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On 'Edmund Burke'

Certainly an article on Edmund Burke by Conor Cruise O'Brien is sufficient provocation to justify almost any mayhem on the part of a distinguished scholar of Burke. But Mr. Stanlis has allowed himself to be lured too far in his review of that article for *Chronicles* (*Vital Signs*, May 1991), into an argument against John Locke resulting from O'Brien's misunderstanding of both Burke and Locke.

The argument is misdirected by two curious difficulties for a Burke scholar — failure to consider sufficiently the historical context, and being overly influenced by the modern liberal interpretation of Locke. Twentieth-century liberals such as George Sabine, embarrassed at having no important nonsocialist theorist for their cause, have sought to picture John Locke, who wrote half of his work on religious themes and was a practicing Anglican — and whom the modern historian Sidney Ahlstrom has called a “defender of the faith” — as a Cartesian, social democratic rationalist. But it just does not fit, no matter how hard disciples like O'Brien have tried.

The liberal Locke caricature was so worn by the 50's that Leo Strauss could only rescue it by creating the fantasy of what he slyly called Locke's “partial” law of nature. For it is extremely difficult not to recognize that Locke was a believing Christian who accepted revelation as well as reason and science. More important, by attacking Locke in this manner, Strauss criticizes both Locke and Burke for what Mr. Stanlis calls philosophical dualism.

Those who are misled by the clear writings of Locke upon religious subjects rest their defense, as Mr. Stanlis ultimately does, on the fact that Locke had orthodox critics in the Anglican church, and that liberal deists tended to like Locke. Yet the explanation for both was simple: Locke was, in fact, a libertarian Christian who believed in tolera-

tion. So were many other Christians whose credentials few would question, such as Lord Baltimore, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, or Lord Acton.

It is true that Locke had a minimal definition of what had to be believed to be a Christian. That is because he supported both a state church and toleration. If citizens were required to belong to or at least support an English state church (as Roman Catholics would not), toleration would require that church members be forced to submit to a minimum of doctrinal beliefs. That minimum — that Jesus Christ was Lord and Saviour and that his commands were to be followed — is based upon Jesus' Last Supper statement (“Eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent”) and is not a bad minimum if one is looking for such.

Why did Voltaire like Locke? Yes, he probably did think Locke's message of freedom would destroy Christianity. But Locke thought Christianity was hardier, and it has been. Mr. Stanlis emphasizes that “unlike Locke, Burke accepted the Church of England just as it was.” But that is the point. The Church of England was more tolerant in Burke's time than it was in Locke's, partially due to Locke's influence. It still held the faith, but it had stopped beheading dissenting Englishmen.

Mr. Stanlis makes much of the fact that Locke did not tolerate Catholicism. But a non-Catholic king would not be accepted as head of the church — and nontoleration clearly was the only politic position for Anglicans who desired to keep their heads to take. By Burke's time toleration was relatively safe. Even a Catholic like myself finds it difficult to argue that a believing Anglican should be required to be a martyr for Rome in order to be called a Christian.

Stanlis's argument becomes path-breaking when he claims that “Locke approved the Revolution of 1688 not

on constitutional grounds, but out of religious bigotry against Catholics.” The charge of monomaniacal anti-Popery against the epitome of English common sense, John Locke, is hard to make. Although Locke was concerned about the foreign influences of Popery and was obviously dependent upon his anti-Catholic sponsor, Lord Shaftesbury, this by no means proves anti-Popery was his primary justification for his views on the most important event of his lifetime.

As proof, Mr. Stanlis argues that the myth of Locke’s constitutionalism “endured for 266 years, until Peter Laslett shattered it in 1956 in his superb edition of Locke’s two treatises.” Well, Laslett makes an excellent case that Locke wrote most (not all) of his work then, but Laslett does not attribute Locke’s motivation to anti-Catholicism. On this matter, Laslett is ambiguous: “We do not know whether he [Locke] ‘believed in’ the Popish Plot anymore than we know if Shaftesbury did, but he never criticized Shaftesbury’s actions at any time.” Few servants criticize their masters and, as Laslett notes, Locke is especially circumspect about anyone, be he high or low. On the central question, Laslett is clear: “Even in this, to us his earliest [writings], Locke is revealed as a constitutionalist, and a man convinced of the distinction between secular and spiritual power.”

Mr. Stanlis’s claim that Locke and Burke are not in the same tradition is harder to answer. But I will stand with F.A. Hayek and say that Locke and Burke stand in the same British empirical and moral tradition—of course differing in that they faced different problems during their lifetimes.

