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# COSMOS + TAXIS

Studies in Emergent Order  
and Organization

Symposium on Gregory Collins'  
*Commerce and Manners in*  
*Edmund Burke's Political Economy*



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# Collins' Burke: Introduction to the Symposium on *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke's Political Philosophy*

DANIEL B. KLEIN<sup>1</sup>

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Gregory Collins believes that dedicating oneself to getting great figures right is a good way to do political philosophy. He has immersed himself in Edmund Burke, dedicated to getting him right. The result is the 578-page book *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke's Political Philosophy*, plus numerous articles, including Burke on slavery (Collins 2019, 2020b).

Collins is a postdoctoral associate and lecturer at Yale University political science department. The book grew out of his dissertation at Catholic University of America. Does he get Burke right? In this symposium we find that opinions differ.

In “Tocqueville’s Burke, or Story as History,” Ralph Lerner writes: “Burke and Tocqueville each engaged all his art in retelling his nation’s history with a view to reshaping prevailing perceptions.” Writing in the 1850s, Alexis de Tocqueville, in *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, used Burke in a way that served his prospective message.

There is something of the same with Collins’s Burke. Maybe that is as it should be. And maybe the same can be said about each of the eight contributors to this symposium. The eight contributors are Richard Bourke, Stephen Davies, Samuel Gregg, Lauren Hall, Iain Hampsher-Monk, Emily Jones, Anna Plassart, and Richard Whatmore.

The matter is nicely put by Bourke: “The central question raised by Collins concerns the relationship between markets and morals. On the one hand Burke celebrates the role of commerce and on the other extols virtue. But how does he reconcile these two positions?”

Burke lived, spoke, and wrote economics, morals, and politics. Did Burke propound a pro-market, pro-virtue politics? If so, was it coherent? How might it be interpreted today, in words that 2021 readers find meaningful?

People who speak three languages are called *trilingual*, and people who speak two languages are called *bilingual*. Those who speak one language are called American. I do not know how good Collins’s French is, but he’s definitely American.

It’s somewhat similar with another country’s history, institutions, and culture, even if language is shared. It is noteworthy that most of the eight commentators are British and leading Burke scholars. It is exciting to see Collins’s book engaged by scholars with a native understanding of Britain and its past. Of the eight commentators, Lauren Hall hails from the United States, Samuel Gregg hails from Australia and now lives in the United States, and Anna Plassart hails from France and now lives in the United Kingdom. The others hail from the United Kingdom or Ireland (Bourke).

Burke as natural-rights exponent is highlighted by one of our commentators. The symposium finishes with Collins's reply to all of the commentators.

Thanks are due to all contributors, to Gregory Collins, and to Leslie Marsh and *Cosmos + Taxis*, for affording us a searching symposium. Dedicating oneself to getting great figures right is a good way to do political philosophy. Burke's relevance does not fade. In fact, it seems to grow during the present discontents.

## NOTES

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# How disputatious a subject is Edmund Burke?

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Gregory Collins's hefty tome makes the argument that Burke himself contributed to the sciences of politics and economics that have protected liberty and promoted capitalism from the enlightenment era to the present. Collins's argues that those who have venerated Burke as the champion of liberty were right. His legacy has been vindicated and advocates of market liberty do well to feel grateful to Burke. Here then we have a book then that will help latter-day Burkeans because rather than having to read Burke's complicated writings there is a systematic exposition of his economics and politics. One way of describing what Collins has achieved is a textbook in Burke's economic and political writings from first to last. Collins provides a lot of evidence underlining Burke's kinship with and influence upon Adam Smith. He shows that a strong rope of kinship can be traced too from Burke to a modern equivalent, the incomparable Friedrich Hayek.

Accolades and plaudits then are due to Collins and we welcome another contribution to the progress of knowledge. Knowledge is what this book is about, knowledge of politics, knowledge of the economy. Burke was almost always right and should be lauded once more as a seer, just as he was when what he said about the French Revolution came true. Collins's scholarship is impeccable and shows Burke's relevance for contemporary battles against both radical liberals and would-be socialists critical of free markets. Ammunition is made available by Collins for those today who want, like Burke, to smite down enemies among the radicals, including the descendants of Richard Price's politics, the dissenting pastor whose speech on the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille inspired Burke to write the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. If there is such a thing as human science, through the work of people like Burke it has made a real contribution to what we know about how the world does and ought to function in underlining the importance of private property, liberty and free markets. Burke's work needs to be labelled as significant in the tradition promoting right reason and reasonable politics.

Does the last paragraph get this book wrong? There is another reading of Collins's work. It is properly historical, bowing the knee to the great John Pocock and largely following the line of the meticulously justified recent reinterpretation of what Burke was up to, that of Richard Bourke in his *Empire and Revolution. The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (2015). Bourke recognised Burke as a politician whose position, generally in opposition or only briefly in office, meant that he tended to be on public display. Burke was perpetually in polemical battle and spectators scrutinised

Burke's beliefs for their consistency. What then made Burke into a Pantheonic figure? Bourke shows that it was first and foremost the conjunction of perspectives upon property, prescription, and precedent. Landed property grounded political leadership and gave it substance and independence. Property rights and how to pass them from generation to generation and person to person—occupation, possession and prescription, accession and succession—Burke defended in accordance with the textbooks in natural jurisprudence that formed the basis of his legal training. Setting aside the issue of the justice of the original acquisition of property, prescription meant long-term enjoyment of the rights of possession. Precedent meant how such rights had been formulated and defended in the English system of common law. The role of common law in politics in turn signified the importance of manners, the conventions and habits that played a major role in the formulation of codes of justice and morality enjoining deference in the face of social rank. Justifications of Britain's government became utilitarian, derived from the recognised benefits of peace and order over time rather than by reference to an original contract. Such government for Burke had to be prudent, advising on particular strategies in specific circumstances, weighing up the influence of laws and manners and the politics of the possible, following the brilliant Montesquieu's recommendations in *De l'esprit des lois* (1748). Politics becomes more of an art than a science. Principles signifying universal laws or rules of action become difficult to find. Right reason and reasonable politics unfold differently in one set of circumstances than they do in another.

Collins in many places follows Bourke. What we get then from Collins is a properly nuanced sense of Burke's complicated responses to the issues of his time from navigation acts to commercial treaties to poverty and to revolutions. Collins reads all of Burke's texts, outlines mostly a brief sense of context and then summarises the texts before moving on to the next chronologically. When the claim is made that Burke may have provided Smith with the idea of contemporary politics as being in need of the wisdom of Solon, for example, that Smith inserted into the 1778 edition of the *Wealth of Nations* (as well as in the 1790 edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*), everything is properly documented. Is Collins's book then to be read in the tradition of recent work by intellectual historians, scholars of political thought and political economy who have reinterpreted what was happening in the final decades of the eighteenth century?

Humans are tribal creatures and different tribes do things differently. Among those who study the past in the form of the history of ideas, differences in approach are especially marked. Collins's book is reminiscent from certain angles of the work of Samuel Hollander on John Stuart Mill in carefully detailing every single contribution Mill made to economics and evaluating it by questioning how far it 'really' contributed to science, how far it made sense? Collins's book is better written than Hollander's work, more accessible and more informed historically. Collins's work is about economics but also about what we would call political science. There are two tribes there but any tensions between them are not those I am interested in. What I want to know more about is the relationship between Collins's historical analysis and his outline of Burke's legacy, the tradition that leads on to Hayek. Collins knows what works in politics. Burke was right, so was Hayek. What role then does the history play in the contemporary policy analysis? Is the history icing on the policy cake so that it is a good thing to be able say that your own claims about how the world works were once seconded by the great Edmund Burke? Or is the history playing a different role?

The reason for raising such an issue is because I was unclear when reading Collins's book what his intentions ultimately were as the author? To raise Quentin Skinner's famous question, what did Collins see himself to be doing as an author? The step-by-step guide to Burke on particular issues was very well done but then there seemed to be a leap into another kind of analysis, drawing lessons from or coming to conclusions of relevance to the present. Is this then the use of history, the move from usable past to present judgement? Perhaps Collins does not see the tension I'm alluding to; I'd like to know more about his own sense of tribal membership.

A second question is what is Collins's major reinterpretable claim about Burke? Scholars of course don't have to be original to be valuable. In Burke's case though there are at least two major perspectives that I would have anticipated engagement with, authored by historically-minded scholars whose works have had a singular impact over the past more-than-twenty years. The first is Donald Winch and the second

István Hont. Winch is not used much by Collins, and only once in the text in a discussion of how far Burke could be said to have been defending the status quo. Winch's Princeton PhD supervisor in economics, Jacob Viner, is engaged with more directly. Hont only appears in Collins's bibliography as the editor with Michael Ignatieff of *Wealth and Virtue* (1983). Let's consider Winch's view of Burke and, at higher speed, Hont's view too.

Winch's book *Riches and Poverty* appeared in 1996 and said a lot about Burke's political economy and his relationship with Smith. In 1995 Winch gave the Carlyle Lectures at the University of Oxford and these too contained a lot about Burke. As the writing is so good, being destined for a public audience, and as they can be freely downloaded from the website of the St Andrews Institute of Intellectual History, which holds digital copies of many of Winch's papers, I'll use the text of the lectures rather than Winch's book (they are not identical and someone should examine the differences).

Winch makes the point in his Carlyle Lectures that contemporaries in the 1790s were divided about Smith's legacy and his relationship especially to Burke. On one hand Smith was said by Winch to have an "almost telepathic sympathy with Burke" and on the other was "being cited by [Thomas] Paine as an example of all that Burke had failed to be as political analyst." Smith's description of Richard Price in a letter to George Chalmers of 22 December 1785 as "a factious citizen, a most superficial Philosopher, and by no means an able calculator" seemed, as Winch put it, "to tilt Smith's affinities firmly in Burke's direction, bearing in mind Burke's lament for 'the age of chivalry' in the face of 'sophisters, economists, and calculators', Price having the singular distinction of being all three in one." Did this mean that Smith was a Burkean or Burke a Smithian? Rather, to Winch the controversy revealed "how rapidly the business of using Smith to validate both ends of the political spectrum got going." Both ends of the political spectrum meant Burke and Paine. Winch warned that "any decent genealogist, worthy of his fee, can supply you with a plausible family tree". Burke's own legacy was equally disputable and what Winch had to say is worth quoting in full:

Before the recent celebrations of an alliance between the ideas of Smith and Burke became popular, those who were anxious to preserve Burke's 'conservative' reputation went to some lengths to prove that the alliance either did not exist, or that it was an unfortunate mésalliance. Hence what might be called Das Burke Problem: how can we reconcile his defence of the ancien régime with his boasts about his command of political economy and his equation of the laws of free commerce with the laws of God? The hard-headed economic side of Burke was certainly not the one that his immediate followers in England, the Lake poets—those who began the business of disseminating Burke's form of patriotic conservatism—were anxious to perpetuate. Indeed, as I shall show in next week's lecture, when faced with Robert Malthus's transformation of Smith's system they denounced the entire business of political economy as anathema (Winch 1995).

Winch's interpretation of Burke charted what were termed his "moods". There were several Burkes because there were different moods at different times for distinctive topics. Burke "in some moods at least, was anxious to reverse the causal sequence: commercial progress depended on the maintenance of a particular form of polity and would not survive its destruction." This described Burke's position *viz-a-viz* the supporters of Revolution at Paris and their British apologists, termed by Burke the "political men of letters" who sought to eradicate the age of chivalry together with "the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion".

Burke, for Winch, was not an optimist who associated the progress of commerce and politeness with gradual improvements in government. His position could not easily be aligned with the ideological parties of the day. Again, Winch is worth hearing from substantially:

Burke argued that a world constructed on commercial foundations alone could not survive the demise of those gothic or feudal institutions that had presided over its birth. More specifically, Burke

took up Paine's challenge to defend the hereditary principle not merely with respect to monarchy, but to the landed aristocracy as well. The landed interest provided the stability that no other order within society, mercantile, moneyed, or professional, could furnish. It was invested with the properties of permanence, serving to integrate all other interests in society, without which, in fact, the multitude, as Burke said, could 'scarcely be said to be in a civil society'. Hence too Burke's defence of those laws of primogeniture and entail that had brought his aristocratic 'great oaks' into being and by which the stabilising role of the landed classes was preserved.

For Winch, the relationship between Smith, Burke and Paine had to be reconstructed "jig-saw fashion", by which he meant that there were no seamless traditions or connections between the three men who shared some claims and disagreed about others. Burke, for Winch, was an exponent of the science of the statesman or legislator. The science taught, in accordance with the wisdom of Solon, that, in the imperfect world of the second best, something that worked in a particular set of circumstances would not work in others. History mattered and so did manners. There were no universal rules about property being needed to be defended in every possible circumstance. There were no universal rules about markets. What people believed mattered, especially in matters of religion. Furthermore, the late eighteenth century was a period of acute uncertainty about the future, when few could be sure that their own state would not either become weak or cease to exist. In consequence, it was necessary in discussing politics and markets to talk about how far whatever was recommended was compatible with national survival, which might depend on waging war.

What did you get if you put all the pieces of the jig-saw together? In Winch's eye what marked Burke out from such men as David Hume and Smith was his emphasis upon orthodox religious piety. Hume's scepticism and infidelity were dangerous. Smith's opinion of Christianity was masked but nevertheless probably similar to Hume's. For Burke, by contrast, religion was the very source of modern civility and it was madness to treat religion as mere superstition. Religion consoled the poor with regard to their condition. Smith affirmed providential order in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It was Winch's view that the author of the *Wealth of Nations* would have baulked at Burke's assertion that the laws of commerce are the laws of God as suggested in *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*.

A further disagreement between Smith and Burke leads up to Winch's view of the clear-cut division between them. Smith had condemned the mediocre education available at the University of Oxford. In his *Reflections* by contrast Burke defended the "old ecclesiastical modes and fashions of English universities." Smith would have been appalled at Burke's argument that "Gothic and monkish education" was compatible with modern conditions of liberty. Winch argued that what was most distinctive about Burke's politics was his defence of the Gothic/feudal institution of the laws of primogeniture and entail. It might be said in reply that Burke does not discuss entail. Yet entail, like primogeniture, gave Burke's "great oaks" their size and substance. The point is that he wanted the great oaks to retain their present role in society especially as they helped to prevent French-style revolutions from breaking out. Burke went beyond the defence of landed property. He was saying that a state could not consider itself secure or any property intact unless vast territorial possessions continued inviolate. Burke's defence was not provoked by Paine's rude assault on nobility and primogeniture in the *Rights of Man*. Bourke has shown in *Empire and Revolution* that the defence of primogeniture was integral to Burke's perspective on English and Irish landholding from the late 1760s (Bourke 2015, p. 274f).

For Winch the contrast with Smith's position could not have been starker as Smith described primogeniture as contrary "to nature, to reason, and to justice", being derived from the absurd supposition: "that every successive generation of men have not an equal right to the earth....but that the property of the present generation should be restrained and regulated according to the fancy of those who died perhaps five hundred years ago" (Smith 1785, I, p. 383). Smith went on to attack entail as a means of "maintaining [the] exclusive privilege of the nobility to the great offices and honours of their country" adding abruptly that, those who have "usurped one unjust advantage over the rest of their fellow-citizens" think it reasonable that they should have another to prevent their poverty from rendering the practice ridiculous. Burke and Smith

could never agree in consequence on the wisdom of taxes on absentee landlords in Ireland and why Burke would have condemned Smith's proposal to subject idle and unimproving Scottish landowners to a tax on their failure to make good use of an asset that had communal benefits. Winch held that Smith wanted to reveal to the world dangerous injustices. Scotland was always in mind and the hope of Smith and Hume was that the progress of the right kind of commerce would replace the feudal nobility with better governors for the people. Burke ended up, from the perspective of Smith, Hume and their friends, defending a feudal equivalent of the mercantile system that had been responsible for Scottish backwardness. Collins does address this issue but plays down the division. In so doing he overplays the linkage between commerce and peace (a difficult argument to employ in a century of growing trade and ceaseless war). He seems unaware of the background argument that the Anglo-Scottish union would only be a success if the lairds, especially Jacobite lairds, were seen no more. Commerce had to operate to remove existing elites in Scotland if economic development was to occur and civil liberty established. Burke, in defending primogeniture, gave the impression of arguing against the operation of commerce in relation to ranks in general and therefore the impression of opposing a position that united those broadly described as authors of the Scottish Enlightenment.

One of the criticisms of Winch's work was that he did not take what we term international relations as seriously as he ought to have, given its importance to the enlightenment mind. Such a perspective was developed by Hont. To his eye it was vital in working out what Burke was doing to look at his final writings when he had to face directly the possibility that Britain would be destroyed as a polity because of the power of French republican patriotism. Hont's reconstruction of the science of the legislator was not only concerned with the careful natural jurisprudential recommendation of specific policies in particular circumstances. It was first and foremost about national survival, a fact that Burke faced head on in the final years of his life. It is worth hearing from Hont himself as he makes the argument with such clarity:

The French Revolution was caused by the bankruptcy of the French state as a consequence of a century of warfare, and consequently it was, initially, a revolt against Machiavellianism, nationalism and the military-financial quest of national grandeur. Its supporters focused intensely on ways of abolishing or reforming the state system that allowed this cycle of war to develop. The more radical wing wanted to abolish statehood as the culprit, as the cause and facilitator of nationalism. Herder was [among this group] and he wanted a stateless society, which he called a nation (a purely cultural and linguistic group entity without sovereignty and its unpleasant competitive consequences) to replace it. This anti-statism was the precise opposite of the idea of reinforcing the state with the psychological might of strong sociability, derived from ethnic or racial identity. Herder saw the pairing of nationalism with statism as a monster, as a super-nationalist entity driven by envy, hatred and the quest for recognition, and predicted that the bloodiest wars would happen when 'Fatherland would be pitted against Fatherland' in total war, replacing the moderate damage caused by past wars between prince and prince. It must be remembered that the nationalist turn of the French Revolution was caused by the war against France by an European alliance, of states, which Edmund Burke, for one, justified as a humanitarian intervention against disturbers of the continental peace of the European neighbourhood or commonwealth of nations (he used the Roman law of neighbourhood disturbance to justify the war legally) (Hont 2009).

What struck Hont, in a radical reinterpretation of the political thought of the time sketched out in the essay 'Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind', a chapter in his book *The Jealousy of Trade* (2005), was that the late Burke was making an argument that his earlier selves would have found difficult to stomach because it justified all-out war against France in the hope of crushing the fanatic and enthusiastic doctrine of republican cosmopolitanism being fomented in France. Entirely without precedent and altogether unexpectedly, republican cosmopolitanism was spreading like a deadly virus across the earth. Patriots in different countries were suddenly delighted to bow down to the French Republic and even give up their own nation

and national identity to become cosmopolitan republicans. The French revolutionary contagion amounted to the most powerful crusade in history. Zealots embraced it. It was a new reformation yet potentially far greater than that of Luther or of Calvin. Burke called for ceaseless and constant war to the death on republican France even if Britain itself was destroyed in the process. Markets and morals had to be directed to such an end. Burke sought in his final great work, the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, to foster a British nationalism capable of vanquishing French republicanism or at least of defeating it in war. It is significant that Burke's position, arguing that the cancer had to be cut out or the patient would die, was exactly that of his nemesis Thomas Paine, who was making exactly the same calls for the extinction of contemporary Britain as a polity by war, being the state that was preventing republican cosmopolitanism from becoming a global force.

In reconstructing late eighteenth-century economic and political thought through ongoing controversy about the relationship between commerce and social ranks and commerce and international war for markets and empire, Winch and Hont emphasised the crisis-ridden nature of Burke's world and the difficulty of finding solutions. For Burke and others it was evident that the enlightenment had failed. The great achievement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been to put a stopper in the bottle of effervescent religious enthusiasm. Protestants were no longer murdering Catholics in large numbers. Instead, new forms of enthusiasm, often cosmopolitan and always acutely moralising and demanding particular self-sacrifice, were translating themselves into a social war that was becoming international. For Burke new strategies had to be formulated in the hope of preventing religious war from destroying the continent once again.

Collins has rather avoided making a grand interpretative claim about Burke and the period in which he lived in the manner of Winch or Hont. Perhaps his view is that Winch and Hont got Burke wrong despite their impact on Bourke, who as noted has been a major influence upon Collins. Alternatively, perhaps Collins's intention was to write for a broad audience and did not want to complicate the story being told. I would have liked to know Collins's view because, whether Winch and Hont were right or wrong, they put forward significant reinterpretations. It means that the Burke we get from Collins is a bit of the liberal hero, a bit of the prudent conservative, and a bit of the eighteenth-century politician, dealing deftly and employing his singular intelligence to reform where possible. Perhaps they are one and the same. At the end of his life though, Burke was convinced that any sacrifice, even the collapse of Britain in its contemporary form, was worth an end to republican cosmopolitanism. Republicanism cosmopolitanism in France and across Europe was fostering moralistic and fanatical politics that corroded the pillars upholding states. Burke's prediction, which came true, was that republican cosmopolitans, however devoted to the Rights of Man and the Citizen they might think themselves, could easily turn into terrorists or imperial-minded patriots serving the establishment of what was in reality a French empire.

The problem for Burke, as he had acknowledged in the failed attempt to reform the East India Company with Charles James Fox and in the failed attempt to bring Warren Hastings to justice, was the strength of Britain's mercantile system. The argument of Paine's that Burke found near impossible to refute was one that he himself had formulated and fostered alongside Smith, that Britain was a mercantile empire governed by a corrupt nexus of merchants and politicians whose power was such that they could pass legislation for their own profit but in the name of the public good. It smacked of hypocrisy and imprudence suddenly to describe such a polity as the acme of liberty and good government. That is why so many of Burke's former friends turned against him and why even when agreeing with him the historian Edward Gibbon called him a "rational madman" (Gibbon 1956, III, 229-230). From an eighteenth-century point of view Burke was faced with two accusations that he could not easily refute. The first, from a Hume-Smith perspective, was that in defending the existing structure of land ownership in Scotland and in Ireland he was turning himself into an apologist for a feudal aristocracy that had done damage in each country. This feudal nobility in England had turned itself into a commercial nobility addicted to war and empire, reaping in the process vast fortunes and erecting a mercantile system to perpetuate itself. Burke had been in the forefront of those assaulting Britain's empire as a mercantile system. He had failed on every front yet, it seemed to many, in the 1790s became the arch-defender of the mercantile system as the model polity for Europeans, a genuine alternative to republican cosmopolitan democracy.

Collins's eighteenth century is less bleak than Burke's. Burke's world was full of crisis and catastrophe. Never was a person more aware of the abyss either side of the tightrope. By the end of 1791 more and more countries were engulfed by revolutionary contagion. The eventual collapse had been anticipated by Burke because for him, as for almost every one of his generation, what existed in politics was bound to change given the contemporary addiction to war and empire. Like Smith, Burke had been working on what might be termed crisis tactics since at least the end of the Seven Year's War. Collins paints a Burke who always had an answer because his Burke lived in a world where what existed could be maintained and as such was likely to survive into the future. I'm not sure that the actual Burke believed that what existed could be maintained. Burke was trying to influence or abate the forces that were to unmake what had existed.

I'm not sure either whether the actual Burke would have considered our world to be any better than his. He might well have concluded that enlightenment had ended permanently, seeing fanaticism and enthusiasm permeating political discourse against the background of the mercantile system. The Burke of the final letters to friends, with their despondent and apocalyptic political judgements, was not sure if there was anything left worth conserving. Fortunately for Burke and his legacy, the French republican experiment imploded and, as Burke had predicted in 1790, a Caesar figure arose in the wake of democratic crisis in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte. In other words, normal politics were restored with different actors in the main roles. If Burke had lived a little longer, he may have have felt relief and worked anew on the crisis tactics he laboured on during his last years.

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## Edmund Burke, Political Economy, and the Market

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The character of Burke's political economy, barely remarked on until the Twentieth Century, has since the 1960s, become a central issue in the struggle over Burke's political identity, and hence his legacy, on both sides of the Atlantic. Nor has this argument been conducted only within Burke scholarship but has been part of a wider political and cultural struggle.

The first shots were fired by C. B. Macpherson's British Academy 'Great Minds' Lecture and his subsequent book (Macpherson, n.d., Macpherson 1980). Macpherson's essentially Marxist interpretation drew attention to Burke's defence of the free market in his 'Thoughts and Details on Scarcity' and argued that Burke's aestheticisation of the English past and traditions was an ideological mask and salve for the raw and aggressive economic conditions that, at base, constituted his (and our) contemporary world.

However, in England the public argument really took off in the wake of Margaret Thatcher's adoption of neo-liberal political economic policy and her appointment of avowedly Hayekian advisers and ministers.<sup>2</sup> There followed a kind of battle for the soul of the English Conservative party. Thatcher increasingly excoriated and excluded as 'Wets' those who would not follow her in abandoning Keynesian economic policy and the Post-War welfare consensus to pursue a policy of privatisation of public assets and an extension of the role of the market.<sup>3</sup> One of the main sites of contestation amongst Conservatives was the identity of Burke himself. Burke, in his own time an Irish Whig, had by then become so established as the 'Father of Modern Conservatism' (see Jones 2017). that any argument about the ideological character of English conservatism (now increasingly focussed on its economic policy) had, it seemed, to demonstrate that Burke had subscribed to it.<sup>4</sup> A series of Conservative politicians set out, in scholarly-format writings, to show Burke's views on the relationship between the government, economy and society as clearly placing him in either the 'wet' or the 'dry' camp of the party, thereby establishing one or the other position as 'true' and 'original' conservatism.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, In the US where Burke has often been celebrated (somewhat exaggeratedly) as a 'supporter' of the American rebellion against British rule, there had emerged a different kind of conservative reading of Burke. This, inspired by Straussian concerns with a relativistic modernity, and so not, originally focussed on market, drew on Catholic thought to locate him in a Thomistic natural law tradition.<sup>6</sup> At the same time Burke was recruited into a more explicitly political and not specifically Thomistic campaign against aspects of modernity by Russel Kirk, writers for William

Buckley's *National Review*, Irving Kristol, and the Locke Scholar Willmore Kendall. The 'modernity' that was being opposed here was a shifting one, from a utilitarian market capitalism through various kinds of cultural relativism to those who were flirting with socialist and communist projects. What these two strands shared was something largely missing in the British Burkeans, a foregrounding of religion as a focus of modernity's attack, and in need of defence.<sup>7</sup> The battle was against Jacobin's modern avatar—Communism.<sup>8</sup>

Although the issue of political economy was central to the English interpretive debate, its role in the American one is less clear. A utilitarian, market-oriented consumerism was one of American conservatism's early targets. But the American right's Burke too had its extreme libertarians—the most exotic perhaps being Murray Rothbard's attempt to show that Burke's early *Vindication of Natural Society* was not (as its author insisted in a second edition) a satirical exaggeration, but an earnest defence of a kind of libertarianism (Rothbard 1958). But the vigorous endorsement of a free-market economy would eventually join the defence of a version of Christianity (albeit one that Burke would barely have recognised and certainly not endorsed) as the two wings of American conservatism.<sup>9</sup>

One touchstone in these ideological interpretive struggles was Burke's attitude to the market. Strategically, arguments tended to presuppose that showing Burke's enthusiasm for free trade and endorsement of market relations was enough to establish an identity between his position and the new neo-liberalism. By contrast, English 'one-nation' Tories ('Wets' in the new nomenclature) stressed Burke's emphasis on the importance of cultural continuity, local identity and customary social relations—all threatened (as Burke himself acknowledged) by the commercialisation of life as the market penetrated more and more areas of existence. At a crude level such approaches foster obviously partisan readings of the texts, but in more subtle ways they drive anachronism through their presentist concern to find Burke not only coherent but right (ie in agreement with the writer's beliefs). This is compounded in this case by an important feature of economics as a modern discipline, namely its loss of a sense of its own history. The attempt to force Burke into the 'wet' or 'dry' camp was an anachronistic exercise to be engaged in by the ideologue, but of no interest to, indeed subversive of, scholarship.<sup>10</sup>

Gregory Collins's work is the first major academic study to organise itself around Burke's political economy. He has sought out and draws together Burke's thoughts and comments on economic issues across the whole of his career on an unprecedented scale. It is a work of tremendous industry and a rich contribution to Burke scholarship. His attempt to integrate the recent thinking, pioneered by John Pocock's (1982) emphasis on the role of manners in Burke, promises a way out of the rather sterile debate about whether Burke should be thought of as for or against free-market capitalism and into a wide range of other important issues of real concern to Burke himself and his contemporaries. Gregory expresses full recognition of the danger of the kinds of anachronism mentioned above, writing of his intention to 'avoid when at all possible to depict Burke's political economy as a doctrine of "capitalism"' (Collins 2020, p. 11, hereafter C & M). He points out that the term only comes into use some time after Burke was writing, and that even what we would later recognise as the practice had 'barely sprouted in his day' (Ibid.). And he signals recognition of the difficulty raised by deploying some other key economic terms such 'Liberal', 'Free trade', 'civil society', and 'political economy' itself.

