

recognize that man is a thinking reed, rather than a victim of conditions and processes, will not solve the problems, but it might improve the level of the discussion.

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Dr. Kirk's Kirk

THE PORTABLE CONSERVATIVE READER. *Edited by Russell Kirk.* (Penguin Books, New York, 1982)

Conservatism has never been easy to define. Ever since Chateaubriand conjured the bothersome term out of the linguistic chaos of French counterrevolutionary politics in 1818,¹ politicians and journalists (not to mention scholars) have struggled manfully to explain it—usually to no avail. Chateaubriand knew that the language of politics works best when it is vague and imprecise; and he understood that a political term's success and ultimate survival may owe as much to its opacity as it does to the positions and ideals associated with it at any given time. For that reason I have always rather enjoyed the late Richard Weaver's definition of conservatism as "the paradigm of essences towards which the phenomenology of the world is in continuing approximation." It is also William Buckley's favorite definition; one that he happily inflicts on any person foolish enough to insist on such an explanation. "I have never failed," writes Buckley, "to dissatisfy an audience that asks the meaning of conservatism."

This, of course, does not mean that a definition of political conservatism is beyond our capacities. It is only to suggest that it is not the sort of term that readily lends itself to the type of facile definitions that political scientists and journalists tend to employ when dealing with ideologies in general. Anyone interested in developing a deeper understanding of what conservatism is all about would do well to look into the book at hand. Its editor, Russell Kirk, is our most profound and ardent student of historical conservatism. Since the publication of his seminal work, *The Conservative Mind*, in 1953, he has devoted the greater part of his distinguished scholarly and literary career to exploring, chronicling, and explaining conservatism to the American public. That there is a serious revival of intelligent conservatism in America today is due, in part, to the achievement of Russell Kirk. However, in the present an-

1. Chateaubriand coined the term in response to a series of articles in the liberal journal *Minerve*, which declared the French counterrevolutionary right (then known by the name *ultras*) to be the party of ignorance. His journal, *Le Conservateur*, founded in 1818, was briefly one of the most intellectual and brilliantly written *petits journaux* of its day. See Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*; Tene Remond's *Le Droite en France* (Paris: Aubier Editions Montaigne, 1954); and Honoré de Balzac's magnificent *Illusions Perdues*. The noun *conservative* is, of course, derived from the Latin verb *conservare*, which means, quite literally to keep or to conserve.

thology, as in his other major works, Dr. Kirk is concerned not so much with conservatism in general, but with a specific type of conservatism—Anglo-American conservatism. More specifically, he is concerned with the development of Anglo-American conservatism since the French Revolution.

I mention that Dr. Kirk focuses his attention on a specific type of conservatism, because the existence of different modes of conservative action is the principal reason for our historical confusion over the word. The late Willmoore Kendall was fond of pointing out that no discussion of conservatism is possible without some adjectival reference to the type of conservatism to be talked about. Are we, for example, interested in *English* conservatism, or are we interested in *Argentine* conservatism? As Dr. Kirk notes in his introduction to the present volume: "Unlike socialism, anarchism, and even liberalism... conservatism offers no universal pattern of politics for adoption everywhere. On the contrary, conservatives reason that social institutions always must differ considerably from nation to nation, since any land's politics must be the product of that country's dominant religion, ancient customs, and historic experience."

One of the most interesting political developments in recent years has been the war between Britain and Argentina. It is interesting, in part, because it is the kind of war that used to occur quite frequently in European history and that still occurs in Latin America: a clash between two profoundly conservative governments. One might add that it is not simply a clash between two governments that are conservative in political terms alone. The conservatism of the Argentine *junta* and of the present day British Tories is as intellectual and spiritual as it is political. But the conservatism of the Argentines is so terribly different from that of the British that most American conservatives, who are the products of the Anglo-American tradition anthologized by Dr. Kirk, must find it difficult to comprehend, let alone sympathize with. The Argentine conservative—like most Latins—is, above all else, a statist; he is suspicious of capitalism and capitalists, whom he views as deracinated progressives; he glorifies the concept of *la terre et les morts*; and he exalts the *pays réel* of nationalist mythology over the *pays légal* of the modern world. The words of the French conservative, Charles Maurras—who is probably infinitely more popular in Argentina today than he is in France—would, in a slightly Iberianized form, find echo among Argentine conservatives today. From his prison cell at Clairvaux after World War II, Maurras declared: "The God of Robespierre and Rousseau is not the God of Clotilde and St. Remy. The social and moral principles of Catholicism are not those of London and Winston Churchill." For the Argentine conservative is above all a Roman Catholic, and he has long distrusted the English for, among other things, their Protestantism. Indeed, the two most revered contemporary Argentine conservative political theorists, Julio and Rodolfo Irazusta, have devoted an inordinate amount of their scholarship to attacking the British.²

