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Political Economy and Edmund Burke's (Il)Liberal Logic of Empire

Onur Ulas Ince
Singapore Management University

Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire.
By Daniel I. O'Neill. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016. 272p $34.95 paperback.

The first thing to note about Daniel O'Neill's book is that it is primarily a work of political theory. Although O'Neill pays careful attention to the imperial and ideological contexts of Edmund Burke's writings on empire, the book's chief mission is to portray Burke with rather sharp features as an indisputably conservative stalwart of the British Empire. The book derives its critical animus from the recent reclamations of Burke as an untimely if peculiar cosmopolitan who, unlike most of his metropolitan contemporaries, refused to judge and rank non-Europeans as inferior in civilizational terms. Such interpretations have placed much stock in Burke's vindication of Indians against the abuses of the East India Company.[1] Upon finishing O'Neill's book, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, as one scholar of the British Empire has pithily put it, "India was the exception, not the rule in Burke's sympathies."[2]

To those readers who measure cogency of research by the metric of nuance, O'Neill's interpretive framework might appear oversimplifying insofar as it encases Burke's pronouncements on empire in an ideological continuum bookended by "orientalism" and "ornamentalism," persistently reroutes these pronouncements to an unyielding "conservative logic," and rules out any possibility of ambivalence in Burke's fidelity to empire. To this reader,

however, the book's insistence to pursue a theoretical agenda with stakes beyond Burke's immediate context is a welcome intervention. The book's critical impulse breaks the surface most visibly in the conclusion, where O'Neill sketches the ideological, and not narrowly intellectual, legacy of Burke's imperial thought. This should be commended alongside his effort to set the record straight on Burke's position on empire.

In my view, the book invites criticism on its demarcation of the ideological criteria for assessing Burke's defense of empire. O'Neill is so hell-bent on dissociating Burke from the liberal cultural sensibilities with which recent commentators have invested him that he bypasses the manifestly liberal premises of Burke's political economy as well as their significance for Burke's idea of "history as civilizing process" and his justification of imperial rule. O'Neill emphasizes Burke's idiosyncratic appropriation of the Scottish stadial theory by predicating "human progress and development" on the "habitual social discipline" inculcated by hereditary nobility and organized religion (54, 169). What he leaves underspecified in the book is the content of "human progress and development," which, I argue, directs us to the eighteenth-century notion of "commercial society" and to political economy as a specialized language for analyzing the workings of this novel social formation.

If Burke's Whiggism did not necessarily imply political liberalism, then it certainly insinuated commercial progress into the core of his understanding of civilizational difference.[3] As is well known, Burke embraced not only the modern "commercial reason of state"[4] but also "commercial society," wherein the fundamental form of sociality was socioeconomic interdependence between juridically free and equal producer-consumers. Commercial society, as a social formation of immense complexity, had as its enabling condition a set of civil liberties, above all, the right to property, employment, exchange, and inheritance, which Burke listed "amongst the direct original rights of men in civil society."[5] It is also well known that when it came to the day to day operations of commercial society, Burke unambiguously invoked the "truth,

correctness, celerity, and general equity" of the market in setting prices, interest rates, and wages.[6] For instance, he stood up for the right of grain merchants to freely buy, hoard, and sell grain even in times of scarcity,[7] defended the monied property that floated the national debt during the Anglo-French War,[8] and fervently opposed minimum wage legislation as a misguided attempt to relieve the plight of the so-called "labouring poor."[9] Put summarily, civil liberties and the commercial sociability that they underpinned constituted the fabric of Burke's economic liberalism.

Political illiberalism and economic liberalism were far from incompatible under commercial society. If anything, commercial society was unique in that individuals' voluntary submission to political authority constituted the precondition rather than a violation of their basic freedoms. Burke shared this premise with classical political economists such as David Hume, who regarded France as a "civilized monarchy" because it secured basic liberties, and Adam Smith, whose "system of perfect liberty" did not extend beyond the right to freely dispose of one's property and labor. Keeping this point in mind matters for O'Neill's analysis because to the extent that Burke conceived of civilization in commercial terms and to the extent that he tasked the empire with a civilizing mission, then Burke's empire appears much more liberal in its ultimate historical purpose than O'Neill's argument suggests. To be sure, on Burke's account, a hierarchical order of ranks and habits of subordination were lexically prior to the emergence of commercial society insofar as they cultivated the social manners necessary for exercising civil liberties. Yet the ultimate standard for assessing human progress and development remained tethered to commercial growth and complexity. O'Neill tends to conflate these two distinct levels of reflection by treating the preconditions of commercial civilization (political hierarchy, rule of law, submission to authority) as a synecdoche for commercial civilization itself (socioeconomic interdependence, division of labor, market transactions). The "conservative logic" of empire, as reducible to aristocracy and religion, is obtained by submerging the socioeconomic dimension of Burke's view of civilization.

I would hold that the imbrication of political illiberalism and economic liberalism offers a more accurate thread for tracing Burke's prescription of different modes of governance across the empire than political illiberalism alone. For Burke, India required the lightest of imperial intervention because, like Britain, it already qualified as a fully formed, sophisticated commercial society that boasted not only "princes of once great dignity, authority, and opulence" and "an antient and venerable priesthood," but also

> a multitude of cities, not exceeded in population and trade by those of the first class in Europe; merchants and bankers, individual houses of whom have once vied in capital with the Bank of England; … millions of ingenious manufacturers and mechanicks; millions of the most diligent, and not the least intelligent, tillers of the earth.[10]

Ireland stood in need of institutional reform because, although it harbored a nobility and established religion, the Protestant Ascendancy and Popery Laws constricted the basic liberties of the Catholic Irish and impeded the commercial development of the island through profit ceilings, short land tenures, rack-rents, and exclusion from civil professions.[11] Further to the west, the responsibility of bringing barbarous Africans to the fold of civilization fell squarely on the shoulders of the empire by despotically training them in "the habits of industry and sobriety and the means of acquiring and preserving property [which] are the proper and reasonable preparatives of freedom"[12]—"freedom" in this passage denoting not self-rule, of course, but the basic civil liberties of the person and property. In other words, although Burke denied political liberties (or in his words "power, authority, and direction") to the vast majority of the populace, he considered civil liberties to be the patrimony of all free British subjects both within and beyond the British Isles, however imperfect they might have been in current practice. Training attention mainly on the exclusionary principles of Burke's political illiberalism risks occluding the much larger constituency of his commercial ideal and economic liberalism.

In fact, O'Neill hints at this connection, however obliquely, in the conclusion of the book where he contends that Burke's commitment to an imperial civilizing mission "looks a good deal more like the arguments of James and J. S. Mill" (172). This statement clearly targets the arguments of Uday Mehta and Jennifer Pitts, who have favorably contrasted Burke's variegated cosmopolitanism with the shallow liberal imperialism of the Mills. O'Neill's remains a curious statement, however, because these two Utilitarians had no time for ancient constitutions, venerated aristocracies, sagacious common laws, or awe-inspiring religious systems. Therefore, if there is an ideological continuity between their and Burke's vision of the civilizing mission, it has to be sought elsewhere, and that elsewhere, I conjecture, is the ideal of commercial progress and theories of political economy. This represents a missed opportunity in the book because, as Robert Travers has shown, the language of political economy, and especially the designation of civil liberties as distinct from and more fundamental to political liberties, would furnish the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century empire builders with the notion of "despotism of law," a rather convenient ideological construct for governing an alien people in a distant province without political accountability yet without the odium of arbitrary government.[13] This is to say, both the Utilitarians and Burke braided political illiberalism with economic liberalism as just outlined, but they opted for different brands of political illiberalism. This is not to suggest that such difference was inconsequential. On Burke's account, the British imperial parliament was entrusted with safeguarding the Indian ancient constitution rather than arrogantly redesigning such a vast and complex edifice that had evolved over millennia. Burke's failure to convince his audience that India possessed an ancient constitution and commercial society comparable to Britain meant that rival theories of Asiatic despotism carried the day and grounded the attempts to radically reform Indian social, political, and economic institutions, such as the Permanent Settlement of Bengal and the English Education Act. Such fundamental disagreement over the locus, nature, and extent of political power, however, should not lead us to lose sight

of the common coordinates of the modern commercial civilization that oriented both Burke and his ideological rivals.