Mr. Stanlis places Burke in the natural law tradition and Locke outside because he misreads Sterling Lamprecht, who was recognized as the authoritative Locke scholar until modern times. Lamprecht is quoted to show that Locke “stood so close to the deists that he has sometimes been classified as one of their number.” But Lamprecht’s actual point was that those who so classified Locke were mistaken. According to Lamprecht, “The tradition which seems to have had the most outstanding effect upon Locke’s ethical philosophy was that which based morality upon the ‘law of

nature.’ This tradition was very old and widespread. It sprang from the teachings of the Roman stoics, dominated the thought of the medieval scholastics and then found striking expression in several great moralists of the seventeenth century.”

This is the tradition that united Locke and Burke, and it is the same one that has energized the British and American cultures and that modern conservatism at its best still conserves today.

—Donald Devine
Washington, DC

It is unfortunate in the extreme that Peter Stanlis must resort to a caricature of Locke in order to rescue Burke from the seemingly Rousseauian O’Brien. The religious marriage of Locke and Voltaire may be provocative, but it betrays a mind unfamiliar with the religious currents of the 17th century and their impact on political thought and action. While some may find interest in reducing political thought to its lowest common denominator, as in finding the roots of Locke in the Levellers (not to mention the Diggers, with whom O’Brien seems to identify and from whom Stanlis does not distinguish), this does not make Locke any less a Christian, much less a Voltairian deist, unless, of course, one is either a High Churchman or a tridentine Roman Catholic, in which case the positions of the Presbyterians, Harrington, Milton, Sydney *et al.* are no different for purposes of judgment. Nor can one forget that Locke lived and wrote in an age when religious intolerance still found expression in political action. Locke, with his Arminian flavor, hardly appealed to the likes of Calvinist John Edwards and perhaps with reason, but historians will be hard pressed to find any essay of Voltaire’s favoring Christianity, much less a sympathetic one that cites the historicity of Christ without denying His divinity. John Locke’s final days were spent defending his Christianity. Voltaire’s were spent attacking it.

More to the point, how does Stanlis square his view of Locke with that of, say, G.H. Sabine, who ties Locke to Hooker in a “long tradition of medieval political thought, back to St. Thomas, in which the reality of moral restraints on power, the responsibility of rulers to the community which they

ruled, and the subordination of government to law were axiomatic”? Surely this makes a better foundation for explaining Locke’s incongruities, while saving his relationship with Burke and serving to parry a view that identifies him with Jacobinism.

Locke, a precursor of Toland and Tindal? Maybe. An influence on Voltaire and Burke? Definitely. But to divorce him from Burke in the arena of government, much less marry him to Voltaire in the arena of religion, serves no purpose but to disclose a prejudice sharpened by animosity, a prejudice not unlike that which both he and Voltaire sought to frustrate and discourage—the one by sustaining the separation of Church and State, the other by separating the two; the one by accommodating Christianity, the other by destroying it.

—Gordon D. Payne
Verona, WI

Mr. Stanlis Replies:

My two critics not only disagree with me regarding Locke’s politics and religion, but also with each other. Mr. Payne appeals to George Sabine to justify his liberal interpretation of Locke, and thereby criticizes me for writing “a caricature of Locke.” Mr. Devine objects that I was “overly influenced by the modern liberal interpretation of Locke” by the likes of Sabine and Conor Cruise O’Brien, which Payne accepts. I agree with Devine that the common wisdom that perceives Locke as a shiny-bright liberal political philosopher is indeed a caricature of the historical Locke; it is an idealized abstraction wholly shorn of all the sordid conspiracies and underground revolutionary activities he engaged in during more than a decade before 1688. Payne ignores this and accepts at face value Locke’s propaganda, pitched to create a public illusion of social and political respectability. In short, Payne is still engulfed in what Maurice Cranston calls “the myth of Locke’s political innocence.” This myth, consciously cultivated by our secular liberals, is the result either of ignorance or a conspiracy of silence to suppress the historical Locke.