2. Of particular interest is Rodolfo and Julio Irazusta's *La Argentina y El Imperialismo Británico* (Buenos Aires: Coleccion el Mundo de Hoy, 1934). See

Now all this is very conservative, but it is not, as I say, the sort of conservatism that has much appeal for Americans. While General Galtieri and his colleagues are all good conservatives, they are *Argentine* conservatives quite incapable of translating their ideals and passions into forms that might be appreciated and understood by Anglo-Saxons. Mrs. Thatcher, on the other hand, can speak directly to American conservatives, who share her most fundamental values and principles. How, after all, can the Spanish Inquisition explain itself to the Glorious Revolution? What can the *Syllabus of Errors* or the *Manifiesto de los Persas* say to the Chicago School of Economics? In Spain, after the French invasion in 1814, the lower classes joined with the aristocracy in calling for a return to absolutism. The Madrid rabble stormed through the streets of the city chanting, "Down with the Constitution," "Death to liberty!," and "Long live chains." How different, how very, very different from the home life of our own dear Burke.

Yet even the great Burke can appear in many incarnations. For example, to Friedrich von Gentz, the brilliant advisor to Metternich at the Congress of Vienna, who translated the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* into German, Burke was a German romantic, an articulator of *Lebensphilosophie*.³ To Marx, who first discovered that a "vast, tremendous, uninformed spectre" was haunting Europe in the pages of the *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, Burke was merely an "execrable cant-monger" (*Das Kapital*, vol. I, part iv, ch. xxxi). Conor Cruise O'Brien, in his brilliant introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Reflections*, suggests that Burke was essentially a pro-Catholic Irishman, whose hatred of Protestantism was one of the principal reasons for his popularity in France and Germany. "The word protestant," Burke wrote his son Richard in 1792, "is the charm that locks up in a dungeon of servitude three million of your people..." And in recent years Burke has been called a liberal, a proto-Goldwaterite, a socialist, a capitalist. And, of course, Julio Irazusta has discovered some distinctly Latin traits in Edmund Burke.⁴

My point is that the relativistic nature of conservative movements causes them to be both misunderstood by many scholars, and, occa-

also, Natalio R. Botana, *El orden conservador* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1977) and Jose Luis Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1963).

3. *Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution* (Hohenzollern, 1794). Gentz's own reflections on the differences between the French and American Revolutions were translated into English by John Quincy Adams, the sixth President of the United States, who published them anonymously in Philadelphia in 1800. Also of interest on the subject of the Germanification of Burke are F. Braune, *Edmund Burke in Deutschland* (Heidelberg, 1917), F. Meusel, *Edmund Burke und die französische Revolution* (Berlin, 1913), and Alfred von Martin, "Weltanschauliche Motive im altkonservativen Denken," in *Deutscher Staat und deutsche Parteien, Festschrift für Meinecke* (Munich and Berlin, 1922).

4. Julio Irazusta, *Burke* (Mendoza: Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 1952) and *La Monarquía Constitucional en Inglaterra* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1970).

sionally, distorted by their opponents and votaries alike. Nevertheless, as I suggested earlier, it is possible, I believe, to make a few useful and correct statements concerning conservatism in general. To be more specific, it is possible to say something about the conservative *dynamic* that can be applied in most cases to most conservative movements. Oddly enough, Anglo-American conservatism may appear, at least on the surface, to be a partial exception to the following points.

