

# Edmund Burke and the English Revolution

Jeffrey Hart

IN HIS POEM "Blood and the Moon," Yeats writes of "haughtier-headed Burke that proved the state a tree." Edmund Burke would have relished the line, having proved nothing of the sort. What Burke did in the *Reflections* was to construct a powerful myth of English history, in which England settled down from precedent to precedent, unlike the violent nation across the Channel. He wrote while the French Revolution was in its earliest stages and wrote brilliantly, making permanent contributions to political philosophy. But he discreetly avoided the fact that the parliamentary eminence from which he spoke had been born in the cannon and musket fire of the seventeenth-century English Revolution, which was finally consolidated during the reign of Robert Walpole (1720-1742). Before Walpole, England had had the politics of a banana republic.

Yeats might well have derived his image of the tree from the *Reflections* itself, where Burke provides an extended metaphor comparing British agitators and pamphleteers to grasshoppers and the true and stable England to cows grazing under immemorial oaks.

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Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the fields ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field, that of course they are many in number, or that, after all, they are other than the little, shrivelled, meager, hopping, though loud and troublesome, insects of the hour.

In this metaphor, the "British oak" represents a society that has grown organically, a slowly evolving and stable national community. Somewhat unflatteringly here, the true Englishmen are the cows, silent and stolid, chewing the cud. Those organic British oaks, along with the beautiful and vital Marie Antoinette, in another famous and mythic passage, are meant to stand over against the metallic and new "sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators" who are the enemies of the ancient order of Europe, allied with money interests and abstract political theoreticians.

Burke's British oak has a considerable literary history and, indeed, amounts to a natural symbol of tradition. In "To Penshurst," Ben Jonson contrasts the Sidney estate, which "stands't an ancient pile" and has grown casually over the years, with the flashier estates of the recently rich nobility, which are

"grudg'd at" by the local peasantry. The Sidney estate is described as being virtually part of the landscape, and its social life reflects the cosmic chain of being. The whole is epitomized by the Sidney Oak, planted at the birth of the courtier poet:

*That taller tree which of a nut was set  
At his great birth where all the Muses  
met.  
There in the writhed bark are cut the  
names  
Of many a Sylvane, taken with his  
flames.*

In "The Deserted Village" by Burke's friend Oliver Goldsmith, the tree becomes an emblematic hawthorn bush, which represents the humble but organic village, which, as much as Jonson's Peshurst, is part of the natural order:

*The never-failing brook, the busy mill,  
The decent church that topt the neighbor-  
ing hill,  
The hawthorne bush, with feats beneath  
the shade,  
For talking age and whispering lovers  
made.*

Opposed to the hawthorn bush and the village life, Goldsmith arraigns the modern and metallic "trade's unfeeling train." Goldsmith of course, along with Burke, is part of Yeats's spiritual history on that winding ancestral stair in "Blood and the Moon," and the tree elsewhere makes strategic appearances in Yeats:

*How but in custom and ceremony  
Are innocence and beauty born?  
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,  
And custom for the spreading Laurel tree.*

*O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?*

## II

In the *Reflections*, however, and despite Yeats's memorable lines in "Blood and

the Moon," Burke did not "prove" the state a tree. Rather, he "made" the state a tree in imaginative terms for his own worthy rhetorical purposes. He created a powerful myth by selecting from English history such elements as suited the myth, while neglecting cataclysmic events that would have called the myth into serious question.

Burke wishes his reader to believe that English history grew like a great oak, evolving slowly and deviating from precedent only under the pressure of dire necessity. His example of a grudging concession to necessity is the Revolution of 1688. He also uses his treatment of 1688 to screen off the events of 1640-1660, when England was rocked by a convulsive Civil War, King Charles I was beheaded, and Parliament established the basis for its eventual preeminence—control of taxation and expenditure. In the *Reflections*, Burke barely alludes to 1640-1660, and when he does so, it is to wave the bloody shirt. Dr. Price's objectionable sermon in praise of the French Revolution reminds him of a sermon delivered in 1648:

That sermon is in a strain which, I believe, has not been heard in this kingdom in any of the pulpits which are tolerated or encouraged in it since the year 1648, when a predecessor of Dr. Price, the Rev. Hugh Peters, made the vault of the King's own chapel at St. James's ring with the honor and privilege of the saints, who, with the "high praises of God in their mouths and a two-edged sword in their hands, and punishments upon the people; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron."

