

Bibliographic Notes

Standard Edition

- Attitudes Toward History, 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. The third edition contains a new Afterword, "Attitudes Toward History: In Retrospective Prospect."

Original Publication and Other Editions

- Attitudes Toward History, 2 vols. New York: New Republic, Inc., 1937.
- Attitudes Toward History, [2nd ed., rev.] Los Altos, CA: Hermes Publications, 1959. Reprinted by Beacon Press in Boston, 1959 and 1961. This second edition contains a new Introduction (dated August 1955), an Afterword, and an appended essay, "The Seven Offices," originally published in *Diogenes* 21 (Spring 1958), 68-84.

Serial Publication

A short version of Part I was published as "Acceptance and Rejection" in *The Southern Review* 2 (Winter 1937): 600-32. In addition, parts of the opening discussion on William James were published originally as "William James: Superlative Master of the Comparative," Burke's review of Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James*, in *Science & Society* 1 (Fall 1936), 122-25.

Reviews (listed chronologically)

- Groff Gonklin, "The Science of Symbolology," *New Masses* 24 (10 August 1937): 25-26.
- Crane Brinton, "What Is History," *Saturday Review of Literature* 16 (14 August 1937): 3-4, 11.
- Sidney Hook, "The Technique of Mystification," *Partisan Review* 4 (December 1937): 57-59. Hook's review occasioned an exchange of letters with Burke, published as "Kenneth Burke and Sidney Hook: An Exchange," *Partisan Review* 4 (January 1938), 40-47.
- Eliseo Vivas, "Toward an Improved Strategy," *Nation* 145 (25 December 1937): 723.
- Margaret Schlauch, untitled review, *Science & Society* 2 (1937-38): 128-32. Schlauch's review provoked a response from Burke, published as "Twelve Propositions by Kenneth Burke on the Relation between Economy and Psychology," *Science & Society* 2 (Spring 1938), 242-49 (rtp. in Burke's *The Philosophy of Literary Form*). Schlauch's rejoinder was published as "A Reply to Kenneth Burke," *Science & Society* 2 (Spring 1938), 250-53. In addition, V. J. McGill responded to the Burke-Slauch exchange in "Comments on Burke's 'Propositions,'" *Science & Society* 2 (1937-1938), 253-56.
- Henry Bamford Parkes, "Attitudes Toward History," *Southern Review* 3 (Spring 1938): 693-706. Burke, after sending the editors of the *Southern Review* a reply to Parkes's review (entitled "On 'Must' and 'Take Care': Reply to Mr. Parkes's Review of Attitudes Toward History"), requested that it be withdrawn, explaining that he did not want to monopolize that issue of the journal, which was to contain his "Virtues and Limitations of Debunking." An edition of Burke's typescript has been edited by Ann George and, along with her excellent introduction, has been published as "Kenneth Burke's 'On 'Must' and 'Take Care': Reply to Mr. Parkes's Review of Attitudes Toward History,'" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29 (Fall 1999), 21-39.

Excerpts from Burke's Correspondence with Cowley

This set of letters, written during the year Burke was composing *Attitudes Toward History*, chronicles the refashioning of the project and thereby reveals how the book's three-part structure took shape in the process of writing. Moreover, this description implies that Burke's process of composition is characterized less by the activity of revision than by accretion; and this suggests an approach to reading ATH: give special attention to the "conclusions." Also, as you will see, Burke was addressing Cowley not only as his longtime friend but as the literary editor of *The New Republic*.

1. August 17, 1936 - Burke sketches his original thematic and structural plan for the book. This letter also contains an early remark on education, prompted not only by a concern with his daughter's schooling but by his first experience as a teacher, having recently returned from Syracuse University, where he delivered a set of lectures to Leonard Brown's class in the history of criticism. The concern Burke expresses, here, over "the disintegration of knowledge into a thousand disparate disciplines" should be set alongside the concluding remark of the section in ATH on William James: "Here we see James spontaneously obeying his father's injunction, striving to maintain the widest notion of *vocation*, vocation not as a *specialist*, but as a *man*" (14).

To the *New Republic* I should like to offer five articles along the lines of the material I presented at Syracuse. It would be full of *examples*. It would go light on my tendency to over-abstractionism. It has already been tried out on the dog -- and as evidence as to how the dog took it, I should be more than delighted to be required to present a letter I received from Leonard Brown (which incidentally breathes contentment not only with my orations, but also with yours and Horace's).

The five articles should appeal (a) to those who are interested in *trends*, in accounts of present trends with relation to trends in the remote past and the near past, and (b) those who are interested in *education*, particularly in the attempts to combat the disintegration of knowledge into a thousand disparate disciplines -- in other words, those who look yearningly toward the "integrated program," such as they look yearningly toward in Happy's [Eleanor, the second of three daughters] courses at Dalton. The "flower in the crannied wall" approach.

