

## In the Fullness of Time

by Peter J. Stanlis

The Metaphysics of Edmund Burke

by Joseph L. Pappin III

New York: Fordham University Press;  
225 pp., \$30.00



Perhaps the best way to understand and appreciate Joseph Pappin's unique achievement is to consider this fine book in the light of previous scholarship that attempts to ascertain the religious and moral sources and foundations of Edmund Burke's political philosophy. John Morley, the chief Victorian authority on Burke and the source of all subsequent empiricist, utilitarian, and positivist interpretations of his politics, on one occasion candidly admitted that his strictly secular and rationalist approach to Burke's politics could not explain the complex religious or metaphysical origins or dimensions of Burke's thought:

In Burke's character . . . [and] at the bottom of all his thoughts about communities and governments there lay a certain mysticism. . . . To him there actually was an element of mystery in the cohesion of men in societies, in political obedience, in the sanctity of contract; in all that fabric of law and charter and obligation, whether written or unwritten, which is the sheltering bulwark between civilization and barbarism. When reason and history had contributed all that they could to the explanation, it seemed to him as if the vital force, the secret of organization, the binding framework, must still come from the impenetrable regions beyond reasoning and beyond history.

Reference to the abstract term "mysticism" was as close as Morley ever came to an awareness of nature and intellectual tradition in the metaphysical premises

of Burke's political philosophy. In two books on Burke, Morley never considered his metaphysics and never even mentioned moral natural law.

To this day contemporary empiricists—in their positivist, utilitarian, secular, and rationalist approach—are no closer than Morley to an adequate explanation of Burke's political philosophy. Many of them simply ignore Burke's religion or deny that it has any relationship to his politics or dismiss his references to God as "the one great Master, Author, and Founder of society" as idle Enlightenment jargon, thereby treating all references to transcendental reality as meaningless rhetoric. Among the great merits of Pappin's book is that he is acutely aware of the limitations, as well as the strengths, of the Morley tradition of Burke studies, and he takes those limitations fully into account. Whereas the empiricists generally reduce Burke to a partisan Whig politician, denying that he had a political philosophy because he never wrote a systematic treatise in political theory, Pappin takes seriously Burke's definition of the statesman as "the philosopher in action" and does not dismiss him as merely a political activist.

Before a book like Pappin's could be written, certain preliminary studies of Burke's political philosophy were necessary. The late Ross J.S. Hoffman, in his anthology *Burke's Politics* (1949), noted in passing that the ancient tradition of moral natural law was a vital element in Burke's political philosophy. A full accounting of this cardinal principle, which provided the moral basis of Burke's legal and political theory, was provided in my *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (1958). Since then several notable books have further extended the thesis, the most important of which was Francis Canavan's *The Political Reason of Edmund Burke* (1960). In an appendix to that study, "Burke's College Study of Philosophy," Canavan answered the question first raised by Barker: how Burke came to know and to use the theory of St. Thomas. He examined "the list of authors who formed Burke's college course in philosophy" at Trinity College, Dublin, and found that it included six textbooks that "represent in varying degrees the scholastic tradition of medieval Christian Aristotelianism." Canavan found "the sources of Burke's 'Thomism'

in his college education."

Another giant step toward understanding Burke's metaphysics was taken by Canavan in *Edmund Burke: Prescription and Providence* (1987), a study of Burke's extensive reading of theology. Canavan found that Burke was thoroughly imbued with the Christian worldview inherited from centuries past, particularly in the theology of the Anglican Church during the 17th century. He observed:

Those aspects of the worldview that came down from the Middle Ages and were more relevant to Burke's political thought were metaphysical in nature. . . . They concerned the fundamental structure of reality. Prior to the distinctive Christian beliefs about sin and redemption, but assumed by them, was a particular conception of the world as created. This conception, with its implications, furnished the basic premises of Burke's understanding of man and society.

Canavan limited his study of Burke's Christian worldview to its practical manifestation in legal prescription and to the providential notion of history in Burke's political philosophy. He was well aware that the specific metaphysical foundations of Burke's politics remained to be ascertained.

Now, in the fullness of time, Pappin has crowned the work of all of his predecessors in the search for the origins and foundations of Burke's political philosophy by describing his metaphysics. The very titles of his six chapters clarify the structural unity of his study and identify the vital subjects covered: "Metaphysics and Politics"; "The Problem of a Burkean Metaphysics"; "The Case for Burke's Metaphysics"; "The Philosophy of God and Human Nature"; "The Metaphysical Elements of Teleology and Natural Law"; and "Concluding Reflections: Metaphysical Nihilism and Radical Individualism." The final chapter should be of great interest to anyone concerned with the nihilist threat to civilization in the 20th century. Pappin also provides an excellent bibliography of primary, secondary, and general sources. The author and subject index make it a most useful

study for scholars and general readers.

