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# The Political Philosophy of James Burnham

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## Introduction

James Burnham (1905-87) was a prominent post Second World War conservative philosopher. He wrote numerous books and journal articles, with at least two of his books – *The Managerial Revolution* and *The Machiavellians* – achieving classic status. His academic productivity virtually ended with the publication of his *Suicide of the West* that was panned by non-conservative critics. Burnham thereafter channelled his energies into journal management and policy consultation. For the last nine years of his life he was virtually incapacitated by serious illness.

Intellectually Burnham moved from an early Trotskyite stance, to disillusionment, to his own brand of conservatism. This article aims at an examination of Burnham's political philosophy and attempts to locate it within the boundaries of Anglo-American conservatism. It focuses on his methodology, his view of human nature, his perception of change, and his thoughts on the State and society.

## Methodology

James Burnham is optimistic about the ability of the social sciences to emulate the methodology of the physical sciences (Burnham, 1932; 1941, pp. 153-4, 277-8; 1943, pp. 33, 289). He acknowledges that this involves difficulties but contends that similar obstacles were overcome in the physical sciences. Perhaps the paramount obstacle stems from the opinionated belief that such emulation is impossible and from the opposition of the ruling establishments that fear scientific knowledge about the exercise of political power (Burnham, 1943, p. 289).

A scientific method necessitates a conceptual theory based on empirical data. From this theory can be deduced hypotheses capable of being empirically tested. Thus the theory enables prediction that can result in its validation, expansion or rejection. The theory offers an interpretation of past phenomena, present phenomena and, given certain prerequisites, future phenomena. This prediction serves as the criterion for evaluating theories. Likewise, a genuine empirical theory will differ from a "metaphysical" theory in terms of relevancy:

The test for the empirical significance of a statement is whether that statement and the deductions that may be drawn from it make any difference, any observable difference, as compared with other statements dealing with the same subject matter and the deductions that may be drawn from them. Most metaphysical and religious statements, such as "all things are

ideas" or "God created the world", are not empirically significant because it doesn't make any observable difference whether or not they are true. Most general theories of world history, like causal theories holding that destiny or God or economic relations or what not are "responsible" for everything that happens historically, are not significant, because, again, it doesn't make any observable difference whether or not they are true. But Boyle's Law of Gases is significant, because observable differences in the behavior of gases under varying pressures and volumes may be expected logically to follow from its truth or falsity (Burnham, 1941, p. 276).

A scientific theory should not be discarded simply because there is doubt about it or evidence that conflicts with it. "It must be further shown that it is less certain than alternative theories covering the same subject matter, that there are in its case more difficulties, more negative evidence than in the case of at least some one alternative theory" (Burnham, 1941, p. 274). There can seldom be certitude about any scientific theory. Nevertheless, even an incorrect theory can be of value, since it is superior to no theory and is a step in the right direction. In the final analysis, the ultimate that can be expected by the social scientist is probability (p. 274).

Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* indicates his own employment of conceptual theory. He suggests a theory, based on empirical data, to account for the changes in the Western political systems. This theory, involving elite composition, explains the present and enables testable prediction about the future. Burnham compares this theory with existing ones and asserts that it explains reality more adequately. Finally, he employs it to examine three case studies, thereby testing its applicability.

Burnham is scrupulous throughout his works in citing his objectivity, which he considers all-important in the scientific method. All value judgements must be recognized and when possible minimized (Burnham, 1941, p. 190). Throughout his works Burnham strives to divorce values and facts. He will acknowledge a value system and then indicate, given the circumstances, the course of action most consistent with its implication. Nevertheless, he distinguishes between the accepted norm and the facts. He describes facts as he sees them and is perhaps unduly pessimistic about the future of his own values[1]. Defending his dichotomized methodology, he notes in his *Managerial Revolution* that:

A scientist may hate the plague which he is studying; but he must not permit that hatred to juggle the results he gets in his laboratory. The subject of this book is knowledge, not passion. We are trying to find out what is happening, in Russia and Germany as elsewhere, not what to feel about it or what to do about it (1941, p. 192).

