little to do with Strauss and everything to do with liberal fear of attempts to reintroduce standards of religious morality to public conduct. Unfortunately, she merely asserts her fundamental position, that one cannot strive for virtue and still retain freedom. But our nation was founded on precisely the opposite assumption. Since long before the Constitution's drafting, Americans have believed that a free people can remain free only if, through local associations and religious morality, they are kept virtuous.

Drury's book sheds little light on the conservative movement in America. Indeed her book actually sheds little light on Strauss and his followers. For all of her criticism of Straussian ideas and goals, Drury barely mentions the central problem with Straussian scholarship, which is methodological. It is not enough merely to mention the seemingly odd coincidence that all great thinkers, on Strauss's interpretation, agree with him on all important matters. One must show the weaknesses in Strauss's meta-history if one is to discredit his interpretations and enlighten readers regarding the history of political thought.

There is much with which to take issue in Strauss's meta-history. For example, to claim as Straussians do that Locke was merely a prudent popularizer of Hobbesian theory is to commit several methodological errors. It is to ignore that there is simply no historical evidence to support the claim that Locke saw himself in this role, that to interpret Locke in this way requires that violence be done to the clear meaning of his language and argument; and that such an interpretation, for all the difficulty and damage involved in producing it, bears no fruit because it is not necessary to explain the rise of what is genuinely new in early modern thought, namely, the rise of the troublesome concept of sovereignty. The rise of that concept is owed to thinkers outside the Straussian canon, such as Jean Bodin and the apologists for Henry VIII.

By pointing out methodological problems such as these, Drury might have begun a fruitful conversation with and about Straussians. But she eschews such inquiry in order to depict yet another rightwing conspiracy to undermine freedom. In the end, Drury's book, both in what it says and in what it overlooks, can perhaps best be taken as a sign of our need to recommence serious study of our history if we are to relearn how best to conduct rational scholarly and political arguments.

**Correcting an Imbalance**

*IAN CROWE*


After his retirement from Parliament in 1794, Edmund Burke passed on to his friend and disciple, French Laurence, responsibility to convey to posterity the principles upon which he had fought his exhausting struggle against Warren Hastings and the corruption of British
rule in India. That struggle contained at its heart Burke’s understanding of justice: the upholding of transcendent, God-given principles in the context of particular and diverse circumstances. Hastings, he had argued, had been guilty of a "geographical morality" that had stripped Indian subjects of their dignity, and he warned the judges presiding at the impeachment of the enormity of their responsibilities in passing judgment on Hastings: “There is one thing, and one thing only, which defies all mutation; that which existed before the world, and will survive the fabric of the world itself; I mean justice.”

Laurence had only limited success in his task: two hundred years on, and despite the exceptional work of some historians in recent years—most notably Professor P. J. Marshall’s editing of Burke’s writings on India—the majority of commentators in Britain remain as bemused and suspicious about those principles of justice as ever Fox and Pitt were. Namier, famously, came to bury Burke, not to praise him, and, buried deep in the preoccupations of eighteenth-century politics, shrouded in a decent but functional rhetoric and liable to crumble into dust on exposure to the bracing air of democracy—that is still how many of us Britons like our Burke.

These two books are welcome evidence that things are different in the United States, that there exists in America a serious determination to take on Laurence’s legacy and explore the dynamic relationship in Burke’s thought between transient circumstances and the unchanging principles that infuse them—the key to Burke’s concept of justice. Each study, in quite a different way, argues forcefully that Burke was a deeply Christian and truly catholic thinker who saw man as neither so elevated as to deserve unrestrained liberty nor so bad as to merit slavery; who saw reason and instinct as drawn from a common root in natural law, not as antagonistic manifestations of science and superstition; who believed that a God-given diversity in humans is the source of harmony, not discord; who viewed private possessions as the nursery of public virtue, not the root of injustice. Can there be any other modern political philosopher who has achieved as much? Father Francis Canavan draws us to an appreciation of this achievement through a systematic account of Burke’s treatment of property; Professor Joseph Pappin shows the richness of Burke’s intellectual ancestry and the astounding breadth of his philosophical insights. Neither study jars with the other in any respect. They complement each other and combine to offer a powerful challenge to the obstinately enduring view—consistent with the British intellectual’s required suspicion of anything catholic, and of political “truths”—that Burke was at best a precursor of utilitarianism (surely the most smug expression of geographical morality) and at worst a gifted but cynical propagandist.

