
Editor's Note

The 2006 volume of the *Political Science Reviewer* includes a symposium on the writings of Edmund Burke and a symposium on Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*. These themes were chosen with the intention of beginning this journal's existence under a new editor with a conscious re-affirmation of its core principles and purpose. Eschewing over-specialization and narrow ideology, the *PSR's* founders, George W. Carey and James McClellan, sought from the journal's beginnings to fill a need defined in broad terms by subject matter (the study of politics and public life) as it filled a specific need defined by method and format (article length reviews of important but often overlooked works). The result for many years has been a journal dedicated to publishing articles that integrate rigorous analysis with moral imagination, providing insight into the problems of public life growing from explications of important political works. Refreshingly un-doctrinaire in terms of subject matter, ideology, and methodology, the *PSR* nonetheless stood for something crucial to any constructive public discourse: the conviction that we can know important things about our nature and the proper nature of our life together.

Edmund Burke exemplified in his life and writings the kind of integrated approach to public life at the heart of the *PSR's* mission. Famously referred to as a philosopher in action, he defended permanent goods in changing circumstances. Never forgetting that real people are affected, and often harmed, by the speculative plans of ideologues, Burke sought to protect the traditions that order our lives, the institutions, beliefs, and practices in which people actually live. The attempt to force human nature to fit one's view of how the

world ought to be can be as damaging to actual people as the self-serving notion that “power politics” is the only game in town, and so should be played to the hilt. In this sense Burke was the consummate political scientist—he knew that the problem with a pure emphasis on practical politics is the same as the problem with overly idealistic politics—neither actually “works” in the sense of protecting the preconditions for a decent life. Prudence is the first of virtues in the Burkean mold because it is necessary to grapple with the realities of human nature (for both good and ill) in order to achieve and maintain any decent, civilized life. Burke saw and acted on the need to integrate the universal with the particular, to make the abiding standards of natural law historically real, applying them to social beings in their concrete circumstances.

It also is appropriate for this volume to address Kirk’s *The Conservative Mind*, a seminal work of the cultural and intellectual movement with which the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, publisher of this journal, historically has been associated. Recent, at least partly successful, attempts to reinterpret radically the conservative tradition in America make timely a re-examination of Kirk’s work; a work which forged a coherent vision from often unsystematic elements. Kirk interpreted the work of figures as diverse as John Adams, John C. Calhoun, and George Santayana in terms of the abiding tradition of the west, and of Christendom in particular. He thereby traced the arc of cultural and intellectual development by which the natural law tradition came to grips with the circumstances of modernity and late modernity. He also presented an integrated vision of public life, showing the necessity of decent culture for economic prosperity, of moral imagination for any decent constitutional and legal order, and of a historical sense for contemporary practice to achieve even minimal coherence.

This will be the first issue of the *PSR* not officially under the direction or co-direction of George W. Carey. My hope is that it will continue to reflect his vision and at least some of his insight into the nature of public life, and of the human condition. I will continue to look to him for guidance and inspiration. I also will continue to rely on the excellent editorial advisory board assembled by this journal

and hope the *PSR* will continue to profit from the assistance of scholars of such high caliber. In this issue we note the passing of one of the board's esteemed members, Maurice Cowling.

There will be some unavoidable administrative changes as the *PSR* shifts to the use of peer review for article selection—a choice made in recognition of the need for such review in order to secure for authors the increasingly necessary and difficult-to-achieve status of tenure. Nonetheless, the journal's emphasis will remain on article length reviews of books important for political scientists as its focus will remain on a broad vision of debates concerning the nature of public life and the public good.

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