In this book Burnham describes a process that he personally finds quite repulsive. Nevertheless, he dispassionately records the genesis and evolution of the new system.

Burnham envisions a value system as having a different basis from a factual system. He writes:

Now we cannot prove attitudes, values, ideals and goals to be false or true in the same sense that we can prove cognitive assertions to be true or false. We can merely try to understand

them clearly, to estimate their probable consequences, to relate them to the pattern of human life as we have become acquainted with it, and then to judge them, if we feel called on to judge, as acceptable or unacceptable (1964, p. 156).

The initial assertion of a value design involves, then, a “leap of faith”. But given a value system, the social scientist can scientifically dictate a course of action to implement that goal. Not every goal, however, should be considered. The scientific method demands goals that are possible, mundane, and that have a possibility of realization (Burnham, 1943, p. 34). To cite freedom from want as a goal is to transcend science for mysticism since want ceases only with death. Universal and permanent peace cannot be a rational goal, given the nature of man and the history of the past. While science need not dictate the goal and the value system, to be implemented scientifically these must be non-Utopian and reachable with the available resources.

Another methodological objective sought by Burnham is that of accumulative knowledge. Instead of pursuing esoteric projects, Burnham urges the social scientist to build on the efforts of others. Theories should be tested and re-tested, while attempts should be made at refinement and expansion. Thus he welcomes criticism of his managerial theory which he considers as but an outline to be completed by subsequent scientists (Burnham, 1941, p. 278).

Burnham hopes that this entire process will eventually lead to the discovery of laws of human behaviour (1943, p. 33). There will be a systematic effort to discover regularity in man’s activity. From a scrutiny of history and contemporary political behaviour Burnham himself deduces a limited number of such “laws”. One is that all social or economic groups strive to improve their status in society relative to power and privilege (1941, p. 89). Another states that within an established group an internal revolution can succeed only if the ruling élite is divided (1949, p. 151). Burnham maintains that proper study could unearth many such laws, and that such thinkers as Machiavelli, Mosca, Michels and Pareto have pioneered the venture.

### **Human Nature**

There is little optimism in Burnham’s view of human nature. While he is uncertain of the explanation, he nevertheless has certitude that there is evil within the essence of man’s character and that man has strong evil inclinations. Consequently, Burnham predicts rather nonchalantly the probable decline of the West and destruction of civilization. In the 1940s he foresaw the end of the electoral process while later he awaited the total eclipse of the American Congress. He sees a latent danger in mass education since the literate masses will be more susceptible to propaganda (1964, pp. 138-9).

Burnham cites both historical and contemporary evidence to substantiate his view that man is at least partially depraved and has not changed. He has never had a “natural aspiration for peace or harmony” (1943, p. 47), nor has he really sought the “good society”. Instead, man has historically and consistently sought increased power and prestige for himself and his clique.

Men have existed on the earth for at least several hundred thousand years, and probably for several million. Their common humanity has never prevented them from always being divided, from always fighting, killing, torturing and oppressing each other. The very philosophers who proclaimed the metaphysical doctrine have been conspicuous in the fighting and the torturing; the religions which profess the Fatherhood of God have inspired among the fiercest of the wars and persecutions; the fashionable naturalists of common humanity have not been backward in defending the saturation bombing of helpless cities, where common humanity was thoroughly disintegrated in common (1947, p. 15).

In addition to the witness of history, Burnham appeals to the teachings of the great world religions[2]. These religions, despite their idealism and dogmatic variation, are united on the question of man's imperfect nature. Burnham writes:

Those who were inclined to dismiss religious doctrine as superstition might nevertheless have noted that it was borne out in full and terrible detail by the entire history of man, in every continent, climate, and region of the earth, in every society at every stage of development from primitive tribe to mighty empire, constructed by whatever race, black, brown, yellow, red or white. Only those who know very little about the history of mankind can suppose that cruelty, crime or weakness, mass slaughter or mass corruption, are exceptions from the normal human rule (1964, p. 133).