The subjects of the five articles would be roughly as follows:

"Acceptance and Rejection." How thinkers, of either the imaginative or conceptual sort, build vast symbolic bridges to get them across the gaps of conflict. Our examples would be from myth, legend, ritual, philosophy, religion, theology, science, epic, tragedy, comedy, sentimentality, and satire. The ways in which, by the rise of new material, such frames of acceptance become irrelevant, and even obstructive.

"Neo-Malthusianism." Where we, somewhat perversely, pick a bad name for our principle, and then try to live it down . . . Basic point: How a given frame of orientation provides its particular opportunities for laxity, for letting down -- and how people tend to "move in on" these opportunities, eventually organizing their laxities, or liberties, until the frame of orientation itself is endangered . . .

"Authority." My thanks to George Soule [an editor at the New Republic], who put me on to Laski [influential British political theorist and Socialist (1893-1950); as Paul Jay notes, the reference is probably to Laski's *Authority in the Modern State* (1919)], and thereby made some of my blusterings on this subject more precise. Our discussion would gravitate around the psychological concept of "identification." The ways in which the identification process finally heads up in a symbol of authority. (Simplest example: Germans have been building roads for many centuries, but when they build a road after 1933, *Hitler* does it.) . . .

"Euphemism and Debunking." The verbal issues that are tied up with the problem of engineering shifts in the symbol of authority. The integrative nature of euphemistic symbols, the disintegrative nature of debunking symbols . . .

And now, having reviewed the ways in which cultural integers are wound up and wound down, and the problems of winding-up again out of the materials of the winding-down, I should be prepared, and should have prepared the readers, for a discussion of "Metaphor," as the strategic center of symbolic frames and their rebuilding . . . Among other things, the approach to history through this entrance has made me realize, as I never did before, precisely how *revolutionary* was the shift from the feudal *family* concept of authority to the bourgeois concept of *delegated authority* . . .

So much for the five. I have not tried to tell the whole story. I have tried simply to indicate that the articles I am proposing for the New Republic are very much in line with the interests of the gazette (the contemplation of historical transitions, and the ways and means of contributing to historical transitions) . . . [Selected Correspondence 212-13]

2. October 6, 1936 - Seven weeks after the first letter, Burke describes how the structure of the projects has changed.

Greetings, to the editor of a great book review section, from the chap who decided to write a book review of history.

. . . [T]hings began to fall together, and I hated to gamble with luck, so I kept on. And now the problem is as follows:

I have bumped out 20,000 words, which makes the first third of my book review, but doesn't match the outline I submitted to the New Republic. In fact, things are altered considerably. All the business about shifts of authority, euphemism and debunking, and metaphor is there, but only in an adumbrating form . . . The whole, to date, focuses upon "frames of acceptance and rejection" (our reworking of Schopenhauer's "Bejahung und Verneinung" formula?) [See Textual Note 2 below].

I start with an analysis of William James, Whitman, and Emerson as propounders of representative U.S. Bejahung frames. Then I struck an unexpected bonanza. I began analyzing various poetic categories (epic, tragedy, comedy, humor, satire, burlesque, grotesque, elegy, didactic) from this standpoint, and found that they responded with (to me) astonishing relevancies -- so the remainder of the section is devoted to an analysis of these categories.

So now I am wondering about Section I. I am wondering whether the New Republic will find some of it usable. In any case, I shall try to get it revised and typed, and to submit it soon. As an economic interpretation of art forms it is, to my limited knowledge, something new, so I have hopes that the editors will take kindly to it, even though my whole story isn't definitively driven home. [Selected Correspondence 214]

3. October 20, 1936 - Two weeks later, Burke informs Cowley that he written the second section (which will be published as "The Curve of History").

[. . .] I batted out the second section, on History proper. And now, while the world goes on its way, I keep trying to decide whether I should offer this section instead. For the first, on maturer computation, seems to be circe 27,000 words in length, while the second is circa 15,000. Or maybe I shall wait until they are both typed, and come around with both, to let the editors pick and choose as they see best.

I ain't exactly modest about this thing, which seems to have got a very complex message said quite articulately. And if *this* puts you to sleep, like Permanence and Change, then I shall have to admit that you set too high standards for me, and that I must *always* disappoint you. [Selected Correspondence 215-16]

Textual Notes

1. Burke's opening quotation from James is not found in his published work but in a note jotted down during the summer of 1869 (at the age of 27), shortly after James concluded his medical studies at Harvard. Burke would have seen this note while reading Ralph Barton Perry's *The Thought and Character of William James* (1935), a book he was reviewing for the new Marxist journal, *Science & Society*. According to Perry, James wrote the note at a time when "his depression and inward brooding brought a perpetual deepening of his philosophical interest" (301). Here is the complete text of the note, as found in Perry's book:

(a) *Man* = a bundle of desires, more or less numerous. He lives, inasmuch as they are gratified, dies as they are refused.