That the book misses the opportunity to integrate the political and economic aspects of Burke's position on empire does not diminish its value in the least. Precisely because it offers a selective, coherent, and pointed account of Burke's imperial thought, *Conservative Logic of Empire* promises to invite criticism, generate controversy, and inspire new lines of inquiry.

Endnotes

1. See Frederick Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Liberal Imperialism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
2. Duncan Bell, "The Dream Machine: On Liberalism and Empire," in *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 33.
3. J. G. A. Pocock, "Introduction," in Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987).
4. Istvan Hont, "An Introduction," in *The Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).
5. Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), Vol. 8, 110.
6. Ibid., Vol. 9, 134.
7. Ibid., Vol. 9, 130–2.
8. Ibid., Vol. 9, 347–8.
9. Ibid., Vol. 9, 128.
10. Ibid., Vol. 5, 389–90.
11. Ibid., Vol. 9, 477–8.
12. Ibid., Vol. 3, 578–9.
13. Robert Travers, "British India as a Problem of Political Economy: Comparing James Steuart and Adam Smith," in *Lineages of Empire: The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought*, ed. Duncan Kelly (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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Edmund Burke, Native Americans, and the Burkean Imagination

Burke A. Hendrix
University of Oregon

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I didn't want to agree with Dan O'Neill's interpretation of Edmund Burke in his excellent new book, but I found myself persuaded that Burke was considerably less admirable on colonialism than some scholars have recently suggested and that many of us may want to believe. In this response, I nonetheless want to suggest that Burke's work holds within it useful resources for meaningful forms of anticolonial thinking. I will suggest specifically that we can extract a Burkean method for thinking across difference that is consistent with key portions of O'Neill's evidence (94–110), even as it requires extrapolation from it.

Because my research focuses primarily on colonialism in North America, I understand my role in this forum to be responding to this side of Burke's work. What Burke has to say about Native Americans in his work is limited but consistently unpleasant. Perhaps most famously, in *Reflections* he describes the French revolutionaries as acting like "a procession of American savages, entering into Onondaga, after some of their murders called victories, and leading [their prisoners] into hovels hung round with scalps" (65). This is not a one-time portrayal. Native Americans are portrayed throughout his work in profoundly negative terms (65–66), as the antithesis of civilized society, which must be either "civilized" by American colonists or exterminated (74). As O'Neill

rightly notes, Burke continually "others" Native Americans as a counterpoint against which civilization must act.

Despite the consistency and brutality of these portrayals, I am not sure that they reveal much that is distinctively Burkean—even if they are made by Burke himself—because they seem to reflect simply the worst stereotypes of his time. So far as we can tell, Burke knew relatively little about Native Americans (64–65) in comparison to Ireland—for which he had first-hand experience—and India—for which he had careful study in this capacity as parliamentarian. Since many proto-liberals of this time said precisely the same things, Burke's "conservative logic of empire" may not be operative here in meaningful ways.

A more distinctly "Burkean" position seems to exist in Burke's work on India. O'Neill argues that Burke pursued a different strategy in regard to India, which focused on "saming" elite Indians rather than "othering" them. On O'Neill's account, India mattered not because Burke fundamentally respected diversity but because India was fundamentally the same in its key social features. O'Neill argues that Burke saw two social structures as constitutive of civilized society—established religion and landed elites—and that he found them in the Brahmins and *zamindars* (96). Indian social order, for Burke, was in certain ways superior to that of England (99) and therefore worth preserving against British colonial destruction. As O'Neill makes clear, Burke was concerned with the elites of India, not the ordinary people. As in England (and France), they were best ruled for their own good by their betters (121–3).

Although I do not disagree with this basic analysis, I believe that O'Neill ultimately understates the sheer difficulty of the act of imagination that Burke undertakes to render India cognizable under these civilizational categories. India has always been hugely complex, in ways that often led many British thinkers to see either formless chaos or the dead weight of historical despotism—in either case, fertile territory for British action to impose a desired pattern onto this new space. In these conditions, to see India as a kind of lost brother represents an astounding accomplishment of the imagination, which is underpinned by practices such

as analogizing a map of India to that of Europe and describing kingdoms and territories in richly evocative terms (95–98). In Burke's portrayal, the texture of the subcontinent is vibrant and alive, with an India that is unavoidably different in its details. Even if India is in some deep structural sense the *same*, the details differ profoundly, in ways that Burke must navigate in his imagination and rhetoric.

In this light, it seems reasonable to extract a distinctive position from Burke's work that deserves great attention, even if it does not reflect everything that Burke himself said or believed. We might conceptualize a *Burkean method* for thinking across difference, which focuses on the imaginative recognition of similar social structures or normative values across patterns of apparently profound variation (94–95). Let us return to the Onondagas, the Native Americans referenced by Burke above. Burke's own criteria of landed aristocracy and established religion may be too narrow for these purposes, but we might generalize them somewhat and focus in their spirit on (a) established patterns of legality and (b) mechanisms for the generation of religious awe. Viewed in this way, the Onondagas cease to be unknown and unknowable others, but more readily come into imaginative focus.

Consider first established patterns of legality. In Burke's day, the Onondagas represented the central political core of the Six Nations Confederacy—the Haudenosaunee—and thus served as the "Firekeepers" who anchored together the Six Nations' political life. The confederation was a complex web of legal relationships which ran directly through the central "council fire" kept burning on Onondaga lands. When the League met to transact political business, the Mohawks and Senecas acted together as one "parliamentary house," with the right to propose legislation or agreements, with the Cayugas and Oneidas acting as a second parliamentary house. The role of the Onondagas was to preside over these deliberations and to act as tiebreaker or to exercise a delaying veto over decisions that they saw as unwise.[1] In their role as Firekeepers, the Onondagas were expected to preserve and record political decisions. The Onondagas were thus, in a

straightforward sense, the overseers of legal procedure within a complex commonwealth made up of multiple language groups and historically independent peoples, bound together by a deep sense of tradition which nonetheless allowed for reform when necessary.

The Onondagas as Firekeepers also played a central role in the religious life of the confederacy. As evidenced in historical treaty records kept by British colonial officials, the Onondagas and members of the Six Nations routinely insisted that political transactions must be accompanied by ceremonial actions intended to sacralize the proceedings. Treaty records abound with thanks offered to the higher powers that made human life possible. Agreements were often sacralized by smoking ceremonial pipes and by the exchange of wampum belts that were understood as both acts of memorialization and works of beauty in their own right. These patterns were reflective of practices that took place within the interactions of the League itself, centered on the special responsibility of the Onondagas for ensuring that the people of the Six Nations maintained appropriate awe in the face of a spiritualized universe.[2]

Because my own imaginative and descriptive capacities are vastly inferior to those of Edmund Burke, this quick portrayal will be evocative only to those who already have some sense of the richness of the political and spiritual life of the Six Nations. With deeper engagement, however, Onondaga social practices will eventually be recognizable as a form of living together that successfully generates feelings of thankfulness and religious awe at the world's beauty, and a deep respect for legal precedent and prudential political deliberation. This is not the Onondagas as Burke describes them, but it seems to me that it is nonetheless a *Burkean understanding* of the Onondagas that looks for something beyond bare reason and abstract principles to bind human society together. These are not the manic principles of the French terror but those of the reverential, affective politics for which Burke is our chief spokesman.