It is fitting that the foreword should be written by Francis Canavan, who observes that “this is a book that has long been needed to be written.” In the great conflict between “realists” and “nominalists” of the late Middle Ages, which is certainly one of the most crucial issues in all intellectual history and which has shaped modern thought in every branch of knowledge, Pappin shows conclusively that Burke’s metaphysics is in the realist tradition. This makes Burke’s politics “basically consonant with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition,” separates him philosophically from the empirical-utilitarian-ideologically rational thought of John Locke and discredits the interpretation of contemporary scholars in the tradition of Morley, who reduced Burke to a Whiggish political hack and skillful rhetorician. Pappin accurately details and summarizes the views of the scholars whom he rejects, thus absorbing his opposition, and in the final four chapters presents clearly and conclusively the metaphysical assumptions that constitute the premises of Burke’s unsystematic but consistent political philosophy. Pappin’s book deserves an honored place on the shelf of every student of Burke, and in every college and university library.

*Peter J. Stanlis’s most recent book is Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and Revolution (Transaction).*

## Cui Bono?

by Paul Gottfried

The Economics and Ethics of  
Private Property  
by Hans-Hermann Hoppe  
Norwood, Massachusetts: Kluwer  
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288 pp., \$59.95



Hans-Hermann Hoppe’s essays will not be everyone’s cup of tea, particularly in view of the author’s stated purpose to defend individual property rights as the basis of a free and productive society. Hoppe tackles his job of apologetics by engaging in both economic analysis and ethical theorizing.

The economic aspect of his work is mostly a cogent criticism of government policies that claim to distinguish public from private goods and benefits. Hoppe responds to the humanitarian claims of self-described advocates of the “common good” by asking “cui bono?” Who exactly is served each time the government takes under its control some aspect of the economy—or provides a service that might otherwise be privately fulfilled? Hoppe believes the government is never justified in circumventing market mechanisms to provide goods and services. He judges such activity to be irrational and unjust, ignoring the information supplied by market demand while frequently infringing on property rights.

Hoppe goes on to argue that a cooperative civil society would emerge if consenting property holders could have their way. To an objection made by the less thorough libertarian Loren Lomasky, that the demand for a government based entirely on the contractual activity of property holders is “unrealistic,” Hoppe responds by pointing out the obvious: no economic libertarian will likely have his druthers in today’s world, but it is useful to show that public order would result from voluntary activities being undertaken by politically uncoerced property owners. Market mechanisms and self-interest would take care of social needs.

One may of course ask whether cooperative structures would in fact result if our present welfare state suddenly vanished. In the absence of cultural unity and some preexisting community, I tend to doubt it. Nor is it clear that Hoppe’s society can function in the face of violent disagreement without the use, or at least the threat, of force. Professor Hoppe and I have arrived at our hostile views of the welfare state partly by different mentors, he through John Locke and Jürgen Habermas and I through Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt. Unlike him, I believe that productive freedom is impossible in the absence of political and social cohesion.

In his philosophical essays, Hoppe makes a number of sound points about the implicit assumptions of communication. Drawing on Habermas and, to a lesser extent, Murray Rothbard, Ludwig von Mises, and Kant, he demonstrates the self-contradiction of a totally subjective view of knowledge. All communication is based on unavoidable pre-

suppositions, he explains, without which it could not exist; we would not even attempt such activity unless we believed that the data we transmit and receive is mutually intelligible. Our communication reveals another epistemic assumption, Hoppe observes: namely, that a constant self (what German idealists call the “transcendental ego”) lies behind interpersonal communication as a continuing source and point of reference. Each self asserts its identity by entering into contractual relations with other consenting selves, if the opportunity is present. For self-ownership as well as the possibility of mutually intelligible communication are unspoken givens in human action, Hoppe maintains, and thus the self becomes aware of its own integrity as it projects itself into an ever-widening web of social and legal relationships. From at least an implicit recognition of self-ownership, Hoppe’s ego appropriates external objects by bestowing labor upon them and by laying claim to whatever is accessible to new owners. It is through these economic and contractual self-projections that Hoppe’s ego recognizes its own permanence and its ties to a larger world.

While Hoppe works out this process of individual self-discovery with a certain rigor, he reaches too hard for ethical truths that his investigation simply will not yield. Unlike Mises, who as an ethical nonabsolutist assumed the subjective basis of human wants while believing that people do act rationally in pursuit of subjective goals, Hoppe looks for ethical universals operative in economic men. The same problematic leap is already present in John Locke, whom Hoppe cites with obvious admiration. Despite the mechanistic, experiential epistemology he later developed in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke in the *Second Treatise of Government* points to “right reason” and quotes Richard Hooker’s neo-Aristotelian views, particularly in his description of the state of nature, of man’s natural moral faculties. But Locke writes not as a lawyer arguing on behalf of the natural law but as a polemicist, denying the gloomy, predatory state of nature described by Thomas Hobbes. Because Locke sets out to make a case for government by consent, he abandons his skeptical view of innate ideas and his otherwise inflexible materialism to embrace the Anglican scholastic Hooker. People can reason together even in the absence of civil society