

Passion and virtue as the foundation of politics in Edmund Burke

di *Enrico Graziani*

ABSTRACT: The paper, drawing on the interpretative lines of Edmund Burke's political philosophy, investigates love as passion and charity as virtue, which, together with sympathy, constitute the foundational elements of politics. These categories are interpreted as a possible solution to human viciousness, in defense of individual freedoms and all those principles that establish prudence as a political criterion. The analysis takes on a threefold meaning: as a discovery of the objectivity of emotions; as an antidote to the pathologies of politics; and as a recovery of the passions that motivate political action. These three concepts seek to reorganize the organic nature of political systems, which, in Burke's lexicon, takes on the characteristics of a process of "social construction" within a theoretical horizon that positions the conservative mind, pioneered by Russell Kirk, as the basis and foundation of the moral and political universe.

KEYWORDS: love – charity – sympathy – objectivity of emotions – political action

Introduction

A philosophical-political discussion of human virtues and passions may seem surprising when the chosen interlocutor is an author as unsystematic as Edmund Burke. Yet contemporaneity has given Burke the credit for combining human passions and civic virtues in a political dimension, shifting them from a predominantly aesthetic to a political plane. It is the Anglo-American political philosopher Russell Kirk, with his 1993 book *The Politics of Prudence*, who presents a new Burke. On the one hand, he was an interpreter of the «anomalies and ambiguities of his time» and a staunch critic of the French Revolution; on the other, Kirk argues, he offered, with his political categories, antidotes for unraveling the tensions of contemporary politics¹. Kirk refers, first and foremost, to the victimization of the West, which has become, in his view, «a victim of the science of ideas», in various forms resulting in nationalism, anarchism, and syndicalism, abandoning the past, tradition, and historical continuity. Burke's philosophy has sparked a multitude of interpretations and generated harsh polemics, ideological acrimony, limitations, or even hermeneutic distortions². Burke has been recognized not only as a traditionalist historicist

¹ R. Kirk, *The politics of Prudence*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute Bryn Mawer, Pennsylvania 1993.

² On the various interpretations of Edmund Burke's philosophical-political thought, we have an immense body of writings, especially in English, while the repertoire in Italian is more limited. For a reconstruction of interpretative sources in English, alongside the pio-

writer, a supporter of counterrevolution, and the founder of the idea of modern conservatism³, but also as a theorist of caution and moderation in political action⁴. But Burke harbors a dual soul. On the one hand, that of a political thinker belonging to the Anglican tradition who, as Roger Scruton writes, gave rise to a sort of paradox now known as Burkean conservatism, «heir to an insular culture, in which custom, as the final court of appeal, prevails over reason, and principles are more a matter of custom than explicit rule»⁵. On the other hand, that of a philosopher who gives space to emotions by examining, on a moral level, those human virtues that, on a political level, stand as constructive qualities and attitudes for the politician in action. For this reason, the passion of love and charity as virtues, in a political context, are grafted onto the stub of the responsibility that the politician has in the exercise of his functions. From John Morley, Edmund Burke's first interpreter, to Russell Kirk, Peter Stanlis, John Pocock, Alfred Cobban, and the many scholars who have followed Burke's lead in recent years, the analysis of the theme of passions has always been conducted by seeking a connection between the aesthetic and the political. Proof of this is that, in the *Enquiry*, Burke fully grasped both the empirical and inductive conception of practice developed by Hume in the *Treatise* and the *Political Essays*, and the rationalist and deductive conception proposed by Locke⁶. Analysis of Edmund Burke's political writings, beginning with Mario Einaudi's 1930 publication of *Burke and the Historical Address in Political Science*, has consistently emphasized how the various elements of Edmund Burke's political philosophy found in the *Enquiry*, with regard to the conception of the foundation of practical principles, can be traced back to a Humean anthropology of morality and form the basis of the political direction Burke considers essential to the continuity of politi-

neering studies initiated by R. Kirk with *The Conservative Mind, From Burke to Eliot*, first edition (1953), followed by four subsequent editions, the latest published by Regnery Publishing, Washington DC, 1995, see P. J. Stanlis, *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1958; C.B. Macpherson, *Burke*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1984; and, in recent years, with updated sources and a complete bibliographic repertory, Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830–1914*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017. On the Italian side, see the pioneering study by M. Lenci, *Individualismo democratico e liberalismo aristocratico nel pensiero politico di Edmund Burke*, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici italiani, Pisa-Roma 1999; E. Graziani, *Ordine e libertà. L'Autorità del tempo in Edmund Burke*, Aracne, Roma 2006; S. Vantin, *Gli eguali e i diversi. Diritto, Manners e ordine politico in Edmund Burke*, Mucchi Editore, Modena 2018.

