

# interpretation

a journal of political philosophy

volume 3/2,3

winter 1973

page

97	leo strauss	note on the plan of nietzsche's <i>beyond good and evil</i>
114	alexandre kojève	the idea of death in the philosophy of hegel
157	muhsin mahdi	remarks on the <i>1001 nights</i>
169	larry peterman	an introduction to dante's <i>de monarchia</i>
191	larry l. adams	edmund burke: the psychology of citizenship
205	nathan rotenstreich	human emancipation and revolution
221	walter b. mead	christian ambiguity and social disorder



martinus nijhoff, the hague

edited at

queens college of the city university  
of new york

# interpretation

a journal of political philosophy

volume 3

issue 2,3

## *editors*

seth g. benardete - howard b. white  
hilail gildin *executive editor*

## *consulting editors*

john hallowell - wilhelm hennis erich hula - michael oakeshott leo  
strauss · kenneth w. thompson

interpretation is a journal devoted to the study of political philosophy.  
it appears three times a year.

its editors welcome contributions from all those who take  
a serious interest in political philosophy regardless of their orientation.

all manuscripts and editorial correspondence  
should be addressed to the executive editor

## **interpretation**

**jefferson hall 312 - queens college - flushing, n.y. 11367 - u.s.a.**

## *subscription price*

for institutions and libraries Guilders 36.— - for individuals Guilders 28.80  
one guilder = ab. \$ 0.37

subscription and correspondence in connection  
therewith should be sent to the publisher

**martinus nijhoff**

**9-11 lange voorhout - p.o.b. 269 - the hague - netherlands.**

EDMUND BURKE :  
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CITIZENSHIP

LARRY L. ADAMS

For Edmund Burke, the psychology of politics was a crucial but a complex question. The categories of nature, need, and reason developed by Liberal theorists to explain political behavior were inadequate, but the legitimacy, the persuasive power, of the older Christian anthropology was declining. Thus Burke found himself, almost as Matthew Arnold found himself a century later, working "between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." A political psychology viable for citizenship in the new modern era would have to reach in two directions, back to the conception of a moral order implicit in the Christian tradition, and forward to provide direction and legitimacy for the rising aspiration for secular liberty. The three sections of this paper, accordingly, will successively discuss Burke's conception of the moral order, his system of political psychology, and his justification of secular liberty.

I

Any form of political behavior was incomprehensible, Burke believed, unless it were related to a personal and a social past and future. Purely isolated acts signify nothing. What is required is an appreciation of the subject-citizen as an actor within structures which transcend him in time and space—familial, social, ecclesiastical, and legal structures. And the most subtle and decisive form of order—interlaced with each of the others in human affairs—is the moral order.

Critics can readily point out that Burke does not define the moral order. He says that it is encountered as part of the "givenness" of life. It is understood by the devout to proceed from God. At a minimum, an awareness of it brings a sensitivity to the invisible ethical dimension of all human relationships.

One meaning of the moral order is that men are not self-created and self-subsistent, and therefore cannot be auto-nomous, self-lawed. Men are born, and live out their lives, related, dependent, and obligated. Maturity consists, it is true, in outgrowing the dependencies of the child, but it consists as well in understanding and developing a wider range of relationships and obligations.

...the awful author of our being is the author of our place in the order of existence  
...We have obligations to mankind at large, which are not in consequence of any special voluntary pact. They arise from the relation of man to man, and the

relation of man to God, which are not matters of choice. On the contrary, the force of all the pacts which we enter into with any particular person or number of persons amongst mankind, depends upon those prior obligations.<sup>1</sup>

This passage is remarkable because it contradicts Burke's usual scrupulous care to reason from specific and familiar occasions to more general and remote ones. The statement seems designed to establish the dependency of social order upon divine will; the consequent primacy in human affairs of the moral order; and the corollary that consent could not have been, as John Locke hypothetically argued, the original and sufficient basis of political order since any such agreement would itself depend upon some prior order and context of obligation.

