**Edmund Burke, the French Revolution and the Battle for the Soul of the Whig Party**

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Edmund Burke split dramatically with Charles James Fox and his Whig connection after the outbreak of the French Revolution. In his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), Burke contended that he had not abandoned his party’s principles and that it was the Foxite Whigs who had morphed into a new party. The article demonstrates that while Burke believed that the French Revolution rendered old party battles irrelevant to an extent, he did not lose his confidence in the creed of his party as he understood it, nor in the idea of party as such, as the remaining years of his life demonstrate. Key members of the party remained attached to the doctrine of party loyalty Burke had formulated*,* which meant thathe was for some years a lone voice of dissent within the Whig camp*.* Eventually, however, many of the ‘Old Whigs’ became convinced of Burke’s interpretation of events in France and their threat to Britain, and joined William Pitt the Younger in a coalition government in 1794, leaving Fox and a small rump in opposition. Several Whigs and Liberals in the nineteenth century rehabilitated Burke’s reputation, but they regretted his split with Fox and many believed that he had become insane in the 1790s. However, this article concludes by suggesting that the position he took on the French Revolution in opposition to Fox and the Foxites may have sustained rather than hindered the survival of Burkean Whiggism in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** Edmund Burke; party; Charles James Fox; Whiggism; the Whig party; the Rockingham Whigs; the French Revolution; the Glorious Revolution; duke of Portland; William Pitt.

1

Edmund Burke (1729/30-1797) is the best-known advocate of party in parliamentary history as well as in the history of political thought. He has been called the only classic defender of party among political philosophers[[1]](#footnote-1) and is often feted as the generator of the doctrine of parliamentary opposition in the sense of the ‘promotion of a consistent program to be advocated in opposition and realized in office’.[[2]](#footnote-2) Most discussions of Burke and party are focused on his canonical *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), in which he famously defined party as ‘a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.’[[3]](#footnote-3) By contrast, this article concentrates on Burke’s attitude to party after the outbreak of the French Revolution. Although he broke dramatically with his Whig connection in the wake of this event, it is demonstrated that Burke did not lose faith in either the creed of his party as he understood it or in the idea of party as such. Many key members of the party remained wedded to the doctrine of party loyalty which Burke had set out in the *Present Discontents.* This meant thathe remained a lone voice of dissent within the Whig camp for a long time*.* Eventually, however, many of the ‘Old Whigs’ became convinced of Burke’s interpretation of events in France and their threat to Britain, and joined William Pitt the Younger in a coalition government, leaving Charles James Fox and a small rump in opposition. Even if the triumph turned out to be short-lived, as leading Whigs in government split over the question of Catholic emancipation in Ireland, for a while Burke’s interpretation of ‘aristocratic Whiggism’ experienced a renaissance which still had resonance in the following century. It has been argued that Burke rejected party,[[4]](#footnote-4) but the truth is that it was the Whigs in the coalition with Pitt who failed to live up to his demands for party principle and loyalty.

2

Burke and his Whig connection left government for the second time in less than two years at the end of 1783. The short-lived Fox-North coalition was brought down by George III over regulation of the East India Company, with the king declaring that anyone voting for Fox’s India Bill was his enemy. The king – still no friend of the formerly Rockingham and now Portland Whigs – replaced the coalition with William Pitt, who bolstered his position in the 1784 general election. This election had been called early, after only half of the potential lifetime of the parliament, to give Pitt a majority. The court system had won the day, and Burke was devastated since it looked as if the king’s interpretation of the constitution had prevailed, and party had failed.[[5]](#footnote-5) ‘We have been labouring for near twenty years to make [the House of Commons] independent’, he wrote to William Baker, ‘for me to look forward to the event of another twenty years toil – it is quite ridiculous.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

A clearer dichotomy between an opposition party and a broad-bottom treasury party, and at least the semblance of a two-party framework, emerged after 1784.[[7]](#footnote-7) The opposition Whigs under the duke of Portland and Fox became bigger than they had been under Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd marquess of Rockingham, with approximately 145 MPs out of 183 members of the opposition belonging to their connection after the election of 1790. This was largely thanks to better party organisation and electoral management by Portland and his assistant William Adam.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, many commentators, including Horace Walpole and Edward Gibbon, believed that the party names lost meaning after the American war.[[9]](#footnote-9) There are indications that both sides viewed themselves as Whig and accused the other side of being Tory. Pitt never described himself as a Tory, but as an ‘independent Whig’.[[10]](#footnote-10) But from Burke’s perspective, there was little doubt that the opposition were the true Whigs and that Pitt represented Toryism, since he was personally backed by George III. The founding of the Whig Club at Westminster to aid Fox’s election was part of an effort to confirm this interpretation and monopolise the term.[[11]](#footnote-11)

At least at the start of the new campaign, Burke showed himself more than willing to continue in a spirited opposition to the crown and its new minister. On 14 June 1784, he criticised the monarch’s meddling in the business of Fox’s India Bill in a lengthy speech which he later described as a ‘defence of the Whigs’.[[12]](#footnote-12) But his standing in his party was diminishing. The death of Rockingham in 1782 was a heavy blow for Burke and it impacted his position within the party, since his closeness to Rockingham had been crucial from the beginning of his political career. In July 1765, six months before he entered parliament, Burke became his private secretary during the first Rockingham ministry. After the fall of this ministry, he stayed loyal to Rockingham when he was approached by Henry Seymour Conway about a potential job in the new Chatham administration.[[13]](#footnote-13) Burke would later highlight that he at this time had been ‘free to choose another connexion’ but that ‘he cheerfully took his fate with the party’.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In 1791, the man who had written and spoken so fervently and eloquently of party loyalty and unity would become responsible for creating a schism within the Whigs. Samuel Johnson had said of Burke to James Boswell: ‘I remember being present when [Burke] shewed himself to be so corrupted…as to maintain, that a member of parliament should go along with his party right or wrong…It is maintaining that you may lie to the publick.’[[15]](#footnote-15) But Johnson had misunderstood Burke, who had written in the *Present Discontents* thatif one disagreed with one’s party more than one time out of ten, one had chosen the wrong connection. ‘Men thinking freely, will, in particular instances, think differently’, he had argued*.* What was crucial was agreement on ‘*leading general principles in Government*’.[[16]](#footnote-16) Burke was a partisan, but an independently minded one, who sought to lead his party in his own direction.