³ E. Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830-1914*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019.

⁴ R. Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence*, cit., p. 9.

⁵ Roger Scruton, *Manifesto dei conservatori*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2007, pp. 3-4.

⁶ Cf. A. Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century*, London 1960, pp. 78-80. For further study of these aspects, see M. D'Addio, *Natura e società nel pensiero di Edmund Burke*, Giuffrè, Milano 2008, p. 91, note 3.

cal institutions. Furthermore, in Burke, the overcoming of the politics-aesthetic dualism is provided by the unifying force of morality. This thesis is also supported by Arrigo in his 2023 book, *La filosofia morale di Edmund Burke*, which finds confirmation, and a certain affinity, with the pioneering writings of Russell Kirk, Peter J. Stanlis, Francis Canovan, and the more recent writings of Emily Jones and Ioannes Chountis⁷. This paper, following the suggestions of these interpretative lines, investigates love as passion and charity as virtue, fundamental elements in Edmund Burke's political theory. These are interpreted as a possible solution to human vice, in defense of liberty and all those principles that establish prudence as a political criterion. Since this interpretation is still underdeveloped, it can be seen as a starting point for a more extensive study of the foundation of morality in politics, which, in Edmund Burke, refers to the codes of love and charity that, on the political level, involve the other human passions.

Research Plan

The themes of love and charity are not systematically developed by Edmund Burke, either in his literary and aesthetic writings such as *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), a skillful imitation of the style and content of Bolingbroke's works, or in the pages of *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), a second edition in 1759 of clear humean inspiration⁸, or in his works and parliamentary speeches following his election to the House of Commons in 1765. The theme of love has a specific dual meaning, political and aesthetic; that of charity extends across a transversal plane that takes on a triple

⁷ Cf. G. Arrigo, *La filosofia morale di Edmund Burke*. Carocci, Roma 2023. E. Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830-1914: An Intellectual History*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017; I. Chountis, *Edmund Burke, Parliamentary Reform, and 'Nabob' Influence: a Novel Argument in «Parliamentary History»*, vol. 44, 2/2025, pp. 233-249.

⁸ As attested by M. D'Addio, *Natura e società nel pensiero di Edmund Burke*, cit., p. 90, note 2. Burke had drafted a first version of the *Enquiry* during his years at Trinity College. Among the friends, "men of learning and candour," to whom Burke had shown the manuscript, was William Markham, then Headmaster of Westminster School and later Archbishop of York. It should be noted, with regard to the relations between the first part of the *Enquiry*, devoted to "taste," and Hume's analogous essay, that the announcement of the edition of Hume's four essays in 1757 had sparked a polemical intervention by William Warburton, the future Bishop of Gloucester, which led the publisher to withdraw what had already been printed and Hume to replace the two incriminated dissertations – *Of Suicide* and *Of the Immortality of the Soul* – with the one concerning taste, *Of the Standard of Taste*, and to make corrections to the fourth dissertation, *Natural History of Religion*. On this aspect see also P. Casini, *Introduzione* to David Hume, in *Storia naturale della religione*, Laterza, Bari 1970, pp. 14-15. The relationship between Burke and Hume was marked by mutual esteem, as is evident from Hume's correspondence of April 1759, when the philosopher informed Burke of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. See *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. by J.Y.T. Greig, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1969, vol. I, p. 303.