Burke argues, as an example, that marriage may be voluntarily entered into, but that the obligations which it entails follow automatically, often at pain and sacrifice to the parties (a point which had disturbed Locke's efforts to analyze all social relationships as completely consensual). The consent of children to be raised by their parents is not formally declared, but it may safely be assumed, "because the presumed consent of every rational creature is in unison with the predisposed order of things."<sup>2</sup>

So the family represents the unison of the natural, the social, and the moral orders. Burke implies as well that the natural association of the family arises prior to, and conditions, any association of men through social compact. Relationship is prior to autonomy, and duty conditions consent, before the individual has ever encountered or become aware of the political.

Burke seeks to extend the natural ties of the family into a natural sanction for social classes and hierarchy when he writes, "Men came in that manner into a community with the social state of their parents, endowed with all the benefits, loaded with all the duties of their situation."<sup>3</sup> Out of the physical relations of family are spun the social ties of the nation, and without willing it, "... we are bound by that relation called our country which comprehends (as it has been well said) 'all the charities of all.'"<sup>4</sup>

The progression of the individual's membership in the family to full membership in the polity is then a natural one, not alone because of the continuities of obligation, not only because birth determines social rank and role, but because family and state are both affective associations. Family and polity are cooperating agencies which symbolize, transmit,

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: F. & C. Rivington, 1801-1827), 16 vols. *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs, in Consequence of Some Late Discussions in Parliament, Relative to the Reflections on the French Revolution* (1791), VI, 206.

<sup>2</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>4</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, p. 207.

and enforce the moral order. "Every sort of moral, every sort of civil, every sort of political institution, aiding the rational and natural ties that connect the human understanding to the divine, are no more than necessary to build up that wonderful structure, Man . . ." <sup>5</sup>

One such institution which bears a special relation to the moral order is the church.<sup>6</sup> Man is by nature a religious animal, as the English well recognize, and it is to the persecution of the church in France that Burke ascribes the soteriological character of French Revolutionary politics.<sup>7</sup>

One indispensable function which the church provides for society is the consecration of authority. This consecration is to be prized not because it meets formal ecclesiastical requirement, or even the revealed will of God, but because of its practical psychological benefits. Rulers need to be reminded that their authority is derivative and transient, and that their eminence of office places them not beyond the moral order, but instead closer to its Creator. Religious consecration of secular authority provides some security against the temptations latent in power and pomp.

This consecration is made, that all who administer in the government of men, in which they stand in the presence of God himself, should have high and worthy notions of their function and destination; that their hope should be full of immortality; that they should not look to the paltry pelf of the moment...<sup>8</sup>

Consecration serves as a ceremonial reinforcement of the ruler's conscience against the temptations of high office, and as a reminder of the existence of the moral order. The need for religious standards of conscientious political behavior is not confined to monarchs; on the contrary, the need is more imperative in the "collective sovereignties" of republics and democracies. The people, or their representatives, acting collectively "are themselves in a great measure their own instruments":<sup>9</sup> there is less institutional distance, and fewer possible impediments, between a decision and its implementation.

What is more, the anonymity of a crowd is a condition directly opposite to that of the eminent and visible political authority. In a large crowd, assembled and dissolved on a moment's notice, responsibility for conduct is so widely diffused as to be unassignable, and the bonds of conscience of individuals may be severely weakened. Burke

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: F. & C. Rivington, 1801-1827), 16 vols. *Mr. Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the Proceedings of Certain Societies in London, relative to that event, In a Letter intended to have been sent to a Gentleman in Paris* (1790), V, 227.

<sup>6</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 81, 92, 226.

<sup>8</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 226.