Before the outbreak of revolution in France, Burke had taken an independent position on the Regency crisis of 1788-9 during George III’s mental illness, arguing that the prince regent should attain full monarchical authority.[[17]](#footnote-17) Many opposition Whigs waited for the king to die because as long as he was alive there was little hope that he would let them back into power.[[18]](#footnote-18) By the time of the Regency crisis, the opposition Whigs had forged an alliance with the prince of Wales using classic ‘reversionary interest’ tactics. While Pitt and the administration wanted to impose restrictions on the prince regent, Burke took the constitutional high ground and argued that the British constitution vested executive power in the crown, and that the hereditary right to the crown in the house of Hanover had been established by the Act of Settlement of 1701. Burke feared that parliament was usurping powers which belonged to the executive, and that Pitt would effectively make himself king during the Regency.[[19]](#footnote-19) In the process, Burke went to great rhetorical lengths in portraying Pitt as a power-hungry innovator and a threat to the constitutional equilibrium. Burke’s advice was that the prince should have taken the lead by announcing his intentions to parliament, which would have made his Whig friends the ‘proposers’ and Pitt and the administration the ‘opposers’.[[20]](#footnote-20) But Fox and others in the party believed this tactic to be too extreme, which allowed Pitt’s ministry to keep the initiative. In any event, George III recovered in February 1789. Burke would later present his arguments in favour of hereditary monarchy in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) as favourable to his party and the prince. He wrote: ‘As to the party and its Interests, – in endeavouring to support the Hereditary succession of the Prince of Wales, I consider their power as included in the assertion of his Right.’[[21]](#footnote-21)

In addition to the Regency crisis, Burke’s involvement in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, former governor-general of India, created distance between him and the Foxites. Fox did not like Burke’s obsession with Hastings, whose trial went on for much longer than initially expected. What made matters worse was that Pitt refused to make it a party question by offering limited support to the prosecution. Fox lost interest, and when he planned for a new ministry during the Regency crisis, he left out Burke’s name as the proposed head of the board of commissioners for the affairs of India.[[22]](#footnote-22) Burke was once again going to be offered the office of paymaster general, below cabinet-level.

There are few signs that Burke had lost his conviction of the importance of party, however. As late as August 1789, he wrote that ‘Party is absolutely necessary at this time. I thought it always so in this Country ever since I had anything to do in publick Business’.[[23]](#footnote-23) Burke had traditionally viewed the Protestant dissenting constituency as the mainstay of the Whig party.[[24]](#footnote-24) However, in 1784 many dissenters had supported Pitt and helped him win an overwhelming majority in the general election. In a letter from 1792, Burke argued that the dissenters ‘had long shewn themselves wholly adverse to, and unalliable with the Party. They had shown it…signally in 1784.’[[25]](#footnote-25) It is clear, however, that Burke had for a while sought to win them back. As late as September 1789, he wrote to Fox advising him to publish a volume of essays by Joseph Priestley, dedicated to the prince of Wales, for electioneering purposes: ‘Dr P. is a very considerable Leader among a Set of Men powerful enough in many things, but most of all in Elections…It would be material to you to gain entirely some of these dissenters.’[[26]](#footnote-26) In the wake of the French Revolution, however, Burke sharply diverged from the dissenters. Writing to Richard Bright, a prominent dissenter in Burke’s old constituency Bristol, in February 1790, Burke said that he had become ‘less desirous, than formerly I had been, of becoming active in the Service of the Dissenters.’[[27]](#footnote-27) The reason, as he described it, was that he had ‘observed’ and ‘felt’ that the dissenters were turning themselves into ‘a party which seems to have contention and power much more than Piety for its Objects.’[[28]](#footnote-28) What made things even worse, this party was ‘proceeding systematically, to the destruction of this Constitution in some of its essential parts’, in ‘imitation’ of events in France.[[29]](#footnote-29) In March 1790, Burke astonished Fox and many of his friends by actively opposing a new motion to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The *Reflections,* publishedin November 1790, is Burke’s most famous condemnation of the French Revolution. More specifically, it was a response to the dissenting section of the broad Whig landscape and more precisely to Richard Price’s *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789)*.* In this address Price compared the French Revolution with the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9 and seemed to be calling for general revolutions across Europe.[[31]](#footnote-31) Burke was increasingly concerned with his colleagues’ sympathetic attitudes towards the French. Fox periodically praised the French Revolution publicly, and in private said that the storming of the Bastille was the ‘greatest’ and ‘best’ event in world history.[[32]](#footnote-32) Burke’s first major quarrel was with his Irish compatriot Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Burke’s son Richard wrote to the Earl Fitzwilliam, Rockingham’s nephew and heir:

[Sheridan] thinks it advisable, to throw himself into a new line of politics, different from that which has been pursued by the party, that is, the principle of recommending themselves to the public favor, by administering ably and conscientiously the *actual existing government,* when in place – and when out of place, by the resistance of all bad measures, and above all things adhering to and maintaining both the form and substance of our present constitution. This I take to have been the principle of Lord R[ockingham]’s party, of the same party under the present head [Fox]. The new line – I call – an endeavour to recommend ourselves not by conduct only, but by seeking favor with various descriptions of men[[33]](#footnote-33) by flattering them with hopes of real or pretended improvements of the constitution; And by disgusting them by the representation of the vices or supposed vices of that constitution, to excite such a popular spirit, as shall give the power to correct them[.][[34]](#footnote-34)

What was particularly problematic for Richard Burke and his father[[35]](#footnote-35) was that Sheridan had allegedly said that the French Revolution should be celebrated by all ‘without *any distinction of parties* – on *general principles.*’[[36]](#footnote-36) Richard Burke reminded Fitzwilliam that ‘*General principles without distinction of parties,* never I believe was the principle of present opposition.’ If that had been Burke’s argument in the *Present Discontents,* it would have made it virtually indistinguishable from Lord Bolingbroke’s ‘coalition of parties’, which Chatham had sought to put into effect in 1766 after the fall of the first Rockingham ministry. ‘[W]hat is the meaning of *general principles without distinction of parties,* but – the formation of *a new party* upon *new principles*’, Burke’s son asked rhetorically.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Fox and Burke fell out dramatically during the debates on the Quebec Bill in May 1791, which moved Fox to tears.[[38]](#footnote-38) The French question arose when parliament debated the establishment of a constitution for a French province under British dominion. In the debate, Fox ‘condemned [the *Reflections*] both in public and private, and every doctrine contained in it’.[[39]](#footnote-39) Defending himself, Burke contended that ‘there was not one step of his conduct, nor one syllable of his book, contrary to the principles of those men with whom our glorious revolution originated, and to whose principles as a Whig, he declared an inviolable attachment.’[[40]](#footnote-40) Six months earlier, when the *Reflections* had been first published, Burke assured Sir Gilbert Elliot that he had received from Portland, Fitzwilliam, Devonshire, Cavendish, and Montagu ‘and a long et cetera of the old Stamina of the Whiggs a most full approbation of the principles in that work and a kind indulgence to the execution.’[[41]](#footnote-41) Lord John Cavendish had written to Burke on the publication of the *Reflections,* thanking Burke ‘for the real service which I think it will do: all men of sense must I think feel obliged to you, for shewing in so forcible a manner, that confusion is not the road to reformation.’[[42]](#footnote-42) Fitzwilliam wrote that the pamphlet was ‘almost universally admired and approved’ on its publication.[[43]](#footnote-43) Portland later referred to the *Reflections* as ‘the true Whig Creed’.[[44]](#footnote-44) To his disappointment, when he clashed with Fox ‘not one of the party spoke one conciliatory word.’[[45]](#footnote-45) Burke had dismissed Fox’s suggestion that there need not be any loss of friendship as pretence.[[46]](#footnote-46) The Whig press reported that Fox had got the better of Burke in their exchanges in the Commons.[[47]](#footnote-47) Burke continued to vindicate his position after the rupture in *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,* published just within a few months of the Quebec debates. This pamphlet reiterated what Richard Burke had told Fitzwilliam the previous year: Burke had not abandoned the party’s principles, it was the Foxite Whigs who had morphed into a *new* party*.*

