

Against that revolution Edmund Burke wrote his *Reflections* that are taken by several of the authors in this collection to the origin of conservative thought. Burke emotionally abhorred the practices of the revolutionaries but, more theoretically, he abhorred the very idea of the attempt “to obliterate their former selves.” Underlying the *Reflections* are the convictions: that one ought not break with the past in the way that the revolutionaries of 1789 intended; and, perhaps less clearly, that one could not break with the past in that way. Tocqueville continues: “I have always felt that they were far less successful in this curious attempt than is generally supposed in other countries and than they themselves at first believed”. In other writings, e.g. on taxation in America, on the East India Company, on slavery... Burke clearly did not suggest that traditional practices and ideas were necessarily good and to be retained. He opposed neither liberty nor change. What he opposed was the revolutionary idea that it was imperative to break utterly with the past before the radically new and perfect invented future could be imposed from above. “The conservative emphasis on the importance of tradition and established order, which entails mutual obligations and duties for all [is] ... opposed to that illegitimate order which is simply established by violence and comes with no obligations on the part of its rulers ..”(Andreasson, 100) supposes not merely tradition but good tradition. It is as purblind to suppose the past to have been entirely bad as to expect a newly invented order to be entirely good. A tradition is the ambiguous fruit of greed and power and of many good ideas and practices that have stood the test of time. To winnow the wheat from the chaff, to distinguish the good from the bad, to discover what ought now to be done or not done are the unavoidable and enduring elements of argument. Conservatism is not as clear as revolution. Hence Levante Nagy, in the first essay in *Reflections*, thinks of it as an “essentially contested concept”. Different people use the same term differently, such that if someone claims to be a conservative the listener does not yet know what precisely is claimed. That this is so is borne out in several valuable essays that examine the conservative tradition in different countries. Gergely Egedy writes of “The [Patrician] Conservatism of József Antall” in Hungary, Kasper Støvring of “Cultural Conservative Traditions in Postwar Denmark”, Dogancan Özsel, Hilal Onur Önce and Aysun Yarali of “New Trends in the Political Discourse of the Turkish Military: Marching towards Radical Conservatism?”, Agnès Alexandre-Collier of Sarkozy’s UMP, Peter Dorey of “A Conservative ‘Third Way’ ...” in the United Kingdom after Thatcher and William Miller of “Current Trends in Conservatism in the United States”. In Turkey, the radical conservatism of the military that would preserve what Atatürk established in a fairly recent revolution (239 but *passim*) is far removed from the

conservative traditions in Denmark, where some “conservative intellectuals are preoccupied with the necessity of a cultural community of common mores and customs, which are interpreted from a national perspective” (282). The Danish traditions are not wholly identical and are unlike the conservatism of József Antall, the first Prime Minister of Hungary after the collapse of communism, who “In keeping with the Burkean traditions of organic change ... made it clear that his government would try to implement the necessary and painful changes by ‘relying on our historical heritage’ instead of copying mechanically a foreign model.” (257) (It is worth noticing that to speak of social change as “organic” is to speak metaphorically; see, Rose on Hegel 111-115) In many of the post-communist central European states, initial euphoria at the removal of a crippling lack of freedom was soon tempered by the discovery that the new freedom brought with it new, not entirely welcome, responsibilities, uncertainties, and risks. In the older democracies, when the trauma of the second war had abated, and a welfare state established, the difference between “conservative” and “socialist” parties became far greater in rhetoric than in practice; and, in those democracies where violent (revolutionary) civil strife erupted what drove it was often based more on an image of traditional cultural identity than on a difference between conservatism and socialism although the (conservative) recovery of the past was often expressed in socialist rhetoric.

A great advantage of the collection is that beside studies of the particular countries and states stand theoretical studies and interpretations – Peter Dorey on “The Importance of Inequality in Conservative Thought” concentrating largely, but not exclusively, on contemporary writings in English and on the United Kingdom; David Rose on the influence of Hegel; Stefan Andreasson’s “On the Nature of Anglophone Conservatism and its Applicability to the Analysis of Postcolonial Politics” and John Varty on Adam Ferguson.

Giorgio Baruchello’s “What is to be Considered? An Appraisal of the Value of Conservatism in the light of the Life Ground.” discusses the contemporary Canadian environmentalist John McMurtry and Gerard Casey’s “Conservatism and Libertarianism: Friends or Foes?” Both are concerned with values, that is, with what is to be conserved or brought about. The values they discuss are neither the same nor necessarily wholly incompatible. “McMurtry’s life ground entails that a good economic system: (1) must secure the provision of vital goods for as many citizens – ideally all of them – for as long a time as possible – sustainability being no short-term goal; and (2) it must generate the conditions for a fuller enjoyment of life along the same spatio-temporal coordinates.” (Baruchello, 309) Someone who thinks of himself as a conservative might very well agree with that ideal – or might not – but to think

of it as a specifically conservative ideal is to give yet one further twist to the meaning of that essentially contested concept. A particular libertarian might well accept the ideal, but *qua* *libertarian* will ask how it is to be achieved, for the libertarian *qua* libertarian concentrates on the value of freedom over against coercion, particularly state coercion.

The freedom valued by the libertarian is not unfettered; it is freedom from coercion, particularly state coercion, to do or not do what does not damage another. The libertarian rule: “do not agress against another” is, in fact, the second of Ulpian’s precepts of justice: “hurt no-one” (Justinian *Institutes* I.I.3 *Digest* 1.1.10.1). It does not follow from the injunction to love of one’s neighbour – which is to an extent the positive expression of “hurt no-one” – that people ought to be coerced into doing so. The basic libertarian value is the repudiation of coercion when the intended action does not harm another. The repudiation of coercion is the fundamental libertarian value but libertarians must have others also and two libertarians may well have different values: “One more or less certain way for to prevent its [libertarianism’s] collapse into libertinism is for it to adopt the cultural core values of conservatism [once one has determined what those values are and found them to be good] and this libertarians are free to do. Conservatism, on the other hand, is always at the mercy of the questions – whose tradition? Which customs? What habits?” (Casey p.53) Every human is born and educated into a tradition, which it is wise to examine and to keep what one finds good, unwise unthinkingly to try wholly to abandon, and unwise blindly to accept in all it details. That having been said, the basic moral question remains: what am I to do in the world in which I find myself?

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