This Burkean method of comparison provides a lens for sympathetic comparison across difference that liberal theories seem to

structurally lack. Liberal theories, in general, orient us to look only at the Onondagas for degrees of central control and individual freedom rather than anything more textured. Historically, liberals routinely saw in Native American peoples either uncontrolled liberty or chaotic, meaningless anarchy, and had few tools for seeing anything else. In many ways this lack of imaginative resources continues unchanged. Most academic political theorists are liberals at heart, and this translates even for those deeply opposed to colonialism into an anodyne invocation of pluralism that doesn't really understand what it wants to tolerate or respect.[3] Native Americans often become a kind of blank cypher even now. Yet the Onondagas are still here, and they still consider themselves the Firekeepers of the Six Nations confederacy as their ancestors did, entrusted with the protection of its legal structures and the fulfillment of its responsibilities to a sacralized world.[4] What exactly do liberals know to say about circumstances of this kind? Burke himself thought about the Onondagas as a liberal would (67), but those drawing on Burkean resources can surely achieve something better.

A reader's tolerance for a "Burkean method" that goes against many of Burke's own arguments and beliefs will vary depending on temperament and intellectual approach. Because my own interest is in Native American politics and conceptualizing what decolonization means rather than on interpreting Burke's thought itself, I am happy to draw resources from his work that help with that task, even when they require setting aside much of what Burke actually said. Others may reasonably disagree. Whatever our intentions in reading Burke, Dan O'Neill's fine book gives us the tools to think clearly about how deeply such uses of Burke require paring away much of what Burke the historical figure actually said and believed.

Endnotes

1. See for example Oren Lyons, "Indian Self-Government in the Haudenosaunee Constitution," *Nordic Journal of International Law* 55 (1986): 117–21 and Donald S. Lutz, "The Iroquois Confederation Constitution: An Analysis," *Publius* 28 (1998): 99–127.

2. See the description of mechanisms of peacemaking in Robert A. Williams, "Linking Arms Together: Multicultural Constitutionalism in a North American Indigenous Vision of Law and Peace," *California Law Review* 82 (1994), 981–1049.
3. Even liberal theorists who are deeply knowledgeable about Native American societies lack tools to convey the texture of cultural difference. Compare, e.g.,Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995) to John Borrows, *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2002).
4. See as a prosaic example Onondaga Council of Chiefs, "Memorandum on Tribal Sovereignty 1990," in Robert Odawi Porter, eds., *Sovereignty, Colonialism, and the Indigenous Nations: A Reader* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).

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Burke, Cultural Difference, and the Problem of Imperial Critique

Lida Maxwell
Boston University

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The two primary connected claims of Daniel O'Neill's book are, first, that, far from being an anti-imperial exemplar, Edmund Burke was actually a fervent imperialist who justifies empire as a civilizing force in the world; and second, that attending to what O'Neill calls this "conservative logic of empire" usefully complicates the recent scholarly emphasis on liberalism's entanglements with empire. O'Neill's book makes an important contribution in synthesizing Burke's diverse writings on empire, and it offers a productive corrective to oversimplified depictions of Burke as an anti-imperialist.

However, I have three related sets of questions and concerns about the book. First, I am concerned that while O'Neill is surely correct that it is incorrect to call Burke an "anti-imperialist," it may also be an oversimplification to call Burke an imperialist. Second, I critically examine O'Neill's claim that Burke's analogization of India to Britain erases difference and serves as a tool of empire. Finally, and connectedly, I ask after the political stakes of O'Neill's reading of Burke. In particular, I wonder if O'Neill's focus on class as the driving force of empire ends up dismissing the importance of imperial (and post-imperial) forms of subjection that lie along racial and cultural vectors.

Burke, Imperialist

O'Neill states his basic claim succinctly in the first chapter when he says that "Burke's great innovation was to develop a substantively conservative logic of empire that relied on his notion of history as a civilizing process to justify and defend the new global British Empire in both the West and East."[1] While O'Neill is surely correct that Burke is not an anti-imperialist, I am less compelled by his claims that we should view Burke as an imperialist, especially since the vast majority of Burke's writings on empire consist in critiques of the way the British Empire operates in practice. Burke is critical of the Crown's policy toward the American colonists; he is critical of attempts to ally with Native Americans and slaves against the colonists; he is critical of oppressive policies in Ireland; he is critical of oppressive practices and policies in India. While I agree with O'Neill that it is incorrect to read these criticisms as amounting to "anti-imperialism," I am also not sure that they amount to a civilizational logic of empire. To read Burke's writings as developing a "logic" of empire suggests that his focus is only on sustaining British sovereignty/imperial rule rather than also and perhaps equally on combating injustice and suffering within the empire. Put differently, to call Burke an "imperialist" seems to miss what is distinctive about him: that he was one of the most fervent critics of British imperial practice.

In my view, it seems more appropriate to call him a critic of empire or, in Jennifer Pitts' terms (drawing on Michael Walzer) a "connected critic."[2] Burke did not critique empire as such, but his critique of British imperial practice called for unsettling British identity and practices of governance more than O'Neill's focus on his "logic" of empire allows. For example, in his speech opening Hastings' Impeachment trial, Burke says that he and his fellow Britons should not try to "force nature" into the "circle of municipal justice," but instead "enlarge the circle of justice to the necessities of the Empire that we have obtained."[3] In this passage (and others), Burke looks less like he is implementing a conservative logic of empire and more like he is trying to identify new standards of judgment and governance for a novel imperial situation.

To read Burke as a critic of empire does not require that we avow everything he says, but it does allow us to acknowledge what is meaningful in his critique, as well as the tensions and ambivalence in his thought, even if he does not call for the dissolution of empire as such.

Burke on India

In his chapter on Burke's writings on India, O'Neill offers a serious critique of Uday Mehta's reading of Burke as offering a cosmopolitanism of sentiments, which Mehta opposes to a liberal cosmopolitanism of reason. Mehta's emphasis in his book is on two different ways of addressing the unfamiliar: whereas liberals assume they can categorize and classify the unfamiliar through recourse to the generalities of reason, Burke's cosmopolitan project assumes (on Mehta's account) mutual unfamiliarity and pursues a conversation between "two strangers" that "has as its purpose the understanding of the sentiments that give meaning to people's lives," with the hope that "wider bonds of sympathy can be forged."[4]

O'Neill suggests that Burke's analogization of India to Europe shows Mehta's argument to be flawed. If Burke portrays India as *like* Europe—both structured by traditional political and social hierarchies, and civilized by organized religion—then there is no conversation "across difference." Instead, Burke's quest to "save" India from British rule is (on O'Neill's reading) a quest to save traditional hierarchies, and the elites who compose their upper echelons, from the uprooting, leveling impulses that Burke sees in both the East India Company and the French Revolution. While I agree that Mehta insufficiently explores how Burke's analogization of Britain and India may diminish difference, I also think that O'Neill's reading insufficiently attends to Burke's references to the *limits* of that analogy and thus misses the ambivalence of Burke's writings on India: that they may shore up traditional political hierarchies while also challenging forms of imperial oppression that align with culture and race.