However, avoiding terminology not yet available to one's subject doesn't guarantee avoiding anachronism. One can also fall victim to it by ascribing anachronistic content to terminology that is shared by moderns and historical subjects. Despite the author's intentions of avoiding the anachronisms of the 'Burke and free market capitalism' debate, they can surface in other ways. Indeed the decision to open the book with an assertive reading of *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* [hereafter TDS] as 'an account of Burke's economic doctrine' with the claim that it presages aspects of Hayek's thought initially led me to think we were being led back again into that territory (C & M, p. 41). It is a trite but nevertheless repeatable point (of which Collins himself reminds us) that Burke was, through most of his life, a politician responding to issues of the moment. His 'thought' as we have it is expressed in a range of occasional and polemical texts which are not in any sense doctrinally systematic, but expressed pithily and epigrammatically. In consequence with

Burke, there is perhaps more danger than with any other political thinker, of the interpretive gleam in the scholar's eye being mistaken for a doctrinal nugget. It is at least possible that a modern political theorist, who has probably spent more time reading these pieces than Burke did composing them, should find coherences there of which the author was unaware.

The TDS/Hayek doctrine functions as a recurrent standard throughout the study, Burke's policy stances on American trade, domestic economical reform, the reform of the East India Company and the French Revolution are each discussed against this yardstick and in each case it is explained how and why EB deviates from this doctrine.<sup>11</sup> The results are invariably sensible and illuminating expositions of Burke's position<sup>12</sup>. But the effect is an odd one as they present the independence of markets from government as the central 'doctrine' of debate within political economy. But for Burke and his generation, Political Economy was a much wider complex of issues centred on the capacity of Britain's moderate, trading monarchy to survive in the struggle to prevent any European State from establishing 'universal empire'. In this contest political and economic questions were hardly yet disentangled.<sup>13</sup>

In assessing the prominence to be given to TDS we should also remind ourselves (as indeed Collins does) that, like two of the *Four Letters on a Regicide Peace*, it was not a work of Burke's own fashioning but a text concocted by his literary executors, cashing in on the demand for *Burkeana* after his death. It was put together from two sources: copies of notes Burke had 'hurriedly scribbled' and sent to Pitt (on rumours that Government was about to intervene in the market for grain following two bad harvests) and three fragments of a letter from Burke to Arthur Young, agriculturalist, travel writer and secretary to the Board of Agriculture (which had been trying to elicit a pamphlet from Burke on the proposal to set minimum agricultural wage).<sup>14</sup> Although the work does contain statements of economic principles,<sup>15</sup> it perhaps has even less of a claim to being Burke's systematic treatment of the field than most of Burke's mature writings. So it is a bold move to set up this text from the very end of Burke's life, that owes its origin to a very specific political problem, and was written for a very narrow purpose and audience, as the epitome of Burke's economics, against which apparent departures need to be assessed.

Even bolder than the presentation of this text as the epitome of Burke's economic thought on the market, is the striking decision to interweave it with a comparison of the doctrine drawn from it with the thought F. A. Hayek as a way of assessing Burke's economic credentials. It's not at all clear—given Collin's declared concern to avoid anachronism—why one would do this. But what it allows to resurface is a pattern of argument that is shared by the much cruder Burke of the free-marketeers. The key presumption here is that 'the market' can function as a kind of trans-historical referent that enables precisely the kind of identification of Burke's views—or even the plausibility of comparing them—with Hayek's. In what follows I want to historicise 'the market'—failure to do which has bedevilled this kind of discussion of Burke—and explore the questions that raises.

Let me start with TDS and broaden out the case. Given Burke's continuing fulmination against the speculative market in government securities in France (near contemporary with TDS). It had always seemed to me problematic to read Burke as committed to the universal endorsement of market mechanisms that the more libertarian Burkeans sought to ascribe to him. I shall ask what Burke—and Hayek—could have meant by the market and their defence of it.

The immediate context and professed subject of TDS is agricultural policy. All the examples in the document relate to the relationship between agricultural wages and the price of agricultural produce. The contracts he discusses are exclusively those between labourers and farmers, and farmers and the purchasers of grain. So, despite what I acknowledge are the most abstract seeming claims,<sup>16</sup> it is hard, without presupposing that *any* defence of a market in one field is a defence of it *tout court*, to read its claims as such. Burke's discursive comments in that text all refer to detailed features of agricultural production, indeed they go as deeply into the specific features of cultivation, as into the contractual relations between the peculiar and specialised roles that had developed within agricultural production; a field of which Burke was, of course, not only a keen observer, but in which he was practitioner. If we did not live (as Burke did not) in a world where every day public reference is made to 'the market' as a universal abstraction, it might be more natu-

ral to read Burke's remarks as comments on the observable facts of the matter in the case of actual empirical agricultural markets. And in fact, in this same document, Burke makes clear that he thinks different markets have their own unique properties. He argues that it is agriculturalists' *experience of agricultural* markets that entitles such producers to dismiss as dogmatic claims by city dwellers (who themselves have their own experience of *other kinds* of markets) that food prices need government intervention. Indeed so far from generalising from the features of agricultural markets to trade and manufacture, Burke explicitly *contrasts* the distinct bodies of economic knowledge that might be drawn from the two sectors.<sup>17</sup> Burke's recognition of the specificity of the characteristics of particular markets suggested to him the implausibility of generalising across all markets.<sup>18</sup>

This notion that economic knowledge is knowledge about the specific economic activities in, and properties of, particular markets is less odd when we consider the concept of the market in a more historical light. Aboriginaly the market was thought of as a physical space to which sellers brought objects for sale,<sup>19</sup> a space that in early modern England was specifically licensed to allow such assembling to take place. In such empirically experienced markets all sorts of roles, conventions, and patterns of exchange and obligation emerged, influenced by the particular features and properties of the commodities exchanged there.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, within most modern economic thinking, the market is a logical and increasingly mathematical abstraction. It designates a purely theoretically defined space in which agents, to whom is described a limited rationality, interact under certain legal side-constraints. Unlike conceptions of markets that draw on the experienced properties of actual markets in particular commodities, it is a way of modelling exchange relations precisely *in abstraction from* the specific properties of commodities.<sup>21</sup>

Tracing the process by which the concept of the market has been transformed and abstracted in this way is an appropriate object of historical investigation—Ricardo's Corn Model and the marginalist revolution are clearly important stages. The question for the Burke historian is where along this (possible bumpy) continuum is Burke to be situated? My concern is that any collapsing of this conceptual change affects the kind of questions that might be considered appropriate in relation to Burke's economic views, which in my view is not, 'were there any exceptions to Burke's opposition to government intervention in private economic activity' (C & M, p. 77)<sup>22</sup> but: 'on what cultural and rhetorical resources could Burke have drawn on in his political economy writings and what were his preoccupations in deploying them?'

Once we recognise the historicity of key terms, such as 'market', even the relationship between propositionally identical claims becomes problematic. Burke certainly talks about markets in abstraction from particular physical spaces, but it is far from clear (and seems historically implausible) that Burke had any conception of the market as a formal model defined by the properties ascribed to it by modern economic thought. Burke, in short recognised a market, as an (often very specific) pattern of exchange in a particular field, but he didn't subscribe to a general conception of the market, as an abstract, universal set of principles capable of modelling behaviour, and thereby generating policy across a range of economic sectors.

It is of course, difficult to prove such negatives conclusively, particularly since the claim hinges in part on the argument that claims apparently cast in grammatically universalist terms must be understood as limited on the grounds of historical context.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless there are two prominent examples, both discussed by Collins, where, quite apart from considerations specific to the particular issue, Burke rejects arguments not just *that* make universal claims about the eligibility of the free market, but *because* they make such claims—as we should expect from one who waged a lifelong campaign against the over-confident deployment of human rationality.

In the conflict with America, triggered by the introduction of taxes on British goods imported to America, Burke opposed the argument<sup>24</sup> that the Navigation Acts should be repealed, allowing free trade between Great Britain and the Colonies, and instead drawing any necessary revenue for imperial administration by direct taxation; which, it was acknowledged, might require American Representation in Parliament. Burke's reaction was to repudiate the recourse to taxation and to return to the status quo, supplying colonial expenses from the trading monopolies provided for in the Navigation Acts. But Burke

doesn't just reject the (Smithian) policy, he does so *on the very grounds* that it is drawn from abstract arguments, urging instead proven, customary, (but nevertheless monopolistic) practice:

I am not here going into the distinctions of rights, nor attempting to mark their boundaries. I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions; I hate the very sound of them. Leave the Americans as they anciently stood, and these distinctions, born of our unhappy contest, will die along with it. They and we, and their and our ancestors, have been happy under that system. Let the memory of all actions in contradiction to that good old mode, on both sides, be extinguished forever. Be content to bind America by laws of trade; you have always done it. Let this be your reason for binding their trade. Do not burden them by taxes; you were not used to do so from the beginning. Let this be your reason for not taxing.<sup>25</sup>

Burke's presumptive principle of imperial political economy here is that the reversion to proven practices (even in monopolistic) should trump abstract argumentation to the contrary.

Next, in discussing what was to be done about the East India Company's monopoly of Trade in his 'Speech on Fox's East India Bill', Burke seems to address Smith's argument against allowing merchants monopoly political control of the Indian trade:

I do not presume to condemn those who argue *a priori* against the propriety of leaving such extensive political powers in the hands of a company of merchants. I know much is, and much more may be said against such a system. But, with my particular ideas and sentiments *I cannot go that way to work*. I feel an insuperable reluctance in giving my hand to destroy any established institution of government, *upon a theory*, however plausible it may be (Burke 1981, pp. 386-7, my italics).<sup>26</sup>

Once again Burke objects to deciding such policy issues on claims that are derived *a-prioristically* from an abstract theory about the proper relationship between political power and (even monopolistic) merchants.

But if Burke parts company from Smith on this issue, his distance from Hayek on it is of another order altogether. Collins' commentary on the symmetry between Hayek and Burke suggests more than discerning 'in the background of *Thoughts and Details* a faint silhouette of F. A. Hayek' (C & M, p. 53). The core of the symmetry lies in his ascription to both Burke and Hayek the belief that 'the free flowing price system in market economies channelled disparate pieces of information in a way that steered commerce towards efficient ends' (C & M, p. 54) and that for both, it was government ignorance of this information that underpinned their objection to government intervention in commerce. But the claims by Burke and Hayek that governments do not possess the knowledge to intervene effectively in the market are logically different claims, resting on historically very different conceptions of the market. Burke's is an empirical claim. For Burke there may conceivably *be* such knowledge, indeed, we can agree with Collins that part of Burke's claim is that parties to wage contracts (uniquely) have such knowledge as is 'necessary to arrive at an informed opinion about whether employment contracts will satisfy their particular preferences in the agricultural economy' (C & M, p. 122). And it is because such knowledge is known only to the individual contractors—that only the parties to the contract are in a position to assess their needs and opportunities with respect to what is being offered—that governments or third parties intervening are ill placed to second guess the prices arrived at. But this is essentially a practical question: the 'knowledge' that the agents possess does actually exist, it's just that government (at least no eighteenth-century government) could hope to assemble and process such knowledge.

Hayek's claim is a much stronger and qualitatively different claim; it is an ontological one. For Hayek, the prices arrived at in the market are signals that together comprise such economic knowledge as might be needed to (*per impossibile*) intervene.<sup>27</sup> For Burke, a labourer or farmer might know what bargain they

would be prepared to strike—even in the absence of a partner to the deal. But Hayek's point is that in the absence of a market of free contractors economic knowledge simply does not exist. It is the prices that constitute it. Reference to economic knowledge, or 'market data', Hayek (1988, p. 99) observes

often leads economists to assume that this knowledge exists not merely in dispersed form but that the whole of it might be available to some single mind. This conceals the character of competition as a discovery procedure.... The problem is not how to use *given* knowledge available as a whole, but how to make it possible that knowledge which is not, and cannot be, made available to any one mind, can yet be used, in its fragmentary and dispersed form, by many interacting individuals ...

For Hayek the incompetence of government intervention is not (as it is when asserted by Burke) a matter of practicalities. For Hayek it would be *logically* impossible for a government to acquire the kind of knowledge that would enable it to intervene beneficially in a market, because on his account such knowledge is only generated from freely contracting individuals, moreover it only exists in this dispersed, piecemeal fashion as contracted prices, and is hence unavailable in principle *to any one*. Intervention by government falsifies the price signals that would otherwise have constituted the knowledge.

My critique here is tangential, and an invitation to reflect on how difficult it is with an historical subject such as 'the market' to combine the identification of 'principles' with an historical understanding of its development. An evolving practice, or our reflections on it, such as 'the market' may (and periodically has) from time to time been presented as exhibiting 'principles' by abstracting from its then current practices. But we can surely only understand earlier versions of those principles (and hence their changes) by first making the huge effort to think away our contemporary versions of them; rather than starting off by proleptically identifying, in those in whom we seek origins, their modern descendants. And something similar goes for 'Political Economy' itself which was, as Collin's individual discussions ultimately show, at this time a field of contestation between the different demands—strategic, demographic, moral, and cultural as well as economic—made on those seeking policy solutions for the survival of the European states; and not a single principle drawn from what we have now come to call 'economics', which Burke then integrated into those wider concerns.<sup>28</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/politics/staff/hampsher-monk/>
- 2 There were some Conservative Politicians, such as Enoch Powell and Rhodes-Boysen, members of the Mont Pelerin Society, who had long subscribed to Hayekian positions. But the most prominent and influential amongst Thatcher's entourage was Sir Keith Joseph, a self-described and sudden 'convert' to Hayekian political economy, Secretary of State for Industry and subsequently for Education and Science and creator and Director of the Centre for Policy Studies, a think-tank for the Conservative Party closely aligned with Hayek. Geoffrey Howe and Nigel Lawson, successive Chancellors of the Exchequer in Thatcher's Cabinet, were also influenced by Hayek.
- 3 Sir Samuel Brittan, the distinguished political commentator and economics correspondent of the *Financial Times* wrote "Hayek's book [*The Constitution of Liberty*] is still probably the most comprehensive statement of the underlying ideas of the moderate free market philosophy espoused by neoliberals". The many faces of Liberalism, *Financial Times*, January 22, 2010. Thatcher snifflily referred to 'the progressive consensus' that she sought to disrupt (Green 2002, p. 216).
- 4 Michael Gove, currently Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the UK Cabinet Office, points out that 'Edmund Burke [has] been conscripted as often in battles between Tory factions as in battles against other parties'... 'Burke's words, like a medieval crown, used to lend legitimacy.' And he notes 'The invocation of him was heard more frequently at those points in the seventies, eighties and nineties when the Tories became more attuned to ideology and, indeed, riven by it' (Gove 1997, p. 152).

- 5 Successive treatments of the conservative tradition by politicians that seek to give centre-place to Burke (although for very different ideological reasons!) include Gilmore's *Inside Right: a study of Conservatism* (1977) and Willetts's 'Modern Conservatism' (1992). The former sought to depict Burke as resisting, the latter as advancing, the strand of economic liberalism in Toryism. John Redwood claims Margaret Thatcher saw society 'in Burkean terms, favouring the small battalions and voluntary associations rather than massive extensions of state power to try to solve social problems' (Redwood 2005). See most recently Norman (2013, pp. 284, 289), who urges modern politicians to take seriously Burke's critique of a kind of utilitarian individualism and insistence on the importance of 'society as a basic category within politics'... rather than 'the individual atom of much modern economics'; and to recognise Burke's attempt to teach us that 'the simplifying assumptions required to push economics to towards the hard sciences ... import logical error' ... there can, and must be debate about .. free markets' (pp. 253-4).
- 6 The centrality of Natural Law to Burke's thought was first argued by a group of Catholic commentators, notably Stanlis (1958), and Canavan (1960) and Pappin (1993). Although no American political party identifies so closely with Burke as do the British Conservatives, there have been a number of associations and foundations, academic and political, which broadly identify with Burke's thought.
- 7 For a sympathetic account of Burke's affinities with the American right, see Henrie (1997). For an intricate and more critical overview of what he calls an increasingly Disneyfied version of Burke, see Deane (2013).
- 8 Calling into question the 'liberal modernity' view of the 'Atlantic' and 'Sister' revolutions of France and America as parallel moves into the modern world.
- 9 Ironically a deconstructed version of C. B. Macpherson's analysis of Burke's political philosophy as a kind of 'mask for modernity'.
- 10 It seems, nevertheless worth briefly rehearsing this contested terrain between polemic and scholarship as a context alluded to but largely passed over by Collins in his aspiration to present an academic study.
- 11 *C & M*, pp. 198-9 (Economical Reform), 290-97 (American trade), 381-2(East India Co.), 446, 475, 479, 508 (French Revolution).
- 12 These sensible remarks often seem to withdraw from the claims made about the centrality of free trade: 'Burke always calibrated his support for trade within larger constitutional, prescriptive, and imperial contexts' (*C & M*, p. 381) and 'Much like social relations between men should be governed by principles beyond transactional barter, political relations between nations should be influenced by considerations that surpassed commercial activity' (p. 508).
- 13 This approach has generated a considerable literature that hardly surfaces in Collins's work. Pocock's is only one such. The work of Winch (1996) and Hont (2005), Bourke (2015) and Whatmore (2012) enlarge on this wider conception of the subject.
- 14 See, the introduction to TDS in *W & S* IX, p. 119. Burke received Young at his Beaconsfield estate on 29th April 1796, but it is not clear that anything substantial emerged from the meeting (Burke 1969, vol IX, p. 459).
- 15 As a good rhetorician Burke knew that audiences 'love to hear stated in general terms what they believe to be true in particular' (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1395b).
- 16 Such as: '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. Nobody, I believe, has observed with any refection what the market is, without being astonished by the truth ,the correctness, the celerity, the general equity which the balance of wants is settled' (TDS, *W & S*, IX, p. 133.).
- 17 Town and City dwellers, Burke writes, 'are to be heard with great respect and attention upon matters within their province, that is on trades and manufactures; but on any thing that relates to agriculture, they are to be listened to with the same reverence which we play to the dogmas of other ignorant and presumptuous men.' (TDS, *W & S*, p. 129).
- 18 Indeed Collins account richly details Burke's recourse to evidence: 'In his view, general claims about political economy, and political life overall, should be verified by the sanction of political experience' (*C & M*, p. 257). So I

am at a loss to understand why our author sets up Hayek as a standard and insists that Burke subscribes to a universal doctrine, when so much of his excellent analysis shows him to be operating empirically.

- 19 Both the hiring of agricultural labourers and the buying and selling of corn and stock still, and well beyond Burke's time, took place in physical spaces, where actual Farmers, labourers, bags of corn and animals were displayed and bargained for.
- 20 Economic anthropologists have long demonstrated the emergence of such patterns in markets that appear to approximate to the economic models of the 'perfect market'. I discuss some of these, and wider issues on the identity (and status) of claims made about and on behalf of markets in Hampsher-Monk (2015).
- 21 Although of course such properties can be re-introduced into the model, just as the side constraints or presuppositions (notoriously, perfect knowledge or barriers to entry) can be varied.
- 22 To put it tendentiously, that is to say, 'how much, and on what grounds did Burke deviate from a yet- to- be-formulated conception of market universalism?'
- 23 There are numerous uncontested historical cases where this is accepted to be the case. Take for example the numerous historical claims of a universal right to the franchise, which nevertheless have to be understood to exclude women, and even, in earlier cases men in service; or extensive early-modern claims to freedom of conscience, which commonly presumptively (even where they do not explicitly) exclude atheists, Jews, Muslims—and even Catholics.
- 24 Advanced by Smith, Knox and Tucker. See Winch's (1996, p. 138) reconstruction of the opposing sides on which Burke and Smith found themselves.
- 25 'Speech on American Taxation', W & S, II, p. 458.
- 26 W & S, V. These examples are part of a more extended discussion of Burke and Smith on Empire and Market in my (Hampsher-Monk 2015, 2009).
- 27 The claim is the focus of the calculation debate with socialist planners such as Oskar Lange in the 1920s and 30s.
- 28 This essay draws on two previous publications in which I have discussed the relationship between Burke and conceptions of the Market (2015, 2009).

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# 'No meagre doctrine of non-interference': The Posthumous Career of Edmund Burke's Economic Thought in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain

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As a historian of Edmund Burke's afterlife, and the ways in which his thought has been interpreted, adapted, and adulterated, I find the question raised by Collins's illuminating study of Burke's economic thought to be a relatively simple one—what took Burke scholars so long to treat his economic thinking in such a way? For me this is a question of not simply what Burke did, said, and wrote, but which aspects of his life and works were deemed most useful and representative for understanding both the 'essence' of his thought, as well as what aspects were prioritised in promoting Burke's original contributions to the history of thought. This essay will therefore address the ways in which Burke's economic thought was interpreted and positioned in the century follow his death in Britain. These were formative years in the development and canonisation of Burke's thought and his status as an original and important political thinker, which also led to the invention of his now canonical position as the so-called 'founder of modern conservatism' prevalent around the world today. We need to look at two distinct though related aspects of discussion of Burke's economic thought in the years following his death in 1797 in Britain. The first aspect concerns representative accounts from the early nineteenth century and how these developed over time. The second considers the reasons for the relative elision of Burke's economic thought as compared to his constitutional, political or imperial thought.

In her account of the reception and interpretation of both Burke and Adam Smith's thought, Emma Rothschild has observed the trend towards merging and simplifying the economic positions of both Burke and Smith. Thus, while (for Rothschild) much of Burke's later economic thought produced in the 1790s contradicted that of Smith, by the posthumous publication of Burke's pamphlet, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), in 1800, it was taken as little more than an exposition of Smith's 'principles'.<sup>1</sup> The editors claimed in their introduction that Burke paid 'the greatest deference' to Smith's views in the *Wealth of Nations*. It was, Rothschild argues, as though all the different Smith's constructed by his interpreters in the late eighteenth century—Whitbread's Smith, with his right to the produce of labour, or the 'quasi-French, quasi-atheistical, quasi-revolutionary 'Oeconomist"—had vanished into the simple prescription of 'economic freedom' (Rothschild 2013, p. 64).<sup>2</sup> Rothschild draws on early reviews of *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* that underscore this. The rather clipped review in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, announced that Burke

proceeded 'on the principles of Dr. Adam Smith, that all trade should be free; and that government should not interfere by compulsory acts and regulations, particularly in grain and agriculture. He was equally averse to public granaries.' Similarly, the *Monthly Review* bundled Burke's pamphlet with a selection from other authors who espoused 'the principle of Dr. Adam Smith, that all trade should be free', and one of the authors was even described as 'Smithian'. Rothschild therefore suggests that, by the start of the nineteenth century, Burke's interpreters conceived of the pair as 'equivalents'.<sup>3</sup> Understanding Burke's immediate reception history is, therefore, essential in understanding how his thought would be understood and put to use by later thinkers and political actors once again (Sack 1987, pp. 623-640).

The relevance for us is that, if Burke and Smith are seen as equivalent (whatever the reality might have been) but that Smith was nonetheless the primary progenitor, then economic principles alone could not constitute Burke's particular 'contribution to mankind'. Burke's economic thought did not occupy the benchmark status that Smith's did. Yet this did not mean that Burke's expositions did not gather praise and admiration in the century following his death, with a number of commentators positioning Burke's approach on the simplified issue of 'free trade' as indications (to his nineteenth-century admirers) of his 'prophecy' and deep insight, as well as part of his general desire to improve the conditions of the people.<sup>4</sup> 'Economical reform he [Burke] laboured to effect,' the historian of party George Wingrove Cooke declared in 1837, because 'it was a boon to the people' (Cooke 1836-37, pp. 377-78).

Free Trade was certainly the key idea that Burke's principal interpreters came back to again and again, and commentators primarily drew upon the 1773 Corn Act, the speech on American Taxation, his position on trade with Ireland, and *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*. Here, Burke's most significant champion in the nineteenth century was the Liberal man of letters and MP, John Morley (1838-1923). Morley had been an admirer of Burke from a young age and was particularly expansive in his discussions of Burke's economic thought. Not only did he write two well-received accounts of Burke's life and thought—*Edmund Burke: A Historical Study* (1867) and *Burke* (1879)—both of which enjoyed considerable longevity, Burke was a regular feature in many of his other books, articles, and speeches. Of particular interest is the discussion of Burke in Morley's two-volume *Life of Richard Cobden* (1881). Cobden, Morley claimed, frequently praised *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* for its 'luminous' attack on the notion of treating agriculture as if it were 'different from any other branch of commerce, and denounced tampering with the trade of provisions as of all things the most dangerous' (Morley 1881, p. 113). The 1903 edition of the *Life of Richard Cobden*, published the year in which the then Unionist MP Joseph Chamberlain launched his protectionist Tariff Reform campaign, restated Morley's belief that Burke was a useful weapon to evidence Morley's argument that there was no essential bond between agricultural protection and Conservative policy. At that time Burke was firmly associated with the Conservative and Unionist cause, so the Liberal free trader Morley could present Burke as both 'the most magnificent genius that the Conservative spirit has ever attracted' and 'one of the earliest assailants of legislative interference in the corn trade.' Morley added that the 'important Corn Act of 1773 was inspired by his maxims' (p. 167). For Morley, Burke's thought demonstrated the vital distinction between constitutional politics and economic policy.