Finally, Burnham appeals to the authority of modern science, citing the findings of biology, psychology, and anthropology (1964, p. 135). These disciplines, he contends, have recorded the non-rational and often anti-rational inner drives that motivate man. These drives, often aggressive, have generated actions that are disruptive and injurious to order in society. They have placed the individual in opposition to the well-being of society. They have reduced the eighteenth-century belief in the noble savage and the rational humane man to the status of a fatuous myth.

Nevertheless, Burnham does not disparage human nature as totally corrupt. Rather, he sees man's character as essentially mixed. The altruistic motives have "to a very slight though nonetheless potentially important degree" (Burnham, 1947, p. 199) affected man. The conflicts in history have not pitted saints against sinners. There have been no saints; nevertheless, there has been a relevant difference involving the question of degree:

We do not ever have, in history, a choice between absolutes, between Good and Evil, God and Satan. Evil, along with good, pervades the fabric of the City of the World; Satan, if not enthroned, is always present at the world's assemblies. Our choice is always between gray mixtures of good and evil; our right choice can never gain more than the lesser evil. What is always relevant, therefore, is the exact composition of the mixture, the degree, the measure (1947, p. 219).

War plays an important role in Burnham's view of human nature. Burnham sees life as a struggle, almost a Hobbesian war of all against all. There has always been fighting over the spoils and there is nothing to indicate that the future will differ (Burnham, 1941, p. 138). The ruling élites will employ their resources to accelerate their power and prestige, as will the stronger nations. "It is war that decides the survival of social systems as well as of nations"(1941,

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p. 241), and thus, historically, war has been “a normal and integral part of all human societies” (1941, p. 240).

All social groups – have made war constantly...Our moral beliefs are such as to make us like to think that war is an “exceptional” type of event; the facts are that it is not. To say this is not to praise war or to consider it a “good thing” but only to tell the truth (1941, p. 240).

Burnham contrasts his view of man with the liberal view which he labels the product of non-empirical ideology. The liberal flouts history, experience and science in defence of a dogmatic optimism concerning man, his aims and possibilities. He ignores the constancy of human performance, believing that human nature is evolving and is capable of momentous development in the future (Burnham, 1964, p. 64). Burnham contends that “only an ideologue obsessed with his own abstractions can continue to cling to the vision of an innately uncorrupt, rational and benignly plastic human nature possessed of an unlimited potential for realizing the good Society” (1964, p. 134). The liberal, because of such faith, has failed to reconcile himself to reality and is constantly being surprised by worldly events and human activities. Since his basic assumptions are incorrect, he tends to reside in a kind of Utopian dream world.

### **Theory of Change**

Burnham’s works are characterized by his interest in change and his hesitancy to pass judgement on the observed change. His *Managerial Revolution* is an élitist interpretation of the transition that is ensuing in the industrialized West. His *Suicide of the West* attempts to analyse the rationale for the “decline of the West”. In *The Machiavellians* he examines his subjects’ analysis of change and indicates his agreement with their conclusions. They envisioned changes stemming from social revolution and intimately linked to the “rapid shift in the composition and structure of the élite and in the mode of its relation to the non-élite” (1943, p. 257). There is revolutionary change (1) when the élite cannot or will not adjust to the new technological and social forces; (2) when a significant proportion of the élite rejects ruling for cultural and aesthetic activities; (3) when the élite fails to assimilate promising new elements; (4) when a sizeable percentage of the élite questions the legitimacy of its rule; (5) when élite and non-élite reject the mythological basis of order in the society; and finally (6) when the ruling class lacks courage to employ force effectively (1943, pp. 257-8). The most drastic change – revolutionary change – is seen almost solely in terms of the ruling element, its composition, activity and enthusiasm. Burnham contended throughout the 1940s that these characteristics adequately described the Western private-capitalist ruling class and that a new élite was in the process of arising.