Just to note one example of this in his speech opening the impeachment, Burke says that "if we must govern such a Country,

[we] must govern them upon their own principles and maxims and not upon ours … we must not think to force them to our narrow ideas, but extend ours to take in theirs." There is, he says, a "great gulf … fixed between you and them"—a "gulf created by manners, opinions, and laws, radiated in the very nature of the people, and which you can never efface from them."[5] Given Burke's references here to the "great gulf" between Britain and India (a sentiment he repeats elsewhere in different forms), it does not seem quite right to say, as O'Neill does, that the "act of theoretical imagination" Burke called his fellow Britons to engage in was not "to confront the experience of difference" but to "show that, despite their seeming differences, Europe and India were essentially the same in all the ways that mattered."[6] Rather, Burke was trying to do both: to ask Britons to see Indians as civilized subjects governed by the rule of law, like themselves (on this point O'Neill is surely correct), but to also see Indians as civilized in a very different way that demands that Britons extend the boundaries of the circle of sympathy in ways that are challenging and unsettling to their own identity.

The Stakes

I think the reason that O'Neill does not sufficiently acknowledge this part of Burke's writings on India is because he, like David Cannadine (on whom he relies), tends not to see cultural, religious, political, and racial differences—the ones Burke is talking about it in his reference to the "great gulf"—as aligned with the domination of empire. For O'Neill, Burkean empire appears to be a project of class hierarchy—of keeping the elites of various nations in power and the have-nots out. As O'Neill puts it, Burke's "deepest concerns … lay not principally with the common people but rather with their social and economic superiors, in India no less than in France."[7] Burke, O'Neill says, "took up the cudgels not on behalf of all human beings but rather in the service of a very specific conservative, hierarchical understanding of civilization and those who had made it possible, the landed aristocracy and the purveyors of organized religion."[8] From this perspective, Burke's ongoing

descriptions of the deep cultural difference between Britain and India, and the need to engage in imaginative sympathy for Indians, appear as so much window dressing for a conservative, elitist project of keeping everyone else down.

Maybe. But the reason that Mehta and some other postcolonial scholars have found promise in Burke is precisely because oppression and domination—in empire and in a post-imperial constellation—consist of more than class domination. There is a form of domination that consists in economic privation and political disenfranchisement. There is also a (connected) form of domination that consists in the portrayal of non-Western people as backwards, less rational, inherently linked to oppressive cultural and religious practices, or as simply illegible. This is the kind of oppression to which postcolonial scholars, among others, have drawn our attention—a form of oppression that may not legally or politically exclude non-Western people from rights to freedom and equality but portrays them as unequal, un-hearable, and uncivilized in practice. In our contemporary political context, it is not surprising that Burke's writings on India have captivated the imagination of those who are concerned about, and who face, this kind of oppression. While Burke's writings on Hastings and the East India Company undoubtedly served to reinforce (in some ways) class domination, they were also an extended, sometimes profound, sometimes profane testament to the injustice of treating non-Western people, just because they are non-Western, as deserving of despotic rule and domination by the West.

I think it is important to draw out the ambivalence of Burke's critical writings on empire: namely that they offer an enabling precedent for a certain kind of imperial critique while at the same time sanctioning (differing forms of) oppression of other imperial subjects (African slaves, Native Americans, the lower classes). Attending to this ambivalence reminds us that the lingering forms of oppression bequeathed to us by empire are not only class-based and not only formal and legal in nature but also may consist in informal cultural, disciplinary, and political forms of exclusion and (il)legibility that Burke both resists and sanctions in his writings.

Endnotes

1. Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 27.
2. Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 100. On this point, see also: Lida Maxwell, *Public Trials: Burke, Arendt, Zola, and the Politics of Lost Causes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).
3. Edmund Burke, "Speech Opening the Impeachment," in *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 6 (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2000), 279.
4. Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 22.
5. Burke, "Speech Opening the Impeachment," 302.
6. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire*, 98.
7. Ibid., 115.
8. Ibid., 175.

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Edmund Burke, Imperialist Ideologue?

Ross Carroll
University of Exeter

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In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* Edmund Burke attacked two alarming trends in French politics. One was the growing taste for what he called "innovation." The French, he warned, had been bamboozled by novel doctrines to their extreme detriment, a fate his English readers would avoid provided they remained true to their native reluctance to innovate. The second trend was the prevalence of what we might today call "ideological thinking" among French political and cultural elites. Those who are blinkered by an ideology (in this case the rights of man), Burke suggested, will lack the capacity for finessed political judgment necessary to steer the state through choppy waters.

In this very fine book Daniel O'Neill takes this alleged critic of innovation and ideology and argues that he himself was both innovator and ideologue. Burke, O'Neill claims, made a "great innovation" by blending ornamentalist and orientalist justifications of Britain's imperial endeavor in ways highly original to him (27). This innovation, however, also made of Burke the most dogmatic of ideologues, whose several interventions on issues of imperial policy were informed by an overarching conservative ideology. "Informed" is perhaps too light a word; so blinkered was Burke by his conservative logic of empire, O'Neill suggests, that it "dictated" his responses to the various imperial crises he was confronted with

throughout his career (58). There is little here of the moderate, flexible pragmatist that conservatives today look to for inspiration, or of the critic of imperial abuses that has attracted even the left of late. On O'Neill's reading, Burke as thinker and political actor was ideological to the core, to the point where his criticism of ideologues in 1790s France starts to resemble an act of projection.

This revised account of Burke's imperial thought is nothing if not bold and should be commended for offering a useful corrective against the tendency to read too much into Burke's criticisms of British imperial abuses. Advocates of imperial withdrawal were rare among British political elites of the eighteenth century, and this book establishes beyond a shred of doubt that Burke was not among them. It also helpfully brings to light some unsavory aspects of Burke's writings on empire that other commentators have either glossed over or ignored entirely. One is that Burke sought reconciliation with the American colonists partly because he saw them as a potential vanguard in a westward imperial push against Native American "savages" (72). Another is that the "Sketch of a Negro Code," often described as an anti-slavery tract, was in fact nothing of the sort (it would be a strange anti-slavery document that proposed re-enslavement of the manumitted as punishment for crimes as innocuous as "idleness, drunkenness" or "vagrancy") (87). Even Burke's impassioned denunciation of Warren Hastings' abuses of power starts to look a little less pristine when we take seriously his condoning of Sir Robert Clive's earlier plundering of Bengal.

Welcome as this willingness to confront uncomfortable evidence undoubtedly is, I have concerns about the overall portrait of Burke we are left with at the end of it all. Although the book's treatment of individual pieces of evidence is persuasive, I am not convinced that in each and every case Burke's decisions emanated from a single identifiable "logic." Put otherwise, I want to question whether all of Burke's writings on empire can be considered mere expressions of a coherent conservative ideology, as O'Neill suggests.

My first apprehension concerns the relation between theory and practice in Burke's project. O'Neill insists that Burke had an

unwavering commitment to the British Empire as a theoretical ideal and it is this that interpreters of his writings should emphasize first and foremost. The profound reservations Burke had about how imperial policy had been "bungled in practice" (reservations often confused with a rejection of empire as such) are thus, for O'Neill, of secondary importance (39). The risk here, however, is that privileging Burke's theoretical vision over his judgments about political practice will impair our ability to understand what Burke was about in writing what he did. Burke was a consistent thinker, but he was no less consistently interested in the unavoidably practical question of how imperial power was being used (and abused). One gets the impression from O'Neill that Burke only took an interest in imperial policy to the extent that it undermined his theoretical ideal, and that so long as Britain's empire remained civilized (i.e., hierarchical and religious) his sympathy for the Indians, Irish Catholics, and coerced American colonists who were its victims would have been far more muted. Those who pretend otherwise, O'Neill implies, are guilty not only of misdirecting their interpretive attention, but of extending to Burke an interpretive charity that he ill deserves.