Neither of my critics mentions Richard Ashcraft’s *Revolutionary Politics*

and Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1986), nor the excellent scholarship of Mark Goldie on "The Roots of True Whiggism" and "John Locke and Anglican Royalism." From original manuscripts by Locke in the Bodleian Library, Ashcraft describes Locke's exclusionist revolutionary activities and close associations with old Commonwealth radicals in their prosecution of the Popish Plot, the Monmouth Rebellion, and the Rye House plot to murder King Charles II and the Duke of York. Ashcraft presents "the historical evidence for the view that Locke's political theory is much more clearly linked with the ideas of the Civil War radicals than we have been taught to believe." He notes that in courting the populace, "Locke invariably presses his argument as a hard-line radical." Ashcraft proves to the hilt Laslett's observation that Locke "went much further toward revolution and treason than his earlier biographers knew, anxious as they were to present him as a man of unspotted personal and political virtue." The same applies to Locke's theory of property ownership. He praises the "honest industry" of the dispossessed and condemns "the idle, unproductive, and Court-dominated property owners" as undeserving of their property, thus throwing out legal prescription in favor of utility based upon labor. Ashcraft observes: "It seems strange that this rather radical endorsement of the claims of labor over those of land ownership has been so little commented upon by those who are eager to award Locke the honor of having formulated the modern defense of the private ownership of property. . . . Locke was not advocating the return of the Diggers, though his attitude toward property is not so far removed from theirs as is generally assumed."

Before Payne accepts Sabine, "who ties Locke to Hooker," he should read Peter Munz's *The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought* (1952). After four pages of comparisons of similarities and differences between Hooker and Locke, Munz concludes: "Hooker would have been unable to understand the reasoning of Locke." The reverse is also true. Unlike Payne, I take seriously statements about Locke's religion made by his closest associates. Robert Ferguson, one of Locke's col-

leagues in subversive revolution, recorded that Locke's patron, Shaftesbury, attributed to Locke his own Socinian religious beliefs. Like the good Anglican Socinian that he was, Locke never denied, nor did he affirm, the divinity of Christ, so that as an extreme minimalist in doctrine he remained one point removed from Unitarianism and a world apart from orthodox traditional Christianity.

Following Lamprecht, Devine asserts that Locke's appeals to moral natural law places him in the same tradition as the Roman Stoics and medieval Schoolmen. This colossal error is well contradicted by Munz: "The fundamental and far-reaching difference between Hooker and Locke is reflected in their theories of natural law." Devine agrees with me that Burke is in the tradition in which he places Locke, and this forms the basis of his linking Locke with Burke, even including Locke's empiricism. While the empirical element in Burke's politics (probably derived in part from Montesquieu) is rooted in the facts of history, simultaneously it is connected with the moral norms of natural law through his providential view of history. In sharp contrast, Locke's empiricism rejects or neglects history in favor of immediate sensory impressions backed by ideological theory based upon private discursive reasoning and logic of the kind that Michael Oakeshott condemned as "rationalism in politics." To Locke, medieval Christianity was a tissue of vile superstitions, whereas Burke revered its achievements. Locke's philosophical orientation is not in the tradition of the Stoics and medieval Christianity, regarding natural law, but in Newtonian 17th-century science and speculative philosophy. As William Hazlitt demonstrated in "Mr. Locke a Great Plagiarist," (*Works*, Vol. 20), Locke at once condemned Hobbes as "an exploded writer," and rejected Descartes's innate ideas. Yet he expropriated all of his basic philosophical principles from these and similar writers, such as Malbranche and Spinoza. As John W. Yolton has shown in *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1983), Locke wholly accepted and only slightly modified Hobbes's materialism and mechanistic conception of human nature. In Britain and

France, throughout the 18th century, Locke was the acknowledged fountainhead of the materialist philosophy. The materialism of Anthony Collins in *Discourse on Free Thinking* (1713), that of Joseph Priestley, La Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine* (1748), D'Holbach's atheism, and many others, all drew from Locke's "thinking matter."

Locke's materialism is wholly at variance with the orthodox Christian conception of human nature, which includes soul or spirit, and which is necessary for a valid normative comprehension of natural law. Like Hobbes, Locke used the traditional language of natural law, but largely emptied it of its normative content in favor of a sensory perceived "nature" as a descriptive process in a Newtonian universe, applied to man in society. His conception of "reason" was the private discursive logic of each individual, not the "right reason" (*ratio recta*) of Cicero, the Stoics, Medieval scholastics, Hooker, and Burke. The latter three found the moral norms of natural law embodied in the Justinian Code and common law, in the corporate nature of man in Church and State, and in constitutional law. In contrast, like Hobbes, Locke had an atomistic and hedonistic conception of man, derived from a fictional "state of nature," in which each isolated individual possessed "natural rights" centered in his will and desire to survive. To overcome the anarchy of a state of nature Locke, like Descartes and Hobbes, attempted to place ethics on a mathematical basis. If Mr. Devine wishes to rid himself of the illusion that Locke is in the political tradition of Burke, let him read Caroline Robbins's *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth* (1959), and then read copiously in the replies to Burke's *Reflections* by Locke's revolutionary "natural rights" disciples.