Burnham is impressed with the individual’s limited volition in change. He pessimistically notes that numerous problems are insoluble and that “broad patterns of social change are established by factors beyond deliberate human control” (1943, p. 303). While citing the rise of the managerial class and the decline of the West, he is extremely pessimistic about the reversal of these

trends. There is virtually nothing the individual can do. Man arrives in a world already conditioned by forces beyond his authority. His own organism as well as the geography and culture of his habitat are beyond his control:

Nor are we responsible for the houses that we already find built, the cities and factories and temples, the veins of ore that others have opened, the land that others have cleared, the tools and machines that are the products of their ingenuity. No more are we responsible for the courts and armies and jails already functioning, the boundaries our fathers have drawn, the whole vast frame of thought and feeling, of science and myth and philosophy that reaches us out of the long past where we were not. The ponderous but moving weight of the world, the social as well as the material world, is, for us, a brute and alien fact. It is a snowball, not rolled by us, grown already monstrous when we come upon it, moving now under the compulsion of its own inertia. The most, surely, that we can propose to ourselves is to alter by a degree or two, with the lever of the mind, the direction or rate of its advance (Burnham, 1947, p. 145).

Burnham approvingly paraphrases Machiavelli's comparison of history with a river the course of which cannot be diverted (1947, p. 145). During violent floods there exists no possible counteraction. However, during a normal stage, limited precautions can be initiated to ensure that in time of flood the damage will be limited and somewhat controlled. Man's thoughts and actions thus have some impact, but one necessarily related to a narrow frame of reference (p. 144).

Likewise, man's approach to change is complicated by the lack of an intelligible cause-and-effect relationship in the process. For Burnham, like his Machiavellians, sees an interdependent and reciprocal causal relationship (1943, p. 232). Society's various elements are so related and intertwined that change in one area can provoke unforeseen activity elsewhere. There often exists a delicate balance of forces in the more desirable societies that can easily be disrupted by thoughtless innovation[3]. The liberal fails to appreciate this fact and hence often blunders in the name of humanitarian reform:

Liberals...when seized with the "passion" for reform...do not reflect unduly on the fact that no social innovation takes place in a vacuum. When we alter item A, especially if it is changed deliberately and abruptly instead of by the slow molding of time, we will find items B and C also changed, and to some degree the entire social situation, sometimes in most unexpected ways (Burnham, 1964, p. 61).

No single element can be cited as the causal stimulant in change. Burnham castigates the Marxists for their belief "that technology is the sole determinant of the nature and process of history and civilization" (1947, p. 20). Technology is important but should be complemented by considerations of climate, custom, institutions, religion, mores, individual genius, etc. For "the nature and fate of civilization is the resultant of the interaction of all these and still others with each other and with of course technology as well" (p. 20). Promoters of change consequently tread a precarious path.

### **The State and Society**

In defining the term government, Burnham writes:

A genuine government is not an abstraction. It is composed of actual human beings, organized into institutions, and cemented by a common body of shared ideas. A considerable percentage of the subjects, or citizens, of a genuine government must be ready to recognize, freely or

through coercion, that there is no political power superior to the government. That is what is meant by calling a government "sovereign", and without sovereignty it is not a government (1947, p. 43).

A government is a "form of organized coercion and power", a renunciation or rejection of power being irreconcilable with government.

Virtually every area of government involves mythology[4]. Since the origin of government cannot be rationally ascertained or explained, man has spun myths to fill the vacuum (Burnham, 1959, p. 6). The ancients spoke of gods and heroes as their progenitors while post-Renaissance man has created fables about the "state of nature", "primitive communism" and the "social contract". Likewise man has failed to explain rationally the success of certain governments while others having similar and sometimes superior resources have failed (p. 6). Burnham cites the dilemma of legitimacy as another such problem. While one can rationally defend the need for government, one must resort to myth to justify the rule of some men over others[5]. Burnham's recognition of the role of myth in government does not involve a derogatory value judgement, for he notes that "these myths are able to both express and to organize reality" (p. 69). Also he contends that myth is but one factor in government.