<sup>9</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 226.

then argues, as does Sigmund Freud, that the practical and psychological limitations on political behavior are much weakened when the political actor is corporate—"the people," or a crowd or a duly constituted assembly claiming to act on behalf of the people. It follows that the sanctions of religion take on added significance under those circumstances. "It is . . . of infinite importance that they should not be suffered to imagine that their will, any more than that of kings, is the standard of right and wrong."<sup>10</sup> It is the church, the only institution whose leading responsibility it is to serve as spokesman for the moral order in the affairs of men, to declare "... the early received, and uniformly continued, sense of mankind."<sup>11</sup>

Again, the objection may be raised that Burke has spelled out no specific rules to lend force and content to "the moral order." It may be true, as he contends, that "... the votes of a majority of the people cannot alter the moral any more than they can alter the physical essence of things"<sup>12</sup>—but this admonition would carry more weight if he could explain in detail what is the content of "the moral essence of things." On this point, Burke defends his position with counsels of caution. "Nothing universal can be rationally affirmed or any moral, or any political subject. Pure metaphysical abstraction does not belong to these matters."<sup>13</sup> The inaccessibility of a systematic morality, he claims, does not disturb him: "Even in matters which are, as it were, just within our reach, what would become of the world if the practice of all moral duties, and the foundations of society, rested upon having their reasons made clear and demonstrable to every individual?"<sup>14</sup> After all, we can rest assured that "If there were not some principles of judgment as well as of sentiment common to all mankind, no hold could possibly be taken either on their reason or their passions, sufficient to maintain the ordinary correspondence of life."<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, Burke does believe some essentials concerning the moral order are evident. Perhaps the first of these in importance is the existence of God, who is the security of the moral order. "I allow, that if no supreme ruler exists, wise to form, and potent to enforce, the moral law, there is no sanction to any conduct, virtual or even actual, against

<sup>10</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 229.

<sup>11</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 230.

<sup>12</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>13</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>14</sup> *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: F. & C. Rivington, 1801-1827), 16 vols. *A Letter from Mr. Burke to a Member of the National Assembly in answer to Some Objections to his book on French affairs* (1791), VI, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: F. & C. Rivington, 1801-1827), 16 vols. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), I, 87.

the will of prevalent power.”<sup>16</sup> The existence of God means that men must always be mindful of the distinction between the commands of God and the commands of the state. Burke writes indignantly of the French revolutionaries that “. . . they endeavour to destroy that tribunal of conscience which exists independently of edicts and decrees. Your despots govern by terror. They know that he who fears God fears nothing else . . .”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, contrary to the analysis of Professor Leo Strauss,<sup>18</sup> Burke does distinguish between the moral order and the process of history. Conscience is distinct from community: “Whatever turns the soul inward on itself tends to center its forces, and to fit it for greater and stronger flights of science [i.e., learning].”<sup>19</sup> Yet at the same time, Burke emphasizes the extent to which institutions, and even history itself—since history embraces communal events, leaders, symbols, and accomplishments—assist in the transmission and the application of the moral order. It is institutions and history which embody and give specific substance to the moral order; it is the institutions and the history of a people which discipline and direct the conscience of that nation. This conception of the mediation of the moral order by history and institutions is apparent in Burke’s conception of “prejudice.”

Prejudice represents the cumulative judgments and values of the community over time, and as such it is superior to individual experience. It might better be called “postjudice,” since while it represents a pre-judgment for an individual, that judgment issues from accumulated experience, belonging either to him personally or to the community. “We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that the stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages.”<sup>20</sup> There was no reason, he insisted, for men of learning to make war upon folklore, as the French *philosophes* had done.

Prejudice, or the inherited shell of conventional morality, serves the practical needs of the multitude in lieu of that reflective morality for which the common man has neither the time, the inclination, nor the education to develop for each situation he encounters. Conventional morality amounts, as John Dewey later wrote, to “ideas fixed in our muscles.” Prejudice is the real source of continuity and cooperation in human behavior. “Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency;

---

<sup>16</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 316-318.

<sup>19</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 218.