meaning; theological-political-social, opening «a view of the culturally other»⁹, in which, for the first time, the lexicon of unity and plurality is intertwined with the founding elements of a new politics in which “equals” encounter the “different”¹⁰. The theme of love will be developed through an aesthetic-political perspective that moves from the *Enquiry* to the *Reflections on the French Revolution* of 1790, in which the concept of love shifts from a predominantly aesthetic vision to a political conception. The theme of charity, rarely articulated by Burke, will be linked to the aesthetic category of sympathy, moving from the *Enquiry* to the *Discourses on Empire*. Therefore, while the exploration of Burke’s love requires a clear diagnosis on three levels: aesthetic, philosophical, and political, the theme of charity is triggered by a theological device that, while not directly linked to the theological virtues, uses sympathy to arrive at charity considered as a civic virtue. Philosophical and aesthetic elements go hand in hand with political ones and are defined by the historical events of which Burke was both a protagonist and a spectator. The axioms from which the argument proceeds are common to both fields of research; they concern: 1) the recognition of a contextualized organicity that serves as a common thread throughout Burke’s writings; 2) a teleological vision of the political community closely tied to the natural law vision, as many have pointed out, of Lockean origin, even though, as Martelloni writes, «for Burke there is no rational law of nature, but a suprarational law – and it is made to be called irrational, tying it to the sphere of intuition and emotion rather than that of reason¹¹ – which, by binding individuals in an indissoluble contract, truly a contract between present, past, and future generations, as he states in *Reflections on the French Revolution*, ends up completely destroying the very ancestry of Locke’s contractual theory»¹². This is the space in which to explore the nature of the concept of love and charity, which takes on a triple meaning in Burke: as a discovery of the objectivity of emotions, perfectly suited to the structure of his philosophical-political reasoning; as an antidote to the pathologies of politics; and as a passion that motivates political action. Essentially, Burke emphasizes the need to transcend the dichotomy between reason and emotion, elevating love as a universal passion, and charity as the epitome of diversity.

⁹ Cf. G. M. Arrigo, cit., p. 129.

¹⁰ S. Vantin, *Gli eguali e i diversi. Diritto, manners e ordine politico in Edmund Burke*, Mucchi Editore, Modena 2018. In the sense of the “equals,” the author considers English rights and freedoms and their validity in relation to the normative value of *manners*, understood “as social behaviors consecrated by their objective repetition over time (*diuturnitas*) and by the shared moral conviction regarding their qualification as social obligations,” *ivi*, p. 66. In the sense of the “different,” she presents the critique advanced by Mary Wollstonecraft against Burke’s organicist conception: “everyone has equal rights but not equal things,” *ivi*, p. 127. From this follows the “duality” of Burke’s paradigm of change within preservation.

¹¹ Cf. E. Burke, *Observations on a Late Publication on the Present State of the Nation* (1769), in *Works*, 1899, vol. I, p. 398, where one reads: «Politics ought to be adjusted, not to human reason, but to human nature; of which reason is but a part, and by no means the greatest part.»

¹² Cf. A. Martelloni, *Introduzione, Scritti politici di Edmund Burke*, edited by A. Martelloni, Utet, Torino, 1963, p. 22.

The concepts of love and charity are part of a plan for reorganizing organic unity after the fractures generated by the breakdown of medieval organicity: Protestantism, individualism, popular sovereignty, and constitutional metaphysics.

1. The Concept of Love as an Aesthetic Category

Burke's lexicon is notoriously indebted to classical Greek and Latin philology, particularly Ciceronian philology, in defining its object. The fundamental character of Ciceronian philology leads Burke to explore linguistic and stylistic aspects in his works and in the *Discourses*. The frequent use of hypotaxis (complex and articulated sentences), *concinuitas* (elegance and balance of form), and rhetorical figures such as asyndeton (variation of style in the presence of intense emotions) blend with an ideological and cultural universe inherited from Humean anthropology, which recognizes the conflictual nature of human psychic and behavioral dispositions. This aspect aims to overcome the conflict between instinctual and rational forces. For this reason, in Burke, the relationship-correlation-contrast between the aesthetic categories of beauty and the sublime is strategic. In the *Enquiry*, Burke completely absolves this relationship-correlation-contrast; indeed, as Mitchell states, he accentuates the correlation between will and necessity¹³. These philosophical-political categories are made explicit in the *Reflections*, in which Burke explains the gap between the French revolutionary spirit – a spirit of theoretical clarity, freedom, and the will to rebuild society from the ground up – and the English constitutional spirit – a spirit of the sublime because it is linked to the sympathetic structure of language, custom (manners)¹⁴, and necessity. And it is precisely the concept of necessity, from the Greek ἀνάγκη (whose English translation is twofold, necessity-need), and its paradigmatic vision taken from the Aristotelian syllogism in the *Topics*, which contains elements for organizing the linguistic basis of the art of rhetoric, that assumes a central significance in Burke's speeches and writings and is fundamental to seeking answers to the problem of love. Given that it is necessary to return to the anthropological vision of morality, relevant both to the natural law theme that projects a model of organic society, to the aesthetic categories of beauty and the sublime, from which the correlation between will and necessity arises, and to Burke's understanding of English political and constitutional structures¹⁵, the concept of love, developed by Burke in a political context both

