proud to have been associated with it and to have had you as a friend.<sup>48</sup>

Professor Copeland died unexpectedly on January 28, 1979 at the age of seventy-one. At the University of Massachusetts a professorship was named for him in the Department of English. In further tribute, the entire edition of the *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, the early planning of which he had led, fittingly bears a dedication to him. Dame Lucy Sutherland, whose career had been a landmark in the progress of women at Oxford, died a year later. She did not live to see how impressively Volumes Two and Five, edited by her former students Paul Langford and Peter Marshall, launched the *Writings and Speeches*. John Woods, having taken an early retirement at the University of Leeds in 1983, died soon after in his mid-fifties, without having completed Volume Three of the *Writings and Speeches* with its rich collection of material on Bristol and the American Revolution. His death, a serious

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<sup>48</sup> Letter to Copeland from John Brooke, February 24, 1978. Copeland Papers, Box 3, Folder 20.

loss to Burke scholarship, may have been hastened by the index crisis, but the cause and effect relationships remain uncertain. Valerie Jobling, however, lived nearly a century until 2014. Late in 2015, Peter Marshall brought the *Writings and Speeches* to a close by publishing his fourth of the series' nine volumes, and with it concluded the foundational period of modern Burke scholarship. Impressive biographical superstructures by F. P. Lock, David Bromwich, and Richard Bourke had, with his considerable assistance, already been built upon its work.

The substituted general index is roughly half the length of that John Woods had projected, but Burke scholars have been fortunate in the circumstances of its compilation. Even though she was also caring for her mentally ill husband, the admirable Barbara Lowe proved to be the right person at just the right time. Forty years later Peter Marshall recalled that "she was astonishingly quick to master the issues and showed a fine judgement." However, being neither an historian nor previously a reader of Burke, she needed guidance from Marshall who gave it unstintingly. As Copeland explained in his preface, Marshall "having a sabbatical leave for the academic year 1974–75, put his scholarly judgement and his exceptional knowledge of Burke at her disposal for a period of more than twelve months. . . . The General Index could never have been finished without his devoted assistance." According to Ms. Lowe in a letter to Copeland, Marshall had been "quite superb." For his efforts Copeland and Paul Langford concurred on the adjective "Herculean."<sup>49</sup> As early as June 1975, Copeland had written Barbara Lowe that from her reports he thought the index must be coming close "to what I always thought the final shape of it ought to be."<sup>50</sup> Four decades on, and from intensive experience, Richard Bourke considers the index "superb," and David Bromwich has found it to be "indispensable." In the end, by the project's final collaborative endeavor, Barbara Lowe and Peter Marshall succeeded in giving the edition a Volume Ten fully worthy of its predecessors.<sup>51</sup>

49 *Correspondence*, 10, vii; Copeland Papers, Box 12, Folder 94; Box 4, Folder 30.

50 Copeland Papers, Box 12, Folder 94: Letter of June 12, 1975.

51 I owe thanks to Robert S. Cox, Head of Special Collections and University Archives, and Danielle Kovacs, Curator of Collections at the University of Massachusetts for their welcoming assistance; to Elizabeth Lambert for first acquainting me with the Copeland papers and for her "The Scholarly Factories," *SBHT* 23 (2013) 22–31,





*Left to right:* Peter Marshall, Valerie Jobling, John Woods, and Thomas Copeland in Ireland. This photograph is reproduced with the kind permission of Dr. Sally Jobling. I am indebted also to Dr. Ian Crowe for calling to my attention a brief account of the occasion as Peter Stanlis summarized it in *The Burke Newsletter*, V. 6, No. 1 (Fall 1964) from a letter by Thomas Copeland. In July 1964 the four people photographed, along with the French scholar Michel Fuchs and his wife, made an excursion to Ireland. There they spent two days in Dublin and three driving through the southern counties visiting “every first-rate Burke site.”

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which draws on conversations with Valerie Jobling; to Dr. Sally Jobling for reading material relating to her mother and supplying note 19; to David Bromwich for a quarter-century of enlightenment and sustained generosity; and especially to Peter Marshall, for encouraging this project from its beginning, generously communicating significant information from a perspective available nowhere else, helpfully reading a late draft, and suggesting the inclusion of the accompanying photograph.

*Addendum*

*Because of differences in disciplines and, in some cases I suppose, age, readers may be unfamiliar with some of the scholars who populate Professor Copeland's account. Knowing that even well-deserved fame is fleeting, the editors have reasonably asked me to supply minimal identification for those I believe most needing it. No attempt has been made to be entirely inclusive, and readers will not find members of the Sheffield inner team and such celebrities as Sir Lewis Namier, but this list does include the remaining editors of volumes, some members of the Correspondence's Advisory Committee—most themselves distinguished editors—and a few additional people momentarily prominent in the account.*

*Volume editors*

**Alfred Cobban**, an historian of modern France at University College, London, and co-editor of Volume Six, had published his *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century* in 1929. However, he is remembered chiefly for writings in the 1950s and 1960s, gathered in *Aspects of the French Revolution*, which culminated in *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (1964). Along with studies by George V. Taylor, they initiated and greatly influenced the displacement of long-prevailing Marxian interpretations of the French Revolution. It was hoped that he might edit Volume Seven of the *Correspondence* and perhaps the *Reflections* volume of the *Writings and Speeches*, but cancer intervened and he died in 1968.

**Holden Furber**, editor of Volume Five “with the assistance of P.J. Marshall,” was Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania. For a summary of his career as a student of British India far more instructive than space permits here, see Marshall's obituary for him in *The Independent* (27 January 1993): <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-professor-holden-furber-1481112.html>.

**George Guttridge**, editor of Volume Three, a native of Hull and a graduate of Cambridge, became Sather Professor at the University of California at Berkeley. He published primarily on the political history of mid-eighteenth century England, and wrote *English Whiggism and the American Revolution* (1942) and *The Early Career of Lord Rockingham* (1952). He died in 1969, and three colleagues then wrote an enviable remembrance in tones remarkable, not only for Berkeley, but many places else in 1970—and since: <http://texts.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb-629006wb&doc.view=frames&chunk.id=div00020&toc.depth=1&toc.id>.

**R[obert] B[rendan] McDowell**, editor of Voume Eight, co-editor of Volume Nine, and editor of Volume Nine of the *Writings and Speeches*, was the author of *Irish Public Opinion 1750–1800* (1944) and *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760–1801* (1979) among many books. At Trinity College, Dublin, he was a figure of mythic dimensions—“a much-loved work of performance art,” one writer called him—and, upon his retirement, the subject of two books of anecdotes by former students and Dublin acquaintances. They should not be allowed to obscure his extensive knowledge as evinced in his *Writings and Speeches* volume. He died in 2011 at the age of ninety-seven.

**Robert A. Smith**, co-editor of Volume Six, had contributed much, as Thomas Copeland's assistant, to the setting up of the operation at Sheffield. Previously he had co-edited three volumes of the *Correspondence of Horace Walpole*. He taught at Emory University, and his writings include an introduction to eighteenth-century British politics, a collection of Burke's writing about revolution, and one of the best accounts of Burke's positions on slavery, for, surprisingly, *History Today*.

**Dame Lucy Stuart Sutherland**, editor of Volume Two, exemplified outstanding historical scholarship, as Thomas Copeland recorded in 1976 in a passage this essay quotes, and achieved immense distinction, as Richard Bourke, in his address printed in this issue, told those attending the London symposium he hosted forty years later. Born in Australia and raised in South Africa, she attained first-class honors in modern history at Somerville College, Oxford. Apart from her academic work, during World War Two she rose to the post of Assistant Secretary of the UK's Board of Trade. Her ability evident, soon afterward she was appointed Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. From 1945–71 she served effectively at a time when the situation of women at major universities advanced significantly. Her obituary in the *London Times* recognized that “by virtue of her personality, no less than her gifts as scholar and administrator, she was outstanding among the academic women of her generation.” Having made history at Oxford, she then edited for a time and contributed to the eighteenth-century volume of *The History of the University of Oxford*, which she did not live to see published.

### *Three distinguished editors*

**R[obert] W[illiam] Chapman** is famous for having edited what was, in the decades when the *Correspondence* was published, the standard edition of Jane

Austen's writings. (Subsequent editions have simply introduced improvements into his.) He also edited an excellent edition of the letters of Samuel Johnson.

**L[awrence] F[itzyroy] Powell**, at the request of R. W. Chapman, who was secretary to the Clarendon Press, undertook the revision of the great nineteenth-century edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* by George Birkbeck Hill. Ever since, it has been known as the Hill-Powell edition, an accolade in itself. He was a member of the *Correspondence's* Advisory Committee throughout the life of the project, and Copeland appreciated his sound advice.

**Frederick A. Pottle**, Sterling Professor of English at Yale (the chair David Bromwich now occupies), was both a biographer of James Boswell and the editor of the extensive Yale Boswell edition. He appears to have been the embodiment of what Copeland regarded as an exemplary general editor, although Copeland knew that he had assumed a different role, himself. Professor Pottle, too, served on the *Correspondence's* Advisory Committee.

#### *Others*

**R[onald] S[almon] Crane**, Professor of English at the University of Chicago, achieved eminence as a leader of the "Chicago School" of literary criticism and edited *Critics and Criticism*, the collection of essays best remembered for conveying its position. He respected Burke, and in his service on Copeland's Chicago committee, took pleasure in working on problems of organizing an edition. Copeland highly valued his assistance. He died in 1967.

**Ross J[ohn] S[wartz] Hoffman**, Professor of History at Fordham University, remains best known in Burke scholarship for his political biography of Lord Rockingham, *The Marquis* (1973). His anthology *Burke's Politics* (1948), co-edited with Paul Levack, was one of the earliest manifestations of the conservative wing of the American Burke revival enacted mainly in the succeeding two decades. He died in 1979. For a summary of his political perspective, see the following account by Jeffrey Nelson: <http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/print.aspx?article=890&loc=b&type=cbtp>.

**George Richard Potter**, Professor of Medieval and Modern History at the University of Sheffield, supervised the arrival of the Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments (among them Burke's papers) at the Sheffield Central Library. From the first *Correspondence* volume to the last, he is listed as a member of the Advisory Committee. His excellent counsel made him a valuable friend to the project, which he lived to see successfully completed before his death in 1982.

*The following addresses and papers were originally delivered at a half-day conference organized by the Centre for the Study of the History of Political Thought, Queen Mary University of London. The conference, which took place on June 24, 2016, at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, London, marked the publication of Volume IV of the Oxford University Press edition of The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, "Party, Parliament, and the Dividing of the Whigs, 1780–1794," edited by P. J. Marshall and the late Donald Bryant, and, with it, the completion of the nine-volume series, after a period of thirty-four years.*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

*P. J. Marshall and Burke Studies*



**RICHARD BOURKE**

*Queen Mary University of London*

P. J. Marshall started working on Edmund Burke in Michaelmas 1957. In that year, after his BA at Wadham College, Oxford, he began research on his doctorate under the immensely distinguished Dame Lucy Sutherland. He was attracted to research on eighteenth-century British high politics—a field that had been revolutionized by figures such as Lewis Namier, and practised with exceptional skill by historians such as Sutherland.

It is now fashionable to disparage the achievements of Namier, often dismissed by social, cultural and intellectual historians, few of whom have ever read his work. But, while it may be true that Namier held some views about the conduct of parliamentary life that one would want to call into question, let us not forget his sheer brilliance and originality—the transformation of our understanding of the conduct of administration, the tremendous mastery of a vast array of sources, the deep immersion in the details of the political process.

These were traits that Sutherland possessed too, and Peter Marshall came to exemplify them in turn. Peter dislikes praise, but I have to say, I never cease to be amazed by his extraordinarily complete grasp of British politics in the eighteenth century—extending into Ireland, India and America. Unbeknownst to him, graduate students, and established scholars, run scared of this thoroughly modest man because he is unable to hide his total command of the field.

As a doctoral student, Peter thought about working on Charles Townshend, but Sutherland pushed him towards the study of India, and so he nervously agreed to begin work on the Hastings trial. That started his serious engagement with Burke, an engagement that has not ceased. As I speak, at eighty-two he is in the middle of a book on the Burkes and the West Indies.

Although Peter started his research working on a moment of ideological crisis, what interested him above all was the *process* of politics, not the conceptions or beliefs that could be found within it. Yet he couldn't quite avoid ideas either. It was from Peter's 1965 study of the Hastings trial that I first learnt of its main protagonist's defence of his own conduct in India, relying on circumstantial justification. Burke took an opposite view. But this changed everything: if Burke was not pleading prudential judgement, or a purely contextual vindication for standards of political conduct, what was the basis of his criticism of power, and how did this relate to surrounding practical conditions?

Before finishing his thesis, Peter moved to King's College, London, where he spent a long and illustrious career—rising to become, what he still remains, the leading British imperial historian of his generation. Throughout that career, his work on Burke has continued, nearly all of it in an editorial capacity. His work on editing Burke began around

1962. The late Holden Furber, the Pennsylvania-based South Asian historian, was at work on Volume Five of the great *Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, which had begun to appear under the general editorship of Thomas Copeland in 1958. But Furber encountered difficulties, and so, under Sutherland's influence, Marshall was brought into the project.

Anyone who has worked on Burke knows what an extraordinary achievement the *Correspondence* was. None of us could operate without it. Even if we return to the manuscripts, we depend on it for guidance. Marshall was peculiarly well suited to work on Volume Five, since it covered 1782 to 1789—a period in which India loomed ever larger in Burke's mind. At that time, Cobban was leading on Volume Six, which contained the earliest results of Burke's serious engagement with France. Yet, before long, Cobban was suffering from cancer, and so responsibility for Volume Seven fell to Peter and to John A. Woods. Even when his name does not appear on later volumes, Marshall maintained a deep involvement in the project.

Indeed, Marshall's contribution to the final Index volume, which appeared in 1978, was massive. By this time, the planning of the *Writings and Speeches* had already begun, with Copeland again involved in the early stages. By then he had spent a considerable portion of his career working on Burke, from his doctoral work at Yale to his editorship of the *Correspondence*. This latter task had been undertaken at Sheffield, where the bulk of Burke's papers and correspondence are to be found. Copeland and his team, including Peter, lived in student halls, while they occupied a portion of the public library as they worked on the edition. The undertaking was a labor of devotion, a disposition that captures Peter's attitude to scholarship.

As events turned out, the editorship of the *Writings and Speeches* did not fall to Copeland, who now entered upon a period of emotional decline. Sutherland intervened to help save the project. With neither Chicago nor Cambridge University Press prepared to take it on, Sutherland explained to OUP that they would, and the general editorship was conferred upon the late Paul Langford. The volume that forms the occasion of this conference represents the culmination of that project.

While the *Correspondence* was pursued as a full time research project, the *Writings and Speeches* were edited by working scholars pursuing careers on other subjects as they proceeded with the works of Burke.

I will leave to later discussion any comment on the Clarendon edition; but it is worth mentioning the mild controversy that greeted the project from the start. Matters such as what to include, which editions to use, and how to arrange the material, were always open to debate. Burke's earliest philosophical essay was strangely excluded from Volume I; his work on the *European Settlements in America* was ignored; his massive contribution to the *Annual Register* was left to one side; the division between the French and British material has always been a matter of delicate judgement.

Also among the list of complaints, some of the manuscript versions of Burke's speeches were inexplicably cut short—like one parliamentary intervention during the Wilkes disturbances in 1769, when Burke launched into a discussion of Rousseau's *Contrat social*. This of course is a gem to the intellectual historian—nowhere else does Burke discuss this work (strangely, since he devoted nearly a whole pamphlet to the discussion of Rousseau in 1791).

This particular passage on Rousseau from Cavendish's parliamentary diary, the multi-volume extravaganza still in the manuscripts room at the British Library, was omitted from Langford's own volume—Volume II—of the *Writings and Speeches*; but it needs to be said that in general terms Langford's work was painstaking and innovative. It is thanks to Langford's example that manuscript notes of unfinished speeches were included in any of the Clarendon volumes. It is wrong to see such material as the mere detritus of a parliamentary career. It is obvious that it has a significance capable of changing the whole picture—and it is perhaps worth mentioning that only a fraction of items like this appear in the *Writings and Speeches*.

Marshall's largest contribution to the production of the *Writings and Speeches* was the completion of volumes V to VII, on India. The use of draft speeches, especially in the case of Volume VI, has been transformative. It enables us to see, if you're prepared to read, that Burke was developing a theory of resistance in 1788. Gone was the idea that there was a fundamental shift in Burke's thought after 1789—though, strangely, nobody seemed to notice.

We are here today to celebrate Peter's completion of Volume IV of *Writings and Speeches*, which he took over, after a major period of interruption, from the late Donald C. Bryant. Like David Bromwich, I was treated to early exposure to Marshall's work on the volume, and so have



had more time to absorb its contribution. I won't dwell on its virtues, though these are certainly abundant, since they will become apparent as the program proceeds. I will, however, say this: Marshall's mastery of both the manuscripts and the reports of speeches is unsurpassed. For what it's worth, I learned how to navigate this material from Peter. Now it is available to readers more generally—so we can read Burke on the marriage act, St. Eustatius, the dissenters and the slave trade with ease, we can assess his late evaluation of the American Constitution, and properly see the full range of his writings on the French Revolution—for so long truncated since so many scholars, including editors of Burke, have strangely avoided trawling the newspaper reports where alone these interventions are to be found. All of us are greatly in Peter's debt. His has been a truly heroic achievement.

