
 NEW TITLES

History

EDMUND BURKE: His Life and Opinions. By Stanley Ayling. St. Martin's. 316 pp. \$19.95

Two centuries after he wrote *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke (1729–97) remains an intellectual force to be reckoned with, distasteful to liberals, an icon to conservatives. The liberal philosopher A. J. Ayer, for example, recently reduced Burke's philosophy to a piece of doggerel: "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them high and lowly, and ordered their estate." Conservatives, however, honor Burke because he opposed radical change in some of the most elegant rhetoric a practicing politician ever wrote; as Burkeans, conservatives rebut John Stuart Mill's depiction of them as the "stupid party." The English biographer Stanley Ayling's approach to Burke's life and thought is fresh and non-partisan. Burke was not the first, or the last, gifted Irishman to make his way in the world of English politics and literature (a journey encumbered by financial disasters and charming but dishonest relatives whose fortunes he was always trying to repair or improve). The real adventure in Burke's life was his struggle with the issues arising from the Old-Order-shattering events of the revolutionary era. Ayling's subtitle underscores the fact that Burke's pessimism, his mistrust of easy answers, and his respect for established institutions and forms were really *opinions*, not political philosophy. Ayling reveals that in the 19th century Burke—championing colonial Americans and Irish Catholics, and suspicious of the Crown's authority—was considered a liberal. Political climates change, however. During this century, conservatives have drawn from *Reflections on the Revolution in France* a political philosophy: skepticism toward the politics of ideas, caution about governmental action, and respect for elites, religion, and property. Yet many conservatives today are abandoning

these opinions, and old Burke may outlast another set of champions who have tried to pigeonhole his eloquent complexity.

THE BODY AND SOCIETY: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. By Peter Brown. Columbia. 504 pp. \$45

A pagan Greek who observed the Christian practice of celibacy and continence wondered how this "new teaching, bizarre and disruptive of the human race," had arisen. Princeton historian Brown is similarly perplexed. The question is all the more puzzling because Jesus ad-

