

STUDIES IN

Burke
AND HIS TIME

JOHN FAULKNER

Burke's Speech on the Test and Corporation Acts

LUKE SHEAHAN

Conservative, Pluralist, Sociologist: Robert Nisbet's Burke

"BURKE, KIRK, AND REVOLUTION IN THE MODERN MIND"

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
THE EDMUND BURKE SOCIETY, NOVEMBER 17, 2018

VIGEN GUROIAN

Burke and Kirk on Radical Ideology in Modern Times

WILFRED McCLAY

A "Generous Loyalty":

The Vindication of a Forgotten Virtue

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to Thomas Cromwell, 1534*

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*Rousseau's General Will
and the Risk of Tyranny*

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Blessed Frédéric Ozanam on Revolution

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Editor's Introduction



IT MIGHT BE EXPECTED that, in 1941, churchmen in Great Britain had more pressing concerns than a defense of their Church Establishment; but, in that year's edition of *A Christian Yearbook*, the Rev. J. V. Langmead Casserley wrote an article containing just such an impassioned argument, the kernel of which was reprinted as an appendix, "The meaning of 'Establishment'," in a volume of essays of the same year entitled *The Vocation of England*.

After explaining what the term did *not* mean, Langmead Casserley describes the church "Establishment" as "an act of mutual recognition involving mutual obligations. So long as the 'establishment' persists," he continues, as if pitching conventionally for divine favor in the fight against fascism, "it can be said with truth that the English state and nation as such confess the Christian Faith and are pledged to its maintenance and defence." But then the author's point takes a sharp turn, and, as the definition continues to come into focus, we see its import in terms that speak to a deeper concern: that the Western democracies should not wage war against atheistic totalitarian regimes by means that would come, even in victory, to endanger the very liberties and culture they had been summoned to protect:

"Establishment" rests upon a lofty conception of the nature and responsibilities of both Church and State alike ... The unique standing and responsibility of the English Church in relation to the English people is based upon their long common history, rather than upon the complexities of their legal and political relationship.

Similar thoughts and admonitions may be argued to have informed Edmund Burke's understanding of the relationship of Church and State as he addressed that "lofty conception" and what it meant for toleration and liberty of conscience amid shifting contexts, from relief bills in the 1770s to the petitions for relief by dissenting Trinitarians and Unitarians that spanned the early years of the French Revolution.

In this current issue of *Studies in Burke and His Time*, John Faulkner's meticulous analysis of Burke's complex and long-misunderstood response to Charles Fox's motion to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in 1790 throws important light upon this complicated facet of Burke's thought by considering recently published evidence of the approach to toleration that Burke adopted on that occasion. How, how far, and why did Burke's response to this issue change when confronted with the unfolding events in France? In addressing this pivotal theme, the author's achievement is, not least, to show what fresh insights into supposedly familiar territory can be achieved when scholarly editing—in this case, Peter Marshall's recent Volume IV of the *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*—is placed in the accomplished hands of one of Burke's closest and most insightful textual critics.

Luke Sheahan's discussion of Robert Nisbet's interpretation of Edmund Burke as "the first conservative and the original pluralist" also helps us to apprehend more closely the concept of toleration in Burke's thought, though this time as it applies to a society infused with the secularizing legacy of the American and French revolutions, and the consequential emergence of the "ideological" mindset in political discourse.

In many ways, these related issues of toleration and ideology, besides being redolent of Langmead Casserley's admonitory treatment of Church-State relations, infused the theme of our fourth Edmund Burke Society conference, "Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk, and Revolution in the Modern Mind." Assembling on the campus of Belmont Abbey College, near Charlotte, North Carolina, participants were invited to discuss the intellectual legacies of the American and French revolutions as reflected in the writings of Burke and Kirk. It was soon evident that the connection between evolving conceptions of toleration and secularization (or "disestablishment") arising from those revolutions appeared closely linked to the emergence of ideology, or the

“ideological mindset.” While Luke Sheahan’s illuminating examination of Robert Nisbet’s historic repositioning of Burke’s place in the pantheon of modern conservatism shows that the definition of that term is not agreed upon, even today, even within conservative circles, the conference’s two keynote speakers, Dr. Wilfred McClay and Dr. Vigen Guroian, elucidated this link in distinct but compellingly coherent ways.

In his treatment of the term “radical ideology” as a means of bridging the years between the writings of Burke and Kirk, Vigen Guroian set minds thinking about the price that has to be paid for the loss of a sense of transcendence in culture and society, and the impact of such secularization on the signification of toleration as a means to reconcile liberty with order. Wilfred McClay’s absorbing treatment of the history of “loyalty” argued how that vital social virtue is corroded and enervated as it is reduced to an adherence to abstract principles, rather than arising from a “love for one’s own, and preference for what is one’s own, what is generative and originitive, for one’s forebears and ancestors, enjoys a certain necessary priority in the human affections, a solid and immovable base upon which the superstructure of other ideas can be erected.” We are delighted to be able to carry the text of each address in this issue of the journal.

The program’s afternoon session comprised a panel of four invited guests under the chairmanship of Dr. Steven Millies, who each spoke on an author whose thought could serve to broaden the parameters of the conference theme explored by the keynote speakers. The concept of loyalty was richly revisited by André Gushurst-Moore in his comments on Thomas More’s famous letter from prison to Thomas Cromwell, in which More crucially contrasted the divisiveness of “man’s affectionate reason” (a kind of *proto-ideology*) with those “ties of affection that are conceived in the heart” and nourish the virtue of loyalty. Indeed, if the roots of the ideological mindset may be found in that “affectionate reason,” that may explain why Burke found true loyalty in such short supply during the French Revolution; and the grotesque, paradoxical consequences to which this dearth gave rise, in an untethered unity and coercive liberty, were excitingly laid out in Ivone Moreira’s succinct examination of Rousseau’s “general will,” which closed with this sublime definition: “[A] perfect theoretical principle—terrifying

in practice—with all the ingredients necessary for rationally justifying an autocracy.” *Mutatis mutandis*, one could easily be reminded here of the metaphysical madness of those “hot men” of Unitarianism such as Priestley and Price, and why Burke considered them as more a political faction to be resisted than as a theological sect to be tolerated. To separate church and state, in whatever kind of alliance, to subsume one in the doctrinaire moral or rational authority of the other, or to collapse the concept of a faith community into a political one, is to collapse the space for the pre-political in its integral relationship with government, and so to open the way to unrestricted power, all the more insidious for its professed commitment to toleration and individual liberty.

Within this threatening context of secularizing ideology, Troy Feay offered an illuminating insight into the writing and life of the post-revolutionary French Catholic Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, whose founding of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul may appear like a bridge of spiritual continuity and (in the true sense) tradition across the revolutions, providing in its conception and execution a vibrant response both to the injustices that the revolutions had attempted to address and the ideologies to which they had given birth.

The Edmund Burke Society is indebted to the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal and to Belmont Abbey College, its President, Dr. William Thierfelder, the History Department, the Phi Alpha Theta Honors Chapter, the Office of College Relations, and the Office of Academic Affairs for their generous support in the planning of this program. Fittingly, given the centrality of the theme, the conference formed a part of the centennial program commemorating the life and legacy of Russell Kirk, who did so much to revitalize the study of Edmund Burke in America.

IAN CROWE

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Burke's Speech on the Test and Corporation Acts

A RECONSIDERATION



JOHN FAULKNER

Among many merits of the recent concluding Volume IV of the Clarendon Press *Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* is its making available different and often fuller texts of Burke's unpublished speeches than had been previously found in print. One result is that material from Hansard's *Parliamentary History of England* appears considerably less frequently than in some earlier volumes. Editor P. J. Marshall, in his choice of material from compilations, prefers to draw upon the earlier *Parliamentary Register* to which Burke may have contributed supplementary matter. He has also found alternative versions in newspapers themselves which are superior to those the *Parliamentary History* provides even when they are its source.¹ Some of the accounts newly available in print may raise questions concerning things students of Burke had taken for granted. For Burke's "Speech on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts" (2 March 1790) the new volume reprints the fullest newspaper account of the debate, that in *The Diary*. Both it and a second newspaper that Marshall cites, *The Gazetteer*, include a striking detail—that following his speech, Burke had left the chamber

¹ For greater detail see my review-essay of Volume IV in *Studies in Burke and His Time*, 25 (2015), 71–80. <https://kirkcenter.org/edmund-burke-society/journal/>

without voting.² Most writing on the speech has assumed that, since he had spoken against Fox's motion for repeal, Burke had voted against it. This mistaken assumption appears to have arisen from scholars having relied on the account of the debate in the *Parliamentary History*.³ Although, as Marshall indicates, the *Parliamentary History* also reprinted *The Diary's* account, its compiler made occasional deletions, the most important of which unaccountably omitted its long concluding sentence. It is in that sentence, now restored, where Volume Four's readers can find Burke telling the House of Commons he "would not vote against the Motion."⁴ Within my knowledge, only F. P. Lock, having read deeply in contemporary reports, had previously taken note of and discussed this unusual aftermath to one of Burke's more unusual speeches.⁵ It is a detail important enough to provoke reconsideration of Burke's role in the debate.

Burke's purpose in leaving the House of Commons without having cast a vote is and likely will remain a matter of conjecture. In his annotation to the speech Marshall discloses that *The Gazetteer's* reporter attributes Burke's departure to exhaustion "from the heat" of the crowded House, but he appears not entirely to credit it. His own explanation is that Burke may not have wanted to vote against individuals he acknowledged to be "sober and well-meaning conscientious dissenters" as late as 1792.⁶ These might, one supposes, include the Dissenter "of Learning,

2 Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford *et al.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–2015), 4:318–19. *The Gazetteer* 4 March 1790. That Burke "forbore" from voting was also reported later in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 60 (May 1790), 426.

3 *The Parliamentary History of England* (London: Hansard, 1816), 28: cols. 432–43.

4 *Writings and Speeches*, 4:318.

5 F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998, 2006) 2:262–64; 2:411. Since Vol. 4's publication, Martin Fitzpatrick, using the 1816 edition of Burke's speeches, has also taken note of Burke's not having voted. "Edmund Burke, Dissent and Church and State," *Liberty, Property and Popular Politics England and Scotland, 1688–1815: Essays in Honor of H. T. Dickinson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016), 97.

6 *Writings and Speeches*, 4:309. Marshall also discusses more generally Burke's concern about other Dissenters' collective hostility to the church establishment in his introduction, 4:25–26. Lock, too, is inclined to an alternate explanation. Later in his biography he refers plausibly to Burke's not voting as a "compromise" between his suspicions of Unitarian defenders of the French Revolution and his sympathies with "well-meaning conscientious dissenters," 2:411. He and Marshall quote from the same letter of Burke to his son of 23 March 1792, which confirms that Burke had

sense, and ingenuity” Burke later wrote of in his important letter to William Weddell about his first reading of Richard Price’s *Discourse on the Love of our Country*.⁷ Marshall’s inference is plausible and perhaps sufficient. Still, he has left an additional possibility out of play which, being conjectural, may be better addressed in an essay such as this.

In their discussions both Lock, who describes Burke’s departure without voting as surprising, and Marshall cite expressions of Burke’s former willingness to vote for at least partial repeal.⁸ For instance, Burke’s *Correspondence* reports a candid conversation in 1778 during which Burke told Lord North that, were an attempt made then (none was), he would support repeal of the sacramental tests both acts impose.⁹ Lock further calls attention to Burke’s parliamentary conduct in 1779: when a measure was introduced to relieve Dissenting teachers of a requirement to subscribe to the doctrinal articles, Burke supported the substitution of a declaration.¹⁰ That would be his course again in the 1790 debate on Fox’s motion to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. He had since become angered by the language of certain admirers of the French Revolution, notably Joseph Priestley, against the church establishment, although significantly his concern did not move him to defend the acts themselves in his speech. Because the movement for repeal did not reach Parliament until the later 1780s, circumstances then left him uncertain about what position he should take, but that was because he had come to suspect that attacks on the Established Church would follow repeal. He gave no indications that he had come to regard the acts themselves as any less objectionable.

In 1772 and 1773, Burke had adopted the position that, while clergymen of the Established Church should not be relieved of the requirement to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, there was no good rea-

not voted in 1790. *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas Copeland et al. (Cambridge and Chicago: Cambridge UP and U of Chicago P, 1968), 7:119.

7 *Correspondence*, 7:56. In their footnote 6 the editors, P.J. Marshall and John Woods, suggest that the Dissenter Burke mentions may have been Dr. Richard Brocklesby.

8 Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 2:264, 262.

9 *Correspondence*, 4:7. Notice that the repeal Burke addresses is of the sacramental tests, not the entire acts as Fox proposed in 1790.

10 Lock, *Edmund Burke*, 2:262. Burke had also supported the provision of the Quebec Act of 1774 which replaced the Test Act locally with an oath of allegiance that Catholics could more easily swear and thus hold office.

son why Dissenting ministers should be required to subscribe to any of them. Although Rational Dissenters were already beginning to argue for repeal of the existing law on grounds of right, he had supported their parliamentary effort as a matter of toleration. A provision of the Test and Corporation Acts, however, provoked Burke to a more complicated position than subscription had. In his speech in March 1790 his few comments on the acts themselves center on the sacramental tests both imposed, and his language is strong. The report of Burke's speech from *The Diary* that Marshall prints summarizes him in the third person as saying "the present [sacramental test] he had always thought a bad and insufficient Test to its end. He was convinced that it was an abuse of the Sacramental Rite, and the Sacramental Rite was too solemn an act for prostitution."¹¹

Both acts had imposed a political expedient that required taking the sacrament to certify membership in the Church of England by occupants of specified offices of power and profit. They had thereby made it an occasion for lying. Objection to the sacramental tests was far from unique to Burke and had often been raised by advocates of repeal, which he had been until this debate. In 1789 Henry Beaufoy, a member of the Church of England, in his speech moving the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts had pungently observed:

The Saviour of the world instituted the Eucharist in commemoration of his death, an event so tremendous, that nature, afflicted, hid herself in darkness; but the British legislature has made it a qualification for gauging beer barrels, and soap boilers' tubs, for writing custom-house dockets and debentures, and for seizing smuggled tea.¹²

¹¹ *Writings and Speeches*, 4:317.

¹² *Parl. Hist.*, 28: col. 15. See also: Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979), 75–98. Although Goodwin's account of the 1787–1790 attempts to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts remains valuable, it greatly overestimates Burke's influence on the 1790 debate. Pitt's was the decisive opposition. Throughout the extended campaign votes for repeal would increase only marginally from 97 (1787) to 105 (1790). The key in 1790 to defeating Fox's motion, as Pitt knew, was to enlarge the number of members voting. He issued a rare Call of the House for the preceding day to ensure a large attendance. 175 more total votes were cast than in 1789 when repeal had more astutely been moved by Beaufoy on May 8th, late in the

The tests would again be criticized in the 1828 debate that finally repealed them by Lord John Russell, who, as he introduced his bill, spoke directly of the temptation they offered to lie:

When men are told that if they take the sacrament, they will be fit to hold office, and not without, it is in fact holding out to them a temptation to abuse the sacrament, and to pervert the most holy of God's ordinances to purposes of the most paltry ambition. It is putting the consideration of patronage and profit in contradiction with the most sacred duty a Christian can perform.¹³

This is not the only way in which Burke's speech would anticipate aspects of the eventual repeal.

Burke's view of the sacramental tests is consistent with one of his earliest writings in England. A brief essay from the 1750s in the notebook William Burke shared with him is titled "Religion of No Efficacy Considered as a State Engine." Its point is:

If you attempt to make the end of Religion to be its Utility to human Society, to make it only a sort of supplement to the Law, and insist principally upon this Topic, as is very common to do, you then change its principle of operation.... By forcing it against its Nature to become a Political Engine, You make it an Engine of no efficacy at all. It can never operate for the Benefit of human Society but when we think it is directed in quite another way: because it then operates from its own principle.¹⁴

session after members had begun to leave Westminster. Fox's motion, able to attract only three votes more than Beaufoy's 1789 bill, then lost 294–105. G. M. Ditchfield, "The parliamentary struggle over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787–1790," *English Historical Review*, 89 (July 1974), 568–69. Burke did speak strongly against Dissenters' attacks upon the church establishment, but depictions of the debate in which he turned back a tide of support for repeal are doubtful. The votes which many Dissenters had expected seem not to have been within their reach.

¹³ *Parliamentary History*, NS 18: col. 687.

¹⁴ *A Note-Book of Edmund Burke*, ed. H. V. F. Somerset (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1957), 67. In "Tracts Relating to Popery Laws," about a decade later, he wrote more generally and emphatically: "Religion to have any force on men's understandings,

This early passage coheres also with Burke's defense eight months later in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* of the British clergy's financial independence of the state.¹⁵

Burke, I suggest, sought in his speech to defend the Established Church not solely from the ill-will of Dissenters that he attempted to document elsewhere in the speech, but also from the politically-conceived sacramental tests the two acts imposed which interfered with its operating "from its own principle"—an abuse of the sacrament in relation to both the Church itself and to office seekers conscientious about religion. Although to characterize the tests as an abuse of the sacrament is a judgment based upon theological premises, the perspective from which Burke viewed the tests may have been as much constitutional. To him in 1790 the Established Church held a central constitutional position in close relation to the state, and impairment from operating according to its own principle could be perceived as undermining its constitutional functions.¹⁶

This understanding of what Burke may have intended by not voting is unavoidably conjectural, but it is not ruled out by the other speculations previously mentioned. *The Gazetteer's* conjecture that he had been affected by the heat of the chamber¹⁷ seems negated by the conclusion of *The Diary's* report. It summarizes him as saying he "would not vote against the Motion, although he did not think this a fit moment for such a Motion to be put," thereby portraying his failing to vote as a deliberated abstention—a characterization confirmed in a letter to his son a year later.¹⁸ Mine is not incompatible with the conjecture that Burke had left to avoid offending by his vote Dissenters he respected. Both motives could have converged, since he regarded the amendment

indeed to exist at all, must be supposed paramount to Laws, and independent for its substance upon any human institution." *Writings and Speeches*, 9:466.

15 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001), 265–66. All subsequent citations of *Reflections* refer to this edition. For readers' convenience, I refer to the page numbers of Clark's edition rather than those of the first edition which he supplies in brackets.

16 Some of the church's functions, as Burke understood them, are described in *Reflections*, 265–68.

17 That Burke had previously used the "hot and crowded House" as an excuse for not attending the 1789 debate can be variously construed. *Correspondence*, 5:470.

18 *Writings and Speeches*, 4:318; *Correspondence*, 7:119.

he was proposing as offering a preferable means by which many Dissenters could qualify for offices as individuals. Unlike those speculations, however, mine seeks the source of Burke's unwillingness to vote within the speech in his own language. Still, being conjectural, the most it can ask from a reader is a concession of its plausibility.

Readers commendably wary of conjectures, however, need not adopt mine to recognize that Burke's speech needs reconsideration. Accounts of the speech commonly portray it in a context of his hostility to the French Revolution.¹⁹ At a distance, many commentators have followed Charles James Fox who, still reacting to Burke's "Speech on the Army Estimates" three weeks before, replied in Burke's absence that the good principles in his speech had been undone by his misconceptions about the revolution in France. Fox, however, overstated the amount of emphasis Burke had given to Dissenters' excited support of the revolution in this speech. (In *The Diary's* report Burke refers in three places to the revolution, twice, however, in response to Fox himself, who had introduced both France and Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of our Country* into his own speech.²⁰) In any case, Burke had been troubled about how he should vote on the repeal of the acts well before the revolutionary activity in France against which he would react. He had already absented himself from the debates of 1787 and 1789 before having read Price's *Discourse* in January 1790 when he began to identify Dissenting members of the London Revolution Society as supporters of French revolutionaries. In his speech his criticism focuses primarily upon Dissenters' longer-term hostility to the Established Church rather than on their reception of the Revolution.²¹ He did not choose

19 Since these include nearly all accounts and seem to follow upon their authors' unawareness that Burke did not vote on Fox's bill, information which likely would have led to at least some revision, it has not seemed essential to list them. In note 12, however, I have addressed Goodwin's influential discussion.

20 In responding to Fox's praise of Price, Burke read a passage from the *Discourse* and criticized it, but no report I have found has identified Price's subject in the passage. It may have but need not necessarily have concerned France.

21 Although Price's *Discourse* and Priestley's rhetorically combustible metaphor foreseeing the "explosion" of the Established Church received some emphasis, many of the writings by Dissenters Burke cited date from the later 1770s and early 1780s, as Martin Fitzpatrick and, before him, Ursula Henriques have pointed out. Fitzpatrick, 96; Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England 1787-1833* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1961), 116.

to defend the Test and Corporation Acts, and his criticism of the sacramental tests was characteristic, not of speakers opposing repeal, but of those favoring it, the position to which he had inclined all along. Ultimately, his speech led to a proposal which had nothing to do with France: the substitution of professions of belief for the sacramental tests he criticized.

Just beyond its account of Burke's criticism of the test for prostituting the Sacramental Rite, *The Diary* continues, he "professed himself ready to grant relief from oppression to all men but unwilling to grant power, because power once possessed was generally abused."²² In this report's phrasing (which appears to argue over-generally against granting anyone power), he, like Pitt, distinguished between the right to practice one's religion unhindered, which he supported, and a right claimed by Dissenters to hold office, which he denied, once again addressing the issue in contention as a question of tolerance rather than of right.

The prospective "abuse" which made him anxious about granting power to certain Dissenters was that they might then attempt to alter or eliminate the existing church establishment, an anxiety that had, as has been noted, preceded his concerns about the revolution in France. If one can prescind from the question whether an establishment should exist at all and momentarily grant Burke his perspective, his concern seems not unfounded. In a footnote to his sermon *The Evidence for a Future Period of Improvement in the State of Mankind* (1787, the year of the first attempt to repeal the acts) Richard Price had admitted a difference among Dissenters over a civil establishment of religion. He identified only two opinions. Some Dissenters, like Price himself, wished to see all such establishments abolished. The others, he conceded, sought only the replacement of the established religion by their own.²³ Burke thought it necessary to frustrate the wishes of both categories of Dissenters to preserve the present church establishment, to his mind an essential component of British government. However, since he does not cite it, it seems unlikely that Burke had read Price's footnote. Had he known of it, it was too helpful to his purpose not to use. It can serve

²² *Writings and Speeches*, 4:317.

²³ *Richard Price: Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 168 n20.

here, then, only to confirm some of his inferences from the publications by Dissenters that he does cite. There is little doubt that such hostility to the Established Church existed. The more fundamental issue was whether the constitution could and should be changed in the ways Dissenters wanted; but most proponents knew that to tie it to the repeal of the acts was to attach a stone which would sink Fox's bill.

When Henry Beaufoy introduced motions to repeal the Test and Corporations Acts in March 1787 and again in May 1789, Burke had absented himself, although in 1789 he had written testily to the Bristol Dissenter Richard Bright that, if his current poor health permitted him to attend the debate, he would vote for repeal.²⁴ (Had he attended in 1789, he would have heard Beaufoy assure the House of Commons that ample legal securities remained to exclude Catholics, Jews, and even Quakers from office and that the only people empowered would be Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists. If he did read that in a newspaper report, it may have left an impression that the sponsors, however understandably, were seeking power for themselves more than justice.²⁵) In March 1790, when Fox led a third attempt to repeal the acts, Burke acknowledged that he had been unable to decide how to vote in the two preceding debates and admitted that "even yet he had not been able to satisfy himself altogether." What he was able to say was that he "could not vote for" his friend's question, phrasing which did not necessarily commit him to vote against it. And, in the end, he did not.²⁶ What he was doing in the speech, however, could not be fully understood by readers unaware that he had not voted.

Having announced at the outset that he could not vote for Fox's motion, Burke proceeded immediately to take issue with Pitt, the leading speaker against repeal. In this rather strange beginning he seems to have been trying to do two things. First, having only narrowly avoided public conflict with Fox three weeks earlier in the debate on the army estimates, he contrived to defend Fox as soon as possible after signaling that he would be disagreeing with him. Second, he was also distanc-

²⁴ *Correspondence*, 5:470.

²⁵ Why Quakers? Beaufoy characterized them as "enemies from principle to the revenues of the church." *Parliamentary History*, 28: cols.9, 8.

²⁶ *Writings and Speeches*, 4:306-307.

ing himself from Pitt's position, upholding the acts. He seems to have sought a standpoint independent of both, and perhaps tried to evade the choice that Fox's motion to repeal the acts had delimited. Burke's own proposal did not retain the Test and Corporation Acts as they stood, but sought to replace their sacramental tests with another kind of test, a profession of belief that a religious establishment is not contrary to "the law of God or disagreeable to the law of Nature."²⁷ To establish the need for such a profession he offered documentation from hostile statements by Dissenters, including Priestley's unfortunate explosion metaphor, but then he proposed it be referred to a committee for consideration. Meanwhile, he intended to move the previous question temporarily to close the debate. If the committee should not determine his evidence to be well founded, he "would hold himself bound to vote for the repeal" of the acts. On 2 March 1790, Burke thus envisioned himself in varying contingencies voting for his amendment, voting for repeal, or not voting. No evidence suggests that voting against repeal was an option he was willing to consider. He agreed to be further guided by the House; if it should prefer an immediate vote on repeal, he would submit.²⁸ Since, when the vote on repeal was eventually taken, the motion was defeated 294–105, it was no surprise that House members had indicated vocally, though informally, their preference for an immediate vote to Burke's time-consuming deliberations. By that point, most observers in the chamber must have foreseen the defeat of repeal. Having been uncharacteristically deferential, Burke then left without voting. His abstention does seem to be a gesture of some kind, but of what?

Burke had originally favored repealing the Test and Corporation Acts and removing the legal disabilities they imposed, but, in the decade leading up to 1787, Dissenters' attacks on both the existing establishment of the Anglican Church and the idea of a church establishment itself had become vehement enough to complicate his view. However, he may also have regarded the sacramental test as bad law with enough intensity to rule out voting against repeal. By abstaining, he was ruling out as well voting with Pitt against Fox, a secondary consideration, I believe, but still at the time a significant one. His acknowledgment of indecision

²⁷ Ibid., 4:317 n3.