# *Burke on the New and Old Whigs*



DAVID BROMWICH

*Yale University*

Like all in my generation who have worked on the life and thought of Edmund Burke, I owe a tremendous debt to Peter Marshall. The largest encouragement may come simply from the example of his scholarship: the persistence in rendering subtle and intelligent judgments of the miscellaneous materials that confront us; the conscientious sifting of probable motives and patterns from the daunting mixture of legend, slander, and contradiction that has marked the fame of Burke almost from the beginning. Our situation as historians or as commentators can seem to resemble the predicament of the novelist portrayed in Henry James's story "The Middle Years": "We work in the dark—we do what we can—we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art." Yet the pursuit of accurate history is not driven by madness or inspiration; it might even be thought of as a therapy of sanity, but with its own element of compulsion. Marshall's introduction to Volume IV of the *Writings and Speeches* sums up, with characteristic sympathy and precision, the mood of Burke's last years that separated him from many earlier associations and commitments: "Deeply pessimistic about the future and seeing himself as beleaguered in the midst of turpitude, folly, and cowardice, he adhered rigidly to his

own rectitude, sacrificing to it some of the sympathies and the generous vision of politics and human nature that had enriched his life.”<sup>1</sup> This essay will discuss a major work of Burke’s final phase that seems almost wholly in keeping with his writings and speeches of the 1770s and 1780s.

Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in November 1790, sold well and pleased George III, but its critical reception among the remnant of the Rockingham party dismayed the author. He comforted himself in a letter to Sir Gilbert Elliot on 29 November 1790:

When Fox disapproves, and Sheridan is to write against me, do not I want considerable countenance? I assure you that I have it; and that I have received from the Duke of Portland, Lord Fitzwilliam, the Duke of Devonshire, Lord John Cavendish Montagu and a long et cetera of the old Stamina of the Whiggs a most full approbation of the principles of that work and a kind indulgence to the execution.<sup>2</sup>

The split with Fox would preoccupy Burke for the next three years, until war with France rendered untenable the welcoming stance that Fox had adopted toward the revolution. Their quarrel became public on 6 May 1791, when the House of Commons debated the framing of a constitution for Quebec.

Rising to address the question, Burke denounced the French constitution as the worst of all possible examples; and as proof of its depravity, he cited the revolt and bloody suppression of slaves in the French West Indies. At this point he was called to order by one of the younger members around Fox, on the ground that his opinions of France had no pertinence in a discussion of Quebec. No sooner did Burke recommence than he was called to order again. This pattern was repeated half a dozen times: plainly the humiliating calls to order were no longer about whether Quebec ought to be discussed broadly or narrowly; rather they were a test of whether Burke would be allowed to speak at all. Fox, for his part, weighed in with a rambling half-hearted speech of conciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–2015), 4:34.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. T. W. Copeland et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958–70), 6:178.

The house, he said, had no more call to discuss France than it did Athens or Rome. He recalled his friend's apparently opposite sentiments on liberty during the American war, and quoted Burke himself on the presumption favoring the people in cases of popular rebellion. "No revolt was caused without provocation," Fox remembered Burke to have said; and he had indeed said it, though in slightly different words, in *A Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*. Fox in this rebuttal was pert and facetious, in a manner offensive to the terms of his friendship with Burke; for he also alluded to statements Burke had ventured in private which were meant to remain private.

As Burke began his reply, Fox walked off the floor, possibly on some piece of business, but he was followed by several of his clique who assumed that a deliberate insult was meant and wished to aggravate it. Stirred now to a pitch of indignation, Burke charged that Fox had

ripped up the whole course and tenour of his public and private life with a considerable degree of asperity. The right honourable gentleman, after having fatigued him with skirmishes of order, which were wonderfully managed by the light infantry of opposition, then brought down upon him the whole strength and heavy artillery of his own judgment, eloquence, and abilities.<sup>3</sup>

Pausing to bestow ironic appreciation on the "corps of well-disciplined troops, expert in their manoeuvres, and obedient to the word of their commander," Burke said in conclusion that he had

frequently differed from Mr. Fox in former instances . . . but that no one difference of opinion had ever before, for a single moment, interrupted their friendship. It certainly was indiscreet at his time of life to provoke enemies, or give his friends occasions to desert him; yet if his firm and steady adherence to the British constitution placed him in such a dilemma he would risk all; and as public duty and public prudence taught him, with his last breath, exclaim, "Fly from the French constitution!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Speeches of the Right Honourable Charles James Fox* (London, 1853), 394.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Fox, having returned, leaned forward to whisper to Burke, "There is no loss of friendship," but in the hush of the moment he was audible to the House; and so was Burke when he answered that there was indeed a loss of friendship.

It is in this context of disappointment and formal rebuke that one must understand Burke's adoption of a mask (though a penetrable mask) of anonymity in the pamphlet he wrote to answer critics of the *Reflections*. *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* was published in August 1791. It is a work of closely reasoned historical analysis and also an eloquent apology—the second of Burke's three sustained acts of self-vindication, after the *Speech at the Bristol Guildhall* in 1780 and before *A Letter to a Noble Lord* in 1796. A long middle section of the *Appeal* consists mainly of evidence from the pamphlets written against the *Reflections*; the passages Burke selects, from Wollstonecraft and Paine among others, sound close to parody but are never far from accurate paraphrase. Burke has lost none of his Swiftian talent for making a dry digest of a projector's theory, which exposes its hollowness while seeming to sympathize with its benign aspirations.

The immediate provocation of the *Appeal* came from a *Morning Chronicle* report of 12 May 1791 which had given a partial account of the Quebec debate: "The great and firm body of the Whigs of England, true to their principles, have decided on the dispute between Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke; and the former is declared to have maintained the pure doctrines by which they are bound together, and upon which they have invariably acted. The consequence is, that Mr. Burke retires from parliament." It was crafty of Burke to throw his disquisition into a seemingly dispassionate third-person narrative. Hoping, as he says, to avoid the faults of "angry friendship" and "calm enmity," he seeks in the *Appeal* "the cold neutrality of abstract justice," with the aim of convincing "impartial men." The whole doctrine of the *Reflections* amounted, he says, to nothing more than a principled attachment to the British constitution, with emphasis on the liberal descent of the people of England. By contrast, his critics have interpreted the book as a counterrevolutionary tract. In this sequel, however, Burke is no longer offering an English sermon to France on the good of a regulated freedom; nor does he profess to speak for the English people, as he did in vehement passages of the earlier

book which were cast in the first-person plural. The *Appeal* is a party pamphlet. The accused, "Mr. Burke," takes his stand within the party, "before the present, and if ever he can reach it, before the coming, generation." To perform that function, he must persuade his Whig readers to share his understanding of the English past. At the same time, Burke claims to speak from a unique position: he informs his readers that Pitt has advised him to praise the English constitution but to say nothing about the French. He will dare to disobey the advice because he is now answerable to no party.

The *Appeal* contains a good deal of measured flattery of the former Rockingham Whigs, but the admiration is tinged by regret:

The opposite rows are a sort of seminary of genius, and have brought forth such and so great talents as never before (amongst us at least) have appeared together. If their owners are disposed to serve their country. . . they are in a condition to render it services of the highest importance. If, through mistake or passion, they are led to contribute to its ruin, we shall at least have a consolation denied to the ruined country that adjoins us—we shall not be destroyed by men of mean or secondary capacities.<sup>5</sup>

By any standard of ceremony less exalted than Burke's, it seems a fantastic conceit to pray to be buried by a distinguished undertaker; yet in the *Reflections* he had wished no less for Louis XVI, and this oddly characteristic idea will come up again in his final speech against Warren Hastings: if the parliament must die soon, let it die well. In the *Appeal*, Burke asks his former allies to recognize that the French Revolution has no honorable connection with any English party: "it is no part of their original contract." He continues to think the "French scheme" is "not a comparative good, but a positive evil." This, however, should not lead anyone to believe that he opposes all republics. He denies that the French design "did at all deserve the respectable name of a republic."<sup>6</sup>

These last quotations suggest a difference between the stance—and perhaps the implicit politics—of the *Appeal* and the *Reflections*. The new

<sup>5</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:373.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 374, 376.

pamphlet is not a satire on reform by a defender of the existing order. It offers itself from the first as essentially the work of a reformer. On the British constitution, on the defense of aristocracy, and on the authority of nature over speculation, the *Appeal* and *Reflections* speak with one voice, yet they are written in distinct idioms. The style of the *Appeal* is public and polemical; this requires a restraint quite absent in the *Reflections*. But the recalibration of tone and address seems to have prompted also a change of emphasis in the formulation of Burke's anti-revolutionary creed. The *Appeal* exhibits an unmistakable piety toward a libertarian ideal Burke takes to represent the deepest tradition of Whig politics.

The younger Foxite Whigs, says Burke, have misunderstood the principle of his life, partly because of the sheer range of his exertions in the cause of reform. Their charge of tergiversation he considers the worst that could be brought against him, or against anyone: "not so much that he is wrong in his book . . . as that he has therein belyed his whole life. I believe, if he could venture to value himself upon any thing, it is on the virtue of consistency that he would value himself the most. Strip him of this, and you leave him naked indeed."<sup>7</sup> He will dedicate most of the pamphlet, therefore, to showing that a readiness to take on allies for a limited purpose while adjusting his point of attack does not constitute a change of principle.

Through all his apparent changes, says Burke, he has been guided by a concern with constitutional balance. (We are back at "equipoise," the last word of the *Reflections*.) A statesman is compelled to defend "the throne at one moment, and the people at another, depending on how the cause of one or the other affects the balance of the constitution." Burke has parted company with radicals before, in his defiance of the demand that a representative act on instructions from his constituents, and again in his resistance to parliamentary reform. In the early 1780s, he was at odds with elements of his party, but no one then charged him with apostasy. Yet the difference between Fox and Burke had begun before the discussion of Quebec. It had a foreshadowing in the army estimates debate, when Fox expressed his admiration for revolutionary France, in defiance of Burke's memorable warning.

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7 Ibid., 390–91.

The two supported American liberty together, Burke recalls, but now he wonders if they may not have done so for different reasons. Fox has lately told his followers that Burke sympathized with the American desire for liberty. Burke replies that he never believed the Americans rebelled “because they had not enjoyed liberty enough,” nor that they “meant wholly to throw off the authority of the crown,” and this seems an accurate memory; but as Marshall has shown, all three of the persons most closely involved in negotiation of the peace terms with America—Fox, Burke, and Shelburne—were uncertain about the degree of independence the former colonies would assume; of the three, Burke may have erred most in his optimism.<sup>8</sup> Even here, in the *Appeal*, he recalls a conversation with Benjamin Franklin, the day before Franklin’s return to America on the eve of war, as evidence that his understanding was correct. Burke did in fact support the American resistance which led to revolution, but only as a necessity; he thought the Americans “had, taken up arms from one motive only”—to resist the attempt to tax them without their consent and use the tax revenue to maintain colonial government and British soldiers in North America.<sup>9</sup> Resistance to power when abused, he asserts, is a different thing from the building of a new heaven on earth.

From this review of his consistency of opinion, it would appear that Burke’s politics were always prudential: the American war should never have been fought, because the victory of English armies over Englishmen “would prove fatal in the end to the liberties of England itself”; and the French Revolution is wrong now because the revolutionists treat France as a country of conquest.<sup>10</sup> There is no proper parallel between limiting the power of the king of England and overthrowing the king of France. “One would think that such a thing as a medium had never been heard of in the moral world. This mode of arguing from your having done *any* thing in a certain line to the necessity of doing *every* thing, has political consequences of other moment than those of a logical fallacy.”<sup>11</sup> Burke wants to be remembered as neither a friend nor

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8 Ibid., 395.

9 Ibid., 396.

10 Ibid., 397.

11 Ibid., 399.



an enemy of monarchy, and the same goes for republics in the abstract: the circumstances of the country and the materials at hand affect the propriety of the choice. He has studied ancient and modern republics, with much respect for both, and he considers this research a necessary part of all political education. He has concluded that “neither England nor France, without infinite detriment to them, as well in the event as in the experiment, could be brought into republican form; but that every thing republican which can be introduced with safety into either of them, must be built upon a monarchy; built upon a real, not a nominal monarchy, *as its essential basis*.”<sup>12</sup>

The argument is temperate and balanced. What is curious is that Burke should now assert that the *Reflections* offered itself above all as the work of a reformer; he goes so far as to deny that the book contained any defense of existing abuses: “On the contrary, it spares no existing abuse.” More wishful words were never spoken. To cite the most obvious instance, Burke throughout the *Reflections* certainly implied that Dissenters, because their ideas of liberty brought them so close to the French revolutionists, should be excluded from English political rights and responsibilities. His “Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief” of 1792, a sequel to his attack on the Reverend Dr. Price in the *Reflections*, would ask the House of Commons to spare an existing abuse on the ground that its preservation served as a bulwark against a pressing danger. Again, his advice against poor relief in *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* of 1795 will argue that the poor must be made to feel their adversity as part of a necessary system, or rather as part of a system governed by necessity. Burke surely did believe this; but he was also adapting his argument to the political exigency of a crisis. Once let the poor feel that their fate is remediable by political measures, and they will grow active in the democratic cause. To heighten the virtues of monarchy means nothing if it does not mean thinking of the monarch as a friend with frailties, toward whom one has a duty to “palliate his errors and defects, or to cast them into the shade, and industriously to bring forward any good qualities that he may happen to possess.”<sup>13</sup> Is this not to concede that the defender of monarchy must defend existing abuses?

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 404.

The first part of the *Appeal*, as we have seen, is an ethical justification of Burke's character as a reformer. The last part will denounce the French Revolution on old and new grounds and restate Burke's belief in the continuity between nature and art. This requires the author to acknowledge the given inequalities of society and the duties of a natural aristocracy that molds the character of a free people. But suppose the French Revolution was the act of a majority of the French people, does this fact by itself close the argument? To Burke, the suffrage of the majority cannot be decisive, since neither the majority nor any part or class of a nation may alter the constitution without a breach of the covenant. Justified change requires the consent of all the parties. Majority rule indeed may hardly enter the discussion of the right or wrong of a change in the method or form of government. Trust, says Burke, is the real basis of government, trust strengthened and renewed over time. And unlike a social contract, trust is not a thing to be regularly or episodically re-negotiated. The idea of majority rule gains its hold on us from the plausibility of considering society as a number of individuals and then determining the source of power in government to be a problem in arithmetic. It is true (Burke grants the Hobbesian premise) that we begin in nature as individuals. But society is an artifice that improves on nature. The atomism of men in their natural state, where we find "a number of vague loose individuals, nothing more," shows the difficulty of making sense of an abstraction like the people. It takes "many a weary step" before the unaggregating individuals "can form themselves into a mass, which has a true politic personality."<sup>14</sup> Majority rule is not found in nature. It comes from "an incorporation produced by unanimity" and by "an unanimous agreement, that the act of a mere majority (say of one) shall pass with them and with others as the act of the whole." In this defense of artificial society, two points stand out: a presumption (implicit in the convention of majority rule) of some prior agreement by unanimity; and the knowledge, shared by the members of a society, that majority rule is a device to be employed where appropriate and convenient. In law, a mere majority often does not convict, and a minority will sometimes suffice to acquit.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 445.

More fundamental to social order than the practice of majority rule is the idea of prescription—a sense of rightness about the way things are done because they have been valued so through “time out of mind.” Property itself, a fiction by which we live, depends on this prescriptive understanding. If the convention of property is once surrendered, no fiction of equal strength will take its place and the result will be anarchy. What prevents this from happening all the time is nothing but the presence of “habitual social discipline.”<sup>15</sup> It is this that gives weight and character to “the people.” Accordingly, both in nature and in a society rightly formed by art from the extension of nature, the social order is shaped most of all by certain individuals, fitted for government by their training, who form a natural aristocracy. Notice that this idea cuts across the division between presumptive and actual virtue which Burke had made so much of in the *Reflections*. There he asserted that the temple of fame must not be too easy of access and that genuine merit should allow no scheme of rotation or sortition. His phrasing in the *Appeal* brings the earlier distinction into view in order to revise it. “A true natural aristocracy,” Burke now observes,

is formed out of a class of legitimate presumptions, which, taken as generalities, must be admitted for actual truths. To be bred in a place of estimation; To see nothing low and sordid from one’s infancy; To be taught to respect one’s self; To be habituated to the censorial inspection of the public eye; To look early to public opinion; To stand upon such elevated ground as to be enabled to take a large view of the wide-spread and infinitely diversified combinations of men and affairs in a large society; To have leisure to read, to reflect, to converse; To be enabled to draw the court and attention of the wise and learned wherever they are to be found.<sup>16</sup>

What is evoked is a family of traits grounded in self-trust—a virtue that he associates here with knowledge, just as knowledge is regulated by curiosity, care, and sympathy for others. The result is constant activity in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 448.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the service of society at large. Such a class, Burke says, is the creation of ages. It cannot be devised in accordance with political need.