3

In the *Appeal*, Burke addressed his erstwhile party friends, whom he privately described as ‘incurable, for they will not allow that there is any sort of disease in [the party], except the difference between Fox and me’.[[48]](#footnote-48) Written in the third person, Burke said of himself that he was ‘known indeed to have been warmly, strenuously, and affectionately, against all allurements of ambition…attached to the Whig party.’[[49]](#footnote-49) To his former party friends he stated his intention as ‘mak[ing] it manifest to the world, that those [Whigs] who condemn me, condemn their predecessors in principle whom they so highly and justly honour and esteem.’[[50]](#footnote-50) He celebrated the memory of Rockingham in the *Appeal*,[[51]](#footnote-51) but his main focus was on the ‘Old Whigs’ of the reigns of William and Anne. ‘I shew myself [in the *Appeal*] no worse a Whigg than the Somer’s, Godolphins, and Jekylls’, he wrote to Lord Charlemont.[[52]](#footnote-52) Having joined the party in his mid-thirties, he had been perfectly aware of the differences between Whig and Tory principles, and he knew that he was a Whig.[[53]](#footnote-53) He had also clearly understood that joining the Whigs at that time would not be ‘a road to power’, especially not for someone of his status.

Burke’s predicament now was that this party – via ‘the mouth of him [Fox] who must be regarded as its authentic organ’ – had not only disapproved of him but indeed disavowed him.[[54]](#footnote-54) Burke argued that the French Revolution could only determine the character of any British party, which had been formed before that event, if ‘they choose to imitate any of its acts, or to consolidate any principles of that revolution with their own opinions.’[[55]](#footnote-55) Because the new-modelled French constitution had become an object of comparison and imitation for ‘factions, at home and abroad’, scrutinising it was a proper enterprise, Burke argued. The risk was indeed that people would be tempted to sacrifice ‘the good, of which they had been in assured possession, in favour or wild and irrational expectations.’[[56]](#footnote-56) In other words, Burke believed that he was sticking to the tenets of Whiggism by defending the British constitution.

Fox could claim, as he had done, that he was the true Whig since he celebrated the fall of absolute monarchy. Lafayette and other French revolutionaries viewed Fox and his supporters as their natural allies.[[57]](#footnote-57) From this perspective, the main charge against Burke was inconsistency. Burke countered such accusations in the *Appeal* by saying that ‘if he could venture to value himself upon any thing, it is on the virtue of consistency that he would value himself the most.’[[58]](#footnote-58) He contended that the three parts of Britain’s mixed and balanced constitution had to be defended in distinct ways, and those who were friends of the whole would not hesitate to support the part in most need of defence. There was thus no contradiction for a constitutional Whig to defend monarchy, Burke argued, referring to his record on ‘economical reform’ aimed at reducing the influence of the crown when it had been ‘too great’.[[59]](#footnote-59) Moreover, by citing his famous speech to the electors of Bristol seventeen years earlier, Burke demonstrated that he had never been a partisan of any one part of the constitution exclusively but rather a partisan of all of them.[[60]](#footnote-60) In any event, many continued to criticise Burke on account of perceived apostasy. John Millar, Adam Smith’s student, criticised Burke in *An Historical View of the English Government,* which was dedicated to Fox, referring to ‘the distinction between the *old* and the *new* whigs, by which a famous political character endeavoured lately to cover the desertion of his former tenets’.[[61]](#footnote-61)

More specifically, Fox had accused Burke of inconsistency in supporting the Americans against Britain and not the French struggle against absolute monarchy. ‘[I]t was evident the American states had revolted, because they did not think themselves sufficiently free’, Fox had told the Commons during the Quebec debate.[[62]](#footnote-62) Burke disagreed, clarifying in the chamber that ‘[h]e was favourable to the Americans, because he supposed they were fighting, not to acquire absolute speculative liberty, but to keep what they had under the English constitution.’[[63]](#footnote-63) As a Whig, Burke’s key reference point was the Glorious Revolution. In the *Appeal,* Burke stressed that ‘[h]e considered the Americans as standing at that time, and in that controversy, in the same relation to England, as England did to king James the Second, in 1688.’[[64]](#footnote-64) In other words, the Americans had been on the ‘defensive footing’. The same analysis had allowed him to separate the French Revolution from the Glorious Revolution in the *Reflections.* What Burke wanted to stress in the *Appeal* was that it was his party which had shifted ground and abandoned their principles, whereas he was still defending the legacy of the Glorious Revolution and Whiggism.

Burke acknowledged that it was with regards to 1688-9 that those ‘who speak in the name of party have thought proper to censure him the most’.[[65]](#footnote-65) He admitted that ‘he must be defended on party grounds too’, that is to say, he must show that his interpretation of that ‘leading event’ was ‘in perfect harmony with that of the ancient Whigs’. The party he had joined ‘did not affect to be better Whigs, than those who lived in the days in which principle was put to the test.’[[66]](#footnote-66) He re-emphasised his version of a lineal story from the *Present Discontents* of how the Whiggism of the Revolution was transmitted, via the Whigs under Anne and the two Georges, to Rockingham’s connection, which he had joined. As the clearest statement of Whig tenets, Burke returned to the period in which he believed that British party ideologies had matured: the rage of party in the reign of Anne. More exactly, he returned to the ‘great constitutional event’ of the impeachment of Henry Sacheverell in 1710. Sacheverell was a high-church clergyman who had preached a notorious sermon on 5 November 1709 entitled *The Perils of False Brethren, in Church, and State* at St Paul’s Cathedral to commemorate Gunpowder Plot Day. The printed version of the sermon became a bestseller, and infuriated the Whigs because it attacked religious toleration and, according to Whigs, the Revolution Settlement as a whole. Sacheverell was impeached, but received a very light sentence, and the episode is believed to have swung much of the country behind the Tories and paved the way for their landslide election victory in 1710.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The purpose of the Sacheverell trial, Burke claimed, was that of ‘stating the true grounds and principles of the Revolution’.[[68]](#footnote-68) By comparing his *Reflections* with the published speeches from the trial, from which he cited at length, Burke’s intention was to show that he had not diverted from the ‘old Whigs’. In the *Reflections,* Burke had argued that the subversion of the ‘ancient constitution’ – ‘inviolably fixed in King, Lords and Commons’ – had justified the Revolution. It had been carried out ‘from necessity’.[[69]](#footnote-69) Rather than modelling a new government, it sought ‘to derive all…as *an inheritance from our forefathers.*’[[70]](#footnote-70)Citing extracts from the managers of the trial, including Nicholas Lechmere, James Stanhope, Robert Walpole, and Joseph Jekyll, Burke showed that the Whigs of the trial believed that the Revolution had not fundamentally changed the nature of the monarchy. The Act of Settlement (1701) did not create an elective monarchy but the safeguarding of the hereditary principle in the Protestant line.[[71]](#footnote-71) Jekyll, for instance, had put the Revolution and the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 ‘exactly upon the same footing’.[[72]](#footnote-72) Burke took the opportunity to celebrate Walpole’s legacy as a ‘sound Whig’ and ‘safe minister’, who governed by ‘party attachments’ rather than corruption as Bolingbroke and others in the motley opposition – consisting of Tories, Jacobites, Whigs, and Patriots – had claimed.[[73]](#footnote-73) Walpole’s financial acumen had laid the foundation for Britain’s later military glory, Burke argued. For many ‘old Whigs’, Britain’s military strength relative to Catholic and absolutist France had always been a top priority. As we shall see, for Burke this remained a priority for the rest of his life, even as he differed from earlier generations of Whigs on the question of toleration for Catholics.