²⁸ Ibid., 4:318.

appears highly probable. At some point as the third attempt at repeal was in preparation, he seems to have hit upon a solution of making the removal of disabilities against a Dissenter conditional upon the individual's willingness to renounce opposition to the Church Establishment. That this renunciation would be made individually followed from his recognition that not all Dissenters posed a threat to the Established Church.²⁹

When his amendment was ignored by the House of Commons he, as he had said, "could not vote" for Fox's repeal motion, yet, if I am correct, he *would* not vote to retain the "bad and insufficient" tests. Whether he might have overcome his aversion to them had the vote on repeal been close we have no way of knowing. Since it was not close, what he was doing by his speech was making a public record on the issue. Like his proposed substitute declaration, not voting enabled him to reconcile concerns potentially conflicting in the simple up or down choice Fox's bill required.

* * *

In offering his substitution for the sacramental test, Burke likely knew that it had little chance of adoption in the debate on Fox's motion to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. Still, the legislative means he chose were not inherently unsuitable for achieving a settlement. Aspects of the legislation in 1828 which finally brought the Dissenters relief came to resemble what Burke had suggested in 1790. The crucial vote in the House of Commons was on a resolution by Lord John Russell that the House "go into committee on the question of the Sacramental Test."³⁰ It won by a margin of forty-four votes. It is worth noting, moreover, that, although the debate is identified loosely in *Parliamentary History* and

29 It also accorded with the position on penal laws against Catholics Burke had taken a decade before in his *Speech at Bristol Previous to the Election* which criticized "proscribing the citizens by denominations and general descriptions." "Crimes," he had said: "are acts of individuals, and not of denominations: and therefore arbitrarily to class men under general descriptions, in order to proscribe and punish them in the lump for a presumed delinquency, of which perhaps but a part, perhaps none at all, are guilty, is indeed a compendious method, and saves a world of trouble about proof; but such a method, instead of being law, is an act of unnatural rebellion against the legal dominion of reason and justice...." *Writings and Speeches*, 3:659–60.

30 Richard W. Davis, *Dissent in Politics 1780–1830, The Political Life of William Smith, MP* (London: Epworth Press, 1971), 245.

many places else as "Debate on the Test and Corporation Acts," unlike Fox's bill in 1790, Russell's sought to repeal not the entire acts but only their sacramental tests. His measure's title is: "9 Geo. IV cap 17: An Act for repealing so much of several Acts as imposes the Necessity of receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as Qualification for certain Offices and Employments." In the course of the debate in 1828, Burke's 1790 speech was occasionally evoked by opponents of repeal.³¹ However, the speaker who recalled him most accurately, Sir Thomas Acland, an independent supporter of Tory administrations, cited him for a reason other than his words in opposition to Fox's motion:

Mr. Burke was of the opinion, that the substitution of an oath for the Sacramental test might be enacted, and actually produced a form which he had prepared, and considered adequate to meet the views of both parties. It is not for me to enter now into this part of the question; but, with good-will, I doubt not, some scheme might be effected.³²

Acland would soon play a meaningful role in the composition of such a declaration—which was not at first really an oath. Here he was anticipating a declaration rather than proposing one; but such a substitution would soon be raised by someone highly influential in the government.

The success of Russell's bill in the House of Commons put the Dissenters in a more advantageous situation concerning repeal than ever before, and differing estimates how its passage might affect the larger issue of Catholic Emancipation introduced an element of uncertainty. To minimize that, as Richard Davis explains, the Wellington administration's leader in the House of Commons, Sir Robert Peel, who had until then opposed the bill, now offered to give:

full government support if some satisfactory declaration safeguarding the Church were agreed to. With government support the bill was almost certain to pass. Without it, it was almost certainly headed for the same grave in the Lords

³¹ However, since the 1828 bill sought to repeal only the Sacramental Test, Burke's position had not aligned with that of the opponents to Russell's motion who quoted him.

³² *Parliamentary History*, NS, 18: col. 763.

which had claimed so many [Catholic] Emancipation bills. Everything depended on whether or not the Dissenters were willing to make a concession.³³

The legislative situation, in a context of less suspicion, had thus come close to what Burke had sought in 1790 by proposing a substitution for the sacramental tests by a declaration, and Acland, deeply involved in the negotiations, had acknowledged Burke's precedent.

Further clarification is plainly needed. It does not seem likely that Fox's parliamentary approach of seeking the repeal of the acts themselves would have succeeded even in 1828. Russell's more focused motion followed by Peel and Acland's emulation of Burke in their own substitution for the sacramental test may have been somewhat better suited to survive opposition in the House of Lords, particularly by helping to detach bishops from the ranks of the test's defenders. Still, Burke's proposed substitution had not been a compromise. It would have retained tests. By eliminating the *sacramental* tests, it would merely have removed an indefensible testing procedure. Its language had little to offer to Dissenters, who, had his substitute profession advanced further, would have opposed it. What Peel proposed was, like Burke's, a replacement declaration, but, unlike his, one arrived at through consultation with Dissenters. It was also better designed to provide assurances to doubtful voters in the House of Lords against the undermining of the Church Establishment by the newly-empowered office holders. If its concessions were exacted, also, with the intent of making Peel's own role in the debate appear somewhat less a surrender, that seemed relatively harmless—at least until the bill arrived in Wellington's House of Lords. By agreeing to the declaration's concessions, Dissenters would have to sacrifice the aim of those among them not opposed to Catholic Emancipation to compel the government to recognize as a matter of right their eligibility for the offices from which they had been excluded. (Members of the Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty and other anti-Catholic Dissenters had resisted any inclusive argument based upon rights which could be applied to Catholics as well.) In return, although on a basis of toleration and not right, Dissenters would

33 Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, 246.

likely gain victory in the Upper House for the repeal Russell's bill had sought. Whether such a conditional repeal was worth their approval depended upon the language of the declaration that emerged from the negotiations.

What in the declaration of 1828 replacing the sacramental tests made it more acceptable to them than the provisions of Burke's substitute profession would have been in 1790? Burke's declaration takes the form of an oath, ending in "so help me God." It begins:

I A. B. do in the presence of God, sincerely profess and believe that a religious establishment in this state is not contrary to the law of God, or disagreeable to the law of Nature, or to the true principles of the Christian religion, or that it is noxious to the Community; and I do sincerely promise and engage, before God, that I never will, by any conspiracy, contrivance, or political device whatever, attempt or abet others in any attempt to subvert the constitution of the church of England, as the same is now by law established....³⁴

Burke's excessively lengthy profession—only the first half of which is quoted here—is cast in the form initially of a statement of belief followed by a pledge to refrain from certain actions. At the outset of negotiations over the substitute declaration in 1828, in a meeting with Russell and Peel, William Smith, the astute and experienced M.P. who occupied a sensitive position representing the Dissenters' United Committee in contacts with members of the government and other parliamentary leaders, conveyed limits to what Dissenters would accept. Smith, who had been the first speaker in the House of Commons to reply to Burke's speech thirty-eight years earlier, told Peel that "Dissenters would not consent to anything like a religious test of fitness for civil office."³⁵ By

34 *Writings and Speeches*, 4:317 n3. The oath, not printed in *The Diary*, is taken from *Parliamentary History*, 28, cols. 441–42. Its source is unknown.

35 *Committees for repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: Minutes, 1828* (Nos 212–274), ed. Thomas W. Davis (London Record Society 1978), entries 230; 234. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol14/pp86–106>. In 1790, Smith had defended Dissenters from Burke's criticisms of their hostility to the Established Church but had not addressed his substitute profession. Burke, having been discouraged by the vocal response of fellow MPs, seems never to have formally proposed it.

framing his statement as a profession of belief, Burke had devised something they likely would have regarded as such a test. When, after much conferring, the draft of the declaration Acland had been composing for Peel was circulated, it committed the declarer to pledge only that he would refrain from using the powers of his office to *act* against the Established Church.

An additional requirement upon which the United Committee insisted, was that any declaration adopted should be required of all persons entering an office and not exclusively of Dissenters.³⁶ (Accounts of the 1790 debate do not specify of whom Burke intended his profession to be required.) The language of the declaration in the bill upon leaving the House of Commons read:

I, A.B. do solemnly declare that I will never exercise any power, authority, or influence, which I may possess by virtue of the office of _____ to injure or weaken the Protestant Church as it is by law established within this realm, or to disturb it in the possession of any rights or privileges to which it is by law entitled.³⁷

Since this was not a religious test and since it would be taken, not only by Dissenters, but by all entering the specified offices, only the declaration's omission altogether would have been less objectionable to the Dissenters.

In the House of Lords the substitute declaration had to face an onslaught of amendments from Ultra-Tory opponents. Lord Eldon proposed beginning the declaration with "I am a Protestant." This was a fallback position from the declaration he would have preferred, "I am a member of the Church of England," but it was defeated anyway. Moreover, by adopting the tactic of amending the declaration, opponents had conceded the removal of the sacramental test. The declaration survived, only to incur damage from an amendment by Edward Copleston, one of the bishops who would subsequently vote for repealing the tests. Urgent debate over preserving a Christian constitution "induced" (Davis's verb) the Duke of Wellington to support Copleston's amendment to insert

³⁶ Ibid., item 242.

³⁷ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, 246.

immediately after “declare” the phrase “on the true faith of a Christian.” This language, quite close to phrasing apparently deleted from the earliest version shown to William Smith, passed, and thus it re-imposed a religious test.³⁸ Despite its wording, “true faith of a Christian” obviously was not meant to deter faithless Christians from making the declaration. Nor, as Davis explains, did “Christian” exclude Unitarians, as some supporters of the amendment had assumed.³⁹ But, as it was intended to do, it did exclude Jews and atheists. Further, by transforming the declaration into an oath, the added phrase became a barrier to Quakers, whose consciences forbade them to take oaths. Thus, by endorsing that amendment, Wellington in effect repeated Beaufoy’s assurances in 1789 that Catholics—who remained excluded by an additional provision—Jews and Quakers would not be admitted to any offices by the repeal. The declaration carefully worked out in the House of Commons was reduced to dimensions of repeal that had failed between 1787 and 1790.

Although finally in 1828 they had been held in check within the United Committee, the clearest-cut victors were probably the anti-Catholic Dissenters—but only for a matter of months. The looming consequences of Daniel O’Connell’s election in Ireland to a seat in the House of Commons that another oath prevented him from taking would soon influence Wellington to give way on Catholic Emancipation, and prosperous Catholics, at least, would have only one year more to wait. Jews, however, would have to wait seventeen years to hold corporation offices and thirty to serve in the House of Commons.⁴⁰ The amended Test Act, itself, would survive until the Statute Law Revision Act of 1863.⁴¹ The tactic of substitution that had made victory possible

38 The removed language had been: “this I declare on the faith of a Christian.” *Committees for Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: Minutes 1827–8*, entry 238. Smith, representing the United Committee, may have objected to it in the draft since it was a religious test. Davis, 246–47.

39 Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, 247.

40 Richard A. Gaunt, “Peel’s Other Repeal: The Test and Corporation Acts, 1828,” *Parliamentary History*, 33 (2014), 259.

41 Davis, 247n1. For a learned discussion from a different perspective on the debate in the House of Lords, see: J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP: 1985), 392–97. Other works I have found helpful not previously cited in the notes are Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution, The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015), 723–27; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846*, New Oxford History of England (Oxford: Oxford

also allowed the extent of that victory to be contained. Still, after four decades of intermittent struggle by Dissenters, the United Committee accepted the amendment and celebrated the bill's passing.⁴² Passage of the bill did bring opportunity to certain categories of individuals. Although victory amounted to something less than the vindication of any constitutional theory, it left that of the ultra-Tories, affirming the identity of church and state, in peril. Looking ahead, Lord John Russell could take satisfaction from having been able "to force the enemy to give up his first line, that none but Churchmen are worthy to serve the State," and from foreseeing that "we shall soon make him give up the second, that none but Protestants are."⁴³ The embodiment of his "enemy," Lord Eldon, thought glumly that might well ensue. A political displacement had occurred, and subsequent battles would be fought on terrain less familiar by contending forces unforeseeably realigned.

* * *

When, on 2 March 1790, Burke raised the prospect of certain Dissenters abusing the powers that repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts would give them, he addressed a disposition to alter the Established Church that was not a recent development. Still, he was aware that the French

UP, 2006), 379–83; F. P. Lock, "Burke and Human Rights" in *A Moral Enterprise: Politics Reason, and the Human Good: Essays in Honor of Francis Canavan*, ed. Kenneth L. Grasso and Robert P. Hunt (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2002), 17–35; Michael W. McConnell, "Establishment and Toleration in Edmund Burke's "Constitution of Freedom," *The Supreme Court Review* (1995), 393–462; G. M. Ditchfield, "Repeal, Abolition, and Reform: A Study in the Interaction of Reforming Movements in the Parliament of 1790–96," *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1980), 101–18; and the articles on Smith, Acland and Peel in *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1820–1832*, ed. D. R. Fisher (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

42 William Smith, however, would in 1829 present Unitarian petitions supporting Catholic Emancipation and vote in favor of it. Before leaving Parliament in 1830, he also voted for Jewish Emancipation.

43 Quoted by Asa Briggs in *The Making of Modern England 1783–1867 The Age of Improvement*. 1959 (reprint, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1965), 231. Neither of the two "lines" Russell ascribes to the Ultra-Tories had been Burke's position in the 1790 debate. Although two years later in his draft for his "Speech on the Unitarians' Petition" he went so far as to identify church and state as a single entity, even there Burke declined to draw the corollaries limiting service to the state that Russell would decades later attribute to his own Ultra-Tory adversaries. *Writings and Speeches*, 4:490–91, and especially 501.

Revolution had raised the expectations of many Dissenters, and the common practice of historians in assimilating Burke's role in the debate over Fox's motion for repeal to his intensifying opposition to the French Revolution and to his forthcoming break with Fox is understandable. Unfortunately, it adopts a vantage point from which some things that do not actually occur in Burke's speech have become assumed. My intent in reconsidering the speech has been to draw attention to the importance of the often-overlooked sacramental test, to discourage a reading back of slightly later Burke positions into the speech, and to provide help in more adequately limiting such assimilations.

Those misgivings extend, however, only to interpretations of that single speech. Soon afterward, Burke's responses to aspects of the French Revolution did come to be significant components of his writing on church-state relationships in England. In his speech on Fox's repeal motion he had been able to take for granted that most of his audience in the House of Commons, augmented by the reinforcements summoned by Pitt's Call of the House, at least assumed the value of the Church Establishment. Having little need to justify the Church Establishment, Burke was able merely to assert its importance and identify a certain strain of organized Dissent as its opponent, while proposing the amendment to which he gave his concluding emphasis. Moreover, he had already begun *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and may have advanced far enough to foresee that it would provide more advantageous contexts for explanations of the place of the Established Church than the speech.⁴⁴ It is in the contexts of *Reflections* and those of subsequent writings, particularly Burke's "Speech on the Unitarians' Petition"

44 One significant new context was provided by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy on which debate began in Paris 29 May 1790 and which was promulgated on the 24th of August. The abolition of the tithe in August 1789 and the nationalization of church property in November had made provisions for alternative funding necessary. Under the Civil Constitution Roman Catholic clerics would hereafter be paid by the government, and that dependency predictably led members of the National Assembly to dictate the reorganization of the church in France. Burke in response insisted upon the need to retain the comparative independence of England's Established Church. D. M. G. Sutherland, *The French Revolution and Empire: The Quest for a Civic Order* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 91–96. *Reflections*, 265–66; 269–71.

and its drafts,⁴⁵ where the influence of the revolution in France upon his defense of the Established Church must be sought.⁴⁶

Amid several alternatives, however, the perspective I would most like readers to take on this essay is politically biographical. Since the

45 *Writings and Speeches*, 4:487–515.

46 In *Reflections*, Burke echoes the passage quoted on page 12 of this essay from his notebook remarks on “Religion of No Efficacy Considered as a State Engine.” There, however, he attributes it to “men of light and leading in England” who:

would be ashamed, as of a silly deceitful trick, to profess any religion in name, which by their proceedings they appear to condemn. If by their conduct (the only language that rarely lies) they seemed to regard the great ruling principle of the moral and natural world, as a mere invention to keep the vulgar in obedience, they apprehend that by such a conduct they would defeat the politic purpose they have in view.

Reflections, 266; *Notebook*, 67. Burke’s intricate argument here does not lead to a separation of church and state. The wisdom he attributes to the “men of light” consists in their recognition that the Established Church must be independent to act according to its own principle for it is only by so acting that it can fulfill its constitutional role. But in *Reflections*, at least, the “purpose” of such men is described as “politic,” and they are assessing the Church’s effectiveness as an instrument. Their conclusion is then: to be successfully instrumental the Church should not be subordinated. This comes close to paradox. The clearest way of avoiding it would seem to be to reconceive those political purposes according to moral limitations upheld by a church being true to its nature. In the same extended discussion, however, Burke writes of the Established Church’s constitutional relation to the state in language suggesting that independence does not preclude proximity. The people of England regard the Church “as the foundation of their whole constitution, with which, and with every part of which it holds an indissoluble union. Church and state are ideas inseparable in their minds, and scarcely is the one ever mentioned without mentioning the other.” *Reflections*, 264. Seven months after *Reflections*’ publication, when preparing for the Debate on the Unitarian Petition, he would, in disagreement with William Warburton’s characterization of the relationship between church and state as an “alliance,” assert that the two were “one and the same.” *Writings and Speeches*, 4:490–91, 506. For present purposes it may be enough to observe that in *Reflections* Burke was not shifting emphasis from the need for maintaining the independence of the Established Church from the state to identifying them as one. That he was asserting both simultaneously raises difficulties for some conceivable explanations of his position. The distance from “inseparable” to “one and the same” is very slight, even though, as Richard Bourke points out, “this union did not imply an identity of function.” *Empire and Revolution*, 725. Still, it is clear that the “Speech on the Unitarian’s Petition,” and especially the ramifications of the final four words of Burke’s statement there that “in a Christian commonwealth *the Church and the State* are one and the same thing; being different *integrant parts* of the *same whole*, which is the Church” (the italics are Burke’s) require an inquiry of their own far beyond the scope of this essay. *Writings and Speeches*, 4:491.

debate on repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts began in 1787, even before the proximate beginnings of the French Revolution and the publication of Price's *Discourse*, it illustrates the earliest in a series of occasions on which Burke had to struggle to hold principled positions he had formerly taken in some coherent relationship to defenses of British institutions that he now felt it necessary to make. On this issue we are afforded a better view of one such attempt than we have in some later debates when the prospects for coherence may have been slighter. It came at a pivotal moment in the development of Burke's thought, and it may provide a point from which the extent of some of his later divergences and intensifications can be estimated.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ I am deeply grateful to David Bromwich, Emma Macleod, and Peter Marshall for their kindness in reading a late draft of this essay.

Conservative, Pluralist, Sociologist

ROBERT NISBET'S BURKE



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Introduction

The profound influence of Edmund Burke has been recognized by a variety of thinkers. Russell Kirk, Peter Stanlis, and others named Burke the founder of modern conservatism. Even those who are critical of his ideas and of their influence on conservatism, such as Leo Strauss, recognize his significance.¹ One scholar who wrote not only on Burke's conservatism but on his broader influence on modern social thought is the American sociologist Robert Nisbet. Few, if any, of Burke's commentators give him credit for as broad an influence on the modern world as does Nisbet, who sees Burke not only as the founder of philosophical and political conservatism, but also as essential to strains of philosophical radicalism and liberalism and even a central figure in the modern discipline of sociology. To understand Nisbet's view of Burke's expansive role in modern political and social thought, this paper will explore

¹ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950). See Chapter VI.B.

Nisbet's understanding of Burke as the first conservative, the founder of modern pluralism, and the original sociologist.

Nisbet was one of the most cited public intellectuals of the twentieth century.² In addition to writing important textbooks of sociology, he held the Albert Schweitzer Chair at Columbia and delivered the 1987 Jefferson Lecture for the National Endowment for the Humanities.³ Despite his professional training as a sociologist, he made a significant contribution to contemporary political thought by focusing his sociological scholarship on the relationship between political power and social groups.⁴ His first book, *The Quest for Community*, became one of the founding treatises of post-war American conservatism. As a New Deal Democrat, he did not write *Quest* as a conservative book, nor did he intend to contribute to a broader political movement, certainly not to conservatism.⁵ However, his book was received as a traditionalist challenge to the efficacy of state action and state power.⁶ As his career progressed, Nisbet became increasingly associated with intellectual con-

2 Robert G. Perrin, Introduction to the Transaction Edition, *Tradition and Revolt* by Robert Nisbet (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999; Originally published by Random House, Inc.), viii.

3 See Robert Nisbet, *The Social Bond: An Introduction to the Study of Society* (New York: Knopf, 1970. Reissued in 1977 by McGraw-Hill, New York in a new edition coauthored with Robert G. Perrin.) and Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966. Reissued by Transaction, New Brunswick N.J., 1993 with a new introduction by the author).

4 Nisbet writes in the first sentence of the preface to his first book, "This book deals with political power—more specifically, with the impact of certain conceptions of political power upon social organization in modern Western society." *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press. Republished in 1962 by Galaxy Book, New York under new title: *Community and Power*. Reissued in 1969 under original title: *The Quest for Community*. Reprinted by Institute for Contemporary Studies, San Francisco with a new preface in 1990, and by ISI Books, Wilmington with a new introduction in 2010.) All quotations from latest edition.

5 Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, Transaction Publishers, 2008), 106.

6 After reading *Quest* and corresponding with Nisbet, Kirk added Nisbet to later editions of *The Conservative Mind*, naming him one of the prominent conservatives of the twentieth century. See Bradley J. Birzer, *Russell Kirk: American Conservative* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 194. For Kirk's discussion of Nisbet's ideas and importance, see Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7th ed. (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1985), 482–90.

servatism⁷ and his political allegiances changed accordingly.⁸ He cultivated an enduring friendship with Russell Kirk⁹ whose book *The Conservative Mind*, published the same year as *Quest*, is largely thought to have provided thinkers of the nascent conservative movement with an intellectual pedigree and history, beginning, of course, with Burke.¹⁰ In addition to his substantial scholarly output, Nisbet wrote for *Commentary* and *Reason*, among other publications associated with the American right, and he spent the last several years of his career as a Resident and then Adjunct Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Nisbet has been described as “one of America’s foremost sociologists of conservatism because several of his writings analyze conservatism as a social and intellectual movement.”¹¹ Throughout his career, Nisbet maintained the argument that modern sociology originated in the work of nineteenth-century conservatism, which was in his view inspired by Edmund Burke. Toward the end of his career, Nisbet directly addressed “conservatism” as a body of ideas whose origin is in the writings of Burke in a slim volume titled *Conservatism: Dream and Reality*.¹²

7 See Alfred S. Regnery, *Upstream: The Ascendancy of American Conservatism* (New York: Regnery, 2008), 48–9; and George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006; originally published by Basic Books, 1976), 77–78.

8 Paul Gottfried, “Nisbet, Robert A. (1913–96),” *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), 634–5.

9 For an overview of the correspondence and friendship between Kirk and Nisbet see Birzer, *Russell Kirk*, 192–196. Birzer records that in addition to kindly correspondence and reviews of each other’s books, they even vacationed together. Kirk excerpts the final chapter of Nisbet’s *Twilight of Authority* (Oxford University Press, 1975; Liberty Fund, 2000) titled “The Restoration of Authority” in his *Portable Conservative Reader*. See Russell Kirk, ed., *The Portable Conservative Reader* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc. 1982), 644–705. Nisbet’s excerpt is the last entry. Kirk explains, “Because Nisbet believes a real restoration of authority and of much else to be quite conceivable, his analysis is a fitting conclusion to an anthology of conservative writing.” Kirk, *Portable Reader*, 645.

10 Nisbet himself holds this view. See Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 106. Writing to Kirk shortly after the publication of *The Conservative Mind*, Nisbet wrote that Kirk had broken “the cake of intellectual opposition to the conservative tradition in the United States.” Robert Nisbet to Russell Kirk, May 27, 1953, Kirk Papers.

11 Robert Lowell Stone, *Robert Nisbet: Communitarian Traditionalist* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2000), 77.

12 Kirk recommends Nisbet’s *Conservatism* as an excellent overview of philosophical conservatism. See Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1998), 49–50.

Despite his association with American conservatism and his relationship with AEI and other institutions of the American right, Nisbet was critical of various strains of the American conservative coalition as it came to be represented in the Reagan presidency and the Reagan political coalition. He sincerely disliked the democratist orientation and social conservative policies of American evangelicalism, he excoriated the militarist tendencies of neoconservatives as anathema to traditional conservatism,¹³ and he criticized American conservatives' focus on *obtaining* political power, and using it for their own ends, rather than *limiting* political power, and protecting the autonomy of the social realm from political interference.¹⁴ Nisbet's disagreements with actors and ideas associated with late-twentieth-century American conservatism is largely owing to his devotion to Burke as the founder of modern conservatism and his belief that much of what passed for conservatism on the political stage in late-twentieth-century America owed little to Burke's ideas.

For Nisbet, Burke was the first thinker of the modern period to correctly perceive that the modern state, especially in its democratic form, was a threat to non-political groups. As such, Nisbet viewed Burke as the first conservative, the first pluralist of the democratic era, and the first modern sociologist. Most readers will be little surprised by the first assertion, but exhibit increasingly raised eyebrows by the following two. Nisbet views Burke as the first pluralist and the first sociologist for the same reason he views him as the first conservative: Burke's primary concern was to conserve the social order in all its plurality from the intrusions of political power.

Nisbet's apprehension over the effect of political power upon the health of social groups long predates the publication of *Quest* or even his discovery of Burke. It can be traced back at least to his graduate work at Berkeley in the 1930s. He wrote his dissertation on a collection of nineteenth-century conservatives such as Louis de Bonald, Rob-

13 See Robert Nisbet, *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). Reprinted by Liberty Fund. Chapter 1 "The Prevalence of War" discusses the warlike tendency of every president since Woodrow Wilson. He further argues that the prevalence of war is leading to a "New Absolutism" and names Reagan as merely the latest installment in that development along with both Roosevelts, Wilson, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon. Nisbet, *Present Age*, 43.