Burke's time served as Paymaster General also inspired the interpretation of Burke that positioned him as an administrative—as opposed to radical—political reformer.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in the early nineteenth century, the question of his own finances and how Burke afforded his Beaconsfield property were also a significant source of concern and gossip for commentators assessing his life and thought.<sup>6</sup> Over time, however, the 'finance issue' over Burke's personal economy was settled and his reputation as an effective reformer of economic abuses became a key component in a narrative of how Burke's vision of reform (and his fundamental rootedness to the constitutional settlement of 1688-9) worked in practice (Cooke 1836-37, p. 376). By the turn of the twentieth century the depiction of Burke as an economic or administrative, rather than radical or parliamentary, reformer was commonly repeated in popular political texts as well as general history books. For the well-known historian Goldwin Smith, writing in 1899, Burke's *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* (1770), which denounced 'evil court influence' and the 'vast patronage, parliamentary and official' of the King's Friends, was contrasted to his remedy of party government based on principle and the

national interest. Burke's practical solution, Smith explained, was to move for 'economical reform, abolishing sinecure offices, setting a limit to pensions, reducing the preposterous expenses of the royal household, and retrenching a civil list on which there was a debt of six hundred thousand pounds contracting partly by waste, partly ... by the administration of the king's golden pills' (Smith 1899, ii.226). It was in this way, Smith tells us, that Burke's particular ideal of constitutional government could be realised.

The presentation of Burke as an effective reformer of abuse was also evident in William Hunt's volume for the popular *Political History of England* series, published in 1905. Hunt—then President of the Royal Historical Society—explained how Burke was an ardent reformer of abuses, but 'with the constitution itself he would have no meddling'. Unlike Pitt, he saw that 'the only effectual check to corrupt influence was to be found in government by a party united for the promotion of national interests upon some common principle' (Hunt 1905, p. 70). But while Burke was opposed to changes in the constitution, 'he laboured to bring parliament into a sound state by reforms which allowed the publication of its proceedings, improved the system of deciding the lawfulness of elections, and checked the multiplication of places and pensions, as well as by other measures of a like tendency' (p. 105). The perceived success of Burke's measures was encapsulated by P.A. Brown's *The French Revolution in English History* (1918). Brown argued that political reform had become a dead issue in the mid- to late 1780s thanks to the 'seven years of Burke's economical measures' and the success of the Rockingham Whigs which had effectively 'weakened the advocates of Thorough' (Brown 1918, p. 24).

While the themes of confiscation and spoilation found in *Reflections* and the *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796) were significant for Oxford Tractarians and William Cobbett alike in the early nineteenth century (Kirby 2016 pp. 137–8), the young John Maynard Keynes' Cambridge prize essay of 1904 was perhaps the most systematic (though unpublished) analysis of Burke's economic thought produced in Britain. Here, Keynes presented the right to property as a 'fundamental tenet of Burke's political faith'. Writing during a period of debate not only around protection and tariff reform but also the expansion of social welfare and the role of the State, 'The Political Doctrines of Edmund Burke' stated that compulsory redistribution, understood as 'State charity', was anathema to Burke. Yet according to Keynes this was 'no meagre gospel of non-interference' (Keynes 1904).<sup>7</sup> Keynes argued that Burke believed property and prescription were natural and therefore good. Burke was therefore not concerned with the unequal nature of property and saw poverty as inevitable.<sup>8</sup> Instead Burke argued in favour of the existing distribution of wealth, and of placing the vast preponderance of political power in the hands of the 'sluggish' propertied class throughout his writings.<sup>9</sup> Hence for Keynes 'Burke's economic theories, as well as those subjects already discussed, were largely dominated by laissez-faire'. It was, however, a theory admirably researched: 'In no other case has so powerful an imagination been combined with so vast a fund of information.'<sup>10</sup> Burke was thus positioned favourably in relation to his Whig contemporary, Charles James Fox, who Keynes claimed had never read the *Wealth of Nations*.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, when 'the great work appeared', Burke was 'the earliest advocate of its principles in the House of Commons, and by far the most acute and well-informed critic of the nation's finances'.<sup>12</sup> Again, however, if our task is to understand how Burke's interpreters were divining his 'original contributions' to thought, and the place his economic thought had in this (as compared to, say, his constitutional thought) we see Burke presented as an *advocate* of Smith's economic thought rather than a trailblazer—presumably, like Smith.

In practical terms, Burke's advocacy, as presented by Keynes, encompassed the policy of Irish free trade, which was presented as not only beneficial to Ireland but to Britain and Ireland as a whole.<sup>13</sup> *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* was presented through the lens of biography, and uses Burke's farming experiences at Beaconsfield to interpret the text as an attempt to influence Pitt against fixing wages in farming, and that magistrates were not competent to fix wages because they were not experts.<sup>14</sup> Hence Keynes's Burke is as much 'the hard-headed man of finance as the impassioned defender of liberty or of chivalry', as the upholder of 'rank, and office, and title, and all the solemn plausibilities of the world' or of ecclesiasticism exalting 'her mitred front in courts and parliaments'.<sup>15</sup> For Keynes therefore:

Perhaps it was as an exponent of Queen Anne Whiggery and the glorious Constitution that he liked himself best; but it is as one of the earliest exponents of Laissez Faire, of a modified political utilitarianism, and of expediency against abstract right, that he is most important in the history of opinion.<sup>16</sup>

Yet despite Keynes's best efforts (and this was an unpublished essay, after all) it remained the case that histories of British economic thought found it easy to side-line Burke and instead centre Hume, Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo—as in the University of Pennsylvania Professor of Political Economy, Simon N. Patten's *The Development of English Thought: A Study in the Economic Interpretation of History* (1899). Similarly, while the political theorist and economist Harold Laski (1893-1950) was a great admirer of Burke who declared that there was 'hardly a greater figure in the history of political thought in England', he nonetheless criticised Burke. Laski did so on the grounds that, firstly, Burke's notion of a 'disposition to preserve and ability to improve' concealed what was to Laski a significant problem if it meant 1688 was a 'perpetual model for the future'. Secondly, and more significantly for our purposes, Laski chastised Burke for not writing more on the importance of economic matters (1920, pp. 189, 199, 214). Moreover, Laski's book, *Political Thought from Locke to Bentham* (1920), written for the popular Home University Library series, was significant both in its reach and the quantity of reprints and editions (7 between 1922 and 1942), but also in its use as a textbook for students in the interwar period.<sup>17</sup> It was a pronouncement, therefore, that had considerable reach and longevity.

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This brings us nicely to the second part of our analysis, which considers why Burke's economic thought was rarely centred in formative analyses of his political thinking in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain. To begin with, key questions surrounding Burke's thought centred on his consistency, but tended to focus on his relative support or denunciation of the American and French Revolutions. His thought and life were divided into spatial 'areas': Ireland, America, France, India, and Britain. For the Liberal Prime Minister and lifelong reader of Burke, W.E. Gladstone, Burke had been right on Ireland and America, but wrong on France (Morley 1903, ii. 709).<sup>18</sup> Political economy was not absent from these themes—American taxation and Irish free trade to name the most prominent in nineteenth-century commentary—but it is significant that his economic writings, including *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, were far less likely to be included in editions of Burke's selected works (Jones 2017, p. 12). As the 'conservative' Burke that we are more familiar with today was constructed, constitutional politics remained a, if not the, central concern. As the Tory journalist and friend of Disraeli, T.E. Kebbel observed in 1864, it was an 'obvious truth that Free Trade was not a great question of Constitutional politics' (Kebbel 1864, p. 311).<sup>19</sup> This was, as we saw above with Morley, a sentiment that would be repeated across the spectrum into the twentieth century.

More negative accounts of Burke's temperament also made positive appraisals less straightforward. Because of the propensity to chastise Burke's Irish 'temper' well into the nineteenth century, Burke's character was simultaneously positioned as 'passionate' or one-sided.<sup>20</sup> So, for example, while the *Economist* editor Walter Bagehot (1826-1877), writing in 1861, understood that 'the doctrines of free trade, were present, like all great political ideas, to the overflowing mind of Burke,' they were, 'like all his ideas, at the daily mercy of his eager passions, and his intense and vivid imagination' (Bagehot Jul. 1861, p. 204). For Burke, Bagehot argued, great ideas were 'a supernatural burden' revealed through 'great visions which had been revealed to him, with the great lessons he had to teach, and which he could but very rarely induce anyone to hear' (p. 223). To this Bagehot contrasted the mind of William Pitt who, for Bagehot, had 'the best administrative intellect' and thus a more receptive audience for his ideas (p. 228).

At the same time, a more robust defence of Burke's contribution to political economy was beginning to be made. The late 1850s and early 1860s marked the beginning of a more rigorous interrogation of Burke's economic principles, undertaken by a new generation of Liberal admirers that placed him as a *forerunner* of Smith. For some, such as a young James Fitzjames Stephen writing in the *Saturday Review* in 1858, Burke's political economy was an example of his modernity and demonstrated his legacy to contemporary Liberals:

If the policy which Burke shared with his party is obsolete [anti-prerogative], his larger and more distinctive political principles have become the rule of modern legislation and government. A sound political economist before Adam Smith, and a supporter of Catholic Emancipation when Plunket and O'Connell were in their infancy, Burke repeatedly protested against paper constitutions and abstract theories of policy long before the French Revolution inoculated the world with a spurious and morbid Liberalism. It is in his speeches and writings that foreigners may study to the best advantage the principles which, in their historical operation, bear the name of the English Constitution. (Stephen, J.F. 1858, pp. 372-3)

Burke's 'sound political economy' could therefore serve as part of a string of examples that demonstrated his relevance to political and intellectual life a century later, although the continued centrality of constitutional politics remains clear. For Fitzjames Stephen's brother, Leslie, this was equally true. So not only did Leslie Stephen write, in his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), that despite Burke's irritable temper he remained a powerful advocate of 'honour, justice, and mercy', Burke's 'views of political economy' were celebrated 'as far in advance of his time as his view of wider questions of policy'. In a reversal of Bagehot's earlier judgement, Burke's dramatic oratorical style was presented as ensuring that 'he laid the foundations of his intellectual supremacy deep in the driest and most repulsive of studies' (Stephen, L. 1876, ii 223). By the 1890s, when Stephen had replaced the late Matthew Arnold as the nation's preeminent man of letters, he repeated this argument. Here, Stephen positioned Burke in contrast to Tom Paine in a manner which subsumed Burke's political economy into a broader analysis of his distinctive 'organic', 'historic' method:

The whole pith of Burke's teaching, indeed, is his anticipation of what we should now call the historical method; and in that consists, as I should say, his superlative merit. He saw with unequalled clearness the necessity of basing all political economy upon the truths now recognised by every philosophical writer, that the state is an organism developed by slow processes, and depending for its vitality upon the evolution of corresponding instincts. He therefore argues, with more accuracy than his contemporaries, the vast importance of the crash which was taking place before his eyes. (Stephen, L. 1893, p. 273)

Yet once again this quotation is also representative of the tendency to privilege other aspects of Burke's work in analysing and assessing the 'essence' of his thought. A similar sentiment informed the entry on Burke's economic thought in the neoclassical economist, F.Y. Edgeworth's, *Dictionary of Political Economy* (1890 and later editions). Here, Edgeworth argued that, 'A rich vein of economic wisdom, mixed with other precious materials, runs through the whole vast tract of Burke's political writings', stating that *Thoughts on Scarcity* was most representative of Burke's economic thought. He noted admiringly how 'The fallacies of the mercantile theory did not snare Burke. ... [But] He is no bigoted preacher of *laissez-faire*.' Again, it was stated that for Burke wealth was only one 'element of wellbeing', 'not to be separated from "the great texture of the mysterious whole"' (Edgeworth 1891-9, i. 194-5).<sup>21</sup> Unlike the Stephens, however, Edgeworth maintained the unreconstructed opinion that *Thoughts on Scarcity*—to Edgeworth the most typical example of Burke's political economy—simply 'enunciates general principles worthy of the *Wealth of Nations*' (i.195) The singularity of Burke's economic thought remained under question. Meanwhile, the Conservative Edwardian publications increasingly distilling Burke's thought to a neat, six-point, 'political philosophy of conservatism' in this period, divided over the issue of protective tariffs, placed particular emphasis on the broad principle of 'the sanctity of property' only.<sup>22</sup> A stress on the organic conception of society, and thus hatred of revolutionary change, as well as the value (or necessity) of precedent, tradition, religion and rank retained their centrality in analyses of Burke's thought in a world increasingly conscious of, and threatened

by, Communist revolution. A selective reading, and centring, of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) lay at its heart.

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In his introduction, Collins outlines the ways in which scholars and polemicists writing in the decades after Keynes, Edgeworth, Morley and the Stephens picked up on these themes in attempts to place Burke in increasingly anachronistic modern political labels, such as 'classical liberalism' and 'capitalism' (Collins 2020, pp. 10-11). But as significant scholarship on Burke increasingly takes his connections to enlightenment thought, political economy, and constitutional and imperial politics more seriously, we have a growing number of significant volumes effectively contextualising Burke's principles (Bourke 2015; Bromwich 2014). However, the association of Burke with 'conservatism' centred on a particular reading of opposition to revolution that privileges particular passages from the *Reflections* remains mainstream—the 'Disneyland Burke' outlined by Dwan and Insole, and constructed in part by his nineteenth and early twentieth-century interpreters (Dwan and Insole 2012, p. 13). For intellectual historians interested in reception, circulation and that much contested term, 'influence' (Arcenas 2020, pp. 495-505), the question remains of the extent to which 'Disneyland Burke' will be challenged in more popular, less academic settings.

## NOTES

- 1 Though for an alternative assessment of Rothschild's broader claims for Burke's inconsistency in the 1790s with his previous economic thought, see Collins (2020, pp. 466-67).
- 2 Collins (pp. 501-502) notes the similarities but also the 'gulf' between Burke and the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Smith included.
- 3 Gentleman's Magazine 70 (1800, p. 1270); Monthly Review 33 (1800, pp. 392-3); É. Halévy, *La formation du radicalisme philosophe: L'Évolution de la doctrine utilitaire de 1789 à 1815* (1901, p. 98), all cited in Rothschild (2013, p. 276).
- 4 Anon., (1823); Stephen (1876), 2.226; Anon., (1890), pp. 423-437 at p. 428.
- 5 For Burke's position see Collins 2020, Chapter 5.
- 6 The clearest and most significant refutation was Napier (1862, pp. 59-64).
- 7 John Maynard Keynes Papers, JMK/UA/20/2/27; JMK/UA/20/2/28. My thanks go to the Librarian at King's College, Cambridge, for permission to cite material from the J. M. Keynes papers.
- 8 JMK/UA/20/2/29; JMK/UA/20/2/33.
- 9 JMK/UA/20/2/30.
- 10 JMK/UA/20/2/36.
- 11 JMK/UA/20/2/37.
- 12 JMK/UA/20/2/39.
- 13 JMK/UA/20/2/40.
- 14 JMK/UA/20/2/41.
- 15 JMK/UA/20/2/42; JMK/UA/20/2/43.
- 16 JMK/UA/20/3/21.
- 17 Laski's text was reprinted in 1922, 1925, 1927, 1930, 1932, 1937, and 1942.
- 18 Morley retorted that surely India and 'home affairs' needed to be added.
- 19 There are similarities here with Collins' collapsing of the Smith-Burke problem see Collins (2020, p. 533).
- 20 A classic example is Arnold (1965, pp. 13-14).
- 21 This was repeated in other publications: 'Morley, Character Sketch', p. 428.
- 22 See, for example, Cecil (1912, p. 48).

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# Edmund Burke and the eighteenth-century debate on poverty

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Gregory Collins' excellent study of Edmund Burke's political economy is, in some ways, an unapologetic exercise in historical redemption: "scholars", he writes in the introduction, "have already made great strides in broadening our apprehension of Burke by refuting caricatures of him as a coldhearted reactionary" (Collins 2020, p. 4). However, he maintains, such efforts have primarily focused on reassessing the delicate balance between Burke's instincts for political and social reform and his well-known "disposition to conserve institutions" (p. 4). What recent studies by Bourke, Bromwich and Norman have achieved for Burke's reputation as a political writer, Collins aims to do for his reputation as a political economist.

As he is all too aware, this is no mean task. As always with Burke, the historian's task is complicated by the fact that he was a practising statesman as well as a philosophical writer. Throughout his career he discussed a wide range of context-specific political and economic issues, which often makes it challenging to identify coherent philosophical principles underpinning his thought. In addition, Burke's status as a modern-day icon of conservative thought requires untangling layers upon layers of ideological appropriation by various "isms". This includes seemingly contradictory assessments of Burke as a staunch defender of the economic interests of *ancien régime* aristocracy and as a proponent of free-market capitalism.

Luckily for his readers, Collins does a fine job of cutting through modern labels to recover the general principles of Burke's economic thought, which he convincingly describes as—not uncharacteristically for late Enlightenment political economy—"aiming to sustain the virtues of market liberty while protecting against its debasing tendencies" (p. 527). In other words, Burke's commitment to tradition and culture was combined with an unshakeable commitment to "preserving the underlying sources for civil progress" (p. 532). This explains Burke's steadfast support for the kind of free-market economics associated with classical liberalism. Burke emerges from Collins' retelling as a paradoxical god-father for Anglo-American conservatism.

The book undoubtedly succeeds in persuading that Burke's economic ideas rest on a coherent set of general principles that cannot not adequately be described by words such as "reactionary" or even "conservative". Perhaps Collins' goal of "refuting caricatures" proves most challenging, however, when he examines Burke's engagement with the contemporary debate on the "labouring poor": Burke's reputation is arguably at an all-time low among historians and philosophers of poverty, welfare, and economic justice. This is not a new development, as Burke has long been seen

as anticipating the harsh turn taken by British poverty laws in the nineteenth century. His most-often cited contribution to the debate, found in his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795, first published in 1800), is his striking observation that “those who labour … are miscalled the Poor” (Burke 1800, p. 2) and ensuing critique of the expression “labouring poor”, dismissed as “[base and wicked] political canting language” (Burke 1800, p. 3). The passage has been described as a “momentous portent of the future”—an early attempt to introduce a formal distinction between the poor deemed deserving of compassion and charity (the old, the sick, the infirm), and those able-bodied people who could work and should therefore not be eligible for government relief (Himmelfarb 1984, p. 68).

As Collins notes, Burke’s reputation as a “blind defender of the interests of the landed aristocracy at the expense of the impoverished” endures to this day (p. 108); indeed recent works still lament his “often staggering indifference to the suffering of the poor” (Pitts 2006, p. 62, cited in Collins, p. 108).

Against the latter charge, Collins mounts a convincing defence. “Burke’s attitude towards the lower social order”, he pushes back, “continues to be misunderstood” (p. 108). The misunderstanding persists because Burke’s economic ideas have tended to be viewed through ahistorical lenses such as “liberalism” or “capitalism”. Instead, Collins suggests, Burke’s political economy, including his views on poverty and welfare, must be located within several overlapping eighteenth-century intellectual contexts (p. 12). These contexts include not only his staunch opposition to French revolutionary discourse in the 1790s, but also the economic crises that marked the end of the eighteenth century and the resulting calls for new public policies in support of the poor, as well as his early enquiries into the roots of Irish poverty. Most importantly perhaps, Collins points to Burke’s Christian commitment to the moral duty to aid the poor, exemplified by his own private charitable endeavours. Collins’ argumentation amounts to an appeal to consider Burke’s intentions as relevant context for his admittedly unforgiving advice against all forms of government support for the poor, and his presumption in favour of allowing market mechanisms to play out unhindered:

Burke, in fact, did exhibit a lasting concern for the poor, for he harboured a firm belief in the power of private charity and the morality of market liberty … Such imperatives, he maintained, would ease the mean condition of laborers in a far more effectual fashion than state meddling in the market or public expressions of pity (p. 108).

Burke, the argument goes, did demonstrate significant concern for the plight of the poor, both throughout his public life, and via his private charitable activities. Importantly, the harsh non-interventionist policies he is often castigated for advocating did have the intended long-term aim of *improving* the situation of the poor (“a Free trade”, Collins quotes him as writing on p. 341, “is in truth the only source of wealth”, and therefore an “obvious” remedy for the Poor). That Burke may have hoped to see a decrease in poverty might appear self-evident to modern readers, but it is in fact revealing of his position within much broader eighteenth-century debates about poverty, which Collins alludes to but doesn’t fully develop—understandably so, since his primary topic lies elsewhere.

Delving deeper into the complex, long-running debates about poverty that Burke was building upon would provide richer context for his scathing rejection of the language of the “labouring poor”. Most obviously, as illustrated by the above quote, Burke positioned himself against Mandeville- or mercantilist-inspired arguments about the supposed “utility of poverty” (Furniss 1920, p. 17; Martin 2015). Rather, he followed Adam Smith (amongst others) in analysing the growth of commercial opulence as improving living standards for all, including the poorest members of society. Also similar to Smith’s was his attempt to redefine or reconceptualize the notion of poverty itself. Since the mid-eighteenth century, and against a background of increasing poverty and cyclical economic crises, arguments had begun to emerge that were questioning the traditional understanding of the poor as those “without income from property or profession and, therefore, dependent upon their manual labour for living” (Cowherd 1977, pp. 1–2). Such reconceptualizations of the poor ranged from Montesquieu’s redefinition of poverty as the absence of work in *Spirit of the Laws* (Montesquieu 1989, XXIII, 29), to Smith’s argument that poverty was a relative, socially- and

psychologically-constructed state. They also included more empirical arguments such as the data gathered by Burke's friend Arthur Young to demonstrate that labourers had seen their standards of living steadily increase in the eighteenth century - leading Young to conclude that "the *labouring poor...* is a term that means nothing" (Young 1771, p. 298). Considered in this longer context, Burke's oft-quoted assertion that "those who labour ... are miscalled the Poor" no longer reads as the opening salvo in a nineteenth-century quest to deny relief to the able-bodied poor, but rather as the culmination of a decades-long debate about the conceptualization of poverty in commercial society.

Many of the themes skilfully analysed by Collins in his discussion of *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, including Burke's relative understanding of poverty, his insistence that rising standards of living had significantly improved the lived experience of "the poor", his rejection of public schemes of charity, and his attempts to grapple with the effects of cyclical economic crises upon the labouring masses, are illuminating in their own right, and help build a fuller and more nuanced understanding of Burke's political economy. But they would also gain from being read as adapting—and sometimes adopting—a series of novel arguments developed in enlightened Britain and Europe in the previous decades. Of course, there is limited scope to do so in a monograph focused primarily on Burke himself. Yet, reading *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* as a late contribution to an Enlightenment debate would only strengthen Collins' efforts to overhaul Burke's reputation for cold-hearted indifference toward the poor. It would also open up fruitful avenues for rediscovering enlightened writers' debates about poverty, which have long stayed in the shadow of their famous—and infamous—nineteenth-century heirs.

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# Edmund Burke and the Political Economy of Empire

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The political and economic life of the eighteenth-century European world is notable for many things, not least among which were two phenomenon that increasingly preoccupied the minds of many European thinkers and rulers.

One was the emergence of Britain as a global power with an empire. Many people, from North America to the Indian sub-continent, were starting to regard and treat that empire as a cohesive whole. The second was a more intellectual development: the beginning and spread of sustained criticisms of the mercantilist economic arrangements that had dominated Western economic life and policies since the end of the Middle Ages, and which had helped drive the impetus for world empire, starting with Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth century followed by other European states, most notably the Dutch Republic, France and Britain.

In many cases, the new arguments for free trade narrowed in on the beggar-thy-neighbor logic that underpinned what Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* called "the mercantile system." Ideas such as the efficiencies which arise from the division of labor as well as the importance of what later generations would call comparative advantage threw into question the mercantilist assumption that countries grew wealthy at other nations' expense. Smith and others taught that the mercantilist notion that wealth was strongly correlated with the acquisition of precious metals reflected a serious misapprehension of the nature of wealth. A nation's wealth was not wrapped up with how much gold it possessed. Instead wealth concerned the ability of a nation's economy to satisfy the needs and wants of consumers.

The intellectual challenge to mercantilism grew. The challenge could not be limited to economic thought and policy. It had direct implications for the ways in which the leaders of European nation-states viewed the world in political terms. If, for example, wealth lay not in possessing more gold and silver than others, then part of the argument for conquering wide swathes of the earth in order to acquire more quantities of such metals no longer made sense. Equally shaky was the rationale that the acquisition of colonies was vital if nations wanted to grow their markets. For if trade was mutually beneficial to the parties to an exchange across borders, then it made little economic sense for the political leaders of a country, say France, to try and encourage people in France via tariffs or other preferential arrangements to focus their trade upon French colonies, while simultaneously discouraging them from trading with Spaniards, Prussians, or Neapolitans.

## EMPIRES ARE COMPLICATED THINGS

Both domestic politics and the conduct of foreign policy, however, embrace considerations which go far beyond the economic aspects of trade questions. Statesmanship involves understanding the realities which nations confront as much as it concerns the pursuance of objectives designed to transform the political and economic status quo into a better state of affairs.

Though economics forms an important part of that calculus, the legislator has to take many other factors into account. What, for example, are the extra-economic consequences of trading with nations ruled by regimes that are focused on suborning other countries? Does the government's responsibility to uphold national security have implications for what type of goods and services are freely exchanged between, for instance, British (or American) merchants and those living in Revolutionary France (or China)?

Three factors created specific complications that no responsible late-eighteenth British statesman could ignore or avoid. The first was that Britain *did* possess an empire. That empire had been acquired at a considerable spillage of blood and treasure over several decades. This made it highly unlikely that any parliament or government would even consider suddenly abandoning colonies and territories located in every continent, no matter how compelling the economic case for doing so might be.

A second consideration was that, despite growing inclinations to see the empire as one interconnected whole, the economic and political arrangements of this empire differed significantly from place to place. The economic conditions and political systems of the free-spirited American colonies, which considered themselves linked to Britain by a common language, history, religious bonds, and allegiance to the person of the monarch (rather than the binding authority of the King-in-Parliament), were vastly dissimilar to those prevailing in the Indian possessions controlled via that most mercantilist of outfits, the British East India Company.

Further complicating matters was a third factor. For better or worse, other European powers, most notably Bourbon and then Revolutionary France, had foreign policy ambitions that, if realized, would result in diminishment of both Britain's global influence and its desire to maintain a balance of power in Europe.