1. Conservatism is not made-up of a single *body of ideas*. What we call conservatism—or, to be more specific, *conservatisms*—is not a single ideology but a multiplicity of ideologies.
2. Conservatisms are not simply movements opposed to change or movements addicted to the *status quo*. On the contrary, conservatisms come into being in *response* to some change or crisis (such as the French Revolution or the Great Depression); they are *reactive* movements in that they owe their character to whatever it is they are reacting to.
3. Conservatisms are thus situational ideologies. They vary from time to time and place to place. What they do have in common is that they are all responses (or, at least, they start out as responses)—but to unique circumstances that may differ profoundly from one another. It is the nature of the circumstances to which a given conservative movement is responding that will define the nature of that movement.
4. As a result of their reactive nature, conservative movements often tend to be movements of lost causes. At the very least they may be movements that build upon causes that have been lost or damaged by events (such as the French monarchy in 1789). Many conservatives tend not to respond to change until it has already taken place. Then they tend to glorify or utopianize that which has been changed (or lost) in order to combat the forces that brought the change about in the first place. Some conservatives sound like firemen who have arrived at the scene of a fire after it has already destroyed a great house. Having arrived too late to put out or prevent the fire they try to remind those willing to listen of the magnificent edifice that once stood on the recently consumed spot. Occasionally they will exaggerate the beauty and splendor of the old house, which may, in truth, have been a fire-trap.

The conservatism of the great Burke, which Russell Kirk has done so much to popularize and elucidate over the years, was very much in keeping with this definition. Like the Continental conservatives, Burke saw a "spectre" that was "unappalled by peril, unchecked by remorse . . . [and that despised] all common maxims and all common means" arising from the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France. But unlike such Europeans as Adam Müller and Joseph De Maistre, whose experience of the Revolution was very different from his own, Burke did not retreat into a neo-medievalism to battle the horrors of Jacobinism. Rather, he responded to the French Revolution like an Englishman imbued with heavy doses of Whiggery. To those in Britain who feared the Jacobins, he declared:

Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud 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, meagre, hopping, though loud and troublesome, insects of the hour.

To the spirit of the Revolution, Burke juxtaposed the genius of English institutions and the "sullen resistance of the English people—the cattle under the British oak (i.e., the great Whig families)—to innovation. The British, he boasted, had "not . . . lost the generosity and dignity" of their forefathers, nor had they been transformed into savages.

We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress amongst us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers. We know that we have made no discoveries, and we think no discoveries are to be made, in morality; nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which will be after the grave has heaped its mould upon our presumption, and the silent tomb shall have imposed its law upon our pert loquacity.

Burke gloried in the fact that the English were, in his words, "men of untaught feelings." "We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility."

Burke, of course, was an extraordinary man. His view of English history was anything but romantic, and he was fully cognizant of the many imperfections in late eighteenth-century British society. While he tried to reform British society he was also convinced that the kind of perfection sought by the Jacobins could never be achieved since there were imperfections in all human creations and institutions. Those Englishmen who agreed with Tom Paine and wished to turn public opinion against the English Constitution, as the Jacobins and the French *philosophes* had turned French opinion against the French social order, were, in effect, subverting all that was truly good in English society. In Britain, Burke argued, all political reforms had "proceeded upon the principle of reference to antiquity." Even before the Magna Carta, he argued, citing Sir Edward Coke, one could discover "reformations." Indeed, these reformations were part of the Ancient Constitution, which was unwritten and immemorial.⁵

Burke battled Jacobinism not with the weapons of the philosopher, but with those of the good common lawyer. Burke confronted the theories of the Jacobins with the British Constitution. What such European legal theorists as Stahl and Savigny admired in Burke was his emphasis on the prescriptive foundations of law, which in Roman property law appeared as mere theory, but which, in Britain, emerged as reality. "Our Constitution," Burke boasted, "is a prescriptive constitution; it is a constitution whose sole authority is that it has existed time out of

5. The importance of the reformationist constitution is brilliantly emphasized in J.G.A. Pocock's *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).

mind." To the children of the French Reign of Terror this was both wondrous and intelligent. The laws of Britain, Savigny wrote, evolved out of the "silent growth of the nation, the people and the institutions" (*die stillwirkenden Kräfte*); their authority (*obrigkeitsgedanke*) came from the unique spirit and traditions of the people.

Perhaps because Burke based his arguments on real traditions and institutions instead of utopianized visions of the past, as many European conservatives did, he may be said to have triumphed, and his writings speak as much to our own time as they did to the early nineteenth century. In post-Peelite Britain, Disraeli could echo the conservatism of Burke, when he declared, in a famous speech, "In a progressive country change is constant; and the question is not whether you should resist change which is inevitable but whether that change should be carried out in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws and the traditions of a people, or whether it should be carried out in deference to abstract principles, and arbitrary and general doctrines." But even British conservatism—for all its Burkean pragmatism—remains a largely reactive phenomenon. As Lord Hugh Cecil noted of Sir Robert Peel and his approach to social change, "As long as Ireland could be governed without granting Emancipation, he resisted it. As long as he could work the fiscal administration of the country without repealing the Corn Laws, he defended them. But the conversion to which no abstract argument could lead him was at once asserted by the logic of fact. An impending civil war in Ireland, an actual famine there, did what no reflections on religious liberty or free trade would have done."