A bit later, Burke reproves Dr. Price and his Revolution Society for confusing 1688 with 1648:

The gentlemen of the Old Jewry, in all their reasonings on the Revolution of 1688, have a Revolution which happened in England about forty years before and the

late French Revolution so much before their eyes and in their hearts that they are constantly confounding all the three together.

Yet, for all the horror with which he views 1640-1660, that "Revolution which happened in England" established the basis for the parliamentary system which was decisively consolidated in 1688 and provided the platform from which Burke spoke in 1790.

### III

Burke's treatment of 1688 is central to the *Reflections* and establishes his exemplary statesman, Lord Somers, as the hero of the book. Lord Somers indeed is a hero, not only of 1688 but of Burke's theory of knowledge in its relationship to practical action. "Unquestionably," Burke concedes, "there was at the Revolution, in the person of King William, a small and temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession." That is, King James II was overthrown and fled the country. He was replaced by a Dutchman, William, Prince of Orange. How did Parliament determine that this "small deviation" was necessary? Lord Somers recognized it and persuaded Parliament of its necessity.

In the very act, in which for a time, and in a single case, Parliament departed from the strict order of inheritance, in favor of a prince, who though not next, was, however, very near the line of succession, it is curious to observe how Lord Somers, who drew the bill called the Declaration of Right, has comported himself on that delicate occasion. It is curious to observe with what address this temporary solution of continuity is kept from the eye, whilst all that could be found in this act necessary to countenance the idea of a hereditary succession is brought forward and fostered and made the most of by this great man and by the legislature who followed him.

But what does constitute a condition of necessity? Burke begins by defining the necessity of 1688 in such dramatic terms that one would conclude that it would take the supposed genius of Lord Somers to discern it.

It would be to repeat a very trite story to recall to your memory all those circumstances which demonstrated that their accepting King William was not properly a *choice*, but, to all those who did not wish, in effect, to recall King James or to deluge their country in blood, and again to bring their religion, laws and liberties into the peril they had just escaped, it was an act of *necessity*, in the strictest moral sense in which necessity can be taken.

Yet Burke also understands that—and let us concede him his description of the 1688 necessity—there are more difficult determinations of necessity.

The speculative line of demarcation, where obedience ought to end and resistance begin, is faint, obscure, and not easily definable. It is not a single act, or a single event, which determines it. Governments must be abused and deranged, indeed, before it can be thought of, and the prospect of the future must be as bad as the experience of the past.... Times and occasions, and provocations will teach their own lessons. The wise will determine from the gravity of the case, the irritable, from sensibility to oppression, the high-minded, from disdain and indignation at abusive power in unworthy hands, the brave and bold, from love of honorable danger in a generous cause, but, with or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good.

We will return to Lord Somers and to Burke's theory of how the wise, the thinking, and the good discern the "line of demarcation" that separates sedition from forbearance, but first we must observe that Lord Somers in 1688 is not the only one keeping things from the eye, as

Burke delicately puts it. Burke wishes to contrast the prudent English way of managing things—those great English oaks—with the convulsions just across the Channel. But to make this contrast, he must ignore seventeenth-century English history. Such names as Charles I, Buckingham, Laud, Cromwell, Pym, and Monck do not make an appearance in the *Reflections*. In 1790, Burke famously predicted the Terror in France before it occurred: “in the groves of their academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows.” Yes, Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety, but the prediction is also backward-looking. It is impossible to think here that Burke has not in mind Charles I on the scaffold in 1649.

#### IV

Now, if one takes a large view of the political landscapes in question, comparing the 1640-1660 period in England with the period of the French Revolution, beginning—I select the date a bit arbitrarily—with the fall of the Bastille in 1789 and ending—again arbitrarily—with Waterloo in 1815, one notices a roughly similar time frame. There are, of course, important differences between the two cataclysms in detail, but there are also broad similarities, not least that in both cases monarchs basing their legitimacy on absolutist claims were not only deposed but beheaded.

The debates among historians about the English seventeenth century and about the French Revolution are rich and contentious. We have the Marxist school of Lefebvre and the Sorbonne historians, the British pragmatists, the narrative school, exemplified by Simon Schama, all viewing the French Revolution through different lenses. There are debates among historians about whether the English events are properly called a revolution or merely a rebellion. We have the Whig interpretation of Macaulay and

Trevelyan and their followers, which sees the revolution as an act of the propertied classes demanding freedom of speech, especially as regards religion, freedom from imprisonment without trial, abolition of extra-parliamentary taxation, and firm Protestantism. There are revisionists and re-revisionists. R. H. Tawney and Christopher Hill stress economic and social pressure from a rising bourgeoisie and the overthrow of feudal aristocracy. Such revisionists as Conrad Russell, who see no long-term or significant causes and results, could be called accidentalists, while counter-revisionists such as Richard Cust see clearly a conflict over law, liberty, foreign policy, and religion. Not at all surprisingly, there are striking parallels between the historiography of the English and French upheavals.