Government, in theory and practice, involves a non-rational element, a factor that is apart from, beyond or above reason. But this is an element only: perhaps decisive for a government's success or failure, but quantitatively minor. Luck or Grace, though needed, do not spring from deliberate effort. Good government is the consequence also and obviously of wise laws, viable institutions and able governors. To gain and secure these is the political task of reasonable men, even when they know that these gains are not enough (1959, p. 21).

In the government's functioning and decision-making there should be an attempt to maximize the rational and scientific elements. Employing utilitarian-type jargon Burnham contends that "the American nation is not a super-being on whose altar the subject is ready to sacrifice blood, treasure, and life, but a mere practical convenience, the only justification for which is its ability to serve the interests of private citizens" (1959, p. 89). Thus Burnham analyses the function of his own State in rather pragmatic and unemotional terms. The obsession with an organismic view as well as the mystical contract linking the generations is nowhere to be found in his works. Nevertheless, he is not oblivious to the emotional power of nationalism. This force has proved the strongest adversary of both the Communists and Fascists and thus he bemoans the possible implications of the Liberal onslaught against national pride. He seems to insinuate that traditional nationalism is irrational and unscientific, but that the survival of the West demands popular deference to the mythology. It should be encouraged and sanctioned even by those like himself who are unmoved by it and are scientifically inclined.

In his later works, traditional continuity becomes increasingly significant to the successful political system:

The miracle of government, like other miracles, occurs in time. In and through time, the paradox is resolved, reason merges with what is beyond or outside of reason, the word is made flesh. If we translate into political and historical terms: the problem of government, insoluble

by abstract reason alone, by ideology, become solved by social experience acting through time – that is, by tradition (Burnham, 1959, p. 25).

Rational planning cannot guarantee a strong, just and free government, but it is possible for such to evolve, given the time, luck, and proper circumstances (1959, p. 27). Irrational political systems founded on fallacious premisses can become workable and just through prescription. Over a period of time, absurd institutions can acquire legitimacy and develop a balance conducive to freedom. The theoretical and rational problems of government can often work themselves out. Thus sovereignty which in theory cannot be divided, shared or delegated, in the United States, has been allowing “existence, time and tradition [to] overcome a paradox of abstract reason” (p. 34). “An actual, operating political system is a function of time, practice, and custom – in short, of tradition as well as of abstract schemes and ideas” (p. 275). Thus in his later book on the Congress, Burnham places emphasis on the tradition, the history and the evolution of that body, thereby coming to terms with a value de-emphasized in his earlier works.

Despite this innovation, Burnham’s criterion for a good government remains constant throughout all his works. Such a government is both strong and just. It is strong enough to maintain order but not so strong as to destroy individual freedom. The worst possible government is that which is absolutely weak or absolutely strong in contrast to the *via media*. This delicate balance is difficult to obtain and can seldom be the product of abstract reason. Burnham contends that the United States reconciled justice with strength by granting the Government ample power to perform the protective function but “dividing that sovereignty among a variety of officers and agencies having a relative independence of each other” (1959, p. 38). This precarious balance, however, has been seriously compromised.

Burnham sees the State inevitably ruled by that élite that controls the economic structure. He is concerned with actual control rather than apparent or symbolic control. Those who control access to the instruments of production and thereby receive preferential treatment are the élite (Burnham, 1941, pp. 93, 122-3, 155).

Repeatedly Burnham returns to the élitist studies of the Machiavellians, showing that the masses are unable to govern themselves and that historically an élite has always ruled. Organized society itself presupposes such rule:

Social life cannot dispense with organization. The mechanical, technical, psychological, and cultural condition of organization require leadership, and guarantee that the leaders rather than the mass shall exercise control. The autocratic tendencies are neither arbitrary nor accidental nor temporary, but inherent in the nature of organization (Burnham, 1943, p. 184).

The primary objective of the élite is to enhance its own interests and to maintain its power and prestige (Burnham, 1943, p. 234). The wellbeing and prosperity of the élite, however, need not conflict with that of the nation as a whole. A natural harmony of interest is possible (p. 300).