While Disraeli and Peel are not extensively dealt with in Dr. Kirk's current anthology, the pragmatic and humane nature of the tradition he is expounding is presented in some detail. Clearly it is impossible to include the entire corpus of Anglo-American conservative thought in a mere 700 pages, and doubtless most readers will regret certain omissions and question some of his selections. For example, I was surprised to find George Gissing (but delighted to discover a conservative fragment in that radical spirit), and I regreted the absence of Anthony Trollope. But in truth, all that is most essential—and a good deal more—are included in Dr. Kirk's collection. The most important parts of Burke are here, as are some little read but important works by such significant early Americans as John Adams and Fisher Ames.

Aside from such classic nineteenth-century conservative figures as John Randolph, Fenimore Cooper, Sumner Maine, Cardinal Newman, and Henry and Brooks Adams, the modern period is dealt with in some detail. Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, Christopher Dawson, C. S. Lewis, and T. S. Eliot are included, as are such contemporary figures as Robert Nisbet, Irving Kristol, and Malcolm Muggeridge. Dr. Kirk includes Michael Oakeshott's widely anthologized "On Being Conservative"—an essay that defines a conservative as one who wishes to conserve the *status quo* (which would make Fidel Castro a conservative)—but this was included, no doubt, as a *jeu d'esprit*.

I would like to see Dr. Kirk edit an anthology of European conservative thought. It would be an important contribution and the natural culmination of his life-long study of conservatism. For the time being,

however, we must be satisfied with the current volume, which, along with Dr. Kirk's *Conservative Mind*, will prove to be an indispensable aid in our understanding both of conservatism, and of the roots of our political culture. No person interested in the future course of our politics can afford not to own this book and to dip into it regularly.

P. P. Witonski

Hissing The Messenger

THE MISMEASURE OF MAN. By Stephen Jay Gould. (Norton, New York, 1981)

STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT MENTAL TESTS. By Arthur R. Jensen. (The Free Press, New York, 1981)

These two books contrast instructively not only in their treatment of a common topic—the measurement of intelligence—but in their ways of handling a socially sensitive, scientific issue.

Arthur Jensen has conjectured that the disparity between black and white performance on IQ tests is significantly genetic in origin. *Straight Talk* calmly explains the construction of IQ tests and the evidence for this conjecture. Genuinely concerned to inform his reader, Professor Jensen keeps the mathematics to a judicious minimum. He attempts to persuade by standing back and letting the facts do the talking. *Straight Talk* is masterly, timely and courageous.

Then there is *Mismeasure*. Writing in an unscientific New Journalist idiom (“As a paleontologist, I am astounded”), Stephen Jay Gould nudges the reader with an aren’t-we-superior tone that presumes all who disagree are buffoons or “racists.” He does not argue; he snickers. Nominally a critique of IQ tests, almost half of *Mismeasure* is a pointless attack on craniometry and other long-extinct fads. Much of the rest rings with hollow laughter at intelligence tests constructed before 1920. The author offers no evidence against “hereditarianism” or any alternative explanation of Professor Jensen’s data, apparently satisfied that invective is rebuttal enough. His one serious “refutation” of mental testing is a tried-and-false sophism he fails even to state coherently.

Despite the cogency of one case and the non-existence of the other, Professor Gould is the hero of the hour while Professor Jensen is roundly hated. The left can be expected to hiss bearers of inequalitarian news, but Professor Jensen fares as badly on the right. Thomas Sowell dismisses IQ discrepancies as test artifacts, George Gilder calls Professor Jensen a “racist,” and William Letwin got off some gratuitous swipes at him in *Policy Review* 19. Meanwhile, Professor Gould is *Discover*’s “Scientist of the Year.”

Opponents of IQ tests in general and Professor Gould in particular occupy a series of fall-back positions. Some simply deny there is any such phenomenon as intelligence. This is Professor Gould’s official position except when it isn’t. Others concede that intelligence is a real