And yet, whatever the debates about detail, it remains the fact that both rebellions or revolutions involved the overthrow of an absolute monarch and, indeed, his execution. In both, absolute monarchy was abolished forever, and new sources of legitimacy had to be sought. It might fairly be said that the medieval system of divine right was extinguished. In both England and France, parliamentary bodies came into conflict with the court, and both upheavals resulted in a shift of power from crown to legislature.

Two years after the death of Cromwell, Charles II was restored to the throne—but at the invitation of Parliament. His rule was anything but absolute or unthreatened, Parliament having retained control of taxation and appropriation. Charles had to deal with Shaftesbury's rebellion and the succession crisis. Parliament prevailed in the succession following the death of Queen Anne and named the Elector of Hanover as George I, while the English Navy fended off an invasion on behalf of Catholic Stuart James III. Not until 1745 and the

defeat of the invading Scots under Bonnie Prince Charlie at the hands of the Duke of Cumberland at the Battle of Culloden was the Hanoverian succession finally safe.

This history does not much resemble Burke's slowly and grandly growing British oak. Indeed, the historian J. H. Plumb, in *The Origins of Political Stability in England*, has argued persuasively that the vaunted stability of England was the handiwork of Robert Walpole, leading minister from 1720 to 1742. Until Walpole, England had a parliamentary system in place but not altogether secure, an instability with the politics of a Tammany boss. Walpole rendered elections less-frequent and, through hard cash from the Treasury—"secret funds"—made opposition much more expensive. Under Walpole, England became a one-party state, but the resulting stability laid the basis for its later commercial and international power.

## V

If it be asked whether what occurred in England in the seventeenth century was a revolution properly so-called, of course the answer depends on what you define as a revolution. However, it is arguable that this was the English revolution against the attenuated medieval order, as was the French Revolution. Hugh Trevor-Roper has given an excellent evocation of the trial of King Charles I:

On January 30, 1649, King Charles I was executed, and cries of horror arose from an outraged world.... No judge would sit in the new High Court of Justice. Soldiers dominated its sessions in Westminster Hall, and its President wore a bullet-hat throughout the proceedings. When he called upon the King to answer the charge made "in behalf of the good people of England," Lady Fairfax called from the gallery, "No, not half of them. It's a lie!" Her words were cut short. "Down with the whores, shoot them!" ordered the colo-

nel of the guard. When the King demanded to be heard, the rhythmical cry of "Justice, justice, execution, execution!" drowned his words, as arranged by a Puritan clergyman; and when the death warrant was drawn up, intimidation and forgery were required to complete the list of signatures....

On the day of execution staples were fixed to the platform in Whitehall to tie the King down in case he struggled—an absurd precaution, as anyone should have known who knew him. Soldiers around the scaffold prevented him speaking to the crowd, who expressed their indignation with sullen groans and had to be dispersed by cavalry. Even the Army shrank from the act they carried out; a promise of 100 pounds and promotion could not find a soldier to be executioner, and the common hangman who carried out the sentence—a skilled practitioner who had prepared himself in childhood by decapitating cats and dogs—died of remorse within a few months.

I think we must conclude that in his *Reflections* Burke is defending the consolidated results of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, a consolidation completed on behalf of Parliament in 1688 and later made secure by Walpole. Burke had to ignore the revolution that had constructed his own platform as a House of Commons man. When he wrote the *Reflections*, he had nothing to offer as guidance to the French, who had just commenced their own revolution.

## VI

While Burke, in the *Reflections*, engaged in some historical sleight of hand, he does set forth a valuable theory of knowledge of politics, and human behavior generally, a theory that has been developed and expanded upon through our own day. Here again, Lord Somers is central, the statesman who recognized the necessity of deposing James II. The question is, then, just how Somers recog-

nized the necessity.

Many, and perhaps most or all, major expositions of philosophy can be traced back to an original but also primal insight. This seems to me true of Plato and Aristotle as well as Hegel, Nietzsche, James, and Wittgenstein. However that may be, it is certainly true of Burke, who said that he was “startled into reflection” by the theories he took to lie behind the French Revolution.