O'Neill maintains that Burke, in order to defend this theoretical ideal, tacked back and forth between opposing "theoretical strategies," one emphasizing civilizational similarities between core and periphery (ornamentalism) and the other stressing exotic otherness or difference (orientalism), and that most of what Burke wrote on empire can be understood as exemplifying one of these (1). However, this seems to rule out those cases where Burke's assessments may not have been mere ideological reflexes but considered political or moral judgments. Take, for instance, Burke's decision to blame the Protestant Ascendency for the oppression of Irish Catholics rather than take issue with the government in London. In O'Neill's view, this shows Burke at his most ideologically blind. Unable to imagine that his beloved imperial metropolis might be at fault, Burke heaped all the blame onto the Protestant Ascendency and so failed to trace the roots of Irish oppression to its true source. Likewise, O'Neill claims that Burke's

campaign for freer trade with Ireland was mainly an instrumental move aimed at preserving Ireland's place in the empire and that he was more than willing to forgo free trade in other circumstances.

Did Burke, then, arrive at these conclusions merely from a steely determination to keep his imperial ideal alive? Maybe. But Burke was often in broad company in adopting the positions he did, and not everyone who agreed with him can have shared his precise vision for the empire. Gustave de Beaumont, a French thinker with little investment in Burke's imperial dream, offered a very similar condemnation of the Irish aristocracy for their colossal failure to sympathize with the Catholic majority and made clear that he attributed responsibility for Ireland's sufferings to them rather than to London.[1] On the issue of Irish trade Burke was also far from alone. Adam Smith, most notably, called British attempts to "crush" Irish industry "equally unjust and impolitic."[2] Mary Wollstonecraft, hardly an ideological fellow traveler of Burke's, similarly decried the "painful subordination" that Ireland had to suffer as a result of British trade policy.[3] Now it might be that these thinkers were ideologically hamstrung in the same way Burke was. But it could also be that they, like Burke, arrived at these judgments on the basis of considerations of justice unrelated to keeping Ireland anchored in the empire. That this is at least a possibility suggests that the notion of a "conservative logic of empire" is being asked to explain too much of what Burke said and did.

My second concern is that the book seems overly conditioned by the literature to which it responds. All academic productions need to show how they are correcting a scholarly consensus in order to clarify their contribution. In this case, however, I wonder if in O'Neill's haste to refute certain authors he has allowed himself to mirror some of their mistakes. Whereas O'Neill's opponents not only *interpreted* Burke as a critic of empire but also *celebrated* him as such, he responds by not only interpreting Burke anew as favorably disposed toward empire but also by *condemning* him on those grounds. If Burke had become a "kinder, gentler, figure" appalled

by imperial violence, then he must now be exposed as the unrepentant and unsentimental hack for the British imperial cause that he was (7). If some have looked fondly on Burke's sensitivity to cultural difference, we must now see him as nothing other than an inveterate foe of "modern secular liberal democracies" (177). There is a seesaw quality to this sort of exchange, and the risk is that we will end up with two contrasting Burkes that are little more than stand-ins for ideological positions. The three-dimensional historical figure, in the meantime, fades from view.

My final point is related to the previous one and concerns O'Neill's insistence that "conservative" is the appropriate label for a thinker like Burke. Michael Oakeshott famously defined conservatism not as a set of doctrines but as a kind of skeptical disposition. There is little trace of this sort of skeptical conservative in O'Neill's portrait of Burke. His Burke is a doctrinaire conservative all the way down and apparently we must recognize him as such lest we be duped into thinking that he might have had something interesting to say about the political world in which he lived. This return to the hoary old reactionary Burke leaves the reader with the following final impression. 'Some on the left have been tempted to learn something from Burke's imaginative and rhetorically devastating critiques of British imperial abuses. But let us not make that mistake; conservatives are rotten and Burke was among them!' In other words, it is the polemical note that rings in the reader's ear rather than the contribution the book makes toward our understanding of a vital figure of the eighteenth century. The book's concluding sentence proclaims that the debate about Burke's defense of empire is well worth having, but one gets the sense from O'Neill that there is little of worth to be had in reading Burke at all. At most he should be glanced at as a representative (maybe a particularly eloquent one) of British conservative ideology but otherwise can be consigned to the dustbin along with the rest of the reactionaries. Those of us who still include Burke on our syllabi will be inclined to disagree.

Endnotes

1. Gustave de Beaumont, *Ireland: Social, Political, and Religious* (London: Harvard University Press, 2006). The chapter entitled "A Bad Aristocracy is the Primary Cause of all the Evils of Ireland" makes Beaumont's case clear.
2. Smith cited in Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158.
3. Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 42.

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O'Neill on Burke's Not-Particularly-Conservative Logic of Empire

Brandon Turner
Clemson University

Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire.
By Daniel I. O'Neill. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016. 272p $34.95 paperback.

In *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire*, Dan O'Neill sets out to get a few things straight, and by the time he concludes this tightly focused book he largely succeeds. His positions—his "increasingly heterodox" positions—are three: first, that "Edmund Burke was a consistently conservative political thinker"; second, that "he was a passionate defender of the British Empire in the eighteenth century"; and third, that "Burke's conservatism … provided the theoretical framework within which his defense of empire was built."[1] It is, I think, quite fair to say that O'Neill's real focus in *Conservative Logic of Empire* is on the second of these propositions, so I'll start there.

There is a clear-sightedness to this book that is rare in academic writing. O'Neill circles back again and again to one plain fact: that, despite his celebrated attacks on British rule in India under Warren Hastings, Burke's support for British empire in India—and many other places besides—never flagged. O'Neill deftly follows Burke's arguments for empire across the globe, tracking Burke's rhetorical and conceptual changes as they shift to meet new terrain. The principle shift here is between a strategy of Orientalism to one of Ornamentalism. In the New World and elsewhere, Burke "others" the natives of the New World and the African slaves forcibly brought there; in the colonies, Ireland, and India, meanwhile, he

shifts rhetorical registers and embraces subjected populations by emphasizing their civilizational closeness to Britain. In so doing, he lends justification to a British *mission civilisatrice* upon the savage "Others," and to a moderate and profitable imperial subjection for Britain's cousins. On these points, O'Neill accumulates a wealth of oft-unsettling textual evidence; few readers will finish this book still holding that Burke was one of Britain's first anti-imperialist figures.

The Conservative Logic of Empire is, however, a work unusually constrained by its literature, where the *facts* of Burke's imperialist sympathies have taken something of a backseat to the remarkable ways in which these sympathies were *expressed*. Recent work on empire in modern political thought by Uday Mehta and Jennifer Pitts, among others, as well as recent treatments of Burke's life and ideas, have emphasized Burke's role as an often-vicious critic of British imperialism—indeed, a critic of often surprising depth and imagination. These accounts tend to draw at length from Burke's extended engagement with the East India Company's activities in India and, in particular, his near-decade-long pursuit of Warren Hastings, and they tend to highlight the impressive rhetorical heights of Burke's many long speeches delivered before and during Hastings' trial. This Burke repeatedly and powerfully prods the imaginative and sympathetic powers of his audience by emphasizing at great length the profound similarities between British and Indian society.

> This multitude of men [India] does not consist of an abject and barbarous populace; much less of gangs of savages, like the Guaranies and Chiquitos, who wander on the waste borders of the River of Amazons or the Plate; but a people for ages civilized and cultivated—cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods.