He calls the aristocracy he has ideally described “natural” because it is the offspring of human nature operating through society. In apparent answer to Rousseau, he asserts that no “savage and incoherent mode of life” could engender persons thus distinguished by vigilance, foresight, and circumspection. Such people are the product of human nature, whose proper soil is society. Reason, a civil and social reason bounded by given obligations, is itself part of human nature:

For man is by nature reasonable; and he is never perfectly in his natural state, but when he is placed where reason may be best cultivated, and most predominates. Art is man’s nature. We are as much, at least, in a state of nature in formed manhood, as in immature and helpless infancy. Men qualified in the manner I have just described, form in nature, as she operates in the common modification of society, the leading, guiding, and governing part.<sup>17</sup>

That “art is man’s nature” can seem a paradox in the manner of certain aphorisms of Oscar Wilde: only in masks do we tell the truth. Yet, in a context where “legitimate presumptions” have the quality of “actual truths,” the naturalness of art is a matter-of-fact premise for Burke’s idea of a natural aristocracy.

The paradox comes in only when we compare what Burke says with what the state-of-nature theorists wanted to mean by nature. For them, nature revealed the elements from which human life was built up; and this was so metaphysically, whether or not such a state ever existed. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, each for different reasons, all entered into the experiment of guessing what human life would be like without the layers of custom, habit, and property, the tissue of obligations and conventions that make for life beyond the necessity of self-preservation. Whether they saw nature as an attractive or a repulsive extreme, they had theoretical motives for drawing a line at the original contract that nature crosses in order to become society. By this method, they gave the sacredness of a baptism to the distinction between sovereign and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 449.

subject, owner and laborer, lawgiver and citizen. Property, of course, was the central artifice which made all contingent things in nature suddenly absolute. When Rousseau said that the fault of the theorists before him was that they went back to nature but did not go back far enough, he meant that previous descriptions of that state were contaminated by a spirit of calculation which the theorist had learned from society and then read back into nature. When Rousseau described the state of nature, therefore, he was turning Hobbes upside down. Burke does the same to Rousseau, and with consequences as far-reaching.

Prudence and moderation are the leading traits of the constitutionalism Burke defends in the *Appeal*. His final paragraphs go back to the *Speech on Conciliation with America* in order to interpret *Reflections*; the opinions of the latter book, he says, “never can lead to an extreme, because their foundation is laid in an opposition to extremes.” This is no longer the author who had written that the revolutionists of France were waging “war with Heaven itself.”<sup>18</sup> Rather, a sense of political convenience and a knowledge of human nature have joined to shape his temperament, as he would represent it; and Burke rewrites the great passage of the *Reflections* (celebrated and mocked already in the pamphlet wars) about a permanent body composed of transitory parts whose law is perpetual decay and renovation. All of the parts are made, he says now in more nearly secular language, not for themselves alone but “to limit and control the others,” so that the operation of each is “checked and stopped at a certain point. The whole movement stands still rather than that any part should proceed beyond its boundary. From thence it results, that in the British constitution, there is a perpetual treaty and compromise going on.”<sup>19</sup>

In the *Reflections* Burke had spoken of the catastrophe of a historical rupture that would end human continuity as we know it: “No one generation could link with the other. Men would become little better than the flies of a summer.” The *Appeal* speaks on this subject with a subtly different voice, as the author shows why human and social existence cannot be patterned after a contract:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 470.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 471.

We have obligations to mankind at large, which are not in consequence of any special voluntary pact. They arise from the relation of man to man, and the relations of man to God, which relations are not matter of choice. On the contrary, the force of all the pacts which we enter into with any particular person or number of persons amongst mankind, depends upon those prior obligations. In some cases the subordinate relations are voluntary, in others they are necessary—but the duties are all compulsive. When we marry, the choice is voluntary, but the duties are not matter of choice. They are dictated by the nature of the situation. Dark and inscrutable are the ways by which we come into the world. The instincts which give rise to this mysterious process of nature are not of our making. But out of physical causes, unknown to us, perhaps unknowable, arise moral duties, which, as we are able perfectly to comprehend, we are bound indispensably to perform. Parents may not be consenting to their moral relation; but consenting or not, they are bound to a long train of burthensome duties towards those with whom they have never made a convention of any sort. Children are not consenting to their relation, but their relation, without their actual consent, binds them to its duties; or rather it implies their consent, because the presumed consent of every rational creature is in unison with the predisposed order of things. Men come in that manner into a community with the social state of their parents, endowed with all the benefits, loaded with all the duties of their situation. If the social ties and ligaments, spun out of those physical relations which are the elements of the commonwealth, in most cases begin, and always continue, independently of our will, so without any stipulation, on our part, are we bound by that relation called our country, which comprehends (as it has been well said) “all the charities of all.” . . . The place that determines our duty to our country is a social, civil relation.<sup>20</sup>

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20 Ibid., 442–43.

This carefully pondered explanation of the way that obligations emerge from nature, and the way that rules of conduct are founded in the pre-history of all human relations, confronts us with a familiar truth whose underlying complexity is seldom inquired into.

On this view of human nature and society, we are understood to draw upon the same motives in our most unreflective choices and our most intricate reasoning about events that prompt us to act. Burke offers two examples of obligations that have their origin in nature but are ratified by the will and judgment: the chosen relation between a man and a woman in marriage; and the given relation of children to parents. The duties springing from these distinct obligations are equally compulsory—this much is obvious and commonplace—but Burke is interested in the fact that “the social ties and ligaments, spun out of those physical relations which are the elements of the commonwealth, in most cases begin, and always continue, independently of our will.” The tendency of both examples is to vindicate the justice of natural affections. We are right to feel most strongly about the people and things closest to us. That does not mean that such bonds mark a proper limit of our sympathies. We are forever “spinning out” relations whose scope we cannot comprehend. Burke’s point is that the background of reflex feelings is the same as the background of voluntary feelings. It does not follow here, as it does in the *Reflections*, that the way of nature is to pass from strong local attachments to weak general ones; or that the final test of voluntary feelings lies in their coherence with reflex feelings. Rather, the *Appeal* interprets natural feeling as a thing mediated by society, consistently with Burke’s belief that society is an artifice. “The place that determines our duty to our country is a social, civil relation.” It springs from convention, even though the relation was settled before our birth. What is most remarkable in this long passage is the realized impression of a dense layering of moral relations. And the relations are shown to guide both the performance and the interpretation of moral duties; yet their commandments cannot simply be inferred by the present from the past. “Dark and inscrutable are the ways by which we come into the world”—the distance that abstracts us from history also imparts to historical knowledge its peculiar solidity. We are creatures so formed that we must choose what we have already been given. Where the *Reflections*

spoke of “this choice of inheritance” in the language of religious analogy, the *Appeal* recasts the thought in a social and historical idiom. The empirical temper of the *Appeal* shows most vividly in its stress on our obligations to the future. True, the great passage in the *Reflections* against “committing waste on the inheritance” had also spoken of posterity; but in the *Appeal*, the mention of the generations of the future marks a new emphasis, even as it recalls Burke’s readiness, in speeches and writings of the late 1770s and early 1780s, to think of the progress of mankind as a co-operative enterprise. Yet the structure of his thought is so anchored in the description of present duties, and in an assertion of the tenacity of habit, that the novelty of the argument may go unnoticed.

The burthen of proof lies heavily on those who tear to pieces the whole frame and contexture of their country, that they could find no other way of settling a government fit to obtain its rational ends. . . . Perhaps the only moral trust with any certainty in our hands, is the care of our own time. With regard to futurity, we are to treat it like a ward.<sup>21</sup>

So we are asked to regard ourselves above all as stewards of the present time, and to acknowledge that the link between present and future ought to shape our understanding of our duties. This augments—but it was doubtless also meant to qualify—the sense of the passage in the *Reflections* on how men without a consciousness of the past would become “little better than the flies of a summer.” The nightmare then had seemed to be a reduction of human life to insect life by the acceptance of brute self-interest everywhere. Now, by contrast, Burke seems struck by the sheer imprudence rather than by the monstrosity of a total revolution. We are left to draw for ourselves the possible connections between gross imprudence and inhumanity.

Burke’s ordering of duties in the *Appeal* mixes an Enlightenment hope of improvement with a pragmatic refusal to trade an actual for a speculative good. His politics, as portrayed here in the third person, are moderate and his vision of history is moderately progressive. His argument does not exclude an idea one may associate with the moral philosophy of Kant, namely that “ought” implies “can,” and so the

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 383.



perception of a present inadequacy with an available remedy carries an imperative for reform. Burke, it must be added, unlike Kant, does not envisage a process of continuous improvement whose end is the removal of obstacles to rational happiness. The central constituent of reform, as it is imagined in the *Appeal*, seems to be the preservation of a human and social inheritance. The well-being of the present generation must include avoidance of wars wherever possible, aversion from revolutionary schemes, and rejection of designs that threaten to squander a nation's financial, political, and natural resources. The author of the *Appeal* would preserve the present for the sake of the future, and would call on the past for assistance in humanizing the present.

*Edmund Burke and France:  
The Parliamentary Context  
(1780–1794)*



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This paper explores some of the new insights offered by the publication of Volume IV of *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, especially as they relate to Burke's commentary on France.

Burke's response to the French Revolution is, of course, one of his most enduring legacies to political thought, and it is central to Burkean scholarship as well as to the study of post-revolutionary political discourse. Its importance stems directly from the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), widely acknowledged as the most famous and influential literary response to the events of 1789. In the *Reflections*, Burke formulated a devastating attack on revolutionary France that shaped the revolutionary debate in Britain, provided the first sustained and coherent critique of the principles of the French Revolution, and shaped a counter-revolutionary political thought that still finds echoes in modern political debate. Burke's early warnings of a bloody and tyrannical outcome for the revolution led to a public break with some of

his former friends and political allies, but it also earned him the admiration of many contemporaries, as well as the status of prophet of “conservative” politics.<sup>1</sup> Of course, Burke may have turned out wrong about many aspects of the French Revolution, but this is not the concern of historians of political ideas. Rather, the classic historiographical question, which in fact dates back to Burke’s own time, is that of Burke’s “consistency”: Why did Burke support the American Revolution and domestic parliamentary reform, but not the French Revolution? Did this not contradict and betray his own progressive ideals?

This was the charge laid against him by some of the most prominent Whig voices in Parliament, including Charles James Fox and Richard Sheridan. From their perspective, the French Revolution was a popular rebellion against despotic power, and part of the same arc of progress that had seen popular rights triumph in the Glorious Revolution and in the American Revolution. Burke had approved of the first two revolutions, and some of his Whig colleagues thought it very strange, and inconsistent, that he would disapprove of the third. As they saw it, Burke had turned his back on his previous progressive principles. Throughout the 1790s this assessment was reinforced and seemingly vindicated by Burke’s own discourse about the importance of tradition, medieval natural rights, and the authority of the state.

From our modern vantage point, the Foxite Whig assessment of Burke is lent additional credibility by the assumption that the French and American revolutions were part of the same path of progress towards liberal democracies.<sup>2</sup> Burke’s reputation, then, suffered two successive and self-reinforcing blows: the first was dealt by his own contemporaries, and the second by a strong historiographical tradition that adds weight to his contemporaries’ early criticism by identifying the French Revolution as the beginning of modernity.

However, a strong case can be made—and indeed has been made—that this charge of inconsistency is largely an optical illusion. It has become difficult to seriously maintain that Burke was theoretically

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1 For a recent example see Jesse Norman, *Edmund Burke: Philosopher, Politician, Prophet* (London: HarperCollins, 2013).

2 Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 741.

*inconsistent*—or, to phrase things slightly differently, that he had a drastic change of heart and went from being a progressive writer to a “conservative” writer. This is owing to the work of a number of Burke scholars who argued that the charges of “inconsistency” and turn to “conservatism” made little sense both in historical context, and when assessed against the internal logic of Burke’s thought.<sup>3</sup>

From Burke’s perspective, there was no contradiction between his reformist politics and his critique of French politics after 1789 because the French Revolution was an entirely new phenomenon, which was completely opposed in its nature and principles to the Glorious Revolution and the American Revolution. He believed that it was not advancing the cause of freedom, but rather that it was a dangerous threat to the civil liberties acquired by modern Europeans, and a dangerous threat to the principles that held political society together—especially property and religion. The fundamental problem was that the invocation of original “rights of man” led to challenging established civil entitlements based upon natural rights, in particular the right of property on which government and civil society was built. This inspired a destructive rage for equality, which would naturally lead to “democratic tyranny” and “*degenerate into a military democracy*; a species of political monster, which has always ended by devouring those who have produced it.”<sup>4</sup> In his critique of the events of 1789, Burke was certainly asserting the principle of the authority of the state, but he was also defining the purpose of civil society as the “secure enjoyment of our natural rights.”<sup>5</sup> This is why Burke is notoriously difficult to categorize as either “conservative” or “liberal,” and arguably why he shouldn’t be categorized as either. When Burke’s thought is neither caricatured nor held to anachronistic standards, the charge of “inconsistency” quickly unravels. While old clichés

3 See notably Daniel O’Neill, *The Burke–Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 138; Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke*, 16–17; Ian Crowe, “Introduction: Principles and Circumstances,” in *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997).

4 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 244, 380.

5 The phrase, which appears in Burke’s “Tracts Relating to Popery Laws,” is cited in Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 17. See also, Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–2015) 9:463.

about a supposed turn to “conservatism” have proved resilient, it must be acknowledged that theoretically coherent principles can be compatible with seemingly contradictory practical positions.

What has often been less recognised in this discussion, and what the publication of Volume IV brings to the fore, is that Burke did not primarily operate as a theoretician or as a political philosopher. He was, rather, a career politician engaged in day to day polemics and policy debates. In recent years, Burkean scholarship has moved towards highlighting Burke’s deeply engaged and practical approach by drawing attention to the vast corpus of parliamentary writings and speeches beyond the widely-studied polemical pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. We now have a more nuanced and complex picture of Burke’s commentary on France—and, importantly, we have a more contextual picture of the development of his analysis after 1789. This paper aims to highlight some of the ways in which the publication of his parliamentary speeches in the late 1780s and early 1790s can help enhance this emerging picture. This wealth of materials, many of which are made easily available in a modern edition for the first time, is further encouraging us to redirect our attention away from Burke the “prophet” towards Burke the politician. Contextualized by abundant and erudite editorial notes, they provide powerful new tools to explore Burke’s involvement in day-to-day political controversy and new entry points to understand his political and philosophical commentary.

This is not to say that Burke lacked philosophical depth. He was intimately acquainted with the European canon as well as with the philosophical controversies of his time, and his political analysis drew on a wide array of arguments inspired by figures ranging from Cicero to Grotius, and from Locke to Hume (though with particular fondness for Montesquieu and particular dislike for Rousseau). Yet his thought was a philosophical patchwork at the service of his intellectual commitment to specific political causes, and most often at the service of the political arguments he formulated in favor of a particular course of action. Burke’s philosophy was embedded in his practice as a politician, and it is this aspect that we can recover through the examination of his political speeches.

*The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Volume IV:  
Fresh Perspectives on Burke and France.*

An examination of Burke's parliamentary speeches between 1789 and 1794 immediately places Burke's commentary on the French Revolution in a context less readily familiar to historians of political ideas—not that of the famous Burke–Paine debate and the pamphlet war that dominated the early 1790s, but, rather, of the parliamentary debates that constituted Burke's more usual turf, and of an internal Whig debate that had very deep roots. There is not merely a stylistic distinction between polemical pamphlets and parliamentary debates, but also one of substance: one important additional layer of context provided by these newly available texts is the background of Burke's previous and concurrent concerns as a member of parliament.

One example is provided by Burke's speeches about France before 1789, which put his later commentary in the perspective of his broader view of French history, French politics and French ambitions. This is potentially important since, as previously stated, Burke was a practical politician who usually thought in the abstract rather than contextually. Burke's critique of the revolution has traditionally been contrasted with his support for Whig principles, parliamentary reform and the American Revolution. But his parliamentary speeches in the period suggest that this is not how he first approached the French problem. Rather, he initially approached French events as part of his wider and long-standing concerns about French ambitions of universal dominion.

Burke's "Speech on French Commercial Treaty," delivered in February 1787 and widely admired by contemporary observers, makes for a particularly striking contrast with his later positions. It was delivered as Parliament was being asked to ratify the Eden Treaty of 1786, which was to reduce tariffs on goods from both Britain and France. The treaty was strongly supported by Pitt on the basis of Adam Smith's ideas of free trade, and was extremely beneficial to Britain, as well as enjoying the support of British commercial interests. This made it a challenging proposition for the opposition Whigs to oppose. Burke's tactic was to use the treaty's obvious economic benefits as an argument *against* its adoption: he argued that superficial and short-term economic gains

were being used to conceal negative long-term political consequences. The treaty was so advantageous to Britain, he claimed, that it had to be regarded with suspicion—the French had to have an ulterior motive.