¹³ Cf. T. W. J. Mitchell, "Eye and Ear: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Sensibility," in Id., *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987.

¹⁴ In the sense intended by Serena Vantin: "Manners give substance to everything that is 'social': both from the standpoint of politics and law, and from that of morality, religious practices, education, and economics." Cf. S. Vantin, *Gli eguali e i diversi. Diritto, manners e ordine politico in Edmund Burke*, Mucchi Editore, Modena, 2018, p. 68. The author refers to M. Lenci, *Individualismo democratico e liberalismo aristocratico nel pensiero politico di Edmund Burke*, cit., p. 95. Burke thus defines *manners* in *Letter on a Regicide Peace*: "that which haunts or comforts us, corrupts or purifies, exalts or debases, barbarizes or refines us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation." Cf. E. Burke, *Letter on a Regicide Peace*, in G. Arrigo, cit., p. 82.

¹⁵ Cf. L. Rustighi, *Strong emotions of Terror. emozione e politica in Edmund Burke*, in «Metamor-

in the Discourses and in the Reflections on the French Revolution, is influenced by the interpretative keys employed in aesthetic analysis. The themes of beauty and the sublime and the derivation of the concept of love present in the Enquiry thus project us into the political dimension.

2. The Notion of Love as a Derivative Concept

While the theme of the sublime in Burke has been widely discussed¹⁶, the theme of love remains confined to interpreters of the *Enquiry* who have emphasized its specificity in relation to the two axes of Burkean aesthetics: beauty and the sublime. We can say that Burke's conception of love revolves around these two lexemes, which, along with the concepts of pleasure and pain, create a correlation-contrast between the two terms. Burke writes that beauty produces a specific passion: love. He distinguishes terror – linked to self-preservation¹⁷ – from the sublime, which is also connected to self-preservation, since it concerns the individual sphere. Love is included among the passions that are linked to society, which, in his view, is divided into two categories: the society of the sexes and society in general. In the society of the sexes, erotic passion is strictly speaking the domain most proper to beauty. It follows that marital society is the simplest form of society¹⁸. Love is, in fact, the passion of procreation, of the reproduction of the sexes and of their bonds. Society in general, however, is distinguished by being dominated by much more ambiguous passions because, unlike love, they cannot be traced back to beauty in its purity, but manifest elements of sublimity, sympathy, imitation, pleasure, and ambition. These passions coexist like sexual love and self-preservation, even though they are different elements placed within a relationship-dimension of necessity-objectivity. It is the feelings linked to the sphere of pleasure (especially love), which has to do with union and, above all, with the family, that promote not so much subjective freedom and individual will, but rather the relationship between people and the overcoming of any possible independence. In this sense, the beauty from which love derives and the sublime from which terror unleashes exist as two autonomous and mutually uncontaminated dimensions. Contrary to

fosi dei lumi» 10/2020, pp. 124-144.

¹⁶ There is a vast literature on the theory of the sublime in Burke, characterized above all by the extensive Introductions and Presentations to editions of the text by Pseudo-Longinus, Περὶ ὑψους, translated into Italian. Among the many, in chronological order, see Longinus, *Il sublime*, edited by G. Lombardo, Aesthetica–Mimesis, Milano 2022. For a specific reading on the subject, see E. Graziani, “Edmund Burke and the Representation of the Sublime: Digital Sublime versus Natural Sublime,” in *Etsi Deus non daretur... Scritti in memoria di Serenella Armellini*, Giappichelli, Torino 2024.

