

satisfied with their levels of material consumption certainly suit the interest of our economic elites. And they gladly subsidize those who expound these positions.

In the end, however, there is heuristic value in the libertarian arguments developed by Hoppe, including his far-out call for defense forces organized and financed by private insurers. What Hoppe works to distinguish for us is the belief that individuals should control their earnings and resources from the glorification of capitalist consumption yoked to public administration. Libertarian premises can serve radically different political purposes depending on the other values one hopes to actualize. Thus, not only Professor Hoppe, a twice transplanted Saxon German who grew up under the Communists and then studied with and rebelled against the dean of German political correctness, Jürgen Habermas, but also Italian neo-federalists are pushing libertarianism in a regionalist and traditionalist direction. Italian libertarians Fabio Massimo Nicosia, Carlo Lottieri, and Guglielmo Piombini combine their defense of privatization with embattled journalistic activity as Northern Italian separatists. Like Hoppe, who is their gray eminence, these libertarians wed individual freedom to regionalist loyalties. And in the United States, the much-maligned *Southern Partisan*, which to my knowledge has never praised slavery or the Klan and has superlative black contributors, represents much the same neo-federalist position. Despite the lack of support from social or political elites, one encounters Hoppe's arguments being made simultaneously by other provocative intellectuals, from Italian professors of economics to neo-Confederates to black paleolibertarians Walter Williams and Elizabeth Wright. It is unlikely that these spirited commentators will be on history's winning side, but I do wish them and their difficult careers the very best.

Burke's Enduring Significance

IAN CROWE

Edmund Burke, Volume 1, 1730-1784,

by F. P. Lock. *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. xv + 564 pp.*

The Portable Edmund Burke, ed. Isaac

Kramnick, *New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999. xxxix + 573 pp.*

On Empire, Liberty and Reform: Speeches and Letters, Edmund

Burke, ed. David Bromwich, *New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. 525 pp.*

F. P. Lock's *Edmund Burke* is the best biography of Burke to have come out in recent times, and it is all the more impressive for not trying to be what it is not. Through a meticulous description of Burke's life and career, Lock presents a solid factual basis from which the reader can assess Burke's position in the development of British political thought. Generally he eschews lengthy judgments upon his subject's beliefs and restricts himself to analyses that are restrained, gently provocative, and rooted in specific events or materials. In other words, this is a work that mirrors key features of Burke's own achievement: exhaustive in its scope, catholic in its use of evidence, defining through context and circumstances, somewhat ambiguous in mean-

IAN CROWE is editor of *The Enduring Edmund Burke* (ISI Books, 1997). He is program director at the Russell Kirk Center, Mecosta, Michigan; director of the *Edmund Burke Society of America*; and editor of the joint newsletter of the *British and American Edmund Burke Societies*.

ing, and, occasionally, unpredictable in argument.

The strengths of this approach are accentuated by Lock's own pleasing style of writing, by the careful grouping and modulation of the material, and by the design of the book, where informative illustrations, and the positioning of footnotes at the bottom of the page (all the more important given the absence of a bibliography) reflect Oxford's Clarendon Press at its best.

This first volume (the second is expected in a few years) covers Burke's life from his birth, resituated to 1730, to Pitt the Younger's defeat of the supporters of the Fox-North coalition at the general election of 1784. Lock argues that Burke was driven in this period by a faith in "party" as a way of preserving the liberty and independence of the House of Commons, and by an accompanying, somewhat idealistic reliance upon the people's ability to recognize and support such a virtuous connection. Consequently, 1784 is seen to have marked "an even more decisive break between Burke's middle and later career" than the death of Rockingham two years earlier. This sustained focus on the themes of Burke's early years is very welcome. The distracting ideological tussles over Burke's legacy (from which Lock keeps his distance) have gained much of their force from the convention of using the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as a summation of, and a starting point for tracing, Burke's political principles. Such a technique, flawed in itself, now generates more boredom than light, and Burke scholars should be grateful that this work, as it stands, offers an exciting alternative.