The ulterior motive identified by Burke was no less than France's long-term objective of complete global power. In manuscript notes (provided by the editors in this volume), he pointed out that France was different from Britain and other countries in that it had never considered commerce as the main object of its politics: "Her great Object is Power."<sup>6</sup> In his speech he described how France "proceeds systematically, and makes her progress in a regular series," whereas Britain acts "wholly without system."<sup>7</sup>

France's strategy, Burke argued, was to lure Britain in with a deal that advantaged British manufactures in the short term, but that had the long-term effect of facilitating French access to capital, thereby increasing its foreign commerce and naval power. France would then eventually be able to beat Britain at its own game, and use its commerce and navy to become the undisputed dominant power. This had been the long-term strategy behind France's generous commercial policy towards America, and it was the long-term strategy behind this treaty. It was the only explanation, Burke wrote in his notes, that could account for France's willingness to sign up to the Eden Treaty:

If therefore to raise a Navy superior to ours has been her long known object, I can then account for this Treaty on some rational principles. For whatever France suffers in this Treaty, and she does apparently suffer some disadvantage, it is in the sale of manufactures. Whatever she gains, she gains in her System of Commerce and Navigation.<sup>8</sup>

In his speech to Parliament, he admitted there was "reason to admire the depth of the designs of France. She was ready to put up with a temporary loss in trade, by the superiority of our manufactures, for a permanent, future advantage in commerce."<sup>9</sup> But Burke warned his audience to make no mistake: this treaty could not "be regarded as a simple

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6 Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:240n2.

7 *Ibid.*, 238, 239.

8 *Ibid.*, 240n2.

9 *Ibid.*, 238.

commercial treaty”; on the contrary, “it bore strongly upon the political interests of the country.”<sup>10</sup>

One striking aspect of the speech is Burke’s deep conviction that, for the past centuries, France has continuously been strategizing for a path towards universal dominion. Its true national ambition is not commerce or even wealth, it is “Power.” Somewhat ironically, Burke was here turning the usual French argument against Britain on its head: traditional military attempts at universal dominion appeared out of date in the new global and commercialized eighteenth-century world; it was through commercial power, supported by naval power, that it was now being attempted.<sup>11</sup> One could wonder why Burke was attributing long-term secret ambitions of universal dominion to France, when Britain was openly pursuing similar naval and commercial ambitions—but Britain did so, in his account, “without system.” Its objective was prosperity instead of power, and herein lay the difference.

The “Speech on French Commercial Treaty” becomes more directly relevant to Burke’s reception of the French Revolution when compared to the more famous “Speech on Army Estimates” of 9 February 1790. The “Speech on Army Estimates” earned its place in the history books for providing Burke’s first public comments on the French Revolution. Burke’s concerns about France had grown through the summer of 1789, and he had become clearly critical by the winter of 1789–90. Delivered shortly after he had read Price’s controversial sermon “A Discourse on the Love of Our Country” (1789), Burke’s “Speech on Army Estimates” expressed urgent worries about the French Revolution and the dangers that revolutionary principles could pose to England. Burke was voicing publicly his fear of contagion, and his willingness to “abandon his best friends, and join with his worst enemies.”<sup>12</sup> The speech is usually cited for announcing many of the arguments of the *Reflections*, as well as Burke’s public opposition to the stance adopted by many reformist Whigs.

Yet the speech contains another rather striking element, notable in its relation to Burke’s past concerns rather than his future ones. This was

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Pincus, “The English Debate Over Universal Monarchy,” in *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707*, ed. John Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41–42.

<sup>12</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:288.



the continuities identified by Burke within France—the continuity of French aims and ambitions even beyond the revolution, and the resulting continuity that should, in his view, characterize Britain’s attitude to France. The first part of the speech, which has long been available in a number of editions, argued that “France is, at this time, in a political light, to be considered as expunged out of the system of Europe,” and that the British government should consequently decrease its military spending, since the power that had traditionally represented the main threat to Britain, was suddenly no longer a military threat at all.<sup>13</sup> Britain *should*, however, be afraid of the contagion of extreme democratic ideas.

But later on in the same speech, in a section that has not been widely available until now, Burke qualified his argument. France was “no danger” for now, he repeated, but he also warned of “her return to vigour,” of a gradual return of her powers of attack.<sup>14</sup> This was not because he was foreseeing the well-rehearsed story of democratic institutions being hijacked by military and populist leaders, but rather because he was considering France in the long-term perspective of the natural balance of power. France was Britain’s natural enemy, the “only power” which Britain would do right to regard with jealousy. It was reduced to weakness now, but its gradual return to power was inevitable, and Britain’s preparations for defence “ought to be proportionably gradual.”<sup>15</sup>

This little-known part of the speech highlights the inaccuracy of the traditional portrayal of Burke as being somehow romantically nostalgic of the French ancien régime. As his own words make clear, nothing could be further from the truth. It is true that Burke defended certain elements of the French monarchy that he saw as characteristic of the European ancien régime, in terms of religion, civility and rights—but these were not specific to France. Burke’s famous defence of the ancien régime should not conceal his negative assessment of France and its historical relationship with Britain. Ancien régime France, he wrote, had been an intolerant “painted and gilded” tyranny, a courtly despotism.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 297, 298.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 285.

The “Speech on Army Estimates” suggests that Burke’s structural distrust of France, and his view of France as naturally inclined to seek universal dominion, helped shape his later negative assessment of the political dangers posed by the French Republic. It was not *only* due to his mistrust of republicanism, democracy and natural rights, or to any characteristic specific to the French Revolution, but arguably also to his naturalized assessment of France as structurally hungry for dominion, and as Britain’s natural rival and enemy. France was a constant source of danger and negative influence, whether in times of war or peace. Burke reminded his audience how, during the years of peace in the reign of Louis XIV, the despotic nature of the French regime was “glossed over” by “a plausible shew of cultivated manners,” and France’s supposed refinements were imitated in Britain. Thence, he added, “our Government became despotic insensibly, and the people groaned under the oppression of courtly tyranny, wearing a brilliant exterior.”<sup>17</sup> Now Britain saw France in the opposite extreme, which was “equally dreadful,” and it was equally tempted by imitation. Burke concluded that, as the example of Louis XIV showed, peace with France “had frequently proved more dangerous to [Britain] than a state of open war.”<sup>18</sup>

The continuity usually underlined in Burke’s commentary on the French Revolution correctly highlights his longstanding philosophical concerns for the social and political principles that buttressed ancien régime Europe—most notably his concerns for the rights of property and the place of religion. But, in the context of his parliamentary speeches, his assessment of the French Revolution is not merely a commentary on this unique, all-important event in European history, but also a commentary that was part of a much longer-running discussion of French power and French ambition. This allows another sort of continuity to emerge, in the shape of Burke’s ever-present warnings against French influence and French ambitions of universal dominion. This remained at the core of his assessment of the events of 1789–1790, even as France was ostensibly demolishing its entire political structure and relinquishing its place as a European power. Because it was at the core of his early assessment, it also shaped his more famous critique of the French Revolution:

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 304.

initially, Burke merely warned that the French threat, whether in the shape of its negative influence or in the shape of structural ambitions for universal dominion, had only gone dormant. Eventually, as he saw the situation evolve, he sharpened this assessment into a warning against an aggressive military state that would enact France's age-old ambition.

### *Regency Crisis*

Burke's speeches on the Regency crisis from late 1788 to early 1789 provide additional layers of context to the well-known Burkean narrative. The crisis was triggered by George III's illness and the subsequent necessity of establishing a regency. Because the future Regent favored the Whigs, Pitt attempted to limit his power in the interest of Parliament. Meanwhile the Whigs, including Fox and Burke, found themselves in the unusual position of defending royal prerogative. Burke threw himself into the dispute with unprecedented passion, arguing that Pitt was usurping authority by giving Parliament the new privilege to decide at will who should be Regent and in what conditions. For Burke, this was an attack on the principle of hereditary monarchy, whose very arbitrariness was a protection against the personal ambitions of politicians. He wrote in his speech of December 1788 that hereditary monarchy was, "our strong barrier, our strong rampart against the ambition of mankind!" and that it "sheltered the subject from the tyranny of illegal tribunals, bloody proscriptions, and all the long train of evils attendant upon the distractions of ill-guided and unprincipled Republicks."<sup>19</sup> If Parliament was allowed to alter succession, it would be allowing the constitution to be "changed, be overturned and annihilated."<sup>20</sup> The Regency crisis, therefore, pushed Burke to publicly formulate a clear argument against constitutional change, and made him rehearse his interpretation of 1688 and the reasons why it could not be used as precedent. The powers used by Parliament to impose terms on the Crown in 1688 did not apply in 1788, he argued, because there had been no violations of liberty or constitution. In the absence of such violations, Parliament dictating to the

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

king was illegitimate; it was stepping outside of the constitution for no acceptable reason. One would have thought that “we were in America in the midst of a new Commonwealth, devising the best means we can to establish a new Constitution. . . . The present mode was irregular as well as dangerous, for the House began with resolving themselves into a Republic compleatly.”<sup>21</sup>

During the Regency crisis, Burke positioned himself on the side of King against Parliament, arguing that the people had no right to sideline royal authority in the absence of obvious violations of liberty. In doing so, he was already using the revolution of 1688 as a benchmark to distinguish legitimate revolution from illegitimate revolution. He defined the Glorious Revolution as an “[act] of necessity”: when a “delinquent Monarch” attempted to deprive men of their natural rights and liberties, as James II had done, then the people “may hurl such a King from the throne.”<sup>22</sup> The manuscript notes made available alongside the text expand on Burke’s 1788 assessment of the Glorious Revolution: because King James had “deliberately aimed at depriving his people of their Liberties,” the people had had a right “to dethrone such a King and then with whatever irregularity, to form such a settlement *de novo* as best seems to them best [sic]. This is the lesson and principle.” The Glorious Revolution, therefore, “was not formed upon precedent, but upon general reason, and the inalienable rights of men.” It was not a constitutional act founding its legitimacy in the sovereignty of the people or of Parliament, but rather a necessary irregularity: the people had been “obliged to act against the actual constitution, in order to regenerate it.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, he concluded, the precedent of 1688 merely illustrated the right of the people to temporarily act against the constitution in order to overthrow a monarch who had attempted to curtail their natural rights—it did not imply the constitutional supremacy of Parliament. This was an argument Burke would develop further in his “Speech on Army Estimates,” as well as in the *Reflections* and in the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*.<sup>24</sup> Yet the account of 1688 that

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 250–51.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 253n1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 292–93.

Burke developed during the Regency crisis was distinct from his 1790s argument: he was still invoking the “rights of men,” not only to rely on “general reason” to act against the constitution, but also to “form a settlement *de novo*.” This was not quite the argument later voiced during the French Revolution debate, according to which 1688 was a revolution led by the aristocracy in order to preserve the existing constitution and the order of society. The “Speech on Quebec Bill” of 6 May 1791, for example, clearly outlines Burke’s repudiation of the Rights of Men as a standard for political conduct, in favor of the Law of Nations—“received for many ages, by the general consent of all nations.”<sup>25</sup>

The Regency crisis, then, can be read as a transitional step in Burke’s thinking, during which he still accepted the legitimacy of unconstitutional revolt in order to claim certain inalienable liberties, but also already argued against the sovereignty of Parliament, and maintained the illegitimacy of increased parliamentary powers when the king had not infringed on popular liberties.

While it affords us a glimpse of Burke’s thoughts on legitimacy and revolution in the run-up to the French Revolution, the Regency crisis also presents an early example of the style of overly emotional politics and dramatic warnings of impending doom that were to characterize his interventions after 1789. During the Regency crisis, his dramatic style attracted much derision and, as highlighted by this volume’s editors, marked a low point in his public standing.<sup>26</sup> With the recovery of the king, his alarmist warnings turned out not to be needed; but the fact that some of his predictions about revolutionary France did come true has given, in hindsight, a rather different shine to the same style of emotional, dramatic parliamentary performances. In fact, read in this context, the transcript of his “Speech on Quebec” in May 1791 suggests how much he was still perceived as an overly dramatic speaker strangely obsessed with his pet topics, as he is repeatedly challenged and called to order for speaking off topic and relating the question of Quebec to the situation in France. This is one more useful warning from the Regency crisis against the temptation to interpret Burke through the lens of our

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 247.

modern understanding of the French Revolution as a unique historical and historiographical landmark.

*Civil and religious liberties*

The previous examples illustrate how Burke's parliamentary speeches before 1789 can help us contextualize, and therefore better understand, the roots of his hostile reaction to the French Revolution. Conversely, after 1789 it is possible to identify ways in which Burke's crusade against France shaped other areas of his practice as a politician. It is easy to forget that the French Revolution was far from the only subject occupying Burke in the period.<sup>27</sup> In fact his concerns about France coloured his perspective on many other areas, and arguably shaped his reaction to a number of domestic policies and debates after 1789.

Burke had, for instance, previously wavered on the issue of the Test and Corporation Acts. He was torn between his principled support for Toleration, and his fear that the Dissenters' ultimate goal was rather the disestablishment of the Church of England. He had not been present in Parliament for attempts to repeal the Acts in 1787 and 1789; but, in the 1790s, his position solidified against repeal.<sup>28</sup> His concern was not theological, but rather entirely political: he had come to believe that the Unitarians, in particular, were not just a "theological Sect," but also a "*political* faction" with political objectives.<sup>29</sup> Burke's commitment to toleration was now trumped by his conviction that religion was a fundamental support of state and society, and that the state therefore had not only a vested interest, but also a duty to uphold the established Church through "moderate coercion."<sup>30</sup>

There are other examples of the way in which the revolution debate inflected his positions on domestic questions. Towards the end of the period covered in this volume, in March and April 1793, Burke intervened on Sheridan's Motion on Seditious Practices, and on the Trai-

<sup>27</sup> Much of Burke's attention at this time was focused on the trial of Warren Hastings. See Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 820–50.

<sup>28</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:306–19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 494.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

torous Correspondence Bill.<sup>31</sup> This was in the context of Pitt's emerging policy of repression of revolutionary ideas and radical agitation. The Aliens Act of January 1793 had been interpreted by the opposition as suspending Habeas Corpus for foreigners, which it effectively did. Burke's interventions were in support of this policy of suspension of individual freedoms, because these were superseded, in his view, by the greater immediate danger represented by revolutionary ideas.

Sheridan had argued in his speech that the government was exaggerating the extent of discontent and sedition in the country in order to rally support for the war and discredit the movement for reform. He had denounced oppressive acts against freedom of the press and free speech, and pleaded for the "poor wretches" who had been thrown in prison for advocating the same reforms that Burke and Pitt had pushed at the end of the American war.<sup>32</sup>

In his response, Burke supported the bill, without addressing the core of Sheridan's charge. Instead, he used his speech to further criticize the revolution, and Fox and the Whig leaders. He pursued the same line later in the same month, in the debate about the Traitorous Correspondence Bill, which made it a treasonable offence for British subjects to sell certain goods to France, buy land in France, or travel to France without a licence. The bill was strongly criticized by the opposition as an infringement on individual rights, but Burke supported its provisions. He argued that the suspension of some aspects of civil liberty was more than justified by the current French threat, which could potentially kill off all liberty. He stated:

Every Law that was made took away something from the portion of Liberty. It was then to be considered, whether the present measure was such as took away more than was necessary of that Liberty?—if so, he thought it should be put down: and, next, whether it took away such a Liberty as, if it remained, could do no mischief?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 566–75, 575–86.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 578.

He also argued that the restrictions on commerce were justified by concerns of national security, namely the necessity of isolating Britain from revolutionary ideas. This was in spite of Burke's private acknowledgement that the threat was, at this stage, a possibility rather than a reality—he was reported to have admitted that “he did not know any persons in this country who had been guilty of any overt acts against the Constitution.”<sup>34</sup>

From the Foxite Whigs' perspective, Burke's position was certainly at odds with his pre-revolutionary stance supporting reform and individual civil liberties. But his defence of Pitt's repressive policies was, in Burke's view, entirely justified by the different wider international context, and by the emergence of the dangerous principles of the French Revolution: it was the necessity of maintaining deeper principles of stability and natural rights that justified the limited suspension of specific individual rights. As he explained during the debate on the suspension of Habeas Corpus in May 1794, “the Habeas Corpus was unquestionably one of our most invaluable securities; but, in times of great emergency, even that must be given up temporarily [sic] for the whole.”<sup>35</sup>

The same clash of competing principles can be observed in Burke's much more familiar stance on the war with France, which took shape in the period covered in this volume. Burke's arguments in favor of war are well known, and illustrate how he prioritized principles that had become incompatible in practice: military intervention with the aim of changing another state's political arrangements was not acceptable in principle, but this principle was superseded by the more immediate and much more important danger of republican and democratic contagion, which threatened the very foundations of European society.<sup>36</sup> It was the same reasoning that prevented Burke from supporting the establishment of a constitutional monarchy for France in the event of a British victory.<sup>37</sup> It is certainly possible to accuse Burke of having been pushed too far by his all-consuming fear of French democracy—for instance, his assessment of Lafayette was likely unfair, and in some respects factu-

34 *Ibid.*, 576.