Having explained and defended the principles of the ‘old Whigs’ – those he viewed as the ‘constitutional ancestors’ of his party[[74]](#footnote-74) – Burke proceeded to attack the works of the ‘new Whigs’, referencing Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Men,* written against Burke’s *Reflections.*[[75]](#footnote-75)The purpose of this was that ‘[t]he Whig reader may make his choice between the two doctrines.’[[76]](#footnote-76) In private, Burke wrote to his son that he believed that the great majority of his party were of his opinion and that he wanted to ‘get the better of their inactivity, and to stimulate them to a publick declaration of, what every one of their acquaintance privately knows, to be as much their Sentiments as they are yours and mine.’[[77]](#footnote-77) Burke’s main attention was fixed on Paine, who had stated that the Septennial Act 1716 showed that Britain had no constitution, since it demonstrated that the legislature could exercise unlimited, arbitrary power.[[78]](#footnote-78) When responding to Paine, Burke sought to associate him with quasi-Jacobitism by arguing that the modern Whigs ‘represent the king as tainted with principles of despotism, from the circumstance of his having dominions in Germany.’[[79]](#footnote-79) As J.C.D. Clark has recently argued, Paine’s anti-monarchical writings relied on an earlier anti-Hanoverian political discourse, which originally included Jacobite elements.[[80]](#footnote-80) Paine did not identify with either Whiggism or the appeal to party. In the preface in the second part of *Rights of Man*, Paine ridiculed the Whig tradition in which Burke took pride, and condemned all parties as self-seeking in the same breath:

But who are those to whom Mr. Burke has made his appeal? A set of childish thinkers and half-way politicians born in the last century; men who went no farther with any principle than as it suited their purpose as a party; the nation was always left out of the question; and this has been the character of every party from that day to this.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Whilst portraying himself as an undisputable Whig in the *Appeal,* Burke did not shy away from drawing attention tohis previous disagreements with his party under Rockingham’s leadership, including on questions of parliamentary reform and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. In these cases, he had gone against the opinion and even the solicitations of some of his ‘best friends’.[[82]](#footnote-82) His point was that ultimately principle must be put before party. Party could uphold principles in politics, but it could also become an engine for destructive ones. As he had made clear from his early writings on the subject, party could operate for good as well as for ill, and the Rockingham Whigs were only good insofar as they represented sound tenets. The next section elaborates how Burke understood his party’s principles.

4

Burke and Paine not only disagreed about monarchy but also about aristocracy.[[83]](#footnote-83) The Rockinghams were a party of the major Whig aristocratic families, the Cavendishes and the Devonshires, even if there was space for an Irish self-made *novus homo* such as Burke. Burke referred to the landed aristocracy in a letter to Richmond as ‘the great Oaks that shade a Country and perpetuate your benefits from Generation to Generation.’[[84]](#footnote-84) Burke was, however, no sycophant, writing early in his career to Portland that ‘[w]hatever advantages I have had, have been from friends on my own Level; As to those that are called great, I never paid them any Court; perhaps since I must say it, they have had as much benefit from my Connection, as I have had.’[[85]](#footnote-85) Towards the end of his life, Burke presented himself as a self-made man in a pamphlet responding to the duke of Bedford and the earl of Lauderdale, two aristocrats friendly to the French Revolution and who criticised Burke’s pension.[[86]](#footnote-86)

In the *Appeal,* Burke had argued that ‘[a] true natural aristocracy…is an essential integrant part of any large people rightly constituted.’[[87]](#footnote-87) An aristocracy was naturally ‘elevated’, but it also needed ‘[t]o look early to public opinion’, which is what the Rockinghams had done, both in government and opposition.[[88]](#footnote-88) The party in which he had acted had always had the ‘reproach’ as well as the ‘estimation’ of being an ‘Aristocratick party’, he wrote to Fitzwilliam. ‘Such I always understood it to be, in the true Sense of the word; that is to say, a party grave and moral, equally removed from popular giddiness and profligacy on the one hand, and from servile Court compliances on the other.’[[89]](#footnote-89) Aristocracy properly understood equalled independence for Burke. In a letter to William Weddell, the other MP for Malton, Burke argued that the purpose of the Whigs was to support ‘aristocratick principles’ and ‘aristocratick interests’ for the sake of ‘the real Benefit of the Body of the people, to which all names of party, all Ranks and orders in the State, and even Government itself ought to be entirely subordinate.’[[90]](#footnote-90)

Burke told Fitzwilliam that many of the party leaders had given him written assurances that the *Reflections* would be both honourable and useful to the party, until Fox had encouraged a complete change of tone. What had happened since was that the leaders had started ‘to propagate the principles of French Levelling and confusion’.[[91]](#footnote-91) After the example of Burke, no one dared to speak out against the events in France. The party was no longer safe for principled disagreement. Burke assured Fitzwilliam that he would not stay in parliament ‘one hour after’ the Hastings trial had been concluded.[[92]](#footnote-92) However, Burke’s references to Portland towards the end of the letter shows that he suspected that enthusiasm for the French Revolution among the Whig aristocracy was waning.

The French Revolution clearly showed Burke’s readiness to differ and depart with the Whig aristocracy when he believed that they were condoning doctrines which would ensure their own destruction and that of the mixed and balanced constitution. In May 1768, Burke had in a parliamentary debate described the British constitution as consisting of king, parliament, and people, with parliamentary members of both the Lords and Commons described by Burke as a ‘middle class’ that would mediate between popular turmoil and royal domination. Central to his argument, starting with the *Observations on a Late State of the Nation* (1769), was that partisanship was a duty for this ‘middle class’. In the *Appeal,* Burke argued that parties themselves contained ‘a middle sort of men; a sort of equestrian order’, undoubtedly with reference to people of more humble pedigrees such as himself.[[93]](#footnote-93) This ‘equestrian order’, standing ‘between the principal leaders in parliament, and the lowest followers out of doors…are the fittest for preventing things from running to excess.’ The problem, however, was that even they tended to go along with their leaders. And what made things even worse, the leaders were themselves ‘blindly led’ by the whims of the multitude.[[94]](#footnote-94)

The aristocratic part of the constitution was important insofar as it held a middle position between people and monarch. Burke was often censured for being excessively rhetorical, whether he was denouncing British abuse in India or the excesses of the French Revolution. This was part of his brief as a parliamentary orator whose job for most of his thirty years in parliament was to criticise the government of the day. At the same time, the avoidance of extremes is an organising theme in many of Burke’s writings, especially in the *Appeal.* ‘The whole scheme of our mixed constitution is to prevent any one of its principles from being carried as far, as taken by itself, and theoretically, it would go’, he wrote.[[95]](#footnote-95) This applied as much to aristocracy as the other two branches. The British constitution was one of ‘perpetual treaty and compromise’.[[96]](#footnote-96) By castigating the British constitution, the ‘new teachers’, or the ‘New Whigs’, sought ‘to deprive men of the benefit of the collected wisdom of mankind’.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Burke’s key argument in favour of an aristocratic party was its ability to be relatively independent from both the populace and the monarch. Ultimately, Burke also wanted individuals in the parties to think freely and not be blindly led by either their leaders or their followers. In any case, the *Appeal* itself and his subsequent activities demonstrate that he had not given up on his party entirely, as we see in the next section of this article.