14 See Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 110-14 and Nisbet, *Twilight*, 44-5.

ert de Lamennais, Auguste Comte, François-René de Chateaubriand, Frédéric Le Play, and Emile Durkheim, who mounted intellectual defenses of the social realm against the ravages of democratism and industrialism. At the time, Nisbet did not see Burke as essential to this way of thinking. During his seven years of academic study at Berkeley “any reference to Burke was as tendentious as rare.” Nisbet finished his dissertation and joined the Berkeley faculty in 1939. As a budding sociologist he was concerned with the atomizing effects of modern society on social groups and the psychological damage such social isolation did to the individual. He repeatedly cites Durkheim’s groundbreaking study *Suicide*, arguing that groups with less social cohesion have higher suicide rates than others.¹⁵

The post-war Burke renaissance would awaken Nisbet to the fact that Burke had been the originating intellectual force behind the nineteenth-century philosophical movement that came to be known as conservatism. This group of thinkers he discovered in graduate school were animated by Burke’s concerns with the intrusions of the French democratic state into the social realm as were thinkers in the pluralist strains of nineteenth-century liberal thought such as Alexis de Tocqueville and even anarchists like Pierre Joseph Proudhon and Peter Kropotkin. From the general conservative and pluralist thrust of these nineteenth-century thinkers emerged sociology, the academic study of the social realm as distinct from the political and economic. To that discipline Nisbet would devote his life’s work.

Nisbet labels Burke a *conservative* because Burke wanted to *conserve* the inherited social and political institutions of England and elsewhere. This is not to say that Burke wanted to preserve them as they were—he was nothing if not a reformer; but reform, for him, was quite different from revolution. Reform preserved what was best in inherited institutions, while revolution dispensed with them entirely. Burke was a *pluralist* because he believed in a plurality of social groups that composed a realm distinct from the state but on which the state relied for the shaping of good citizens. One need not desire to conserve traditional social institutions as such to believe in the importance of a plural social order. Burke was what might be called a proto-*sociologist* because he believed

¹⁵ See, for example, Nisbet, *Quest*, 11–12.

that the social realm was a sphere of phenomena distinct from the political realm and that the individual's relationships to various social institutions were distinct from his relationship to the state. Furthermore, this realm could be investigated, studied, discussed, and defended as a realm existing with its own locus of authorities independent of political power. Following Burke, the social realm became an area that continued to be studied. Tocqueville's famous work on American democracy includes manifold sections on local governing townships, voluntary associations, and the like. For Nisbet, it is an undertaking impossible to conceive without the influence of Burke. Furthermore, Nisbet perceived in the groundbreaking work of Comte, Le Play, Tonnies, Weber, and Durkheim echoes of Burke's defense of the social realm.

Burke was not the first pluralist or the first sociologist in the sense that he was not the *first* thinker to have pluralist ideas or the *first* to study social institutions. Nisbet explicitly acknowledges Aristotle, not Burke, as the first pluralist.¹⁶ Burke was not even the first pluralist of the modern era: that distinction Nisbet gives to the seventeenth-century Dutch jurist Johannes Althusius.¹⁷ But Burke was the starting point, the *original* source, the scholarly impetus of nineteenth- and twentieth-century pluralism and sociology. Unlike Althusius, who needed to be rediscovered in the late nineteenth century, Burke was the thinker to whom pluralists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries looked for philosophical inspiration and sustenance. Likewise, there may have been others who studied society as proto-sociologists prior to Burke, but nineteenth-century sociology took its orientation from Burke's defense of social institutions against the Jacobin attack during the French Revolution. Burke's concern for conserving the social realm animated pluralists of all sorts in the nineteenth century, even those who had little desire to preserve traditional social institutions, and it instigated forays into the study of the social order which gave birth to the modern discipline of sociology. Conservatism, pluralism, and sociology were to Nisbet good things in the modern world, each a counterweight

16 Robert Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers: Community and Conflict in Western Thought* (London: Heinemann, 1973) Reprinted by Washington Square Press, New York, 1982, 390.

17 *Ibid.*, 396.

to the centralizing and individualizing tendencies of modern political and economic order. For Nisbet, the intellectual genealogy of all three of these movements can be traced directly to Burke.

There are disagreements as to how Burke ought to be read.¹⁸ Certainly Nisbet here is giving us one particular reading of Burke, one that emphasizes his defense of the “little platoon” and his warnings about the centralization of power in the purportedly democratic state in France. Nisbet was a public intellectual as well as an academic, publishing in widely circulated periodicals and having much to say on twentieth-century politics, which he saw as diverging from Burke’s thought in important ways. An impetus for his revival of Burke is precisely this deviation, this tendency for twentieth-century politicians, whether from the left or the right, to implement reform at the national level, through the exercise of raw political power at the expense of the local and the associational. He criticized virtually every president from Wilson to Reagan for their expansionist foreign policy, which he thought not all that different from Napoleon’s, as well as the intrusive domestic policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, Johnson’s Great Society, and Reagan’s moral majority.

The importance of Burke in Nisbet’s thought is rarely mentioned or reflected in the scholarship on Nisbet. In two recent symposiums on Nisbet’s work,¹⁹ the influence of Burke is mentioned in one article, but

18 Steven D. Ealy, “The Varieties of Burke in Contemporary American Conservative Thought,” *Modern Age*, 58, no. 1. Ealy provides an overview of six readings of Burke drawing from Russell Kirk, Leo Strauss, Francis Graham Wilson, Willmoore Kendall, Richard Weaver, and Friedrich Hayek. While certainly there is overlap between some of these interpretations, the diversity of readings Burke gets from his twentieth-century self-described conservative admirers is astounding.

19 The following articles appeared in *The American Sociologist*: Judith Adler, “Sociology as an Art Form: One Facet of the Conservative Sociology of Robert Nisbet,” *The American Sociologist* (2014) 45:8–21; Ronald Schwartz, “Riverside Days: Recollection of Robert Nisbet as a Teacher,” *The American Sociologist* (2014) 45:34–49; Daniel Gordon, “Legitimation, Ambivalence, Condemnation: Three Sociological Visions of the American University in the 1960s and 1970s,” *The American Sociologist* (2014) 45:51–67; Bryan S. Turner, “Robert Nisbet and the Problem of Community,” *The American Sociologist* (2014) 45:68–83; Peter Baehr, “Totalitarianism in America? Robert Nisbet on the “Wilson War State” and Beyond,” *The American Sociologist* (2014) 45:84–102. The *Society* symposium included the following articles: Judith Adler, “*Caritas* and Community: Reflections on the Sociological Art of Robert Nisbet,” *Society* (2015) 52:316–323; Daniel Chernilo, “Social Change and Progress in

only in passing.²⁰ Brad Lowell Stone discusses Burke as one of Nisbet's "intellectual heroes" along with Tocqueville, but his analysis is brief and introductory.²¹ This article will explain in detail how central Burke was to Nisbet's thought by showing the massive and salutary influence Nisbet believed Burke had on modern social philosophy. Understanding the role of Burke in Nisbet's political and social thought helps to explain why Nisbet took the stances he did against centralizing schemes from Wilson's War state to Reagan's moral majority.

Burke as Conservative

Like Kirk and many others in the twentieth-century conservative fold, Nisbet believed that Burke was the first conservative of the modern period, although he admits that, as a member of the Whig party, Burke would not have viewed *himself* as a conservative.²² Burke was often a champion of the downtrodden and oppressed, opposing the exercise of British power against Irish Catholics, Governor Warren Hastings's abuses in India, and unjust regulation in the American colonies. Despite being an Anglican, Burke defended dissenter religious traditions and Roman Catholics against established church restrictions. In short, Burke was far from a throne-and-altar reactionary. Nonetheless, Nisbet sees in Burke's writings and actions the formation of the body of beliefs and impulses that came to be known as *conservatism*, oriented as they were primarily toward *conservation* of the social order.²³ Burke's objections to

the Sociology of Robert Nisbet," *Society* (2015) 52:324–334; Paul Gottfried, "Robert Nisbet and the Present Age," *Society* (2015) 52:335–343; Field, "My Father," 344–50.

20 Adler, "Caritas and Community," 317.

21 Brad Lowell Stone, *Robert Nisbet: Communitarian Traditionalist* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2000), 63.

22 Burke is the first thinker treated in Kirk's *Conservative Mind* and the first excerpted in *The Portable Conservative Reader*, edited by Kirk, with the explicit understanding that all the American and British conservatives he treats are the intellectual heirs of Burke and indebted to his ideas. See Kirk, *Conservative Mind*, 6. "Every conservative thinker discussed in the following chapters—even the Federalists who were Burke's contemporaries—felt the influence of the great Whig ..." For an overview of Kirk's interpretation of Burke's thought and influence see Kirk, *Conservative Mind*, chapters 1 and 2, and Kirk, *Portable Reader*, xii–xix and 1–48. For an explanation and critique of Kirk's interpretation of Burke see Birzer, *Russell Kirk*, 104–110.

23 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 19.

British imperial policy were largely based on his desire to conserve the traditional social arrangements in India, Ireland, and the American colonies from the ravages of imperial policy. While the term conservative was not used in political discourse until around 1830,²⁴ Burke articulated a way of thinking that had wide influence upon later thinkers who appropriately adopted the term to describe their political and moral beliefs.

Kirk famously rejected the description of conservatism as an ideology, writing in *The Conservative Mind*, “[C]onservatism is not an ideology, but instead a mode of looking at human nature and society.”²⁵ Nisbet, however, uses the term “ideology” on the grounds that its present meaning does *not* denote the embrace of abstract principles that distort the interpretation of reality (which was why Kirk objected to the term), defining it, instead, as “any reasonably coherent body of moral, economic, social, and cultural ideas that has a solid and well-known reference to politics and political power; more specifically a power base to make possible a victory for the body of ideas.”²⁶ He identifies three dominant ideologies in the modern world: conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. His goal in *Conservatism* is to describe the body of ideas that has historically gone under that title. Nisbet’s term for the tenets of the conservative ideology is “dogmatics,” which he describes as “the arching perspectives, the essential insights and propositions, and the intellectual thrusts of conservatism as this body of thought has existed in the West for nearly 200 years.”²⁷ Nisbet explains that he cites Burke more than any other thinker because “Burke is the prophet—the Marx or the Mill—of conservatism.”²⁸ Burke is the founder of conservatism and within his body of writings, Nisbet believes, are nearly all the principal beliefs that later conservatives would consider essential.

Nisbet argues that there were two “eruptions” of conservatism and that Burke was the essential ingredient in both. The first eruption was

24 Ibid., 21. “The words conservative and conservatism applied to politics did not appear in the West until about 1830, but the substance long preceded the words.”

25 Kirk, *Conservative Mind*, 490.

26 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 15. Kirk did not like even this use of the term. See Kirk, *Politics of Prudence*, 50. Kirk writes of Nisbet’s book *Conservatism* that he “agree[s] with everything in it except for Dr. Nisbet’s attempt to classify conservatism as an ideology, and his praise of Kirk’s works.”

27 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 18.

28 Ibid., 19.

launched by Burke in reaction to the French Revolution and the second was launched by a resuscitation of Burke scholarship in the 1950s and 60s by Russell Kirk, Peter Stanlis, and Nisbet himself, among others. On why these eruptions happened, Nisbet writes, "Each ... came in response to the same basic challenge, that of a political order extending itself ever more rapaciously into traditional society."²⁹

Burke's primary articulation of the principles that have characterized conservatism for the last two hundred years are found in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Nisbet writes, "Rarely in the history of thought has a body of ideas been as closely dependent upon a single man and a single event as modern conservatism is upon Edmund Burke and his fiery reaction to the French Revolution."³⁰ A generation after Burke, "Bonald and de Maistre in France, Coleridge and Southey in England, Savigny and Hegel in Germany, Haller in Switzerland, and Balmes in Spain" would be defending Burke's articulation of traditionalism against the Enlightenment values of individualism and progress in their respective countries.³¹

While Burke's concerns were primarily instigated by the political and social turmoil of the French Revolution, other events and ideological currents shaped later conservative beliefs. The Industrial Revolution, Methodism, and the utilitarianism inspired by Jeremy Bentham, all threats to traditional society which Burke was not historically situated to address directly, triggered the reaction of later generations of conservative thinkers; but the response of post-Burkean conservative thinkers to these movements and ideas was Burkean to the core. Just as Burke had perceived the Jacobins of the French Revolution as attacking traditional French society, Burkean conservatives perceived later movements and ideas as attacks on the traditional social order that Burke had defended.

Nisbet describes the dogmatics of conservatism as a set of six conceptual pairs: history and tradition, prejudice and reason, authority and power, liberty and equality, property and life, and religion and morality. We will discuss each pair briefly to outline Nisbet's conception of Burke's conservatism and its influence.

²⁹ Nisbet, *Prejudices*, 55.

³⁰ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 19.

³¹ Stone, *Robert Nisbet*, 77.

Conservatives esteem *history* and *tradition*. By history conservatives do not mean mere chronology, nor do they mean the sort of “natural histories” popular in the nineteenth century. History for Burkean conservatives, Nisbet writes, is “no more than *experience*.”³² It is the concrete experience of the human race in the recorded past as it is encapsulated in the ongoing life of society. It is the “persistence of structures, communities, habits, and prejudices generation after generation.”³³ Burke’s defense of contract as “a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born”³⁴ reflects this concern with the historical continuity that underlies the political order, as does his criticism of those who think “it is a sufficient motive to destroy an old scheme of things, because it is an old one.”³⁵ Nisbet writes, “We cannot know where we are, much less where we are going, until we know where we have been. This is the bedrock position of the conservative philosophy of history.”³⁶

Related to history is tradition. Tradition for the conservative is inherently selective. It does not mean passive acceptance of *all* the past has to offer, but, appropriation of the *best* that the past has to offer. A respect for tradition is Burke’s willingness “to avail [oneself] of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages.”³⁷ Nisbet’s conservative respects tradition not because he is against change, but because he is against change for its own sake. Following Burke, the conservative opposes the “spirit of innovation” that equates social change with social progress, as if every reform inherently improves its subject by virtue of changing it. Traditional institutions and traditional ways of doing things may seem outdated, but nonetheless have important psychological or sociological functions. Renovation of traditional institutions may undo a great deal of good by eliminating the social practices or institutional manifestations of humaneness and stability. Burke’s defense of English constitutional institutions, including the rights and privi-

32 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 38. Emphasis added.

33 Ibid., 39.

34 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001), 261.

35 Ibid., 252.

36 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 41.

37 Burke, *Reflections*, 251.

leges of commoners, is that they are inherited, they are traditions. He writes, "We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and an house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors."³⁸ History acts for the conservative as a sort of winnowing process that, over time, produces better social practices encapsulated in customs. To eliminate the tradition is to remove what may be the best social practice of available alternatives. Nisbet compares history and tradition to the biologist's idea of natural selection. They are the processes whereby superior social practices are selected and retained as functionally significant to persons, just as superior biological organisms are retained through natural selection as functionally significant to the survival of the organism.³⁹

Prejudice and *reason* are juxtaposed ways of understanding the primary means through which persons and societies understand truths and incorporate them into their way of life.⁴⁰ Burke's famous defense of prejudices heavily influenced later conservative thought and its opposition to Enlightenment epistemology. Prejudice is a way of knowing, understanding, and feeling. It is opposed to individual truth-seeking and individual reason as these things were glorified by the French philosophes. Burke writes, "[T]he longer [prejudices] have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small ..."⁴¹ Prejudice is how ancient wisdom embodied in tradition becomes actionable in individual thought and sentiment. "[P]rejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence."⁴²

Burke's attack on the "sophisters, economists, and calculators"⁴³ is based upon his idea that much of what is good in society is derived from tradition that lies in the prejudices common to the people. These preju-

³⁸ Ibid., 184.

³⁹ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 43.

⁴⁰ Nisbet titled one book *Prejudices*, a collection of about seventy essays on a wide variety of topics. He took the title from Burke's observations on prejudices. See Robert Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982).

⁴¹ Burke, *Reflections*, 251.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 238.

dices embody a "latent wisdom" that provides resolve to act virtuously in the moment of need. In many ways, Burke's idea of prejudice is a populist notion. Nisbet writes, "Ironically, the Burkean idea of prejudice fed the gathering democratic idea of the will of the people, for Burke's idea was a reference above all to the kind of sense, understanding and knowledge that is common among individuals in a nation, not something that is the special preserve of an intellectual elite."⁴⁴ But unlike Rousseau's General Will, which was the will of the people "*after* it had been purged of the traditional and purely experiential,"⁴⁵ Burke's prejudices were the will of the people *constituted by* the traditional and experiential.

In the nineteenth century, Burke's term "prejudice" was discarded, but the idea behind it gave birth to a scholarly shift in epistemology. Study of the intuitive, folk sentiment, and the pre-rational replaced emphasis on individual reason. The dichotomy between reason and prejudice that underlies Burke's defense of prejudice became a common way of organizing types of knowledge. William James's dichotomy between "knowledge of" and "knowledge about" reflects precisely Burke's distinction between prejudice and reason.⁴⁶

Nisbet sees one intellectual impetus for Burke's defense of prejudice over individual reason in Burke's belief that rationalism undergirded tyranny. If it is true that a person can reason their way to the right answer to any question without reference to anyone else, then presumably a ruler can reason his way to the best piece of legislation for an entire country without advice from others, including those the legislation would govern. The premise of individual reason provides a premise for tyranny. Furthermore, the strongest impulse in opposition to tyranny was not individual reasoning about abstract natural rights a tyrant ought not violate. Rather, the reasons and impetus to oppose tyranny were found in the prejudices of the people which, if properly constituted, make them resistant to the tyrant's claim to power. Burke writes, "In England ... we still feel within us, and we cherish and cultivate, those inbred sentiments which are the faithful guardians, the active monitors

⁴⁴ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 45.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

of our duty, the true supporters of all liberal and manly morals.”⁴⁷ Over time, Nisbet writes, a people build up “prejudices about religion, property, national autonomy and long-accustomed roles in the social order. These, not abstract rights, are the motive powers in the struggles of peoples for freedom which we honor.”⁴⁸

Like the juxtaposition of prejudice and reason, Nisbet contrasts the concepts of *authority* and *power*. Burke’s defense of the social order was predicated on his defense of authority and his critique of power. Rather than taking the side of authority against liberty, the Burkean defense of authority is based on the idea that liberty means the freedom of social groups and institutions to exercise authority over their members. Nisbet writes, “[T]he hallmark of conservative politics has been its greater affection for the private sector, for family, and local community, for economy and private property, and for a substantial measure of decentralization in government, one that would respect the corporate rights of the smaller unities of state and society.”⁴⁹ Burke famously defended the Irish and the Indians from British imperialist meddling on the grounds that freedom for these peoples meant the freedom to live by their own customs, to live under local authority. While Burke believed in liberty, it was liberty tied to order, to the exercise of authority and restraint upon passions. This restraint was largely exercised by social groups.

The effect of this conservative concern for a preservation of social authority is a conception of liberty that does not focus on enumerated individual rights, but on restrictions on state power. Burke wrote to Prime Minister Pitt in his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, in response to the question of what action the government should take were the country threatened by an internal disaster, arguing that the state should only do what “is truly and properly public, to the public peace, to the public safety, to the public order, and to the public property.”⁵⁰ Nisbet sees this Burkean concern that the plethora of smaller authorities that constitute the social realm ought to be left alone reflected in the Amer-

47 Burke, *Reflections*, 250.

48 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 49.

49 Ibid., 52–3.

50 Edmund Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke, Vol. 4 (Miscellaneous Writings)*, ed. E. J. Payne (Reprint, with a foreword by Francis J. Canavan, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 90.

ican Constitution, which restricted federal power to allow states, localities, and the whole private sphere broad latitude for action. Although they were not enumerated, these rights were guaranteed implicitly by restrictions on state power that preserved an autonomous realm free from federal interference. Nisbet writes, "Liberties, individual and communal, existed, as it were, in the interstices of the Constitution."⁵¹

Power is coercion, generally exercised by the state. Political power need not be limited to monarchies, however, and Burke's criticism of popular government (as it was championed by the French Jacobins) is that it justified the invasion of private autonomies and authorities on the grounds that the people could not oppress themselves. For Burke, these dogmatists for democratic power were just as wrong as those who advocated power resting solely in a hereditary monarch. "These old fanatics of single arbitrary power dogmatized as if hereditary royalty was the only lawful government in the world, just as our new fanatics of popular arbitrary power, maintain that a popular election is the sole source of authority."⁵² But such an order has no basis or mechanism of restraint for those in power. Burke writes, "Instead of finding themselves obliged to conform to a fixed constitution, they have a power to make a constitution which shall conform to their designs. Nothing in heaven or upon earth can serve as a control on them."⁵³ Nisbet writes, "It was Edmund Burke who first identified this novel form of power taking shape in Revolutionary France and spreading first to other parts of Western Europe, then to other parts of the world."⁵⁴ But Burke saw that if society lost the plurality of natural authorities, it would not get individual freedom from social authority, but military domination.⁵⁵ The vacuum left by social authorities would be filled by state power: whether the source of that power was ostensibly popular was beside the point. Liberty would

⁵¹ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 55.

⁵² Burke, *Reflections*, 176.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁵⁴ Robert Nisbet, *Sociology as an Art Form* (Oxford University Press, 1976; Republished by Transaction Publishers, 2002), 51.

⁵⁵ Nisbet, *Prejudices*, 56. "Burke saw the fateful affinity that lies between revolution and militarism. The one breeds the other. The more the revolutionary government pulverizes the traditional bases of authority and community, the greater the need for sheer force to hold together the unstable aggregate of atoms that results. In the short time use of the military is unavoidable."

not survive such an expansion of power, no matter where it ostensibly resided. Burke writes, “[P]ower of some kind or other, will survive the shock in which manners and opinions perish; and it will find other and worse means for its support.”⁵⁶ Due respect for the autonomy of social institutions and their ability to impose restraints on their members was the only guard against such an exercise of raw political power.

Liberty and *equality* are likewise juxtaposed values in Nisbet’s conservative mind. Nisbet writes:

There is no principle more basic in the conservative philosophy than that of the inherent and absolute incompatibility between liberty and equality. Such incompatibility springs from the contrary objectives of the two values. The abiding purpose of liberty is its protection of individual and family property—a word used in its widest sense to include the immaterial as well as the material in life. The inherent objective of equality, on the other hand, is that of some kind of redistribution or leveling of the unequally shared material and immaterial values of a community.⁵⁷

The concept of equality opposed by Burke and the conservatives is an equality of leveling. Burke writes, “[T]hose who attempt to level, never equalize.”⁵⁸ Schemes of equalization “pull down what is above. They never raise what is below: and they depress high and low together beneath the level of what was originally the lowest.”⁵⁹

This distinction between liberty and equality is found in Burke’s distinction between the purposes of the French and American revolutions. The American Revolution was driven by a desire for liberty from British dominance and, as this impulse was embodied in the American Constitution, a desire to limit the new government, to keep it from impinging upon the individual and corporate liberties of the new American citizens and states. In contrast, the French Revolution located liberty in the nation as a whole rather than in the pre-existing local communities.

⁵⁶ Burke, *Reflections*, 241.

⁵⁷ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 60.

⁵⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 205.

⁵⁹ Burke, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 69.

The nation secured *individual* liberty insofar as it violated the liberty of localities and associations to exercise their authority. It liberated its citizens from associational hierarchies so that they could be equal citizens of the state. Essentially, the distinction Nisbet makes is between “freedom from” and “freedom to”: the freedom of the individual secured by the state was not *freedom from* authority *per se*, but *freedom to* participate as an equal citizen in the national community embodied in the state.⁶⁰

The power exercised by the French national community suppressed the natural social authorities residing in aristocracy, local borough, and association. This exercise of power was supposed to establish freedom. But “[t]he freedom that the Jacobins celebrated, Burke believed, was essentially the freedom of the people as a national community to act against all groups, beginning with the aristocracy and the monarchists, which sought to limit or qualify in any way this monolithic community.”⁶¹ The fact that it was the people, or at least a majority of them, who exercised power made no difference to the conservatives. Tocqueville, de Maistre, Bonald and the like dismissed as self-evidently false the idea that the people could not tyrannize themselves. A majority could well tyrannize a minority. “Power is power,” Tocqueville argued, no matter where it resides.⁶² In the name of equality, the democratic French state could exercise power unknown to the “absolutist” French king because it was stamped with the seal of “the people.” Furthermore, the intention of equality to abolish hierarchy does not so much abolish it as transfer it from one set of individuals to another.

Property and life are also in tension for Nisbet’s conservative. Nisbet begins his discussion of property and life by quoting Paul Elmer More’s essay on property.⁶³ More writes, “To the civilized man the rights of

60 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 61. Stone points out that this distinction between negative liberty and positive liberty was best explained by Isaiah Berlin, although Nisbet does not mention him. Stone, *Robert Nisbet*, 85–6. See Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

61 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 61.

62 Ibid., 61.

63 More criticized John D. Rockefeller’s failure to defend actions he took to protect his property in the so-called Ludlow Massacre in Colorado in which a number of miners employed by Rockefeller were killed when they refused to vacate his property. See Paul Elmer More, “Property and Law,” in Kirk, *Portable Conservative Reader*, 435–51.

property are more important than the right to life.”⁶⁴ Property for the conservative is more than chattel, it is “the very condition of man’s humanness, his superiority over the entire natural world.”⁶⁵ Nisbet connects More’s sentiment to Burke in that Burke believed that property was the essence of civilization. As such, it made life possible.

For Burke, the Jacobin attack on property was one of the great crimes of the French Revolution. Burke especially defended corporate ownership of property, such as that embodied in monasteries and universities. According to the Jacobins, only individuals owned property. Property that tradition dictated had belonged to various institutions for hundreds of years was forfeit to the state.⁶⁶ But for Burke and later for Nisbet, privately owned property was the basis of social institutions; it allowed them to sustain their existence independent of a central source of power and wealth.

Again, Nisbet connects the conservative principle to the social group. In the case of property, it is especially related to the family. Hereditary property is the root meaning of *familia*. The Roman family under the Republic held property as the foundation of the family, the binding principle that gave the family independent economic sustenance. The power and durability of the family depended upon the inherited property that belonged to the family and to the family alone. Neither the state nor any of the family’s individual members had a claim to it. Land is especially important for the conservative understanding of property because it provides a permanent home, a rootedness for the family. The conservative defense of primogeniture and entail follows from this corporate understanding of property and the desire to make it a permanent feature of the corporate body.

Even with this basically feudal notion of property, both Burke and Tocqueville, and many other conservatives since, defended a *laissez faire* economic system.⁶⁷ In his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* Burke referred

64 Quoted in Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 67.

65 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 68.