35 *Ibid.*, 624.

36 *Ibid.*, 524–32, 546–57, 557–66.

37 Burke developed the view in his “Remarks on the Policy of the Allies” begun in October 1793. See also *ibid.*, 598.



ally wrong.<sup>38</sup> It is also possible to judge that Burke was wrong about the magnitude of the French danger, and about its potential of destruction for European society. But if we accept that Burke's beliefs and fears were genuine, as they certainly were, it then becomes difficult to argue for inconsistency or contradiction—or rather, the contradiction existed, but was in his perspective easily solved in favor of what he considered higher principles, including immediate concerns for the very survival of European society.

### *Conclusion*

Discussions of Burke's reaction to the French Revolution are often framed by the wrong questions—"consistency," or "conservative" and "liberal" labels are not necessarily the most interesting categories to assess writers, especially a practical politician such as Burke who never claimed to be the author of a coherent philosophical system. Regardless of its consistency, or lack thereof, the power of Burke's *Reflections* remains—it shaped much of the Revolution debate in Britain, it offered the first sustained and coherent critique of the French Revolution, and it still echoes in contemporary political discourse. This is where the importance of Burke's commentary on the French Revolution lies.

The publication of Volume IV of Burke's *Writings and Speeches* is a welcome reminder of the need to direct our attention towards Burke himself—on writings and speeches embedded in his own time, in the context of policy debate and political upheavals. Burke's carefully reconstructed parliamentary interventions are a much-needed tool, which should help build a rather more complex picture of Burke as a writer whose arguments were crafted not only in the philosophical context of his time, but also in the immediate context of domestic policy and politics.

Of course many of these texts were already available to dedicated Burke scholars with the time and inclination to explore issues of the *Parliamentary Register* or contemporary newspaper reports. But the added value of the present edition is substantial. The editors not only

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<sup>38</sup> See for example Burke's unfounded accusation that La Fayette had murdered Foulton and Berthier de Sauvigny. *Ibid.*, 599.

provided erudite contextual information for all of Burke's speeches, but also effected the complex and painstaking work of compiling and contrasting the different reports, versions and manuscripts available. More prosaically, but essentially, the very availability and accessibility of these newly edited texts is a major attainment: it should provide the impetus for these texts to become more widely investigated by scholars interested in British political discourse in the 1790s, as well as fuel new enquiries into Burke's seminal response to the French Revolution.

# *Burke and Unitarianism*



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This essay offers a series of related contexts in which to read and assess Burke's speech on the Unitarian Petition, delivered on 11th July, 1792, as now reconstituted by Peter Marshall in a careful and intellectually astute act of editorial assembling made from a number of fragmentary sources.<sup>1</sup> What emerges from this characteristically judicious act of reconstruction in the final volume of Burke's *Writings and Speeches*, is a powerful defence of the English religious establishment that is at once original in style and execution and also reflects a case built on Burke's suitably tried-and-tested principles of prescription; it was a warning of the dangers of innovation in a time of revolution, and hence typical of his turn of mind in the 1790s. It was also typical of an Anglican mentality, and was built on recognisably catholic foundations; innovation in theology necessitated innovation in politics, and both were to be resisted. For Burke, Christendom had to unite against the dangers of radical infidelity; in a strange way, Joseph Priestley—Unitarianism's vociferous champion—thought in an analogous way, but his conception

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981–2015), 4:487–515. I am indebted to Noël Sugimura, John Robertson, Mishtooni Bose, and the late Rory Allan for their illuminating comments.

of Christianity (which, to mark his distance from what he considered to be the idolatrous worship of the morally revered but completely human Jesus, he always spelt with a lower case “c”), was not one which Burke was minded to recognize.<sup>2</sup> Millenarianism and innovation went hand in hand in Burke’s thinking, and both were to be repudiated. And repudiation of Unitarianism united Burke with cultivated sceptics as well as with pious believers, both clerical and lay.

At least three members of The Club, the society of literary men built around Samuel Johnson, were vocal opponents of Unitarianism: two of the three were also mutually dismissive of each other’s religious views. To the pious Johnson, Edward Gibbon was regrettably an infidel historian, but while Gibbon had mordantly and repeatedly scrutinized the doctrine of the Trinity in his historical treatment of its evolution as the central dogma of the Church, he made his disapprobation of Priestley, the most prominent of a party of pioneering Unitarian divines, even clearer in a footnote in the fifty-fourth chapter of his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Describing the intellectual and ecclesiological consequences of the Reformation as these were felt in late eighteenth-century England, the ex-convert to Catholicism declared in the main body of the text that:

The predictions of the Catholics are accomplished: the web of mystery is unravelled by the Arminians, Arians, and Socinians, whose numbers must not be computed into their separate congregations. And the pillars of revelation are shaken by those men who preserve the name without the substance of religion, who indulge the licence without the temper of philosophy.

In the appended footnote Gibbon went well beyond the usual confines of the otherwise tolerant Republic of Letters, stating his intentions unequivocally in reference to Priestley’s recently published *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*: “I shall recommend to public animadversion two passages in Dr. Priestley, which betray the ultimate tendency of his

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<sup>2</sup> G. M. Ditchfield, “Anti-Trinitarianism and toleration in late eighteenth-century British politics: the Unitarian Petition of 1792,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 42 (1991): 39–67.

opinions. At the first of these . . . the priest; at the second . . . the magistrate, may tremble!"<sup>3</sup> In the first of these passages, Priestley had attacked the doctrine of the Atonement; in the second, which occurred in a "general conclusion" to the work dedicated by Priestley to a sustained critique of a prominent English divine, Richard Hurd (a close disciple of the polemical divine William Warburton), Priestley had asked why the teachings on the relationship between Church and State of Luther and Calvin should have been instituted in Britain, rather than those advocated by Socinus or the Anabaptists.<sup>4</sup>

Priestley had also provocatively inserted "A Summary View of the Evidence for the primitive Christians holding the Doctrine of the simple Humanity of Christ," as an appendix to the *History*, thereby initiating a controversy with a rebarbative Anglican divine, Samuel Horsley, a former secretary of the Royal Society who was immediately preferred from the archdeaconry of St Albans to the see of St David's in 1790 as a direct result of his engagement with Priestley on the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>5</sup> Through the medium of an archidiaconal charge delivered to the unsuspecting clergy of St Albans in May 1783, Horsley had attempted to lambast Priestley's scholarship, particularly his citations from the Greek fathers, a critique predicated on the Anglican tradition of patristic scholarship, more especially as promoted by Bishop Bull.<sup>6</sup> Both Priestley and Horsley were more at home with natural philosophy than they were with the more intricately speculative details of doctrinal history, but this did not prevent either man from appealing to his own supposedly superior understanding of early Church history. After detailing his case, Horsley regretted that:

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3 Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (3 vols., Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1994), 3:439 and note.

4 Joseph Priestley, *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (2 vols., Birmingham, 1782), 1:275–76; 2:484.

5 Priestley, *History of Corruptions*, 2:485–89. See F. C. Mather, *High Church Prophet: Bishop Samuel Horsley (1733–1806) and the Caroline tradition in the later Georgian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

6 On which tradition, see Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: the construction of confessional identity in the seventeenth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

It is a mortifying proof of the infirmity of the human mind, in the highest improvement of its faculties in the present life, that such fallacies in reasoning, such misconstructions of authorities, such distorted views of fact and opinions, should be found in the writings of a man, to whom of all men of the present age some branches of the experimental sciences are the most indebted.<sup>7</sup>

By publicly rebuking Priestley, Horsley had initiated a controversy that Priestley relished. It was an exhausting engagement, as can be seen by the manner in which Horsley excused himself in his *Tracts in Controversy with Dr. Priestley* from reading the four-volume expansion of his opponent's views constituted by his *History of Early Opinions Concerning Christ*:

He would not, by an unnecessary and unreasonable opposition to neglected arguments, be the instrument of drawing four volumes, fraught, as the very title imports, with pernicious heretical theology, from the obscurity in which they may innocently rot in the Printer's ware-house.<sup>8</sup>

Priestley, however, was not minded to give up the controversy; hence, he originally devoted an appendix in his *History of the Corruptions* to a learned rebuttal of Horsley's arguments against him. Priestley's *History* also contained another appendix in which he had addressed unbelievers, and had closely criticized Gibbon's treatment of the early Church in the *Decline and Fall*. It was a criticism that left Gibbon completely unconcerned; nor was Priestley disconcerted either by Horsley or by Gibbon: both offending passages remained in a later edition of his *History*, which appeared in 1793.<sup>9</sup>

The fifth volume of the *Decline and Fall*, in which Gibbon had made public his disapprobation of Priestley, was published in 1788; within a year priests and magistrates would tremble across the Channel, and

7 Samuel Horsley, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of St. Albans, at a Visitation Holden May 22nd, 1783* (London, 1783), 64.

8 Samuel Horsley, *Tracts in Controversy with Dr. Priestley upon the Historical Question of the Belief of the Ages in Our Lord's Divinity* (London, 1789), xiii.

9 Priestley, *History of Corruptions*, 2:440-66.

Gibbon, a Burkean *avant la lettre*, would quickly make clear his support of Burke's sentiments on such matters as laid out in the *Reflections*.<sup>10</sup> In 1791, Priestley's house and laboratory in Birmingham were destroyed by a Church and King crowd, and the polemic and chemist eventually escaped to Pennsylvania, where he was to die in 1804 as yet another disappointed radical millenarian. His *Memoirs* appeared posthumously, in 1806, and he carefully notes in exile that "the criminality of the magistrates and other principal High Churchmen in Birmingham, in promoting the riot, remains acknowledged."<sup>11</sup>

Gibbon's dismissal of Priestley and all his works might be characterized as the reaction of a *politique* in an Anglican country. This is not quite right, but his reaction was certainly not as theologically-moored as was that of Dr Johnson. For Johnson, the Trinity was so sacrosanct as not to be spoken of in "mixed company." In 1781, when Bennet Langton, a Tory High Churchman, asked his friend if the magistrate ought not to tolerate those who dissented from the doctrine, Johnson roundly replied: "Why then, Sir, I think that permitting men to preach any opinion contrary to the doctrine of the established church tends, in a certain degree, to lessen the authority of the church, and, consequently, to lessen the influence of religion." Not satisfied with this response, Langton averred that, "It may be considered . . . whether it would not be politick to tolerate in such a case." Johnson would not concede his ground, repudiating Langton's intervention thus: "Sir, we have been talking of *right*; this is another question. *I* think it is *not* politick to tolerate in such a case." As Boswell phrased it, Johnson "at this time waved [sic] the theological question," immediately before adducing at this moment in the *Life of Johnson* a pri-

10 See David Womersley, *Gibbon and the 'Watchmen of the Holy City': the historian and his reputation, 1776–1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 207–40.

11 Joseph Priestley, *Memoirs of the Rev. Dr Joseph Priestley, to the year 1795* (London, 1809), 121. Burke insisted that it was not Priestley's religious, but rather his political, principles against which the crowd reacted: *Writings and Speeches*, 4:510–11. Writing, a year before the speech, to his son, Richard, on 24 July 1791, Burke was more clearly condemnatory of the Birmingham rioters, not least for playing directly into Priestley's hands: *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland et al., 10 vols. (Cambridge and Chicago: Cambridge University Press and University of Chicago Press, 1958–70), 6:306–07.

vate prayer of the good doctor in order to evince “beyond doubt” Johnson’s “own orthodox belief in the sacred mystery of the TRINITY.”<sup>12</sup>

As Jonathan Clark pointed out some thirty years ago in an account of the eighteenth century that, along with the work of J. G. A. Pocock, inspired consequent explorations of England’s peculiar experience of Enlightenment, politics during the eighteenth century, far from being secular, was pronouncedly, if occasionally, theological (or at least religious) in nature.<sup>13</sup> And as the Oxford edition of the *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* has increasingly made clear, Burke’s own role in such a history of politico-theology was profound. But were Burke’s responses to the Trinity and the menace of Unitarianism those of a *politique* or those of a pious believer? Was he closer to Gibbon or to Johnson on these matters?

Gibbon’s warning to the civil magistrate, regarding a passage closing an appendix to the second volume of Priestley’s *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, demonstrates that Priestley himself had made no ready distinction between theology and politics. In common with Burke, although for very different reasons, Priestley dismissed the Warburtonian notion of a contract between Church and State; his sentiments were a conscious legacy of what was later to become known as the Radical Reformation.<sup>14</sup> The politics of Luther and Calvin had become those of the Church, be it as established respectively in England and Scotland (and more equivocally in Ireland), purely because the opinions of the fathers of the magisterial Reformation “had the sanction of the *civil powers*, which those of Socinus, and others of the same age,

<sup>12</sup> James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), 543.

<sup>13</sup> J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832: ideology, social structure, and political practice during the ancien regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); J. G. A. Pocock, “Post-Puritan England and the problem of the Enlightenment” in Perez Zagorin ed., *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 91–112, and “Clergy and commerce: the conservative Enlightenment” in R. Ajello, E. Contese, and V. Piano eds., *L’età dei Lumi: studi storici sul settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi* (2 vols., Naples: Jovene, 1985), 1:523–62.

<sup>14</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:490–91. Here he opposed the alleged authority of William Warburton, *The Alliance Between Church and State* (London, 1736), on which see Stephen Taylor, “William Warburton and the alliance between Church and State,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43 (1992): 271–86.



and who were equally qualified to judge for themselves, had not.” More troublingly (in the passage recommended by Gibbon to the attention of the civil magistrate), Priestley had also adverted to the fact that the opinions of “the Anabaptists of Munster” were for him exactly on a level with those of Socinus; and this when the memory of the “Munster Monster” epitomized for many the murderous religion of the enthusiastic mob. There was an echo of Warburton’s thesis provocatively allied with Satan’s tempting of Jesus in the explosive closing paragraph of Priestley’s millennial *envoi* to his frankly polemical history:

It is nothing but the *alliance* of the kingdom of Christ with the kingdoms of this world (an alliance which our Lord himself expressly disclaimed) that supports the grossest corruptions of Christianity; and perhaps we must wait for the fall of the civil powers before this most unnatural alliance be broken. Calamitous, no doubt, will that time be. But what convulsion in the political world ought to be a subject of lamentation, if it be attended with so desirable an event. May the *kingdom of God*, and of Christ (that which I conceive to be intended in the Lord’s prayer) truly and fully *come*, though all the kingdoms of the world be removed, in order to make way for it.<sup>15</sup>

To Priestley, the Warburtonian alliance was an Erastian blasphemy; to advocates of establishment, both lay and clerical, the whole of Priestley’s theology was an extended and noxiously heretical blasphemy, undoing, as it did, many of the central teachings of the Christian Church, and not least Trinitarian orthodoxy and the doctrine of the Atonement, which, as Boyd Hilton has demonstrated, was to prove central to much of the thought of the closing decades of the eighteenth century and into the first two thirds of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> In the 1780s and 1790s, the years of its intellectual pomp, Rational Dissent was becoming increasingly marginal to the specifically *religious* life of by far the greater part of the nation.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Priestley, *History of Corruptions*, 2:484.

<sup>16</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought 1785–1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> See Knud Haaksonssen (ed), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in eighteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Gibbon's repudiation of Priestley's deviant teachings has its echoes in Burke's appalled denunciation in the *Reflections* of Price's evocation of the *Nunc Dimittis* in welcoming the French Revolution. Both the Unitarian theologian and the Arian preacher were treated as breaching political decorum but, fundamentally, both stood condemned for promoting heresy and blasphemy. However distant the promised millennium might have been, and for Priestley it was evidently not that distant, it was disingenuous of him to plead that he was not seeking to subvert government in his expectations of a promised new dawn, although he would have pleaded that it was God, not Priestley, who was most active in this great transformation.<sup>18</sup> (Priestley's critics, and perhaps more especially his religiously sceptical opponents, implied that he sometimes had difficulties distinguishing himself and his desires from God; as William Hunter, the rector of St Anne's, Limehouse, put it *contra* Priestley in 1787: "The Millennium is not yet come.")<sup>19</sup> And there was a striking disequilibrium between the fears of the magistrate and those of the priest in that Priestley's expectations of doctrinal transformation were more limited, seemingly, than were those of directly millennial change. Discoursing in the first volume of the *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* on the doctrine of the Atonement (the first passage lamented by Gibbon), he honestly rejected it as a Socinian, but he likewise noted, cautiously, that, "We are not, however, to expect a sudden and effectual reformation in this or in any other capital article of the corruption of christianity." The Church acted more slowly than God. Just as it had taken a long time for the corrupt doctrine of the Trinity to be accepted, so "we must be content if the overthrow of it be gradual also." His favored metaphor did his thinking for him: "Great buildings do not often fall at once, but some apartments will still be thought habitable, after the rest are seen to be in ruins. It is the

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18 See Isaac Kramnick, "Eighteenth-century social science and radical social theory: the case of Joseph Priestley's scientific liberalism," *Journal of British Studies* 25 (1986): 1-30. For a collection of essays encompassing Priestley's polymathic activities, see Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (ed.), *Joseph Priestley: scientist, philosopher, and theologian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

19 William Hunter, *A Letter to Dr. Priestley, F.R.S., &c, In Answer to His Letter to the Right Hon. William Pitt* (London, 1787), 9. Hunter had formerly been a fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, and was an ornament of that university's orthodoxy.

same with great *systems of doctrine*, the parts of which have long gone together." Withstanding the accusations of his opponents that the loss of all traditional doctrines at once would result in "universal scepticism," Priestley, who later sought to refute Paine's *Age of Reason* in addition to the unbelief of revolutionary *philosophes*, preferred a gradual change to a sudden transformation. As with politics, so with theology, it was to be achieved by divine agency:

It hath pleased divine providence, therefore, to open the minds of men by easy degrees, and the detection of one falsehood prepares us for the detection of another, till, before we are aware of it, we find no trace left of the immense and seemingly well compacted system. Thus by degrees we can reconcile ourselves to abandon all parts, when we could never have thought of giving up the whole.<sup>20</sup>

It is curious, when considering this gradualist tone, that Priestley felt readier to alarm the civil magistrate than he did the clergy of the Church of England. Burke's primarily political response to the Unitarian challenge was, therefore, commensurate with Priestley's systematically anti-systematic, inherently political theology. It was the province of the historian, albeit a sceptic, to question both halves of Priestley's politico-theological enterprise; the politician, although a believer, was therefore right to focus on its directly political element and implications.