Such were some of the most salient facts facing successive eighteenth-century British administrations when they had to consider questions of economic policy. These only grew in importance following Britain's comprehensive victory over France in the Seven Years War (arguably the first truly world war) and its ensuing addition of vast possessions across the globe to an already large overseas empire. They also created significant and perhaps irresolvable political and economic dilemmas.

What, for instance, should London do if (as frequently occurred) the East India Company ran into financial difficulties? Should London (pressured by parliamentarians, merchants, and government officials who held shares in "John Company") regulate trade in ways that sought to encourage American colonists to buy tea from the Company, despite the disadvantages this would visit upon independent colonial American tea-importers and despite American doubts as to whether Parliament even possessed the authority to legislate in such a manner? Or should London undertake a sustained effort to engage in substantial reform of the East India Company, a task that would involve confronting numerous interest-groups, many of whom numbered among one's own parliamentary supporters? Such an undertaking would require the expenditure of a considerable amount of political capital.

## IMPERIALIST OR FREE TRADER?

One of the many strengths of Gregory Collins' *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke's Political Economy* (2020) is that it brings further into the light how Edmund Burke's deep appreciation of the arguments for domestic and international liberalization and his willingness to try and promote greater commercial freedom within the Empire and even between Britain and other nations was conditioned by the factors highlighted above. And, like any politician, Burke's involvement in these matters was shaped by legislative maneuvering and deal-making that were—and are—part-and-parcel of parliamentary and political life.

The picture that emerges is one of an economic reformer and liberalizer who was nonetheless deeply attuned to the political realties in which he had no choice but to move if he wanted to realize specific economic policy goals. This is especially evident in Collin's analysis of Burke's approach to questions of foreign trade. Burke's most well-known and specific treatment of economic questions, his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* memorandum of 1795 is notable for its strong advocacy of economic liberty and free exchange. Collins points out, however, that the context of this document is (1) domestic and (2) focused on a specific market: i.e., farmers and laborers in Britain's domestic grain market (p. 209).

There is a long-standing debate as to how closely Burke's view of foreign trade tracked this approach to domestic economics. Some have argued that Burke represents a type of mercantilism which gradually moderated over time towards a clearer free trade position (Stevens 1975, p. 204) that eventually became more solidified by the time he penned *Thoughts and Details*. Others have presented Burke as a vigorous free trader from the very beginning of his political career (Cobban 1960, p. 193).

Collin's interpretation differs from both these positions. He argues that, "because of his defense of the British Empire and the political constraints imposed on him as an elected legislator," Burke "was not what we today would call a champion of 'free trade' absolutism" (p. 211). Yet Burke was far from neutral about such matters. Collins holds that the evidence suggests that "Burke leaned strongly, though not wholly, in favor of liberal commercial intercourse between nations—particularly those within the British Empire—throughout his adult life, even prior to his entry into Parliament in 1766" (Ibid.). Moreover, Collins suggests that there are clear parallels between Burke's largely free trade positions and key ideas expressed in *Thoughts and Details* concerning the moral, material, social and political benefits of free exchange.

At the same time, Collins argues that Burke's willingness to defend Britain's possession of an empire overlapped with the favorable view that mercantilism held of colonial expansion, even though Burke disputed basic presumptions of mercantilist thought (p. 212). There were also, Collins points out, occasions when Burke willingly subordinated trade considerations to the Empire's other needs, such as its security but also its integrity. By "integrity" Collins means the demands of the moral law and upholding the rightfulness of imperial authority in the Empire's disparate parts (Ibid.).

Taken as whole, Collins' picture of Burke adds up to a firm political commitment to the Empire on Burke's part combined with an equally strong endorsement of the moral and economic case for commercial liberty. But Collins also clarifies that it was not a question of Burke trying pragmatically to navigate his way between two competing poles. Instead, we are presented with a Burke who wants to advance simultaneously a nexus of economic, political and moral principles—a nexus that he believed to be integral to his role as a legislator—in the far from perfect circumstances in which he, like every other political actor in history, found himself.

## ECONOMIC STATECRAFT

To my mind, Collins' nuanced portrait of Burke vis-à-vis questions of foreign trade is supported by the evidence. Collins' presentation shows Burke using policy debates to educate his fellow parliamentarians, government officials, and the reading public about the arguments in favor of greater commercial liberty at a time when, as Collins stresses on numerous occasions, the modern economic case for fewer restrictions on trade was still at an early stage of development and influence. In that sense, Burke was practicing a type of economic statecraft from which contemporary legislators and policymakers today could learn a great deal.

A good example concerns Burke's involvement in the first Rockingham ministry's drafting and promoting of the Free Ports Act, passed by Parliament on June 6, 1766. It is worth reflecting upon this insofar as it shows Burke seeking to move the needle towards more commercial liberty in ways that reflected a political commitment to the Empire's cohesion and the overall well-being of all its members.

Burke invested considerable energy in promoting the Free Port Act. The law created free trade ports in the British Caribbean: specifically four such ports in Jamaica and two on the island of Dominica. It also diminished the scale of trade regulation between Britain's North American possessions and British, French,

and Spanish colonies in the West Indies. The Act thus represented a shift away from the regulatory policies of George Grenville's ministry which had sought to protect existing West Indian monopolies by restricting European rights of navigation and foreign imports.

One remarkable feature of the Act is that, as Collins underscores (p. 238), its drafting involved extensive consultation with merchants—including merchants who presumably imagined that the expansion of free ports in the Caribbean might represent a threat to their monopoly positions. Such consultations were not common practice, and the Rockingham ministry was criticized by some at the time for soliciting the views of merchants (p. 241). Burke himself made a point of consulting merchants, even to the point of convening meetings to gauge their thoughts on the likely effects of the 1766 Act (p. 240).

The Act embodied a number of compromises that maintained some mercantilist regulations. A major reason for some of the compromises, no doubt, was the discussions held with merchants involved in foreign trade and associated with different parts of the Empire. But Collins points out that overall it did amount to “conscious movement in the direction of freer commercial intercourse” (p. 238). Burke claimed that as a consequence of the Act, “The trade of America was set free from injudicious and ruinous Impositions—Its Revenue was improved, and settled on a rational Foundation—Its Commerce extended with foreign Countries; while all the Advantages were extended to Great Britain” (Burke 1766/1981, p. 55).

Written in the aftermath of the Act and the short-lived first Rockingham ministry, it's fair to say that Burke may have been exaggerating his case. Plenty of regulations that free traders would generally oppose remained in place. In later life, Burke himself wrote in his *Letter to a Noble Lord* that he would have liked to have gone further in pushing for the expansion of commercial liberty “if more had been permitted by events” (Burke 1796/1991, p. 159). By this, Burke appears to have meant the pressures exerted by West Indian merchants who generally opposed free trade, the Rockingham ministry's focus upon repealing the Stamp Act and passing the Declaratory Act, and the significant divisions within Rockingham's Cabinet which plagued the ministry's one year and two weeks on the Treasury benches.

For all Burke's retrospective frustration, the words and deeds of his involvement in the passing of Free Ports Act reveal a great deal about his way of weaving together his pursuits of political and economic objectives. One benefit of the consultations with merchants, in Burke's view, was that it helped to establish sufficient support for the Act in the West Indian and North American colonies by reconciling the interests of different parts of the Empire (Burke 1766/1981, pp. 55-56). For all its limitations, the agreement helped to free up French and Spanish trading with the Empire, thereby serving the long-term interests of Britain and its colonial possessions. Just as importantly, the process of drafting, debating and legislating the Act had generated wider reflection in political and commercial circles upon the mercantilist policies and practices of the time. This helped to facilitate a process of educating people living in different territories of the Empire in what Burke plainly believed to be the strong case for economic liberty over and against the zero-sum outlook that underpinned mercantilist positions.

## PRUDENCE IN ACTION

Therein perhaps lies the essence of Burke's approach to the economic issues that loomed large in his time and became even more important in the decades leading up to and beyond the nineteenth century. His was a position that combined awareness of political facts, a commitment to what might be called the regime of the Empire, a belief that mercantilism was flawed, a confidence in the generally positive effects of free trade, and a willingness to invest time and energy in shifting political and commercial opinion in an economic direction that he thought would serve the interests of the Empire as a whole. What one might see throughout all of these pursuits, however, is a deep attachment to the idea and practice of prudence.

Burke's prudence should not be understood as pragmatism, let alone *realpolitik* or a penchant for deal-making. It was more a reflection of what Collins calls Burke's “political temperament.” In the realm of economic policy, this was actuated, in Collins' words, “by a purposeful attempt to move towards realization of a principle and yet tolerate, however regrettably, the policy results that followed given the constraints of

political circumstances" (p. 247). Clearly, Burke is neither an ideologue adhering to simplistic formulations nor someone content to manage a mercantilist status quo and personally profit (as many parliamentarians did). Instead Collins' rich account of Burke's approach to the political economy of Empire provides us with edifying material in the study of how Burke engaged in the practice of virtuous statesmanship.

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# Burke, Natural Rights, and Social Liberty

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## INTRODUCTION

Gregory Collin's work *Commerce and Manners in Burke's Political Economy* is an excellent and much-needed analysis of Burke's economic thought, as well as an important overview of the relationship between Burke's economics and his broader moral commitments. In addition to delineating the character of Burke's economic thought, Collins does an admirable job demonstrating that Burke is not merely a defender of a "sluggish hereditary aristocracy" (p. 467), as he is sometimes characterized by both friends and foes, but also a defender of market freedom. From my perspective, Collins' analysis places Burke firmly within the classical liberal pantheon, though still in perhaps a unique location. One area I will explore later is why Collins himself disagrees. But before we get there, let's look at Collins on Burke.

## COLLINS ON BURKE AND NATURAL RIGHTS

One area where I think Collins' contribution is particularly important (and where it could even be deepened) is in his treatment of Burke's understanding of rights and the role natural rights play in Burke's understanding of how individuals come to live together in society. Collins, unlike many Burke scholars, sees Burke as a natural rights thinker of a certain kind, grounded in a kind of natural law. Collins correctly finds that Burke's writings on Ireland, the East India Company and the French Revolution share a deep concern with the rights that individuals hold against those in power, wherever that power comes from. What is hinted at in Collins' treatment but that could be put into starker relief is the way in which Burke's defense of traditionally self-interested rights like the rights to labor and property are recast in Burke's writings to become powerfully prosocial rights, providing at least social stability and the foundation for a flourishing civilization. In what follows I will identify the major areas where I think Collins' analysis correctly identifies the centrality of natural rights for Burke's thought and I will end with a few quibbles about how we classify Burke and why it matters.

## BURKE ON RIGHTS AND EMPIRE

Two areas where Burke's treatment of natural rights is most clear are his writings on Ireland and the East India Company. In both the Irish and Indian cases, an understanding of Burke as a natural rights thinker deepens our appreciation of his political thought as not merely protecting British imperial interests or market transactions them-

selves, but as rooted in a moral tradition that sees the protecting of rights as a universal mandate that can limit imperial claims or parochial claims of self-interest. Without understanding Burke as a natural rights thinker, understanding his treatment of the claims of the Irish and the East India Company might seem at odds with his defense of the French monarchy and aristocracy. That which links both together is an understanding of how rights interact with and protect the communities in which real people live.

In the Irish case, Collins presents Burke's writings in the Two Letters as perhaps the clearest example of his natural rights thinking. Collins also beautifully highlights the way Burke sees theory and practice, morality and policy, working closely together. As Collins notes, “[Burke] intimates that the preservation of natural rights was the spring for commercial productivity and economic growth; that these rights should not be circumscribed; and that the exercise of natural rights trended toward equality. (Burke does not specify which type of equality, whether it be economic, social or political)” (p. 323). For Burke, natural rights are defensible not only on moral grounds, but also on practical and community-oriented grounds, arguing that rights protect individuals while creating the conditions for flourishing communities.

Unlike Locke and other social contract theorists, Burke's natural rights stem not from a discrete contract but from emergent human needs, needs that interacts with their social and political environment in complex ways. Burke's defense of the Irish is consistent with this view. He appeals, not to a contract, but, according to Collins, to a “form of natural rights reasoning: the individual has a least some right to produce, and he has the right to consume the rewards of his toil” (p. 324). But as always with Burke, individual rights, in order to be natural in the way Burke thinks about them, must be consistent with community flourishing. In this way Burke makes a practical appeal to the English—that protecting Irish rights will result in greater commercial benefits and economic growth—as he defends the foundational moral rights to labor and property themselves.

Similar arguments characterize Burke's defense of the Indians against the East India Company, but this time he is arguing against an abusive corporate monopoly rather than state imperialism (though the two are obviously linked in this case). For Burke, the power wielded by the East India Company is so close to state power, due to its protected monopoly status and state-like accoutrements of armies and police, that it creates the same threats to individual rights as state power does, perhaps even more so since it is even less accountable than a traditional state. Burke attacks the East India Company on both legal-contractual and moral grounds, arguing that not only did the East India Company violate the terms of its charter but it also violated its duties to the Indian people as human beings.

As part of this discussion, Burke emphasizes that the East India Company itself was a charter based on a broader end, that which ensured not just profits for the crown but also -- while not explicit in the charter itself, perhaps, but implied by the nature of the duties we owe other human beings—beneficialness for the Indian population. Thus the corruption of the East India company was criminal not merely because it violated the expectations of the charter for honest dealings, but also because it violated the rights of the Indian people themselves in profound ways. Collins quotes a contemporary description of Burke's position here: “... ‘there was but one side to look at, the question for our consideration was simply this, whether or not we should suffer [i.e., accord] a country to enjoy that to which she had a natural right...’” (p. 328). As part of his defense of Fox's India Bill, Burke sets out to understand the nature of a charter itself. As Collins notes, the opposition to Fox's India Bill argued that the bill was a violation of the chartered rights of the company, those rights granted by the crown and, presumably, irrevocable except by the Crown itself. Under this kind of social construction of rights, all that matters is the legal question of whether there is a legal right to the thing itself. Under a nominalist legal regime, as long as a legal authority granted the charter, the charter is valid.

Burke takes a different approach, one consistent with his broader natural rights commitments, but rooted as always in his prudential consideration of the needs of the time, place, and polity. The East India Company was qualitatively different than the limited commercial charters in other areas. As Burke notes, the charter of the East India Company “began in commerce and ended in empire” (Hoffman and Levack, p. 235). It was a peculiarly comprehensive charter, and one that, because of its comprehensive nature, requires

closer attention. As Burke notes, the East India Company is a positive charter for a monopoly granted by a sovereign power. It differs in both legitimacy, form, and content from the negative charter of, for example, the Magna Carta, which is a charter that emerges from the way in which humans naturally defend their rights. Different kinds of charters, differing in principles. Burke objects to the East India Company's monopoly not only because it is bad business practice but because in practice it has violated foundational principles, in this case, rights: "Magna Charta is a charter to restrain power and destroy monopoly. The East India charter is a charter to establish monopoly and to create power. Political power and commercial monopoly are not the rights of men; and the rights to them derived from charters it is fallacious and sophistical to call 'the chartered rights of men'" (Hoffman and Levack, p. 256).

In his defense of the Indians and his rejection of the claims of chartered rights made by the East India Company and its shareholders, Burke responds:

The rights of *men*—that is to say, the natural rights of mankind—are indeed sacred things; and if any public measure is proved mischievously to affect them, the objection ought to be fatal to that measure, even if no charter at all could be set up against it. If these natural rights are further affirmed and declared by express covenants, if they are clearly defined and secured against chicanery, against power and authority, by written instruments and positive engagements, they are in a still better condition: they partake not only of the sanctity of the object so secured, but of that solemn public faith itself which secures an object of such importance (Hoffman and Levack, p. 255).

For Burke, an economic charter is much like a political charter, namely, it is created not only for the private gain of those in power, but for the broader public good and, crucially, to protect the rights of those whom the monopoly on power rules over. In this way, Burke grants the legal charter of the East India Company, but argues that "granting all this, they must grant to me, in my turn, that all political power which is set over men, and that all privilege claimed or exercised in exclusion of them, being wholly artificial, and for so much a derogation from the natural equality of mankind at large, ought to be some way or other exercised ultimately for their benefit" (Hoffman and Levack, p. 257). Rights confer duties, and in Burke's eyes the rights granted to the East India Company by the Crown are void precisely because they did not fulfill their corresponding duties to the Indian people, duties predicated upon the humanity of the Indians themselves.

These two kinds of charters are, in effect, mirror images of one another. The Magna Carta restrains the power of the crown and restores the balance toward individual liberty, while the East India Company tilts that balance back toward monopoly and coercion. As Collins notes, "[f]or Burke, however, Fox's bill did not threaten these real chartered rights of men because the charter of the East India Company was formed on diametric principles. Magna Carta was a document limiting the power of the king and the concentration of political authority, while the purpose of the Company charter was to grant the firm institutional privileges" (pp. 377-378). Collins points out that it is never Burke's contention that all monopolies are illegitimate. Monopoly may very well be legitimate if it is a reward for risky investments that may not be done at all without a promise of exclusivity. At the same time, reward for risk is not the only or even the primary foundation for monopoly. The monopoly must do something else to justify its existence.

As Burke notes, "[t]hese chartered rights (to speak of such charters and of their effects in terms of the greatest possible moderation) do at least suspend the natural rights of mankind at large, and in their very frame and constitution are liable to fall into a direct violation of them" (Hoffman and Levack, p. 256). Thus, despite the practical efficacy of such monopoly granting charters, one must always be aware of the potential for abuse and their effects on the humans under them. As Collins notes, "[e]ven though Burke acknowledges that the East India Company charter did not express the real natural rights of man, he avows that the firm did possess the authority to exercise their political and trading privileges" (p. 378). This view is consistent with Burke's emphasis on prescription as a way to meld the practical exigencies of human social life with the moral rights and duties that that social life sacralizes. Collins too notes the connection to prescrip-

tion, arguing “Burke’s reasoning merges with his defense of prescription in his broader political philosophy, one that consecrated long-lasting bodies because of the authority of time and the utility of their existence” (p. 378). Moreover, the practical benefits of such monopolies do not undermine their moral obligations. In fact, they strengthen them. As Collins notes, “Privilege is a gift, not a right. And because privilege is a gift, there prevails an even greater moral imperative to exercise it with exceeding care and caution” (pp. 379-380). Precisely because of the danger that commercial monopolies like that granted to the East India Company pose to individual rights, they must be held to a higher standard than that we expect from individual merchants or traders whose professionalism requires little more than the self-regenerating virtues of honesty and prudence.

At the same time, while privilege is a gift and not a right, rights themselves are not unlimited. Collins argues, “Burke did not hold natural rights to be inviolable. He hints that the limitation on natural rights might be justified if the action that curbed them—in this case, the Company charter—engendered some reward to those subjects whose rights were constrained” (pp. 378-9). As Collins makes clear, the benefit must not only benefit those who retain the privilege but also those whose rights *are* constrained, in some way shape or form. As in the natural rights tradition broadly, the justification for a monopoly on power of any kind for Burke is that individuals willingly entrust their rights to such a monopoly so that they might be better protected. Even failing this most basic protection, an empire might justify its existence (though not its monopoly) on basic materialist grounds, as a kind of consolation prize for the violations it engenders. This might take the form of commercial profit, or it might take the form of the permanent institutions of greatness, the infrastructure of legitimate empire, that repays the harvesting of natural resources with the benefits of civilization. Even on this bare materialist grounding, Burke argues, the East India Company has failed the Indian people. He notes,

Every rupee of profit made by an Englishman is lost forever to India. With us are no retributory superstitions by which a foundation of charity compensates, through ages, to the poor, for the rapine and injustice of a day. With us no pride erects stately monuments which repair the mischiefs which pride has produced, and which adorn a country out of its own spoils. England has erected no churches, no hospitals, no palaces no schools; England has built no bridges, made no high-roads, cut no navigations, dug out no reservoirs (Hoffman and Levack, p. 263).

Thus on all the grounds that might justify political power, the East India Company fails. And of course, on narrower grounds it also fails as a legitimate commercial endeavor, at least on Burkean grounds, given the corruption and violence it supports.

Here Burke explicitly refers to the broader theory of compact, though as usual he emphasizes the importance of the duties that accompany our rights under any contract or charter: “I ground myself, therefore, on this principle: that if the abuse is proved, the contract is broken, and we re-enter into all our rights; that is, into the exercise of all our duties” (Hoffman and Levack, p. 257). Because the East India Company has violated not only the legal but the moral foundations of its charter, the charter itself is null and therefore any reform is not a violation of the rights of charter but merely individuals stepping back into rights they had placed in trust to the company. But even in the face of the moral and practical abuses, Burke’s reformation spirit remains hesitant and perhaps even slow.

Rather than simply declaring the contract void, Burke displays his usual respect for institutions of long standing and develops a careful procedure by which such a contract can be judged. Burke provides a four-fold way of determining whether the contract is broken, relying not on public opinion or the harsh mob rule of, say, the French revolutionaries but instead by insisting on maintaining as much as possible the delicate balance between stable institutions and the protection of rights, itself a reciprocal relationship. Even in the face of rights abuses, Burke argues that drastic changes to the charter require that the abuses be “great and important” in their object, that the abuse itself be “great”, that it be “habitual and not accidental,” and that it should be “utterly incurable in the body as it now stands constituted” (Hoffman and Levack, 1949, p.

259). When calling for drastic reform on the basis of egregious violations of natural rights, Burke requires that the reformer show that no viable alternative exists of a less drastic nature. In the end though, there is no legitimate charter without trust and a very specific end (rights): “Charters are kept when their purposes are maintained; they are violated when the privilege is supported against its end and its object” (Hoffman and Levack, 1949, p. 273). Burke marshals all his moral indignation to emphasize the way in which the East India Company has not only violated its legal charter through imprudence, mismanagement and corruption, but that it has violated the more foundational moral grounding of its charter via rights violations and injustice to the Indian people themselves. As Collins notes throughout, Burke’s judgment of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of commerce is always grounded in a moral foundation, with rights at the core of that foundation.

## RIGHTS AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Where many commenters have argued Burke’s work shifts is in his seemingly sudden departure from a defender of natural rights of the Irish and Indians and into a harsh critic of the abstract rights claimed by the French revolutionaries. Collins, correctly, sees Burke’s shift not as a change in belief but instead as a rhetorical shift that results merely from the practical reality that the danger to individual rights is now coming from another direction. Collins’ discussion of Burke’s take on rights focuses on the way Burke sees rights and duties intertwined and the way abstract rights undermine real rights or the way in which rights are actually protected in civil societies, pointing out that “the drive for perfect equality through schemes of wealth redistribution compromises the very social order that allows civil society to endure and flourish in the first place” (p. 465). In particular, the very appeal to abstract and extreme notions of particular kinds of rights serves to undermine others, particularly those like labor and property that are foundational for individual and societal flourishing.

Part of Burke’s criticism of the French is the sheer abruptness of their calls for reform. Collins emphasizes Burke’s belief in the importance of allowing norms to grow and emerge as part of a general evolutionary process and he links that to economic prosperity: “the slowly accreted social, legal, and constitutional insights and practices generated by the many over time—the ‘general bank and capital of nations, and of ages’—reflected a reservoir of wisdom that had occasioned prosperity for Britain for generations” (p. 482). While Collins continues, arguing that, “[a]bstract theory was no match for the gradual expansion of economic wisdom throughout the ages” (*Ibid.*), it is worth emphasizing that this economic, social, legal, and constitutional wisdom is always for Burke animated by the reality of moral principles—rights—that are ours by virtue of being human. Rights are not merely claims to unimpeded action, but they also prescribe duties toward others, creating a foundation for a cooperative community.

One area that Collins’ analysis is particularly important is the emphasis he places on Burke’s rejection of a transactional model for society broadly. Burke’s criticism clearly rejects some of the more libertarian theories of society as merely a transaction or simple contract between individual and society, instead emphasizing the complexity of human social life and the importance of attachment and feeling. Collins notes Burke’s criticism of the view that society is merely contractual or transactional, arguing that “Burke’s argument, distilled to its essence, is that the substitution of temporary contracts in place of pre-commercial ethics as a primary driver of social relations provokes the uninhibited expansion of the state and the rise of engineers of the soul” (p. 497). In place of a transactional contract, Burke rejects the individual-state social contract altogether, focusing on one in which generations of community members contract together. Collins here quotes Burkes’ famous characterization of the “great primeval contract”, where “[e]ach contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaevaeal contract of eternal society” (p. 509). It is therefore a contract not just between an individual and a ruler, but between the past, present, and future, and between the web of interconnected and interdependent individuals who rely on a stable social and economic framework for their survival.

Burke's recasting of traditional social contract theory into an intergenerational compact signals his unique position as a kind of natural rights thinker, one for whom market transactions are softened by traditional affections, where the social contract is not one between ruler and ruled but one which extends throughout society, and where markets were "provinces of social interaction and part of a wider ethical and religious order; they were not mere mediums for the maximization of personal autonomy and material wealth" (p. 522). Rights, like markets, exist to protect individuals and the communities they inhabit, by preserving voluntary interactions, producing prosperity, and supporting both rights and their corresponding duties in a complex web that extends across time and space, bound together by eternal law.

If I were to quibble with one minor area of Collins' discussion here it is that while Collins emphasizes the importance of property and, in particular, Burke's criticism of the revolutionary confiscation of church property, Burke continues to defend other kinds of rights in these writings as well. His is not a merely conservative defense of the rights of the status quo. As perhaps one of the best examples, Burke claims at one point, "Far am I from denying in theory; full as far is my heart from withholding in practice, (if I were of power to give or to withhold), the real rights of men. In denying their false claims of right, I do not mean to injure those which are real, and are such as their pretended rights would totally destroy" (Burke 1790, p. 150). The real rights of men are, of course, those of men in society, but it would be wrong to read this merely as civil social rights or as social constructs of a particular legal and moral order.

Instead, Burke believes that the natural rights that exist must be filtered through the medium of society, through the affections, traditions, and manners of the people, before they become compatible with both individual and community safety. As Collins himself notes, "natural rights and property rights were rooted in nature, and acquired greater authority through time as expressed in prescriptive titles, formal agreements, and statutory acts. For Burke, natural rights most likely did indeed exist, but their realization could best be manifested and fortified in a community that protected them through a long train of institutional and historical processes" (p. 377). One of Burke's primary criticisms of the French is that they apply abstract rights directly to society in a way that results in the violations of rights, in the same way that the injudicious application of an acid to water can result in an explosion. Rights are a fundamental part of society; they cannot merely be slapped on top. Burke is clear on this too, arguing, "Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it; and exist in much greater clearness, and in a much greater degree of abstract perfection: but their abstract perfection is their practical defect. By having a right to every thing they want every thing" (Burke 1790, p. 151). Indeed, Collins' hedge that natural rights "most likely did indeed exist" for Burke is countered by Burke's own claim that such rights "do indeed exist," but that they must be applied carefully and judiciously to avoid upsetting the careful social web in which they exist.