66 Ibid., 68.

67 Greg M. Collins, “Edmund Burke on the Question of Commercial Intercourse in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Review of Politics*, 79 (2017), 565–595. Collins argues that Burke defended a *laissez-faire* economic system throughout his career, even decades prior to writing *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*.

to "the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God"—a notion echoed by Tocqueville.⁶⁸ Burke also spoke approvingly of supply and demand in labor and production as essential to economic prosperity and warned against any imposition on that fundamental economic scheme.⁶⁹ He wrote, "The balance between consumption and production makes price. The market settles, and alone can settle, that price. Market is the meeting and conference of the consumer and producer, when they mutually discover each other's wants."⁷⁰ Burke excoriated the Jacobin government for imposing regulatory schemes on the economic system. Both Burke and Tocqueville viewed property as an essential bulwark of traditional institutions and also an inviolable part of the social realm into which the political state should not intervene.

Nisbet repeatedly cites Burke's treatise on scarcity which advises William Pitt to refrain from using government power for economic aid even in times of crisis.⁷¹ Burke writes, "To provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of Government. It would be a vain presumption in statesman to think they can do it.... It is the power of Government to prevent much evil; it can do very little positive good in this, *or perhaps in any thing else*."⁷² This is not to say that conservatives are not concerned with care for the poor; but the Burkean conservative connects such social functions to social institutions. Nisbet writes:

There are groups beginning with the family and including the neighborhood and church, which are duly constituted to render assistance, and in the form of mutual-aid, not high-flown charity from a bureaucracy. Such groups are mediating bodies by nature; they are closer to the individual and in their very communal strength natural allies of the individual.⁷³

68 Burke, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 81.

69 Ibid., 64.

70 Ibid., 77.

71 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 70.

72 Quoted on Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 70. Italics added by Nisbet. See Burke, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 61.

73 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 73.

For the political authorities to ignore the function of these groups in the economic care of their members would be to denigrate them, to diminish their importance and relevance in the lives of their individual members. Nisbet continues, “[T]o bypass these groups through welfare aid addressed directly to designated classes of individuals is, conservatism argues, at once an invitation to discrimination and inefficiency and a relentless way of eroding the significance of groups.”⁷⁴ From associations formed in private, in the social realm, “rooted in property,” come sustenance for those in need.⁷⁵ As Burke writes, “Without all doubt, charity to the poor is a direct and obligatory duty upon all Christians, next in order after the payment of debts, full as strong, and by nature made infinitely more delightful to us.”⁷⁶

The last set of Nisbet’s conservative values is *religion* and *moral-ity*. Conservatives have largely supported established churches. Burke famously defended the established Church of England; Bonald and other conservatives advocated an established Roman Catholic Church. Nisbet argues that conservatives did so for two reasons. First, it “conferred a certain sacredness upon vital functions of government and upon the whole political or social bond.” As Burke wrote, “religion is the basis of civil society.”⁷⁷ Tocqueville later pointed out that religion countered the materialistic self-absorption of democratic society so that individuals contributed more readily to the common weal. Second, “an established, meaning a prominently featured and inevitably strong church, would act as a check upon the power of the state, upon any of its acts of ‘arbitrary power.’”⁷⁸ In short, religious establishment both bolstered the political order and restrained its power.

It is important for Nisbet’s conservative that religion be primarily institutional. The religion of Burke was opposed to Joseph Priestley’s evangelical, millennialist Christianity, with its emphasis on religious enthusiasm and individual experiences and belief. This is not to argue that thinkers in the line of Burke and Bonald were or were not personally devout, but that personal devotion was not the social or political

⁷⁴ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁶ Burke, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 72.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁸ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 81.

purpose of their defense of religion. Indeed a great many of Burke's disciples in later centuries such as Irving Babbitt, H. L. Mencken, and Albert Jay Nock were ambivalent when they were not hostile to religion, but nonetheless understood its restraining effect upon individuals, social institutions, and political power. Burke was aware that non-state authorities, such as the aristocracy, needed the restraint of church, monarchy, and other countervailing institutions. So did the monarchy and so did the people at large.⁷⁹ A strong established church joined the great balancing act along with a strong monarchy, a strong aristocracy, and a strong democracy to preserve a humane social and political order.⁸⁰

"It is religion as *civil* religion," Nisbet writes, "that seems to be the closest to a common essence of conservative belief, religion in which a transcendental core manifests itself in civil as well as religious garments, one in which the most sacred feast days—such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and New Year's Day—all serve religious and civil ends alike." Civil religion is important for the political and social worlds, because it is a religion that provides unifying and sanctifying symbols that bolster the political order as well as moral teachings that undergird the social order. But it is a religion that, while serving civil purposes, does not allow invasion of personal beliefs by the political powers. The Moral Majority, prominent when Nisbet published his book in the 1980s, was anathema to Nisbet's Burkean conservative because of its "brazen and calculated confusion of the secular—as manifested by intrusive laws and constitutional amendment—and the transcendently religious."⁸¹ This movement called for more state interference in the social realm than any disciple of Burke would condone. As Burke himself wrote, "[P]olitics and the pulpit are terms that have little agreement. No sound ought to be heard in the church but the healing voice of Christian charity. The cause of civil liberty and civil government gains as little as that of religion by this confusion of duties."⁸²

79 Ibid., 83, 81–2.

80 Burke, *Reflections*, 255–56.

81 Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 83–84, 84.

82 Burke, *Reflections*, 157.

Burke as Pluralist

Burke's pluralism is directly related to his conservatism. Nisbet points out that one of the great consequences of Burke's conservative concern with preserving traditional institutions from incursions from the state was to shift focus to the social realm itself. While discussing efforts to turn "Gascons, Picards, Bretons, Normans [into] Frenchmen" through policies of geometrical measurement in reference to the national French polity, Burke pointed out that human affection resided instead in the small groups of society, the products of tradition and prescription. He writes,

We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen. We pass on to our neighbourhoods, and our habitual provincial connections. These are inns and resting places. Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill. The love to the whole is not extinguished by this subordinate partiality.⁸³

This concern for French meddling in the social realm was preceded by Burke's opposition to Warren Hastings's policies of intrusion into traditional Indian society, his support for the "salutary neglect" of the colonial establishments in the American colonies, and support for a soft hand in Ireland. This shift produced a sea change in scholarly work in the nineteenth century that reverberated across the three great ideologies. Of course, utilitarianism and individualism continued to have a great influence over nineteenth-century scholarship; but, for a good many thinkers, the natural law focus on a pre-social world was rejected and replaced with concern for the strictly *social*. Nisbet explains:

The point is, the conservatives were instrumental in identifying the world of institutions and their growths—identifying this world for the uses of nineteenth-century scholarship and science—simply by virtue of their sustained eulogy of it at the

⁸³ Ibid., 366.

expense of the hated, 'metaphysical' world of natural law and natural rights.⁸⁴

Many were profoundly influenced by Burke's pluralist concern for "the subdivision ... the little platoon we belong to in society,"⁸⁵ but rejected his traditionalist bent. Conservatives such as Bonald and de Maistre were influenced by Burke's concerns, but so were liberals and radicals. The latter liked Burke's defense of the local, the associational, and the non-state, but disagreed that these things were necessarily the product of tradition.⁸⁶ Nonetheless Burke's conservative pluralism not only produced a nineteenth-century version of conservatism that carried on his defense of traditional institutions and the whole realm of customary allegiances against the meddling of the political state, but it also produced both a liberal pluralism and a radical pluralism with similar goals. These latter pluralist movements differed from conservative pluralism in important ways, but they shared Burke's fundamental concern with the negative effect of state intrusion into the social realm.

To understand Nisbet's argument for Burke's influence on liberal and radical pluralism, it is important to understand how Nisbet dichotomizes political philosophy between two basic presuppositional orientations: monism and pluralism. Monist political philosophy presupposes essential unity. It begins with an assumption that there must be one central authority, a sovereign power that exercises unquestioned power. "Distinction between state and society is either denied in this succession of thinkers," Nisbet writes, "or else the social sphere is deemed to be so inherently ridden with conflict and corruption that only through the most stringent uses of political power may the individual be saved."⁸⁷ Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau are the exemplars of this way of thinking.

In contrast, pluralists assume that there are a variety of social authorities, of which the political power is but one. To a plurality of social authorities, pluralists attach a variety of communal functions and corresponding allegiances. While there is a significant difference

⁸⁴ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 86.

⁸⁵ Burke, *Reflections*, 202.

⁸⁶ See Yves Chiron, "The Influence of Burke's Writing in Post-Revolutionary France," in *The Enduring Edmund Burke*, ed. Ian Crowe (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1997).

⁸⁷ Nisbet, *Twilight of Authority*, 224.

between the dogmatics of the major ideologies of the modern world there is a greater difference between the philosophical orientations of monists and pluralists within each ideological category. One's fundamental presuppositional orientation greatly alters how one's ideological principles are manifested. Conservative pluralists have more in common with liberal and radical pluralists than they do with conservative monists. Monists of all ideological stripes pursue power as an end unto itself. The same applies to liberals and radicals: they may promise different uses of power, but they see the use of political power and not its limitation as the goal of politics.⁸⁸

Burke's concern for the social realm emerged from his conservative effort to preserve traditional social institutions; but some later thinkers separated the preservation of traditional social institutions from the fundamental insight that social institutions as such are important. For liberals, this means that social institutions are important for individuals. For radicals, this means that new social institutions need to be formed in the creation of a new society.

Nisbet offers his most thorough explanation of the influence of Burke on modern pluralists in *The Social Philosophers*, published over a decade before his study of Burke's influence in *Conservatism*. In *The Social Philosophers*, Nisbet discusses Louis de Bonald and Friedrich Hegel as exemplars of conservative pluralism in the nineteenth century. Like Burke, Bonald opposed the French Revolution because of its centralizing tendencies. He believed that all of the medieval institutions, the family, the guilds, the rural communities, and, most importantly, the church, had their own inherent authority that attached to their specific sphere of function.⁸⁹ Bonald emphasized the ability of traditional institutions to exercise authority over their members. While this implied institutional *freedom* from the state, Bonald's emphasis was on institutional *authority*. He attacked democracy and individual equality on the grounds that these values lead to atomization of social groups, to increased state power at the expense of the autonomy of traditional institutions.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid., 41–6.

⁸⁹ See footnote 16 above.

⁹⁰ Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 415.

Because of his early devotion to the political state, Hegel is situated a little uncomfortably among the conservative pluralists. However, his plural understanding of the organization of society, especially later in life, was due to the influence of Burke. He "viewed society as plural, possessed of not one but several natural centers of authority."⁹¹ The political state rules all of the local institutions, but it does not rule the individual directly, as it does in the thought of Hobbes and Rousseau. The rule of the political state is mediated through the lesser social institutions.

While the emphasis of the conservative pluralists was on plural authority and the ability of associations to exercise legitimate functional authority over their members, the liberal pluralists emphasized the protection of the freedom of associations—and the freedom of individuals to associate—from the centralized power of the sovereign state. Robert de Lamennais and Alexis de Tocqueville are Nisbet's examples of liberal pluralists who followed the example of Burke.⁹²

Nisbet had devoted a chapter of his dissertation to Lamennais. While Lamennais was a staunch conservative at the beginning of his career, defending the autonomy of the Roman Catholic Church from state domination, he was eventually excommunicated and became a supporter of liberal and radical causes.⁹³ Lamennais began his career with a concern for the authority of the church, but later he defended the authority and liberty of non-religious associations by essentially applying that same pluralist analysis and advocacy of functional autonomy that applied to the church to all associations. Nisbet explains:

In effect, what led to [Lamennais'] loss of confidence in the church, and then his expulsion from it, was hardly more than his carrying to other spheres of society the principles he had limited in the beginning to the church alone. From a posi-

⁹¹ Ibid., 416, 417.

⁹² In *Conservatism*, Nisbet had discussed Tocqueville as a conservative. His placement in *The Social Philosophers* as a liberal pluralist is curious from the perspective of his later work. Perhaps he explained his nuanced view of Tocqueville best in *The Sociological Tradition*, published several years earlier 1966. Nisbet wrote that in Tocqueville "liberalism and conservatism coalesce. His personal associations were with the liberals of his time ... Yet the special cast of his consideration and criticism of democracy is emphatically conservative." Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, 17.

⁹³ Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 419.

tion in which he argued for the complete autonomy of the church in society, he had, by 1830, reached the point of arguing for the autonomy of all associations in society, including those new kinds that conservatives tended to distrust: labor unions, cooperatives, and liberal political parties ... He was but extending to new forms of association in society the same rights of autonomy, of communal status in the law, that he had at first sought only for the church.⁹⁴

Freedom of associations, any associations, old or new, was the goal of Lamennais's political thought. He opposed individualism on the grounds that it was insufficient to save individuals from the oppressions of political power. Nisbet quotes Lamennais: "[N]o individual strength can offer sufficient guarantee of security against the incomparably greater force which is called sovereignty and from which arises the necessity of a new liberty, the liberty of association."⁹⁵ Voluntary and autonomous associations could provide individuals with the psychological and material security necessary to preserve freedom from political power.

For Nisbet, as for many others, Tocqueville is one the best commentators on the effects on society of modern democracy and egalitarianism. Rather than understanding the popularization of power in modern democracy as an advance for *freedom*, Tocqueville, like Burke, saw it as a reorganization of *power*. Tocqueville's primary concern was the relationship between democracy and freedom, which is the same as the relationship between equality and liberty. Democracy tends to have two effects: leveling of social ranks and centralization of power. In his famous study of America, Tocqueville noted that the preservation of freedom is due to the pluralism found in American society, a pluralism that was largely eviscerated in France by the Revolution, as Burke noted with distress. America had a division of authority, robust local institutions, federal structure of political power, a free press, and most importantly, freedom of association. The freedom of the individual, even if guaranteed in the Constitution, means little. But an "unlimited free-

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 420.

dom of association" can protect the individual from arbitrary power by means of countervailing institutions to political power. Tocqueville saw the importance not only of freedom of political associations, but also freedom of civil associations which serve "to diversify the social bond, to multiply the sources of social identification for individuals, and to make even more difficult the rise of the political mass, so easily captured and exploited both by faction and by central government."⁹⁶ It is not hard to see here a Burkean concern for the "inns and resting places" of the human spirit.

The radical pluralists wrote in the same pluralist vein as the conservatives and liberals described above, but they were still ineradicably radical. In Nisbet's words:

Whereas *conservative* pluralism saw its mission essentially as the recovery or reinforcement of historic and traditional groups and communities, and whereas *liberal* pluralism was concerned chiefly with relationships between the democratic state and a structure of social authority that would promise the highest degree of individual freedom, what we find in radical pluralism is a vision of a totally new society, which would be built on the ruins of capitalism and nationalism ... [T]he chief distinction of the radical vision of the future is that it is in its way fully as pluralist, localist, and decentralist as anything to be found among the liberals and conservatives who looked to Tocqueville and Burke for inspiration.⁹⁷

But unlike mainstream radical thinkers, as typified in the French Jacobins and Karl Marx, who intended to remake society through the exercise of centralized power, radical pluralists intended to remake society on the basis of a plurality of groups.⁹⁸

The two radical pluralists that Nisbet describes are Pierre Joseph Proudhon and Peter Kropotkin. Nisbet describes these two figures first in depth in his chapter on "The Ecological Community" in *The Social Philosophers*. But he brings them up again in his chapter on pluralism

⁹⁶ Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 428.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 430-1.

under the section titled “A Note about Radical Pluralism,” which follows his discussion of conservative and liberal pluralism.⁹⁹

Proudhon believed in the idea of mutualism, a natural form of common property ownership that he believed would replace capitalism. Rather than requiring a radical redistribution of power through a central authority, mutualism was based upon “*naturally* mutual ties.” These ties were natural in that they would exist in “all parts of human society not yet corrupted by either the private-property system of capitalism or the centralization of the state.” At the center of the system of mutualism is the family, “the oldest and most basic representation of mutual aid and of the unforced social bond.”¹⁰⁰ The family is the basis of a federal and decentralized order of society. Proudhon has a place for government, but the primary source of authority is the local and decentralized commune. Nisbet explains:

Each group, whether a family or a local or work association—would be sovereign over all matters affecting it alone ... Federalism and mutualism would be the keys to the good society. From mutualism would proceed the groups and communities made desirable by human nature and social function, with a maximum of autonomy in each. From federalism would proceed the necessary political structure of that autonomy to be found in each form of group and association. Thus would be achieved, not direct rule through centralized bureaucracy, but indirect rule, with a high premium placed upon decentralization and division of powers.¹⁰¹

Kropotkin, like Proudhon, was an opponent of capitalism, but he also hated the Bolshevik Revolution and the centralized political and economic systems it implemented. While he was radical in his belief that the present social and political worlds were hopelessly corrupt, he

99 Ibid., 322–6. While we need not go into depth on Nisbet’s idea of the ecological community, its primary orientation is the “idea of nature,” that all of life is interwoven with the environment. Among its elements is the idea of the autonomous association, which grows naturally as it is needed. The other elements of the ecological community are the idea of nature, the web of life, cooperation, and simplicity.

100 Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 367.

101 Ibid., 371.

believed that the principles of mutual aid and cooperation could produce a society that was peaceful, decentralized, and based upon small social units where individuals lived in harmony. Kropotkin wrote about mutual aid as it naturally existed in society, even a society corrupted by capitalism and statism, and how mutual aid could become the founding and guiding principle of a new society.¹⁰²

As advocates of a plural community, Proudhon and Kropotkin opposed the Marxists who supported centralized organization of the state under the control of the proletariat. Instead, Proudhon encouraged workers to form a variety of associations. "Multiply your associations and be free," he wrote.¹⁰³ Similarly, Kropotkin advocated decentralization and diversification of society. Both believed in building a good society by creating a variety of associations. The good society for these radicals was the plural society.

The inherent radicalism of radical pluralism should not be overlooked. Unlike both conservative pluralism and liberal pluralism, it rejected Western social and political order in its entirety. It differs profoundly from the conservatism of Burke, which understood the human need for continuity and the threat to civilized and humane order posed by revolutions. Nonetheless, Nisbet writes, radical pluralism is "the strongest and the most consistent attack from the left upon modern nationalism and political centralization."¹⁰⁴ Whatever its fundamental differences with conservatism and liberalism, Nisbet sees radical pluralism still founding its central insights on a plural, decentralized social structure, the very structure defended in Burke's *Reflections*.

Burke as Sociologist

For Nisbet, Burke was the original sociologist *because* he was the first conservative and the original pluralist. Just as the term conservative was not in use when Burke articulated the principles that would form its central body of thought, so sociology was not yet the term for the study of social institutions when that study first began. The social groups that

¹⁰² Ibid., 376.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 431.

¹⁰⁴ Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 432.

were central to the conservative reaction to the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution became the focus of the new discipline that Auguste Comte would dub “sociology.” Nisbet makes this point first in an article titled “Conservatism and Sociology,” published in 1952.¹⁰⁵ He explores the thesis in more depth in *The Sociological Tradition*, published in 1966. It remains one of the most intriguing parts of Nisbet’s scholarly perspectives and provides an unexpected way in which Nisbet sees Burke playing an important role in the modern world.

Nisbet’s thesis is that “[s]ociology ... from the very beginning borrowed heavily from the insights into society that such men as Burke, Bonald, and Hegel had supplied.” In other words, the scholars who first began working as sociologists, men such as Auguste Comte and Frédéric Le Play and later Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, were responding to the political and economic dislocations of the French and Industrial Revolutions with the same basic perspective as Burke and his disciples.¹⁰⁶ Nisbet quotes Burke’s *Reflections* at the end of the second chapter of *The Sociological Tradition*: “Many parts of Europe are in open disorder. In many others there is a hollow murmuring underground; a confused movement is felt, that threatens a general earthquake in the political world.”¹⁰⁷ Nisbet believes this sums up the state of mind of many nineteenth-century conservative thinkers, and that the concerns of these conservatives were translated into what he describes as the “unit-ideas” of sociology: “community, authority, status, the sacred, and alienation.” These are the basic perspectives that “provide fundamental, constitutive substance to sociology amid all the manifest differences among its authors.”¹⁰⁸ When sociologists practice sociology, they

¹⁰⁵ Robert Nisbet, “Conservatism and Sociology,” *American Journal of Sociology* (September 1952), 167–175. Reprinted in *Tradition and Revolt*, Robert A. Nisbet (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 73–90.

¹⁰⁶ Nisbet, “Conservatism and Sociology,” 84. Nisbet makes the same point in the last section of his chapter on the plural community in *The Social Philosophers* entitled “Sociological Pluralism.” Nisbet writes, “The discipline of sociology largely arose in the nineteenth century among the very circumstances in which we have found the beginnings of modern pluralism.” Nisbet, *Social Philosophers*, 432. Chapter two of *The Sociological Tradition* is titled “The Two Revolutions” and explains how they worked in tandem to destroy the old medieval order and produce the dislocations of functional meaning that so concerned the conservatives.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, 6, 5.

are studying in some way one or more of these five ideas as manifested in the social order.

In a new preface for *The Sociological Tradition*, Nisbet admits that it is a thesis that his reviewers found hard to accept.¹⁰⁹ There are two good reasons that it rankled many modern readers. First, there is a significant difference between the philosophy and social commentary of Burke and Bonald and the empirically-based science of society that followed, first in the work of Comte and Le Play, and continuing through Weber, Durkheim, and the like to the present day. But, Nisbet argues, while they were empirically oriented in their studies, Comte and Le Play focused on the very same subjects that provoked the philosophical ire of Burke and the early nineteenth-century conservatives. Comte's concern for family, community, religion, and language is identical to Bonald's, but, rather than discussing them in the context of theology, Comte placed them in the context of social science. While Le Play, unlike Comte, was driven by Bonald's strictly Catholic concerns and thus writes in a vein strongly resembling Burke's religious orientation, his approach to the discussion of society was quite different. Nisbet writes: "[I]n Le Play's work the basic insights and assumptions of philosophical conservatism become translated into an empirical study of human relationships. The essential content of conservatism remains; the methodological approach is changed significantly."¹¹⁰

Second, the political and religious orientation of sociologists has primarily been liberal or radical in politics and atheist or agnostic in religion. This obscured for many commentators the conservative impetus behind the entire sociological project. Reflecting on the research that led to the discovery of his thesis, Nisbet writes:

I began to sense a paradox about sociology: although modernist in thrust, liberal to radical in temper, the discipline—as I could see it in its European history—was profoundly conservative at its core. Sociology sprang not from the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century but rather the Anti-Enlightenment that was touched off by Edmund Burke in his

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., xv.

¹¹⁰ Nisbet, "Conservatism and Sociology," 84–5, 86.

Reflections on the Revolution in France, in 1790, and given diverse influence by such weighty figures on the Continent as de Maistre, Bonald, Adam Muller, Savigny, Hegel, and others in the early nineteenth century.¹¹¹

This “paradox of sociology,” Nisbet writes, “lies in the fact that although [sociology] falls, in its objectives and in the political and scientific values of its principal figures, in the mainstream of modernism, its essential concepts and its implicit perspectives place it much closer, generally speaking, to philosophical conservatism.”¹¹² This interplay of philosophical conservatism and political and scientific modernism makes the paradox of sociology a “creative paradox.”

To further cement the influence of Burke on pluralism and sociology, Nisbet closes his chapter on pluralism in *The Social Philosophers* with a section on “Sociological Pluralism.” He spends the most space on Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, “the two nineteenth-century men who remain to this moment the most creative forces in contemporary sociological theory.”¹¹³ Both of these figures were concerned with the persistent effects of the French Revolution on society and articulated a pluralist alternative that emphasized the importance of social groups and structures of authority and the damage done by the intrusion of the political state. Durkheim’s *Suicide* (1897) was a poignant study of the deleterious effects of the centralizing state on individual well-being. Likewise, Weber’s concerns over bureaucratization relate to a fear that rational authority will replace traditional and charismatic authority to the detriment of social welfare.

The study of sociology is unimaginable for Nisbet without the backdrop of Burke’s defense of tradition and custom, of the practices and mores attaching to the social realm as distinguished from elements of strictly political power. The effect of Burke’s defense of history, tradition, prejudice, authority, liberty, property, and religion was to increase scholarly attention to the role of social groups and institutions. The great extent to which these “dogmatics” became transferred into perspectives and concerns of nineteenth- and twentieth-century sociologists

¹¹¹ Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, xi–xii.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹³ Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers*, 433.

demonstrates the wide influence of Burke's philosophical conservatism as well as the core of its insight: the political realm is a poignant threat to the social.

Burke at the End of the Twentieth Century

Nisbet sees Burke's influence everywhere in the last two centuries—in literature, art, sociology, political conservatism, and even in certain strains of liberalism and radicalism, as we discussed in the section on pluralism.¹¹⁴ He discerns Burkean insights, even in language. Such terms as “*social, tradition, custom, institution, folk, community, organism, tissue, and collective,*” suffuse nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship. The very fact that the word “conservative” is used in common political and philosophical parlance demonstrates the influence of Burke. Traditional conservative concerns such as the family continue to have broad appeal.¹¹⁵ This is not to say that conservatism has won out. Nisbet admits that the majority of the values that Burke and his disciples defended have disappeared.¹¹⁶ Even the use of such terms as “family” often lack reference to conservative concepts.¹¹⁷ Nisbet would have sympathized with Russell Kirk who almost went as far as to title *The Conservative Mind* “The Conservative Rout.”¹¹⁸

In a number of popular writings, which appear in different form in *Twilight of Authority* (1975) and his Jefferson Lectures published as *The Present Age*, Nisbet is quite critical of many Republican as well as Democratic presidents and policies throughout the twentieth century. While a number of the Republicans at least have claimed the conservative mantle, the policies they advocate have little to do with the principles

¹¹⁴ The entire Romantic movement was inspired by a Burkean conservatism. Nisbet does not believe that most Romantics were conservatives, but that their fundamental impulses were inspired by a Burkean remonstrance for conservative values. Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 94–5. Nisbet also deals with this point extensively in *Sociology as an Art Form*.

¹¹⁵ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 103, 115.

¹¹⁶ Nisbet, *Prejudices*, 57.

¹¹⁷ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 115. Nisbet refers specifically to Governor Cuomo's use of “family” in his speech at the 1984 Democratic Convention, “not . . . in reference to the household but to the whole American nation.”

¹¹⁸ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 109.

Burke articulated. While Nisbet's first discovery of Burke was largely academic, as the intellectual source of sociology through pluralism and philosophical conservatism, his use of Burke became polemical. Nisbet saw in Nixon and Reagan support for policies and the pursuit of power for its own sake that had little to do with Burke's defense of the social realm from the ravages of political power: no matter how "conservative" the motivation of its wielders, its use to intrude in the social realm was inherently unconservative.