In The Political Economy of Edmund Burke, Canavan first places Burke in his historical context, with a survey of property holding and wealth distribution in “Burke’s world.” There is something awkwardly arbitrary about the selection of secondary sources here, but the exercise serves an important role in stressing the diversity of economic circumstances and the changing nature of wealth that Burke could observe. By emphasizing this flux and carefully taking into account when interpreting such works as Thoughts and Details on Scarcity, Canavan confronts head on the criticisms of those who equate a belief in unchanging principles on Burke’s part with knee-jerk reaction, and, at the same time, offers a key distinction: that Burke was concerned with the essentially private nature of property, not with its existing distribution. This distinc-
tion—it is between principle and circumstance—enables Canavan to show the underlying consistency of Burke's approach to property holding (from Ireland and the spoliation of Catholic estates to the French Revolution and the plundering of the Church) and, in so doing, to clarify our understanding of familiar concepts in Burke's thought. For example, the private nature of property holding reminds us that political wisdom should consist in dealing with what citizens have, not with what any particular group of citizens feels it ought to have. In Canavan's own words: "We must take men as they are, neither as angels nor devils, and provide legitimate channels for their pursuit of wealth." This means that the public power—government—should deal with what is, not what is willed: "...it is to the property of the citizen [that] civil society is pledged," and, furthermore, that right political action—civic virtue—resides, not in constructing virtue-friendly systems, but in knowing how virtue may be nurtured in, and arises out of, circumstances that are given.

The importance of prescription in Burke's thought, as Canavan shows, was to underpin the "stability of property," certainly because this was useful for order, but also because—as "part of the law of nature"—it put legitimate restraints upon human desires and acquisitiveness. When prescription is explained in the context of Burke's treatment of property, it becomes evident how futile it is to try to separate the moral from the practical within it—they are inextricable and consequently prescription can be seen to bind principle and circumstance. But if God thus confirms the inequalities inherent in property holding, he also shows the virtuous impulses of man in the sense of trusteeship that comes with security of possession. Canavan explores the ways in which Burke argued that a secure possession of private inheritance illuminates and excites the responsibilities that tie class to class and that should link property to government. This understanding of the sources of civic responsibility is one that the modern, bloated "public power" can never replace, however many dictates it may impose from above.

All this shows—and it is explored in further depth when Canavan turns to Burke's economic thought—that Burke's defense of the status quo was a defense of the private against (that which is misnamed) the public. Whiggery truly understood was indeed a defense of property, but it was a defense of property with a moral purpose, or, put another way, a defense of a truly public good built upon reverence for the private: "[P]roperty...deserved protection and esteem only because of the higher ends it served." This position is exactly why Burke ended up offending both conservative and radical Whigs. It is also why so many people misunderstand his concept of "rights," which he based not on abstract principles but on the security of private possessions as that security tends to the "end" of society. This is a concept of increasing importance in today's world, where threats to the private come not so much from the despot as from the democratic government with its popular mandate.

Whiggism, for Burke, was "resistance to arbitrary power," and that threat could come as easily from the people as from a tyrant. Jacobinism—in Burke's words, "the revolt of the enterprising talents of a country against its property"—was using the popular mandate as a key to the seizure of personal, or, at least, factional power, and with no anchor in property, the use of this power was likely to be beyond all restraint. Canavan drives this argument home with great effect in the final chapter of the book, on the French Revolution. Nowhere is the point better made than in Burke's reaction to the confiscation of the property of the Catho-
lic Church in France: “It is not the confiscation of our church property from this example in France that I dread, though I think this would be no trifling evil. The great source of my solicitude is, lest it should ever be considered in England as the policy of a state to seek a resource in confiscations of any kind; or that any one description of citizens should be brought to regard any of the others as their proper prey.” Burke’s faith in the great wheel of circulation, by which the profits of the rich were naturally dispersed among the population, might, as Canavan is prepared to admit, have condemned thousands to abject poverty, but has it really been the expansion of the public power that has alleviated this problem today? There may be more to Burke’s faith in the inherent drive to harmony that he found in unequal property holding than wishful thinking or a slavish service to aristocratic masters.