Burke continues this theme of emphasizing the reality of rights at the same time that he criticizes the French application of them, pointing out that "[t]he pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false. The rights of men are in a sort of *middle*, incapable of definition, but not impossible to be discerned" (Burke 1790, p. 154). But notice, Burke is careful to avoid the claim that rights don't exist at all, merely making the more prudential claim that "[t]hese metaphysic rights entering into common life, like rays of light which pierce into a dense medium, are, by the laws of nature, refracted from their straight line. Indeed in the gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns, the primitive rights of men undergo such a variety of refractions and reflections, that it becomes absurd to talk of them as if they continued in the simplicity of their original direction" (Burke 1790, p. 153). Thus the real rights of men are still natural rights, but filtered through a social medium. They are protected by protecting individuals, the communities to which those individuals belong, and the grown traditions, norms, and mores on which those communities rely.

Here, for Burke, one of the important social media is an affectionate attachment to the polity, a good that revolutionary thought intentionally undermines. As Burke notes, "prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence" (Burke 1790, p. 76). The rights that exist by virtue of human reason must nevertheless be filtered through social media of attach-

ment to make them safe for human life.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is not accurate to say merely that Burke criticizes the natural rights of the French full stop, but instead to point out that Burke characterizes himself as a natural rights thinker of a peculiar sort; one who sees rights emerging safely when intermixed with the social and affectionate life of humans within a community. Applying the abstract rights of individuals to society without such media is indeed irrational precisely because humans are not found in isolation in nature. They live and flourish in communities bonded together by sentiment and attachment. Thus Burke's understanding of rights sees that only to the extent that they are intermixed with the ingredients that make that society possible in the first place will the rights engender the overall progress of society.

None of this undermines the reality of these rights, nor the universality of that reality. Burke claims liberty not solely as the inheritance of British citizens in a unique historical context, but as "the birthright of our species. We cannot forfeit our right to it but by what forfeits our title to the privileges of our kind" (Hoffman and Levack, pp. 278-9). As Collins notes about the Irish issue in *Two Letters*: "[Burke's] summoning of nature suggested a recognition of the common humanity between England and Ireland that existed beyond the reach of a particular political or economic tradition, such as English mercantilism" (p. 325). This universalism may surprise some who have been used to hearing the way in which Burke's rights talk is often linked to the idiosyncrasies of the British constitution and linked, as it often is, to the "prejudice" of a citizen's love of his own way of life. But such a view ignores the way in which Burke's belief in liberty is a foundational moral grounding that applies to humans everywhere and always. Such liberty must, however, be understood within the particular cultural and developmental model of the community in which it is applied.

This universalism is even clearer when Burke summarizes the rights that he hopes the French will protect:

When, therefore, I shall learn that, in France, the citizen, by whatever description he is qualified, is in a perfect state of legal security with regard to his life, to his property, to the uncontrolled disposal of his person, to the free use of his industry and his faculties: when I hear that he is protected in the beneficial enjoyment of the estates to which, by the course of settled law, he was born, or is provided with a fair compensation for him.... [...] when I am assured that a simple citizen may decently express his sentiments upon public affairs... I shall be as well pleased as everyone must be who has not forgot the general communion of mankind, nor lost his natural sympathy, in local and accidental connections (Hoffman and Levack, p. 280).

These are the rights of "social liberty", as Burke characterizes it, but they are not, therefore, social constructs. They are instead the rights that every human has by virtue of his or her membership in the human race, a membership which requires social living as one constituent of the goal of flourishing.

This understanding of liberty as both social and universal, and as linked to the natural rights all humans share but which must be filtered through particular social contexts, is particularly important, since what Burke says about abstract rights in the French case might seem to contradict things he says about the East India Company and the colonies generally. One way to resolve these contrarieties is to see Burke as a natural rights thinker, concerned with a moral foundation due to all humanity on the one hand, but as a statesman also concerned with the peace and prosperity of his own particular world on the other.

Burke's rhetorical shift during the French Revolution is less a rejection of natural rights and more the adjustment of the prudential statesman who realizes that the danger is coming from another direction. While in the Irish and East India case, individual rights were being challenged and even destroyed by an imperial government, in the French case the benefits of society itself were being torn down in the name of abstract rights. As Collins notes, "[t]he existential danger of the French Revolution, and of the new Whigs' attraction to the Revolution, derived from Frances' attempt to apply the principles of temporary contracts to society at large, such as the transformation of marriage from a religious covenant to a civil contract" (p.

505). As the direction of the danger to individual rights and societal flourishing changes, Burke's emphasis must change too, from defending natural rights against state oppression to instead defending the institutions of civil society (and the rights those institutions protect) against revolutionary chaos. Burke positions himself on the side of the community not because he believes natural rights are now wrong or because communities take precedence over individuals but because he believes healthy communities are vital to the protection of those individuals and their rights.

## BURKE AS CLASSICAL LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE

Collins and I perhaps part ways slightly when looking at Burke's overall legacy and his position within the classical liberal world. Collins asks an odd question toward the end of his chapter on rights. He asks, "how was Burke able to defend a conception of tradition and custom in the *Reflections* while also praising a relatively novel phenomenon—market liberty—in *Thoughts and Details* and in his other writings and speeches, including the *Reflections* itself? Was Burke a secular classical liberal in disguise?" (p. 521). It's an odd phrasing by a usually careful author and deserves a closer look. In the most obvious sense, Collins is seemingly equating classical liberal thought with secularism—in the sense of the "secular" personal not being a theist—which is both confusing and requires defense, at the very least. There is, for example, a debate over whether Locke himself was in fact religious and in what way his religion impacted his thinking. Even more, Locke himself is not really a classical liberal at all but in fact an early-modern liberal, whose work then became the basis for the classical liberal thought that comes later. While these are somewhat minor points, in this section in particular Collins so narrowly restricts the definition of classical liberal (secular, transactional, rigidly individualist) that Burke's own nuanced community-focused view indeed struggles to fit. As Collins concludes, "If we located Burke's economic thought in a broader intellectual context, moreover, we find that his belief in exchange economies was not driven by *the premise that individuals emerged out of an abstract state of nature and assented to a voluntary contract* to secure their pre-civil right to private liberty, *a core premise of classical liberalism and libertarianism*" (p. 522, italics added).

Of course, there are other classical liberal thinkers, like Adam Smith, whose work shares in common much with Burke and who Collins mentions in a footnote on the same page but without further elucidation. If Burke isn't a classical liberal on the definition Collins provides it is not clear how Smith is one either. It's simply not clear why Collins equates classical liberalism with Lockeanism and then ignores Smith and the other classical liberals who, like Burke, fail to fit the Lockean mode in similar ways. It is also worth noting, as Collins admits, that Burke's positions were in fact quite liberal within his time (pp. 531-532), including his attacks on the East India Company, and, on the other side, that the Burkean respect for and admiration of locally-grown traditions and prejudices continued well into 20<sup>th</sup> century classical liberal thought, most clearly in the works of Friedrich Hayek, who called Burke "the great seer" (1982, I: p. 22). Hayek, in fact, bemoans the state of the term "liberal" and wishes in fact to redeploy the phrase "Old Whig" in honor of Burke's thought and the tradition from which he comes, but realizes the unlikelihood of such a phrase taking off. Hayek too, crucially, believed it important to live in "two worlds at once", where the transactional nature of the market is separated clearly from the affectionate bonds of family, neighbors, and friends. There is a clear and accepted lineage from the classical liberalism of Burke's thought to that of Hayek and other classical liberals.

While all this might seem to be nitpicking, it matters precisely because so much of Burke scholarship has ignored the ways in which Burke's writings so clearly and profoundly defended the rights of individuals, and particularly those of vulnerable individuals like the Irish and English, against the power of the state. On this standard view of Burke's thought, many scholars underestimate the universality of Burke's claims of right, insisting on a narrow, parochial view of Burke as a defender of British rights, rather than rights broadly. Collins moves explicitly in this direction when he claims that "Burke's life, however, displayed a greater effort to defend the imperatives of commercial liberty in a traditional, historically informed Anglo-American framework, not in conformity to the speculative theorists of the Physiocrats or the contractarian

notions of civil society championed by English radicals" (p. 522). And yet, such a summary ignores Burke's vigorous defense of the rights of the Indians and the rights of the Irish. By hedging in this final chapter, Collins undermines the very power of Burke's defense of a universal morality that he has defended so beautifully in the rest of the book. It is an odd turn and one that ultimately remains under-defended.

It's also not clear this move is necessary at all. Whether Burke is to be rightly claimed by conservatives or classical liberals or both matters much less than his overall legacy as a particularly nuanced thinker whose work has much to teach us. As Collins notes, "The distinctive aspect of Burke's economic thought, however, was its attempt to blend liberal commercial principles with the distilled wisdom of Europe's past prior to the advent of mass markets" (p. 533). He continues to clarify Burke's vision of a harmony between markets and virtue, a vision that reconciles "market vibrancy with the pre-commercial pillars of religious instructions, social affection, and aristocratic moderation" (*Ibid.*). There is much to criticize about unquestioning support for markets and corporate power, especially when those markets operate on the basis of cronyism and corruption and when such cronyism undermines the local and voluntary interactions of neighbors and friends in communities across the globe. Burke continues to provide a worthy way within the liberal tradition, one characterized by deep belief in moral universals alongside profound respect for the lived experiences of people in their particular communities enmeshed in their own peculiar ways of life.

## CONCLUSION

My discussion here is meant as a friendly amendment to Collins' otherwise excellent work. Ultimately, Collins's discussion of natural rights and the broader moral foundation of Burke's economics is a masterful and most welcome addition to Burke scholarship broadly. As Collins implies throughout his work, the problem is not that we cannot understand Burke's economic thought without natural rights, but that we lose much of the force and much of the principle of his arguments when we fail to connect his arguments to his deeper moral commitments. His defense of property, the rights and duties of the workers, traders, and employers, and even his criticism of the way the French misused the language of rights to justify their violations points to the reality that Burke is himself primarily and fundamentally concerned with the protection of natural rights, rather than using them as rhetorical flourishes to arguments on practical affairs. As Collins powerfully argues, "...oppressed Indians—just like struggling Irishmen, and enslaved Africans, and industrious Americans, and enterprising individuals of all stripes—possessed just as much of a right to labor and deal and earn a profit as affluent Englishmen" (p. 400). Understanding the centrality of rights to Burke's overall economic theory can also help us better understand his place, often misunderstood, within the classical liberal pantheon (Collins' later claims notwithstanding). It can also help reassert the fundamental importance of economic rights, now much maligned in contemporary thought, to theories of rights broadly, and to place those rights firmly on a prosocial foundation. A better understanding of Burke's economic thought helps us all clarify why economic rights in particular are at the core of the classical liberal and conservative worldviews and how Burke might fit into both.

## NOTES

1 I have made this point at more length elsewhere (Hall 2011).

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## Whigs, Statesmen, and Economists

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For many years there has been a discussion around what is known as the 'Adam Smith Problem', which has produced a sizeable literature (Otteson 2000; Teichgraber 1981). The problem or challenge it is concerned with is that of how to reconcile his two major works, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*. The argument is that they reflect and express fundamentally different ideas about things such as the best way to understand society and its workings, the nature of human motivation, and the way we should think about both individual actions and their motivations. Gregory Collins's book is a contribution to a related question, which we may call the 'Edmund Burke Problem'. Here the challenge is that of reconciling the arguments and approaches found in Burke's later political writings on the one hand and his approach in his work *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* on the other (Coniff 1987). The challenge is acute not only because of the apparent difference in argument and approach but also because of the contemporaneous nature of the works in question (*Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* was written in 1795).

The two 'Problems' are clearly related and not only because Burke and Smith were close to each other and, on Smith's own account, very much on the same page. The connection is firstly that the issue in the two cases is the same, that of how to reconcile the perspectives found in works of philosophy or social and political theory on the one hand with that found on works of political economy on the other. The argument in both cases is that the economic works expound an individualist and clearly free market position while the other works set out a position that can be described as classical republican or paternalistic, according to taste. In Burke's case Collins's argument is that *Thoughts and Details* sets out a rigorously laissez-faire position in which the economic role of government is limited and the emphasis is on the importance of an emergent spontaneous order rather than the results of deliberate policy. By contrast, the political writings starting with *Reflections on the Revolution in France* are understood as presenting a case for a traditional aristocratic and paternalistic regime (Stanlis 1991).

There are two common approaches to these 'Problems'. The commonest is to argue that the commitment to 'free market' principles in the *Wealth of Nations* and *Thoughts and Details* is only apparent and that deeper reading shows that both of these works actually reflect the more cooperative and paternalistic vision of society found in *Moral Sentiments* and Burke's later political writings (Coniff 1987). What this means in contemporary terms is that Burke and Smith are cast out of the free market canon, or at least for

many authors are recast as paternalistic conservatives, classical republicans or even moderate social democrats. The rival interpretation, advanced by Bagchi (2014), takes the mirror image approach and argues that the political works in Burke's case are actually still driven by the individualistic and free market approach of the *Thoughts and Details* and that it is the paternalism and critical view of exchange relations that is only apparent.

The second way in which the two 'Problems' are related is that they are in fact both particular instances of a wider question. This is the issue of how to understand both thinkers and many others in the context of debates that were happening in their own time. The main discussions that are relevant here are ones about the nature of civilised society, the sources of wealth and whether commercial societies were compatible in the long run with both social order in the widest sense and good government. The specific question of the best means of promoting prosperity and the responsibility of the statesman for the poor and indigent and was at the heart of much of this discussion. (Another important question was the relation of both of these to population but Burke was not as concerned with that as some of his contemporaries). Gregory Collins' work is thus a contribution to both the specific question of how to understand Burke's economic thought in the light of his political philosophy and concerns (or, to flip it, that of how to make sense of his politics in the light of his expressed political economy) and the wider question of how exactly to locate and categorise the thought of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The book is a massive work of scholarship but also leads on to or opens up other enquiries.

The great value of the book lies in two of its main features. The first is that Collins looks at the form and content of Burke's treatment of what we can broadly call economic questions in the whole of his works and public pronouncements, including many fairly obscure ones. The idea is to tease out whether he had a consistent approach to this and if so, what it was. What this leads to is not the kind of either-or allocation of his thought described above but rather a way of reconciling the two apparently contrasting and conflictual aspects of his thought and to show that they are united by both coming from a more general social and political philosophy and view of human nature (Collins 2020, §1:1-3). This means that Burke does not come out as being clearly in the category of either free market economist or paternalist conservative. Instead, he is a member of a different category, one that was recognisable to his contemporaries but obscured to current observers by the passage of time. That is the second strength of the book and its argument. It is a historical one that avoids the problems of anachronism that beset so many works by political theorists and philosophers and, a fortiori, economists. The problem with both of the approaches described earlier is that they are exercises in applying contemporary categories to thinkers from an earlier period (as opposed to looking at intellectual descents or the similarities and differences between more recent thinkers and older ones). The process is essentially one of saying "given what Burke says here where would we place him in terms of contemporary categories". This is not helpful in understanding his thinking and what he is saying. Even worse it makes Burke, and other thinkers of his time, into prizes in a political tug of war and obscures the genuine insights that people from a previous era may have for our current concerns – if only we take them as they were.

What Collins does is to look at the whole range of Burke's writings and speeches on matters to do with anything economic or to do with political economy, a term that in his time meant the whole arena of public policy and statesmanship concerned with the physical well-being of the public. The materials include public finance, taxation, and debt, trade and commercial policy, the legal system as it concerned things such as property and exchange, money, and specific questions such as colonial policy, poor relief and the regulation of the poor and their work, population, and public improvements as they were called. The materials also include matters not usually thought of as economic, such as war. The materials, then, cover the greater part of what we might call statesmanship. (The main topics not included being public morals, dynastic matters, and religion.) Most of what Burke wrote or said is grist to Collins's mill. Collins pays detailed attention to many of his Parliamentary speeches, most notably those concerned with India policy and the activities of the East India Company and its chief figure Warren Hastings (Collins 2020, §9:1-6). What emerges from all of this is a picture of someone with a sophisticated and consistent political economy, which remained con-

stant in its key points throughout his career. This is also relevant to the recurring question of whether Burke underwent a change in his thought under the impact of the French Revolution, with a move from progressivism as found in his earlier writings and speeches on America, Ireland, and India to a much more conservative and traditionalist one – the clear implication is that in reality there was no change, and the views articulated in things like the *Reflections* or the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* were consistent with his earlier positions and in fact followed from them (Collins 2020, §12:1-6 ).

What though was Burke's political economy or statecraft, in the account given here? Reading the forensic analysis presented here shows that there are five elements. The first, which has been eagerly picked up by several reviewers and focussed on by them to the exclusion of the rest, is that this is what we might call a strongly Smithian or even Hayekian political economy (Collins 2020, §4: 1-9). The emphasis throughout is on the importance of personal choice by economic actors and the ways these are aggregated by social processes to produce an unplanned and unintended outcome, as in Smith. In specific policy terms this means opposition to the kinds of extensive and elaborate controls that were a prominent feature of the Ancien Régime throughout Europe, including Britain. There is support for freer trade and opposition to the special privileges of monopolistic corporations. Burke was clearly not a supporter of the mercantilist policy of the older court Whigs any more than Smith was (Collins 2020, §8:1-8). One very prominent feature is Burke's hostility to the contemporary form of colonialism as shown in his attack on the policy and conduct of the East India Company and his views on the way forward for relations with the American colonies (Collins 2020, §7: 1-4 and §10:1-3). That hostility to colonialism is also a prominent feature of his speeches and writings on Irish affairs, with his criticism of the dependent and exploitative relationship between the two kingdoms and his advocacy of open exchange between the two (Collins 2020, §8:1-8). He is also hostile to slavery and other forms of unfree labour on both moral and economic grounds (Collins 2017). In modern terms there is an advocacy of a spontaneous economic order and a critical view of government commands in this area.

In other words, Burke is clearly on the same page as Smith, an advocate of what we would now call a free-market approach. Collins's book though shows that this is not all there is to say. The point made stands but needs to be qualified in ways that highlight the distinction between the approach to a commercial society of Burke and that of some of his contemporaries and that of later generations. The second element of his political economy, according to this account is that it is institutional. The exchange relations and spontaneous order that he supports is located within an institutional framework of legal rules and rights. The main point of policy and judgment for Burke was not to maximise economic efficiency and output. That was desirable but not if it meant undermining key institutions such as property rights (understood to include traditional entitlements) or long-standing rights and claims. This can be seen in his criticisms of Hastings' actions in India as not only simply and straightforwardly predatory but also as undermining and flouting the traditional rights and expectations of indigenous Indians (Collins 2020, §10:3. See also O'Neill 2009). This also explains something that Collins devotes some time to examining, Burke's treatment of the French Assembly's attack on the properties and endowments of the Church (Collins 2020, §11:4). In pure economic terms this could be justified as leading to a much more efficient (and private) use of resources, with the secularisation of church property a form even of forced privatisation. For Burke though this was a violation of a basic social institution that was foundational for the functioning of society and of the kind of economic relations he favoured. It was also an act of force and based on abstract principle: it has long been noted that it was this action that sparked Burke's alarm and hostility towards the Revolution, at a time when most others were still sanguine about its prospects. It was his perception of what this reform involved that made him see what was happening in France as something subversive and not the kind of improvement and reform of which he approved.

The third element of his thinking is one that makes qualification of his approach being free-market even more necessary. He favoured measures such as the Navigation Acts for example, clearly an anti-free trade measure that was intended to boost British merchant shipping and so, indirectly, naval power. In other words, for Burke economic policy was subordinated to politics (hence 'political economy'). It was the

best course of action to bring about the prosperity and power of a given political community but as such the details were subordinated to the needs of that community, which were specific and particular and influenced by things such as geography, history and geopolitics (Collins 2020, §5:1 - 7). This again meant that for him pure economic efficiency was not the ultimate criterion for the statesman. It also meant advocating a general policy of leaving people to their own devices did not mean downplaying the promotion of the 'general welfare' or the place of policy in human life – the question was what was the best way of promoting the general welfare and for Burke the answer was to leave people to their own devices but with the major caveat that the public interest of the polity as a whole could and should override individual choice where necessary.

The fourth part of Burke's political economy is, though, the one that is central to the book, along with the already mentioned support for a Smithian approach. This is the idea alluded to by the use of 'manners' in the title. Collins convincingly shows that for Burke exchange relations were not an end in themselves and were not conducted in a vacuum (Collins 2020, § 12:3-4 and also §10:1-4). They took place in a social and moral context. That context was a whole range of social norms of behaviour and conduct and a range of ethical rules, sociologically and historically rich rules, to which all kinds of human interactions were naturally and properly subject. This is exactly like Smith's anthropology and psychology of human nature, character and interaction in *Moral Sentiments* – the only real difference is Burke's greater emphasis on history and the historically evolved nature of 'manners', the term used to refer to these social conventions and institutions. This has important and far-reaching implications. It means that exchange relationships do not exist in a pure, asocial state. If people try to behave as though they do or act as though those actions can take place with no reference to the fabric of 'manners' then the results will be deeply destructive, Burke thought. In particular doing this will make exchange relations predatory and violate principles of natural justice as well as inherited social convention. His attacks on Warren Hastings show this very clearly. What this means is that Burke was not an exponent of an abstract idea of market relations or human action of the kind that is found in much modern social theory. It also means that for him exchange relations were an enormously important but still secondary kind of human interaction and, like all human interactions, subject to the rules of manners. Some kinds of exchange and action, while economically justified, were illegitimate on other grounds because of the way they violated the rules of manners.

Burke is therefore definitely not making the kind of cynical and provocative case made by people like Mandeville, according to which trade and commerce are ends in themselves, understood in the way that Machiavelli had presented politics (See Stafford 1997 for the common response). He is also different in his approach to many of his contemporaries, notably in France. There is a clear difference in this respect between his approach (and Smith's) and that of people such as Turgot or Mercier De La Riviere or Quesnay, or, later on, Say (Vardi 2014). The approach of these French authors was much more abstract and rationalistic and dealt with human beings abstracted from the demands and context of manners. We should not think that this is a case of grounded Anglo-Saxons versus ratiocinating Frenchmen – there were plenty of French authors, such as Constant or De Stael who were in Burke's camp and British ones like Bentham who most definitely were not. It is also worth noting here the way in which Burke's political economy is part of a whole model of human psychology and sentiment that he put forward as a young man in his *Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. In that work Burke argued for both the importance of feelings and emotion as compared to abstract intellect and for the importance of inherited and historical sentiments and feelings. There is a clear similarity between that aesthetic theory and his approach to public affairs and commerce (White 1993).

The final element of his thought as set out in the book follows from this. Not all exchange relations are of the same sort or have the same moral content because the nature of the human interactions that embody them are different. That means different kinds of exchange relations have different moral standing and that it is not the case that any and all consensual exchange relations are good. One particular feature of Burke's economic thought, which features prominently in the *Reflections* and his other later works, is his attitude towards purely financial exchange relations and his view of the 'money interest' as he called it. This was at least sceptical but often hostile (Collins 2020, §11:5-6). In the post-1790 works Burke clearly sees the work-

ings of pure finance and the social and political interests associated with it (the money interest) as being responsible in part for the disaster he saw taking place in France. This fitted in with an important part of his political economy, which was his thinking about public debt and the financing of government. For Burke as his speeches on these matters make clear, debt was much to be preferred to the system of liquid loans from financiers that the French monarchy depended on, not least because this was a central factor in the undermining of the entire political and social order there. (For an argument as to why his judgment was completely correct on this, see Root 2018).

For Burke the problem with purely monetary and speculative exchange relations is that they are detached from history and associated with novelty. More fundamentally, they are removed from the context of manners and human relations. He contrasted money relations and transactions, and the kinds of property they gave rise to (essentially tradable fiduciary claims) with other kinds of transactions and property claims, above all the ownership of long-lasting or permanent goods of which land was the preeminent case. A state financed by debt and monetary speculation is inherently unstable as compared to one that is not. A certain amount of secure and reliable debt is actually desirable for him but the massive indebtedness of both France and Britain in his time was not. That is why he favoured economical reform as it was called, meaning the reduction of government spending through such measures as the abolition of sinecures. This all meant that speculative transactions of various kinds, made possible by easy access to money and credit, were not just ill-advised but morally disreputable. All of this is a huge qualification to the first point about his being in general a supporter of markets and voluntary exchange. He was, but in a very qualified way, and in a way that is different in kind to that believed in by many who would like to claim his mantle today.

This all leads to the questions that Collins's work poses and which need further exploration. How should we locate Burke's thought historically and in relation to his contemporaries? As far as the label we should apply to it goes, the conclusion should be that terms like 'liberal' or 'conservative' and even more 'free-market' are anachronistic, and should be avoided. For contemporaries for the greater part of his career there was no problem in the label to assign him, because he clearly expounded the recognised views of a well-known political position, which was a Whig one. Specifically, it was a certain kind of Whig political economy that had moved on from the more classically mercantilist position of Walpole and the Court Whigs to one that incorporated a different set of ideas about the best course of economic policy. This form of Whig thinking and policy had emerged from the circle around the Marquess of Rockingham, of which Burke was a prominent member (O'Gorman 1967). One of the persistent mistakes made by contemporary writers in trying to explain this kind of Whig politics, which Burke exemplified, is that of trying to fit it into the categories of either 'liberal' or 'conservative'. The problem is that those two identities did not really become formed until the 1820s (when both terms were first used as political labels). Emily Jones has persuasively argued that Burke was still seen as a Whig for most of the nineteenth century and was only defined as a conservative in the 1880s (Jones 2015). Both of these later political identities grew out of and derived from Whig thinking which is why trying to apply them retrospectively leads to problems in categorising and understanding not only Burke's thinking but also that of many of his contemporaries, such as both Portland and also Fox and Sheridan.

So, what is the Whig politics that Burke followed and expounded? As well as the economic thinking or political economy that has already been described, it had four other elements. The first was the idea of a balanced constitution or form of government (as supposedly embodied in the British settlement of 1688) in which the practice of government was carried on by a governing class inspired by ideals of public service. Good government rather than small or efficient government was the aim but good government did not mean service to or being guided by an abstract notion of progress or perfection. The second part was the notion of reform or improvement. This meant measures and changes that corrected abuses and removed bards or aided the appearance of good things by removing barriers. Improvement was not the same as progress, because it lacked the teleological quality of the latter. It was also an anti-revolutionary concept because the central feature of improvement is that the thing improved or reformed survives rather than being replaced or transformed (Collins 2017; Slack 2014). The third is the idea of statesmanship, a notion of how

governance should be carried on and the ends at which it should aim that combined the ideals of keeping the ship of state afloat and of improving and repairing it. This is where Burke's political economy comes into play, because an obvious question was what concrete policies the statesman should follow. For Burke (and other Whigs of his time) improvement, signified by things such as greater prosperity and well-being and greater humanity and lenity of manners was brought about mainly by social action and the playing out of free exchange (Collins 2017; Boyd 1999). The fourth aspect was the notion of culture and refinement or civilisation, which is where manners come in (O'Neill 2004). This was a central concept in eighteenth century thought, having been introduced into European thinking towards the very end of the previous century by the Jesuits. What united all of this was the notion of providence and a providential natural order in which things should normally and naturally work out for the best. For believers such as Burke this was still the providential dispensation of the Christian God, while for others (such as Smith, almost certainly) it was derived from the idea of a detached deity or Nature.