Nonetheless, the conservatism founded by Edmund Burke as a sustained defense of the social realm against state power seems to be here to stay. "A political faith," Nisbet writes, "that is two centuries old does not extinguish easily."¹¹⁹ The election of Ronald Reagan, the first president to explicitly claim the conservative mantle, demonstrated a major victory for conservatism. There was much in Reagan that Nisbet found unconservative; but the fact that he could win a national election espousing conservative values and claiming the conservative mantle spoke volumes about how far conservatism had come as a political force by the end of the twentieth century.¹²⁰ The same could be said of Margaret Thatcher in England.¹²¹

Nisbet sees the second eruption of conservatism, the one that Reagan rode to the White House, as taking place from 1950–1970. It took its primary impetus from a rediscovery of Burke. While no contemporary thinker emerged from this renaissance with the stature of a Burke or Hegel, "it has led to a major change in national temper in the United States and has had a highly visible influence upon the intellectual class."¹²² It produced the likes of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Russell Kirk, Richard Weaver, and William F. Buckley—all of them nationally-known figures who, with the exception of Mises and Hayek, adopted the conservative label. Nisbet recognized that this was an extraordinary achievement, liberalism and radicalism having long held supremacy in American politics and political thought.

¹¹⁹ Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 116.

¹²⁰ His courting of evangelicals and his populism are but two examples. Nisbet, *Conservatism*, 110–11.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹²² Nisbet, *Prejudices*, 57.

However, Nisbet believed that even at its ascendancy to the American presidency, conservatism was already in decline, writing: "There is nevertheless a fragility about conservatism that can only become more apparent with time. There is already clear evidence of fissure and fragmentation."¹²³ In an essay titled "Conservatism," published in 1982, and in the final chapter of *Conservatism*, he identified several features of the present state of conservatism that indicated a crack-up was under way. Most of his criticisms have to do with the fact that a number of factions and figures claiming the conservative mantle had rejected the primary feature of Burkean conservative thought—"protection of the social order and its constitutive groups from the enveloping bureaucracy of the national state"—and embraced, instead, values and impulses at odds with Burkean dogmatics.¹²⁴

After the second eruption of conservatism in the period after the Second World War, several groups joined the conservative coalition. The neo-conservatives arose in opposition to President Johnson's Great Society programs. While many were formerly of the Left, they had a lot in common with Burkean traditionalists, including antipathy for growing federal bureaucracy and centralization of power. Likewise, they valued localism and the private sector. Evangelical Christianity also took on the conservative mantle, largely in response to *Roe v. Wade* and other advances of social liberalism. While evangelicals shared with traditional conservatives a concern for traditional moral values, religion, and family, their "enthusiasm" for religion—and religion in politics—was anything but Burkean. "Burke had no use for enthusiasm in either religion or politics," Nisbet writes, "and enthusiasm is what these evangelicals exude."¹²⁵ Nonetheless, their religiously based opposition to big government and bureaucracy made them fellow travelers of traditionalist conservatives, if not actual conservatives in a philosophical sense. These two groups combined to create tensions within conservatism more broadly that pulled it away from its Burkean moorings.

Whatever the success of conservatism, what Nisbet saw as its crack-up came as a rejection in various sectors of the broad conserva-

¹²³ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Nisbet, *Prejudices*, 59.

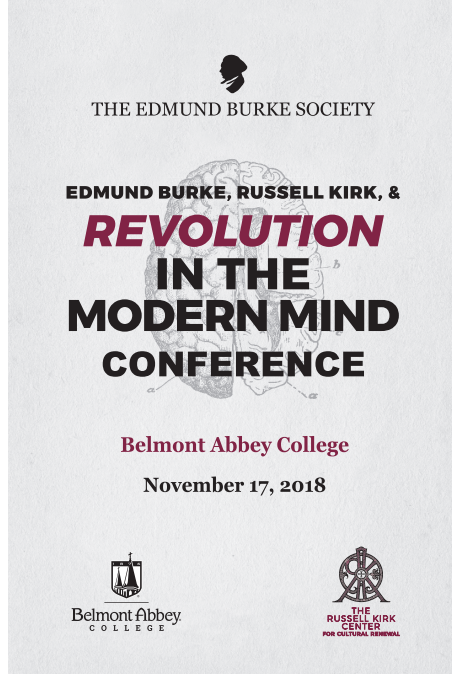
tive coalition of the central conservative concern: protecting the social order composed of a plethora of private groups from state interference. Nisbet writes in 1982: “[A]t the present moment this historic objective is far from the desires of many self-styled conservatives who are more interested in capturing the state, or a part of it at least, as the means of imposing a given moral value upon the entire nation.”¹²⁶

Nisbet said the same about liberalism and radicalism at the end of the twentieth century.¹²⁷ For Nisbet, the decline of conservatism is the decline of conservative pluralism. The sort of conservatism that Nisbet identifies as ascendant has more to do with a monist militarism and moralism than with Burkean social conservatism. But Nisbet believed that liberalism and radicalism are no better off than conservatism. Liberalism seeks only power for the sake of the individual and radicalism no longer seeks to build social institutions. The pluralist strains of these ideologies had also lost their Burkean moorings. Little has changed on the national stage in the last three decades to indicate a resuscitation of Burkean pluralism in any of the ideologies.

Nisbet’s pessimism regarding conservatism, and pluralism more broadly, at the end of the twentieth century raises the question of whether Burke’s influence will continue to endure as its primary ideological repository declines. It seems likely that, if Nisbet is right about the depth and breadth of Burke’s influence on modern thought, it is here to stay no matter the vicissitudes of contemporary politics and philosophical trends. If a lengthy essay written in the eighteenth century in response to a contemporary revolution can be so influential in shaping powerful strains of all three of the great ideologies and of producing an entire discipline devoted to teasing out the empirical details of its insights, then its resilience and value as a real alternative to current monist political and social thought should be taken seriously. Nisbet’s Burke will likely be with us for some time.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 59–60.

¹²⁷ Nisbet, *Twilight*, 45–6.



The conference program included, in the morning, the two keynote addresses, from Dr. Wilfred McClay and from Dr. Vigen Guroian. After lunch, attendees reassembled for the conference panel session on selected writers and texts, and time for open discussion. The panel included (from left to right): Dr. Farrell O’Gorman (speaking on St. John de Crèvecoeur), Dr. Troy Feay (on Frédéric Ozanam), Mr. André Gushurst-Moore (on Thomas More), Dr. Ivone Moreira (on Rousseau), and Dr. Steven Millies (Chair).



Burke and Kirk on Radical Ideology in Modern Times



VIGEN GUROIAN

Much was written about ideology and particularly radical or revolutionary ideology during the last century; and much continues to be written. There are those who argue, and I believe Russell Kirk would agree, that ideology, in its predominance, is radical by nature. Political radicalism denotes a commitment to altering existing social structures and transforming value systems by means that defy or undermine normal political processes through disruptive or violent acts. Or as Kirk himself has written: “The ideologue ... thinks of politics as a revolutionary instrument of transforming human nature ... [i]n his march toward Utopia”¹

During the past century, the discussion of ideology in Anglo-American settings had to do more often than not with the endeavor to understand and answer the challenges of Marxism and Communism during the Cold War. What is more, this inquiry looked especially to the French and Russian revolutions as forcible overthrows of government and social order that were driven by a radical ideology.

In this century, analyses of the threat of radical Islam posed by the likes of Al Qaeda and ISIS or the Islamist State have drawn on this body of scholarship. Political scientists and religionists have sought to clarify to what degree these movements are genuinely religious, which

¹ Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1993), 1.

is to say Islamic, and to what extent they have secular sources and borrow from past forms of modern ideology, again rooted particularly in the French and Russian revolutions on the left and fascism on the right.

I will not add any more to that. My sole reason for mentioning this background is to place what I do have to say about Burke and Kirk on radical ideology in an historical context and to signal the importance of Burke's seminal thought on the subject. Kirk honored Burke's principled conservatism and prudential form of politics. Yet he was also among the first in the mid-twentieth-century revival of Burke studies to advance an appreciation for the originality of Burke's insights into ideology. In the essay "Why Edmund Burke Is Studied," which serves as the Epilogue to his eminently readable book *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered*, Kirk states the following:

Burke, with his prophetic gifts, perceived the shape of things to come in this bent world of ours. His passionate refutation of leveling ideology and totalist politics has lost nothing of its force with the passing of two centuries. What he said of the Jacobins is yet more true of the Marxist ideologues of our century.²

My concern here is primarily with Burke, though I will draw liberally from Kirk's writings when they help to clarify Burke's thought. But let me begin with Kirk's own enumeration of the principal characteristics of radical ideology. For, all of these elements of radical ideology show up in the course of Burke's speechifying and writing on the French Revolution from 1789 until his death in 1797.

Kirk names some seven characteristics of radical ideology: (1) a belief in the unlimited malleability, or perfectibility, of human nature, (2) a belief in an "illimitable progress of society" which will rid the world of the human "proclivity" for conflict and violence, (3) a "[c]ontempt for tradition" in which "[r]eason, impulse, and materialistic determinism are severally preferred as guides to social welfare," (4) the rejection of "[f]ormal religion" and its replacement by ideology, (5) a preference for total democracy based on an egalitarianism that rejects all forms of social, economic, and political stratification or hierarchy, (6) an

2 Russell Kirk, *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1997), 227.

impetus toward centralization or consolidation of power in a singular authority that is said to embody the people's will, and (7) a partiality for "[e]conomic levelling"—the rejection of private property in favor of one kind or another of collectivism.³

Burke did not have at his disposal the word ideology. He called the French revolutionary ideas an "*armed doctrine*."⁴ Kirk explains that Burke considered this "armed doctrine" to be "an inverted religion, employing central political power and strength of arms to enforce conformity to its 'rational' creed."⁵

It is noteworthy that in the Napoleonic era, several decades after the Revolution, a Frenchman by the name of Destutt de Tracy did coin the term *ideology*. De Tracy's principal concern, however, was education, not politics. He championed educational reform and claimed to be guided by a new science of ideas based upon a strict materialist theory of psychology wherein all of human knowledge derives from sense experience.

It was really not until the middle of the nineteenth century that ideology became identified with an allegedly scientific theory of revolution envisioning an overthrow of the existing order and the advent of a new secular order of social concord and eternal peace. This was the work of Karl Marx. Marx prophesied that the bourgeois capitalist economic system would gestate from within itself its own complete overthrow by a rising proletarian class, and that this would usher in for the first time in human history a classless society. Marx consciously looked back to the French Revolution as a harbinger of things to come and the revolutionary ideas of the Jacobin party as an incipient, though (in retrospect) insufficiently scientific, revolutionary ideology.

Burke, for his part, pointed out the "novelty" of the cataclysmic events that were unfolding in France and the "armed doctrine" that drove the revolution. To my mind his selection of the locution "armed doctrine" covered well Burke's profound insight that the ideas and ideals of the French revolutionaries constituted a secular religion. That is to say, the Jacobin vision was not so much a platform of political principles as a

3 Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, seventh revised edition (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2001), 10.

4 Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford *et al.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–2015), 9:199.

5 Kirk, *Edmund Burke*, 166.

godless dogmatic faith that projected into the future a world rid once and for all of the unjust domination of the many by a corrupted few.

Burke would have none of this. Jacobinism is "*Atheism by Establishment*," he declared in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796–97), a "mockery of all religion." It "institute[s] impious, blasphemous, indecent theatric rites, in honour of their vitiated, perverted reason, and erect[s] altars to the personification of their own corrupted and bloody Republic."⁶ Burke had begun to reach such conclusions more than half a decade before, in his monumental political tract *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. However, it took Burke some time in observing the course of the revolution to express full throat his conclusions about the religious flavor of Jacobinism.

By 1797, the Jacobins had, among other things, abolished the Christian Gregorian calendar and replaced it with a calendar of the Republic (or calendar of the Revolution) whose epochal date was the founding of the French Republic in September of 1792. In this calendar, the Christian week of seven days, which begins on Sunday with the celebration of Jesus's resurrection, was replaced with a ten-day week, the last day of which was declared an official day of rest and festivity. Likewise, a Festival of Reason was instituted as the highest of "holy days." Churches were renamed as temples of reason. In the cathedral of Notre Dame, the Christian altar was taken down and replaced with an altar to Liberty. "To the revolutionaries," Kirk explains,

Christianity was superstition—and an enemy. The dogmas and doctrines of Christianity must go by the board. But in short order, the theological dogmas were supplanted by secular dogmas. Christian charity was supplanted by "fraternity"—which, in effect, led to the attitude "Be my brother, or I must kill you." The Christian symbols of transcendence were adapted to the new order; but in degraded form: for perfection through grace in death, the French theorists substituted the promise of perfection in this world, with every appetite satisfied.⁷

6 *Writings and Speeches*, 9:241.

7 Kirk, *Edmund Burke*, 165–66.

Also very much like a religious movement, Jacobinism possessed a messianic component with missiological aspirations. In *Thoughts on French Affairs*, published in 1791, Burke identified this messianic and proselytizing characteristic of Jacobin ideology. He compared it to the religious fervor and excesses of the radical Reformation. "The principle of the Reformation was such as by its essence, it could not be local or confined to the country in which it had its origin," he observed. "The present Revolution in France ... bear[s] little resemblance or analogy" to the "internal revolutions ... brought about in Europe, upon principles merely political." Instead, this "*Revolution of doctrine and theoretic dogma*" seeks "changes which" are like those in the past "made upon religious grounds, in which a spirit of proselytism makes an essential part."⁸

Burke reckoned this characteristic of Jacobinism to be something quite new in the history of Europe. Up until the present, when Europe divided into factions and coalitions of opposing interests, these behaviors might be explained in part by the fragmentation of Christendom that the Reformation had brought about. Catholics warring against Protestants and vice versa. But divisions and coalitions were now arising that had little or nothing to do with the Christian past. "In the modern world, before this time," Burke noted, "there has been no instance of [a] general political faction, separated from religion, pervading several countries, and forming a principle of union between the partizans in each."⁹ Now an atheistic "armed doctrine," was spreading itself through out the old body of Christendom. As religion did in the past, so this "armed doctrine" was cementing together under one cause alliances of otherwise competing and antagonistic parties.

In his struggle to make sense of this new, threatening phenomenon, Burke looked back into the history of Europe and identified several Christian sectarian messianic movements which he thought the Jacobin ideology and behavior strongly resembled. In *Reflections*, he recalls the Münster Rebellion of the sixteenth century in Germany when, in 1534, radical Anabaptists sought to impose by force their belief in an absolute egalitarianism which they claimed the Bible commands. For

8 Edmund Burke, *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Daniel E. Ritchie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 208.

9 *Ibid.*, 209–10.

a brief time, they established a communitarian regime in the German city of Münster. Private property was abolished, a theocratic government was installed, as the New Jerusalem was to be rung in and spread throughout Europe. "When the Anabaptists of Munster ... had filled Germany with confusion by their system of levelling and their wild opinions concerning property," Burke reminded his readers, "to what country in Europe did not the progress of their fury furnish just cause of alarm?"¹⁰ Was not something quite like this afoot in France?

And again, in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* published one year later, in 1791, Burke likened the behavior and goals of the Jacobins to the leadership of the English priest, the Abbé John Ball, in the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381. That "reverend patriarch of sedition," Burke remarked, preached that "all the evils which have fallen upon men had been caused by an ignorance of their 'having been born and continued equal as to their rights.'" And Ball believed that when the poor at last grasped this simple truth about the source of their wretched condition and their claim to justice, there would be, as Burke put it, "[n]o tyranny, no vexation, no oppression, no care, no sorrow ... in the world."¹¹

Thus, by 1791, Burke had not just identified the levelling propensity of the Jacobin creed, he also had begun to trace a genealogy of political radicalism that historians and political theorists have since filled out and analyzed thoroughly. Kirk believed that Burke was correct to claim that there was a connection between the older Christian radical and millennialist sects that sought to hasten a thousand year reign of Christ on earth and the Jacobins who believed that a perfect Republic of Virtue would be brought into existence when all of those who opposed their vision were extirpated. Eric Voegelin has described this inversion of biblical eschatology (doctrine of the last things) as an "immanentization of the eschaton," a secularized belief that man by his own powers or with the help of determinate forces of history might bring about what biblical faith reserved for God, providence, and a transcendent heavenly kingdom.

Viewed from a different perspective and interest, the Jacobin ideology was utopian. Utopian, as I am employing it here, should be distinguished

10 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001), 324.

11 Burke, *Further Reflections*, 170.

from the imaginative presentation of a perfectly harmonious society of unhindered human flourishing that may or may not seek to instigate reform. Burke would have been familiar with this notion of utopia as it well describes Thomas More's *Utopia*. More named his little book "utopia" because the word means "no place." More did not intend *Utopia* to be a blueprint for revolution. Even in Burke's day, utopian had not quite yet become linked in the common mind with radical or revolutionary politics.

Utopianism in the latter, more modern sense arose in the nineteenth century. This included the belief that utopia is indeed a real possibility for some time and place in the future, if only enlightened people would take the right action. Thus the philosopher Hans-Herbert Kogler defines utopianism as the goal of overcoming "social inequality, economic exploitation," and the like, "and other forms of domination that make well-being and happiness in this life impossible."¹² Kirk adds that, "The twentieth-century ideologue after the manner of [that philosopher of Jacobinism] Robespierre, thinks that his secular dogmas are sustained by the Goddess Reason; he prides himself inordinately upon being 'scientific' and 'rational'; and he is convinced that all opposition to his particular wave of the future is selfish obscurantism, when it is not direct vested interest."¹³ "In his march toward Utopia, the ideologue is merciless."¹⁴

Robespierre thought that anyone who stood in the way of the path to the perfect Republic of Virtue should not be spared the guillotine. Burke abhorred the slaughter and the destruction that Jacobinism with its utopian fantasies was unleashing. He realized how antithetical this was to the beliefs and manners that had sustained Christendom. And, most important, he espied the totalitarian impetus of this utopianism, though, once again he lacked the exact terminology to describe it.

Burke also recognized that the regime the Jacobins were putting in place, forged in the heat of a bloody terror, was unlike any government, thus far known to man, that claimed to be democratic. "The political dogma, which, upon the new French system, is to unite the factions of different nations, is this," wrote Burke in *Thoughts on French Affairs*. "That

¹² Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 939.

¹³ Russel Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969), 157.

¹⁴ Kirk, *Politics of Prudence*, 1.

the majority ... is the perpetual, natural, unceasing, indefeasible sovereign; that the majority is perfectly master of the form as well as the administration of the state, and that the magistrates, under whatever names they are called, are only functionaries to obey the orders (general as laws or particular as decrees) which that majority might make; that this is the only natural government; that all others are tyranny and usurpation.”¹⁵

In his *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, several years later, Burke at last found the language to describe the spectacle he beheld. He began with a comparison of Great Britain's constitutional monarchy and the new “democracy” that the Jacobins had established. “The British state is,” Burke argued, “that which pursues the greatest variety of ends, and is the least disposed to sacrifice any one of them to another, or to the whole.” This characteristic of respect and value for the plurality of life and diversity of interests within a healthy commonwealth, he explains, is nourished by a “system of manners and the habitudes of life” precedent to and independent of “the laws of the state.”¹⁶ In such a pluralistic social and political order, room exists for the flourishing of personal liberty and for the various actors in the commonwealth to pursue those functions necessary to secure the well-being of individual and community. This new France, however, exhibited nothing of the sort. Instead, Burke exclaimed:

What now stands as Government in France is struck out at heat. The design is wicked, immoral, impious, oppressive; but it is spirited and daring; it is systematick; it is simple in its principle; it has unity and consistency in perfection.... The state is all in all. Every thing is referred to the production of force; afterwards every thing is trusted to the use of it.... The state has dominion and conquest for its sole objects; dominion over minds by proselytism, over bodies by arms.¹⁷

Burke lived to see how the Jacobin democracy swiftly evolved into a one-party dictatorship, as the “total revolution” gave birth to a “total state.” The Jacobins had “made a schism with the whole universe.”¹⁸ “It

¹⁵ Burke, *Works*, IV, 322–23.

¹⁶ *Writings and Speeches*, 9:287.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9:288.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9:249.

is not a revolution of government. It is not the victory of party over party” as in ordinary politics, Burke declared. Rather, “[i]t is a destruction and decomposition of the whole society; which never can be made of right by any faction, however powerful, nor without terrible consequences to all about it.”¹⁹

Burke could find no good example from the past that would account in full for what was being played out in France. Nonetheless, in his struggle to make sense of it, Burke hit upon the heart of the matter, the truly monstrous thing about it. The new Jacobin order lacked both the “riches of convention” that make power mild and the “advantages of nature” that are necessary for what is truly human.²⁰

As Kirk concludes: “At bottom the difference of Burke from the revolutionaries ... was theological.”²¹ Burke had a Christian understanding of human nature and human destiny. He believed in a common grace and God’s providential care of the human race such that politics, or for that matter economics or any other human science, is not itself adequate to account for and respect all that is genuinely human. Burke, Kirk explains, believed that the revolutionists in France made a mistake of homicidal consequence. They believed that they “could perfect man and society by a neat ‘rational’ scheme” that, if not readily agreed to by the population, must be forced upon it at whatever cost in bloodshed and violence.²² In other words, they would destroy an imperfect humanity in order that they might perfect humanity. This, ultimately, is what the Reign of Terror was all about, to sweep the streets clean of all those imperfections, all those imperfect human beings, that obstructed the birth of a new humanity.

In his *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796), Burke was prepared to state that the spectacle in France was the first instance in human history of “a compleat revolution” that extends “even to the constitution of the mind of man.”²³ The “philosophers [of this revolution] are fanaticks,” he declared, answerable to no one but themselves, who “would sacrifice the whole of the human race to the slightest of their experiments.”²⁴ He adds:

¹⁹ Ibid., 9:253.

²⁰ Ibid., 9:288.

²¹ Kirk, *Edmund Burke*, 165.

²² Ibid.

²³ *Writings and Speeches*, 9:147.

²⁴ Ibid., 9:176.

Their humanity is at their horizon—and, like the horizon, it always flies before them. The geometricians, and the chymists bring, the one from the dry bones of their diagrams, and the other [the chemists] from the soot of their furnaces, dispositions that make them worse than indifferent about those feelings and habitudes, which are the supports of the moral world ... These philosophers, consider men in their experiments, no more than they do mice in an air pump, or in a recipient of mephitick gas.²⁵

It is as if Burke had foreseen in his description of Jacobinism and the revolution in France events of the twentieth and twenty-first century in which radical ideology on the march has left untold suffering and massive societal wreckage in its wake.

Conclusion: Burke and the Imago Dei

This, however, is not where I wish to end. Rather, in concluding, I turn briefly to a Burkean theme to which Kirk, above all others, directs our attention. This is Burke on the moral imagination; for, in returning after a hiatus of more than three decades to a deep reading into Burke, it strikes me that a complete comprehension and appreciation of Burke on the moral imagination and its importance for a cultured and civilized life cannot be gained apart from consideration of his religious beliefs. No one who reads Burke with care can ignore his belief in a divine providence. Furthermore, the arguments of previous generations that Burke's invocations of a moral natural law were expedient rhetorical embellishments and not sincere have been answered. Burke himself was morally serious and not a utilitarian.

Yet I believe there is more to be said. Burke's moral imagination is built upon a theological conviction at least as important as his belief in divine providence. Rarely does Burke name this conviction: it is a belief that mortal human beings have been created in the image of the immortal God.

²⁵ Ibid., 9:177.

In 1786, whilst defending his untiring efforts to end the corruption of British rule in India, in a letter to one Mary Palmer, Burke declares that all human beings possess the image of their Creator, whatever the color of their skin or wherever they live on earth. He writes:

I have no party in this business, my dear Miss Palmer, but among 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. I know what I am doing whether the white people like it or not.²⁶

If we look for mention of the *imago Dei* in his speeches and writings on the French Revolution, so far as I am aware there is but one. Yet, once again it is critical to his understanding of what has gone awry in France. Speaking of the Jacobin's atheistic creed, he is moved to say:

They who do not love religion, hate it. The rebels to God perfectly abhor the Author of their being. They hate Him "with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their soul, and with all their strength." He never presents himself to their thoughts, but to menace and alarm them. They cannot strike the Sun out of Heaven, but they are able to raise a smoldering smoke that obscures him from their own eyes. Not being able to revenge themselves on God, they have a delight in vicariously defacing, degrading, torturing, and tearing in pieces his image in man.²⁷

As an aside, here in Burke we have the burning judgment that the Jacobin ideology is not only homicidal but deicidal.

Still, my immediate interest is in Burke's Christian anthropology. I am persuaded that we must understand this Christian anthropology—and I emphasize Christian—in order to grasp fully what lay behind Burke's warnings in *Reflections* that the moral imagination of man is under siege. Russell Kirk, more than any other modern interpreter of Burke, brings to our attention those passages from *Reflections* that I have in mind. These read as follows:

26 Edmund Burke to Mary Palmer on January 19, 1786, regarding the trial for the impeachment of Warren Hastings for crimes committed against the people of India.

27 *Writings and Speeches*, 9:278–79.

But now all is to be changed. All the pleasing illusions, which made power gentle, and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society, are to be dissolved by this new conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies, as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation, are to be exploded as a ridiculous, absurd, and antiquated fashion.

On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order.... Regicide, and parricide, and sacrilege, are but fictions of superstition, corrupting jurisprudence by destroying its simplicity.²⁸

Here we have it, Burke's famous apologia for the moral imagination and his melancholic judgment that all the great artifices of human manners, art, custom, and tradition that the moral imagination brings into existence, and that support it, are being destroyed. Yet these are the very things that give us the power, which reason alone has not, to interpret the world with a reverence for its Creator and respect for the dignity that belongs to each and every human being.

Kirk has written that for Burke the moral imagination "signifies that power of ethical perception which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and momentary events—'especially' as the dictionary has it, 'the higher form of power exercised in poetry and art.' The moral imagination," Kirk concludes, "aspires to the apprehending of right order in the soul and right order of the commonwealth."²⁹

All of this seems right, except that there may be more. This more, I maintain, owes to Burke's specifically Christian convictions about God and man. What is "this scheme of things" on which Burke lays

²⁸ Burke, *Reflections*, 240.

²⁹ *The Essential Russell Kirk*, ed. George A. Panichas (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007), 207.

blame for a blindness that sees a king as but a man, a queen as but a woman, and a woman but an animal? It is an anti-Christian ideology in which human beings are no longer related to God as their creator and redeemer and in whose own image he has made them. *Above all else, the moral imagination is a special capacity to see this image in every human being.* That reason which Jacobinism deifies cannot solely by its power grasp or follow out this mystery of the *imago Dei* to the truth which it reveals: that the meaning and value in all things, and especially human beings, transcends mere usefulness to self or means to the arbitrary ends of a fallen human will.