India, to Burke, was no backwards land of strangers—rather, it was as a wealthy and civilized distant cousin of the English, complete with "princes … of great dignity, authority, and opulence," an "ancient and venerable priesthood," a "nobility of great antiquity

and renown," a "multitude of cities, not exceeded … by those of the first class in Europe," along with "merchants and bankers … ingenious manufactures and mechanics … [and] millions of the most diligent, and not the least intelligent, tillers of the earth."[2] By rendering the unfamiliar familiar in this way, Burke attempted to bridge the gap of sympathy between his British colleagues and their besieged imperial subjects in a project that Mehta describes as a "conversation between two strangers," part of a "cosmopolitanism of sentiments."[3]

O'Neill is having none of this. What Mehta and others celebrate as a cosmopolitanism of sentiments is, for O'Neill, precisely the opposite: Burke's rhetorical strategy during the India affair is one of "saming"—itself a strategy within what David Cannadine labels imperialism as "Ornamentalism": "the process of theoretically assimilating the unknown and potentially alien world of the colonial periphery into the conservative, hierarchical social world that prevailed at the imperial core and ruling on the basis of that conception."[4] Attempts to appreciate Burke as a theorist of difference—let alone *radical* difference—are thus doomed to fail: his loving and lovely descriptions of Indian society were a "celebration of the known and familiar, not the unknown and unfamiliar."[5] This "saming" allows Burke to recognize those features of Indian society that mirror those he most cherishes in England—in particular, its time-worn hierarchies and sturdy religious institutions. This, in turn, generates the titular "conservative logic of empire"—Hastings here plays the part of the leveling Jacobin, and Burke seeks to reassert parliamentary oversight over the Company in order to begin the necessary reform of British rule. Throughout this discussion, O'Neill keeps his plain fact in steady circulation: that, despite the ferocity of his pursuit of Hastings, Burke sought to maintain British imperial control in India. In an oft-quoted line from "Speech on Fox's East India Bill," Burke writes that "if we are not able to contrive some method of governing India *well*, which will not of necessity become the means of governing Great Britain *ill*, a ground is laid for their eternal separation, but none for sacrificing the people of that country to our Constitution"; O'Neill, however,

goads us into finishing that paragraph as Burke immediately continues: "I am, however, far from being persuaded that any such incompatibility of interest does at all exist."[6]

If anything, this could be pushed harder. It's easy enough to imagine a counterargument that acknowledges the fact of Burke's imperialist sympathies while insisting that his sympathetic engagements with Indian society point the way out of the universalist logic of liberal imperialism and towards a respect for difference. This, anyway, seems consistent with the hope that one sometimes spies lurking in the background of this particular literature—the hope that better *approaches* to difference will generate more respect (and less violence) towards those who are different. For O'Neill, however, in a conclusion that could easily be expanded considerably, "*nothing at all* can be divined about a given thinker's association to some strand of Enlightenment ideas and his or her commitment to empire."[7] O'Neill helps us see glimmers of a logic of imperial control even within Burke's sympathetic engagements. What, after all, would an American intelligence official stationed in Afghanistan prefer: a liberal idealist's progressive conception of history, or a rich and textured—one might even call it a sympathetic!—account of Afghanistan's people and its institutions? As political theory continues what some have called its "affective turn," we'd do well to remember that we are not always kind or just or beneficent to the subjects of our sympathy.

Where *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* stumbles a bit, in my view, is in the way it conceives of Burke's conservatism. Dan O'Neill is not what a disinterested observer would consider to be an admirer of Edmund Burke, or of Burkean conservatism—an impression that is reinforced by his previous book, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy*. O'Neill's Burke is a "deeply conservative figure, one thoroughly beholden to the illiberal idea of natural inequality and hierarchy among human beings … entirely antipathetic to any notions of political equality, universal declarations of rights, or secularism … [who] resolutely rejected all forms of democracy and democratization (understood as the right of the lower orders and

women to vote, hold office, and take an active role in politics)."[8] Here, Burke's abiding inegalitarianism informs his handling of the India affair. How might one, for example, spur British elites into reconsidering imperial policy? Tell them stories "focusing on the downfall of the great" to engage their sympathies. For O'Neill, this "rhetorical strategy … [was] wholly consistent with his earlier moral theory, and in keeping with his broader principles … it was profoundly reflective of Burke's own deepest concerns, which lay not principally with the common people but rather with their social and economic superiors."[9] Yet surely it's plausible to suggest that Burke might actually believe that inegalitarianism of a certain kind is necessary for the maintenance of a stable and beneficent civil society, the existence of which benefits all, including the lower orders. One recalls that (and Burke reminds us that), for all its egalitarian rhetoric, revolutionary France was not a particularly egalitarian place in practice.

What might a more, say, sympathetic Burkean conservatism have to teach a would-be imperialist? If conservatism—and here I mean, for lack of a better word, *good* conservatism—if conservatism is understood primarily as a reaction *not* to the leveling or ennobling effects of democratization but rather as a reaction to the pernicious and frequently disastrous effects of what Friedrich Hayek called "the fatal conceit" of modern utopian thinking—if *this* is what we mean by conservatism, then there may be something on offer.[10] A conservative in the mold of a Friedrich Hayek or Michael Oakeshott might say to an aspiring imperialist, as Burke so often does in his letter on France: "slow down! These people are not pieces on a chess board; you act from a dangerously inflated sense of what you're capable of; these attempts to impose order and meaning on a people from the outside will lead inexorably to disaster." If O'Neill is right that having the right ideological or sympathetic commitments has done little to inure us from the siren song of empire, then perhaps this good conservative could offer something else: a stern warning against meddling in what we do not understand.

Endnotes

1. Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 1.
2. Edmund Burke, "Speech on Fox's East India Bill," in *Selected Writings of Edmund Burke*, ed. W. J. Bate (New York: Modern Library, 1960), 272–3.
3. Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 22.
4. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire*, 170.
5. Ibid, 109.
6. Burke, "Speech on Fox's East India Bill," 265–6.
7. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire*, 174, emphasis mine.
8. Ibid., 6. On this description of Burke's conservatism, O'Neill cites Don Herzog's *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders*.
9. Ibid., 115.
10. Friedrich Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, ed. W. W. Bartley III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

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Reply to Critics[1]

Daniel I. O'Neill
University of Florida

In his characteristically insightful comments, Ulas Ince questions why I bypass what he sees as the manifestly liberal features of Burke's political economy. For Ince, my book misses the opportunity to discuss the ways in which Burke's economic liberalism is imbricated within his simultaneous commitment to political illiberalism, or what I have called Burke's conservatism. There is a good deal to be said for Ince's view—not least that it gestures at more contemporary admixtures of liberalism and conservatism—but I wonder if he is perhaps too quick to overlook significant differences between Burke and liberal political economists like his friend Adam Smith. Here, I mention three such differences briefly.

First, when it came to the British settler colonies in the New World, Smith's position in the *Wealth of Nations* was a good deal more skeptical than Burke's. In assessing colonial political economy, Smith engaged in a withering critique of chattel slavery in the British colonies as both fundamentally immoral and economically unwise and developed a recognizably anti-slavery position. But, as I show in the book, Burke's view on colonial slavery was very different. In his early work Burke argues for expanding the slave trade from West to East Africa (76).[2] Later, in arguing against freeing the slaves in the American South for fear of drawing colonial ire, Burke insisted that one of the reasons this should not be done was that "slaves are often much attached to their masters" (79). During the American Revolutionary War itself, he lamented that the slave trade, which he called the "most valuable Branch of Commerce" within the Empire, had "been wholly lost," and this became the basis of one of the draft articles of impeachment he drew up against Lord North in 1779 (83). Similarly, while it is little remarked

by scholars, Burke was horrified by the Haitian Revolution, considered by many as the most successful slave rebellion in human history. Burke read the revolution as disastrous proof of the pernicious consequences of the French doctrine of the Rights of Man, whose spread he compared to a deadly communicable disease infecting and destroying the French West Indian colonies, which he called "most happy and flourishing" until they were exposed to it (88–89).