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, sceptical, puzzled and unresolved.”<sup>21</sup>

Burke often refers to morality as a garment, a play upon the Latin *habit*, or garment, since habit was to Burke the principal conventional form of morality, and society’s means of transmitting it as well. Morality clothes men and covers their primitive nakedness; that is, it protects them from the excesses of nature, their own nature and that of their fellows, and renders them fit for life in civil society. Habits are the constituent structures of character, that level of a man’s selfhood which unifies his behavior and renders it principled; it makes “. . . a man’s virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts.”<sup>22</sup> Habit then is the practical manifestation of the moral order in the lives of men and societies. The role of habit, of the structure and the stability of morality is vital, because “. . . the natural progress of the passions [is] from frailty to vice.”<sup>23</sup> To mix in a theological concept, sound habit is the counter-force to original sin.

## II

Burke does not ordinarily employ a theological vocabulary. He is not a theocrat, and does not wish to appear to be a defender of an ecclesiastical polity. This is probably the basic reason for his development of the concept of the moral order. He understood the widening gulf of modern culture opening before him, and he knew that those who lived in “the modern age,” on the secular side of the chasm, could not be reached directly by religious cries and formulas. He understood that much of the significance of Liberal political theory was that it was profane—literally, outside the temple. He understood that the state of nature myth was a secular counterpart to the Eden myth, designed to break the hegemony of the church over political theory. Much of the fascination of Burke’s work derives from its intense effort to develop conceptual bridges across the widening rift in modern culture, between its religious heritage, memories, and symbols, to its secular aspirations and projects.

And it is entirely consistent with Burke’s task that he would strongly have protested against the divorce of ethics and psychology. Just this sort of divorce seemed to him the essence of Liberal social theory, and he feared that it foreshadowed the rending and decline of European culture. If the mental life of men could be severed from moral purpose, if psychology could be made “value-free,” then the age of “sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators” would have succeeded, “and the glory of

---

<sup>21</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>22</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 219.

<sup>23</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 311.

Europe . . . extinguished forever.”<sup>24</sup> This sort of naturalism, which would sever motive from morality, person from culture, Burke believed he detected in the degrading procession of King Louis XVI and his queen through the streets of Paris by the revolutionaries. “On this scheme of things, a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman, a woman is but an animal; and an animal not of the highest order.”<sup>25</sup>

Whether or not a naturalistic and value-free human psychology is pernicious, or possible, Burke’s theories of the psychology of citizenship can be understood more clearly by distinguishing them from his conception of the moral order which has been examined in the preceding section. Burke did believe that the interior dynamics of mental life animated the political process, and he set out to articulate the buried meanings of the psychology of politics in a way which could be accepted by modern skeptics without destroying the religious ground of those meanings.

...we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestick ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities our state, our hearts, our sepulchres, and our altars.<sup>26</sup>

This eloquent statement can be summarized as an assertion that the state is a filial association. This in itself is a complex proposition, enclosing a series of conclusions which need to be explored.

In the first place, Burke sees that the polity is in historical fact a filial as well as a legal association. In other words, citizenship has arisen from, and remains psychologically grounded in, numerous lesser series of family relationships. So, Burke could rejoice that the statute repealing some of the legal penalties imposed upon English Catholics “made us what we ought always to have been, one family, one body, one heart and soul, against the family-combination, and all other combinations of our enemies.”<sup>27</sup> A further similarity is that membership in the state, like membership in the family, is normally non-elective. Each association “attaches upon every individual without formal act of his own” (although it may have originated in a voluntary choice), and from each association the individual derives benefits without willing them or acting directly to gain them.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 199.

<sup>25</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 201.

<sup>26</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>27</sup> *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: F. & C. Rivington, 1801-1827), 16 vols. *Speeches at Mr. Burke's Arrival at Bristol, at the Conclusion of the Poll* (1774), III, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, p. 205

A second meaning of the proposition that the state is a filial association is that the state is a psychological unity bound with the ties of *philia*, the love of like for like. The polity draws upon the individual's capacity for love, which is developed in the family. "We begin our publick affections in our families," he writes. "No cold relation is a zealous citizen."<sup>29</sup> As the person matures, and his responsibilities widen, so do his affections.