In a letter to Chatham in 1766, the Duke of Grafton referred to Burke as "the readiest man upon all points perhaps in the whole House." Lock works methodically through most of the pieces that Burke wrote or helped to write before he

entered parliament. His assessments of a number of these texts—for example, his discussion of the *Vindication of Natural Society* and his clarification, through the *Account of the European Settlements in America* and the *Abridgment of the English History*, of Burke's understanding of providence and the ancient constitution—form some of the very best sections of the book. Combined with this, a dexterous application of contextual information fills out our sketchy knowledge of Burke's formative years. There are excellent sections on Burke's time at Trinity College, Dublin, and on Irish adventurers in London in the early 1750s. Regarding early influences on his thought, Lock is highly effective in marking the influence of Montesquieu and Hume, although he is a little too willing to accept the influence of John Locke in areas where one could more valuably follow up his important references to Scottish thinkers such as Thomas Reid and Adam Ferguson.

Once Burke has been installed in parliament, Lock offers interesting information illustrative of his subject's temperamental and intellectual fitness for the world of politics. He draws on the evidence of personal friendships and professional enmities for hints about the development of Burke's character—Shackleton in his youth, for example, and, once he had reached parliament, peripheral figures such as Rigby, Grey Cooper, and William Markham. The accumulated material that Lock presents makes it quite clear (what surely only a few characters in the least ventilated corners of academe would still deny) that Burke was no hack or careerist, but a man who was, on the contrary, inhibited by a naïve faith in the persuasive force of true principles in politics. Whatever he meant by the term, he was not a paradigm of prudence to his contemporaries, and, although Lock's explanation of Reynolds's unfinished portrait of Burke

and Rockingham is unconvincing in presenting the former as little more than a hired quill, the aloof ingratitude with which Rockingham appeared to treat Burke at times may be considered a rather shrewd assessment of character.

In his scrutiny of the philosopher in action, Lock's charting of Burke's unhappy relationship with Bristol is excellent, and the chapter on "squalls and stagnation" (1770-1773) is quite the best chapter in the book in its instructive juxtaposing of the minutiae of politics and the grander policy debates, the juggling of which created a particular tension in a man of Burke's station and ambitions. Burke's frequent professions of principled virtue, especially in connection with his charges of secret influence against the king's court, are put under searching scrutiny. By and large, the result is a refreshingly evenhanded and complex appreciation of the difficulties Burke faced in marrying philosophical principles with the practical world of politics and of exercising influence while achieving independence. However, this is also where Lock's technique shows the greatest signs of strain. By the close of the volume, references to Burke's "alarmist fantasies" and "distorted view of the world," his "heated imagination," and his self-righteousness and opinionated posturing, have become repetitious. It is as if the author wishes simultaneously to conjure up and to vanquish some mythical band of Burke-worshippers loitering with intent on the edges of academe.

Such comments also draw Lock into some questionable judgments. Is it entirely fair to ridicule Burke and the Duke of Richmond in 1779 for "still living in the world of the 1760s, afraid of taking office lest they be again undermined by 'secret

influence'"? Four years later, the Fox-North coalition was undermined in the Lords by a monarch who was certainly acting as if he was still living in the 1760s. And was it so "unreasonable" for Burke to suspect Colonel George Onslow of involvement in a court plot to muzzle the government's opponents in the press in 1771? (Onslow's actions led to the summoning of two printers before the House for circulating reports on parliamentary debates—an act that "most members had probably come to accept...as an unpleasant but unavoidable fact of modern life.") The evidence offered here, that "Onslow was supported by independent members as well as by ministerial troops," is hardly conclusive.

More importantly, Lock's very sparing treatment of the "Tract on the Popery Laws" is surprising, given the excellent treatment of writings less definitively Burke's, such as the *Account*. The "Tract" is a useful resource for assessing Burke's complex understanding of justice and law—yes, even natural law—as they relate to his frequent self-justifications. Lock touches upon the point, only to conclude that "Burke does not eschew utilitarian arguments where they serve his purpose," and to assert that, "as in his later political writings and speeches, [Burke] employs whatever arguments he can find with more regard to their probable rhetorical effectiveness than to their philosophical coherence or logical consistency." This is an essentially speculative interpretation that appears again in Lock's comments on the famous *Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies*, when we are told that, "Burke had avowedly set aside all questions of law and right, for he knew that they were against him."



These rather arbitrary distinctions between rhetoric, utility, and law miss the whole point about the fundamentally integrative essence of natural law thought in all its complexities.