This conviction about the *imago Dei* and its relation to the moral imagination is in the immediate background of Burke's analogy of the Jacobin ideologues to "geometricians" and "chemists" who experiment on people as if they are mice. Each time I read this passage, I think of the Nazi doctors who quite literally used human beings in their experiments like mice in the laboratory. It is as if Burke, like the Hebrew prophets, was looking into the future through his percipient metaphors.

Burke is being ironic and satirical when he speaks of the virtues of human nature and the *imago Dei* as "illusions." These virtues that make "power gentle" and "obedience liberal," harmonize "the different shades of life," and incorporate "into politics" those "sentiments that beautify" and ennoble "private society" are not at all illusions in Burke's mind. They are illusions, however, to minds bereft of belief in the *imago Dei* and that vainly elevate their own reason, which itself sin has desiccated, to the rank of deity.

In his landmark essay *Rationalism in Politics*, the political philosopher Michael Oakeshott observes that the rationalist in politics replaces tradition with ideology. For Oakeshott, tradition can be considered apart from a belief in God. Burke—and Kirk—disagree. Burke was a Christian humanist. Tradition for Burke includes a memory of God that reaches back to sacred Scripture. Tradition is the milieu in which the image of God in humanity grows out into the world as culture. This is the wardrobe of the moral imagination. But is it any surprise that ideology, which denies the *imago Dei*, should also seek to destroy a cultural inheritance that humanizes life? Modern revolutions that have been

driven by such ideologies have not only been political upheavals, they also have been revolutions that sought to destroy an existing culture.

Burke understood the meaning of sin, whereas his Jacobin antagonists did not. Timely reform in the political sphere is one way of remedying sin's corruptive effects. Tradition is not inviolate nor, even at its best, wholly consistent with what God wills. Tradition is only a proximate guide to a rightly ordered soul and society. Burke understood this. But the guidance that prescription and tradition provide is a far shot better than unaided reason operating in a world shorn of humanity's cultural inheritance, "that decent drapery of life and all the superadded—ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination" of which Burke spoke. Burke said that, "Art is man's nature."³⁰ André Gushurst-Moore, in his absorbing book *The Common Mind*, explains Burke's epigram: "[T]hus, the integration of art and nature in the mind of Burke, reflective of the complexity of human nature, is the basis of the 'moral imagination' that underwrites a healthy politics, as it does a healthy general culture."³¹

To deprive human beings of this inheritance of the moral imagination and all its works, whether in manners, customs or laws, or of literature and the fine arts, is to strip them naked. Then, indeed, "a Queen is just a woman, a woman is but an animal—and an animal not of the highest order." Then regicide, and parricide, and sacrilege, are mere "fictions of superstition." This is the terrifying legacy of all the radical ideologies of modernity that humankind has endured, right up until this very moment.

In conclusion, I return to André Gushurst-Moore, writing on Burke:

Without a conception of evil, for which we need a system of dogmatic religion, we flounder. The inhumanity of ideology is one of the defining features of late modernity, and it is of this that Burke is prophetic. The "age of chivalry" descends into the cold but sanguinary modernity of "sophists, economists, and calculators"—the scientific advocates of a new and heartless world. Whether in communism, fascism, Nazism, or the more recent Islamist terror nurtured by fundamentalism,

³⁰ Burke, *Further Reflections*, 169.

³¹ André Gushurst-Moore, *The Common Mind* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2013), 91–92.

late modernity continues to imitate the sanguinary ideology established in the French Revolution. The political response of the West (now a mixture of Christian and post-Christian secular liberalism), insofar as it must oppose “armed doctrine[s],” with global aims, should heed the perennial wisdom in the Christian humanism of Edmund Burke.³²

³² Gushurst-Moore, *The Common Mind*, 93.

A ‘Generous Loyalty’

THE VINDICATION OF A FORGOTTEN VIRTUE



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Since the misfortunes of modern France formed one of Edmund Burke’s most famous topics, perhaps it is not out of line for me to begin my argument about the virtues of loyalty with the remarks of a current French leader. I’m referring to the recent speech delivered by French President Emmanuel Macron for the centennial of the end of the First World War.¹ As you may remember, part of the speech was devoted to an expression of horror and disdain for what he called “nationalism.” The comment was meant as a cheeky rebuke directed at Donald Trump, arguably a cheapening and misuse of a solemn occasion. Given the way in which the war ended, with the arrival of an American army, it seemed a rather stunning example of ingratitude—and since Macron gave his speech at what remains perhaps the greatest of all monuments to French nationalism, the Arc de Triomphe, perhaps more than a little bit hypocritical.

Yet let us give him some credit. He was echoing a common view of the causes of the First World War, that it was the rise of toxic and

¹ A video of Macron’s speech can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPfmQIVBe2I>; and an account of the speech at: https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2018/11/11/Macron-renounces-nationalism-at-WWI-commemoration-in-France/2711541947696/.

competitive nationalism that explains the conflict, and hence that nationalism remains the enemy of enduring peace, freedom, and prosperity in the West. And in comparing the present discontents to those of the 1930s—years that came *after* the First World War, the last I checked—he was warning that we are setting ourselves on the path to a similar cataclysm.

At first glance, this might not seem to be a quarrel in which followers or admirers of Edmund Burke would be interested in taking part, let alone taking sides. Burke would not necessarily be a full-bore opponent of nationhood or the nation-state; but his views would likely have tended to resemble those of someone such as George Orwell, whose famous essay “Notes on Nationalism” contrasted nationalism, as an abstract superimposed ideological conformity, with patriotism, as a matter of concrete local affections and affinities, something closer to the notion of *patria*, of fatherland, and of more intimate, organic, and historically evolved forms of association.² It is hard to see either Macron and his side or Trump and his side as exemplars of a genuinely Burkean position.

Yet Macron’s definition of patriotism was nothing like what we generally mean by that term. It was something much closer to cosmopolitanism, something even further away from the Burkean vision of things than nationalism as conventionally understood. Macron distinguished between a bad nationalism and a good patriotism: The nationalist is someone who doesn’t care about people in other countries; the patriot on the other hand is one who supports the French Republic’s universal values, as seen in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and is passionately committed to the idea that this extends beyond a country’s borders. Or, as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum put it in an influential 1995 essay entitled “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”: “I believe . . . patriotic pride is both morally dangerous and, ultimately, subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve—for example, the goal of national unity in devotion to worthy moral ideals of justice and equality. These goals, I shall argue, would be better served by an ideal that is in any case more adequate to our situation in the contemporary world,

2 http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat.

namely the very old ideal of the cosmopolitan, the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings.”³

As I’ve said, Macron’s view is closer to cosmopolitanism than to patriotism, as that term is conventionally understood. But if we set aside his confused and confusing nomenclature, which is really an attempt, in my view, to coopt the warm feelings that the word “patriotism” elicits, and look at the real focus of his disdain, it was the disdain for any form of *particularism*, for the prioritizing of our particular loyalties over and above other commitments that we can and should have, as human beings. His remarks were directed at Trump, yes, and Putin too, but they were also directed at the Hungarians, the Italians, the Brexiteering Britons, the restive Germans, and all the other forces that are splintering the European Union, and challenging the Brussels vision of the world.

Here are the words of Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán:

Europe was led astray not by confident nations, but by imperial designs. Experiments and experimenters in empire building were the root cause of the monstrous wars of the twentieth century, an ocean of suffering, and the repeated devastation of a flourishing Europe. National Socialism and international socialism, fascism and communism all chased imperial dreams: supranational concepts; new forms of human created in melting pots; commercial profits on an unprecedented scale; and the global—imperial—governance to guarantee all this. This has been—and still seems to be—the great temptation that implants itself in the souls of the powerful in Europe. Today in Brussels imperial marches are being played again. It is true that this tune is different from the old one. Today they are not setting out to conquer with force of arms. We are well aware of the fact that Brussels is not Constantinople, nor Moscow, nor Imperial Berlin—nor even Vienna. Nothing has ever been conquered from Brussels: it only ever administered colonies. We, however, have never been either a colony or a coloniser; we have never taken away anyone’s homeland—and so we shall never give ours to anyone else.

3 <https://bostonreview.net/martha-nussbaum-patriotism-and-cosmopolitanism>.

Brussels today is ruled by those who want to replace an alliance of free nations with a European empire: a European empire led not by the elected leaders of nations, but by Brussels bureaucrats.⁴

Thus the conflict boils down to what one means by "Europe." There are two chief possibilities. Is it the ambitious but fraught project of welding the continent into a fluid, borderless, ever more tightly unified economic, political, and cultural union, held together by an abstract invented supranational identity, a common currency adorned with generic secular symbols, and the tentacles of a vast administrative magistracy headquartered in Brussels, and intended to serve as a disinterested substitute for obsolete historical conventions or customs? That is one thing.

Or does "Europe" refer to a certain rich, complex way of life, along with the values and institutions and forms of consciousness that have made that way of life possible: free and self-governing institutions, constitutionally limited governments, prosperity-generating economies, equality before the law, protection of fundamental human rights, freedom of expression and of rational inquiry and imagination, recognition of the dignity of the individual person, a high regard for criticism and self-criticism, and a glorious and cosmopolitan heritage of ideas, stories, artifacts, sciences, languages, faiths, cuisines, literatures, historical consciousnesses, and arguments, all laid out before its heirs as if on a single vast table stretching from antiquity to tomorrow? That is something else again.

The two meanings of "Europe" are obviously closely related, but they are by no means the same, and it is a grave error to conflate them. In fact, the first, newer understanding of "Europe"—the one encapsulated in the initials EU—has in the end necessarily come about at the expense of the second, older one, and the two have inevitably become antithetical. It should by now be evident why this is so. The deep rationale for the EU project lay in a particular conception of the lessons of modern European history—namely, that the very existence of the modern nation-state was to blame for the rivalries and savage wars that

4 <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-on-the-62nd-anniversary-of-the-1956-revolution-and-freedom-fight>.

in the twentieth century wreaked such havoc upon the European continent and much of the rest of the world.

It is right to point out here that the scale of modern nation-states may or may not be compatible with the Burkean vision of things—modern national states are not little platoons, and their very existence tends to suppress and supersede the flourishing of such platoons—that is a quarrel very much worth having. But there is no doubt that something even more fundamental, something even primal, is at stake in the debate in which Macron and Orban and Trump are engaged.

The nub of the matter is loyalty—the idea of loyalty. The recognition that loyalty—and in particular the capacity for loyalty, and the ability to reward it and reinforce it—is in some ways constitutive of our social existence. And adherence to it is different from adherence to abstract principles. That love for one's own, and preference for what is one's own, what is generative and originitive, for one's forebears and ancestors, enjoys a certain necessary priority in the human affections, a solid and immovable base upon which the superstructure of other ideas can be erected.

And this is not only a Burkean question, it may be the most prominent Burkean question affecting us today. How are we to find a place for loyalty in the order of things, loyalty as a form of moral virtue?

* * *

Loyalty is perhaps the least studied and least appreciated of all the moral virtues. That may be in part because a great many intellectuals and scholars question whether it even deserves to be counted a virtue at all. Indeed, there are very few philosophical treatments of the subject, Josiah Royce's book *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (1908) being perhaps the best known; and that is a puzzle. Loyalty is one of the pervading empirical facts of social existence. It is one of the fundamental ethical questions in life, beginning in childhood, and in the ways that childhood friendships form. The question of reliability looms large, in the making of clubs, gangs, fraternal and sororal organizations, and ultimately of patriotic sentiment itself, which involves loyalty to unseen others, and loyalty to the memory of those whose blood was shed on behalf of, or who otherwise performed great sacrifices for the sake of, the patria.

In fact, our capacity for loyalty is one of the things that makes life worth living. Without it there can be no enduring love, no family life, no friendship, no community, no society. Consider Hobbes's famous description of the life of man in the state of nature, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"—doesn't that describe an existence without loyalty?

Loyalty lies at the basis of the things we admire most, a chief element in what we mean when we speak of a person's "nobility of character"—the capacity to endure suffering and misfortune and yet to remain steadfast, the love that endures beyond all things and lasts even beyond death: the chivalric ideal, so esteemed by Burke, represented a triumph of loyalty over mere passion, or rather a triumph of a consuming passion that has hardened into an iron will of dedication and consecration of life, undistracted from lesser passions; the military vocation, which involves the strictest of discipline, but yields control over one's action to those authorities to which one has bound oneself in loyalty; the life of religious consecration, of the priest or monk or nun who forsakes all entailed in a "normal" existence, through an act of the will; or for that matter, the more "normal" work of marriage, in which an act of will is meant to carry the marrying couple's loyalty to one another through the rise and fall of passion, until death parts them.

Our esteem for loyalty lies behind the strength that we give to vows, or oaths, that bind us to something higher and more demanding than ourselves. Consider, for example, the closing words of the Declaration of Independence: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

It also is true that loyalty matters most when it is not just a matter of calculation, but something undergirded and uplifted and supported by sentiment. It rests upon sentiment, not calculation, and it is admirable precisely because it is *not* entirely calculated. No one gets extra credit for being loyal to that which is most profitable to them. Where's the virtue in that? It is most admirable when it represents a steadfastness beyond mere reason, beyond mere convenience. Loyalty to one's imperfect friend or spouse is more admirable than loyalty to one who is perfect, if such a person could be found. After all, if it's a reasonable choice to be loyal, and only that, then it isn't quite loyalty, is it? Instead,

loyalty involves some measure of self-overcoming, of working against interest, a virtue that shows itself when the chips are down, when it's costly, when the rational thing to do might be to cut someone loose. When the weather is foul, not fair.

And I should add too that loyalty matters to us because disloyalty matters to us. If loyalty is a virtue of sorts, then betrayal, as a brutal violation of the trust upon which loyalty subsists, is a profound vice. For Dante, betrayal is the most despicable of the vices. Readers of the *Inferno* will recall that, down at the very pit of hell, in the ninth circle, with the worst of the worst, one finds—what? Disloyalty. Those who are traitors to their families, traitors to their countries, traitors to guests and friends, and of course, Judas, the greatest of betrayers, along with Cassius and Brutus—all three of whom are chewed on for all eternity by a three-headed Satan, the ultimate betrayer, the one who embodies disloyalty as a cosmic principle.

* * *

This is not to deny that we have always understood that there are problems with loyalty. It's not to deny that loyalty, and misplaced loyalty, and conflicts between and among conflicting loyalties, have also always been a problem. A play like Sophocles's *Antigone* is profoundly occupied with just such questions, of the conflicting demands of the family and of the polity, or of the laws of the gods and the laws of man.

And yet our suspicion of loyalty goes beyond that. We often regard it as naïve, and consider the appeal to loyalty to be something potentially sinister or tyrannical, or at any rate to be held in low regard, as was the case with the opprobrium attached to loyalty oaths in the years after the Second World War.

In one sense, it is not hard to understand why this should be so. Loyalty can be a bit like the little girl with a curl in the middle of her forehead: when she was good, she was very, very good, but when she was bad, she was horrid. Similarly, the worthiness of loyalty seems to depend almost entirely upon the object toward which it is directed. "My country right or wrong," Captain Stephen Decatur's famous cry, is not without its power, but also not without its pitfalls. Loyalty can be misplaced, and it is just as possible to be loyal to a bad object, or a mistaken

one, as to be attached to a good and worthy object. And even loyalty to a good thing can be too unconditional. G. K. Chesterton quipped that "My country, right or wrong" is a thing that no patriot would think of saying, except in a desperate case. It is like saying, 'My mother, drunk or sober'.⁵

The code of *Omertà* is part and parcel of a very elaborate and very powerful system of loyalty, one that, in the Southern Italian context in which the word emerged, was intricately tied to families and "little platoons" that were criminal undertakings and protection rackets. This is not to say that they could not serve a purpose, in a disordered society in which legally constituted authority might be regarded as untrustworthy; but they could present loyalty and law as being at odds with one another.

Numerous moments in the movie *The Godfather* suggest themselves as examples, such as the opening scene in which an undertaker appeals to the Godfather to avenge his daughter's rape. The undertaker has used the legal system, and it failed to secure a conviction of the guilty parties; and now the undertaker seeks justice. But the Godfather asks the undertaker, why did you not come to me first? Or when his son Michael Corleone achieves great honor through valorous combat as a Marine, and the Godfather sniffs that, "he performs these miracles for strangers."

The problem of misplaced loyalty manifests itself in a different way, in Wilfred Owen's great poem "Dulce et Decorum Est," when the poet is describing a man dying from a gas attack in World War I:

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

5 From "A Defence of Patriotism," found at <http://www.online-literature.com/chesterton/the-defendant/16/>.

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
*Pro patria mori.*⁶

That concluding Latin phrase comes from the Roman poet Horace: “It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country.” Here those noble-sounding words ring bitter and hollow.

Who can deny that there is much to be said for skepticism about loyalty? That skepticism, however, has become life-denying when we come to inhabit an atmosphere where everything around us needs to be seen as impermanent, revocable. Such programmatic skepticism is utterly corrosive of loyalty, and deeply suspicious of it.

Modern thought, with its emphasis on criticism and hermeneutical suspicion, and its atomizing of community life into the independent choices of autonomous individuals, has either neglected or carelessly disparaged the admirable aspects of loyalty, not only as a sentiment but also as a supreme act of the will, a form of perseverance and commitment to others, both living and dead, that often reflects much of what is noblest and best in the human person.

But a part of the problem arises from the imposition of universal values, thought to supersede more particular loyalties to particular things or persons. One sees this even in an author such as Josiah Royce, who generalized the difference between true loyalty and vicious or “predatory” loyalty as follows:

[A] cause is good, not only for me, but for mankind, in so far as it is essentially a *loyalty to loyalty*, that is, an aid and a furtherance of loyalty in my fellows. It is an evil cause in so far as, despite the loyalty that it arouses in me, it is destructive of loyalty in the world of my fellows.⁷

While every community hopes for the accomplishment of its central cause, and sees that cause’s fulfillment as its highest achievement, Royce

6 <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46560/dulce-et-decorum-est>

7 Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1908), 56.

places particularly high emphasis on the phenomenon of loyalty to a lost cause. A lost cause is not in Royce's view a *hopeless* cause, but rather one that cannot be fulfilled within the actual lifetime of the community or any of its members. Many lost causes are rightly lost, of course: Royce would have recognized the Confederate States' defense of slavery during the U.S. Civil War as such a case. Besides such misguided causes, though, there are a number of legitimate causes that are, by this definition, "lost" simply in virtue of their scope and magnitude. Such causes are not hopeless, however. It is precisely these causes that establish ideals capable of evoking our highest hope and moral commitment.

Chief among these are the universal causes of the full attainment of truth, the complete determination of the nature of reality through inquiry and interpretation, and of the establishment of universal loyalty to loyalty itself. Thus, in practice, the formula of "loyalty to loyalty" demands that one's moral and intellectual sphere become ever broader and remain critical at all levels. All the actually existing communities we know, those we inhabit and identify with, are finite and to some degree "predatory" in Royce's sense. All of them.

In other words, Royce cannot help in the end but subsume the particularity of loyalty under a larger universal, which ends up superseding it, and leeching loyalty of all its particularity and its particular character.

Behind this is the severe universalism of Kantian idealism, which demands that we perform our duty for its own sake, without regard to consequences. And for which the classic example of the difficult choice between lying to protect a fugitive Jew and disclosing the truth to the pursuing Nazi forces, presents itself as a most unwelcome prospect, since the correct answer of course will be the choice of a duty to truth-telling, irrespective of the consequences.

This is too austere, though, and offends against our fundamental humanity. Among other things, it fails to see that considerations such as family loyalty, personal loyalty, and the like are a brake against the potential depredations of a totalitarian government.

How then are we to find a balance? That is where Burke comes into the picture, and provides a way of thinking about loyalty that both confirms its authority and offers room for higher considerations. Let us look at two instances in which Burke provides much needed insight.

First let us consider Burke's debate with Richard Price as shedding light on the dilemmas of M. Macron and the like. Price was a liberal and Enlightened clergyman who greatly admired the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, who offered his "Discourse on the Love of Our Country" as a sermon delivered in London in the fateful year of 1789. It put forward a strikingly rational and proto-cosmopolitan view of patriotism, urging that conventional patriotism was a form of blindness, and that "a narrower interest ought always to give way to a more extensive interest." Price argued that love of our country "does not imply any conviction of the superior value of it to other countries, or any particular preference of its laws and constitution of government." Good citizens should consider themselves "more as citizens of the world than as members of any particular community"; and the king was "no more than the first servant of the public, created by it, maintained by it, and responsible to it." His majesty was not his own, but that of "the people," and his power was "a trust derived from the people."⁸ Hence the monarch, and the state itself, was merely an object of utilitarian value, to be discarded when their utility had ceased. Hence the British people, like the French, whose incipient revolution Price regarded with wide-eyed admiration, had the right to overthrow their monarch and reorder their regime anytime they saw fit to do so.

Burke found such ideas utterly repugnant, and undertook to publish his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in the following year, as a stern rebuttal to Price's sermon. Part of the dispute turned on history, and on the proper way of understanding Britain's past. Price's sermon had been delivered to the London Revolution Society, which was dedicated to the veneration of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and Price had meant his sermon to affirm the Glorious Revolution as an expression of the universal Rights of Man.

Burke strongly disagreed on that point, arguing that the Revolution had been about something entirely different. In the *Reflections*, Burke argued against Price's interpretation of the Glorious Revolution and, instead, gave a classic Whig defense of it. Burke argued against the idea of abstract, metaphysical rights of humans and instead advocated the force of a particular national tradition:

8 Richard Price, *Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 181, 178, 193-94, 185, 186.

The Revolution was made to preserve our *antient* indisputable laws and liberties, and that *antient* constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty ... The very idea of the fabrication of a new government, is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as *an inheritance from our forefathers*. Upon that body and stock of inheritance we have taken care not to inoculate any cyon [scion] alien to the nature of the original plant ...

Our oldest reformation is that of Magna Charta. You will see that Sir Edward Coke, that great oracle of our law, and indeed all the great men who follow him, to Blackstone, are industrious to prove the pedigree of our liberties. They endeavour to prove, that the ancient charter ... were nothing more than a re-affirmance of the still more antient standing law of the kingdom ...

In the famous law ... called the *Petition of Right*, the parliament says to the king, "Your subjects have *inherited* this freedom," claiming their franchises not on abstract principles "as the rights of men," but as the rights of Englishmen, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers.⁹

In place of Price's irreverent Benthamite rationalism, Burke stressed the importance of reverence, and held high the wisdom of traditional and time-honored things. In place of universalism and cosmopolitanism, Burke chose to ground politics and social life in the "little platoon" of the local community, in all its particularity and idiosyncrasy. In place of a society built upon the individualistic myth of the social contract, Burke invoked the givenness of authority and the "contract" of eternal society, a pact joining the living in organic and reverent unity with the dead and those yet to be born. Hence tradition, precedent, and precept were for him nearly always better guides to action than abstract reason, because "the individual is foolish," even the most rational individual, but "the species is wise."

9 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001), 181–83.

Key to his argument, for our purposes, is the rejection of the notion that “a narrower interest ought always to give way to a more extensive interest.” That is precisely the move in Price, and Nussbaum, and Macron, that makes loyalty tenuous, if not impossible; and it is in the vindication of what is proximate, and of what has been generative of one’s own being, that Burke vindicates loyalty. Burke manages to meld the roles of reason and sentiment together in ways that acknowledge the power and necessity of both things. He sees that we are ineluctably *particular* beings, and that we have particular loyalties, to our particular parents, and homes, and neighborhoods, and children, and a hundred other such particularities of situation and history that we cannot deny without denying our humanity.

For Burke, it was a telling argument against Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that Rousseau professed a general benevolence for all of humankind, but that he sent his own children off to a foundling hospital: he was, wrote Burke, in his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791), “a lover of his kind, but a hater of his kindred.”¹⁰ Thus did Burke understand the relationship between a commitment to universals and a commitment to particulars.

But how to keep from being imprisoned by the limitations of this approach? How to be something more than a Godfather? How to avoid being just the prisoner of a slothful and uninventive going-along with sentiment, with attachment to what has always been done? Is there a higher and nobler way of understanding loyalty, and the attachment to particulars that loyalty entails?

Here, Burke’s 1774 *Speech to the Electors of Bristol at the Conclusion of the Poll* may provide us with some enduring illumination. The speech was especially notable for its defense of the principles of representative government against the notion that elected officials should be mere delegates:

... it ought to be the happiness and glory of a Representative, to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opin-

¹⁰ Edmund Burke, *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Daniel E. Ritchie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 50.

ion high respect; their business unremitted attention. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasures, his satisfactions, to theirs; and, above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own. But, his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you; to any man, or to any sett of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure; no, nor from the Law and the Constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your Representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.¹¹

So Burke concludes with the representative's larger, more generous loyalty, a loyalty more generous than that of the delegate. It is a concrete loyalty, grounded in a particular setting and the natural loyalties of a particular constituency. But it is not mindless or slavish. It does not demand that "a narrower interest ought always to give way to a more extensive interest." It is elevated without being coldly abstract. It elevates not by resort to the one-size-fits-all universal dicta, but by recourse to Providence, within which all good loyalties are conjoined and connected. Representation is here understood as itself a *kind* of delegation, rather than the transcending of the particular for the sake of the universal. That is an important difference, and it goes to the heart of the question of loyalty and its place in the economy of our souls and societies.

It can return us, too, to the questions with which we began, relating to M. Macron, patriotism, and the European Union. If the latter is to succeed, it will need to learn how to drawn effectively and respectfully upon the profound national affinities that already exist, rather than seek to renounce and discredit them, and replace them with a universal standard, comprising whatever "more extensive interest" the then-governing cosmopolitan elites have decreed. Loyalty is not the sole key to a peaceful and harmonious world; but it speaks to a great human need, without which all efforts at larger forms of union are doomed to founder.

11 Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford *et al.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981–2015), 3:68–9.