But this separation, as the layman James Boswell intuited, was, in many ways, a false one. His own deeply experiential appreciation of the doctrine of original sin was something he shared with Johnson, whose assurance of the doctrine of the Atonement Boswell cited authoritatively in his *Life of Johnson*: "The peculiar doctrine of Christianity is, that of an universal sacrifice, and perpetual propitiation. Other prophets only proclaimed the will and threatenings of GOD. CHRIST satisfied his justice." In a footnote on the same page, Boswell inferred a relationship between a Unitarian interpretation of humanity as being potentially perfect and visionary politics. Writing of Thomas Fyshe Palmer, a former fellow of Queen's College, Cambridge (then a hotbed of religious radicalism), who had moved to serve what Boswell termed "the sect

<sup>20</sup> Priestley, *History of Corruptions*, 1:275-76.

who called themselves *Unitarians*” in politically combusive Dundee, he wrote consecutively:

The Unitarian sect vainly presumes to comprehend and define the ALMIGHTY. Mr. Palmer having heated his mind with political speculations, became so much dissatisfied with our excellent Constitution, as to compose, publish, and circulate writings, which were found to be so seditious and dangerous, that upon being found guilty by a Jury, the Court of Justiciary in Scotland sentenced him to transportation . . . and he was conveyed to the settlement for convicts in New South Wales.

Boswell had little sympathy for those parliamentarians who made “a loud clamour against this sentence”; he would have had even less for those who sought to turn Palmer into a Unitarian martyr.<sup>21</sup> In this, he was again at one with Burke, who, writing to Henry Dundas on 30 September 1791 about a petition from the Dissenters of York, observed caustically and rhetorically that, “they publicly adopt Priestley and his Cause; They give him compliments of condolence and encouragement, and declare him a *Martyr*—a Martyr to what?”<sup>22</sup> Burke, in common with many of his contemporaries, was suspicious of the pseudo-martyrs of heterodoxy.

Johnson greatly preferred Burke to Gibbon; piety, however expressed, was always greater than inclinations to infidelity for the lexicographer. But infidelity could support religious establishment. As Gibbon put it, expressing his approval of Burke’s *Reflections* in a private letter, during which he ironically endorses the political doctrine of prescription:

I admire his eloquence, I approve his politics, I adore his chivalry, and I can even forgive his superstition. The primitive Church, which I have treated with some freedom, was itself at that time, an innovation, and *I* was attached to the old Pagan establishment.<sup>23</sup>

21 Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 1161 and note; Boswell thanked Burke for recommending the *Life of Johnson* to George III: Burke, *Correspondence*, 6:297–98.

22 Burke, *Correspondence*, 6:420–21.

23 J. E. Norton (ed.), *The Letters of Edward Gibbon* 3 vols (London, Cassell and Company Ltd, 1956), 3:216.

And it was not the first time that the two men had allied together against the perceived enemies of what Gibbon once called “our Dear Mamma the Church of England.” When the anti-dogmatic patrons of a number of incipient Unitarians at Cambridge called for relief from clerical subscription—largely in order to avoid directly-expressed commitment to believing and promulgating Trinitarian orthodoxy—Burke and Gibbon voted against their parliamentary petition in 1772, as did Fox (having been called from a heavy night’s gambling at Brooks’s).<sup>24</sup> The case made by the three politicians was essentially the same: a teaching Church could not afford to play fast and loose with doctrine, and those who directly profited from Subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles ought, therefore, to have continued to subscribe to them. Liberty of conscience could be pursued within those terms; but Unitarianism was not the same as Anglican dissidence, and Fox would part company with Burke and the now ex-politician Gibbon, on the Unitarian Petition in 1792. Surveying this from the perspective of an historian of opinion, Leslie Stephen, still the most percipient student of English eighteenth-century thought, was unsentimentally and practically with the likes of Gibbon and Burke, and not with Fox, as he declared of attempts by clergy at securing relaxation of Anglican subscription through an appeal to legislators: “the House of Commons sensibly refused to expose itself by venturing any theological innovations. A body more ludicrously incompetent could hardly have been invented.”<sup>25</sup> Burke would have recognized something of the spirit informing Stephen’s pregnant comment, as in his strictly constitutional observation in his speech that:

Common parties contend for the superiority in administration leaving the constitution as they found it. This is a question of the constitution. [R]eligion if only related to the individual, and was a question between God and the conscience, it would not be wise, nor in my opinion equitable, for human authority to step in. [B]ut when religion is embodied into faction, and

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24 *Letters of Edward Gibbon*, 1:305; B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: theological debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 45–80.

25 Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians* (3 vols., London: Duckworth and Co., 1900), 1:36.

factions have objects to pursue, it will, and must more or less become a question of power between them.<sup>26</sup>

This was at the root of Burke's strictly parliamentary intervention, as is equally clear from the peroration to his speech, adverting to what Priestley's anti-establishment sentiments entailed:

They say, they are well affected to the State, but mean only to destroy the Church. If this be the *utmost* of their meaning, you must first consider whether you wish your Church Establishment to be destroyed. If you do, you had much better do it now in Temper, in a grave, moderate, and parliamentary way.<sup>27</sup>

Burke spoke rhetorically, confident that the Commons would never concede such territory.

Stephen, the agnostic descendant of a family that had turned with many others to the consolations of Evangelicalism in the 1790s, was critical of Priestley as having been insufficiently a rationalist and too much a theologian, a nineteenth-century equivalent of the suspicions felt about the Unitarian by Gibbon rather more than those felt about him by Burke. In his semi-materialist manner, Stephen pithily identified Priestley, along with Richard Price, as the religious conscience of the manufacturing interest; his characterization remains, for all its arresting acidity, accurate:

But at present such men as Priestley and Price were only so far on the road to a thorough rationalism as to denounce the corruptions of Christianity, as they denounced corruptions in politics, without anticipating a revolutionary change in church and state. Priestley, for example, combined 'materialism' and 'determinism' with Christianity and a belief in miracles, and controverted Horsley upon one side and Paine on the other.<sup>28</sup>

What Stephen subtly admonished retrospectively contained elements of what Burke had feared prospectively; but Burke was not to know how little of a revolutionary Priestley would subsequently look, although he

<sup>26</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:496.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:504.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen, *English Utilitarians*, 1:69.

had readily inferred the rationalist tendencies of Unitarianism: Emerson would not have greatly surprised Burke, one suspects, even if Transcendentalism more broadly conceived might well have done. Observation made possible a perhaps paradoxical prophecy: “as their religion is in a continual fluctuation and is so by principle and in profession it is impossible for us to know what it will be—”<sup>29</sup>

Priestley knew exactly what he was doing, and the nature of the offence his activities and publications had incited; his was a truly radical engagement, no less than freeing the Church from what he thought of as the Platonizing corruptions of the Fathers who, he insisted, had replaced the Unitarianism of the immediately post-Apostolic Church with the distortions of the doctrine of the Trinity. Gibbon had made similar claims, but something like politico-theological prescription had made this the defining feature of Christianity, and the Church, both catholic and Anglican, had every right, therefore, to enforce doctrinal orthodoxy, especially from its clergy. Priestley was, to many of his contemporaries (and not least to Burke), that rare thing, a rational enthusiast, whose prescription for the effective demolition of the established Church of England—about which he was explicit in his *Letter to William Pitt* in 1787—was a serious threat to the stability of the state in turn. As Priestley recklessly (or perhaps courageously) expressed his expectations:

What we are aiming at is to enlighten the minds of the people, and to show them that in the church establishment of this country there is much of error and superstition, and if we can convince them that it is so (and of this I have no doubt) in proper time they will take it down of themselves, and either erect something better in its place, or dispose of the materials (if they should think them of any value) for some other purpose; and who will then be aggrieved or complain? After this there may be no *bishops*, as the term is now understood, but there may be christian ministers, the people may well be instructed in their duty, they may live as happily here, and make a good provision for their happiness hereafter.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:495.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Priestley, *A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt* (London, 1787), 18. Priestley favored the metaphor of the demolition and rebuilding of existing structures.

The rationality of Priestley's enthusiasm was that of an intellectual who rarely if ever saw, let alone appreciated, the raw emotional power of religion, and hence the strength of Hunter's rebuke of "that man, who braves Heaven with his blasphemy, and would cruelly rob the sincere and humble believer, of his best hope, comfort, and expectation."<sup>31</sup> Priestley might have wished to abandon traditional teaching on the Atonement, but in this he was charging against the prevailing religious atmosphere of the age. What was central to Johnson's experiential Christianity became even more so as the eighteenth turned into the nineteenth century. Unitarianism would become an influential and intellectually respectable denomination in nineteenth-century Britain, but its cultural presence was to prove more marked in the America to which Priestley made his way immediately after using his standing in revolutionary France to make systematic "attempts to enforce the evidence of natural and revealed religion."<sup>32</sup> For Burke such attempts would mark Priestley out even more as a rational enthusiast; the French already had their long-established and highly successful religion, Gallicanism: why attempt to replace it with an innovation almost as false as the atheism he discerned beneath revolutionary deism?

As with Gibbon, so with Burke: prescription had, for both men, effectively authorized the traditional teachings of the Church, founded on the Trinity, as orthodoxy. Novelty in religion was at least as troubling to Burke as it was in politics, and as with Boswell, so with Burke, Unitarianism married both elements together in an unholy alliance of non-Church and non-state. Warburton would have been seriously alarmed by such a monstrously paradoxical union. And, for Burke, prescription as process was not the same as history as a rationalizing activity; Priestley could work as hard as he liked to recover the pristine Unitarianism alleged by him to be the true teaching of the primitive Church, but this could not even remotely begin to undo, or even mitigate, the Trinitarian orthodoxy that had prevailed in the Church. After all, Priestley and Burke held different, and distinctive, views of Catholicism. For the ultra-Protestant Priestley, it was the source of all corruption, from the false doctrine of the Trinity to monasticism; whereas for Burke the

<sup>31</sup> Hunter, *A Letter to Dr. Priestley*, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Priestley, *Memoirs*, 125–27



complicated confessional politics of the 1790s made it clear to him that Christians should ally themselves against a common foe, revolutionary atheism. Priestley called for further reformation, demanding in his letter to Pitt, that the legislation of William III against public disputation on the Trinity be repealed, as he insisted that he felt it his duty “to attempt the utter overthrow of this doctrine, which I conceive to be a fundamental corruption of the religion which I profess, the greatest of those that mark the church of Rome, and which was left untouched at the reformation.”<sup>33</sup> Burke, a Whig revisionist with familial exposure to Catholicism as a lived faith, had gone so far as to repudiate in the *Reflections* the settlement of Church lands at the Reformation, a theme to which he was powerfully to return in *A Letter to a Noble Lord*.

Unitarianism was a revolutionary creed, advancing well beyond the dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion. For Burke, it both implicitly and explicitly combined false religion with aberrant politics, and in this diagnosis he was at one with a great many of his contemporaries, from the London Churchman William Hunter to the pious layman Boswell. He was also united with Gibbon, the religiously musical infidel. This was, in every sense, an established position, to which Burke in his speech to the Commons against the Unitarian petition gave eloquent and deeply considered voice.

It was not, however, an uncontested position, and Fox for one spoke against it, as did much of the emancipatory rhetoric that characterized Unitarianism in the 1790s and 1800s; it is to be remembered that William Hazlitt had trained for the Unitarian ministry. Many of the Friends of Peace in the 1790s were Unitarians, and were represented among those members of the London Corresponding Society, with whose tribulations E. P. Thompson chose to begin *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963, were Unitarians openly dedicated to planting the Liberty Tree in England.<sup>34</sup> In a startling pre-echo of a celebrated passage in the *Reflections*, an anonymous critic of William Pitt wrote in a tract entitled *Caricature Anticipations and Enlargements*, in 1787:

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33 Priestley, *A Letter to William Pitt*, 20.

34 E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 19–203.

How far establishing opinions for others, for those yet unborn, with exclusive privilege to those who embrace them, is agreeable to natural rights, to personal religion, and original Christianity, to every just idea of philosophy and science, of moral and religious improvements, as well as of a generous, liberal legislation, none of our high church prelates, doctors, or parliamentary haranguers, have been able to say with any sort of satisfactory evidence.<sup>35</sup>

This is the antithesis of what Burke was to voice five years later. Whether that constitutes progress is not easy to judge without distorting the biases of Whiggism by recourse to those of Radicalism, but the “Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief” was the work of someone rather above the category of a parliamentary haranguer, and indeed of the necessarily interested enterprise of any High Church prelate (and Horsley denied, in a charge to his clergy as Bishop of St David’s, the imputation that he was a High Churchman).<sup>36</sup>

What is most powerful in Burke’s speech, *contra* this anonymous critic of his ally Pitt, is his insistence that Church and State cannot be separated, and hence that an alliance between the two is “an idle and fanciful Speculation,” and the consequent remark that the two halves of the Church, both clerical and lay, are but “*integrant parts of the same whole*,” from which it follows that “the Laity is as much an *essential integrant part*, and has as much its *duties and privileges*, as the Clerical Member.”<sup>37</sup> Burke had effectively questioned the image of the Church promoted by Priestley and his allies, as well as by Warburton in the 1730s, and in so doing had emphasized his own right to play his role in its defence. There can be little doubt that Priestley is one of those Burke accuses of being “metaphysically mad” at the opening of his speech.<sup>38</sup> Tyranny and conceptual innovation, no matter how justified, were closely allied for Burke; hence the power of the nucleus of his principled refusal to grant relief to the Unitarians:

35 Anon., *Caricature Anticipations and Enlargements* (London, 1787), 47–8.

36 Samuel Horsley, *The Charge of Samuel, Lord Bishop of St David’s, to the Clergy of his Diocese, delivered at his primary visitation, in the year 1790* (London, 1790), 33–6.

37 Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:490–91.

38 *Ibid.*, 4:489.

No conscientious man would willingly establish what he knew to be false and mischievous in religion or in any thing else. No wise man on the contrary would tyrannically set up his own sense so as to reprobate that of the great prevailing body of the Community, and pay no regard to the established opinions and prejudices of mankind, or refuse to them the means of securing a religious instruction suitable to these prejudices.<sup>39</sup>

In this short speech is the embryo of the strongest lay defence made of the Church in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, Coleridge's *On the Constitution of Church and State, according to the proper idea of each*. And Coleridge was a renegade from Unitarianism.<sup>40</sup>

Coleridge's experience of the 1790s and 1800s had more than reconciled him to something like a Burkean perspective; his was not the rhetoric of Counter-Enlightenment, however understood, but rather a patient exposition of the tough but tersely conciliatory formula distilled by Burke in his 1792 speech:

A reasonable, prudent, provident and moderate coercion may be a means of preventing acts of extreme ferocity and rigour; for by propagating excessive and extravagant doctrines, such extravagant disorders take place, as require the most perilous and fierce corrections to oppose them.<sup>41</sup>

Where Priestley consciously spoke in the accents of the Radical, Burke evoked those of the Magisterial, Reformation. Where Gibbon regretted the consequences of a Reformation in England that resulted in the open espousal of heterodoxy as presumed truth by Priestley, Burke repudiated a presumption that would abolish the established religion of the country. What Gibbon sardonically characterized as his own attachment to

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39 Ibid., 4:490.

40 On Coleridge, see Basil Willey, *Nineteenth-Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), 1–49; Graham Hough, “Coleridge and the Victorians” in Hugh Sykes Davies and George Watson eds., *The English Mind: studies in the English moralists presented to Basil Willey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 175–92; Pamela Edwards, *The Statesman's Manual: history, nature and law in the political thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

41 Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:490.

the religion of ancient Rome had been undermined by the rise of the new faith of Christianity, which he was prepared to defend against the Unitarian novelties of Priestley and his acolytes. Both of these Gibbonian resonances can be heard in the fundamentals of Burke's declared opposition to Unitarian radicalism, as he systematically laid out the duties of a Christian statesman:

It is principally his Duty to prevent the *Abuses* which grow out of every *strong and efficient principle* that actuates the human Mind. As religion is one of the *Bonds of Society*, he ought not to suffer to be made the *pretext* of destroying its peace, order, liberty and its security.