The ability to live in harmony with others whose private interests may at any time diverge from our own should be not only the incidental result of this wheel of circulation, but also the natural goal of all citizens, and government should act as a facilitator and educator in this goal. The philosophical or metaphysical arguments by which Burke underpinned his position are addressed in The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke. Here we confront society’s telos (to use a word which comes rather more easily to American than British tongues), which exists quite independently of our own choice and consent. The public good, or the state in which the telos can be realized, arises out of private interests, but it does not so magically: there is no invisible hand at work here. As Canavan shows in relation to property, the private good engenders the public good, but it does not create it. This transcendent purpose, or telos, is as natural as the transient circumstances through which it is necessarily realized. Burke believed that society is both natural and artificial; when this point is grasped—against the contrived contractual theorists from Hobbes to Rousseau and beyond—the resolution of the eternal and the transient, principles and circumstances, can be better understood. So, as Canavan puts it, “[t]he term ‘natural’ for Burke...covered not only the constituent elements of human nature, but also that which nature needs to achieve its natural ends.” But Burke’s own professed skepticism about the metaphysical processes required to provide such an explanation is a problem here. Burke does not explicate such thought himself: Pappin therefore has set himself the tricky and perilous responsibility of doing it instead—of “making explicit the implicit,” in his own words.

In a sense, Pappin’s fundamental task is to defend the provocative title of his book. He does so, implicitly, one might say, by presenting two closely related themes that form the framework for the whole argument. These are Burke’s acknowledgment and application of the concept of a natural law (“spawned,” Pappin ventures, “from Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysical roots”), and the dynamic fusion of essence and existence that may be perceived throughout his writings. Even if Pappin is ultimately unable to provide sufficient concrete evidence for positing Burke in an intellectual apostolic succession of natural law thinkers (his professed main aim), his study of “Burke’s metaphysics” is nonetheless of considerable importance for two main reasons. First, he shows that Burke’s conservatism is about immutable principles, not unchangeable circumstances. In so doing he reveals how the dynamism can be restored to conservative thought while retaining the consistency, and indicates that the conservative genius lies in the exercise of prudence, by which principles and circumstances—the transcendent and the transient—are brought into productive har-
mony in political action. Conservatives in Britain, who became captives in the 1980s and 1990s of a market-driven mania which turned its back on principles and tried, instead, to make a virtue out of circumstances alone, could do much worse than seriously to reflect on this matter. Secondly, Pappin does take the fight to those who persist in seeing Burke as utilitarianism’s John the Baptist or as a venal and unprincipled propagandist. Regarding the former, he lands some well-aimed blows at (rather broadly defined) utilitarian interpretations of Burke, from John Morley to lain Hampsher-Monk. In particular, he challenges the consistency of these arguments, and exposes their fallacies. When we move to Pappin’s own construction of Burke’s metaphysics, we are presented with a description of a fascinating harmony of essence and existence, or of stability and change, which requires more than one reading, but more than repays the effort. One of Pappin’s aims, as he introduces some of the metaphysical vocabulary necessary to his task, is to show that metaphysical thought need not create division between the planes of eternal constants and temporal change, but that the stable presence which is part of the human essence cannot be separated from the active, dynamic nature of that same human: “Individual existents have an essence leading intelligibility to reality.” We could almost see here the imprint of a political and social Incarnation—the eternal entering into the here—and–now. To Pappin’s great credit, it is not difficult to see how this metaphysical language is translated into Burke’s most functional political statements. Furthermore, this harmonic formula of essence and existence is developed to show us Burke’s understanding of the relationship between God and human nature, and in so doing we return to the centrality of the telos in Burke’s political thought—“He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection—He willed therefore the state.” Pappin’s exploration, en route, of the relationship between providence and free will enables one to appreciate the roots of Burke’s extraordinary awareness of the true dignity of man, by which humans, “all born equally...in subjection to one great, immutable, pre-existent law,” may strive profitably to enjoy the rights to which their humanity entitles them. The reader can hardly fail to finish this book with a better understanding of why Burke’s compassion for the Irish and the Indians is so much more affective than would be the shallow liberal cant of a Rousseauvian. How did conservatives in America and Britain allow themselves to be argued out of their traditional stand for human dignity and compassion? How? Perhaps they turned their backs too squarely on metaphysics! Pappin’s discussion of metaphysics, indeed, does seem to stand in contrast to Burke’s pejorative use of the term; but Pappin argues that the latter was employed only against those who tried to create universals out of fallible reason while at the same time detaching those universals from real situations and true human reason. That thinking is a false metaphysics, confounding metaphysics itself with abstractions. It is also built upon a false understanding of human reason, which, Pappin stresses, “is not a faculty independent of one’s physical or emotional state, or able to separate itself from environmental influences.” Burke’s sophisticated understanding of the relationship between reason and instinct (too sophisticated, evidently, for our modern–day rationalists) echoes Milton’s picture of the truly rational, the prelapsarian, Adam. Reason, for Burke, is harmony with God’s will, or natural law, which itself combines the eternal with the transient: “Never, no never did Nature say one thing and Wisdom say another.”
Pappin’s final survey of the intellectual consequences of the false metaphysics or reasoning—nihilism and radical individualism—highlights what is happening by default while conservatives devalue the philosophical content of Burke’s writings.