We pass on to our neighbourhoods, and our habitual provincial connexions. These are inns and resting places. Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of [arbitrary, revolutionary] authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill.<sup>30</sup>

Thus through a series of enlarging affections, the individual comes to identify with the nation: he belongs to it, and it belongs to him, just as he and his family, he and his town, belong to one another. Such belonging may have a legal title, but its true foundations for conduct lie in the affections of the individual.

If the polity can draw upon filial affection, it is obviously true that the monarch makes an ideal father figure. For Burke, this is one of the decisive advantages of a monarchy or a "mixed constitution" over a strict republican form of government. Of French revolutionary thought he laments that, "On the principles of this mechanical philosophy, our institutions can never be embodied, if I may use the expression, in persons; so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment."<sup>31</sup> Of course the significance of the king as father figure does not weaken the importance of social and psychological relationships intermediate between those of son and subject-citizen, including those of vocation, friendship, church, and social class. Class in Burke's time was a discernible stratum of society, bound together by blood, manners, education, and economic tasks, and properly also, he believed, by the psychological concomitants of loyalty, trust, understanding, and affection. "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind."<sup>32</sup>

A third sense in which the polity is a filial association is that the family, as the crucible of the affectionate capacities and attachments of the individual, is by the same power the tutor of moral habit, of "salutary domestick prejudice," as Burke calls it.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 402-403.

<sup>30</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 403.

<sup>31</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 202.

<sup>32</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 150.

<sup>33</sup> Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, p. 38.

Civil society is made possible by the internalization of moral demands which results from moral education. If the process of moral education is deficient in a family, the lack or weakness in the consciences of its children may cause social harm. If the family structure and its function of moral education are weak throughout a society, the deficiency in internalized norms will have to be compensated for by some external social authority. Liberty demands more interior order, more ethical maturity, of the citizens who enjoy it than does tyranny. "Men are qualified for civil liberty," Burke writes, "in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains on their own appetites."

Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more of it there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.<sup>34</sup>

Fourth, the state may be considered a filial association because like the family, it is possessed and transmitted as an inheritance. Life, liberty, and property, which Locke views as the cardinal rights of man, Burke sees as the transmitted heritage of society, the filaments binding one generation to the next. "By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges, in the same manner in which we enjoy and transmit our property and our lives."<sup>35</sup> The family transmits liberty in two senses, through the instruction of the conscience of the young, which makes liberty possible, and collectively, in conjunction with other families, in the entailed inheritance of the rights of Englishmen. The transmission of property as well has a psychological dimension beyond legality: "The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most to the perpetuation of society itself. It makes our weakness subservient to our virtue; it grafts benevolence even upon avarice."<sup>36</sup>

Community advantages which are enjoyed "locked fast as in a sort of family settlement"<sup>37</sup> carry a positive emotional charge or force. Liberties received and understood as an inheritance are prized not only rationally, but emotionally: they bear a positive emotional significance to their possessors, who regard the liberties as significant to their own identity, as extensions of the securities for their own selfhood. The spirit of liberty, lacking in itself any limiting or directing principles, is given limit and direction by the memory of the moral struggles that secured liberty, by a sense of familial-national pride in enjoying the

---

<sup>34</sup> Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>36</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 158.

<sup>37</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 128.

liberty, and by a sense of accountability for the liberty to ancestry and posterity. Each generation finds some meaning in the effort to keep the heritage of liberty intact, and, if possible, to improve it.

### III

Issues of liberty seem to present a problem for Burke's thought. On most of the questions of his day, he stood with the reformers, even though there might be skeptics among them. Usually he chose policies we would call liberal. How did he reconcile his alliance with the modern cause of liberty, with his demanding theory of the moral psychology of citizenship? To explore this question is the purpose of this section. To do so will help place Burke's political psychology in perspective, in relation to the dominant course of development in the English-speaking world over the past two centuries: the growth of liberty.