Devine states that Locke "believed in toleration." Payne is closer to the truth: "Locke lived and wrote in an age when religious intolerance still found expression in political action." This is a descriptive historical fact, but it hardly justifies persecution. Some contemporaries of Locke, including John Dryden, condemned all persecution. Locke's total toleration for Protestants and intolerance for Catholics makes him a perfect exemplar of what Acton describes in "The Protestant Theory of

Persecution." Devine errs saying that Locke "supported both a state church and toleration" *because* he was a minimalist in Christianity. Burke was no minimalist, yet supported the Church of England, attacked the casuistry of persecution, and was genuinely tolerant. The differences between Burke and Locke on toleration are religious and philosophical, not historical. Devine's claim that Anglicans had to persecute Catholics because they were not obliged to be martyrs for Rome is what Acton calls "the principle of aggressive intolerance." Ironically, Burke, a Protestant, in his attacks on the penal laws against Catholics in Ireland, rejected the Protestant theory of persecution, whereas Devine, a contemporary Catholic, accepts it.

On 'Rodney King'

Clyde Wilson's article (Cultural Revolutions, July 1991) on the L.A. police video was gratefully received. First, because it was the only one that didn't drip with tears big as horse apples over the poor "victim," and second, because my youngest son is a police officer (as was my grandfather, for thirty years).

The media is quick to publicize bruises on burglars but has little to say about blood on cops. I guess it's OK to pummel the police. Sure looks like it after viewing TV news reports of police attempts to control riots and protesters.

But, regarding the L.A. incident, it's the parole board's fault. If they hadn't been so quick to send that guy back on the street, he could have been safely watching TV in the prison lounge.

—George Savage
Aledo, TX

On the 'Persian Gulf War'

As Theodore Pappas pointed out (Cultural Revolutions, June 1991), David Brinkley celebrated the Persian Gulf war by saying that "World War II is no longer America's 'last great war.'" Brinkley thereby gave conservatives cause to wonder about those two wars, the idea being what makes a liberal glad always winds up making conservatives sad.

That is a 20th-century reality. On the issue of war conservatives part company with liberals. World War II was the liberals' war. Although Hitler was the enemy who galvanized the West, removing him was less than a victory. Since when does a nation fight a war like World War II to learn that one of its allies was on a par with or worse than the enemy? The answer: since the "new world order" has charmed world leaders out of their senses.

The Persian Gulf War, a U.N. war, was a step toward Armageddon. It has left that area in utter chaos and is a warning to Moslems that they have been singled out to receive the treatment that shapes populations to fit the "new world order." A just war is one a nation fights in the name of self-defense or in defense of the moral order.

—Frank Broussard
Opelousas, LA

On the 'Conservative Movement'

As is discussed in the May issue, many of the people now called conservatives have never been conservatives. The left has managed to label anyone who is not a radical as a conservative. The Republican liberals like Bush have gone along with it because of the new popularity of the term, a result of the work of real conservatives plus the failure of liberal policies. The idea that the Republican Party has become an organ of conservatism is due to that hypocrisy and wishful thinking on the part of some conservatives.

The fact is that we do have a real conservative movement with a few strong leaders, but we are a long way from taking over one of the major parties. The majority of Republicans are middle-of-the-roaders and liberals. Most Democrats are radicals (those in office), but there are a few real conservatives still in that fold, too. Check the voting record of, for instance, Ralph Hall from Smith County, Texas.

I don't believe that any real conservatives have been led off the track by George Bush. Realistic politicians will accept the endorsement of the President when it is offered, but they will not sell their souls for it. Those Washington conservatives you speak of are pretend-

ers and should not be mislabeled. Real conservatives never had any confidence in them to start with.

—Dan Walters
Fletcher, NC

Samuel Francis's thought-provoking essay "Beautiful Losers" (May 1991) calls for "a new, radical Middle American Right," but someone has already beaten him to it. It is . . . hold on tight now . . . David Duke! Even though I cannot support Duke because I don't trust him, his ideas and his words and general behavior "under fire" from his detractors (who are legion) certainly meet the standards outlined by Mr. Francis. Duke is loathed by the liberals, feared by blacks, and has caused the establishment folk to outdo each other in rushing to denounce him. His KKK past is always mentioned in the same breath with his name; if only Teddy of Chappaquiddick were so treated.

Yet Duke is not afraid to say some things that Middle American conservatives know "in their bones" are wrong: affirmative action, the welfare state, sensitivity, politically correct behavior, gay rights, womens' lib, abortion on demand, homosexual clergy, taxes, etc.