¹⁷ Cf. Edmund Burke, *Ricerca sull'origine delle idee del sublime e del bello* (1757), edited by A. Baratano, Minuziano, Milano, 1945, p. 77 where Burke speaks of the passions that pertain to the preservation of oneself as those passions concerned with “the preservation of the individual and [that] relate principally to pain and pleasure and are the strongest of all passions”. Critical reflections are found in the edition edited by G. Sertoli and G. M. Miglietta, see *Presentazione*, in E. Burke, *Inchiesta sul bello e il sublime*, Aesthetica, Palermo 1985.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 78.

Rousseau, it is the factor of sociality that makes the difference, and in Burke, the antisocial represents the other side of human nature, intrinsically relational. The negative is correlated with the notion of original sin, to which Burke contrasts the power of love and charity as possible solutions to human vice. In a political sense, vice is at the root of the French revolutionaries' lack of love for humanity. Vice, as Arrigo writes, is inherent in evil, which «comes not from institutions or politics», as Rousseau and Bolinbroke professed, but from the human condition itself. Human nature is naturally modified by its rational nature through the creation of political institutions that represent the virtuous effort of human beings. Love is thus combined with charity and rises to moral sensitivity, as a civic passion opposed to the sentiment of vanity. For Burke, passions, and consequently the love of freedom, are within politics and, as Elena Pulcini has argued, find in politics the conferral of the order necessary for social cohesion¹⁹.

3. Burke's Political Lexicon of Love

Burke's conviction is that passions continually take on new emotional tones and respond to different epochal changes. In his political writings, from his first intervention on the American question, the well-known "Address for the Conciliation with the Colonies" of March 22, 1775, to the publication of "Letter on a Regicide Peace" in 1796, a year before his death on July 9, 1797, the aestheticological categorical toolbox was the most fertile laboratory from which to extrapolate the categories necessary to construct the argumentative cores of his political writings. Aesthetic categories move, so to speak, from a level that involves moral reflection to a level where the concept of love fully enters the dynamics of politics and its changes that generate the gradual development of political institutions. Faced with demanding requests and demands expressed by Parliament – well-known is the debate on the revocation of the Stamp Act – that is, the stamp tax imposed by Grenville on the Americans in 1765, which appeals to the English political tradition dating back to the *Magna Charta* of 1215 and the *Declaration of Rights* of 1689 –, of invoked norms and rights, of financial difficulties and war debts, of the assertions of independence invoked by colonial legislatures in matters of taxation, in the *Conciliation Speech* the stylistic device of love takes on a political meaning limited to its object, which is freedom. Among his considerations on the policy to be pursued regarding America, Burke emphasizes two principal dispositions of the human soul, the humor and the character that distinguish the American people. He writes: «In this character of the Americans, the love of liberty is the salient trait that marks and distinguishes the whole: and as an ardent love is always a jealous love, your colonies become suspicious, restless, and intractable whenever they perceive the least attempt to deprive them by force or deceit of that which they esteem the only good for which life is worth living»²⁰. Faced with the systematic nature of

¹⁹ E. Pulcini, *Quali passioni per quale politica: come si trasforma la passione nel ciclo della modernità*, lecture presented at the *Scuola di cultura* on May 15, 2020. (Accessed September 28, 2025).

²⁰ E. Burke, *Mozione di conciliazione con le colonie*, in *Scritti politici*, cit., p. 87.

taxation regulations, Burke appeals to the value of liberty as a sign of the “necessary” change to defeat old excuses and prejudices, recalling that, «in our country, from the first, the greatest battles for the love of liberty were fought around questions of taxation»²¹. He realizes that imbalance and the loss of meaning generate a social world shrouded in a sterile regulatory network unless adequately nourished by the feeling of love for liberty. The adjective he gives to liberty, «manly, morally regulated liberty», refers to the principle of legitimizing political obligation, and this is why there exists a connection founded on the nature of love for liberty and the moral obligation that each individual has, to himself and to society. What generates love, in Burke’s narrative, is mood, understood as a state of mind, and character, as an indelible mark imprinted on the soul. These are the salient features that define the idea of an «ardent and jealous love of liberty»²² that the American people cherish in accordance with the language of the Constitution. Love for liberty thus takes on a political connotation free from all abstractions and corollaries that delegitimize its political meaning:

As times change, so do circumstances; and Burke knows this well. This is why, in the Reflections, he gives a specificity to the concept of love, which no longer appears as a derivative concept but becomes a principle of political law to be contrasted with the corrupt nature of man and a tool for combating human vice²³. Although he does not theorize love as a political virtue, his political philosophy leads him to defend tradition and a society founded on patriotism mixed with the defense of the homeland and its institutions. The concept of love thus takes on a double connotation: love of country and love of the Constitution. The polarity of the two loves, and their mutual dependence, are marked by the love of freedom. But it is precisely on this aspect that Burke’s political analysis is most incisive. In the Reflections, he does not hesitate to criticize the ideas expressed by Dr. Price, a Fellow of the Royal Society, who in his *Address for the Love of Our Country*²⁴, Burke writes, substitutes a «brand new and unknown bill of rights»²⁵ for the «law known by the name of the *Bill of Rights* [...] Act of the first year of the reign of William and Mary, the cornerstone of our Constitution»²⁶. For Dr. Price, the love of liberty understood as a “blessing” truth as a necessary habit of the honest man, and virtue as the torch of progress, create the link between conscience and action; and it is precisely this bond that drove the French revolutionaries to cultivate freedom,

²¹ *Ivi.*, p. 88.

²² *Ivi.*, p. 87.

²³ F. Canavan, *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke: The Role of Property in His Thought*, Fordham University Press, NY 1995.

²⁴ This refers to the sermon delivered by Price at the Old Jewry in London on the occasion of the centenary of the Glorious Revolution, on November 4, 1789. Central to the discourse is the issue of the acquisition of the English people’s rights after the Revolution of 1688. Dr. Price’s thesis maintains that the English people have the right to: (1) choose their own governors; (2) depose them for misconduct; (3) frame a government for themselves. Cf. R. Price, *Discorso per l’amore per il nostro paese*, in Id., *Scritti politici*, edited by P. Chiarella, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2021.

²⁵ E. Burke, *Riflessioni sulla rivoluzione francese*, cit., p. 170.

²⁶ *Ivi.*, p. 170.

truth, and virtue, giving substance to a precise form of love for one's country, one that coincides with the duty to enlighten it²⁷. For Burke, love for one's country is love for one's part, or «the attachment to the small group of which we are a link in a chain that leads us to the love of our country and of humanity»²⁸. In this way, any portion of the social order contributes to the realization of the organic whole whose cell is represented by the family. It is no coincidence that he writes: «The origin of love of country is in the family. No relationship based on coldness will produce a good citizen»²⁹.

4. Charity as a Correlate of Sympathy

If Burke's concept of love is derived from the aesthetic category of beauty and its primary connotation is that of the most ardent passion that fuels the feeling of freedom, charity is a related concept that is interdependent with the concept of sympathy. Charity is therefore not an aesthetic but a theological category. It harks back to aesthetic sentiment to the extent that Burke considers it «the exercise most suited to a being conscious of its own imperfection»³⁰. Seen in this sense, charity is a constructive passion that rises to a civic virtue even before being a political virtue. It follows that the meaning given by Burke to the lexeme charity is derived from the Greek noun *ἀγάπη*, a form of disinterested, altruistic love. However, in Burke, this takes on the characteristics of an ethical and normative catalogue that refers to the postulates of the verifiability of truth, of the transcendent, against any form of demagogic indifference affected by short-sightedness and conformity. In a certain sense, the religious factor serves Burke to bestow upon charity its attributes, that is, a disinterested sentiment of sympathy and altruism. But it is precisely sympathy, as a passion, that generates charity, which passes from a theological plane to a political and social one. Charity emerges, so to speak, from the theological triad that places it alongside faith and hope, to enter the historical development of societies, becoming a political theology in the dimension of altruism. This is the meaning hidden in the incipit that opens paragraph XII of the *Enquiry*, titled «Sympathy, Imitation, Ambition», in which Burke writes:

under the impulse of these passions [sympathy, imitation, ambition] we are led to take an interest in others, are affected by what affects them, and cannot remain indifferent spectators of anything that men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a kind of substitution, by which we put ourselves in another man's place, and are affected, in many respects, by what affects him; so that this passion may either partake of the nature of those which relate to

²⁷ Thus Serena Vantin summarizes Price's idea of love: cf. S. Vantin, «Una benedizione veramente sacra e inestimabile». La libertà civile in Richard Price, in «Diacronia», 2/2023, p. 41.