Burke was convinced that the tendency of Liberal thought is to isolate politics from its larger moral and psychological setting in human life. The rational, independent adult, coolly contracting obligations which serve his personal needs, is a fictitious creature. Such a conception falsifies the human condition, normatively and empirically. Normatively, by establishing reasoned consent as the ultimate test of legitimate authority, and service of natural need as the proper condition of consent, Liberalism eclipses the symbolic aspects of politics, those ways in which politics points beyond itself, and raises ultimate questions of value and choice, relationship and growth. Empirically, the Liberal model seals off the political experience from formative human experiences of authority with the family, church, and locality, thereby exaggerating the rational coherence of political life. In brief, the Liberal model neglects empirically the affections and symbols which animate the strivings of political life; and neglects normatively the moral order, which alone can explain, relativize, and harmonize those strivings. Nonetheless, Burke believes that the basic conceptions of Liberal political thought can be reconciled with an appreciation of the moral and the erotic foundations of politics, and indeed it is the purpose of his thought to accomplish such a reconciliation.

The framing of a government, Burke contended wryly, required no extraordinary skill.

Settle the seat of power; teach obedience: and the work is done. To give freedom is still more easy. It is not necessary to guide; it only requires to let go the rein. But to form a free government; that is, to temper together these opposite elements of liberty and restraint in one consistent work, requires much thought, deep reflection, a sagacious, powerful, and combining mind.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 484

Thus, it is characteristic of his approach to constitutional government to insist that order be established as the frame and basis of liberty: the combination of the two is the essential feature of constitutional government. This is the reason that Burke can never regard liberty as a self-commending good. Liberty in its commonly accepted meaning is a precondition of a people's greatness, but not its guarantee.

He was unwilling to congratulate the French upon their newly won liberty until he could see "... how it had been combined with government; with public force; with the discipline and obedience of armies; with the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue; with morality and religion, with solidity and property; with peace and order; with civil and social manners."<sup>39</sup> These public conditions and institutions are necessary to the fulfillment of social life, of which liberty is the necessary condition, but not the sufficient cause.

If liberty is not an adequate criterion for judging a political order, it is because it merely reaches the question of the social character and psychology of a people, without answering it. "But what is liberty without wisdom, and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint."<sup>40</sup> Liberty in itself is never deserving of praise—for the reason that the purpose of liberty is to allow the fulfillment of man's moral nature. This is the crucial link between the moral order and the constitutional order. The justification for liberty is that it permits the individual the fullest exercise, and hence the fullest development, of his moral faculties, but liberty itself cannot ensure the development of the good or moral man. Here he differs basically with the Lockean Liberal, who follows the god of growth, Liber, in believing that if the fetters are removed from man he will naturally, without the external guidance of social agencies, assume the form of the good man. For Burke, believing that "the natural progress of the passions [is] from frailty to vice,"<sup>41</sup> this can never be the case. "I cannot too often recommend it to the serious consideration of all men, who think civil society to be within the province of moral jurisdiction," he writes, "that if we owe to it any duty, it is not subject to our will. Duties are not voluntary. Duty and will are even contradictory terms."<sup>42</sup> It is because the first, natural, impulses of men are not automatically beneficent that will and duty often conflict, and that the will of the individual must be subject to the tutelage of the family, church, manners, and the law. In this context, Burke makes a statement of the basis and purpose of government which represents a radical revision of Locke's political psychology. "Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants,"

---

<sup>39</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 483.

<sup>41</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 311.