Although we are promised even more substantial fireworks in the second volume, this study of Burke's earlier life and career is compelling in itself. If, stripped of the blaze of the *Reflections*, Burke emerges, intellectually, as nothing so much as a great politician of Opposition, and a Jeremiah of remote consequences, well, that is shown to be enough to earn him a prime position in the history of political thought and to stir us to examine his earlier writings afresh. Lock's splendid book is particularly timely as those writings are more readily available today than ever before, not least owing to the recent appearance of two new anthologies, from PenguinPutnam and from Yale University Press.

By choosing Isaac Kramnick to edit the long-awaited *Portable Edmund Burke*, Penguin Books have conjured up two considerable achievements for Burke scholars to ponder. The first is an accessible and imaginative anthology incorporating texts from some of Burke's lesser-known writings, such as the "Notebook," the "Address at Bristol" (extracted from the *Speech at the Guildhall, in Bristol*), and the "Sketch of a Negro Code." The second achievement is an Introduction that is markedly more dated than anything one will find in the anthology itself. Most of its arguments can be found in Kramnick's Introduction to Spectrum Books' *Edmund Burke*, which appeared back in 1974.

This Introduction—extraordinary for its failure to introduce the reader to anything much beyond the editor's own preoccupations—sends up on the very first page a smoke screen of tendentious observations on the appropriation of Burke by American conservatives. Nei-

ther the method in this essay, nor the content, which is largely about skepticism, anti-Enlightenment reaction, and innate human evil, has much of the spirit of Burke about it. Instead, the writer adopts the very elements of the appropriated Burke—distorted and incomplete as they certainly are, and centered almost entirely on Burke's anti-Jacobinism—to engage in some *passé* ideological mudslinging.

The reader will find much of the anthology untouched by, even at odds with, this Introduction. For example, Kramnick asserts that the primary evidence placing Burke in the natural law tradition of Aristotle, Cicero, and Aquinas consists of the "meager evidence of Burke's Indian speeches." Now, if the bulk of the "meager" thousand pages of Indian speeches in the Bohn edition of *Burke's Works* has largely slipped past him (not to mention a 500-page volume of "Indian" reports, and various "Indian" letters, covering a good thirteen years of Burke's parliamentary career), our editor might at least have paid some regard to passages such as this one (from the "Tract on the Popery Laws"), written before Burke entered parliament and appearing on page 298 of the book: "In reality there are two, and only two, foundations of law; and they are both of them conditions without which nothing can give it any force: I mean equity and utility. With respect to the former, it grows out of the great rule of equality, which is grounded upon our common nature.... The other foundation of law, which is utility, must be understood, not of partial or limited, but of general and public utility, connected in the same manner with, and derived directly from, our rational nature...."

There are, of course, conservatives who thrive on wheeling out a neutered Burke: their goal always was to find a convenient stick with which to hit communism, and their understanding of Burke never got beyond the anti-Jacobin writ-

ings (which is not to say that the parallels they drew were necessarily illusory—Lenin would probably have been flattered by them). But Kramnick's use of the term "cold war conservatives" here is utterly simplistic when extended to scholars such as Russell Kirk, Peter Stanlis, and Francis Canavan, whose works are broad and subtle in their appreciation of the whole Burke and who, wherever one stands in respect of their conclusions, presented arguments that deserve scholarly responses. Enlightenment for the narrower-minded conservative may lie in reading the works Kramnick cites in his bibliography and in studying the materials he has selected here; but it would help to have a guide who has himself been liberated from the ideological battles of the seventies.

Yale University Press's collection of speeches and letters, *On Empire, Liberty and Reform*, edited and introduced by David Bromwich, contains, on the surface, a limited slice of Burke's writings. The earliest extract dates from 1774, and a quarter of the material concerns India. There are a number of lesser-known letters, but nothing from *Reflections* or the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*. With its imaginative, well-constructed, and challenging Introduction, however, this book will offer any reader fresh and provocative insights into the complex genius of Burke.