²⁸ E. Burke, *Riflessioni sulla rivoluzione francese*, cit., p. 207.

²⁹ *Ivi.*, p. 385.

³⁰ Cf. E. Burke, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795), edited by A. Sezzi, Manifestolibri, Roma 1997, p. 44.

self-preservation [...] or be addressed to ideas of pleasure; and then all that has been said of the social affections, whether they refer to society in general, or only to some forms of it, may be here applied³¹.

It is possible to identify in this assertion the axiological meaning of the lexeme sympathy, which «was predicated on one's ability to imaginatively inhabit the affective and mental space of the other, to feel as the other feels, and to judge his or her actions in response to those feelings, by considering what one would have done under similar circumstances»³². It follows that the fundamental components that contribute to defining the concept of charity, as a correlate of sympathy, are elucidated «not on the entirely rational awareness of the individual's usefulness»³³ (in this case the utilitarian vision falls away), but in the reference to aesthetic sentiment, in particular, sympathy, which establishes affective bonds based on «a real participation of life with life»³⁴ that occurs among associates. The articulation of social relationships, beyond the type of society constituted, if supported by sympathy, makes individuals not indifferent; rather, it encourages them to discover the meaning of “diversity”, of the value and role, of the merits and abilities of each. Burke's aesthetic-moral attribution to sympathy in the pages of the *Enquiry* combines with the theological-political-social toolkit that makes charity the concrete expression of sympathy, engendering in individuals an action that extends beyond the most intimate bonds to embrace society at large. Charity is, primarily, a moral action associated «with a moral code [...] without which, norms and principles are dangerously blind»³⁵.

«Whatever private charity could do, was done for charity», Burke says in his 1785 *Speech on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, encapsulating in this maxim, as in a code, dignity, compassion, altruism, benevolence, and the ability to empathize «by human effort»³⁶. The same meaning is found in the *Speech on Fox's India Bill*, delivered in December 1783 during the impeachment trial against Hastings³⁷. Donlan argues

³¹ Cf. E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, cit., p. 85.

³² Cf. D. I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire*, University of California Press, Oakland 2016, p. 107.

³³ Cf. M. D'Addio, *Natura e società nel pensiero di Edmund Burke*, cit., p. 170.

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 170.

³⁵ Cf. M. C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, il Mulino, Bologna 2004, p. 469. On the extension of philosophical-political thought to ethical codes referring to the concept of compassion, see V. Sorrentino, *La compassione tra etica e politica*, in *Virtù umane Virtù politiche*, edited by G. Cotta, Mimesis, Milano 2020, pp. 211-231.

³⁶ Cf. E. Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Paul Langford, general editor, 9 vols, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1981-2015, vol. 2, pp. 170-171, 168.

³⁷ The impeachment trial against Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of the East Indies, was held in 1787. Edmund Burke accused Hastings of corruption and embezzlement, mismanagement of justice, cruelty, and exploitation of the natives. It concluded in 1795 with Hastings's complete acquittal. For a concise reconstruction of the trial proceedings, see G. M. Arrigo, *La filosofia morale di Edmund Burke*, cit., pp. 130-132, which refers

that in the India Bill, sympathy shifts from an aesthetic level to «an empathic feeling, and takes on the characteristics of a biological mechanism which provides a non-rationalistic explanation of human sociability»³⁸. It is a «feeling of sympathy with every passion»³⁹, as Adam Smith also wrote. This is the chain that makes man participate in the fortunes of others, making their happiness necessary for him. And it is precisely this feeling that generates altruism, seen as a form of recognition of the “different”. Historical perspective leads Burke to describe, in his Speech on Fox’s India Bill of 1783, the ambiguity of British rule over «a territory historically larger than any European State [...] containing more than four times the number of inhabitants in the island of Great Britain [...] a people possessed of great dignity, an ancient and venerable clergy, an ancient and renowned nobility»⁴⁰. But precisely because, Burke writes:

there is no exact resemblance [between Europe and India], this comparison serves as a middle term by which we may bring India closer to our understanding, and if possible to our feelings, in order to awaken some sympathy for the unfortunate natives, to whose fate I fear we shall never be sensible so long as we continue to view this remote object through a fallacious and nebulous filter⁴¹.

