

The Moral Basis of Burke's Political Thought, by Charles Parkin, *Cambridge University Press*, 1956. pp. 145.
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MR. PARKIN'S ESSAY is an effort to show that the writings of Burke, although drafted to deal with political contingencies of his own day, nevertheless derive from a coherent and enduring moral philosophy of man and community. Burke's thought is a "formulation of the moral beliefs on

which English society had been formed;" it is "an accurate expression of the enduring principles of English political and social life." Thus these same principles are relevant to the good society of whatever time and place, granted a touch of artistry in those applying them. This little book consists almost entirely of quotations directly from the works of Burke with the chinks filled in by Mr. Parkin's paraphrases of Burke. The five hundred or so references to the *Works* and *Correspondence* indicate the diligence with which the author has pursued his task.

Burke's solid utterances on the nature of men and society were provoked by the pernicious ideology which had seeped into the 18th century mind—and still festers among us. The intelligentsia had been goaded by their sense of alienation from the real world and real people to fabricate a world of bloodless abstractions with which they could feel at home. The rationalist demands that the world coincide with his verbal formulations of it; but this demand is frustrated by the very nature of things. Man is not in a position to dictate to the universe; there are surd elements in reality which refuse to be wrapped up into a neat parcel. Real life resists and defies, but the abstractions of the rationalist are amenable to the whims of their creator. They are made to be manipulated, and the impulse to manipulate and reform is irresistible in men who are cut off from their cosmic and ancestral roots. *Hubris* takes over and men are as gods.

It is easy to dream up a perfect blueprint for society if the units are imagined to be, not one's imperfect neighbors, but flawless fragments of abstract humanity instead. And men are tempted to make this dream come true. But this is a blueprint which can be realized only by elimin-

ating real people—after which the City of Man can rise in their stead!

This is the kind of thing Burke saw in the French Revolution: not so much a rebellion against tyranny and injustice as a revolt against man's lot on earth and in societies, "a foul, impious, monstrous thing, wholly out of the course of moral nature," a war against man and God.

"I may assume," Burke continues, "that the awful Author of our being is the Author of our place in the order of existence; and that having disposed and marshalled us by a divine tactic, not according to our will, but according to his, he has, in and by that disposition, virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned us."

When men had an unquestioned sense of being rooted in an order beyond time and nature, they felt linked to other men in societies by this bond, and at the same time were given a strong sense of personal identity. But with the dissolution of the belief in a transcendent order social bonds were attenuated and the sense of personal identity turned into a feeling of individual isolation. Separated individual units could have no status in society; each had to find its own place by a series of arrangements separately contracted and fought for. This insures the condition of permanent crisis we have tried to live with for so long.

Burke did not stem the tide which rose in his day, came to its flood and now ebbs. But after nearly two centuries his realism, his strong religious and historical sense, his appreciation of continuity in the human venture, may yet rally those who are fed up with patchwork remedies and panaceas and long for a little sanity in human affairs.

Reviewed by EDMUND A. OPITZ