5

Burke was disappointed with the reception of the *Appeal.* ‘Not one word from one of our party’, he wrote to his son. ‘They agree with me to a title – but they dare not speak out for fear of hurting Fox.’[[98]](#footnote-98) In fact, the pamphlet had insulted some of Burke’s potential allies. Crucially, Portland said that he had ‘never read any word that ever gave me the pain which [the *Appeal*] has done, nor could I, had it come from any other hand.’[[99]](#footnote-99) For a while it looked as if Burke was the only discontented Whig in the Portland-Fox connection, which he had now left. Even his disciple William Windham, MP for Norwich, hesitated at first. The truth, however, was that Burke was right in thinking that Portland and many others did not share Fox’s views on the French Revolution. Fox’s lifelong friend Fitzwilliam thanked Burke ‘heartily…for the authorities you give me [in the *Appeal*] for the doctrines I have sworn by, long and long since’, and declared that he would seek to counter Paine’s doctrines ‘in the mode I myself think the best to resist their mischief.’[[100]](#footnote-100) However, most Whigs were too attached to the idea of party unity and the doctrine of the *Present Discontents* to break publicly. Burke even suggested in a letter that he believed that Fox was himself more ambivalent than he appeared, but that it would be difficult for him ‘[t]o abandon all the young and energetick part of the Party, and the whole body of the Dissenters, upon whom he has lately built his principal hopes’.[[101]](#footnote-101)

The French Revolution had yet to enter the era of violence which Burke had predicted – accurately as it turned out – in the *Reflections.* In September 1791, Louis XVI accepted the new French constitution. In the opening months of 1792, political societies dedicated to reform proliferated in Britain, many drawing on ‘plebeian’ support. The forming of the Association of the Friends of the People by younger Whig parliamentarians caused particular alarm among the Whig aristocrats.[[102]](#footnote-102) Fitzwilliam would later write to Portland: ‘I never will *act in party* with men who call in 40,000 weavers to dictate political measures to the Govt’.[[103]](#footnote-103) Fox was caught between a rock and a hard place. In this new environment, Pitt invited Portland into discussions on measures to pacify the country. The Portland Whigs supported Pitt’s Proclamation against seditious writings in May 1792. Astonishingly, this produced no ‘rupture’ and only ‘vexation’ between Fox and Portland.[[104]](#footnote-104) During the summer, the Portlandites negotiated to join the government in a coalition with Pitt. Burke, from the sidelines, supported the attempts to form a coalition and even entertained the notion that Fox and Pitt could serve in the same cabinet for a while.[[105]](#footnote-105) Fox, on his part, viewed Pitt’s resignation from the treasury as a *sine qua non,* although this was never formally proposed*.* It all ended in failure, to the disappointment of Portland, who wrote to Burke that the home secretary Henry Dundas’s associates ‘do not wish for power for the only purpose which makes that wish justifiable, They have no principle, They know not what *party* is, but for the desire of annihilating it’.[[106]](#footnote-106) Burke would presumably once have agreed, but at this point his greatest fear was rather that Portland was ‘more and more in Foxes power’.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Fox had in fact tried to maintain a fairly moderate position on the French Revolution, seeking to persuade his colleagues that domestic events of 1782-84 rather than French affairs ought to underpin the fundamental division in British politics. But events in France were to take a more extreme turn with the September Massacres of 1792. On 19 November, France made explicit its intention to export the Revolution. Loyal Associations were now formed in opposition to the reformist ones. However, unlike many of the Whig aristocracy, Fox remained convinced that the French did not pose a threat. In a speech at the Whig Club in December 1792, he declared himself openly ‘to be an advocate for “*The Rights of the Peopl*e”’.[[108]](#footnote-108) It was reported that Portland cheered the speech,[[109]](#footnote-109) but the truth was that he had not heard it and wanted to disassociate himself from it.[[110]](#footnote-110) A few months later, after the execution of Louis XVI at the beginning of 1793, Burke, his son, and forty-one others signed an open letter withdrawing their names from the Whig Club because of their unhappiness with Fox’s leadership.[[111]](#footnote-111) The letter was meant to put pressure on Portland, who was notoriously indecisive, to publicly separate from Fox. Against all odds, the connection between Fox and Portland remained for another twelve months. A self-styled ‘Third Party’ – led by Windham –broke away, however, and the Old Whig party began to crumble.[[112]](#footnote-112)

After Fox openly supported the Friends of the People in May 1793, and pushed for peace with France in June, the Portland Whigs moved closer to the ‘Third Party’.[[113]](#footnote-113) In the autumn, Burke wrote *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority,* addressed to Portland and Fitzwilliam. The pamphlet opened with a letter to the former, in which Burke wrote that ‘[n]o man can be connected with a party which professes publickly to admire, or may be justly suspected of secretly abetting the French Revolution’.[[114]](#footnote-114) Whigs had been deluded into thinking of the revolution ‘as an ordinary party squabble about place and patronage’. A general war against Jacobinism at home and abroad was the only way of ‘saving Europe’, according to Burke.[[115]](#footnote-115) Portland responded that his and Burke’s principles were ‘exactly the same’, but that he was ‘not Christian enough to turn the other cheek to the man [Pitt] who has given me a blow nor can I lick the hand which has endeavoured to destroy me’.[[116]](#footnote-116)

In January 1794, Portland finally took the step of committing himself to ‘a full, firm, unequivocal support, both of the war and of its conductors.’[[117]](#footnote-117) In essence, this meant that the Portland Whigs separated from the Foxites and joined Windham’s ‘Third Party’. Burke held out lingering hopes, in vain as it turned out, that Fox could be saved when ‘he sees that the Body of his party is melting away very fast’.[[118]](#footnote-118) According to Fox, the Portland Whigs’ support of the administration equalled ‘the separation, or rather the dissolution, of the Whig party’.[[119]](#footnote-119) Portland himself was worried about breaking up the unity of the Whigs. His understanding of what the Whig party stood for was close to Burke’s. In 1779, Burke had reported to Richard Shackleton that ‘a very wise and a very good man, the duke of Portland, said to me in a conversation on this Subject [of party], that he never knew any man disclaim party, who was not *of* a party, that he was ashamed of.’[[120]](#footnote-120) Portland wrote to Windham in January 1794 that they must consider ‘what our Duty to the publick requires us to do as Whigs, that is, as members of a Party, or as unconnected Individuals.’[[121]](#footnote-121) The question was whether they should support the government from within or without, in other words, whether or not they should form an active coalition with Pitt. Burke had long tried to convince members of the opposition to join the government in the war effort against France. Portland was hesitant about joining the administration, since he believed that it would hurt the party to which he was devoted.[[122]](#footnote-122) As he wrote to Windham:

‘[T]he existence of a Whig Party is essential to the well being of this Country, as well as to the preservation of its Constitution, & allow me, my dear Windham, when the name of Whig has been so prostituted & counterfeited, as We have seen it, to deposit with you in a very few words my definition of The Whig Party, which I have always understood to be, an Union [sic] of any number of persons of independent minds & fortunes formed & connected together by their belief in the principles upon which the Revolution of 1688 was founded & perfected; & by the attachment to the present form of our Government to all its Establishments & Orders Religious and Civil.[[123]](#footnote-123)

Evidently, part of Portland’s reluctance to join the administration stemmed from his understanding of party and the importance of an independent aristocracy. His differences with George III on this score went back to the beginning of the reign in 1760, and this had remained more important for Portland than for Burke. As he wrote to Windham: ‘[T]he characteristick feature of the present Reign has been to…debase & vilify the natural aristocracy of the Country, &, under the proper pretence of abolishing all party distinctions, to annihilate, if possible, The Whig Party.’[[124]](#footnote-124) At the same time, supporting the war without joining the government would ‘vindicate the cause of Whiggism’, which he, like Burke, feared had been hijacked by Fox and his followers.[[125]](#footnote-125)

In the event, however, leading members of the Portlandites joined Pitt’s administration in the early summer of 1794. Portland had changed his mind and was now convinced that ‘the true Spirit of Aristocracy and the true Principles of Whiggism may be revived and re-established’ if his party joined the coalition.[[126]](#footnote-126) Fitzwilliam conceded that even though the formation of Pitt’s government had originally been ‘destructive of true Whiggism’, a coalition could become ‘the cause of the renewal of power in an Aristocratic Whig party.’[[127]](#footnote-127) Portland’s and Fitzwilliam’s understanding of the importance of aristocratic party was similar to Burke’s. Despite Portland and Fitzwilliam’s resolution that the coalition would not sound the death knell of the party, the press reported this development as a coalition between Whigs and Tories which extinguished these older labels and introduced the new ones of royalists and republicans.[[128]](#footnote-128)

In the coalition, Portland became home secretary, Windham secretary at war, Earl Spencer lord privy seal (and shortly afterwards, first lord of the admiralty), and Fitzwilliam lord president of the council, with a promise to take over the Irish policy as soon as expedient. The earl of Mansfield took a seat in the cabinet without portfolio. The Whigs now made up around half of the positions in the cabinet. Burke, having stood down from parliament in June, played no official role in the new coalition, but he supported it and would offer advice on Irish politics in particular, which came under the Portland Whigs’ remit. On the news of naval victories in June 1794, Portland wrote to Burke that the British were finally ‘advancing to restore Order Religion and Law to that unhappy Country and tranquillity and security to the rest of the civilized World.’[[129]](#footnote-129) ‘Order, religion and law’ were also key words in Burke’s correspondence and pamphlets at this time, but he stressed that they were not new concerns but longstanding commitments.

Unsurprisingly, Burke supported the Portlandites’ joining the government, especially since he was distrustful of Pitt’s commitment to war against France. He had earlier said in private that the pamphlets he had written since his split with Fox had ‘one single principle to guide me – namely that the extinction of Jacobinism in France was the sole worthy object of Arms and politicks of this time’.[[130]](#footnote-130) The mid-1790s was the time when Immanuel Kant and others wrote famous essays on perpetual peace*,* following the Abbé de St Pierre earlier in the century. Burke did not write about perpetual peace but rather about war against the French. In the War of the Spanish Succession, peace with France had been a Tory policy, whereas the Whigs had prioritised protecting the Protestant interest and the balance of power in Europe. Already in November 1792, Portland had written to Fitzwilliam: ‘[Fox] is in a manner insensible to the effects of the increasing power of France & to that lust of Dominion which is to me as evident in their present Republican Government as in the Zenith of their Monarchical Glory.’[[131]](#footnote-131)

Before the French Revolution, and despite his general embrace of free trade, Burke had in 1787 opposed Pitt’s legislative attempt to ease trade restrictions between France and Britain, since France was Britain’s political and commercial rival.[[132]](#footnote-132) He returned to this orthodox Whiggism in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1795-7)*,* written at the end of his life. Burke had been committed to the idea that Britain must defeat France on the battlefield at least since his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791). The key was to make sure that the Protestant powers – chiefly Britain, Prussia, and the Dutch – and Catholic Austria, would counterweigh the power and influence of France, the greatest power in Europe. In the last years of his life, Burke was as worried about French dominance in Europe as the early Whigs had been. The spectre of the universal monarchy of Louis XIV had been replaced by the threat of the universal doctrine of Jacobinism. By contrast, Fox viewed war against France as part of a scheme to extend the power of the executive in Britain. Both sides could be interpreted as holding on to Whig orthodoxy, and both sides could accuse each other of apostasy.[[133]](#footnote-133)

Portland’s biographer has argued that the Duke in office made the transition into a nineteenth-century Tory in the coalition government and later as prime minister in 1807-9.[[134]](#footnote-134) Rockingham’s widow was indeed confounded when Portland and Fitzwilliam joined the government in 1794. For her, it ‘seems such a completion of Lord Bute’s system at the first of this reign, *to blend Whig and Tory, to break all connection* and to disperse *all parties’*.[[135]](#footnote-135) This is what the Rockinghams and their inheritors the Portlandites had resisted since the early days of her husband’s leadership. As we have seen, Portland had only a few years earlier expressed the same worries to Burke. What made matters worse was that Lady Rockingham viewed the Pitt administration as Tory. This is also how the Portland Whigs had become accustomed to think of Pitt. He had been their ideological counterpart and was viewed as a Court creature, as evidenced in the events of 1783-4. For Burke and now also Portland, however, the struggle against the French Revolutionaries at home and abroad to save the British constitution and the balance of power in Europe took precedence over old party battles. As Portland’s followers either died, retired, moved to the Lords, or abandoned their leader, the Portland connection was reduced to a tiny faction, and by the time he led the government in 1807-9, he relied on Pittites and the ‘king’s men’. It should be remembered, however, that the Foxite rump was not much more impressive, with Fox mustering only forty-four votes, mainly representing rotten boroughs, in favour of his motion for peace on 10 May 1796. The size of his following in the years after the Whig schism has been estimated at around fifty-five MPs.[[136]](#footnote-136)

Had the Whigs become Tories or the Tories Whigs? This was the question people asked at the time. Fox’s nephew, Lord Holland, for instance, suggested that ‘the Duke of Por: …may call & think himself a Whig & yet be a Tory’.[[137]](#footnote-137) But only a Foxite could maintain that the Portlandites had abandoned the Whigs. From Burke’s and (eventually) Portland’s perspective it was Fox who was the deserter of the Whig cause. It can indeed be argued that the split between Portland and Fox, foreshadowed first by Burke’s ‘disownment’ and later by Windham’s breakaway party, ended the eighteenth-century Whig party, and the last vestiges of the eighteenth-century party framework.[[138]](#footnote-138) The party names were so entrenched, however, that a new party framework would later emerge in the nineteenth century with the same names.