Within this framework, sympathy finds its place as a feeling that, through the categorization of understanding, understood as the essence that integrates the intellect, offers a dynamic depiction of human relationships within a complex society like that of the «unfortunate natives», the result of a historical process. Behind these diagnoses lies Burke’s awareness that when moral elements collide with life’s adversities and sympathy is «a sharing in the fortunes of another»⁴², charity is a form of explication of an axiological plan based on a system of values that, in the name of tradition, form the foundation of the Conservative Mind idealized by Russell Kirk⁴³.

to D. Buonfiglio, *La questione indiana nel pensiero politico di Edmund Burke*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2008.

³⁸ Cf. S. P. Donlan, *Language in the Eye of Society: Edmund Burke on the Origins of the Polite and the Civil*, in «Eighteenth-Century Ireland», 18/2003, p. 87.

³⁹ Cf. A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Rizzoli, Milano 2009, p. 84.

⁴⁰ Cf. E. Burke, *Speech on Fox’s East India Bill* (1783), in Id., *Scritti sull’Impero. America, India, Irlanda*, edited by G. Abbattista and D. Francesconi, Utet, Torino 2008, pp. 138, 284-285.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 286.

⁴² Cf. G. M. Arrigo, *La filosofia morale di Edmund Burke*, cit., p. 134.

⁴³ The Anglo-American philosopher Russell Kirk inaugurated, with his work *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, cit., a new era of studies on Edmund Burke’s idea of conservatism, becoming the conservative standard-bearer of America from the mid-1950s to the 1990s. Today, the Russell Kirk Center operates in Mecosta (Michigan) with the same spirit as its founder, as custodian of the Burkean tradition whose principles form the central core of the value system constituting the *Conservative Mind*.

Conclusion

In the ongoing debate on the critical issues facing the West, the risks of democracy, the rise of autocratic regimes, and the genesis of modernity, its symbolic and political events capable of representing new terms capable of creating a break or discontinuity with the past, the Burkean paradox discussed by Roger Scruton is the most relevant, if not the most evoked, both within self-proclaimed “right-wing” models, advocates of the process of a “new social construction” also discussed by Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*, and within a theoretical horizon that reintroduces the “conservative mind”, pioneered by Russell Kirk, as the basis and foundation of the moral and political order that contrasts with a model of reactionary conservatism such as that currently professed in America by Donald Trump. Within this framework lies the diagnosis of a politics of emotions that, in Burke’s vision, posits love, sympathy, and charity as antidotes to the political viciousness and pathocracies that afflict our democracies. These categories, in Burke, are not systematically developed, but while they exhibit all the characteristics of a derivative concept for love, and a related concept for charity, they constitute a system when they present themselves as antidotes to the immoral elements in our societies. Behind this diagnosis lie more general symbolic assumptions that have allowed us to understand the plausibility of Burke’s political theory. Although considered waning by his own party comrades (the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* is well-known, following recent debates in Parliament regarding his *Reflections on the French Revolution* of 1791), it has delineated, and continues to delineate, the characteristics of a school within the Conservative and neo-Conservative movements of the last two centuries. His categorical vision of politics suggests the most appropriate prudential political choices, both in relation to a traditionalist conservative thought that insists, as Russell Kirk’s “Politics of Prudence” insinuates, on social and institutional organization to guide the views of individuals, and by drawing on the same Burkean strand, in line with individualist conservative thought that insists on individual liberties. In essence, from the Burkean lineage still emerge today, stylistic features and concepts that nourish new conservatism and libertarianism, which consider love for the Nation as a new paideia that defends the permanent order in the face of normative models aimed at changing reality.