Thinking about this and Burke's more explicitly commercial or economic thought should help us to locate him in the debates of his own time and to understand also the legacy he left for later generations. His political economy as set out by Collins, and his wider political and intellectual position give him a definite place in several major debates of his time. One was over the question of commercial society and its desirability. Throughout the eighteenth century there was a continuing debate between advocates of a commercial society and those who held that such a society and the wealth it created would undermine true civilisation and the higher human qualities. These people, who included figures as different in other ways as Montesquieu and Rousseau, argued that the wealth of commercial society created luxury. This meant not just affluence (as we would call it) but a way of living that led to a focus on physical pleasure and gratification and an emphasis on the present at the expense of both the future and the past (Hont 2006; Berg & Eger 2003). Their conclusion was that a lasting and stable society and one in which virtue would flourish would be one that was simple and austere in its lifestyle and tastes and dominated by farming carried on by a class of yeoman freeholders, rather than commerce and trade. Burke clearly belongs to the other side (along with figures such as Hume and Smith), who argued that a commercial society would create greater comfort and prosperity and also lead to a softening of manners and conduct that would make life more peaceful and cultured ('Refined' in the language of the time – there is an irresistible temptation to pronounce the word with a Morningside accent).

However, although Burke clearly favoured a relatively more urbanised and commercial society and thought that part of wise statesmanship was to encourage and allow the growth of commerce, he did not share the view of Mandeville that the morally corruptive effects of commerce were part of the process by which wealth and power were created. For him, because of the emphasis on manners and the way exchange relations and transactions were embedded in a wider set of social relations and codes of conduct, commerce was not an end in itself. It was rather a part of a certain kind of social order, an important but ultimately subordinate part. This is why it is anachronistic to see him as a classic *laissez faire* liberal but also the reason why he does not fit the idea of a paternalistic conservative who believed in a governing class with a responsibility to act directly and powerfully to relieve poverty or promote public welfare by measures such as creating infrastructure. There were many people of that kind in Burke's own time, in the shape of the cameralists, a school of public administration and political economy that was very influential in many Germanic principalities, particularly Prussia and Austria (Tribe 1984; Seppel & Tribe 2017).

Consider Burke's position on another of the contemporary debates, that of how to deal with the challenge of poverty and the impact on the poor of both natural phenomena such as harvest failures and of the rapid changes of the agrarian and artisanal economy well underway in many parts of Europe (but particularly Britain) by the 1770s and later. This was in fact the subject matter of *Thoughts and Details*. The 'scarcity' of the title referred to the dearth of necessities occasioned by harvest problems at the time it was written in 1795. Burke's argument that the government was under no obligation to provide the necessities of life because this was not a public good in the strict sense of the term and that it was something that should be left to private charity, was aimed at the arguments of his one-time colleague Samuel Whitbread (Collins

2020, §2:1-6). The general argument was that ultimately the best way to improve the condition of the poor was through the operation of trade and commerce, with the role of government limited to providing the legal and institutional framework but also, crucially, upholding public morals and manners through an established religion. To return to the point made earlier this is a call for a market-based economy but one where market exchanges take place within a robust social and cultural framework, one that constrains and limits the extent and importance of certain kinds of exchange. At the time there were voices calling for an expanded or reformed role for public poor relief as a part of the institutional landscape, and it was this that Burke was rejecting. Like the Physiocrats across the Channel, he also rejected the idea of controls on prices and market relations where necessities were concerned (Turgot for example had been a major opponent of the long-standing French policy of preventing the movement of grain in times of famine).

This tells us something about the part Burke played in the events of his own lifetime and its immediate aftermath. This was the bifurcation of the historic Whig tradition into two successors, liberal and conservative. This happened in the arena of actual politics, with the split between Burke and his sometime friends and colleagues such as Charles James Fox and the way that he and others like him such as Portland became allies and supporters of Pitt, once their nemesis. At the level of ideas, we can see a process in which the parts of Burke's ideas were taken by contemporary and subsequent writers and developed in different directions, with the two sides each emphasising a different aspect of his united thinking, given it was an expression of the general view of the later eighteenth century Whigs. It is this intellectual bifurcation that led to the belief that there was a contradiction in his thinking or that he had undergone a bouleversement in 1790. The event that led to this bifurcation was of course the Revolution in France. Fox, and those who followed him such as Holland, chose to emphasise the part of Whig thought as expressed earlier by Burke that focussed on improvement and the limitations of government and hostility to monarchical power. This meant that while rejecting the politics of English Jacobins such as Thelwall they supported the idea of the need for radical change in the institutions and governance of Britain and resisted the defensive reactions of Pitt's government to the threat from across the Channel. This way of thinking was taken up and developed by later writers and 'philosophic Whigs', such as Mackintosh and Brougham, and the circle associated with the *Edinburgh Review* such as Jeffrey and Sydney Smith (Jacyna 2014). Others like Portland or Canning accepted the need for a robust response to the revolutionary challenge and chose to emphasise the part of Burke's thought that stressed the importance of maintaining historically evolved institutions and social norms. Both sides agreed on scepticism about abstract reason and hostility to 'enthusiasm' (meaning fanaticism).

Finally, how should we view Burke's political economy and approach to this area of public policy from the standpoint of today? Some of the points of his arguments and analysis, as set out by Gregory Collins, remain as relevant as ever, notably the need to recognise both the need for a state and for that state to be effective, while assigning it a precise but limited role and relying on unplanned exchange and other kinds of social interaction to address and resolve most challenges. On the other side, considering his arguments as presented should lead us to reconsider the way such matters are mostly approached today, in the academy at least. The kind of thinking about public and political economy that we find in Burke's writings and speeches has been replaced by the modern academic discipline of economics. There has certainly been a gain in rigour but something has also been lost. The very idea of 'the economy' as a distinct sphere of human life and experience, that can be studied in isolation, has benefits inasmuch as it can bring greater intellectual clarity but it also leads to a simplified and reified approach that can miss a lot of what is actually going on. Contemporary economists should try to recover the kind of insights that Burke had about the importance of 'manners' and the primacy of politics and other social relations. More specifically, contemporary defenders of limited and constitutional government would do well to rediscover these other parts of Burke's thought or indeed of Whig thinking in general. The idea here would be not to replace or amend economic thinking but to integrate social, cultural, political, and economic thinking in the way that was common in the later eighteenth century and, indeed, for some time thereafter.

We may ask has Burke and the Whig tradition he defended and elaborated, got any representatives today? Are there contemporary figures who can be seen as carrying on that particular flame? One might

point to people such as George Will as an example of this and there are perhaps people in politics or letters who do (Dueck 2020). What is lacking, and needed, is intellectuals who will take up that mantle.

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## Virtue and Utility in Collins' Burke

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Gregory Collins's book, as its title indicates, is concerned with the relationship between Burke's political philosophy and his economic ideas (Collins 2020). It is in fact the first serious monograph dedicated to examining his views on political economy. It deals with its material with authority and insight, building on substantial scholarship. The book includes a rich commentary on *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795); a discussion of Burke's project of Economical Reform; an account of his views on colonisation, American taxation, Irish trade restrictions, and the regulation of the East India Company; and an analysis of his writings on France. The result is an important and original study that adds significantly to our understanding of Burke. The central question raised by Collins concerns the relationship between markets and morals.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand Burke celebrates the role of commerce and on the other extols virtue. But how does he reconcile these two positions?

Collins puts it this way: "How can a political community conserve the strength of culture and religion while securing the right to pursue profit?" (Collins 2020, p. 6). He correctly sees this question as addressing the problem of how utility can be harmonised with morality. There exists a large literature on Burke that views his career as divided uncomfortably between these two commitments. From Alfred Cobban to Judith Shklar, the goal of morality—supported by tradition—is seen as conflicting with the commitment to commercial prosperity in Burke's writings.<sup>2</sup> The relation between morality and tradition raises a subsidiary set of issues. For early modern philosophers generally, morality required us to render justice and achieve beneficence. These twin elements of ethical life were usually distinguished in terms of the enjoyment of rights and the cultivation of goodwill. For many, like Hume, rights were protected by prescription while beneficence was fostered by growth and social stability. Rights and beneficence were therefore seen as guarded by tradition. The question was whether morality, supported by custom, was threatened by the pursuit of advantage that underpinned commercial society.

Collins dramatizes the tension between ethical life and acquisition as an apparent conflict between two of Burke's works: "How, then, could the thinker who wrote the *Reflections*, considered the authoritative Western defense of cultural traditionalism in modernity, also compose a tract called *Thoughts and Details*, in which the same writer provided steadfast support for Enlightenment, market-based principles that were perceived by contemporaries as a threatening force to settled social conventions?" (Collins 2020, p. 3). The goal of Collins's book is to show that there is no incompatibility between these alternatives. Much of the

literature on this period mistakenly describes these polarities in terms of an opposition between enlightenment and traditionalism. For his part, Collins is surely right to see Burke as striving to reconcile transactional conduct with historically grounded duties: the ambition to unite these principles is indeed evident across Burke's corpus. However, the aim of accommodating right and interest is equally obvious in the major works of Montesquieu, Hume, Rousseau, Smith and Kant. Despite an endless stream of commentary to the contrary, the eighteenth century is not usefully seen as a contest between the enlightenment and its opponents.

While Collins's book is rooted in the eighteenth century, he also writes with an eye on the dominant traditions that have shaped the political thought of post-War Europe and the United States. In America in particular, party strife is standardly represented in terms of a contest between liberalism and conservatism. Collins wishes to transcend the liberal-versus-conservative standoff by showing that the ideological commitments advanced by each were accommodated by Burke. He writes that "Conservatives, classical liberals, and libertarians are fond of extolling the benefits of commodification and competitive capitalism, yet Burke's thought discloses an awareness that life is not simply about entering into temporary socioeconomic arrangements, maximizing one's investment, and satisfying one's material desires" (Collins 2020, p. 535). To that extent, as Collins sees it, Burke bridges the divide. But while it is true that Burkean principles offer what look like lessons in ecumenism in the face of dogged modern partisanship, we also need to bear in mind that the history of post-War party combat does not neatly mirror ideological divisions. In fact, there are no compact 'unit ideas' underlying modern political thought, although academic writers struggle to accept the implications of this conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

F. A. Hayek famously invoked Burke as an exemplar of what is commonly described as classical liberalism (Hayek 1960). In this he was building on an Austro-Hungarian interest in Burke that had begun with Carl Menger in the late nineteenth century. Burke, Menger believed, had been peculiarly sensitive to the achievement of social order as an unintended consequence of individual choices (Menger 1883). Much of Hayek's intellectual career is a development of that insight. Yet for Collins Hayek's overarching vision needs to be distinguished from Burke's. For Burke, Collins thinks, unlike for Hayek, markets are not merely compatible with morals; rather, morals are an essential precondition for the operation of market society. In this, Collins argues, Hayek diverges from Burke – just as Burke had allegedly set himself apart from the thought of Scottish enlightenment figures (Collins 2019, pp. 502-3). Competition for Hayek drove civilisation, yet for Burke social progress depended on virtue. How do these causal mechanisms work?

Collins's argument at this point is a development of an account of Burke originally advanced by J. G. A. Pocock (1985). For many eighteenth-century Scottish commentators on political economy, Pocock argued, commerce was the engine of social development and the enabling condition of modern sociability. Yet for Burke commercial society was founded on self-interest. While its capacity to increase wealth and refine manners could not be doubted, both these advances depended on an antecedent regulation of behaviour. "Even commerce, and trade, and manufacture," Burke wrote, "the gods of our oeconomical politicians, are themselves perhaps but creatures" (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 242). These "oeconomical politicians," Pocock supposed, referred to students of political economy like David Hume, Adam Smith and John Millar. For each of them commerce was an agent of improvement. However for Burke, Pocock noted, "commerce, and trade, and manufacture" were the effects of deeper causes on whose ongoing support they depended.

We need to ask now whether Pocock was right to have taken Burke's "economists" to refer to Scottish enlightenment thinkers. Burke's long meditation in the *Reflections* on the culture of modern Europe as a product of a system of manners that rose in the aftermath of the age of barbarism triggered by the fall of the Roman Empire follows on immediately from his outraged observations on the treatment of Marie Antoinette during the March on Versailles on 6 October 1789. The "age of chivalry" was gone, Burke wrote; an era of "oeconomists, and calculators" had succeeded (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 238). One period had succeeded another and, at the same time, one mode of conduct had supplanted its opposite: an attitude of ruthless self-assertion had replaced a spirit of accommodation. This is clearly an historical judgment, but it is underpinned by a set of philosophical assumptions. The philosophical point is that human beings are

capable of both ferocity and respect, and that circumstances determine which disposition prevails. Burke shares this perspective with Hume and Smith, and with commentators influenced by their writings like Robertson, Ferguson and Millar. To this extent, therefore, there was no rift between Burke and the Scots. For key differences, which inevitably exist, we must look elsewhere.

Burke's system of "antient chivalry" had multiple components. It comprised deference, self-restraint and a degree of subterfuge. Each of these implied some kind of moral aptitude. Along with their native fierceness, human beings were capable of deferring to the wishes of others, for example out of admiration. By implication, they were also capable of restraining their own desires and aspirations. Deference and self-restraint did not, however, extinguish self-serving inclinations, although operating together they might encourage us to hide the ongoing presence of self-love. To this extent the more generous sentiments, mixed with self-interest, fostered what I have called subterfuge: the capacity to cover up, and inadvertently diminish, the temptations of self-advancement. We are able, Burke was contending, to mask our passions. We could, in effect, civilize our brutal or "bestial" impulses without ceasing in the process to be animals. This involved refining our natures without completely transforming them. Such refinement spawned culture—the "pleasing illusions" and "decent drapery" of life. Culture appeared in this context as a kind of second nature that both camouflaged our vices and increased our fund of virtue. The "defects" of our "naked shivering nature" were incrementally amended by social artifice (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 239).

The process of refining our passions—not only directly, by holding them self-consciously in check, but also indirectly, by disguising their active presence—was commonly seen in the eighteenth century as the source of "politeness." Human behaviour across time, both in rural and urban settings, regularly banked on such circumspection and polish. It was widely thought, however, that politeness flourished under monarchies. Under the Emperor Trajan, Adam Smith observed, the Roman people enjoyed peace and security of property, giving rise to luxury and, with this, the "Refinement of manners" (Smith, 1985, p. 122). Smith, along with many of his contemporaries, thought, however, that ancient monarchies were established on precarious foundations. By comparison, modern "civilized" monarchies, as Hume described them, enjoyed superior security of tenure, and the art of politeness was freer to develop (Hume 1985 [1742], p. 126).

Hume contrasted modern politeness with ancient rusticity. Social and political conditions had given rise to the difference. "Where power rises upwards from the people to the great, as in all republics... refinements of civility are apt to be little practised," he observed (Hume 1985 [1742], p. 126). This was because, as Machiavelli had shown in the case of Rome, where the orders (*ordini*) were pitted against one another an equilibrium was maintained, curtailing social hierarchy and reducing emulation. The contrast with modern monarchy was striking. Here, social differences were extensive but also graduated: "there is a long train of dependence from the prince to the peasant" (*Ibid.*). The cleavages were not so sharp as to generate open conflict, but they were sufficient to stimulate social aspiration. This fostered an inclination in all members of society to strive to please their superiors. Burke had this process in mind when, in the *Reflections*, he celebrated "that generous loyalty to sex and rank, that dignified submission" which typified French society before the Revolution (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 238). Loyalty and submission characterised relations permeated by what Burke termed a "noble equality"—an equality based on harmonised social differences (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 239).

For Hume, then, reciprocity in modern societies was facilitated by cultural conditions sustained by constitutional arrangements. Those conditions included the habits of politeness fostered by aristocratic manners that prospered in constitutional monarchies. In such a world commerce could readily flourish. Indeed, from a historical perspective, trade and manufactures, as Burke made the point, grew out of this environment in which property was secure and luxury increased. It was only a short step to the conclusion that accommodation in the midst of hierarchy had its origins in the practice of fealty. Fealty was one facet of chivalry. The others were piety and gallantry—or, as Millar put it, "the love of God and the ladies" (Millar 2006 [1771], p. 138). Millar further noted that these principles continued to influence "the taste and sentiments even of the present age" (Millar 2006 [1771], p. 139).

Hume likewise contrasted modern gallantry with the oppressiveness of relations between the genders in earlier civilisations. In promoting “respect” and “complaisance,” gallantry bolstered politeness. True to Burke, Collins observes that “Public opulence derived not simply from the wheel of exchange but from a code of manners” (Collins 2019, p. 487). My point is that this applies equally to Hume, Smith and Millar. Whoever the “oeconomical politicians” snubbed by Burke in the *Reflections* were, they were not the Scottish political economists from whose arguments he was in fact borrowing. For all of these writers, commercial manners over the course of the history of modern Europe had been grafted onto an older collection of civilities rooted in fealty and gallantry. As Hume argued, although we are naturally “proud” and “selfish” in temperament, and “apt to assume the preference above others,” the right culture can dispose us to become more yielding (Hume 1985 [1742], p. 132). Civilised monarchies founded on graduated ranks engendered societies in which acquiescence became habitual.

Adam Smith argued that a purely functional society was in principle possible: “Society may subsist among different men, as among different merchants, from a sense of its utility, without any mutual love or affection” (Smith 1982 [1759], p. 86). Under such conditions, property would be respected, contracts would be observed, and the principles of basic (commutative) justice would generally be observed. But the social graces would disappear, and benefaction would not be practiced. Social relations would be held together “by a mercenary exchange of good offices” (Ibid.). Mercenary interaction of the kind was not inspiring, even if it was based on a peculiarly human tendency—the “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” (Smith 1982, pp. 570-71). Animals did not bargain, Smith astutely commented, though the activity came naturally to humans. But while the inclination to “truck” was sufficient for rudimentary cooperation, the absence of beneficence, and consequently of gratitude, would render social relations both atrophied and precarious.

Social manners “beautify and soften” human interaction; in their absence reciprocity is permanently imperilled (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 239). Along with Burke, Smith believed that beneficence was the “ornament that embellishes” social relations. However, at the same time, he also thought that mores could save society from descending into mutual recrimination. Bargaining was best secured against a background of trust. Just as Burke had drawn attention to the emotions of pity and fear awakened by the sight of greatness brought low in the figure of Marie Antionette (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 243), so Smith reflected on the spectacle of a “fall from greatness” as shocking to the human mind (Smith 1982 [1759], p. 56). Where manners founded on the esteem of social preeminence were replaced by empty forms of equality suffused with bitterness and rancor, opportunity was ampler for envy, malice and resentment.

None of this is to argue that the reconciliation of virtue and utility in Burke’s thought involved a simple reprise of Scottish enlightenment ideas. The differences between them were manifold, as one might expect.<sup>4</sup> For one thing, Burke believed that Christianity facilitated morals while Hume was a persistent critic of piety and other faith-based virtues. At the same time, it is important to recognise that Burke’s position did not mean that he disavowed enlightenment in the service of religious conviction. On the contrary, he shared with Montesquieu, Rousseau and Kant a commitment to faith as a vehicle of improvement. But he also shared with Hume, Smith and Millar the insight that market relations were supported by forms of socialisation that reconciled us to disparities in fortune. None of these figures doubted that utility motivated productivity; but, equally, they all agreed that what Hegel would term the “system of needs” (Hegel 1991 [1821], §190) would have to be buttressed by the social virtues if capitalism was to survive. For economic exchange to function at any level of complexity, self-interest would have to be, in Burke’s words, “subdued by manners” (Burke 2001 [1790], p. 239).

## NOTES

- 1 For essays on this theme in the history of political thought see Kapossy et al. eds. 2018.
- 2 Cobban 1962; Shklar 1969.
- 3 For “unit ideas” in intellectual history see the first chapter in Lovejoy 1936. For a critique see Skinner 1969. For the persistence of the notion of unit concepts in attempts to understand political ideologies see Bourke 2018.
- 4 On Burke’s reaction to the French Revolution compared to the Scots see Plassart 2015, Chapter 1.

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## Response to symposiasts

GREGORY M. COLLINS

I thank Leslie Marsh for the gracious invitation to participate in this symposium, Daniel Klein for serving as editor and soliciting its contributions, and the contributors for their thoughtful and generous responses to *Commerce and Manners*. I am grateful for their praise and their well-taken criticisms, from which I learned much. More important, I am indebted to their scholarship, and to that of all other scholars on Burke and the early modern period. A distinguished British philosopher-statesman once remarked that society is a sacred partnership between past, present and future generations. The discovery and transmission of knowledge is much the same way. The following is my response to the contributors.

### RICHARD WHATMORE

Richard Whatmore asks what my ultimate intentions were as the author. My first intention was expository: to draw out Burke's theoretical and historical conceptions of political economy. Its second was to examine whether his economic thought<sup>1</sup> can be used as an intellectual resource today in debates about the link between markets and morals. My intended audience included Burke scholars, students of the early modern period, and a general public.

Whatmore characterizes this blend of descriptive commentary and normative application as a "tension." In my best judgment, however, it remains faithful to Burke's own approach to the study of public affairs, in which history was used both as a source of interest in its own right and as a preceptor—and one that could be misapplied at that (WS 8: 189)<sup>2</sup>—for the contemporary debates and controversies he confronted in his political life.

This approach, I believe, also remains loyal to the discipline of political theory (my principal discipline), which pursues the study of political thought not as an object of antiquarian curiosity but as a reservoir of wisdom that yields enduring insights into human nature and society. Accordingly, my guiding methodology for the book was inspired by Burke's own flair for connecting the mundane to the theoretical and by his broader epistemic conception of history and custom: begin at the common sentiments and practices of the people and the times by painting the necessary historical context—taking into account contemporary idioms, institutions, and ideological debates—and then from this foundation carefully distill the guiding principles of Burke's economic thought.

Whatmore asks about my own "tribal membership." If he is hinting at whether my approach adheres to the Cambridge school of interpretation (as suggested by his ges-

ture toward Quentin Skinner) or to another school, one may detect in my work a trace of Skinnerite and Pocockian methodology, mixed with a dose of textualism and Aristotelian conceptions of the ascension from *doxa* to *episteme*. It also strives to meet the responsibilities of a study of political theory, which requires the author not only to explain a thinker's insights but also to draw out their application for contemporary affairs. Beyond any specific school of interpretation, however, it is worth reiterating my belief that this historical and textualist synthesis attempted to match Burke's own approach to the study of politics and society.

Whatmore asks for my major reinterpreting claim about Burke. This can be answered in a number of ways. First, although scholars have touched upon Burke's political economy in various fashions, Burke scholarship has paid relatively light attention to this topic compared to its heavy focus on his commentary on the French Revolution, America's War of Independence, aesthetics, British India, and political parties and representation. Such focus, while appropriate, understates his sustained engagement with public policy throughout his political life. Burke therefore was not simply a thinker in action, or a politician on public display, but a policy wonk who carefully connected seemingly mundane debates about trade, taxation, and revenue to broader questions of morality, religion, and empire. Similarly, he fused the quotidian nature of market activity with philosophical ruminations about the role of commerce and economic contracts in his diagnosis of empire and civilization. Burke hence communicated his thoughts on commercial and economical reform not only in public forums but in private study, where he conducted rigorous research on policy and strengthened his command of the nexus between commerce and politics in Great Britain and throughout the British Empire.

This is why *Commerce and Manners* strives to connect Burke's appreciation for the wisdom of historical practice with his use of empirical information in his analysis of commercial and fiscal policy. Although not as moving as his campaign against the French Revolution or his speeches on the American colonies, I do hope readers, after finishing the book, gained a deeper comprehension of Burke's penchant for employing data to augment his mode of reasoning. I thus made a conscious effort to include facts and figures on imports and exports, enclosure bills, and other related statistical information in the book. Burke himself consulted such data when assessing the merits of policy, which illustrated both his thirst for information and his underlying epistemic assumptions about the virtues (and limits) of verifiable experience in understanding public affairs. In short, while Burke harbors a well-earned reputation as a philosopher-statesman who glittered his speeches and writings with literary, biblical, and philosophical references, we should also be aware that he summoned an impressive level of empirical detail in his arguments relating to political economy that enhanced the quality of his political and economic thought.

I believe that the book's attempt to survey Burke's use of data on political economy is one of the imaginative features of the book. Allow me to identify some of other aspects of *Commerce and Manners* that I think are novel, which will further help to answer Whatmore's question about reinterpretation: its mining of Burke's thoughts on political economy prior to his entry into public life, as exemplified by his remarks on trade and property as a member of Trinity College's debating club; its examination of Burke's defense of middlemen trading activities in the grain economy; its analysis of Burke's insights into the connection between revenue and the state; its elaboration of Burke's reflections on political economy in *Account of the European Settlements in America* and *Observations on a Late State of the Nation*; and its investigation into previously unpublished manuscripts of Burke's comments on the corn bounty and enclosure. *Commerce and Manners* also provides, as far as I know, what are the most extended discussions to date of Burke's political economy of the French Revolution, British India, the Navigation Acts, and the grain trade, as well as his multiple fights in Parliament against prohibitions on forestalling, regrating, and engrossing. Furthermore, the book's itemized chart of the litany of constitutional alterations of Burke's economical reform plan, I hope, will be instructive to those readers particularly interested in the labyrinths of eighteenth-century debates over public administration and public finance (Collins 2020, pp. 179-81).

All of this is to affirm my prior point about reinterpretation: while political economy (or any other single subject) did not wholly consume Burke's energies, it remained a powerful object of inquiry through-

out his entire political life—replete with both grand questions of commerce and prosperity and seemingly mundane concerns about revenue, the corn bounty, and enclosure—that conveyed his knack for integrating the demands of statesmanship and theoretical reflection on public affairs with empirical policy analysis. One cannot appreciate Burke's approach to statecraft and his political thought, subjects that have garnered much attention in Burke scholarship, without understanding his proclivity for weaving them together with his attention to more practical questions regarding trade, taxation, and revenue.

In addition, one may consider *Commerce and Manners* a deepened synthesis of various strands of Burke scholarship: Francis Canavan, through the lens of political thought, laid stress in *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke* on Burke's embrace of landed property (Canavan 1995); Frank Petrella, Jr., through the lens of economics, focused his doctoral dissertation at Notre Dame on the mechanics of Burke's economic thought in the context of classical economics (Petrella, Jr. 1961); and Winch, through the lens of intellectual history, located Burke's political economy in *Riches and Poverty* in wider early modern debates about the science of the legislator in managing commercial affairs (Winch 1996). My book attempts to broaden these manifold dimensions of his thought in a way that sharpens the connections between his remarks on supply and demand, the competitive price system, and property rights, on the one hand, and his political philosophy, religious convictions, conception of statecraft, and social and imperial thought, on the other. We should also mention that many histories of economic thought tend to give short shrift to Burke.<sup>3</sup> I hope my book helps to fill this gap.