Among the élite's techniques is its use of ideology, which it employs to create a national cohesiveness, to rationalize its legitimacy of rule, and to foster mass enthusiasm (Burnham, 1941, pp. 25, 35, 55; 1943, p. 87). The scientific validity of the ideology and its correspondence to reality are irrelevant so long as it remains effective. Actually the masses are often aroused to enthusiastic ecstasy behind symbols having little relevance to the actual power issues:

From the time of the Renaissance a number of more or less related new ideologies – religions, philosophies, moralities, theories of law and politics and society – were developed, and some of them became widely believed. None of these ideologies spoke openly in the name of the bourgeoisie; none of them said that the best kind of society and politics and morality and religion and universe was one in which the capitalists were the ruling class; they spoke, as all important ideologies do, in the name of “truth” and for the ostensible welfare of all mankind (Burnham, 1941, pp. 64-5).

Thus the altruistic ideology is often presented to the masses who are unprepared for the disheartening truth. The actual power arrangement and the issues of conflict are concealed. This, Burnham contends, accounts for every establishment's hatred of Machiavelli and the fear of the scientific study of politics (1943, p. 87).

To survive, the élite must supplement effective ideology with a willingness to employ force. When there exists a reluctance or a hesitancy to do such it indicates that the ruling element is on the decline. It doubts its own legitimacy, fears the adversary or lacks ample courage to rule. The “foxes” have supplanted the “lions” and the end is near.

To survive, an élite must be flexible enough to assimilate men possessing the necessary virtues (Burnham, 1941, p. 104). Lack of such mobility will deprive the élite of new blood and will hasten its sterility and corruption. It will also provide the manpower for an adversary élite in opposition to the ruling one.

Burnham examines the possibility of scientific rule. This can never be expected of the masses because of their unwieldy size, their ignorance of methods of administration, their obsession with subsistence, and their lack of the necessary psychological qualities (e.g. ambition, ruthlessness, etc.). Only an élite can rule scientifically, which would mean it “would pursue consciously understood and deliberately chosen goals. The goals would have to be real and possible...All utopias would be excluded...” (Burnham, 1943, p. 299). Although this élite would develop a degree of expertise in the use of myth, it would discard ideology in its own decision making. Under “favourable and temporary circumstances” Rome, the Venetian Republic, England and the Catholic Church have been so governed[6]. Such rule is rare and but temporary: for the scientific élite in employing mythology runs the risk that it will either come to believe its own propaganda or cease to project an air of conviction:

In short, the leaders, if they themselves are scientific, must lie. It is hard to lie all the time in public but to keep private an objective regard for the truth. Not only is it hard; it is often ineffective, for lies are often not convincing when told with a divided heart. The tendency is for the deceivers to become self-deceived, to believe their own myths. When this happens, they are no longer scientific. Sincerity is bought at the price of truth (1943, p. 304).

Likewise, every élite is subject to the corrupting influence of power and Burnham has little faith that any group can long resist this temptation (1943, p. 303).

Burnham saturates his works with his apocalyptic belief that a new class is rising to power in the contemporary world (see Burnham, 1941). This is the managerial class. The management of the existing instruments of production have to a considerable degree escaped the control of the capitalists. Through changes in the technique of production the manager's role has become "more distinctive, more complex, more specialized, and more crucial to the whole process..." (1941, p. 82). The position of the manager is not dependent on the capitalist but "upon the technical nature of the process of modern production" (p. 91). The instruments of production are increasingly coming under the actual control of the managers and this is the essential fact[7]. "More and more of the time over more and more phases of the production process, no capitalist intervention appears" (p. 102). The managerial state developing out of this arrangement will be characterized by an intimate union of the economic and political with a maximum of emphasis on centralized planning. The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany are examples of systems further developed in the direction being followed by all contemporary industrialized states. When the goal is reached the managerial society will give birth to a new superstructure. Novel economic, social and political institutions will arise, while a new mythology of justification will be fabricated (p. 74). While Burnham is confident about the eventual triumph of the managerial class, he avoids speculation on the political form or ideology of defence.