<sup>42</sup> Burke, *An Appeal*, p. 64.

he wrote. "Among these wants is to be reckoned the want [lack], out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions.... In this sense, the restraints upon men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights."<sup>43</sup>

For Burke, then, rights and liberties are not equivalent, because liberty, as the absence of restraint, is morally neutral, whereas the rights or claims of the person are to be viewed in the context of the moral and the social orders, and the development of the person as a moral and social being. Since society and polity are executors of the moral order, and the reality of personality has a basic moral content, the concept of person has no definite meaning apart from, or prior to, society and polity. Hence, "Government is not made in virtue of natural rights, which may and do exist in total independence of it..."<sup>44</sup>

The practical and applicable content of the rights of man, then, is supplied by those institutions which structure human affairs, and structure the human psyche by mediating the moral order. Does Burke's cautious and rather positivistic approach to the rights of man mean that he opposes the notion of social contract? The answer seems to be that while he does not oppose it directly, or altogether, he employs the concept infrequently, and when he does advert to it, it is with a special emphasis, as in the following statement of the position of man in society:

He abdicates all right to be his own governor. He inclusively, in a great measure, abandons the right of self-defence, the first law of nature. Men cannot enjoy the rights of an uncivil and of a civil state together. That he may obtain justice, he gives up his right of determining what it is in points the most essential to him. That he may secure some liberty, he makes a surrender in trust of the whole of it.<sup>45</sup>

This statement typifies the differences between the traditional Liberal conception of authority and obligation—for example, John Locke's—and Burke's. Locke's social contract theory focuses attention upon the moments of crisis in the life of society—social inception and social revolution—and thereby elevates the person over social institutions, and emphasizes the leading role of individual volition in establishing, assenting to, and revolutionizing social arrangements. Burke is concerned with the day-to-day actualities of political life, and consequently emphasizes the extent to which the individual is a member: a part, related, dependent, and obligated. The language in his statement above indicates this: "abdicates," "abandons," "cannot enjoy," "gives up," "makes a surrender." Locke envisions a reasoned assertion of rights discovered and guaranteed by reason; Burke conceives of authority as an intra-

---

<sup>43</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 172-173. Italics in the original.

<sup>44</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 172.

<sup>45</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 172.

personal and interpersonal phenomenon, and therefore focuses upon its moral and emotional basis and meaning.

In fact, Burke argues, rights should not be thought of as rational universals at all. "The pretended rights of these theorists are all extremes; and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false."<sup>46</sup> Since the person is not an acultural or pre-cultural entity, uniform in its condition throughout recorded history, rights cannot be so regarded, either.

This view of the moral meaning of the rights of man allows Burke to accept the notion of a social contract, so long as the special aims and character of the contract are kept in view.

Society is indeed a contract. Subordinate contracts for objects of mere occasional interest may be dissolved at pleasure—but the state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee...<sup>47</sup>

We are reminded, in other words, that the social contract embraces the full range of human concerns and human development. As man is not only an economic creature, the social contract cannot be adequately understood by analogy with economic agreements alone.

It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection.<sup>48</sup>

In short, society is a partnership only in the most extended meaning of the term: an association in all human growth and striving. The burdens and benefits of this vast enterprise cannot be easily reckoned and acted upon: hence his reluctance to speak of men's rights as though these were susceptible of precise measurement.

As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Burke has rendered the calculability of justice, and hence the reasonableness of revolution, far more difficult, by emphasizing both the complexity and the continuity of society.

Society's noblest aspect remains to be stated: her role as mediatrix of the moral order.

Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and the invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable

---

<sup>46</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 176.

<sup>47</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 234.

<sup>48</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 234.

<sup>49</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 234.

oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place. This law is not subject to the will of those, who by an obligation above them, and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law.<sup>50</sup>

Here is the solemn grandeur of Burke's design of the polity, drawing the reader's gaze steadily higher, like the vaulted interior of a great cathedral. Because of its role in relation to the moral order, to personal growth, and to civic liberty, the state is vested with penultimacy in Burke's imagination. Any understanding of political life which does not span the furthest reach of human concerns is inadequate. Political life is inherently psychological because it can free and express the middle term in the growth of inter-personal relationships. For Burke, politics arises from sources Liberal theory has not comprehended, moves over depths Liberal imagination has not sounded, and discloses meanings Liberal analysis has not glimpsed.

---

<sup>50</sup> Burke, *Reflections*, p. 234.