Whatmore provides shrewd commentary on the intellectual differences between Burke and Adam Smith (and David Hume), all of which I agree with. Two primary examples include Burke's allegiance to Christianity and theism and his subsequent attempt to ground his political economy in a religious foundation; and Burke's praise of primogeniture as a necessary instrument for civil stability throughout generations. One may also add, in the context of political economy: Burke's more vigorous attempt to retain the charter of Britain's East India Company; his endorsement of the corn bounty; Burke's greater suspicions of engaging in trade with France; his stronger defense of the older system of the Navigation Acts, and of the imperial project in general; and the subtle tensions between Burke and Smith on the pace of policy reform (Collins (2020, pp. 141-43). Finally, while both Burke and Smith were aware of the rationalist pretensions of their age, Smith, I suggest, displayed a slightly more rationalist touch than Burke.

Such differences, of course, should not cloud the many similarities the two thinkers held as well, as discussed in *Commerce and Manners*. So was in fact Smith a Burkean or Burke a Smithian? I will not lose sleep if one wishes to defend one or both of these arguments, but my imperfect answer is neither: while they both shared affinities for the diffusion of power, market liberty, and the importance of morals in civil society, they harbored their own approaches to the study of human affairs that, in the halls of the academy, warrant drawing out important distinctions.<sup>4</sup>

I am surprised Whatmore writes that I “overplay” the linkage between commerce and peace. If anything, I sought to show in my book that *doux commerce* theory stretched the patience of Burke as an explanation for the development of civilization and for irenic relations between nations. On this matter, which I shall return to later, I find J.G.A. Pocock's thesis about Burke's challenge to the conventional causal historiography of Enlightenment civility—commercial society was the product of, rather than a departure from, the social traditions rooted in Europe's pre-commercial past—largely convincing.

Pocock's argument focuses on the general progression of civilization. Yet I also attempt to demonstrate in *Commerce and Manners* that Burke hesitated to fully embrace the *doux commerce* theory in the foreign arena as well. Burke did not systematically outline his thoughts on this matter, so I endeavored to tease out his reasoning by piecing together his assorted thoughts and public stances on the subject. My verdict was that trade, in his view, was more likely to defuse tensions between the British government and British colonies, including Ireland, the American colonies, and the West Indian dependencies, because these possessions already shared overriding values, principles, and security interests interwoven under Britain's imperial umbrella.

According to Burke, however, the link between commerce and peace was highly suspect when applied to avowed enemies in the international arena. The most conspicuous case in this context was the rivalry between Britain and France, the commercial implications of which Burke was quite aware: he believed that the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, if England had assented to its free trade provisions with France, would have been “ruinous” to Britain because of the underdeveloped condition of its trade at the time of the proposed pact (WS 4: 237n1).

Burke’s unease over France’s economic intentions was further exhibited by his opposition to the Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786, which would have spurred the flow of commercial intercourse between the nations. Burke believed that France—which was neither united under the same sovereign as England, nor shared a common tongue, religion, or security interests—was orchestrating the treaty to extend its imperial influence across the globe<sup>5</sup> to the long-term detriment of Britain, reflecting traditional Whig suspicions of trade with the Catholic kingdom. As Burke indicated in his speech on the treaty, the encouragement of commercial relations to promote peace would be ineffectual if the two parties did not hold overlapping cultural and social preconditions and national security objectives.

This reasoning bears a telling resemblance to his belief in the *Reflections* that the spread of exchange relations relied on pre-commercial foundations that were not established by barter. As Burke wrote in *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, “Nothing is so strong a tie of amity between nation and nation as correspondence in laws, customs, manners, and habits of life” (WS 9: 247). Trade could certainly be included in this formulation, but it was not a necessary condition. Trust, sympathy, and cultural affinity were. Similar reasoning can be found in Burke’s speech supporting the Traitorous Correspondence Bill of 1793, which was designed to limit economic transactions between England and France. He argued in his speech that England’s commercial interests should remain subordinate to wider moral and security considerations.

With specific regard to Donald Winch and István Hont, Whatmore writes that they “emphasised the crisis-ridden nature of Burke’s world and the difficulty of finding solutions.” *Commerce and Manners* does not repudiate this approach—in fact, I would hope that my book’s attention to the great complexities of statecraft in the eighteenth century more or less affirms it—but what drove my narrative was an attempt to unearth Burke’s *argument* about the connection between markets and morals, of which the surrounding time period served as a useful, though not conclusive, guide. After gathering sufficient knowledge about the intellectual substance and contemporary political circumstances of Burke’s writings and speeches on political economy, the political theorist ultimately has to make a judgment about such information. I hope my book rendered this judgment about Burke’s treatment of the role of exchange relations and public finance in the wider social order in a judicious and intelligible manner.

Although I have cited Winch and Hont on numerous occasions, and am certainly indebted to them, I will heed Whatmore’s counsel and continue to engage them in my future scholarship. Perhaps this slight difference in methodology between *Commerce and Manners* and Winch and Hont (and Whatmore) stems from our different disciplinary backgrounds: mine is political theory and political philosophy, not intellectual history. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages when drafting a manuscript. But, once again, I do hope that my extended discussions of the historical context of Burke’s political economy (more so than many works of political theory), as detailed at the beginning of most chapters, and my mining of unpublished archival material, does justice to the age in which Burke lived and establishes credibility in the community of intellectual historians. To answer Whatmore’s question: yes, I hope that the book can be “read in the tradition of recent work by intellectual historians, scholars of political thought and political economy who have reinterpreted what was happening in the final decades of the eighteenth century.” Yet I also hope it can be read in the tradition of political theorists and philosophers studying the normative connections between markets and morals.

I am puzzled by Whatmore’s comments that my picture of the eighteenth century was “less bleak” than Burke’s and that Burke “always had an answer.” To Whatmore’s point, the string of wars throughout the eighteenth century, at a time of unprecedented commercial expansion, does cast into doubt the unassailability of the *doux commerce* thesis in the early modern period, an implication to which Burke was quite

sensitive. In addition, I criticize Burke for communicating a harmonious image in *Thoughts and Details* between the farmer and laborer that understated the tensions in England's agricultural economy in the latter half of the eighteenth century (Collins 2020, pp. 122-23). I also question in my conclusion whether Burke's project of integrating modern commerce with the pre-commercial pillars of the nobility and religion was sustainable in light of the unavoidably disruptive effects of commercial society on settled social order. I would even hesitate to frame the matter as Burke having an "answer" or one trying to "fin[d] solutions"—Iain Hampsher-Monk uses the word "solutions" as well—since the connotations of such language defy the chief premise of Burke's approach to policy and of his broader political philosophy: social ills are not mathematical problem sets that require solutions, but rather natural constituents of the human condition that call for reform and improvement. Better or worse, not true or false, were Burke's touchstones in the formation of commercial policy, and of all policy.

### IAIN HAMPSHER-MONK

Both Whatmore and Hampsher-Monk draw attention to my reference to Hayek in understanding Burke's conception of political economy. Allow me, then, to briefly sum up my interpretation of the Burke-Hayek relationship, which I discuss in *Commerce and Manners* but outline in greater detail in a forthcoming article (Collins forthcoming). Burke and Hayek can be located in the antirationalist tradition for defending the complexity and variety of civic life from the rationalist certitudes of planners and projectors. They also endorsed market liberty and the competitive price system. Yet the thinkers held important differences, including Burke's deeper religious convictions and his commitment to fixed moral truths. More important for our purposes, Burke displayed less confidence than Hayek in the belief that the competitive price system, voluntary contracts, and conventions that could shift based on the protean preferences of individuals could sustain social order and social prosperity in the long term.

Hampsher-Monk writes that the result of integrating Hayek into my analysis is to "present the independence of markets from government as the central 'doctrine' of debate within political economy." If this is the effect that impresses upon the reader, then I take full responsibility. Yet I tried to lay consistent emphasis throughout the book on the notion that Burke confronted an array of complex matters intersecting with commerce—spanning the nobility, religion, custom, law, imperial politics, cultural variety, and international relations—of which the market was a consideration, but not the only consideration, in the practice of statecraft.

It follows that late modernity's propensity to read a "government-versus-the-market" binary (and even the "free trade-versus-mercantilism" binary) into the early modern period oversimplifies such interdependent concerns in Burke's age. In fact, I increasingly resisted this impulse as I deepened my engagement in researching and writing the book. For I could not have written it better myself than Hampsher-Monk: "But for Burke and his generation, Political Economy was a much wider complex of issues centered on the capacity of Britain's moderate, trading monarchy to survive in the struggle to prevent any European State from establishing 'universal empire'. In this contest political and economic questions were hardly yet disentangled."

Hampsher-Monk questions whether *Thoughts and Details* can be interpreted as the "epitome" of Burke's economic thought on the market, given that it was an *ad hoc* letter delivered to government officials at a time of crisis in England's agricultural economy. That it was a quickly written tract is quite true. It is plausible, if not probable, that Burke would have revised the final composition of the letter, which his executors produced by combining his memorandum to Henry Dundas and William Pitt and fragments of a letter Burke had drafted for Arthur Young. And, as I write in the introduction of *Commerce and Manners*, "no greater mistake can be made than to assume" that *Thoughts and Details* "captures the range and depth" of his political economy (Collins 2020, p. 4). The letter is inadequate, if read in isolation from his other writings and speeches, to grasping his conception of markets in their broadest dimensions.

Yet *Thoughts and Details* is the best summation of Burke's perspective on the agricultural economy when taking into account his many direct experiences with, pronouncements on, and legislative activities relating to the subject throughout his political life, such as: his decades-long farming activities and exchange of agricultural knowledge with contemporaries (Collins 2020, pp. 23-25, 31); his efforts on a House committee soon after he entered Parliament criticizing laws banning forestalling, regrating, and engrossing (Collins 2020, p. 75); his successful attempt to repeal the statutes proscribing these activities in 1772 (Collins 2020, pp. 70-72); his resistance to reviving them in 1787 (Collins 2020, pp. 72-76); his opposition to the Butcher's Meat Bill in 1776, which imposed additional regulations on the livestock market (Collins 2020, p. 138); his scattered comments in Parliament on corn policy and enclosure throughout his political life (Collins 2020, pp. 78-92); and his views on agricultural markets following his drafting of *Thoughts and Details*, both in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* and in his communication with Arthur Young (Collins 2020, pp. 70-71, 115, 513-15).

We must also bear in mind that, although that England in the early-to-mid-1790s experienced a rash of socially unsettling phenomena, such as poor harvests, population growth, and war, the “very specific political problem” Hampsher-Monk identifies during this time actually emerged in various forms throughout Burke's life, spanning back to his first years in Parliament. In other words, the complexities of the grain trade he reckoned with in *Thoughts and Details*—scarcity, prices, contracts, forestalling, wages, and so on—had stirred his mind for decades prior to his writing of the letter, as illustrated by the examples above.

It was therefore my judgment that *Thoughts and Details*, even with its imperfections and improvised glow, provided the clearest explication of Burke's most cherished convictions on supply and demand laws and the competitive price system with specific regard to the internal grain trade. *Ninth Report of Select Committee* also reached similar conclusions about the virtues of market liberty (regarding local Indian markets in this case)—and this was not an extempore letter but an official report written primarily by Burke, intended for public consumption, that reflected diligent research and an element of detachment from the heated tribunal of everyday politics (Collins 2020, pp. 358-59).

Hampsher-Monk attempts to historicize Burke's comments on the “market” in *Thoughts and Details*. I agree with much of Hampsher-Monk's rich commentary on the agricultural economy that Burke addresses in the letter. He writes, “If we did not live (as Burke did not) in a world where every day public reference is made to ‘the market’ as a universal abstraction, it might be more natural to read Burke's remarks as comments on the observable facts of the matter in the case of actual empirical agricultural markets.” Hampsher-Monk then writes in a footnote that he is “at a loss to understand why our author sets up Hayek as a standard and insists that Burke subscribes to a universal doctrine.”

First, I do not write that Burke held a “universal doctrine” in favor of free markets. In fact, I push back against the temptation to read *Thoughts and Details* through a rigid *laissez faire* framework. It is worth underlining my belief, which I have also conveyed in multiple public seminars on *Commerce and Manners* as well as in the text, that attempts to read libertarianism into advocates of market economies in the early modern period simplifies these thinkers' capacious outlook on the many considerations of civic life that defy modern “state-versus-the individual” frameworks. Of course, if there were a text in Burke's corpus that could plausibly be interpreted through a state-versus-the-individual framework—a framework that, like Hampsher-Monk, I find anachronistic—it would in fact be *Thoughts and Details*, in which the central object of inquiry concerned whether public officials should further intervene in local agricultural markets.

Second, when drafting the manuscript, I greatly wrestled with the very question of whether to use the phrase “free trade” or “a free trade” in the book. (Such is the tormented life of scholars.) The first was not commonly used in Burke's time and connotes a heightened level of abstraction—unlike the second phrase, it is not modified by the indefinite article “a”—that Hampsher-Monk appropriately believes fails to capture the empirical texture of Burke's, and early modern contemporaries', thoughts on markets in the eighteenth century.

Third, perhaps Hampsher-Monk's comments on reading Burke's economic thought through an abstract lens are also referring to the conclusion of *Commerce and Manners*, in which I sum up the guiding

principles of his political economy. That was one of intentions of the book. Throughout my research on the subject, I became progressively conscious of these underlying themes of his economic thought that he applied in circumstances ranging from the American colonies to the British West Indian colonies to British India to England's agricultural economy. I am certainly aware that some Burke scholars hesitate to affix such principles to his thought. The degree of consistency in Burke's reflections on political economy led me to arrive at a different conclusion.

In general, on the matter of invoking "principle" when describing Burke's thought, I made a good-faith judgment when writing *Commerce and Manners* that this word aligned with Burke's own understanding of his thought. He famously wrote that "[c]ircumstances...give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing colour, and discriminating effect" (WS 8: 58). But we are also reminded of his less famous remarks on principle, which he wrote in 1792 in his draft remarks on the Unitarians' petition for relief. First asserting that he never governed by "*abstractions and universals*," he continued:

I do not put *abstract Ideas* *wholly* out of *any* question, because I well know, that under that name, I should dismiss *Principles*—and that without the guide and light of sound well understood *principles*, all reasonings in *politics*, as in every thing else, would be only a confused jumble of particular *facts*, and *details*, without the means of drawing out any sort of theoretical or practical conclusion (WS 4: 489).

Burke then explains how the "Statesman" has a "Number of Circumstances to combine with those general Ideas" (WS 4: 489). Such remarks embody what I attempted to do in *Commerce and Manners*, consistent with my comprehension of his conception of principle: paint the facts and details necessary for grasping the political context behind Burke's thoughts on commerce, taxation, and revenue, and then draw out the underlying economic principles in his writings and speeches that informed his political theory and statesmanship.

Fourth, and on a similar note, Burke in *Thoughts and Details*, as was characteristic of his political theory in general, blended empirical observation with deeper philosophical insight into human affairs. This is why he alluded in the letter to his own experiences in the agricultural market and offered more general observations on markets, including his most abstract comment in the letter—that "the laws of commerce" were the "laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God..." (WS 9: 137). Much as a faithful rendering of *Thoughts and Details* should not allow these comments to overshadow Burke's attention to empirical observation, one should not historicize the market without recognizing these remarks—brief, yet telling—that include but transcend recourse to experience. Burke himself did not separate such concepts. For even Hampsher-Monk concedes Burke would invoke the market and trade as concepts removed from the heartbeat of particular marketplaces. We should acknowledge both of these articulations of political economy from Burke—their empirical and conceptual dimensions—if for no other reason than because Burke himself did.

Fifth, on the matter of introducing Hayek, I did not incorporate him in the text to set him up as a "standard" for Burke but to probe their intriguing intellectual relationship. It would be quite a curious decision not to include Hayek in a study of Burke's economic thought, since Hayek was heavily influenced by him. Beyond their shared distrust of rationalism in coordinating the diffusion of goods and services, Hayek famously labeled himself an "Old Whig" in the tradition of Burke (Hayek 2011, p. 531); he called Burke "the great seer" (Hayek 1983, p. 22), as Lauren Hall notes; Hayek frequently cited Burke, including his remarks in *Thoughts and Details*<sup>6</sup>; and many scholars have discerned the compatibility of their respective thought.<sup>7</sup> That Hayek was one of the most prominent economists in the twentieth century, and that he located himself in the same tradition as Burke, cries out for elaboration in a book on Burke's political economy.<sup>8</sup> We should also mention that Carl Menger, the founder of the Austrian school of economics, the primary intellectual tradition of Hayek, was influenced by Burke as well (Menger 2009, pp. 173-77, 180-81). Burke, I contend,

was closer to the Austrian school than the classical school of economics because of the former's sharper misgivings about rationalism and the quantification of human behavior.

But Hampsher-Monk hints at a crucial question: should Burke and Hayek in fact be located in the same intellectual tradition? He highlights a possible tension in the foundations of Burke's and Hayek's economic epistemology and ontology that suggests no. According to Hampsher-Monk, while Burke's thought does acknowledge the existence of economic knowledge—he just holds that it would be impractical for public officials to comprehend and apply it—Hayek denies the existence of economic knowledge absent the market price mechanism. It would therefore be "*logically* impossible," in Hampsher-Monk's words, for government to acquire the type of knowledge Hayek believed was necessary to facilitate efficient economic transactions. Knowledge for Hayek was only generated "from freely contracting individuals."

Not only do I agree with much of Hampsher-Monk's thought-provoking analysis here, but he brings to mind one of Burke's chief arguments in the *Reflections* relating to political economy: knowledge, insofar as it was part of Burke's understanding of the disclosure of wisdom throughout the growth of civilization, was not something that could merely be reduced to utility, calculation, and measurement. I move toward Hampsher-Monk's conclusions in my comments on the Burke-Hayek relationship in Chapter 12 of *Commerce and Manners*, and I more fully elaborate on the matter in my recent article on the thinkers.<sup>9</sup> To return back to my interpretation of Burke and Hayek, I argue that Burke held that civil society required sturdier sources of authority and morality that did not depend on the price mechanism, market arrangements, voluntary contracts, personal preference, and even the rule of law. Similarly, Burke's defense of monasteries, his belief that some property should be protected from market competition, and his implicit rebuke of John Locke's labor theory of property and the *terra nullius* doctrine (Marshall 2019, pp. 90-91), among various examples, all imply a recognition of economic value, if we may use the term, that was not simply the product of barter. Framed differently, value for Burke not only derived from a voluntary contract between consenting individuals but from intrinsic goodness itself. Combined with his firm theism and embrace of the fixed moral law, Burke, even given his antirationalist inclinations, harbored a more robust conception of knowledge than Hayek's heavy epistemological skepticism.

Yet we should be fair to Hayek and note his acknowledgment in the *Constitution of Liberty* of the pivotal responsibility of the wealthy classes to provide financial succor for ends that competitive markets struggle to attain, such as cultural and artistic initiatives. He writes, "It is more in the support of aims which the mechanism of the market cannot adequately take care of than in preserving that market that the man of independent means has his indispensable role to play in any civilized society" (Hayek 2011, p. 190). This question of value, admittedly, is a source of tension in Hayek's own writings. With regard to his final comments about the inefficacy of the modern economics discipline, however, Hampsher-Monk would struggle to find two thinkers in the history of economic thought who would embrace his suspicion of modern "economics," methodologically segregated from social and moral concerns, with as much enthusiasm as Burke and Hayek.

EMILY JONES

On the matter of the influence of *Thoughts and Details* and Burke's economic thought, Emily Jones expertly traces the writing's afterlife. We may add a number of addenda to her rigorous survey. In his 1920 book *Christian Socialism*, Charles E. Raven characterized Burke's "benign and wise disposer" comment in *Thoughts and Details*, in which Burke signals his conception of an Invisible-Hand type force connecting enlightened self-interest to the general welfare, as a "sinister sentence" (Raven 2006, p. 34). Beyond *Thoughts and Details*, Burke's economic analysis of Britain's East India Company, as communicated most powerfully in his parliamentary speeches and *Ninth Report of Select Committee*, informed later commentaries on British India (Collins 2020, p. 398n143). Romesh Chunder Dutt went so far as to write, regarding Burke's elucidation of the wealth drain thesis in *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, that "it is doubtful if even that great ora-

tor ever spoke anything more forcible, more eloquent, and more true, within the whole course of his brilliant parliamentary career" (Dutt 1902, p. 49).

In addition, prominent interpretations of the paper money policy of the French Revolution, according to Rebecca L. Spang, "bear an unacknowledged debt" to Burke's criticisms of the French assembly's profligate issuance of *assignats* (Spang 2015, p. 9). And we are reminded of the varying degrees of influence of Burke on Menger and Hayek, and on John Maynard Keynes as well (consult Helburn 1991, pp. 30-54). One additional avenue for further research on this subject is whether Burke's thoughts on free trade or protectionism were used during the Corn Law debates in the 1840s.

Beyond whether Burke was a Smithian or vice versa, Jones raises a crucial issue: whether Burke should be seen as an "advocate" of Smith's economic thought. I question this causal arrow (Collins 2020, pp. 318-22). Burke articulated his views on agricultural markets, laudable avarice, the counterproductive effects of prohibitions on the grain-trading activities of middlemen, the virtues of a limited number of foreign trade regulations, the nefarious influence of select merchants in shaping commercial policy, and the illusory riches of metals, among various ideas they held in common, years before he first met Smith and the publication of the *Wealth of Nations*.

For example, as one of the leading architects of the Free Port Act of 1766, legislation that created six new trade ports in the British West Indies, Burke helped initiate discussions with a wide array of merchants to glean their opinions on commercial policy (Collins 2020, pp. 240-41). In the *Wealth of Nations* Smith would characterize the commercial relations between Britain's West Indian and American colonies, stimulated in part by the Act, as the "most perfect freedom of trade" (Smith 1981, IV.vii.b.39). Burke certainly read and praised Smith's text, which was a far more searching investigation into political economy than anything Burke ever produced, and most likely learned a good amount from it. Burke also may have had a modest amount of influence on particular passages in the *Wealth of Nations* on Pownall's Act of 1773, as documented by Jacob Viner and Francis Horner (Collins 2020, pp. 141-42). And Burke's parliamentary activities addressed a number of matters relating to political economy that Smith discusses in the text, including those relating to the corn trade, Anglo-American imperial affairs, Anglo-French economic intercourse, and the East India Company, as well as the Free Port Act and Pownall's Act.

Furthermore, we should remain mindful of the tensions between the Smith's and Burke's economic thought regarding topics such as Britain's imperial project, the corn bounty, the Navigation Acts, the East India Company charter, primogeniture, and Anglo-French trade. Many of their positions on these subjects do not necessarily signify a difference in principle (primogeniture being one prime exception), but they do not seamlessly fit with one another, which is another reason to be cautious about reducing Burke to Smith's economic thought, or vice versa.

## ANNA PLASSART

Anna Plassart identifies an additional strand of Burke's political economy that has retained some measure of influence in scholars' examination of the early modern period: his conceptions of "the poor," including the "labouring poor," and poverty. Plassart skillfully locates these conceptions in wider eighteenth-century disputes over the meaning of poverty. She demonstrates that Burke's thoughts on this topic in *Thoughts and Details* did not occur *de novo* but reflected a long-running debate in England over whether a distinction could be drawn between the deserving and undeserving poor.<sup>10</sup> The prevalence of the phrase "labouring poor" in this decades-long debate calls into question Emma Rothschild's bold claim that *Thoughts and Details* came close in particular sections to being an "open attack" on Smith, and in particular on Smith's use of the phrase "labouring poor" in the *Wealth of Nations* (Rothschild 1992, p. 87). We are also reminded of Burke's observation in the *Philosophical Enquiry* that abstract words that excited the passions—such as, in Burke's time, "the poor"—could distort man's sense of reality (consult Collins 2020, pp. 95-97).

As Plassart explains, Burke, like Smith and other contemporaries, celebrated the steady expansion of commerce as a means to better the condition of the poor, however defined, as well as the rich. Her appo-

site reference to Arthur Young's (slightly exaggerated) comment in *A Six Months Tour Through the North of England* that the "labouring poor...is a term that means nothing" serves as a nice supplement to my discussion in *Commerce and Manners* of Burke's thoughts on the poor, particularly because Burke and Young were companions and careful observers of the agricultural economy. I agree with Plassart's conclusion that our mastery of Burke's idea of poverty could be deepened by seeing his attempt to define the poor as a way of "adapting – and sometimes adopting – a series of novel arguments developed in enlightened Britain and Europe in the previous decades." On this note, it would be worth exploring further whether Burke indeed provided a novel contribution to the conceptualization of "the poor" in the eighteenth century.

### SAMUEL GREGG

Samuel Gregg shrewdly outlines the many considerations statesmen grappled with in the design of imperial commercial policy in eighteenth-century British politics, including those intersecting with national security, parliamentary politics, foreign rivals, and electoral constituencies, not to mention supply and demand laws. His analysis of the Free Port Act illuminates this confluence of factors. It marked the attempt of Burke and other legislators to reconcile the mercantile interests of the North American colonies and West India colonies; to promote liberty of commerce within the British Empire; to consult the opinions of a wide swath of merchants in the drafting of the bill (as opposed to a privileged few, the infamous *bête noire* of Smith); to push back against the zero-sum economic reasoning of opponents of free trade within the Empire; and to loosen—though not eliminate—the system of mercantilist regulations that had characterized British imperial policy in the West Indies for generations. True to Burke's vision of purpose, the Act encouraged the flow of goods while preserving the British Empire's presence in the region. Gregg wisely characterizes Burke's ability to synthesize such wide-ranging factors in the conduct of statecraft as his "combined awareness of political facts."

Furthermore, Gregg calls attention to the element of prudence informing Burke's approach to economic statecraft.<sup>11</sup> Yet he rightly resists the temptation to reduce Burke's prudence merely to "pragmatism" or "deal-making," a connotation reminiscent of mid-to-late-nineteenth century interpretations of Burke as a statesman of calculating and expedient instincts.

Gregg thus highlights a critical motif of Burke's statesmanship, his idea of reform, that I examine throughout the book. The conventional interpretation of Burke is someone who preferred gradual reform over widespread change. This gradualist interpretation is not wrong so much as it fails, I believe, to penetrate the core of Burke's attitude toward reform. His notion of reform, as epitomized by his many efforts to alter institutions and practices throughout his political life, did not begin with the question of whether to pursue gradual over extensive change.

It rather started with a political temperament, keen on proportion, that wrestled with a number of questions: first, what were the alterations needed at that particular moment in time commensurate with the intensity of the defect pursuant to a moral or constitutional aim? Second, what were the social complexities and competing alternatives necessary to consider at that moment so that the proposed reform did not create counterproductive consequences and undermine its very purpose in the first place? Similarly, and third, how quickly could a statesman pursue this object without creating social disorder? After the weighing of such tradeoffs, an ethical judgment could then be drawn.