Above all, he ought strictly to look to it, when men begin to form new *combinations*, to be distinguished by *new Names*, and above all when they mingle a *political System* with their religious opinions, true or false, plausible or implausible, difference of old and new.

The establishment of a new faith or a new mode of government is generally attended with more fury and violence than happens in an old one.

New factions in politicks are more dangerous to the peace and order of society than the old—first because the old by long continuance abate of their fervour—whereas the new which seeks.<sup>42</sup>

Johnson, Boswell, Gibbon, and Horsley would have agreed with every word spoken by Burke against the claims of the Unitarians. Priestley, however, repudiated its first supposition, namely that Trinitarian doctrine was the orthodoxy of the pre-Nicaean Church, but his revisionist mode of ecclesiastical history was not to the taste of his contemporaries, be they sceptical, such as Gibbon, or believing, in the style of Horsley.

Jonathan Israel has recently conceded that the religion championed by Rational Dissent, and particularly by Priestley, was closely linked with what he calls the Radical Enlightenment; Priestley was almost, but

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42 Ibid., 4:492.

not quite, as revolutionary as was Spinoza.<sup>43</sup> By contrast, Burke, Gibbon, and Horsley clearly belong to Israel's capacious category of conservative Enlightenment, just as they do to the clerical Enlightenment adumbrated in the writings of J. G. A. Pocock; and Pocock, an eloquent student of Burke's conception of prescription, would recognize the true nature of Burke's singling out of Unitarianism as lying outside the bounds of toleration as the otherwise religiously tolerant Burke noted that, "With the Catholicks, with the Presbyterians, with the independents, with the Anabaptists with the Quakers, I have nothing at all to do. They are in *possession, a great title* in all human affairs."<sup>44</sup> As the parliamentary *Diary* recorded Burke's speech, he chose not to meet Priestley's challenge regarding the original faith of the early Christians, and thereby neatly sidestepped the scholarship not only of the pious Horsley, but also of the infidel Gibbon, choosing instead to appeal to the prescription accorded by altogether less contentious, and rather more recent, history:

[T]here was to be found [he observed] throughout the works of the Petitioners a charge of idolatry against the established Christian religion, the progress of which they express their determination to oppose, as if the established religion of the country was an innovation, and not as was the fact, that their religion was an innovation of the religion established in this country, for more than six hundred years, and against the religion of almost the whole globe.<sup>45</sup>

History, along with the imperatives of theology, or at least the consolations of Christianity, was such as to make any concession to innovating

43 Jonathan Israel, "Spinoza and the Radical Religious Enlightenment" in Sarah Mortimer and John Robertson eds., *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy 1600–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 181–203.

44 Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:493; J. G. A. Pocock, "Burke and the Ancient Constitution: a problem in the history of ideas" in *Politics, Language, and Time: essays on political thought and history* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1971), 202–32, and "Josiah Tucker on Burke, Locke, and Price: a study in the varieties of eighteenth-century conservatism," "The political economy of Burke's analysis of the French Revolution," and "The varieties of Whiggism from Exclusion to Reform: a history of ideology and discourse," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: essays on political thought and history, chiefly in the eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 1985), 157–91, 193–212, 215–310 (especially at 256–64, 276–310).

45 Burke, *Writings and Speeches*, 4:507.

Unitarianism impossible for Burke. He concluded his speech both in terms of a civil religion that would have contented Gibbon, and of a revealed faith that would have consoled Johnson, Boswell, and Horsley, (replete with a suitably gentlemanly quotation from Tacitus that would have consoled Gibbon):

But if you think otherwise, and that you think it to be an invaluable blessing, a way fully sufficient to nourish a manly rational solid and at the same time humble piety. If you find it well fitted to the frame and pattern of your civil constitution—If you find it a barrier against Fanaticism, infidelity, atheism. If you find that it furnishes the balm to the human mind in the afflictions and distresses of the world—consolation in sickness pain poverty, and Death. If it dignifies with an hope of immortality, leaves enquiry free whilst it preserves an authority to teach where authority only can teach, communia altaria aequae patriam, fovete [”love, honour and cherish our common altars and our nation”].<sup>46</sup>

In this speech, the principles and convictions that informed the English experience of a clerical, conservative Enlightenment, complete with a residuum of the Magisterial Reformation, were carried against a religiously-inflected variant of Radical Enlightenment, replete with vestiges of the Radical Reformation.

What Peter Marshall’s editorial labour allows one to conclude, alongside Priestley’s own considered rebuke of Burke’s *Reflections* (his *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, published, in common with all his major writings, at Birmingham, in 1791), is that the Burke-Priestley controversy is at least as significant for late-eighteenth-century intellectual history as is the much more thoroughly explored Burke-Paine controversy. Burke himself did not always distinguish between the doctrines of his two most vociferous opponents, as was made clear in his correspondence with the Earl Fitzwilliam.<sup>47</sup> For Priestley, however,

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 4:504.

<sup>47</sup> Burke warned on 5 June 1791 that some fellow Whigs were in danger of submitting to “the Principles of Paine, Priestley, Price” and others, seeing them “magnified and extolled, and in a sort of obscure and undefined manner to be adopted as the Creed

his own attempt at a refutation of Paine was as important to him as was that made by Richard Watson, bishop of Llandaff, a divine often accused of Socinianism by High Churchmen allied to Bishop Horsley.<sup>48</sup> And for all his fears of an established clergy, Priestley was very confident of the rights accruing to him as a minister of religion. Just as Paine had no training in Biblical criticism, rendering his *Age of Reason* invalid in Priestley's estimation, so Burke was quietly excoriated for writing as "a *lay divine*." Accordingly, Priestley repudiated "[y]our idea of the primitive church, which is altogether founded on mistake."<sup>49</sup>

Priestley, who had effectively taken on both the great learning of Gibbon and the altogether more polemical, frequently shallow scholarship of Horsley, was not remotely afraid of Burke, of whom he observed with a calculated slight that, "it is very evident that, whatsoever has been the compass of your studies, *ecclesiastical history* has not been within its range; and facts, notorious facts, such as lye upon the very face & surface of it, unfortunately overturn your whole system."<sup>50</sup> The admonitory tones of a former instructor at a Dissenting Academy were never far away, and he seems also to have intuited Gibbon's affinity with Burke, declaring of his opposition to alleged innovation that, "On this principle, Sir, had you been a Pagan at the time of the promulgation of christianity, you would have continued one. You would also have opposed the reformation."<sup>51</sup> Burke's central historical claim was turned against him, as Priestley insisted that:

Every article, therefore, within the compass of the civil establishment of Christianity, is evidently an *innovation*; and as systems are reformed by reverting to their first principles, Christianity can never be restored to its primitive state, and

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of the Party." He wrote again, on 18 September, insisting that "nothing can make me a disciple of Paine or Priestley": *Correspondence*, 6:273, 402.

48 Priestley, *Memoirs*, 127. Richard Watson, *An Apology for the Bible, in a series of letters, addressed to Thomas Paine* (London, 1796).

49 Priestley, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, Occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France, &c.* (Birmingham, 1791), 88, 78.

50 *Ibid.*, 75.

51 *Ibid.*, 94.

recover its real dignity and efficacy, till it be disengaged from all connexion with civil power.<sup>52</sup>

He also took the opportunity to revert to Burke's Irish origins as he subtly asked where the principle of established religion left the Catholics in Ireland, and adverted to the illegitimacy of tithes as having precipitated the rebellious activities of the Whiteboys.<sup>53</sup>

Priestley was a canny opponent; the doctrine of prescription was not necessarily as applicable to the Church as Burke had evidently hoped and presumed, and his rootedness in Irish Catholicism made him, for someone of Priestley's cast of mind, a deeply compromised defender of the established Church. Priestley's theologically-inflected critique of Burke made him, albeit temporarily, one of his most radically effective opponents in the 1790s. But, as Burke knew, Priestley was politically naïve, and the politician savored the religious paradox of his affiliation with revolutionary France in a letter he addressed, on 18 June 1792, to the Chevalier and Abbé de la Bintanaye, exactly the sort of French nobleman and divine whom the Unitarian despised, and whom Burke revered:

You see how you are indemnified for all your losses of every kind by the reception of the Son of Dr Priestley, who is baptised into the constitution of France under the Godfatherhood of Mr Francais of Nantz. You see, that I act my part in this great Scene, and appear as the Aristophanes to the Birmingham Socrates, and am supposed to prepare the minds of the people to persecute him by my Talents for ridicule. So, you see, we go down, with different merits, to Posterity hand in hand. Well! I must console myself in your partiality for what I suffer from Mr Francais of Nantz, who, thank God can do me no great harm as I am not one of his Countrymen nor a Clergyman of the Gallican Church.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 58, 86.

<sup>54</sup> Burke, *Correspondence*, 7:152–53. On 5 October 1792, four months after delivering the “Speech on Unitarians’ Petition for Relief,” Burke wrote to Earl Fitzwilliam regarding Priestley’s presence as he was granted citizenship of France: “Your Lordship sees with what audacity Priestley comes out, avows himself a Citizen of that Republic of Robbers and assassins, calls his election into the Gang an honour to



Francais's Athenian parallel suited Burke's apologetic purposes; for all Priestley's claims to theological eminence, Burke did not consider him, in any way, a Christian; naturally, therefore, he could never be a Christian martyr, and it was left to a French sceptic to identify Priestley as a heathen hero of deism.

Six months later, in a January 30th sermon preached before the House of Lords, Samuel Horsley affirmed even more strongly how an Anglican-Gallican clerical affinity had grown in the wake of the execution of Louis XVI and the abolition of Christianity in revolutionary France, declaring:

None, indeed, at this season, are more entitled to our offices of love, than those with whom the difference is so wide, in points of doctrine, discipline and external rites; those venerable exiles, the Prelates and Clergy of the fallen Church of France, endeared to us by the edifying example they exhibit of patient suffering for conscience sake.

By contrast, he condemned those who celebrated the executions of Charles I and Louis XVI, lamenting that "with such persons it is meet that we abridge all brotherhood. They have no claim upon our brotherly affection."<sup>55</sup> From the perspective of Burke, Gibbon, and Horsley, Priestley was revealed as a terrible simplifier, both theologically and politically; the politics of the 1790s could not be understood by a mere rationalist, religious or otherwise.

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him, expresses neither shame nor regret at the proceedings, which hitherto have been carried on, or the further that are threatned – publicly wishes them all success –" He also associated Priestley directly with "the worthy Mr Thomas Paine my good friend." *Correspondence*, 7:229.

55 Samuel Horsley, *A Sermon Preached before the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, in the Abbey Church of St. Peter, Westminster, on Wednesday, January 30, 1793: being the anniversary of the martyrdom of King Charles the First* (London, 1793), 25. On Horsley considered as a Burke-allied preacher in the 1790s, see Robert Hole, *Pulpits, politics and public order in England, 1760–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 160–73.

## *A Footnote to 24 June 2016*



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It was the greatest possible privilege to be able to attend the colloquium to mark the publication of Volume IV of the Oxford University Press edition of *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*. I am most grateful to Richard Bourke for organising the occasion and for inviting such stimulating speakers. My warmest thanks are due to them for so generously giving us their time and the fruits of their learning. For those concerned with the study of Burke, it was most encouraging to see so large a gathering, drawn not just from academics, but also from private scholars, who obviously have a lively and highly informed interest in Burke.

With Volume IV, assuming that the production of a cumulative index for the whole series will prove to be impractical, as sadly seems likely to be the case, this edition of *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* is now complete in nine volumes. It has been a long time in completion, the first two volumes appearing in 1981. This length of time inevitably means that mortality has taken its toll of the people who would otherwise have been able to join us on 24 June and to have received the credit and thanks which are so much their due. Had Donald C. Bryant lived a little longer, this occasion would have taken place many years ago and he would have been the sole recipient of our congratulations.

His great knowledge of Burke and of his writings, both published and in manuscript, together with his specialist expertise in Burke's rhetorical strategies made him an obvious choice to edit this volume. His work on it was very far advanced at the time of his death in 1987 and, when I took on the editorship after a lapse of many years, I was immeasurably helped by having access to the texts and annotation that he had prepared. For the relatively small number of items in Volume IV published in Burke's lifetime, I have another great debt to someone no longer alive. I inherited the texts prepared with the unrivalled skill of the great bibliographer Professor William B. Todd, who died in 2011.

The untimely death last year of Paul Langford of course means that the person who most richly deserves all the accolades that anyone might feel inclined to bestow on the edition is not here to receive them. Thomas Copeland would of course have been the natural editor of the *Writings and Speeches*, but when, in the early 1970s, it became clear that he did not, for very understandable reasons, feel that he could shoulder another mammoth editorial task, after so many years devoted to bringing out the magnificent edition of Burke's *Correspondence*, Paul Langford gallantly took on that task. Fortunately for us all, Tom Copeland was able and willing to play a vital formative role in the planning of the *Writings and Speeches*. Tom's input was very marked in setting the template for the edition. Its characteristic features, such as the hard decision to have a mixture of chronological and thematic volumes and to have a full appendix of sources for all occasions when Burke is known to have spoken publicly, were established under Tom's guidance. The *Writings and Speeches* to a large extent followed the model set by the *Correspondence*, although it was done under very different conditions. Ours was very much a hand-to-mouth project by comparison with the *Correspondence*. Editors of volumes of the *Writings and Speeches* did not have the support of the "factory" at Sheffield, where their hands would be guided by Tom Copeland, John Woods and Valerie Jobling. Although Paul Langford was unfailingly helpful to his editors and read all their drafts with a very well informed critical eye, he could not be what Tom in effect was, that is a full time General Editor. There was no one to replace Valerie Jobling, the nominal secretary to the *Correspondence*, but in reality something akin to being another General Editor. She had migrated

to Oxford to work on the history of Oxford University. We had to get on as best we could with our own resources.

From the outset, while drawing on the experience of the *Correspondence*, Paul put his own stamp on the edition. In my view, his greatest contribution was his sense of how the huge deposits of material in the Burke archive at Sheffield and Northampton could, with careful and creative editing, be used, usually in combination with newspaper reports, to reconstruct texts of speeches. Under Paul's direction, lists were made of material at Sheffield and Northampton, which were the invaluable foundations for the work of the other editors. Inevitably, only a limited proportion of known Burke speeches or previously unpublished writings could be given in full in the volumes. Even so, they provide a much more extensive and authoritative body of Burke material than has been available to scholars in the past, who mostly had to supplement the innumerable reprints of the original edition of Burke's *Works* from Cobbett's *Parliamentary History*. Paul Langford's own volume, Volume II, *Party, Parliament and the American Crisis, 1766–1774*, revealed how much new material could be put into the public scholarly domain. New material is especially abundant and significant in Volume III, *The American War 1774–1780*. This was the fruit of the late John Woods's years of absorption in the Burke MSS and his matchless skill in deciphering and attributing them. His death at an early age, before that volume was completed, is yet another example of the cruel vagaries of mortality to which the project has been so prone.

Even though there is a strong temptation, to which I personally have been by no means immune, to give readers a steer in introductions, it should not be the business of the editors of a body of texts to seek to impose their own interpretations on it. Introductions, often all that reviewers are able to read, can be a distraction. The editor's job is to provide material for others to interpret. It is on the extent to which it has given scholars greater access than they had before enjoyed to the astonishingly large corpus of Burke's writings and speeches that this edition must be judged. There is of course disagreement about some known texts that were omitted from this edition, particularly from the first one; new candidates for inclusion have been discovered since we began our work; and, it is profoundly to be hoped, the process of dis-

covering new texts will go on far into the future. A new Burke has not come out of this edition. All we can claim to have done is to have provided an interim survey of the great richness of Burke to the best of our judgement and abilities. We have not established an immutable canon. We will in time be superseded by new editions of Burke.

## *Book Reviews*



Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire*.  
University of California Press, 2016.

Daniel O'Neill's purpose in this book is to overturn the contention that Burke was, in any sense, anti-imperialist or anti-colonialist, as argued by critics and scholars with whom he engages critically in his footnotes.

O'Neill contends that Burke utilized a double-headed strategy in his discussion of the British Empire and its "periphery." One facet was "Ornamentalism," by which he strategized to maintain America, India, and Ireland within the British orbit by the deployment of similarities and resemblances with England and Europe in terms of religious and political hierarchies and landed property. The other was the (academically) ubiquitous "Orientalism," used to emphasize difference and "savagery," as suggested with the Native Americans and African slaves, to argue that only the civilizing mission of the Americans and Europeans could result in the gradual liberation of such people by way of their useful employment as obedient subjects within the colonial orbit of the British Empire. Arguments to the contrary are treated as completely misguided or erroneous and even intentionally misleading, for Burke is understood as a consistent imperialist apologist for empire, and even his deceptive "humane" and anti-imperialist arguments are deemed, rightly understood, to have been a defense of empire, embodying, as such, an ideology totally opposed to the liberal democracy initiated by the French Revolution which culminated in the anti-imperialist strug-

gles against empire in Africa and other parts of the world in the past century and a half. Finally, in O'Neill's opinion, Burke's strategies of both Ornamentalism and Orientalism are part and parcel of the "Conservative Logic of Empire" which the British continued to use throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. The consequence is that Burke must be reevaluated and understood as an imperialist apologist inimical to the basic human rights that, in O'Neill's opinion, we enjoy in a more enlightened era.