The second point of contrast between Burke and liberal political economy as set forth by Smith regards India. Here, Smith argued strenuously against the British East India Company's simultaneous role as monopoly economic firm and regnant political power. Smith believed that the East India Company should either cease to be a monopolistic merchant or cease to have political power. Burke, however, declared his "insuperable reluctance in giving my hand to destroy any established institution of government, upon a theory, however plausible it may be" (38). Which is to say that in the case of imperial conquest in India, as with that of slavery in the New World, Burke's commitment to the conservative notions of "prescription" and "prejudice" led him to argue against the conclusions that Smithian liberal political economy suggested.

Third and perhaps most importantly, as Donald Winch has argued in *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (1996), Burke and Smith had fundamentally different views on the role of aristocracies and established churches. For Smith, the aristocracy was largely unproductive and corrupt, and church establishments threatened the eighteenth century with the specter of religious "enthusiasm." However, as I argued in *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (2007), for Burke an organized religion connected to the state and a landed aristocracy were the central institutions in his theory of history. On Smith's version of the traditional Scottish Enlightenment four-stages historical thesis, it was changes in modes of production that ultimately drove the movement from savagery through barbarism to civilization. However, Burke inverted the Scottish Enlightenment/Smithian

story to argue that it wasn't changes in political economy that propelled the civilizing process, but rather the church and the nobility taming and civilizing "manners" within accepted social hierarchies over historical time, which enabled the "natural aristocracy" to govern, and in turn made commercial society and its political economy possible. In short, I agree with Ince that there was "imbrication" between economic liberalism and political illiberalism but want to hold fast to the notion that the "lexical priority" of the latter over the former is nevertheless crucial for understanding Burke's conservative logic of empire.

I want to turn next to Burke Hendrix's thoughtful remarks on the role of political imagination, or what he calls a "Burkean understanding," and the possibilities for imperial critique and greater intercultural understanding that it might open up. Hendrix is one of the leading experts on colonialism in North America and has done a great deal of terrific work reconstructing the political, social, and economic worldview of Native Americans. Thus, I found Hendrix's juxtaposition of Burke's description of the Onandagas as set forth in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* against the richness and complexity of their actual beliefs and social practices edifying. Edifying, to be sure, but also perplexing from the standpoint of how one should interpret Burke. For, as Hendrix notes, "This is not the Onandagas as Burke describes them." The difficulty I am struggling with is how a view of the Native Americans in general, and the Onandagas specifically, that contradicts what Edmund Burke actually thought of them can appropriately be seen as employing a "Burkean method" to develop a "Burkean understanding" of them.

Burke's actual understanding of Native Americans is more aptly captured when he pleads with the American colonists during the midst of the Revolutionary War: "You will not, we trust, believe, that…we could have thought of letting loose upon you, our late beloved Brethren, these fierce tribes of Savages and Cannibals, in whom the traces of human nature are effaced by ignorance and barbarity. We rather wished to have joined with you, in bringing gradually that unhappy part of mankind into civility, order, piety, and virtuous discipline." For Burke, Native Americans were

exemplars of "savagery," and their radical alterity made them ripe for a civilizing imperial mission, one which he hoped would bind the British and Americans together in one Westward moving empire under "the Command and Blessing of Providence, 'Encrease and Multiply'" (71–72). In short, I am a good deal more skeptical than Hendrix that we can sever such sentiments from something called a "Burkean understanding" and privilege the latter at the expense of the former. The subtlety, interpretive sensitivity, and appreciation of difference here all belong to Burke Hendrix, not Edmund Burke, and there is a wide gulf separating their respective understanding of Native Americans, notwithstanding their shared name.

Looking more closely, however, one sees that neither Hendrix's sensitive understanding of the Amerindians nor the "Burkean method" he advocates is actually derived from his reading of Burke on the Indians of North America, but rather of Burke on India. As for most interpreters, for Hendrix the "real" Burke on empire is not to be found in the New World, or even in Ireland, but rather on the subcontinent. But it doesn't seem to me that in attempting to come to grips with Edmund Burke's overall interpretation of otherness or difference that we are interpretively free to cleave one portion of his argument from the rest and have it stand in for his broader position on these phenomena, a mistake made all too often in the secondary literature. India is crucial, but it is not the whole story.

Having said that, I turn to Lida Maxwell's challenging comments, which do focus principally on India, as well as raising a number of important methodological and terminological issues. With respect to her second set of concerns, Maxwell criticizes my depiction of Burke as an "imperialist" as an oversimplification, and she is wary of my description of him as having developed a "logic of empire." Let me take the latter point first. The "logic of empire" I am saying animated Burke's thinking is not an a priori analytical category but rather my inductive reading of the evidence, which concludes that his particular view of history as a civilizing process crucially informed his interpretation of empire (as well as revolution). I argue further that Burke's historical understanding of other

societies as "savage" or "civilized" structured both the nature and extent of his critique of empire and shaped the practical policies he offered across the empire's landscape to rectify its problems as he saw them. With regard to Maxwell's terminological point, I would argue that a logic so understood certainly does not preclude the possibility of one being a critic of empire. Indeed, throughout the book I am at great pains to demonstrate that Burke criticized imperial practice at length, albeit very differently depending on whether the locale in question was a "savage" or "civilized" society.

I would hasten to add, however, that being a critic of empire in some respects does not preclude one from also being an imperialist. Even if we leave the New World aside, where the evidence is copious, in the Indian case Burke's career-long defense of Robert Clive is also surely a defense of imperialism. It was, after all, Clive and Company forces—not Warren Hastings—that conquered Northern India and established Britain's territorial empire there, which began the siphoning of India's incredible wealth through plunder, taxation, and bribery. And it was Clive and his immediate successors before Warren Hastings ever took office whose avarice created the conditions that exacerbated a famine in India which killed approximately 10 million people in 1769–1770. Yet Burke sang Clive's praises on the floor of the House of Commons in that very year. And in 1772–1773, he fought the creation of a select committee to inquire into Clive and the Company's misdeeds, arguing that "no nation ever formed a tribunal to sit and inquire by what Crimes it was they acquired an augmentation of their empire" (37).

Twenty years later, during Hastings' impeachment trial, when the scale of Clive's crimes was well known, Burke nevertheless praised Clive's "daring and commanding genius" and claimed "that the plan which he laid down, and the course which he pursued were in general great and well imagined" (33). Indeed, during Hastings' trial, Burke relied on his conservative doctrine of "Prudence" to argue that when it came to the violent conquest of India and the fifteen years that followed it (1757–1772) before Hastings took power, the British ought to draw a "veil over a business in which otherwise the fortune, the genius, the talents and

military virtue of this Nation never shone more conspicuously" (36). I would submit that Burke's defense of Clive as well as his preferred policy of willful historical amnesia as a means of bracketing off the violence of armed conquest and its aftermath in India do not exculpate him from the charge of imperialism but rather demonstrate its plausibility.

But what of Burke's later attempt to forge an empathetic bond across the boundaries of difference during the Hastings trial, which both Maxwell and Hendrix point to as the most redeeming feature of his arguments? On this score, I think Maxwell and Hendrix are right to point to Burke's recognition of the limits of such analogies between Europe and India, but of course Burke freely admitted those limits. Nevertheless, in my view it is Burke's *attempt* to efface the differences between India and Europe that really matters, not that he couldn't succeed in doing so completely. The larger point to be made against Uday Mehta and his followers in the postcolonial endeavor to enlist Burke as an ally is simply that Burke's goal was never to valorize cultural difference or alterity. Rather his aim was to erase that difference to the extent possible, thereby assimilating the unfamiliar to the familiar, rather than meeting it happily on the plane of its unfamiliarity, as Mehta would have it.

This approach makes perfect sense given Burke's commitment to the eighteenth century concept of sympathy (or what today we would call empathy), which is after all elicited based on similarity, not difference. To that end, Burke repeatedly tells his parliamentary audience in the Hastings Trial that they should care about what happens in India because it is a civilization like Europe and Britain, not a savage land like America. For Burke, India was defined by great organized religions connected to politics: it had a large land holding aristocracy (the *zamindars*), a Hindu caste system that Burke compared favorably to the European system of ranks, and a Muslim ancient constitution that Burke analogized directly to Britain's. And, as Ulas Ince reminds us, it was also a great commercial society.