At the core of Burke’s thought is this question: Do we perform complex tasks more effectively through reason or through habit? This was a fundamental challenge to the various strands of rationalism important in the discourse of Burke’s time. In the *Reflections*, Burke brilliantly replied: Habit. If one were obliged to be one’s shoes through reason, starting each day with a *tabula rasa* or a *cogito ergo sum*, there is little doubt that one would never get to work. No violinist and no athlete operates through reason, and neither does the postman. Burke is the great expositor of habit, or—to put it another way—unconscious reason. And for Burke, customs, traditions, and institutions are the habits of society.

It follows that the man most able to function in a crisis, to recognize “necessity,” is not the theoretician but the man of experience—Lord Somers—whose knowledge has been gained, not through theory or abstract principle, but through experience. You do not go to the political pamphleteer, Dr. Richard Price, or to the theoretician, Rousseau, but to the statesman, Somers, who, through experience, has a kind of knowledge that is incommunicable except as judgment. Ask a great chef how to prepare a meal. Ask Joe DiMaggio how to catch a fly ball.

Burke’s sense of the complexity of society is such that true judgment is incommunicable and certainly not reducible to rules or principles.

The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science, not to be taught *a priori*. Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science, because the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate, but that which is in the first instance is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operations, and its excellence may arise even from the ill effects it produces in the beginning. The reverse also happens, and very plausible schemes, with very pleasing commencements, have often shameful and lamentable conclusions. In states, there are often some obscure and almost latent causes, things which appear at first of little moment, on which a very great part of its prosperity or adversity may most essentially depend. The science of government being, therefore, so practical in itself and intended for such practical purposes, a matter requires experience and even more experience than any person can gain in his whole life, however sagacious and observing he may be, it is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society or on building it up again without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes.

Burke’s theory of unconscious or habitual cognition is connected in its meaning with John Henry Newman’s term “the illative sense,” by which he meant the intuition of the thinker or practitioner in dealing with the *métier* before him, whether that be a battlefield or a philosophical problem. The general who had seen hundreds of battlefields “knew” where to attack or defend. The philosopher steeped in the tradition of thought has a sixth sense about the likely solution to the problems of current formulation. Burke’s participation in this theory of knowledge informs his famous defense of “prejudice,” a defense scandal-

ous to the rationalist mind. Burke argued that it is folly

To cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason; because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence. Prejudice is of ready application in an emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, skeptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature.

The figure of King Lear lurks behind the text of the *Reflections*, Lear, naked on that heath; in Burke's telling rhetoric, all "the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off. All the super-added ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns and the understanding ratifies as necessary to cover the defects of our naked shivering nature" are to be rudely torn off.

In his distinction between the sort of knowledge possessed by Lord Somers and the sort of knowledge that can be formulated as rules and principles, Burke belongs to a skeptical and prudential conservative tradition we may associate with Montaigne, Hume, Samuel Johnson, Walter Bagehot, and notably, in our own day, Michael Oakeshott. I would add to it the political theory and practice of such men as Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, and of course there are many other exemplars.

It is at the core of Oakeshott's very considerable body of writing on political theory that the most important kinds of knowledge are not transmittable through language—that, indeed, to write down the sort of knowledge gained through experience is perforce to abridge it, provide only a crib. In his famous essay "Rationalism in Politics," Oakeshott ex-

plored this dualistic epistemology with his usual elegance—it is important that he, like Burke, was an aesthete—and it is not difficult to discern behind the following passage, which I cite at some length because it is so telling, the ghost of Lord Somers.

Technical knowledge, we have seen, is susceptible of formulation in rules, principles, directions, maxims—comprehensively, in propositions. It is possible to write down technical knowledge in a book. Consequently, it does not surprise us that when an artist writes about his art, he writes only about the technique of his art. This is so, not because he is ignorant of what may be called aesthetic element, or thinks it unimportant, but because what he has to say about *that* he has said already (if he is a painter) in his pictures, and he knows no other way of saying it. And the same is true when a religious man writes about his religion or a cook about cookery. And it may be observed that this character of being susceptible of precise formulation gives to technical knowledge at least the appearance of certainty: it appears to be possible to be certain about a technique. On the other hand, it is a characteristic of practical knowledge that it is not susceptible of formulation of this kind. Its normal expression is in a customary or traditional way of doing things, or, simply, in practice. And this gives it the appearance of imprecision and consequently of uncertainty, of being a matter of opinion, of probability rather than truth. It is, indeed, a knowledge that is expressed in taste or connoisseurship, lacking rigidity and ready for the impress of the mind of the learner.