Pappin’s endeavors, which require negotiation of some uncomfortable gaps, are effective both in their explanation of the consistency of Burke’s arguments and in the way they illuminate key aspects of those arguments (such as the natural law) that are too often passed off as rhetoric. In all this, perhaps the greatest contribution of the book, and it is a great one, is to restore Burke’s status as a catholic thinker, as so much more than a career politician. Canavan says in the Foreword to this book that it is one “that has long needed to be written”: it now certainly deserves to be read.

Which brings me back to the British perspective with which I began. British philosophical and political thought seem to have lost the intellectual confidence to pursue the nature of the relationship between permanent and transitory things. Consequently we oscillate wildly in our politics between principles and pragmatism (without recognizing their interdependence) and periodically take refuge in utilitarian fudge. In this respect, New Labour, with its high-sounding principles and ruthlessly effective publicity machine, offers a blend of such breathtaking contradictions that one is left, well, lost for words. Distressingly, opposition to this glittering farce is cowed, confusing, and in danger of shrinking further. Facing a not dissimilar situation in the 1790s, Edmund Burke wrote: “The Jacobin minority have been abundantly supplied with stores and provisions of all kinds towards their [ideological] warfare. No sort of argumentative materials, suited to the purposes, have been withheld. . . . The others have not had the question so much as fairly stated to them.”

Canavan and Pappin, with these distinctive and accomplished studies of Burke’s thought, have gone a long way to correcting that imbalance.

All the Kings

JON PARRISH PEEDE


The problem with reviewing biographies is that one tends to praise or criticize in direct proportion to the biographer’s attention to those biographical areas that most interest the reviewer. I confess my own narrow dissatisfaction with Joseph Blotner’s Robert Penn Warren: A Biography because it skates across the surface of Warren’s pivotal college years at Vanderbilt without breaking new ground. A Vanderbilt graduate myself and a Fugitive/Agrarian researcher, I must admit the coloring of my lens here, for overall Blotner’s study is well researched, distinguished in its writing, and to be recommended highly. When Blotner notes that Warren’s early quarters were “innocent of plumbing,” you know you are in the hands of a biographer gifted of phrase, the right voice for Warren.

That a half-dozen distinguished books already cover the Fugitive/Agrarian terrain explains Blotner’s decision to summarize but does not excuse it. The only

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