A Letter from Thomas More to Thomas Cromwell, 1534



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If you have visited the Frick Gallery in New York City, you might have seen there two works of the sixteenth-century portrait painter Hans Holbein; the two works are close together on the same wall. One is the most famous portrait of Sir Thomas More, dressed in the S-chain of his office as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, although you might be forgiven for thinking it the sign of his later office, or “room,” as More would have said, of Lord Chancellor, the head of the judiciary and, after the monarchy itself, the second most ancient office in England. The other portrait is of Thomas Cromwell, architect of the English Reformation (the first modern revolution in England) and faithful fixer of his lord, King Henry the Eighth, until Henry had enough of him, and he, like Thomas More, lost his head on Tower Hill. In this pairing on the wall of the Frick Gallery, we might say that the medieval faces the modern world; united Christendom faces a Europe of the nations, about to busy themselves with a century or so of bloody, religious strife; a world with God at the center opposes the new man-centered modernity; law made in God is distinguished from law made by and for man; Church is contrasted with State; and so on in serviceable, if simplistic contradistinctions.

In the letter that Thomas More wrote to Thomas Cromwell on March 5th, 1534, we see these two figures, and the drama in which they are forever locked by time, play out before us.¹ The historical context is as follows. More had resigned the office of Lord Chancellor on May 16th, 1532. The Chancellorship was the highest office in the land after the King, and More was one of few non-clerics, since its beginnings, to occupy the post. After his resignation, More attempted to live privately. However, in February, 1534, Parliament enacted the Act of Annates, which provided that bishops in England would thereafter be chosen by the King. In addition, Parliament indicted for treason one Elizabeth Barton, a nun in the county of Kent, and Barton is mentioned in the letter. A bill of attainder, before Parliament and drafted by Thomas Cromwell, identified John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and Thomas More as being among Barton's co-conspirators. Cromwell invited More to an informal meeting in Westminster a day or two before More wrote this letter. There is some sense (supported by Diarmaid MacCulloch in his recent biography of Thomas Cromwell) that the King was pushing Cromwell to include More in this way, although Cromwell was not convinced of More's involvement. In the letter, More appears to be of the mind that Cromwell has been supportive of him. Henry, rather than Cromwell, was likely to have been More's true nemesis.

More's writing also has an important literary context. Like Edmund Burke and John Henry Newman after him, More is a classic of English literature. Dr. Johnson, in his history of the English language, prepended to his great *Dictionary*, cites a number of passages from More's works as models of the development of the language. In this, Dr. Johnson is following Ben Jonson, the contemporary of Shakespeare. Ben Jonson, in his *English Grammar* of 1641, used More as one of twelve authors whose works were "models of pure and elegant style." Ben Jonson would also have had sympathy with More's Catholicism, as would Dr. Johnson later. And it is interesting that the quotations from More in Dr. Johnson's history of the English language come just after a long quotation from the fifteenth-century jurist, John Fortescue, who, in his quoted work on *The Difference Between an Absolute and a Limited Monarchy*, argued that

¹ The full text of the letter can be found in W. E. Campbell (ed.), *The Last Letters of Blessed Thomas More* (London: The Manresa Press, 1924), 23–35.

England was an example of the latter, that is, the monarchy was under the law and the law gave the monarchy its authority. This could have been said by Thomas More, a century or so after Fortescue.

What, then, is More doing in this letter, in that "pure and elegant style," redolent of Burke and Newman in having a natural rather than artificial shape, and being a successful vehicle for feeling as much as for thought? We might say that, in the context of his Christian humanism, More is putting the truth into words, and both "truth" and "word" are to be understood in terms of the Logos, which is Christ himself. If Cromwell is the exemplar of the early modern movement towards using positive (man-made) law to enact the will of the absolute ruler, or the absolute State, then More's conception of law is harking back to an older idea that the law is words which are rooted in the will of God; as More says in the letter: "as God knoweth the thing indeed, so his noble Grace may take it," and More is using language to reveal the truth to the King. More's language is made up of his words conforming to the Logos.

There are themes in the letter of obedience, of the common life in which human beings live, ties of friendship and duty, and the complex nature of human society, including Christendom. More is also writing the record; he is an experienced common lawyer, aware that writing is a legal and political act; but for More such things co-exist with the realm of the sacred, and the very center of human existence. We might note the repetition of the word "heart" used five times in the first paragraph:

After my most hearty recommendation, it may please you to understand that I have perceived by the relation of my son Roper (for which I beseech Almighty God reward you) your most charitable labor taken for me towards the King's gracious Highness in the procuring at his most gracious hand, the relief and comfort of this woeful heaviness in which mine heart standeth.... But surely, good Master Cromwell (as I by mouth declared unto you some part for all could I neither then say nor now write) it thoroughly pierceth my poor heart, that the king's highness (whose gracious favor toward me far above all the things of this world I have ever more desired, and whereof, both for the conscience of mine own true faithful

heart and devotion toward him, and for the manifold benefits of his high goodness continually bestowed upon me, I thought myself always sure) should conceive any such mind or opinion of me as to think that ... I had any other manner [of] mind, than might well stand with the duty of a tender loving subject toward his natural prince, or that his grace should reckon in me any manner of obstinate heart against his pleasure in anything that ever I said or did concerning his great matter of his marriage or concerning the primacy of the Pope. Never would I wish other thing in this world more like than that his highness in these things all three as perfectly knew my dealing and as thoroughly saw my mind, as I do myself, or as God doth himself, whose sight passeth deeper into my heart than mine own.

This is the language of the pre-Cartesian world, where the heart is the center of a man's natural being; More returns to this center in the final paragraph. His other faculties, "mind" and "conscience," are bound up with the ties of affection that are conceived in the heart. Human life is lived in common with others. (The word "individual," meaning the single human being, did not become current in English before the seventeenth century, and More would not have used the word in the way it would come to be used in modernity.)

The nature of human political and religious authority is, therefore, in the common life of men. Neither Pope nor King can be considered above the constitution of Christendom, which reflects the human ties of Christian charity, the love of God and neighbor. The human primacy on earth, whether exercised by pope or a secular power, relies for its authority on the assent of the "corps of Christendom," the whole body of the Church and State together. "Since all Christendom is one corps," says More, "I cannot perceive how any member may without the common assent of the body depart from the common head." More conceives of Christendom as a balanced constitution that has grown out of historic settlements made by General Councils of the Church, even more authoritative to More's mind than the Papacy itself: "[N]ever thought I the Pope above the General Council, nor never have, in any

book of mine put forth among the king's subjects in our vulgar tongue, advanced greatly the Pope's authority." More has a horror of disorder; if the authority of General Councils were brought into question, then "through Christendom upon every man's affectionate reason all things might be brought from day to day into continual ruffle and confusion."

It is in passages such as these that we hear in More's words a fore-echo of Edmund Burke and Russell Kirk, and the looming specter of modernity; it is, in Burke's words, the "antagonist world," in which the only authority has become, as More says, "man's affectionate reason." More's stand is not against the King; it goes without saying that More was a profound monarchist, and that Henry had no more loyal subject than More. More is against the prideful man, puffed up with a sense of his own exceptional importance, the final judge in his own causes, as man was to become in future, liberal society; Henry is one of these men, but so are Tyndale, Luther, and the English heretics that More dealt with when he was Lord Chancellor. Thomas More knew that ideas have consequences.

To return to the Frick Gallery, the close observer of the portrait of More will see that there is a definite redness around the eyes, captured in Holbein's paint. They seem the eyes of a man who, when his day job had finished, lit his candle and sat up into the night writing what he saw as the truth against those who would bring the world into chaos. He was engaged in a war of ideas, a war for peace, one that he was (in earthly terms) to lose. What followed was the English Reformation, the English Civil Wars, the Wars of Religion in Europe, because ideas have consequences. Thomas More's writings, including this letter, were attempts to conserve those God-inspired works of culture and civilization that make for human flourishing, and as such, he stands with Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk, and other defenders of Christian civilization.

Rousseau's General Will and the Risk of Tyranny



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The aim of this paper is to analyze Rousseau's concept of the "General Will" and the related risk of tyranny.¹ To achieve this goal, we will start with the concept of General Will as it relates to Rousseau's anthropological thought and then examine the difficulties with the implementation of the General Will model, both conceptual and practical, and the likelihood of its ending in a tyrannical system.

The Anthropological Roots of the General Will

Rousseau's approach to human society is profoundly influenced by his conception of human nature. The fact that he refuses to acknowledge rationality as a feature of human nature *ab initio*, while admitting human perfectibility as a distinction between man and the brutes, prevents Rousseau from seeing man as originally a social creature endowed

1 The first time I addressed this subject was in my chapter "Rousseau and Burke and the Concept of General Will," in *Rousseau e as Ciências*, ed. Olga Pombo e Nuno Melim (Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia das Ciências da Universidade de Lisboa, 2013), 127–139. About fifteen percent of this paper is taken from discussion that first appeared in that chapter.

with reason and destined to be perfected in society. To Rousseau, rationality is a sort of practical virtue to be acquired in society at the expense of totally denying man's primitive human nature. This is why there are no individual rights or individual liberties whose preservation would be a cause of concern in the social model. Society should strip man of his previous nature: free indeed, but irrational. Another consequence of not accepting man's original rational nature is the rejection of Natural Law. Natural Law is no longer to be found in the rational principles inscribed in human intellect by God, since man's rational nature is something related to the social collective experience, begun late in human history as a consequence of a disciplinary effort upon the primitive nature of man: solitary, sensitive, and free. This is why Rousseau thinks that the stricter, more collective, and more impersonal the social experience is, the better it is for the creation of the new man.

For Rousseau, natural rights are perceived as the answer to the natural needs of a savage human nature to which any kind of society is a form of bondage.² This is why he needs to discover a way to reconcile liberty and political society, through a novel conception of liberty that rests on the assumption that human liberty is the absence of any law that has not been given to man by man himself.³ In fact, it might be argued that, if we give up a transcendent guarantee for human law (or the criterion that law must be just otherwise it is not law but injury, as stated by Francisco Suárez in *De Legibus*), what surely remains is the arbitrary will of the stronger human over the weaker one. Rousseau's proposal of a law given to all by all, where each one is at the same time the legislator and the one who obeys, while it aims to resolve the problem of law's legitimacy, neither resolves the problem of tyranny nor that of unjust laws.

2 Rousseau believed until the end that even the right kind of society is a form of bondage. Hence, he cannot have regarded his solution to the problem of the conflict between the individual and society as more than a tolerable approximation to a solution, an approximation which remains open to legitimate doubts. See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 255.

3 This problem would be central to Kant's definition of human autonomy. For Kant, however, the problem would be resolved by considering that human reason is capable of thinking the universal idea, and practical reason is guided by a categorical imperative, universal in its formulation.

The Concept of the General Will

"Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains."⁴ This is the well-known starting point of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, stated along with the promise of presenting a solution to the problem.

Regarding the institution of legitimate power, Rousseau considers that the only way to ensure the freedom of a people is for them to obey solely themselves, which requires engagement in a pact involving all its elements. It follows that the only legitimate sovereign (when in its active form) is the one constituted by all the people congregated in a pact whose will, when directed towards the common good, constitutes the General Will.⁵

The will of the entire body, provided that it is not contaminated by individual interests and is aimed at the common good (in other words, the above-mentioned General Will) should be obeyed by all: "[W]hoever refuses to obey the General Will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free."⁶ That man could be "forced" to be free is only

4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1923), Book I, Chapter I, 5. (Henceforward: *The Social Contract* followed by book, chapter, and page.)

5 The common good of a political community is not the good of the majority and cannot be confused with it. This is why it is so important to define the common good. The common good is what allows the people to achieve their complete realization as human beings. For the full realization of the common good as a factor of human completeness, a law must: respect the rights of those for whose defense society exists; respect the fruits of labor and guarantee the usufruct of men's acquisitions, both material and spiritual; consecrate freedom, both physical and of opinion, that does not overlap collective interests and the individual good. It therefore has no right to usurp what the individual person legitimately has without compensating it. The common good cannot be assured by these guarantees, nor does it undoubtedly come from them: they are indispensable but not sufficient. Men and societies, when functioning under the right conditions, achieve for themselves the end of the common good. The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, in a document entitled *Choosing the Common Good* (2010), has a very profound definition about what it means to choose the common good and what this implies, in fact, the document shows clearly the difference between the common good and the good of a majority: "Promoting the common good cannot be pursued by treating each individual separately and looking for the highest 'total benefit,' in some kind of utilitarian addition. Because we are interdependent, the common good is more like a multiplication sum, where if any one number is zero then the total is always zero" (p. 8).

6 *The Social Contract*, I, VII, 18.

possible due to the double meaning of freedom. In fact, the freedom which man is forced to accept is the political freedom, which is contrary to the natural freedom that man enjoyed before entering civil society that, in turn would manifest itself through the rejection of the General Will's commandments. The problem however is that this civil freedom is also problematic for the rational freedom of individual beings. Since, according to Rousseau, the individual human being—previous to the life in society—is irrational and his freedom is only perceived as a sensitive experience and not a rational one, in this new model of society he is not considered as a person whose liberty must be preserved. Although Rousseau mentions that man would be free inside a political society, not a single element that constitutes the substantial freedom of a rational man, neither the possibility of disposing of himself nor that of disposing of his property, is taken into account. In Rousseau's civil society under the sphere of the General Will, one is tempted to consider man as merely a number, a small and insignificant piece in the overall puzzle, for to belong to this society entails "the total alienation of each associate, together with all his rights, to the whole community."⁷

In this holistic pact, each one gives up his individual interests for the benefit of everyone: "Each member of the community gives himself to it, at the moment of its foundation, just as he is, with all the resources at his command, including the goods he possesses."⁸ Man gives up his own will, in that it is exclusively individual, and finds himself as free as he was before entering society. More so, he finds himself *freer*, for he has now a civil and rational freedom, which Rousseau qualifies as a moral and better freedom. He also has the sovereign's guarantee, through the action of the General Will, to everything he possesses:

The passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked.... What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to everything he

⁷ Ibid., I, VI, 15.

⁸ Ibid., I, IX, 19.

tries to get and succeeds in getting; what he gains is civil liberty and the proprietorship of all he possesses.⁹

With the surrender of individual interests to the whole community, and not to someone in concrete, Rousseau considers that he has safeguarded freedom. From the universal condition of dependency towards the body of the State one can obtain the universal condition of freedom. Although Rousseau admits his suspicions about a majority suffrage—which could conceal a tyranny, since it represents merely the majority of individual interests—in the case of a submission to the General Will this risk does not, by definition, occur. Each member of the political community is, at the same time, in the situation of one who surrenders and one who receives, one who legislates and one who obeys:

Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses, and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has.¹⁰

Only dependency towards an individual subject can deprive one of freedom: this is why it is so important to ensure a condition of equality *vis-à-vis* fellow creatures and a condition of general submission towards the sovereign, which, in Rousseau's opinion, does not hinder individual freedom:

From whatever side we approach our principle, we reach the same conclusion, that the social compact sets up among the citizens an equality of such a kind, that they all bind themselves to observe the same conditions and should therefore all enjoy the same rights. Thus, from the very nature of the compact, every act of Sovereignty, i.e. every authentic act of the *General Will*, binds or favors all the citizens equally; so that the Sovereign recognizes only the body of the nation, and draws no distinctions between those of whom it is made up.¹¹

⁹ Ibid., I, VIII, 19.

¹⁰ Ibid., I, VI, 15.

¹¹ Ibid., II, IV, 28–29.

From the universal condition of dependency, paradoxically, Rousseau deduces that of human liberty. In fact, if man does not compare himself with other men, he does not perceive his misery in the same way. The comparison with other men would have awoken in him the perception of his own individuality as having been deceived and duped. Jacques Maritain, in *Trois Réformateurs*, reacts to this passage as follows:

[H]e is subject to all, but he is subject to no man, and that is the essential thing, there is no man above him. Nay more, as soon as the covenant begets the social body, each is in such wise absorbed in that common self which he has willed, that by obeying it he still obeys himself. Then the more we obey, not a man—God forbid!—but the general will, the more free we are.¹²

It is true that it sounds strange that because the submission is made to a collective body, of which everyone is a part of, the absence of liberty should not to be perceived as such. In fact, the real experience of being dominated by a deaf and blind multitude should be even more frightening than to be subjected to a concrete figure in the state, which would always be preferable to a faceless enemy. For Rousseau, however, to follow the General Will is to follow one's own will aimed at the common good, and, when doing it, a citizen is free, for the civil nature is, for Rousseau, the way in which human nature surpasses itself. The General Will requires that all those forming part of society place the interests that might be important for the whole at its service, and, ultimately, that the judge of what is important belongs to the Sovereign: "Each man alienates, I admit, by the social compact, only such part of his powers, goods and liberty as it is important for the community to control; but it must also be granted that the Sovereign is sole judge of what is important."¹³

Rousseau maintains that, nevertheless, people still enjoy civil freedom, in spite of the decision about what he has to surrender being in the hands of the Sovereign. According to Rousseau, this freedom, founded on equality, does not require that citizens be equal in regard to power and wealth, but merely that power should be kept in due bounds

¹² Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1928), 62.

¹³ *The Social Contract*, II, IV, 27.

regarding the use of violence and, with regards to wealth, that no citizen should be so rich as to be able to buy another or so poor as to be forced to sell himself.¹⁴ However reassuring this assertion may be, we think that we have here a cause for concern, since the General Will still remains the only guarantee for keeping power in due bounds.

For Rousseau, sovereignty is inalienable and indivisible and is found essentially in all the members of the political body and in the expression of its General Will. Sovereignty is inalienable, and political society cannot delegate its own “legislative” power; but the political body can and should delegate its “executive” authority:

I hold then that Sovereignty, being nothing less than the exercise of the *General Will*, can never be alienated, and that the Sovereign, who is no less than a collective being, cannot be represented except by himself: the power indeed may be transmitted, but not the will.... Sovereignty, for the same reason as makes it inalienable, is indivisible; for will either is, or is not, general; it is the will either of the body of the people, or only of a part of it. In the first case, the will, when declared, is an act of Sovereignty and constitutes law: in the second, it is merely a particular will, or act of magistracy—at the most a decree.¹⁵

The sovereign acts through laws, and when Rousseau thought about the role of the sovereign, acting as General Will, he sought to guarantee impartiality through the fact that its actions only concern the elaboration of law, and law is general and not directed to particular facts.

Robert Derathé, however, points out a real difficulty first noticed by Charles Vaughan: few laws existing today would be considered laws in the light of Rousseau's definition, since most of them concern, at the most, several classes of citizens.¹⁶ Rousseau himself recognizes in another passage of *The Social Contract* that individual beings must be directed to act according to the General Will. This statement, even if

¹⁴ Cf. *The Social Contract*, II, XI, 45; J.-J. Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social, ou Principes du Droit Politique*, *Œuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, III (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 391–392.

¹⁵ *The Social Contract*, III, XV, 83.

¹⁶ Cf. Robert Derathé, *Rousseau et la Science Politique de son Temps* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1970), 359.

Rousseau struggles to maintain that “it consists wholly in particular acts which fall outside the competency of the law” is indeed the application of the law to particular subjects, which would be the role of government.¹⁷ In this way, in order to take action, the sovereign legislative power requires an executive power—the *government*, which acts as a minister of the sovereign and an intermediary body charged with the carrying out of laws.¹⁸ As Derathé points out, Rousseau thought it to be possible that a government could rule a state with only a few simple and generic laws. One could think this to be a sign that Rousseau favors a minimal state; but this is only one of the many difficulties concerning contradictory positions within Rousseau’s texts, because man renders to the General Will all that he is and all that he has:

As nature gives each man absolute power over all his members, the social compact gives the body politic absolute power over all its members also; and it is this power which, under the direction of the *General Will*, bears, as I have said, the name of Sovereignty.¹⁹

The description that emerges of this political body is frightening because of its nature and the relation of the individual being with it. Other well-known conceptions of political society, from St. Paul, to St.

¹⁷ Cf. note 18, below.

¹⁸ “It may, on the other hand, readily be seen, from the principles laid down above, that the executive power cannot belong to the generality as legislature or Sovereign, because it consists wholly of particular acts which fall outside the competency of the law, and consequently of the Sovereign, whose acts must always be laws. The public force therefore needs an agent of its own to bind it together and set it to work under the direction of the *General Will*, to serve as a means of communication between the State and the Sovereign, and to do for the collective person more or less what the union of soul and body does for man. Here we have what is, in the State, the basis of government, often wrongly confused with the Sovereign, whose minister it is. What then is government? An intermediate body set up between the subjects and the Sovereign, to secure their mutual correspondence, charged with the execution of the laws and the maintenance of liberty, both civil and political.” *The Social Contract*, III, I, 49.

¹⁹ “Comme la nature donne à chaque homme un pouvoir absolu sur tous ses membres, le pacte social donne au corps politique un pouvoir absolu sur tous les siens; et c’est le même pouvoir qui, dirigé par la volonté général porte, comme j’ai dit, le nom de la souveraineté.” J.-J., Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social, ou Principes du Droit Politique*, Livre II, Chapitre IV, ed. cit., 372.

Thomas Aquinas, and to the Salamanca School's late-scholastic thought considered that power came from God to the sovereign. In the case of the Salamanca School, the power came to political society, which was willed by God as an instrument for human perfection. The rulers needed to rule through just laws, to which the conformity with Natural Law was the guarantee that they would be just and legitimate. The best way of distinguishing free societies from tyrannies was the ability of each man, rationally and voluntarily, to obey the sovereign while also preserving his possessions and his opinions as a free man.

To illustrate the difference here with the ideas of Rousseau, I will choose an author who acknowledges the political body as receiving authority from God as a moral organized community: Francisco Suárez. For Suárez, in the seventeenth century, political society indeed emerged from a *pactum* that placed together members of society with the goal of achieving the common good. However, this society, although it constituted a *Corpus*, did not subtract from or absorb political individual freedoms, though it still required obedience to the ruler elected by the whole body. Let us observe how Suárez presented this pact:

[B]y a special act of their will or common consent men are integrated into a body politic with a social bond to help one another toward a political end. In this way, they form a single mystical body which, from a moral point of view, can be called a unity in itself and, consequently, needs a single ruler. In such a community, then, it follows that this power arises from the nature of the thing itself, and it is not within the power of men so to combine and yet impede this power. If, therefore, men wished for both options—that is to say, to combine socially but under the condition of not being subject to any power—this would be an absurdity and they would achieve nothing.²⁰

20 "[Q]uatenus speciali voluntate seu communi consensu in unum corpus politicum congregantur uno societatis vinculo, et ut mutuo se juvent in ordine ad unum finem politicum, quomodo efficiunt unum corpus mysticum, quod moraliter dici potest per se unum; illudque consequenter indiget uno capite. In tali ergo communitate, ut sic, est haec potestas ex natura rei, ita ut non sit in hominum potestate ita congregari et impedire hanc potestatem. Unde si fingamus homines utrumque velle, scilicet, ita congregari veluti sub conditione ut non manerent subjecti huic potestati,

Suárez considered that, to avoid the risk of tyranny, the sovereign power should be moderated by some representatives of the people, and he also considered that it was very important for the sovereign to be seen to respect the life, liberty and property of the subjects. Consequently, he argued that society could take away liberty and property only as a just punishment for a crime: otherwise, it would be unjust to touch those rights that belong to the individual.²¹

Considering that the guarantee of Natural Law was insufficient to keep power in due bounds, Suárez, in the seventeenth century, considered that a “popular element” should be added to monarchy. In the eighteenth century, Montesquieu and the theorists of the American Revolution conceived other political solutions to moderate the sovereign power, so there was abundant literature on how to avoid tyranny that did not entail being under the power of a corporate body acting as a whole.

This approach to society considered that man was a social creature that would better himself by belonging to civil society but without changing his nature. Therefore, society needed to accommodate a human being and defend its individual rights. Rousseau’s doctrine is different. Although he asserts that in political society man has the right to everything that society obtains for him, in doing so, however, man has no other choice than to submit himself and his will and property to the collective body.

For Rousseau, man was a sort of a solitary animal and life in society would be “*contra natura*”: there is a gap between the primitive nature and the one that results from social life, as if it were not the same nature that learns in society and is promoted through this partnership, but another nature that strips the primitive nature from all its rights.²² As

esset repugnantia; et ideo nihil efficerent,” R. P. Francisci Suarez e Societate Jesu, “De Legibus ac Deo Legislatore,” in *Opera Omnia*, Tomus 5, 181.

21 “[...] Respublica etiam per potestatem altiore quam habet ad regendos homines, potest ex iusta causa (ut in poenam) hominem privare sua libertate.” *De Legibus* II, XIV, 18.

22 “He who dares to undertake the making of a people’s institutions ought to feel himself capable, so to speak, of changing human nature, of transforming each individual, who is by himself a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he in a manner receives his life and being; of altering man’s constitution for the purpose of strengthening it; and of substituting a partial and moral existence for the physical and independent existence nature has conferred on us all” *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter VII, 35.

Jacques Maritain explained this: "In the state of nature we only existed as persons, in no way as parts; in the state of society we no longer exist except as parts."²³ I think it would be better to say that in his primitive nature, man was just a solitary animal and in the collective nature man is just a part of the collective body.

Some Conceptual Problems with the General Will

Several commentators have pointed out that the General Will acts only through laws, which in theory would render its action innocuous, but the truth is that laws can be tyrannical.²⁴ Rousseau himself rejects this latter possibility by saying that it would be a contradiction if the whole body legislates to harm itself. In fact, in this statement, I think we have to admit that Rousseau, who does not accept the classical, theocratically based assertion of Natural Law, acts as if he could use this category, or as if he could replace the transcendent guarantee by the material one—following Hobbes's path—and nothing would change. What is the guarantee that this law is just and that it doesn't harm the body? Man makes mistakes individually and collectively. It is true that mistakes may happen even when we accept natural law precepts, but those precepts give a standard to adjust the route.

There are laws, simple and generic, which, as Rousseau considered, should be the laws necessary to run the state. The Mosaic Laws presented in the Ten Commandments are an example of the aforementioned type of laws; however, these laws needed to be adjusted and elaborated in order to rule complex contemporary political communities. According to Rousseau, the laws given by legislators, who were highly praised in *The Social Contract*, were human laws, and legislators only spoke in God's name in order to keep people in obedience.²⁵ Legislators

²³ Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1928), 62.

²⁴ Allan Bloom, Alfred Cobban, Robert Derathé, to mention only a few.