Technical knowledge can be learned from a book; it can be learned in a correspondence course. Moreover, much of it can be learned by heart, repeated by rote, and applied mechanically: the logic of the syllogism is a technique of this kind. Technical knowledge, in short, can be both taught and learned in the simplest meanings of these words. On the other hand, practical knowledge can nei-

ther be taught nor learned, but only imparted and acquired. It exists only in practice, and the only way to acquire it is by apprenticeship to a master—not because the master can teach it (he cannot), but because it can be acquired only by continuous contact with one who is perpetually practising it. In the arts and in natural science what normally happens is that the pupil, in being taught and in learning the technique from his master, discovers himself to have acquired also another sort of knowledge than merely technical knowledge, without it ever having been precisely imparted and often without being able to say precisely what it is. Thus a pianist acquires artistry as well as technique, a chess-player style and insight into the game as well as a knowledge of the moves, and a scientist acquires (among other things) the sort of judgement which tells him when his technique is leading him astray and the connoisseurship which enables him to distinguish the profitable from the unprofitable directions to explore.

Now, as I understand it, Rationalism is the assertion that what I have called practical knowledge is not knowledge at all, the assertion that, properly speaking, there is no knowledge which is not technical knowledge. The Rationalist holds that the only element of *knowledge* involved in any human activity is technical knowledge, and that what I have called practical knowledge is really only a sort of nescience which would be negligible if it were not positively mischievous. The sovereignty of “reason,” for the Rationalist, means the sovereignty of technique.

The heart of the matter is the preoccupation of the Rationalist with certainty. Technique and certainty are, for him, inseparably joined because certain knowledge is, for him, knowledge which does not require to look beyond itself for its certainty: knowledge, that is, which not only ends with certainty but begins with certainty and is certain throughout. And this is precisely what technical knowledge appears to be. It seems to be a self-complete sort of knowledge because it

seems to range between an identifiable initial point (where it breaks in upon sheer ignorance) and an identifiable terminal point, where it is complete, as in learning the rules of a new game. It has the aspect of knowledge that can be contained wholly between the two covers of a book, whose application is, as nearly as possible, purely mechanical, and which does not assume a knowledge not itself provided in the technique. For example, the superiority of an ideology over a tradition of thought lies in its appearance of being self-contained. It can be taught best to those whose minds are empty; and if it is to be taught to one who already believes something, the first step of the teacher must be to administer a purge, to make certain that all prejudices and preconceptions are removed, to lay his foundation upon the unshakable rock of absolute ignorance. In short, technical knowledge appears to be the only kind of knowledge which satisfies the standard of certainty which the Rationalist has chosen.

Now, I have suggested that the knowledge involved in every concrete activity is never solely technical knowledge. If this is true, it would appear that the error of the Rationalist is of a simple sort—the error of mistaking a part for the whole, of endowing a part with the qualities of the whole. But the error of the Rationalist does not stop there. If this great illusion is the sovereignty of technique, he is no less deceived by the apparent certainty of technical knowledge. The superiority of technical knowledge lay in its appearance of springing from pure ignorance and ending in certain and complete knowledge, its appearance of both beginning and ending with certainty. But, in fact, this is an illusion. As with every other sort of knowledge, learning a technique does not consist in getting rid of pure ignorance, but in reforming knowledge which is already there. Nothing, not even the most nearly self-contained technique (the rules of a game), can in fact be imparted to an empty mind: and what is imparted is nourished by what is already there. A man who knows the rules of one game

will, on this account, rapidly learn the rules of another game; and a man altogether unfamiliar with "rules" of any kind (if such can be imagined) would be a most unpromising pupil. And just as the self-made man is never literally *self-made*, but depends upon a certain kind of society and upon a large unrecognized inheritance, so technical knowledge is never, in fact, self-complete, and can be made to appear so only if we forget the hypotheses with which it begins. And if its self-completeness is illusory, the certainty which was attributed to it on account of its self-completeness is also an illusion.