### **Conclusion**

Today the Anglo-American world embraces two very different forms of conservatism that might be labelled the Burkean and Lockean. Burkean conservatism stems primarily from the writings of the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish statesman-philosopher, Edmund Burke. It sees human nature as basically flawed and incapable of any Utopianism. It limits reason as part and by no means the most important part of human understanding. It perceives the individual as a link in a chain that connects the living, the dead and the unborn. It accepts change but demands that it be slow, gradual, and limited in objective. It stresses an organic/communal perception of society deferring to such principles as continuity, prescription and respect for ancient institutions. It views government as necessary and indeed useful but requiring ample checks and balances to prevent inevitable abuse. It encourages patriotism and love of ancient symbols and traditions. It sees these principles providing humanity with psychic support and anchorage in a world inclined towards chaos and anarchy. It is the philosophy that motivates and explains the thinking of many British Tories and significant American literati.

The second brand of conservatism relates to the heritage of eighteenth-century Lockean liberalism. It is the ideology of those who want to preserve as tradition the Lockean liberal tenets of the past. The liberalism of yesterday

becomes the conservatism of today. Lockean conservatism starts with the atomized, rational individual, demanding his/her rights against authority and accepting government primarily to protect those rights. Lockean conservatism is secular, optimistic, and inclined towards a progressive interpretation of history. It welcomes change, especially if defended as modernization and development. It espouses a contractual view of legitimacy with very limited government. It is especially deferential towards the needs and status of the business sector. Lockean conservatism is an ideology personified in the United Kingdom by Margaret Thatcher and in the United States by Ronald Reagan.

Although Burnham had been a Trotskyite, his works manifest little of the Communist mysticism. There is no deference to dialectical materialism, the progressive interpretation of history, the Messianic class and its destiny, the withering away of the State, and the classless society. Nevertheless, his search, like the Communists, is for a rational and scientific politics and he also is enamoured of economics and éliticism. He saw much that Marx saw but accepted it as humanity's perennial condition.

Obviously, both the Burkean and Lockean priorities differ from Burnham's concerns. Burnham shared Burkean rather than Lockean assumptions about human nature and change but he lacked Burke's appreciation of the spiritual, the organic and the traditional. He linked with Locke in his embrace of the tools of modernity and his concern for individual freedom based on balancing institutions and structures. He was one of the first American conservatives to endorse a "science of politics" and to welcome the attempt to pattern the social sciences after the physical sciences. In his openness to empiricism he perhaps prefigured the later neo-conservatives. Burnham was also one of the first to critique the Marxist-Leninist world in terms of a "new class" interpretation. Here he perhaps prefigured similar perceptions by Milovan Djilas and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In the final analysis, despite these similarities, James Burnham proved unique.

#### Notes

1. He is pessimistic about the survival of Congress, the electoral process, and freedom in the United States. Moreover, he envisions little hope for Western civilization in general. Burnham often engenders the impression that he relishes the role of prophet of doom.
2. There is no evidence that Burnham ever considers these religions as other than mundane institutions that have absorbed certain truths owing to their ages.
3. Burnham's thesis in his *Congress and the American Tradition* (1959) is that such a balance once existed in the United States and was conducive to the freedom enjoyed.
4. Burnham contends that "every political regime is based upon force and myth, upon police, armies and jails, and upon an ideology which is at least partly at variance with reality" (1947, p. 63).
5. Burnham writes: "In historical fact we find that groups which do not accept a principle of legitimacy derived from tradition, custom or faith always undergo a crisis in trying to solve the problem of succession, no matter how rational their pretensions" (1959, p. 9).
6. Burnham sees little hope that the United States will be governed scientifically (1947, p. 240).

7. Burnham contends that “*de facto* control over the instruments of production, rather than a privileged share in the national income, is decisive in the long run”. The group having the former will eventually inherit the latter (Burnham, 1941, p. 268).

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