(b) They exist by mere self-affirmation; and, appealing for legitimation to no principle back of them, are the lowest terms to which man can be reduced.

(c) Abridgement in extent of gratification (as natural history, painting), and in degree (personal isolation, unfathomability of everything to our knowledge). The expansive, embracing tendency, the centripetal, defensive, forming two different modes of self-as-assertion: sympathy and self-sufficingness. (The two combine and give respect?)

To "accept the universe," to protest against it, *voluntary* alternatives. So that in a given case of evil the mind seesaws between the effort to improve it away, and resignation. The second not being resorted to till the first has failed, it would seem either that the second were an insincere *pis aller*, or the first a superfluous vanity. The solution can only lie in taking neither absolutely, but in making the resignation only provisional (that is, voluntary, conditional), and the attempt to improve to have its worth in the action rather than the result. Thus resignation affords ground and leisure to advance to new philanthropic action. Resignation should not say, "it is good," "a mild yoke," and so forth, but "I'm willing to stand it for the present." This brings matters back to proposition (a). What the man *wants*, more or less, being the ultimate appeal for him.

Three quantities to determine. (1) how much pain I'll stand; (2) how much other's pain I'll inflict (by existing); (3) how much other's pain I'll "accept," without ceasing to take pleasure in their existence. Resignation [means] "none of my business." (301-02)

2. Schopenhauer's "Bejahung und Verneinung" (3): The words *Bejahung* and *Verneinung* are key terms in Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (The World as Will and Representation, 1819, 1844, 1859). Nevertheless, Burke's source may be a chapter from Book II of Schopenhauer's *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851), "Nachträge zur Lehre von der Bejahung und Verneinung des Willens zum Leben" ("Additional Remarks on the Doctrine of the Affirmation and Denial of the Will-to-Live"). When Burke stated that "'Acceptance' and 'rejection' (Schopenhauer's *Bejahung und Verneinung*) then, start from the problem of evil" (3), he may have had the following passage in mind:

I know of no greater absurdity than that propounded by most systems of philosophy in declaring evil to be negative in its character. Evil is just what is positive; it makes its own existence felt. Leibnitz is particularly concerned to defend this absurdity; and he seeks to strengthen his position by using a palpable and paltry sophism. It is the good which is negative; in other words, happiness and satisfaction always imply some desire fulfilled, some state of pain brought to an end.

Works Cited

- Perry, Ralph Barton. *The Thought and Character of William James, As Revealed in Unpublished Correspondence and Notes, Together with His Published Writings*. 2 vols. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974. Translation of *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851).
- ---. *The World as Will and Representation*. Translated by E. F. J. Payne. 1958. Reprint, New York: Dover, 1966. Translation of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819; 3rd ed. 1859).
- *Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley, 1915-1981*. Edited by Paul Jay. New York: Penguin, 1988.

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Burke begins *Attitudes Toward History* with a statement that serves to undermine what little most readers will have gathered from the book's title itself: Though the tendency is to pronounce the title of this book with the accent on history, so far as meaning goes, the accent should be on attitudes. Burke's version of this history is fascinating and complicated. I hope others will discuss it in more detail.

Finally, Part III of *Attitudes Toward History* is entitled "Analysis of Symbolic Structure." But his humor is revealing and as someone noted at the conference, this is a how-to book on living or as Burke would say "equipment for living". I think if one looks at the book as a manual or instruction guide the layout might make more sense. Kenneth Duva Burke (May 5, 1897 – November 19, 1993) was an American literary theorist, as well as poet, essayist, and novelist, who wrote on 20th-century philosophy, aesthetics, criticism, and rhetorical theory. As a literary theorist, Burke was best known for his analyses based on the nature of knowledge. Furthermore, he was one of the first individuals to stray away from more traditional rhetoric and view literature as "symbolic action.". *Burke-3 Papers*, (*Burke-3*), offers a rich source of materials related to Kenneth Burke's writings from 1915 to 1969. The collection consists primarily of manuscripts, notes, correspondence, reviews, and annotated news clippings. Highlights include Burke's letters to Malcolm Cowley (1915 to 1929; 1931), early fiction, responses to student writing at Bennington College, speeches, articles, and drafts of *Permanence and Change*, *A Grammar of Motives*, and *A Rhetoric of Motives*, as well as material for *A Rhetoric of Religion*. *Attitudes Toward History* book. Read 3 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. This book marks Kenneth Burke's breakthrough in criticism f... Let us know what's wrong with this preview of *Attitudes Toward History* by Kenneth Burke. Problem: It's the wrong book It's the wrong edition Other. Details (if other): Cancel. Thanks for telling us about the problem. Return to Book Page.