## VII

In *The Sociological Tradition* (1966), a fundamental work of first-rate intelligence, Robert Nisbet writes as an historian of ideas, but as more than that. Like one of his masters, A. O. Lovejoy, he produces by bringing other writers' ideas into conjunction with an accession of knowledge. The whole he creates is more than the sum of his parts. In this major work, he discusses European sociology in its formative period, 1830-1890, its classical age, as he calls it. In the foreground here are the works of Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, Tönnies, Simmel, and Durkheim. Outside the historical time frame of this book, but most certainly waiting in the wings, are such continuators of the great themes as Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. But also, back behind the classical age of sociology, as Nisbet makes clear, is the towering figure of Burke of the *Reflections*:

What are the essential unit-ideas of sociology, those which, above any others, give distinctiveness to sociology in its juxtaposition? These are, I believe, five: *community, authority, status, the sacred, and alienation*.... *Community* includes but local community to encompass religion, work, family, and culture. It refers to social bonds characterized by emotional cohesion, depth, continuity, and fullness.

*Authority* is the structure or the inner order of an association, whether this be political, religious, or cultural, and is given its root in social function, tradition, or allegiance. *Status* is the individual's position in the hierarchy of prestige and influence that characterizes every community or association. The *sacred* includes the mores, the non-rational, the religious, and ritualistic ways of behavior that are valued beyond whatever utility they may possess. *Alienation* is a historical perspective within which each man is seen as estranged, anomic, and rootless when cut off from the best of community and moral purpose.

It is part of the genuine greatness of *The Sociological Tradition* that Nisbet demonstrates that within the "classical" sociologists, virtually all of whom were modernizers and lived during their historical moment, there nevertheless lived these ancient and traditional concerns about the nature of man and society, and Nisbet sees that out of this conflict was born the vision of the classical sociologist.

But he sees more as well. He sees that they were not statisticians, but artists.

Can anyone believe that Tönnies' typology of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Weber's version of *rationalization*, Simmel's image of *metropolis*, and Durkheim's perspective of *anomie* came from the logico-empirical analysis as this is understood today? Merely to ask the question is to know the answer. Plainly these men were not working with finite and ordered problems in front of them. They were not problem-solving at all. Each was, with deep intuition, with profound imaginative grasp, reacting to the world around him, even as does the artist, and, also like the artist, objectifying internal and only partly conscious states of mind.

The proof of such a theory of knowledge is not precisely measurable, but it

is, in a general way, testable against experience. Nisbet's great classical sociologists *saw* something that was not a mirage and not fully measurable in surveys. Before them, Burke discovered and articulated a sort of new continent in the realm of knowledge. As he said, he was "startled into reflection."

But, in conclusion, a word must be said against Burke on behalf of the seventeenth-century revolutionaries who helped to create the parliamentary eminence from which he spoke in 1790. He concealed his own disreputable revolutionary political ancestors, who had violently wrested parliamentary power from the king, and concealed them with the fig leaf of the semi-orderly transition of 1688. And another word must be said against Burke on behalf of the rudderless members of the new National Assembly meeting in Paris in 1790, even as Burke wrote. Burke looks down as from a great height upon these new French legislators.

After I had read over the list of the persons and descriptions elected into the *tiers état*, nothing which they afterwards did could appear astonishing. Among them, indeed, I saw some of known rank, some of shining talents; but of any practical experience in the state, not one man was to be found. The best were only men of theory.

Against that, let us state the case for the new legislator from Lyons or Marseilles. Of course he had no knowledge or experience of representative

assemblies. France had been run by a royal bureaucracy centered in Versailles and deriving its authority from an absolute monarch, though one who was amenable to gradual change. In France in 1790 there was nothing like the English tradition that had nurtured Lord Somers, as incarnated in the *Reflections*. For those members of the National Assembly, at sea in an unpredictable hurricane, there were no Burkean habits to evoke or draw upon, no reservoirs of wisdom inexpressible in words, no code of parliamentary conduct—because they were the *first* parliament. They sought guidance in theory and abstract principle, which was all they had.

Michael Oakeshott gives it as his opinion that a genuine political education requires three generations to acquire, and Burke, based upon his text in the *Reflections*, might well be inclined to agree with Oakeshott. But here we encounter another paradox. Neither Burke nor Oakeshott required three generations to acquire their own wisdom. Burke himself was a "new man" out of Ireland. Michael Oakeshott came from no long tradition of intuitive political governance. What we see in Burke and Oakeshott, both men of genius, is the ability to *imagine* intuitive and traditional wisdom so acquired. But—paradox piled upon paradox—what both Burke and Oakeshott wrote constituted what Oakeshott would have considered a "crib" to real knowledge. Lord Somers remains unpublished and silent.