²⁵ "The legislator therefore, being unable to appeal to either force or reason, must have recourse to an authority of a different order, capable of constraining without violence and persuading without convincing. This is what has, in all ages, compelled the fathers of nations to have recourse to divine intervention and credit the gods

were such a rare breed that we could not find them easily, and, in any case, only the Sovereign embodied in the General Will could legitimately give laws to society:

He, therefore, who draws up the laws has, or should have, no right of legislation, and the people cannot, even if it wishes, deprive itself of this incommunicable right, because, according to the fundamental compact, only the General Will can bind the individuals, and there can be no assurance that a particular will is in conformity with the General Will, until it has been put to the free vote of the people.²⁶

Rousseau does not accept classic theologically based Natural Law, and, by rejecting it, he jettisons an external criterion for justice. Rousseau does try new paths in order to solve the problem of the “bondage” he sees in all political society. His effort, however, results in something very awkward. As a result, his accompanying rejection of the possibility of tyranny from the action of such a sovereign is difficult to prove. In fact, it is easier to prove the very opposite, because a holistic body to which I should commit all that I am and all that I own is the very description of a tyrannical body. A society that seeks for a disembodied common good, which does not respect individual freedom, does not attain a true common good.²⁷

Even if Rousseau describes the actions of the General Will as an expression of the common good, this is a collective will that in each moment expresses what the common good in that society is, without respect for individual freedom, and is its sole interpreter and its own controller. The English historian Alfred Cobban, along with Allan Bloom and Robert Derathé, claimed that the exercise of the General Will is expressed *via* the law, and that this fact renders the applica-

with their own wisdom, in order that the peoples, submitting to the laws of the State as to those of nature, and recognizing the same power in the formation of the city as in that of man, might obey freely, and bear with docility the yoke of the public happiness.” *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter VII, 37.

26 *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter VII, 37.

27 Even though Rousseau asserts that man is freer than before, this freedom could be compared to that of an atom inside a structure but not to that of a person.

tion of Rousseau's doctrines less drastic.²⁸ However, we can catch a glimpse here of a problem, given that the General Will itself always establishes the criterion for what should be the law: "And what is a law? It is a public and solemn declaration of the General Will about an object of common interest."²⁹ Cobban interprets this statement as a mere expression of the widespread assent to the fact that each element in society has to stick to the common will rightfully established.³⁰ The interpretation that considers that the General Will expresses itself by the law that applies to all citizens and is directed to the common good, and that, therefore, it does not constitute in itself a danger to any one, is very common among Rousseau's interpreters and finds its basis in Rousseau himself. Rousseau thinks that the guarantee given by the General Will resides in the fact that the laws, being directed to the common good, are applied to all the body of society and not to a singular subject; its justice is thus guaranteed and there is no reason to fear tyranny by the sovereign.

That the common good should be paramount in the establishment of the social pact was already commonly accepted as true before Rousseau. The pact would obtain the consensus of all the people if the actions of the sovereign were directed to the common good, and, if the sovereign ignored the common good in its actions, he would become subject to criticism or even risk deposition. In the School of Salamanca, Francisco de Vitória and Francisco Suárez both presented the establishment of the social contract as only being possible under the condition that the sovereign acts in defense of political society's common good. Rousseau's doctrine is not merely a reformulation of the principle accepted in the

28 "But the practical application of these doctrines is less drastic than is often supposed, for the volitions of the General Will are expressed only through the laws." Alfred Cobban, *Rousseau and the Modern State* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1934), 126.

29 "Et qu'est-ce qu'une loi? C'est une déclaration publique et solennelle de la volonté générale sur un objet d'intérêt commun." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettres Écrites de la Montagne*, Lettre VI, *Œuvres Complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, III (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 807–808.

30 "In practice, we may ask, is Rousseau claiming any more than that in every state the individual members of the body politic should be compelled by the physical powers of the whole society to obey the laws rightfully established?" Cobban, *Rousseau and the Modern State*, 126.

establishment of a social pact; it passes beyond it in contemplating that the common good can be linked to the General Will, which means that the latter can never be wrong and so Rousseau can, based on this principle, uphold simultaneously the Sovereign's omnipotence and the freedom of the governed. If this were merely an abstract definition that "represents an attempt to justify philosophically the rule of law"³¹ without pretending to have a practical application, it would not constitute a problem; but this is not the case. Rousseau's proposal is to be applied.

Rousseau admits that the General Will should aim to accomplish the common good and that it is this very common good that characterizes it. However, on the basis of its own presuppositions, when asked to define a law, Rousseau answers that a law is a public and solemn declaration of the General Will.³² We are in a vicious circle here: the creation of laws is the action of the General Will, and those laws are directed to achieve the common good and only the common good; but, when asked about what a law is, the answer is: "A law is a declaration of the General Will." The alternative to this circular process would be to consider that the common-good criterion is the one that sanctions the choices of the General Will and is "located" outside and above it. The autocracy of the General Will is not restricted by a principle of natural law or even by the definition of a minimum of generally accepted laws.

Moreover, as much as the abstract construction of Rousseau's system is coherent, the axiom upon which it is built is not verified in itself: the universal application of a law intended to implement the common good—abstractly defined—to be applied to all, does not guarantee its justice to all the members of society. A decision to abolish private property would be considered as a law directed to the common good and were it a general law to be equally applied to all, it nevertheless would constitute a harsh and tyrannical measure to some members of society. The assumption that treating equally all the members of a society is the assurance of absence of tyranny is not taking into account that treating equally what is different is as unjust as treating differently what is equal.

³¹ Cobban, *Rousseau and the Modern State*, 127.

³² "Et qu'est-ce qu'une loi? C'est une déclaration publique et solennelle de la volonté générale sur un objet d'intérêt commun." J.-J. Rousseau, *Lettres Écrites de la Montagne*, Lettre VI, Œuvres, Livre III, 807–808.

The Instrumental Difficulties of the General Will

Moreover, we have to deal with the difficulties over how to implement the General Will. Being a critic of democracy, Rousseau admits that a majority suffrage, and the will expressed by it, could be different from the General Will. The former could express a form of tyranny by the majority.

The General Will cannot be subsumed in the will of the majority. Both these wills are, in essence, different: the General Will is the will of everyone aimed at the common good, whereas the will of the majority is just that, *the will of the majority*.³³ A criticism Rousseau makes of democracy is that the will of the majority tends to be easily identified with the General Will. Nevertheless, the expression of the General Will and its appraisal *in practice* require the use of democratic tools; its theoretical perfection is also its practical imperfection, as Burke observed. Acknowledging the difficulties of a process of enacting the General Will in societies with large numbers of members, Rousseau admits that a practical way of gauging the General Will could be a suffrage, as he expected that the opposing movements inside the political community could cancel each other out and, in the end, the will expressed would point to the common good:

There is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the *General Will*; the latter considers only the common interest, while the former takes private interest into account, and is no more than a sum of particular wills: but take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel one another, and the *General Will* remains as the sum of the differences.³⁴

Rousseau considers that there is a risk of compromising the purity and impartiality of the General Will in the expression of factions inside the community and in the domination of the will of one faction instead of the General Will. To solve this problem, he proposes that the factions should multiply as much as possible, as a way of annulling contrary

33 "On doit concevoir par-là que ce qui généralise la volonté est moins le nombre des voix que l'intérêt commun qui les unit." J.-J. Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social, ou Principes du Droit Politique*, Livre II, Chapitre IV, ed. cit., 374.

34 *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter III, 25.

factions, and make it possible for the final verdict to correspond to the General Will.

But when factions arise, and partial associations are formed at the expense of the great association, the will of each of these associations becomes general in relation to its members, while it remains particular in relation to the State [...] Lastly, when one of these associations is so great as to prevail over all the rest, the result is no longer a sum of small differences, but a single difference; in this case there is no longer a *General Will*, and the opinion which prevails is purely particular.

It is therefore essential, if the *General Will* is to be able to express itself, that there should be no partial society within the State, and that each citizen should think only his own thoughts [...] But if there are partial societies, it is best to have as many as possible and to prevent them from being unequal, as was done by Solon, Numa, and Servius. These precautions are the only ones that can guarantee that the *General Will* shall be always enlightened, and that the people shall in no way deceive itself.³⁵

Another problem with the enactment of the General Will arises when Rousseau admits that the sovereign (the General Will) is to act through the action of a government. Government has a double will too: it shares the General Will and, as government, has itself a will corresponding to the individual wills of all its members. The conflict between these two kinds of will can threaten government's stability; the art of maintaining its continuity resides in the ability to articulate both these wills. It is because he is aware of these difficulties that Rousseau declared himself in favor of the application of the *Social Contract* only in small states and upheld the universal consultation of all the elements in a society for the establishing of fundamental laws.³⁶

³⁵ Cf. *The Social Contract*, Book II, Chapter III, 26.

³⁶ Derathé also stresses that Rousseau did not exclude the possibility that a majority concerned only on imposing its individual inclinations could oppress a minority, and that this is the reason why Rousseau upholds that a vote's result should be close to unanimity whenever it is a question of voting on a law. Cf. Robert Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la Science Politique de son Temps* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 233.

Conclusion

It is impossible to know if Rousseau would have supported the French Revolution. However, as João Espada says, it is rather intriguing that he was the inspiration for so many theorists of the French Revolution, including Robespierre. We all know how the revolution evolved into an example of totalitarian political practice, and how it was a practical illustration of how impossible it was to keep a common political body in due bounds and avoid the abuse of power.

Societies can also make mistakes and the monist domination by an entire body without any form of external control over its totalitarian inclinations could certainly lead to a form of tyranny that is to be feared even more than the tyranny of just one man. One way to contain the tyrannical exercise of power is the existence of sanctions for whoever exercises authority—however, it is practically impossible to punish an entire people, so that it is more likely to expect a tyrannical exercise of power from a crowd than from a single person: “The tyranny of a multitude,” Burke wrote, in 1790, “is a multiplied tyranny.”³⁷

The General Will concept has the danger of a perfectionist political principle, confident (perhaps excessively) in its criterion, and blind to human fallibility: a perfect theoretical principle—terrifying in practice—with all the ingredients necessary for rationally justifying an autocracy.

³⁷ “Letter to Captain Thomas Mercer,” 26 February 1790. See *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas Copeland *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958–78), 6:96.

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam on Revolution



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Frédéric Ozanam was beatified by Pope John Paul II during the World Youth Day celebrations held in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris on Friday, August 22, 1997. The Pope singled out Ozanam's interest in social problems and his unique ideas for solving them that led to his foundation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Ozanam described his association as "A Catholic lay society, humble but numerous, poor but dedicated to the relief of the poor, in an age in which charitable associations have a great mission to carry out for the revival of the faith, for the support of the Church, and for reaching a truce from the hatred which divides men."

Ozanam intended his society to accomplish this through "direct personal relations in home visits to the poor," and through "the sharing of every form of poverty and disregard" in the quest for social regeneration. During the Paris ceremonies, Ozanam was recognized as a precursor to the Catholic Church's social doctrine that would be delineated in *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 and an "anticipator" of the profile of lay Christians that the Second Vatican Council would outline in *Lumen Gentium* in 1965.

Ozanam's approach in his own day was guided by his vision of the history of the Church (which he made a focus of his academic work), its response to the structure of social problems across time, and in par-

ticular its response to moments of revolutionary upheaval. Several quotations from Ozanam, highlighted by the Vatican, make clear his structural approach that would take advantage of the opportunities of social and political turmoil:

It is too little to help the poor day by day; we must begin from the root of the evil and, through wise reform, reduce the causes of the people's poverty.

and

Charity must never look behind itself, but *before* it, because the number of its past good works is always too small and the present and future miseries it must alleviate are always infinite.

He also believed this attitude had a personal application as well: "Great men are those who never have the plan of their Christian destiny in advance, but let themselves be led by God's hand."¹

I. Life in Lyon: The Education of Frédéric Ozanam (1813–1831)

Frédéric Ozanam was born the fifth of fourteen children (though only one of three to survive to adulthood) in 1813 in Milan where his father, a former law clerk and officer in Napoleon's military campaigns in Italy, had gone to complete his studies in medicine. His mother's family background was in the silk trade. When Frédéric was three the family returned to their ancestral home in Lyon, France, where his father took up residency as a doctor in the city's main hospital. Frédéric proved a brilliant student in classics at the Royal College of Lyon where he began his studies at the age of nine. He was a particularly prolific contributor to the school's literary journal, producing over 250 pages of material during his years as a student.

His interest in social issues was also displayed early. Upon his graduation from the College of Lyon in 1829, Ozanam took up an internship with a Lyon lawyer. In 1831 the silk workers of Lyon staged an uprising

¹ Pope John Paul II, "Beatification of Frédéric Ozanam," Notre-Dame de Paris, Friday, 22 August 1997. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19970822_paris-ozanam.html

over a serious drop in wages, one of the first organized workers' riots of the industrial age. Though the uprising was crushed by a 20,000 member contingent of the French army, it was a clear demonstration of the growing inequities of the new economic order. Ozanam responded, at the age of eighteen, by writing *Reflections on the Doctrine of Saint-Simon*.

Henri de Saint-Simon had published an influential manifesto that called for a society based upon the merit of the individual rather than that of an aristocratic or clerical class and that called for merit-based organizations of managers and scientists to be economic and political decision-makers. His followers, known as Saint-Simonians would establish anti-clerical utopian communities in France and the United States. Ozanam rejected the social analysis of Saint-Simon because he felt it gave the poor a false path to a better life since it was not based on the Christian faith or religious principles of mercy and love. However, the challenge of Saint-Simonianism would prod Ozanam to develop an alternative approach to the problems of industrialization.²

II. Active Faith in Paris: The Founding of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (1831-1836)

The year of the Lyon uprising Ozanam headed to Paris where he began studies at the School of Law, receiving his law license in 1834 and his doctorate in 1836. However, he didn't confine his studies to law alone. He spent much of his time in the library of the *Institut de France*, studied Hebrew and Sanskrit, and followed lectures in history. He found the attitude of skepticism in the Paris universities disruptive to his faith and entered into a period of doubt from which he found refuge through connection to the community of liberal Parisian Catholic intellectuals that included François-René de Chateaubriand, Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, Alphonse de Lamartine, Hugues Felicité Robert de Lamennais, and Charles Forbes René de Montalembert. At this point he found himself stirred into an active faith when he encountered a young Saint-Simonian who asked him, "You who pride yourself on being Catholic—

² For biographical references, see bibliography.

what do you actually do? Where are the works that demonstrate your faith and that could cause us to respect and admire it?”³

Ozanam's response was to join with several other young Catholic students to found a society devoted to the relief of poverty that they soon placed under the patronage of St. Vincent de Paul, a seventeenth-century French priest known for his compassion, humility, generosity, and dedication to the poor. The society declared that it would be “taking action of a social character in response to the subject that today agitates the world around us—the fight of those who have nothing against those who have too much, the violent shock of opulence and poverty that trembles the earth under our feet.” In typical academic fashion, the first “action” organized by the society was a series of conferences on the topic of poverty, held at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris.

On a more practical level, members of the society were charged with visiting the homes of the poor, the infirm, and the unemployed to offer practical assistance and moral guidance. The founders developed this method of service under the guidance of Blessed Sister Rosalie Rendu, a member of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, who was prominent in serving the poor in the slums of Paris. The new society collaborated with Sister Rosalie during the cholera epidemic of 1832, during which twenty thousand Parisians died. While fear gripped the population, she organized care for the cholera victims, becoming well known in the city for her work. Frédéric Ozanam's first act of charity was to take his supply of winter firewood to a widow whose husband had died of cholera.

III. Academic and Amorous Pursuits in Lyon (1836–1841)

In 1836 Ozanam returned to Lyon, practicing as a lawyer at the Royal Court. However, he was less than enthusiastic about this professional path and found himself increasingly attracted to an academic career. In preparation, he wrote a thesis, *Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century*, for which he was awarded a Doctorate in Letters in 1839. That same year, he took up a position teaching commercial law at the

3 Frédéric Ozanam, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. VII: *Mélanges*, “Discours de Florence,” juin 1853.

University of Lyon. However, his greater interest in history and literature was well known and in 1841 he accepted a position teaching foreign literature at the Sorbonne.

Though he seriously contemplated joining the priesthood, he was dissuaded from this path by several close clerical friends and instead married Marie Joséphine Amélie Soulacroix, daughter of the rector of the Academy of Lyon, the same year he took up his position in Paris. The couple would have one child, Marie, born in 1845.

IV. Literature and History at the Sorbonne:

Toward a Theory of Revolution (1841–1848)

Ozanam taught courses on German, Italian, and English literature and was elected to a chair at the Sorbonne in 1844. He began a study of the literary history of Europe in the fifth century. Because he refused to confine his studies within national boundaries, he is considered one of the founders of comparative literature. He also did not confine himself to literature alone and began a work of comparative history on the passage from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, traveling widely—to Germany, Italy, England, and Spain—while pursuing his research. There was undoubtedly an apologetic nature to his projects. He wrote that he wanted to “make known the long and laborious education that the Church has given to modern peoples” since, “far from being the enemy of ancient civilization, Christianity kept it from perishing. It saved from drowning science, the arts, and social institutions.” It was in this context that he began developing his theory of revolution. The fall of Rome, he would argue, was not a catastrophe. It was a revolution that enabled the triumph of Christian civilization in the West.⁴

Beyond his academic interests, he continued his pursuit of a Catholic solution to the social, economic, and political problems of his day. Following the school of liberal Catholicism, he advocated a partnership between religion and freedom that would break what he saw as an unhealthy alliance between throne and altar that elevated a pursuit of

⁴ See Ozanam's *La Civilisation chrétienne chez les Francs* (1849) in vol. I of the *Oeuvres complètes* and *La Civilisation au V^e siècle* (1851) in vol. IV of the *Oeuvres complètes*.

power over the cultivation of Christian virtue. But he remained preoccupied with the condition of workers suffering from industrial exploitation, which he saw as more significant than the conflict over political forms or individual morality. In 1836 he wrote, "The great question today is whether society will be no more than excessive exploitation for the profit of the strongest or if it will be consecrated through the service of each to the service of all."⁵

As France edged toward the Revolution of 1848, the phrase "*Passions aux Barbares*" (the French equivalent of the English phrase, "Barbarians at the Gates") became a popular summation of the political moment among certain French Catholics. Ozanam took issue with the phrase. He wrote an article under that title arguing that, just as the Church detached from the Roman Empire in order to influence the German barbarians, so in his time it was necessary to pass "from the camp of kings in order to go to the people."⁶ As the revolution began, he founded a journal, *l'Ère Nouvelle* to defend the ideals of democracy to a Catholic audience and to argue that Christian democracy was the highest form of government. The journal was short-lived, published only from April of 1848 to January of 1849; but in the sixty-five articles Ozanam contributed to it, we see the clearest expression of his "theory of revolution."⁷

V. Paris: The Revolution of 1848

As 1848 began, France was led by King Louis-Phillipe d'Orléans, a successful businessman and one of the wealthiest men in France, who had become king in 1830 with the overthrow of the autocratic Bourbon dynasty that had ruled France since 1594 (with the interruptions of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire). Louis-Phillipe governed as the "Bourgeois Monarch" with the support of bankers and the financial aristocracy—stock exchange tycoons, railroad barons, mineral mine owners, and wealthy landholders. Only one percent of the popula-

5 Selections from Ozanam's personal letters are included in volumes X and XI of the *Oeuvres complètes*. "À Louis Janmot," 13 novembre 1836.

6 Frédéric Ozanam, "Passions aux barbares," *le Correspondant*, 22 février 1848.

7 Ozanam's articles in *l'Ère Nouvelle* are included in volume 8 of the *Oeuvres complètes*.

tion had the right to vote and economic and political discontent began to grow. Unemployment was high, as were food prices, and the government was widely accused of nepotism and corruption.

Because political gatherings were outlawed, reformers would gather at “banquets” to criticize the regime and promote the idea of a republican government. Finally, in February of 1848, banquets themselves were banned in an attempt to quell dissent. Instead, on February 22, the people of Paris took to the streets, initiating three days of rioting that ended with the abdication of the king. On February 26, a republic was declared that established a national “right to work” along with workshops to employ all who needed a job. Elections to a Constituent Assembly, however, produced a conservative government that believed the cost of social reform was too high. On May 15, Paris workmen invaded the National Assembly and proclaimed a new government, but were quickly suppressed by the National Guard.

Conservative politicians formed a new party, the Party of Order, that became the most powerful in the Assembly and forced the closure of the National Workshops. Once again, Parisians protested, almost 200,000 men and women erecting barricades across the streets of the city during what would come to be known as the “June Days.” A French army force of 120,000 required three days of intense fighting to put down the insurrection. The Party of Order consolidated power and sponsored a presidential election in December. Though their candidate did not prevail, the winner of the election was Louis Napoleon, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, who succeeded through name recognition and populist rhetoric that earned him the support of the peasant population. Four years after his election he would dissolve the National Assembly and declare himself Emperor Napoleon III.

VI. The Search for a New Era (1848–1853)

Ozanam decided to take an active political role in the Revolution and stood for election to the National Assembly from the Rhône department. Several ideas which formed part of his policy platform were quite visionary. He is considered one of the first to propose the idea of a “nat-

ural salary,” now known as a “living wage,” that should be assured to all workers. He argued for a form of workman’s compensation in the case of accident or injury on the job, for insurance against unemployment, and for guaranteed pensions for workers in their later years. The Lyon electors of 1848 considered these ideas to be too radically generous and his foray into politics was unsuccessful.

Two of the letters he wrote during the period of his campaign further illuminate his thinking. On March 15 he wrote to his brother, himself a priest. In it he commended him for his “penchant for hardworking, poor men,” and argued that, “if a greater number of Christians, and above all ecclesiastics, had looked after working men over the last ten years, we would be surer of the future.” He exhorted his brother not to sow fear among his congregants by asking them, “What will we eat and how will we dress?” But rather encourage them not to be afraid and not to frighten others, arguing that the crisis was “a storm that cannot last” and that seeking “justice and the good of the land” would end with “all things being given in addition.” It is a hopeful message that revolution need not end in destruction, but in justice and virtue.

One week later, Ozanam wrote to a wealthy supporter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in order to once again argue that his study of Christian history gave him the ability to “propose a series of ideas to spirits troubled and uncertain to reassure them, to revive them, and to rally them in the midst of the confusion of the present.” His “ideas” specifically were that “the plan of God is proceeding more rapidly than we could have believed” and that “a new heaven and a new earth” were being created. He compared the Revolution of 1848 to the fall of the Roman Empire and claimed that, as in the earlier era, though some “may be crushed,” in the end, Christianity would triumph.⁸

Despite the fact that his electoral campaign did not end in triumph, Ozanam continued to spread a message of hope and confidence, particularly through his articles in the journal, *l'Ère Nouvelle*. Following the June Days he penned a lengthy address directed to “All Good and

8 Personal letters in Volumes X and XI of the *Oeuvres complètes*. “À M. l’abbé Ozanam,” Paris, 15 mars 1848 and “À M. Foisset,” Paris, 22 mars 1848.

Well-Intentioned People.”⁹ In it he contended that, though the streets of Paris had gone quiet and open violence had ended, a danger was still “hidden in the attics” and “an enemy” still lurked: “Misery.” The closing of the National Workshops had, he believed, led to tens of thousands of people relying on “the precarious bread of alms.” He then went on to describe in detail the condition of the destitute urban poor and to warn of the “perils of the future” if structural changes to the economy were not made quickly.

He then directly addressed the Priests of France and called upon them not to “denigrate” the “secular idea of freedom” but instead to use their freedom to expand works of charity among the working poor. He insisted that charity be extended to non-Catholics and non-believers, as they were not “any more insensitive than other men to a good word and good deeds.” He told the priests, “Do not be frightened when the wicked or the rude call you communists,” since even, “St. Bernard was treated as fanatical and foolish.” Instead, they should save Europe “once more by a crusade of charity.”

Next, Ozanam addressed the Rich, and warned them that “fortunes pass like the clouds.” Rather than preserving their own fortunes, he called upon them to give to “asylums, and schools, and houses of refuge.” This, he argued, is a form of “repentance,” for which God would “open the doors of heaven to you.”

Finally, he addressed the elected Representatives of the People, acknowledging that they must, “accomplish in months the work of centuries.” He noted that the major issue of the day was unemployment and suggested remedies such as greater investment in agricultural and colonial development. He proposed the creation of a national subscription that would clearly describe the measures necessary to end unemployment and the costs that would be associated with them. The subscription would be published “across the country” by “thirty thousand priests” and “forty thousand mayors.” He expressed his view that making contributions to the subscription “a matter of patriotism and of charity for all” would result in donations from a broad swath of French citizens, from “financiers” to “peasants.”

9 Ozanam's articles in *l'Ère Nouvelle* are included in volume 8 of the *Oeuvres complètes*. “Aux Gens de Bien,” Septembre 1848.

The conclusion of the address was a resounding call not to allow the revolution to precipitate the ruin of the country but to preserve the “Christian virtue of hope” which would be the “guardian of this threatened society.”

In addition to running for office and writing for *l'Ère Nouvelle*, Ozanam continued to participate in practical works of charity through the St. Vincent de Paul Society. At the time of the Revolution of 1848 there were 393 local conferences and councils with those numbers increasing almost daily over the next several years. Indeed, the new government came to rely heavily on members of the society to distribute relief grants to the many people in need. Early in 1849, another outbreak of cholera swept through Paris and Ozanam, along with 112 society members, cared for more than two thousand victims of the disease.

VII. The End of an Era and Legacy

Ozanam suffered from ill health all his life, and would not long survive the revolutionary era of 1848 to 1852, finally succumbing to tuberculosis in 1853, at the age of forty. During those years, though, he continued to press for a reconciliation of republican government with the Catholic Church. He put a great deal of hope in the new pope, Pius IX, who had assumed the papacy in 1846, and who initially proposed to lead the church less as a prince and more as a pastor. This was entirely in line with Ozanam's thinking according to which the church was less a hierarchy of clerics than an assemblage of lay people active in promoting a moral vision of equality and charity.

At the time of Ozanam's death there were already two thousand St. Vincent de Paul centers in twenty-nine countries. Today the St. Vincent de Paul Society has about eight hundred thousand members in 140 countries worldwide whose members, both Catholic and non-Catholic, pursue their own Christian growth through service to the poor.

In 1983, in a speech marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Society, Pope John Paul II declared that we should “thank God for the gift he has made to the Church in the person of Ozanam. We are amazed by all that was undertaken for the Church, for society,

for the poor, by this student, this professor, this father of a family—of intense faith and inventive charity—during the course of a life too quickly consumed.”¹⁰ Certainly for all those who seem to be living in revolutionary times, from his era to ours, Ozanam offers a message of hope and confidence: tumultuous upheaval provides an opportunity for people of goodwill to reorder their priorities and their actions in order to achieve a society of greater justice and reconciliation.

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¹⁰ Pope John-Paul II, “Charity is the Heart of the Gospel,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, n. 24 (13 June 1983).

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