Burke was an eighteenth-century Whig, who believed that the French Revolution and its consequences took precedence over older party divisions. Moreover, his support for Catholic emancipation and his Irishness in general made him an unlikely hero figure among Tories before 1830.[[139]](#footnote-139) Fox was also an eighteenth-century Whig, who, in contrast with Burke, interpreted the British response to French events as a continuation of older party disputes. The Whig cause understood as restraining the executive had not lost its relevance, according to Fox. ‘I remain of opinion…that party is by far the best instrument, if not the only one, for supporting the cause of liberty in this country’, he wrote to Lord Holland a few months into the life of the Portland-Pitt coalition.[[140]](#footnote-140) Party persisted as the supreme instrument for standing up to the monarchy, he argued in a Burkean fashion. Fox was now worried that this instrument risked being destroyed, and he held that his duty was ‘to use the utmost endeavours to preserve together what little remains of this system [of party], or to revive it if it is supposed to be quite extinct.’[[141]](#footnote-141) Fox conceded that the party may become divided again in the future since he believed that people are fundamentally driven by interest and ambition. When politicians act in party, however, they would be less frequently tempted with office and allurements. ‘In short, it appears to me that a party spirit is the only substitute that has been found, or can be found, for public virtue and comprehensive understanding; neither of which can be reasonably expected to be found in a very great number of people’, Fox concluded.[[142]](#footnote-142) In the same letter, he also cited from Rockingham’s epithet, written by Burke: ‘*his virtues were his means’.*[[143]](#footnote-143)

We should note, however, that Burke – somewhat surprisingly considering the role he had played – shared Fox’s fears that the coalition had wrecked party. Burke was far from content with Portland’s performance in the coalition. As originally promised, Fitzwilliam became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland six months into the coalition, in December 1794. However, supporting full Catholic emancipation to the horror of the administration in Britain, he was recalled after only a few months in the position. Burke, also supporting emancipation, was distraught over the sacrifice of Fitzwilliam and the cause of the Catholics, describing Portland, who opposed Catholic emancipation, as ‘the very man who destroyed the Catholicks, and his own friend [Fitzwilliam], and himself, for ever.’[[144]](#footnote-144) Burke had become convinced that his native Ireland was the key to the future of Europe, since it risked falling prey to Jacobin revolution.[[145]](#footnote-145) In this regard, Portland was more like the Whigs of the earlier eighteenth century, who had imposed restrictions on Catholics, especially in Ireland. Burke and Fitzwilliam were convinced this policy had to be revised since Catholic emancipation was necessary to save the Whig cause both in Ireland and in Britain. If the war against France was to be successful, all of Ireland needed to be invested in the cause. It was also in accordance with the general Whig principle of religious toleration, according to Burke and Fitzwilliam.

In a letter to Fitzwilliam in September 1796, Burke argued that the coalition had indeed destroyed party. ‘I was in serious hopes that party which was at last rallied under its proper standard…might, either in Ministry, or out of Ministry…become some sort of Asylum for principles moral and political’, he wrote. Instead, politics had evolved into a straight choice between Pitt and Fox. ‘This extinguishes party, as party…Every thing is forced into the shape of a mere faction, and a contest for nothing short, in substance and effect, than the sovereign authority, for one or the other of the chieftains’, Burke lamented.[[146]](#footnote-146) He added that he believed Britain would be ‘undone’ under either leader, but ‘much more certainly, much more rapidly, and in a way beyond cure’ under Fox.[[147]](#footnote-147)

6

Many of the Portland Whigs returned to the Foxite opposition – including Windham but crucially not Portland, who had turned into a royal servant – a few years after Burke’s death in 1797, but this alliance was fragile.[[148]](#footnote-148) As Emily Jones has recently and masterfully shown in a study of the 1830-1914 period, Burke was rehabilitated among Whigs and Liberals in the nineteenth century, long before he became a hero among Conservatives.[[149]](#footnote-149) However, as Jones stresses, many of these Whigs and Liberals, including Lord John Russell and T. B. Macaulay, believed that Burke had become insane in the 1790s, and they preferred to cite his earlier writings, especially the *Present Discontents.*[[150]](#footnote-150) This article has shown that it was not insanity that had convinced the Portland Whigs to come ‘into office on Mr. Burke’s principles’, as even Burke’s enemies recognised.[[151]](#footnote-151) Fitzwilliam, Windham, and other Whigs joined a coalition with Pitt to give more ideological energy to the war effort and to insist on a Bourbon restoration as a *sine qua non* for peace. They both continued to insist on this principle in the nineteenth century, even after they had reunited with the Foxite Whigs, in Windham’s case until his death in 1810, and in Fitzwilliam’s case until the restoration of the monarchy was achieved in 1814- 15. Moreover, Fitzwilliam and his son Viscount Milton continued to appeal to the authority of Burke, even when they took opposite positions on the question of parliamentary reform in the 1820s.[[152]](#footnote-152)

Already in his own lifetime, Burke was unexpectedly vindicated by James Mackintosh, who had earlier written one of the most eloquent and extensive responses to Burke’s *Reflections,*[[153]](#footnote-153)but had now been converted to Burke’s views after the violence of the French Revolution. In November 1796, Mackintosh defended Burke’s *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace* in the *Monthly Review,* which led to a correspondence and acquaintance between the two Whigs in the last months of Burke’s life. ‘Since that time [1790-1] a melancholy experience has undeceived me on many subjects in which I was then the dupe of my own enthusiasm’, Mackintosh wrote in a letter to Burke, ‘I can with truth affirm that I subscribe to your general principles, and am prepared to shed my blood in defence of the laws and constitution of my country.’[[154]](#footnote-154) In 1818, Mackintosh defended Britain’s unreformed suffrage in the Whig *Edinburgh Review* against the democratic agenda of Jeremy Bentham and his followers.[[155]](#footnote-155) From this perspective, it appears as if Burkean Whiggism survived into the nineteenth century because of, and not in spite of, the position he took on the French Revolution in opposition to Fox and the Foxites.

1. Nancy Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels* (Princeton, 2008), 5, 119-126; Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jeremy Waldron, *Political Political Theory* **[sic]**(Cambridge, MA, 2016), 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke,* ed. Paul Langford et al. (9 vols, Oxford, 1970-2015), II, 317. (Hence: *W&S*). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Frank O’Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution* (New York, NY, 1967), 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. F. P. Lock, *Burke* (2 vols, Oxford, 1998-2006),i, 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Burke to William Baker, 22 June 1784, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W.