Turning next to what Maxwell appropriately calls the "stakes" involved in all of this interpretive debate, I think it is important to

note that my affinity for David Cannadine's notion of "Ornamentalism," which Maxwell rightly points out stresses class similarities as the basis for civilizational affinity, also sits right alongside my deployment of perhaps the quintessential postcolonial notion, Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism," which stresses "Othering." Of course, it the case that in the book I describe the "Other" not in racial terms but rather as a form of "savagery" predicated on a lack of organized religion and aristocracy. But that is because *Burke* does not rely on race as an independent category of analysis. For him the Amerindians and Africans are "savages," whereas the Indians of the subcontinent are "civilized," but this has nothing to do with race per se. Nevertheless, when confronted with what he perceives as real cultural differences, as in the New World, rather than differences that could be greatly diminished if not effaced through analogical acts of theoretical imagination, as in India, Burke's impulse was in fact to defend a civilizing imperial mission. For me, this makes his work of very limited utility for those seeking to embrace cultural difference and other forms of diversity in the present.

All of which brings me to Ross Carroll, among whose probing concerns is a worry that I have reduced the great Burke to a reactionary and doctrinaire conservative and condemned him as a mere "imperialist ideologue." Yet, if we understand political theory as an act of communication intended to further a particular set of practical needs, interests, and activities then seeing Burke as "ideological" should not be shocking. In a classic statement made over forty years ago, Richard Ashcraft asserted that, "A theory is political… only in relation to the maintenance or furtherance of the social, political, and economic objectives of a specifically identifiable group within society," which is "[t]o say that political theory is ideology."[3] One might not wish to go quite this far, but in Burke's case it is nevertheless well worth asking: What would a non-ideological set of arguments concerning empire put forth by a lifelong member of British Parliament look like? One need not hold Marx's view of ideology to believe that considered political judgments don't constitute a view from nowhere and cannot simply be

detached and made to float freely from the particular social and economic interests that they are articulated in part to defend.

For his part, Burke always argued that he was a consistent thinker and, as Carroll points out, recently both Richard Bourke and David Bromwich have described him as such. So, the real question becomes: to what do we attribute Burke's consistency? Like Ashcraft, I believe that the appropriate interpretive standard for answering this question ought to be plausibility based on the available evidence.

Take the issue of Irish free trade, which Carroll mentions. I have produced evidence from Burke's texts taken in historical context to make the case that, on balance, his commitment to Irish free trade was principally about keeping the empire together. Now, I may be dead wrong about this, but that cannot be shown by reference to hypotheticals concerning what constitutes an interpretive "possibility" for a given thinker to have argued. Lots of things are possible. Carroll of course is right that politics sometimes makes for strange bedfellows, but the trick is not to point to the simple fact of superficial agreement between otherwise divergent thinkers on a particular policy, but rather to explain it.

For example, as I also discuss in the book, both Burke and the United Irishmen supported the elimination of the anti-Catholic penal laws. On the one hand, Burke saw the popery laws as eviscerating the Catholic aristocracy and church, the two pillars of the civilizing process. By clinging to these discriminatory measures, he believed that the Protestant Ascendancy was thereby driving four-fifths of Ireland's population into the waiting arms of the Godless, leveling French Revolutionaries, and thus fomenting Irish independence, a prospect Burke found terrifying. For Burke, then, eliminating the penal laws was a means of quelling Catholic discontent and keeping Ireland within the fold of empire. On the other hand, for the United Irishmen eliminating the penal laws was the first step to Irish independence, universal manhood suffrage, and the universal Rights of Man—for which reason they sought (and achieved) a military alliance with the French Revolutionaries. Again, all of this could be wrong, but it is based on my reading of

the available evidence and does not constitute a Procrustean diminution of Burke's argument into an ill-fitting analytical bed.

Without leaving Carroll's final set of concerns behind, I want to turn directly to Brandon Turner's remarks. Turner's comments are very generous, but in some ways he also asks the most difficult question for me to answer; namely, what valuable lessons can we import directly from Burke and employ to help us grapple with political problems in our own time? Or, as Carroll might put it, why should we leave Burke on our syllabi?

One is tempted to answer by saying that while diving into the texts of canonical thinkers for pearls of wisdom is certainly one approach to political theory, it is not the only one. We can also profitably read Burke from a Nietzschean genealogical perspective—to try to understand how we've become what we are, or how the phenomenon of empire unfurled, and with what consequences, up to and including for our own present. I argue here that both elements of Burke's theoretical strategy—Ornamentalism and Orientalism—prefigured a good deal of Britain's subsequent imperial ideology and thus helped shaped the modern world we inherited and inhabit.

Yet somehow I don't think that this answer would completely satisfy either Turner or Carroll, and surely it shouldn't. I believe that one of the fundamental differences between history and political theory is that political theorists are bound by duty to offer a normative assessment of the texts they interpret, whereas historians are not. (I leave aside the question of whether historians can actually evade making normative judgments; I don't believe that such evasion is actually possible.) In any event, the vast majority of political theorists who have written on Burke and empire in the past twenty years have sought not only to *reconstruct* his position but also to *defend* it. In this respect, I am taking issue not so much with their approach as with their conclusions.

So, to answer the normative question that both Turner and Carroll raise: I think there are certainly some principles in Burke's thought which are conventionally associated with conservatism that can serve valuable political purposes. These include reminding us

of human imperfectability, cautioning us about the limits of our rational capacities, recommending skepticism about grand utopian schemes, warning us about the threat of unintended consequences, and recommending incrementalism as sometimes the best mode of change. These concepts have some appeal in an abstract philosophical sense. However, I think that other Burkean principles are less defensible from a normative standpoint: a commitment to an organized religion connected to the state, a defense of aristocracy and hierarchy, a belief that prescription and prejudice constitute the wisdom of the species. Moreover, when we move from the abstract to the concrete, we see that Burke's philosophical principles were actually used politically to excoriate what he saw as the advent of democracy and democratization, to lambast the language of universal rights, to defend massive economic inequality as natural and beneficial, and to mock gender equality as a monstrous assault on nature, all of which viewpoints Burke's writings on the French Revolution amply demonstrate.

Similarly, my book shows that when we turn to the concrete elaboration of Burke's political principles in the context of empire we see that they led him to defend a civilizing mission against the Native Americans of the New World, to celebrate the civilizing capacities of religion for African slaves, to oppose the Haitian Revolution, and to argue passionately against Irish independence. They also provided the basis for a critique of empire in India that overlooked its most violent period and the catastrophic famine that accompanied it, only to later criticize Hastings for attacking the Indian equivalent of the *ancien régime*. But this last move was not meant to decouple India from the British Empire but rather to recall Britain it to its glorious Providential purpose in defending a colonial society as hierarchically structured as its own, a point Burke repeatedly argued until the very end of his life. As a political theorist, I admit to finding these positions normatively troubling, to say the least.

Endnotes

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2. All references to Burke, including quotes, are taken from Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016) and will appear parenthetically in the text.
3. See Richard Ashcraft, "On the Problem of Methodology and the Nature of Political Theory," *Political Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1975), 20. For a further elaboration of Ashcraft's view that, by definition, political theory *is* ideology, see "Political Theory and the Problem of Ideology," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 42 (1980): 687–705; and "One Step Backward, Two Steps Forward: Reflections upon Contemporary Political Theory," in *What Should Political Theory Be Now?* ed. John S. Nelson (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983), 515–48.