



Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered

Russell Kirk

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In this, the liveliest and most accessible one-volume life of Edmund Burke, Russell Kirk ingeniously combines into a living whole the private and the public Burke. He gives us a fresh assessment of the great statesman, who enjoys even greater influence today than in his own time.

Russell Kirk was a leading figure in the post-World War II revival of American interest in Edmund Burke. Today, no one who takes seriously the problems of society dares remain indifferent to “the first conservative of our time of troubles.” In Russell Kirk’s words: “Burke’s ideas interest anyone nowadays, including men bitterly dissenting from his conclusions. If conservatives would know what they defend, Burke is their touchstone; and if radicals wish to test the temper of their opposition, they should turn to Burke.”

Kirk lucidly unfolds Burke’s philosophy, showing how it revealed itself in concrete historical situations during the eighteenth century and how Burke, through his philosophy, “speaks to our age.” This volume makes vivid the four great struggles in the life of Burke: his efforts to reconcile England with the American colonies; his involvements in cutting down the domestic power of George III; his prosecution of Warren Hastings, the Governor General of India; and his resistance to Jacobinism, the French Revolution’s “armed doctrine.” In each of these great phases of his public life, Burke fought with passionate eloquence and relentless logic for justice and for the proper balance of order and freedom. With sure instinct born of his sympathy and understanding, Kirk gives us the incisive quotation, the illuminating highlight, the moving, all-too-human elements that bring Burke and his age to vivid life.

Thanks to Russell Kirk’s skillful evocations, Edmund Burke in these pages becomes our contemporary. “Because corruption and fanaticism assail our era as sorely as they did Burke’s time, the resonance of Burke’s voice still is heard amidst the howl of our winds of abstract doctrine.”

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