If you can find a candidate more "acceptable," David Duke has already tested the water for him, so to speak, and found that there is a rousing reception in Middle America for his message.

—J.D. Calhoun
Ruston, LA

M·O·V·I·N·G·?

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“POLITICALLY CORRECT” is this year’s catch phrase, and before Christmas it will be as stale as the new miniskirt or yesterday’s George Will. Always willing to outdo themselves in gullibility, decent Americans are routinely writing letters to the editor or calling up Rush Limbaugh to protest the infamy of thought control on the nation’s campuses. Even though the platitudes of Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball, and Dinesh D’Souza keep popping up in all the fashionable places, no one—certainly no one in the conservative press corps—has the least suspicion of what is going on.

As Frank Brownlow makes all too clear in this issue, the corruption of academic life is not a new story. Sometime after the First World War universities moved quickly to abolish requirements, lower standards, and introduce bogus disciplines like home economics, social work, and physical education. Foreign languages and philology were replaced with soft courses in literary interpretation, and by the 1960’s students were taking for credit courses in mystery novels and world literature surveys taught by professors who had learned none of the necessary languages.

I spent twenty years hanging around colleges and universities, first as student and then as professor. I have never regretted my departure. With a few distinguished exceptions, my teachers and colleagues were dull-witted, lazy, and militantly anti-intellectual. The brighter students catch on early, and in my last year of full-time teaching, one of them asked me—as politely as he could—if a grown man didn’t have something better to do with his life than pander to students and hang around with losers, by which he meant my colleagues.

The problems of higher education today are not the fault of Marxists, feminists, or minority scholars. Most faculty members are ignorant boors, and the radicals are no exception, but there are intelligent feminists and incompetent conservatives. As I once

tried to explain to a chapter of the National Association of Scholars, their task was to de-politicize, not to re-politicize the academy, and every time they hired or promoted a colleague on the basis of politics, they were augmenting the enemy’s strength. Better a wise Turk than a foolish Christian.

But the crusade against political correctness proceeds on the opposite principle, and instead of seeking to reform our institutions of higher learning many disgruntled liberals and their lite-conservative allies wish only to replace the leftist hegemony with the centrist liberal hegemony that ruled the academic roost until the end of the 1960’s.

—Thomas Fleming

THE OBSCENE CARNIVAL of digging up an American hero who died 141 years ago has come to an end. No arsenic was found in Zachary Taylor’s remains, proving that he was not poisoned, which any competent and sensible historian could have told you without this grotesque and impious exercise. (Even if significant traces of arsenic had been found, it would, in fact, have meant nothing. Arsenic was an ingredient in many medicines and embalming fluids in common use in 1850, and its presence would not have proved conspiracy and poisoning.)

We did not learn anything about American history before the Civil War from this business. There was never the slightest possibility that we would do so. The affair tells us a lot, however, that will never be acknowledged, about our intellectually and ethically degraded present; more specifically, it reveals that what passes for the official view of earlier American history is not only ignorant but warped. No society has ever devoted more resources to historical study than modern America, and no society has ever so wantonly cut itself off not only from understanding but from identification with its own past.

This foolish exercise should never

have been permitted by Taylor’s descendants. There used to be better standards. It is little known, but in the early 19th century there was an effort to remove George Washington’s remains from Mount Vernon to the Capitol. It was quietly but firmly refused by the family, backed by overwhelming Virginia public opinion. It would have been an unseemly and un-republican spectacle, an invasion of privacy that would have made Washington’s tomb hostage to whatever band of politicians happened to get control.

It was alleged that President Taylor’s symptoms at the time of death suggested poisoning, doubtless by proslavery advocates. Any historian familiar with the period knows the imprecision of medical data and records from that era, and would be extremely cautious in drawing any conclusions from them, especially one so drastic as a presidential assassination. But what gave a fraudulent plausibility to the story was something that is in the air: the belief, or rather faith, on the part of vast hordes of petty intellectuals that any and all evils and enormities, real and imagined, must be traced back to Southerners, and particularly to Southern slaveholders.

The issues that were current in 1850 were quite complicated. It would take several pages to explain them fully, and even then it would be beyond the intellectual capacity of a television news anchor or congressman to understand. But, broadly speaking, they did not involve being for or against slavery, contrary to what the media have repeated *ad nauseum*, for in fact almost no one respectable was against slavery, except in mild and marginal ways. The differences involved the political and economic balance of power between the North and South in regard to the future of the new territory acquired in the Mexican War, further complicated by the efforts of two political parties to maneuver for advantage while muddling and compromising the issues, as American poli-