Burke's efforts in crafting economic policy brought alive this conception of prudence, such as his economical reform program, the Free Port Act, Fox's India Bill, and his plan for the gradual abolition of the slave trade and slavery. These initiatives ranged from phased approaches to more systematic alterations to existing political and commercial structures. In short, Burke's exercise of prudence illustrated purposeful, deliberative attempts to preserve or reform existing institutions and customs proportional to the constraints of the moment in accord with a final objective, such as to preserve Christianity, promote trade, defeat France, restore the integrity of the East India Company, or strengthen the British Constitution.

## LAUREN HALL

Lauren Hall addresses Burke's attitude toward natural rights. She convincingly shows that Burke did not wholly repudiate the idea of natural rights, but rather believed they must be conditioned by broader social institutions and habitudes. Her analysis of Burke's use of natural rights language in the cases of Ireland and the East India Company is astute. We could supply an additional quotation to this account from Burke's *Tracts relating to Popery Laws* (which, admittedly, was drafted over two decades prior to the French Revolution): "Every body is satisfied that a conservation and secure enjoyment of our natural rights is the great and ultimate purpose of civil society..." (WS 9: 463). Denying that Burke held some conception of natural rights is almost as inaccurate as stating that Burke held a robust conception of natural rights.

Yet we should also note that Burke tended to summon the language of natural rights with reference to non-English peoples, exhibiting his modes of rhetorical persuasion as well as his political theory. Even in the case of the French during the French Revolution, as Hall writes, Burke invokes the "real rights of mankind." It is worth further inquiry to discover if Burke at any point in his political life gestured toward "natural rights" when referring specifically to the English people. Burke did argue that his notion of prescription—which he applied to all forms of landed property, including English landed property—was rooted in the "law of nature" (Burke 1869, p. 80).

In addition, with regard to Hall's essential observation that, for Burke, natural rights contained an inherent social dimension because human beings were naturally sociable, two additional insights of Burke augment her point. First, Burke provides a conception in the *Philosophical Enquiry* of man's "second nature" (WS 1: 265) that melded fixed human nature with custom, an idea consistent with the thought of Hume and Adam Ferguson (consult Bromwich 2014, pp. 62, 91-92). Hence Burke's notion of this second nature consciously included habit, custom, and tradition, as opposed to other such theories in the early modern period that imposed hard distinctions between the two, and that maintained that such practices militated against man's natural state, as expressed most notoriously by Rousseau. Second, on a similar note, Burke wrote in *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* that "[a]rt is man's nature," arguing that man's fully formed civil relations in which the aristocracy exercises its capacity to reason and bears the responsibilities of public leadership are as natural as any pre-political state of nature (WS 4: 449). Third, pages 460-62 of *Commerce and Manners* do outline Burke's conception of the "real rights of mankind" in the context of the French Revolution (Collins 2020, pp. 460-62). The book's chapters on the Revolution attempt to emphasize that Burke was defending both prescriptive property rights and the right to industry.

With regard to Hall's list of Burke's "liberal" sentiments of his time, we may add: Burke's comprehensive plan for the gradual abolition of the slave trade and gradual emancipation of slaves<sup>12</sup>; his compassion toward a man, accused of sodomy, who had died from a mob (WS 3: 584-85); his similar compassion toward Samuel Hoheb, a Jewish merchant whose property was viciously seized during the plunder of St Eustatius (Collins 2020, pp. 62-63); his openness toward abolishing the pillory as a punitive measure (WS 3: 585); his attraction to John Howard's vision for prison reform (WS 3: 637-38); and his sympathy for men in debtors' prison (Collins 2020, pp. 106-7).

Hall raises a good point: does my statement that "Burke's life, however, displayed a greater effort to defend the imperatives of commercial liberty in a traditional, historically informed Anglo-American framework, not in conformity to the speculative theories of the Physiocrats or the contractarian notions of civil society championed by English radicals" minimize his efforts to defend the rights of the Irish and the Indians? One can certainly modify "Anglo-American" to "cultural," or something to that effect, to accentuate Burke's attempt to promote the liberties of non-English peoples in accord with their local customs and traditions.

On Burke's intellectual kinship with classical liberalism, Hall's many shrewd points are all well taken. My question "Was Burke a secular classical liberal in disguise?" carried a heuristic function to provoke self-reflection on the part of the reader rather than offer a nuanced analytic diagnosis of classical liberalism. I posed this question because one of the common criticisms of classical liberalism, especially in light of con-

temporary discourse in political theory circles on the influence of Locke in America, is that liberalism of whichever variety (early, classical, or progressive), whether intentional or not, contains within it a permanent tension with the exercise of religion, including the exercise of religion in public. Furthermore, all of the classical liberals Hall mentions, regardless of whether they embraced Lockean contractarian notions of society, including Locke, Smith, and Hume, nevertheless remain vulnerable to the criticism—fair or not—that their thought did not rest on a firm religious foundation but was rather influenced by, explicitly or implicitly, secularism (Locke), atheism (Hume), or deism (Smith).<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, there are fascinating parallels between Burke and Hayek, yet Hayek displayed far greater confidence in the efficacy of exchange, the price mechanism, and spontaneous order to drive and sustain the growth of civilization. Hayek did pay homage to the importance of families and tradition (Jerry Muller 2002, p. 385, has characterized Hayek's growing fondness of tradition as "rhetorical warmth"), but his faint attention throughout his corpus to the contributions of individuals and groups who did not generate value through the competitive price system conveys, in my view, a gap between his thought and Burke's.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, while Burke advocated for the rights of individuals (and associations), such a defense against oppression is not the exclusive domain of classical liberalism, and can be credibly claimed by variants of progressive and conservative thought.

More broadly, Hall draws an interesting distinction between early modern liberalism, characterized by Locke, and later developments of classical liberalism, characterized by Smith, to suggest that Burke is in fact in the same classical liberal tradition as Smith.<sup>15</sup> She wonders why I reference Locke in my discussion of Burke and classical liberalism. I do so because he is one of the predominant points of departure for discussions about the origins of classical liberalism—and I would further dispute her claim that Locke is "not really a classical liberal at all."

Typically, "classical liberalism" includes both of these earlier and later varieties of liberalism, which share many of the same commitments as Burke: the virtues of liberty, the primacy of the rule of law, the importance of property rights, and an antipathy to arbitrary rule and social engineering. While recognizing these similarities, however, we should also note their tensions with Burke.

The Lockean strand possesses the sharpest tensions: Burke attacked contractarian notions of society and abstract state of nature thinking; he did not reduce the purpose of government to the security of man's life, liberty, and estate; similarly, he did not conceive government as necessary only insofar as it secured individual liberties, established the rule of law, provided for the common defense, and built selective public works and institutions; and he did not think consent was the basis of social relations.

If we did locate Burke in one of these two classical liberal traditions, he would certainly be closer to the Smithian-Hayekian strand, with its emphasis on organic growth and gradual change. Yet he even holds tensions with this strand of classical liberalism (and *a fortiori* with Lockean liberalism). Burke's idea of "manly, moral, regulated liberty" (WS 8: 57) went beyond Hayek's conception of liberty as the absence of "coercion by the arbitrary power will of another or others" (Hayek 2011, p. 58); Burke possessed a teleological conception of society; he held that God willed the state; and he displayed less confidence in pluralism to sustain the moral and religious ethos of a people.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Burke was a proponent of public religion with a state-established church (while leaving room for the exercise of individual conscience) and did not think worship should be relegated only to the private sphere<sup>17</sup>; he believed the state—not just the rule of law—should be imbued with an element of sacred reverence; he maintained a robust conception of a social hierarchy and a distinction of ranks (one albeit that allowed for movement among classes and fostered a moral equality); and, while recognizing the importance of the individual, the moral sense, and the stimulating effect of enlightened self-interest, his views on the religious nature of man position him closer to Aristotelian-Thomistic intellectual traditions than to classical liberal presuppositions of man (which is not to say that he himself was an Aristotelian or Thomist). There is even an argument to be made that Hume and Hayek were conservatives, not classical liberals.

Taking into account the more libertarian strands of classical liberalism, Burke certainly did not envision the individual-state dichotomy; his conception of government exceeded notions of the night watch-

man state; he did not lower the purpose of man in civil society to the imperatives of self-preservation and the protection of his life, liberty, and estate; he did not dismiss taxation *tout court* as a form of theft or forced labor (even though he was aware of the additional costs imposed by heavy taxes); he did not subscribe to the rationalistic rigidities of later classical economists such as David Ricardo; he never went as far as John Stuart Mill in asserting that the “only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way” consistent with the harm principle (Mill 2002, p. 14); and, of course, his ambivalent embrace of natural rights doctrine presses against prominent schools of classical liberalism today. Many of the foundational premises of secular-progressivism pose even greater tensions with Burke’s philosophical outlook.

In sum, Burke’s thought harbors a level of friction with classical liberalism that should give us pause before placing him in that intellectual tradition—but I am open to being convinced otherwise, and Hall has provided an earnest argument in favor of this conclusion. At the very least, Burke’s sharp emphasis on Europe’s ancient heritage that predated classical liberalism could be used an intellectual resource to enrich and enlarge this tradition.

## STEPHEN DAVIES

Stephen Davies nicely classifies the main themes of *Commerce and Manners* and introduces other fruitful questions about the significance of Burke’s political economy. With regard to the Davies’ compelling remarks on the Adam Smith Problem or Edmund Burke Problem, I concede that introducing such problems as a heuristic, as I do, reveals more about late modernity’s tendency to compartmentalize different segments of society, including economics, history, and moral and social philosophy, than about the question of consistency in the thinkers themselves. These varying complexions of human affairs of course were merged in their time and did not succumb to the specializing trends of today.

Perhaps, then, there is “the Modernity Problem,” taken in this sense of reflexively separating such subjects, rather than an Adam Smith or Edmund Burke Problem. Similarly, while much ink has been spilled about Burke’s supposed breach of consistency in opposing the French Revolution and granting sympathy to the American colonists, I did not come across contemporaries of Burke accusing him of inconsistency (as Rothschild, Judith Shklar, Alfred Cobban, and Gertrude Himmelfarb have done) in opposing the Revolution and supporting a free internal grain trade.

Davies writes that my argument is that *Thoughts and Details* “sets out a rigorously laissez-faire position.” As mentioned, I believe that *Thoughts and Details* should not be read through a narrow *laissez faire* lens. A reader might arrive at this conclusion if he strips away all other moral, religious, social, and institutional considerations in Burke’s thought, when in reality, as Davies notes elsewhere in his response, Burke integrated these myriad concerns in his portrait of England’s agricultural economy. Even in *Thoughts and Details* Burke mentions religious establishments, the magistracy, state revenue, the military, and chartered corporations as necessary constituents of a state, and conceded the possible utility of public granaries in small jurisdictions such as Geneva. He also was a defender of the corn bounty, which tended to benefit the landed interest. And Burke certainly detected an element of “emergent spontaneous order” that arose between farmers and laborers—but, once again, such order was embedded in wider constitutional, aristocratic, and religious structures of English society, many of which were deliberately built.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, Davies astutely notes that the hazard of anachronism leaves Burke and other thinkers to be seized in a “political tug of war.” This is quite true. I think it is safe to say that Burke, if one had to speculate, would reflect the attitudes and temper of modern conservatism (and the Smithian-Hayekian strand of classical liberalism) more than of secular progressivism. But I also believe that at least some of his key insights are implicitly shared by this latter intellectual strand. The left’s criticism of the monetization of many aspects of society accords with Burke’s awareness that human relations should not be reduced to a utilitarian calculus. And the prevailing strand of left communitarianism—which admittedly is in tension with progressives’ competing faith in the redemptive power of the state—is certainly harmonious with Burke’s

defense of corporate social institutions as refuges that provide men and women spiritual meaning, moral purpose, and material welfare. I could also imagine that Burke would be critical of various schools of conservatism today for, among various possibilities, imposing a binary between the individual and the state and prioritizing individual autonomy above religious and moral considerations of a polity; and of other schools for seeking to strengthen the state at the expense of local forms of social organization and market exchange.

If we shall pursue this path of speculation further and compare Burke to twentieth-century thinkers, who are the best representatives of Burke's capacious approach to political economy today? Davies wisely mentions George F. Will as one example. In the economics discipline, I would add Thomas Sowell, who throughout his intellectual life has carefully integrated economic considerations within wider social, moral, and institutional contexts. We could of course include Hayek as well in this list, with the proviso that Hayek's (and Will's and Sowell's) economic thought holds some tensions with Burke's.

Yet another name to add to this list is Wilhelm Röpke, the primary intellectual influence behind Germany's economic recovery plan following World War Two (see Röpke 1960 and Gregg 2020). Röpke balanced a desire for commercial vibrancy with a sensitivity to the importance of farming communities, a consideration that is often neglected in mainstream discussions on economics today. He was keen on reconciling industrial expansion with traditional forms of social life, as manifested in agrarian communities, an imperative in agreement with Burke's effort to merge commercial society within a preexisting social and religious order.

Attempting to identify Burke's economic heirs invites the question of anachronism again, since such twentieth-century thinkers were living in a post-agrarian age in which mass industrialization had displaced many immemorial patterns of living. If Burke were living today, would he attempt to tip the balance back in favor of agrarian communities? Given his appreciation for husbandry and understanding of its critical function in providing nourishment to the masses, I suspect at the very least that he would caution proponents of generating economic efficiency through the mechanization and financialization of society not to forget the natural origin of economic resources: the gifts of the earth.

Accordingly, on the matter of whether Burke, as Davies writes, "clearly favoured a relatively more urbanized and commercial society," the word "relatively" is key here: Burke's steady endorsement of commercial activity throughout his legislative career indicates he did not cling to a romantic conception of agrarian life. I think the best way to frame this inquiry is that Burke favored a *balance* between urban and farming communities that harnessed and reconciled their distinctive qualities—such as, respectively, change and tradition, efficiency and leisure, and energy and moderation—to serve the common good.

This topic sheds light on Davies' acute insight that the "main point of policy and judgment for Burke was not to maximise economic efficiency and output" and that "pure economic efficiency was not the ultimate criterion for the statesman." Efficiency was an important consideration for Burke, but certainly not the decisive one. Furthermore, the better angels of the modern economics discipline often employs empirical data in a modest and sensible manner reminiscent of Burke's consultation of statistical data in his own political life. But, as Davies and Hampsher-Monk rightly observe, the discipline stands to benefit greatly from approaching the study of economic activity from the perspective of Burke: as a human endeavor threaded into a weave of social, moral, institutional, and religious contexts.

Davies appropriately highlights one of the more underappreciated dimensions of Burke's thought as a whole: his shrewd analysis of the debilitating consequences of resting a nation's economy on the slippery foundation of financial speculation, unmoored from the stable anchor of land. For Burke, the detachment of mobile property from immobile property represented a revolution in the possession of wealth, undermined social and moral norms, spread distrust among the people, encouraged novelty at the expense of tradition, and provoked instability. More important, as Davies observes, undisciplined financial speculation did not rely on manners, as practiced in specific human relations, and therefore threatened to dissolve the moral basis of society in Burke's view.<sup>19</sup>

## RICHARD BOURKE

Bourke eloquently describes Burke's idea of ancient chivalry as a habit of civility that allowed men and women to tame man's baser passions and cultivate a European milieu disciplined by moral and social self-restraint. Bourke's and my interpretation of this subject may be closer than he suggests.

On the question of whether Burke's reprimand of "oeconomical politicians" (and "oeconomists") was referring to Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, I agree with Bourke that Burke was not. Rather than claiming in *Commerce and Manners* that he had in mind such philosophers, I provide a number of plausible alternatives, including the Physiocrats, Turgot, Josiah Tucker, and Richard Price (Collins 2020, pp. 493-94). The alliance of the monied interest, of which Turgot was its most notorious representative, with the *philosophes* may be the likeliest culprit, especially in light of Burke's comment in a private letter in February 1790 that "manners," derived from the "chivalrous spirit" that promoted the veneration of women, were "extinguished in so shocking a manner, by means of speculations of finance, and the false science of a sordid and degenerate philosophy[.]" (Burke 1870, p. 473). The phrase "oeconomical politicians" could also quite possibly accommodate French revolutionary legislators who were influenced by this alliance, leading them to be corrupted by the monied interest, seduced by the *assignats*, and charmed by abstract theory. It could even more generally denote Burke's dismay over the progressively calculating spirit of his age.

Far from denying that Burke's contemporaries understood commercial society to rest on ethical (and constitutional) foundations, I of course affirm the point.<sup>20</sup> I briefly outline a number of representative quotations from John Millar (Bourke uses the same quotation) and William Robertson that illustrate Scottish thinkers' recognition of chivalry in the development of European civilization (Collins 2020, p. 502). The point is not that such thinkers did not appreciate the social and moral basis of modern market relations, nor that they did not identify the presence of moral behavior prior to the advent of the modern commercial economy. As Bourke notes, Hume expounds the virtues of gallantry in "The Rise of Arts and Sciences"<sup>21</sup> and Millar in *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*. We may add to this discussion Hume's remarks on chivalry and point of honor in the *History of England*, as well as similar comments on chivalry from Lord Kames (*Sketches of the History of Man*), Robertson (*A View of the Progress of Society of Europe*), and Ferguson (*An Essay on the History of Civil Society*), among their various writings.<sup>22</sup>

Such philosophers and historians all understood the function of chivalry and gallantry to civilize relations between the sexes, inculcate care and submission, and preserve a distinction of ranks. Burke underlined these effects as well. Before proceeding, however, we should note that the Scots retained varying degrees of ambivalence over the efficacy of gallantry in modern society—see, for instance, Hume's deleted passage in "Rise of Arts and Sciences," which was originally kept in the essay for over twenty-five years (Haakonssen 2003, p. 293n34)—and typically drew attention to the influence of chivalry on the conduct of battle and the treatment of the female sex, not on commercial society. Millar went so far as to state in *An Historical View of the English Government* that the "customs of chivalry" produced "certain punctilios of military honour" that were "plainly contrary to the manners of a commercial people..." (Millar 1818, pp. 187-88). Gilbert Stuart observed that the "solicitudes, and the mercenary spirit which rise up with commerce" were "unknown" in a feudal milieu governed by the medieval code of manners and interdependent affections (Stuart 1778, pp. 70-71). Hume's idea of chivalry, moreover, was a secularized version cleansed of religious connotations.

The Scots generally conceived of manners and progress of the arts as coextensive in one steady progressive movement (though they were careful not to be tempted by the millenarian inclinations of French revolutionists), and that manners improved as the socialization process of commerce developed as well. In "Rise of Arts and Sciences," Hume himself writes that "nothing is more favourable to the rise of politeness and learning, than a number of neighbouring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy" (Hume 1994, p. 119). Indeed, the tendency in Hume's thought is to connect the increasing commercialization and urbanization of society with the growing sentiments of humanity and polished manners (consult, for instance, Hume (1994, p. 271).

The crucial point here is that Burke traced a firm causal connection (and with his own distinctive flair of pen) between the emergence of modern commercial society and its pre-commercial foundations—chivalry, religion, and so on—that Smith, Hume, and the other Scottish thinkers, in my reading, do not clearly draw. Burke writes in the *Reflections* that both the nobility and the clergy “kept learning in existence”—and that “commerce, and trade, and manufacture” grew “under the same shade in which learning flourished.” Hence, commercial society grew under the shade of two specific sources: the “spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion” (WS 8: 130). Even if commerce and trade were absent in a people, sentiment preserved by this spirit of religion and the nobility “supplies, and not always ill supplies their place” (WS 8: 130).

With Smith in particular, he, like Burke, was quite aware of the crucial function of local affections and friendships in man’s kinship networks. One could easily copy particular passages from the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* on this subject and seamlessly weave them into the *Reflections*. Yet Smith’s conception of socialization places more emphasis on fellow-feeling and mutual approbation as the basis of social relations, and did not trace the roots of commercial society to ancestral religion and habits of chivalry in his writings. Smith recognized a distinction of ranks, but his idea of socialization carried a more egalitarian touch than Burke’s hierarchical and premodern notion of social attachments. And the *Annual Register*’s review for the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, most likely written by Burke, strongly praised the book for propounding “one of the most beautiful fabrics of moral theory, that has perhaps ever appeared” but also observed that “with regard to morals, nothing could be more dangerous” (*The Annual Register* 1760, p. 485). It is also not clear that Burke would have agreed with Smith’s belief in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as communicated in the poor man’s son parable, that the ambitious yet deceptive pursuit of wealth, greatness, and recognition was the chief spur to industry (Smith 1984, p. 183).

Furthermore, Burke laid greater metaphorical stress on foundations, edifices, and structures as the necessary grounds for the kinetic movements of commerce and social activity. This is not to impose an impenetrable gap between Burke and Smith—and both were sensitive to the drawbacks of commercial society—but the varying degrees of weight they assigned to different parts of a flourishing commonwealth shed light on their most treasured and distinctive religious, moral, social, and economic convictions. Smith’s project was to imagine a system of natural liberty, rooted in sympathy and fellow-feeling, steered by the benevolent hand of Providence; Burke’s was to imagine a system of “manly, moral, regulated liberty” (WS 8: 57), rooted in the Christian religion and ancient manners, realized in a divinely ordered state willed by God (WS 8: 148).

I thus find Pocock’s interpretation more convincing. As he writes, “Manners, then, offer us a key to [Burke’s] argument; but a strictly progressive theory of manners, such as Burke might have derived from his Scottish acquaintances, presented them as arising, and fulfilling the natural sociability of man, only in the course of the commercialization, refinement and diversification of society” (Pocock 1985, pp. 209–10). In addition, Ryu Susato, who has written one of the most detailed expositions of the idea of chivalry in the Scottish Enlightenment, explains, “Burke was to emphasize the traditional values of chivalry, together with those of the Christian religion, more positively and consciously than any who had discussed the subject previously” (Susato 2007, p. 169). More recently, Sora Sato, in her study of Burke as an historian, has concluded, “What was unique [regarding Burke’s views on chivalry and Christianity] was the link he established between ancient manners and commercial arts” (Sato 2017, p. 93).

I agree with Bourke that there is much in common between Burke and the Scottish philosophers. And this debate, admittedly, can verge on the pedantic and rely on overdrawn qualitative distinctions. We should also mention that Burke’s argument itself is vulnerable to the criticism that it understates the shift in beliefs and rhetoric that facilitated the rise of commercial society; this additional consideration has been accentuated by Deirdre McCloskey and Joel Mokyr, among others (McCloskey 2016 and Mokyr 2009).

But I tend to lean on the side of Pocock, Susato, and Sato: Burke’s acute emphasis on the traditional function of manners and chivalry, imbued with deep Christian undertones, as a necessary precursor of commercial society in particular—beyond the fact that these traits were coterminous with it—leads to me to resist approaches that reduce to Scottish Enlightenment thought Burke’s conception of the link between

the nexus of chivalry, manners, and religion and the rise of commercial society. Like the question of Burke's classical liberal credentials, I hesitate to collapse such distinctions.

Beyond the topic of Burke's relationship with the Scots, Burke's relevance for contemporary debates over economics highlights the crux of the markets-and-morals debate. Few people would deny the importance of moral and social norms for market activity. A shortcoming of many contemporary and influential defenders of market competition, economists and otherwise (and I was guilty of this pattern of thinking as well for a time), however, is their dismissal of the pre-commercial religious and traditional foundations of modernity, as demonstrated by their celebration of the demise of organized religion and agrarian society, their primary focus on the hockey stick graph of GDP growth as the definitive mark of human advancement (something that critics of markets, on the other hand, understate), and their portrayal of society prior to the explosion of wealth as backward-looking, ignorant, and insular. The effect of this picture is to imply an absence of human progress before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that only the Enlightenment project rescued humanity from the depths of poverty and superstition.

We therefore witness many moral arguments in favor of market exchange that hinge on ideas often attributed to modern political thought, such as individual rights, autonomous reason, rational self-interest, the harm principle, emancipation from traditional social, moral, and religious constraints, mutual consent, voluntary contracts, the limits of the intellect, the conceptualization of man as a producer and consumer, the overthrow of privilege, secular morality, earthly satisfaction, and utilitarianism. In my best reading of his economic thought, I believe Burke concluded that political economy should be rooted in something older and deeper.

## NOTES

- 1 I will use "economic thought" and "political economy" interchangeably, with the awareness that the former phrase did not exist in Burke's day.
- 2 All references refer to the volume and page number of *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (1970—).
- 3 Hont himself hardly discusses Burke in *Jealousy of Trade* (2010).
- 4 I will return to Burke and Smith in the final section.
- 5 One could of course have summoned the same argument against Britain throughout the 1700s.
- 6 See, for instance, Hayek's citations (2011) of Burke, including on pages 110, 119, 120, 261, 482.
- 7 Consult Collins, "Spontaneous Order and Civilization," introduction.
- 8 Perhaps Hampsher-Monk's apprehension over this decision derives from a preference in methodological approach. My aim was not to trace the chronological development of Burke's thoughts on political economy, although I do hope readers can get a sense of this development when reading the book. It was, first and foremost, to answer the question: what was Burke's conception of political economy?
- 9 Collins, "Spontaneous Order and Civilization."
- 10 Attempts to understand distinctions between these two groups trace back through Gratian's *Decretum* and the medieval canonists to Augustine and Scripture and Paul the Apostle's admonition to work in 2 Thessalonians 3:10.
- 11 For a recent study of Burke's idea of prudence, see Weiner (2019).
- 12 Consult my exchange with O'Neill: Collins (2019, pp. 494-521); O'Neill (2020, pp. 816-27); and Collins (2020, pp. 828-39).
- 13 I say this with the awareness that there of course classical liberals who are religious and those who are not, and that there is much debate about these thinkers' religious views.
- 14 Yet do see my comment in the Hampsher-Monk section on Hayek's remark on the role of independent men of wealth to promote culture and the arts.
- 15 Hall's remarks prompted me to consider an additional point of inquiry that is worth studying further: tracing classical liberal thinkers' conceptions of the role of tradition and custom in their thought.

16 See also my comments on Bourke.

17 This raises the interesting question of whether Burke would have supported a national church in America. I think it is safe to say, at the very least, that he would endorse individual states' support for churches.

18 See my article on Burke and Hayek for additional remarks on Burke and spontaneous order.

19 Of course, fiat money could negatively influence manners.

20 We may also in this light pay heed to the contributions of early modern Anglican clergy in understanding the integrated dimensions of market activity and their relation to Anglican political theology, a connection I perhaps should have explored further in *Commerce and Manners*. Consult Rashid (2020, pp. 107-28).

21 Here Hume projects a more positive interpretation of the concept than in his early essay on chivalry.

22 See Sato's more comprehensive list in *Edmund Burke as Historian* (2017, p. 93n570).

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