The Introduction begins with a description of Burke's career as traced through his writings. In an excellent middle section, Bromwich turns to an appreciation of the literary art of Burke, qualifying the accepted notion of Burke's wordiness with evidence of "short-winded" aphorisms that support Hazlitt's contention that he was "one of the severest writers we have." Finally, the editor tackles the deeper issues of Burke's thought and legacy, exploring themes of consistency and tension, and arguing that the subtlety of Burke's understanding of

the roots of social order might instruct our contemporary social debates in shifting the focus from competing ideological systems back to issues of character, trust, and personal restraint in the public interest. "These ideas are untimely," Bromwich accepts, "and it is often argued that Burke now belongs to the eighteenth century. The present anthology has been compiled in the belief that this is not so. His certainties put him at a distance from us; his anxieties bring him closer."

It is good to encounter such a refreshing appreciation of the enduring significance of Burke's thought, and there is much in Bromwich's intriguing concepts of representation that will exercise the student of Burke. If there is a significant aspect of Burke's thought that is missing from this approach, it may be signaled by Bromwich's assertion that "None of us is born human." Burke employs the word "metaphysics" in a specific sense that requires us to be careful about the emphasis we place upon his skepticism. When Burke wrote that "History is a preceptor of prudence, not of principles," he was conveying a vital distinction. Although we must rely on empirical evidence and circumstances as our guides to what is fair or true, that evidence and those circumstances are just that—*guides*, like the needle of a compass. Their authority itself rests upon a prior faith that they have themselves been made intelligible and useful to us by a Providential order working through a common and unchanging human nature. This order, veiled from our full apprehension, is to be recognized in an act of humility that is itself a source of the trust and common sense without which social intercourse and its mutual—or public—benefits are impossible.

And it is in that act of recognition, that acquiescence of a great mind before the veil, that we may discover the source of Burke's ambiguities, the anxieties and

the certainties, the humanity and the self-righteousness, that Bromwich and Lock identify so effectively. It is there, also, that we may find the powerful awareness of human dignity that is a constant, if evasive, presence throughout the writings of Edmund Burke (not excepting those on political economy). All of which should be more than sufficient to rekindle or broaden our curiosity in this extraordinary figure.

John Adams and the Spirit of America

MICHEL VISSER

John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty,
by C. Bradley Thompson, *Lawrence,
Kansas: University Press of Kansas,*
1998. xix + 340 pp.

JOHN ADAMS (1735-1826) was the most traditionalist of the American Founders and arguably the finest scholar among them. Perhaps because of this traditionalism, his immense contribution to the Founding goes largely unrecognized today. Although most college students come across *The Federalist* at some point, even specialists have little firsthand acquaintance with the thought of the man Jefferson called "the Atlas of Independence." *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* is therefore a welcome contribution. It is well written, vigorously argued, and clearly in sympathy with its subject. It gives a good overview of Adams's mature thought, with a thorough treatment of his masterpiece, *A Defence of the Con-*

MICHEL VISSER is a graduate student at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he is writing on the natural law philosophy of Cicero.

stitutions of Government of the United States of America (1787-1788). This book will serve as the introduction to Adams's political thought for some time to come. It does not, however, entirely live up to its promise, for it mistakes Adams's place in the larger history of political philosophy. Since no adequate understanding of the character of the American regime is possible without understanding its philosophers, flaws in C. Bradley Thompson's argument must be corrected to prevent erroneous interpretations of the "American spirit."

Thompson's major claims are, first, that Adams was one of America's greatest political thinkers; second, that Adams was part of the mainstream of Revolutionary American thinking—against Gordon Wood's famous argument that Adams became "irrelevant" to the American debate; third, that Adams's thought was more or less consistent and did not grow more conservative. Thompson's arguments here are quite convincing.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, "Principles of Liberty," describes Adams's relation to the American enlightenment and his career as an apologist for the American revolution. Thompson overstates Adams's secularism in this first section. To argue that for Adams religion "was little more...than a religion of civic morality" is to misunderstand Adams's roots in Puritanism, however critical he may have been of Calvinist theology. Although there is some excellent material in this part—in particular on Adams's constitutional and legal pamphlets—Thompson does not give a thorough overview of the political philosophy of the early Adams. That remains a study to be written.

The second section, "Principles of Political Architecture,"—longer and more important than the first—explicates Adams's *Defence* and the subsequently published *Discourses on Davila* (1791), which is really the fourth volume of the