Of course, to argue that Burke wanted to keep America, India, and Ireland within the British Empire is tantamount to flaying a dead horse; but to make Burke a benighted reactionary, even when he was intervening in behalf of exploited peoples, and to contend that this is demonstrable by citing what he himself said, requires frequent quoting out of context. Consider, for example, O'Neill's principal incriminatory text, which comes from Burke's *Speech on the Declaratory Resolution* (3 February 1766). This evidence exists primarily in notes and drafts, although other slighter accounts survive, as Paul Langford notes in his edited volume of *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (2:45)—the volume O'Neill quotes as his primary source for Burke's imperial impulse for the subjugation of the colonies (48). But O'Neill's representations of Burke and the act (43, 49–50, 55, 133, 140), starting with the February 1766 speech, are problematic in omitting the parts where Burke makes his well-known distinction between theory and practice, arguing that the authority of Parliament was a declaration in principle that was often superseded in reality by the practical concern of not antagonizing the colonies in order to keep them within the British orbit. For Burke, genuine concern for the rights of the Americans was at one with their rights as Englishmen; but O'Neill's point, depending upon the familiar clause from the act, "in all cases whatsoever," is that Burke was an imperialist apologist for the total power and control of Great Britain in the thirteen colonies. With this binary ideological method of interpretation—that either Burke was progressively anti-imperialist/anti-colonist or he was not—O'Neill can make Burke to be, ipso facto, an imperialist apologist by ignoring the very contexts and backgrounds that he insists are so important for understanding Burke's thought. So armed in all his

references to the Declaratory Act, he ignores the principle/practical distinction by which Burke, in effect, privileged the latter over the former.

It is not as though O'Neill is unaware of Burke's distinction between theory and practice, since he refers to it in another context. He is also aware that the Rockingham Whigs were trying to mediate a delicate middle between the extremes of those who promoted total Parliamentary power and those who wanted total independence for the Americans, and that they reified this in their rejection of the Stamp Act in 1766, while keeping the Declaratory Act as an abstract principle. He highlights the Declaratory Act, however, (his major indictment of Burke in his American writings), in a way that makes his subject an imperialist "in-all-cases whatsoever."

This is also seen in O'Neill's treatment of other speeches and letters where Burke asserts parliamentary authority. The contextual, oppositional corollary always remains out of sight in a way that suggests Burke was, in his heart, an imperialist apologist. Having his ideological cake and eating it too, O'Neill can dogmatically declare that he has demonstrated and "put to rest the long-standing historical canard that Edmund Burke favored American independence" and has thus destroyed "the persistent popular myth that Burke was in favor of American independence" (28, 63). Another strawman is dead and down: no respectable scholar or critic has ever argued that Burke favored American independence, and O'Neill's failure to cite anyone in his book who supposedly does or did underscores that the "canard" and "persistent popular myth" exists nowhere but in his monogram—unless "canard" and "popular" are somehow intended to refer to some kind of hypothesized general reader who suffers this delusion but who reads neither Burke nor O'Neill.

Similarly, in dealing with Burke and India O'Neill's case is that Burke employed an Ornamental perspective and that, although he conveniently did not criticize Robert Clive, Burke's real charge against Warren Hastings and the British East India Company was that they destroyed a hierarchic structure very much like the one in England and Europe. Hence, Burke was only concerned with the Hindu and Muslim aristocrats and the destruction of their civilizations. In this reading, Burke had no concern whatsoever for the common people, and since O'Neill cannot make the "racist" argument, it must be argued that Burke only cared for the



beloved Hindu and Muslim aristocrats because he could connect them with the only class that counted in his reactionary ideology.

O'Neill ignores the fact that, if he were really a British-Empire apologist, Burke would have supported the empire in destroying the Hindu and Muslim hierarchy and, with it, any opposition to the British in India. His serviceable escape hatch is that this was part and parcel of Burke's "Conservative Logic," in that he wanted to make the empire in India run more smoothly by modifying and improving the Company's imperial project so that it could operate more efficiently. Thus, he can also ignore Burke's feeling that the destruction of an aristocratic hierarchy often entailed the suffering or destruction of its people, dismissing the moving private letter to Mary Palmer in 1786 in which Burke refers to "a set of people, who have none of your Lilies and Roses in their faces, but who are the images of the great Pattern as well as you and I." Burke continues, "I know what I am doing; whether the white people like it or not." Since the effect here is to erase racial distinctions, O'Neill insists that these sentences have been celebrated erroneously, and that Burke is really referring to only those Indian aristocrats. It follows that all those implicit brown faces must be exclusively the Muslim and Hindu privileged, and that the inclusive allusion to Genesis 1:27, "created in the image and reflecting the pattern of God," refers rather more narrowly to the Muslim and Hindu elite. Since the enemy must be demonized *in toto*, O'Neill cannot even acknowledge the "progressive" racial inclusiveness (or rather the erasure of race) of Burke's heart-felt sentiment but must turn it into an exclusive social-political privileging of Indian aristocrats over the common people.

Additionally, since O'Neill is operating within a restrictive either-or binary, he fails to consider why Burke did not resort to the supposedly ubiquitous British "Orientalism" in India except that class, rank, and hierarchy explain everything or that, in Burke's representation, it is actually Warren Hastings and the East India Company that become the "Other." Similarly, Burke's support and defense of Muslims in India is dismissed (because he was only interested in the aristocratic Muslims), so the extraordinary fact that the traditional Islamic enemy of Western civilization was not "Orientalized" but defended cannot even materialize as a problem or contradiction to be explained within O'Neill's con-

ceptual grid. Because Burke wanted India within the empire, then it follows, in O'Neill's reading, that any kind of deceptive human rights concerns must be understood only in context of an ideology that either "Orientalizes" those he criticizes (Native Americans, the revolutionaries in Saint-Domingue) or Ornamentalizes those he supports only as they exist to be incorporated within the empire. Again, he categorically denies any presumed sympathy or support (African slaves) unless it is in context of superior, imperialist "civilizing" forces that help turn "savages" into compliant subjects for their respective empires. The Burkean human dimension is always, for O'Neill, a covert ideological distraction.

The chapter on Ireland contains more of the same. After conceding that "Edmund Burke was Irish" (124), he states that Burke's supposed sympathy with the Irish Catholics against the Protestant Ascendancy was a ploy to keep Ireland within the empire, and, as was also the case with India, that his real motivation was to make a deceptive kinder, gentler British Imperialism incorporate Catholics into the imperialist machinery. But this changed with the threat from the French Revolution. Add to the mix Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen seeking independence from Great Britain and choosing "the side of democracy," they constituted an anti-imperialist threat to the empire with the result that Burke supported legislation for Catholic relief and denigrated the Protestant Ascendancy which was, Burke believed, driving Catholics into Jacobin arms. Since the Ascendancy failed to see this threat and therefore failed to incorporate their Catholic brethren into the Ornamentalist Empire, Burke supported the suppression of popular (French) Revolutionary forces inside Ireland and, in doing this, consistently acted as he always had when the "periphery" threatened England's hegemony. The conclusion, then, is that Burke had no real feeling or concern for the oppressed Catholics of Ireland. Yet Burke, far from operating in a vacuum, was earnestly dealing with the existential reality of an empire that, for better or worse, could affect human lives—something that matters less for O'Neill than a Manichaean narrative in which Burke is always aligned with the powers of darkness.

O'Neill repetitively pushes a conspicuous half-truth (Burke upheld the British Empire) but then strips him of any genuine human feeling or concern for those who were exploited, oppressed, or marginalized unless

they were the elite. Since his thesis necessarily confines Burke within the postcolonial binary, this false dilemma is baked into a preconceived pudding of selective proof. It is both convenient and conventional to place Burke in a postcolonial box where he must be either completely anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, or a self-serving apologist for an “Evil Empire” with nothing in between. The result is a series of assumptions that beg redounding questions by way of an academic Occidentalism in which Burke is perpetually the demonized “Other.”

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Michael Brown, *The Irish Enlightenment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Readers of *Studies in Burke and His Time* will welcome Michael Brown's *The Irish Enlightenment*. It substantially enriches our understanding of the intellectual landscape of Burke's native land in his own day, and offers what Brown, who is Chair of Irish, Scottish, and Enlightenment History at the University of Aberdeen, suggests is a corrective to the stereotype of Ireland as Great Britain's proverbially poorer cultural and intellectual cousin in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In this sweeping over six hundred-page book (including 150 pages of footnotes) Brown places his investigation within the contours and configuration of the English and Scottish Enlightenments, which, alongside their French counterpart, form the central panels of the tapestry often called the Enlightenment Project. The book forms part of a trend of research that devotes fresh attention to regional, national, or, as Brown suggests, "peripheral" variations of the Enlightenment. These variations reflect deep debts to the legacies of the French, Scots, and English, but highlight distinctive local characteristics of, or engagement with, Enlightenment thought that historians believe have either been missed or poorly delineated.

Brown defines the Irish Enlightenment as the period between the War of the Two Kings (James II and William III, 1688–1691) and the 1790s. He outlines the book's purposes as twofold: to situate a uniquely Irish strand in the Enlightenment Project; and, to place the country's intellectual identity firmly "within the broader context of British, Euro-

pean, and Atlantic history.” In introducing readers to an astonishing amount of new source material, Brown makes a persuasive case that, as was true in cities like eighteenth-century Edinburgh or Glasgow, the “middling ranks” of commercial society in Irish cities such as Dublin immersed themselves in efforts of improvement and progress. How deeply did Enlightenment priorities ultimately permeate Irish society? How conclusively did Enlightenment ideas affect civic and social arrangements? These questions lie at the heart of Brown’s study.

*Undoing Stereotypes and the Challenge of Sectarianism*

Brown lays an immediate foundation to counter the received historical treatment of Ireland as a colonial backwater riven by religious, social and political divisions by proposing that Irish thinkers were motivated to foster constructive engagement with the wider Enlightenment, premised on the core humanist idea that “man, not God, is the starting point of understanding.” In this they followed, among others, David Hume (who ironically tended to general disparagement of things Irish), Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and William Robertson in looking to “humanist principles” to explore human nature and to define ideas of how best to improve society.

Prominent Irish philosophers, writers, scholars, church ministers and civil servants such as John Toland, Jonathan Swift, George Berkeley, Edmund Burke, Maria Edgeworth, and rather uniquely, Francis Hutcheson (to whom the Scottish Enlightenment may perhaps lay the stronger claim given his long tenure as Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow), explored human nature, conditions of progress, the moral sense, aesthetics, theories of beauty, taste, manners and civility. Like their Scots and English counterparts, they sought to define ways in which Enlightenment ideals might be applied to daily life, ultimately to foster what Brown suggests was civility and a commitment to toleration. The promotion of toleration, Brown continues, was perhaps the most important priority to overcome the corrosive effects of religious, social, and political sectarianism. Brown models the structure of the book on these three categories.

Brown opens in Part I by exploring “The Religious Enlightenment, 1688–ca. 1730,” to examine what he calls “The Presbyterian Enlightenment and the Nature of Man”; “The Anglican Enlightenment and the Nature of God”; and “The Catholic Enlightenment and the Nature of Law.” He charts the course of how the Presbyterian and Anglican churches essentially sought to shift Ireland’s deeply ingrained religious (read Catholic) identity and moral structures to accommodate Enlightenment preferences for rationalism, empiricism, autonomy of mind and spirit, and, by extension, democracy over autocracy. In a slightly less nuanced way than one might anticipate, Brown details selective engagements by some Catholic priests and political leaders with Enlightenment priorities. He ultimately argues that, particularly after the defeat of the Catholic Jacobite cause in the War of the Two Kings, the intellectual fabric of Ireland’s Catholic community remained profoundly colored by a kind of tired Scholasticism that promoted dogma over reason. Interestingly, however, while Brown adds that this Scholasticism also exacerbated a sense of defeatism among those who believed Irish identity would likely be diminished, if not devastated, by William III’s Protestant ascendancy, many in Catholic circles chose to “retain the foundational assumptions of the Catholic confession.”

In Part II Brown shifts his attention to “The Social Enlightenment, ca. 1730–ca. 1760,” delving into “languages of civility” through which appeals to politeness were made and the pursuit of virtue was encouraged. As in Scotland, England, and the American colonies, these “languages of civility” found appeal in “communities of interest,” e.g. clubs, debating societies, etc., through which ideas of progress took root among the commercial ranks of society. Many members of these “communities of interest” were also active in what Brown calls “The Enlightened Counter Public:” a broader combination of literary, scholarly, legal, political and administrative actors, who played seminal roles in recasting political and cultural arrangements based on inclusiveness. To those in the “Enlightened Counter Public,” it was far more important to emphasize behavior over belief in assigning social standing, value or potential.

In Part III Brown takes up “The Political Enlightenment, ca. 1760–1798,” to examine “A Culture of Trust;” “Fracturing the Irish Enlightenment;” and, “An Enlightened Civil War.” He fleshes out a portrait of

an increasingly politicized culture as Ireland enters the 1760s and 1770s, when (often religiously-motivated) political groups and societies started to place greater emphasis on campaigning and the acquisition of influence over encouraging polite debate or political compromise.

This trend was underscored by the fact that although it was technically a kingdom in its own right, sharing a monarch with the Kingdom of Great Britain in the person of William III and his immediate successors, no fully unified Enlightened sense of Irish identity evolved as the eighteenth century went on. This was not helped by the fact that the organization of the state—the government as established under William III's Anglican settlement guided by the Articles of Limerick that ended the War of the Two Kings—was never ratified by Parliament. This, Brown states, left a door open to legal wrangling that often exacerbated political confusion or political exploitation for sectarian ends.

By the 1790s, Brown concludes, the political sphere had begun to fracture and be permeated by nationalism and radicalism. Tensions culminated in the Rebellion of 1798, spearheaded by the republican United Irishmen, who drew inspiration from their French and American counterparts. In 1800 an Act of Union was passed fully integrating the Kingdom of Ireland into the Kingdom of Great Britain. If there was still some hope of advancing the Enlightenment's humanist principles and fostering civility with toleration, Brown suggests, the Act of Union drew a line under them. The defining questions of post-1800 Ireland would not be what does it mean to be enlightened or how can a polite, commercial society be cultivated? Rather the defining questions of the earliest moments of the nineteenth century would be what does it mean to be Irish, or how might nationalist or sectarian preferences prevail?

*Touching on the Influence of the Gael*

The vastness of Brown's book belies the depths to which he appreciates another essential influence on Irish identity, that of the Gaels. Brown acknowledges great Gaelic scholars, writers, and poets but suggests that, despite their rich oral tradition, moving prose and insights into the hardships and strengths of common Irish people, it was precisely

these things that limited the Gaels' ability to transcend rural references and limitations that could not be reconciled fully with the enlightened priorities of the towns. Moreover, as many Scottish Enlightenment historians have concluded about Highlanders, Brown believes Gaels in Ireland could not sufficiently separate themselves from latent Jacobite and Catholic roots and sensibilities to be partners in the Enlightenment. Nor could they relinquish a kind of naïve romanticism that, while enticing to some and even culturally enriching to others, was not conducive to the sober virtues of Enlightenment civility.

All of this said, Brown seems torn in the best sense about the Gaels. Regardless of whether readers accept his conclusion that they were ultimately anti-Enlightenment (and therefore regressive), readers may find the many evocative passages of Gaelic verse quoted by Brown to be sympathetic and engaging.

*Ireland's "Missing Modernity"*

After leading readers through the ebb and flow of wars, rebellion, religious tensions, political intrigues, colonial pressures, scholarly and civic engagements, growing sophistication in literature, aesthetics and political economy, Brown concludes his book under the intriguing caption, "Ireland's Missing Modernity." For all of the ways in which Enlightenment ideals touched Ireland, and transformed (or, as Brown says, transfigured) its social and religious arrangements and institutions, Ireland found itself unable to cast off the elements and hues of sectarianism that form the prism through which the Irish then, and some may say still today, understand themselves. How deeply did Enlightenment priorities permeate Irish identity? Arguably perhaps not as deeply as Scotland or America were eventually transformed by them.

The tapestry of Enlightenment Project studies has surely been enriched by broadening attention beyond what we might call the great Enlightenments of France and Scotland to include more focused attention on national or regional experiences. There is an underlying debate to be continued among historians about the extent to which more peripheral Enlightenments were truly distinct, or whether, as is sug-




gested here, they would not likely have occurred without the original thinking inherent in the French and Scottish examples. The continuation of that debate in no way detracts from the great value of Brown's *The Irish Enlightenment*. On the contrary, he has assured that Ireland's engagement with the Enlightenment Project will long absorb us.

**INGRID A. GREGG**

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