   Copeland et al. (10 vols, Chicago, IL, 1958–1978),v, 154. (Hence: *Correspondence.*) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?* (Oxford, 2006), 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Donald Ginter, ‘The Financing of the Whig Party Organization, 1783-1793’, *American Historical Review,* 71 (1966), 421-40. For the earlier history of Burke’s party, see Frank O’Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England: The Rockingham Whigs, 1760-82* (1975) and Warren Elofson, *The Rockingham Connection and the Second Founding of the Whig Party* (Montreal, QC, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. James Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative* (Cambridge, 1993)*,* 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John Ehrman, *The Younger Pitt* (3 vols, 1969-96), i, 58, ii, 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People,* 50-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Burke to O’Hara, 29 July, 19 Aug. and 11 Nov. 1766, *Correspondence,* i, 262, 265, 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Burke, *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), *W&S,* iv, 408. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Boswell, *The Life of Johnson* (2 vols, 1791), i, 398. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Burke, *Present Discontents, W&S,* ii, 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. John Derry, *The Regency Crisis and the Whigs* (Cambridge, 1963), ch. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. O’Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution*, 5; John Cannon, *The Fox-North Coalition* (Cambridge, 1969)*,* 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Derry, *The Regency Crisis,* 161-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Burke to Windham, *c.* 24 Jan. 1789, *Correspondence,* v, 437-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Burke to Weddell, 31 Jan. 1792, *Correspondence,* vii, 58-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Correspondence,* vii, xvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Burke to Charlemont, 9 Aug. 1789, *Correspondence,* vi, 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Burke to Fox, 1777, *Correspondence,* iii, 382-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Burke to Weddell, 31 Jan. 1792, *Correspondence,* vii, 55-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Burke to Fox, 9 Sep. 1789, *Correspondence,* vi, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Burke to Bright, 18 Feb. 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Burke to Bright, 18 Feb. 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Burke to Bright, 18 Feb. 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. O’Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution,* 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Price, *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (Second edn, 1789)*,* 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Fox to Fitzpatrick, 30 July 1789, *Memorials and Correspondence of Charles James Fox,* ed. Lord John Russell (4 vols, 1853-7)*,* ii, 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This refers to dissenters and political reformers. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Richard Burke Jr. to Fitzwilliam, 29 July 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Burke’s son said: ‘I know I speak his [Burke’s] sentiments’. Richard Burke Jr. to Fitzwilliam, 29 July 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Richard Burke Jr. to Fitzwilliam, 29 July 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Richard Burke Jr. to Fitzwilliam, 29 July 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Cobbett’s Parliamentary History of England* (36 vols, 1806–20),xxix, col. 388. Less than a year earlier, they had celebrated Fox’s victory at the Westminster polls together; see Burke to Charlemont, 2 July 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cobbett’s Parl. Hist.*,* xxix, col. 389; Burke to Fitzwilliam, 5 June 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 273-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Cobbett’s Parl. Hist.*,* xxix, col. 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Burke to Elliot, 29 Nov. 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Lord John Cavendish to Burke, 14 Nov. 1790, *Correspondence,* vi, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cited in E.A. Smith, *Whig Principles and Party Politics* (Manchester, 1975), p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Portland to Laurence French, 30 Aug. 1791, Pw F 6241, University of Nottingham. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Burke to Fitzwilliam, 5 June 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. O’Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution,* 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. L. G. Mitchell, *Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig party* (Oxford, 1971), 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Edmund and Jane Burke to Richard Burke, 10 Aug. 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Burke, *Appeal*, *W&S*, iv, 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Burke to Charlemont, 8 Aug. 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 406. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Burke to Charlemont, 8 Aug. 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 331. This was a reference to ministerialist ‘Whigs’ in the decades after the Glorious Revolution. John Somers (1651-1716) was a prominent member of the Junto Whigs, which was supported by Joseph Jekyll (1662-1738). Sidney, 1st earl of Godolphin was originally a nominal Tory, but first and foremost a royal servant and political manager, who worked with the Junto Whigs in administrations in the early 1700s. The best study is Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne* (1987 [1967]). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, vi, 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, vi, 372. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, vi, 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, vi, 380. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See, e.g., Lafayette to Fox, 6 Nivôse 1800, British Library Add MS 51468, f. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 391. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, vi, 399. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, vi, 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Millar, *Historical View of the English Government* (Indianapolis, 2006), 806n. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Cobbett’s Parl. Hist.*,* xxix, col. 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Cobbett’s Parl. Hist.*,* xxix, col. 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 407. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. See Mark Knights (ed.), *Special Issue: Faction Displayed: Reconsidering the Impeachment of Dr Henry Sacheverell, Parliamentary History,* 31 (Feb. 2012); Brian Cowan (ed.), *Special Issue: The State Trial of Dr. Henry Sacheverell, Parliamentary History,* 31 (Oct. 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Burke, *Reflections, W&S,* viii, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 476. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 432-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Burke to Richard Burke, 5 Aug. 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 316-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* (1791), 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 438. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. J.C.D. Clark, *Thomas Paine* (Oxford, 2018), ch. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Paine, *Rights of Man; Part the Second.* (1792), preface. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 433. On this point, Fox and Paine disagreed as well; see Mitchell, *Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party,* 175-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Burke to Richmond, 15 Nov. 1772, *Correspondence,* ii, 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Burke to Portland, 22 Apr. 1770, *Correspondence,* ii*,* 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796)*, W&S,* ix, 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 448. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See also Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1975), 237-8; Sutherland, ‘The City of London in Eighteenth-Century Politics’, in *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier* (1956), 49-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Burke to Fitzwilliam, 21 Nov. 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 450. He repeated this verbatim in a later letter to Weddell, 31 Jan. 1792, *Correspondence,* vii, 52-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Burke to Weddell, 31 Jan. 1792, *Correspondence*,vii, 543. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 448. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 470. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Burke, *Appeal, W&S*, iv, 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Burke to Richard Burke Jr., 18 Aug. 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Portland to French Laurence, 23 Aug. 1791, *Correspondence,* vi, 369 n2. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Cited in Smith, *Whig Principles and Party Politics,* 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Burke to William Burke, 3 Sep. 1792, *Correspondence,* vii, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. O’Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution,* 82-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Fitzwilliam to Portland, 22 Sep. 1793, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments (WWM), Sheffield City Archives, F.31a. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Burke to William Burke, 3 Sep. 1792, *Correspondence,* vii, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Burke to Loughborough, 13 June 1792, *Correspondence,* vii, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Portland to Burke, 12 Sep. 1792, *Correspondence,* vii*,* 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Burke to William Burke, 3 Sep. 1792, *Correspondence,* vii*,* 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. *The Speech of the Right Honourable C.J. Fox Containing the Declaration of his Principles, Respecting the Present Crisis of Public Affairs* (N.d. [1792]), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. *The Speech of C.J. Fox Containing the Declaration of his Principles*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Wilkinson, *The Duke of Portland*, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Burke, *Correspondence,* vii, 353-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. O’Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution,* 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. O’Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution*, 135-6, 144-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Burke, *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority, W&S,* viii, 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Burke, *Observations on the Conduct of the Minority, W&S,* viii, 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Portland to Burke, 10 Oct. 1793, *Correspondence,* vii, 448. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Windham to Burke, 19 Jan. 1794, *Correspondence,* vii*,* 526. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Burke to Richard Burke, 10 Jan. 1794, *Correspondence,* vii*,* 515-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Fox to Lord Holland, 9 Mar. 1794, in *Fox Memorials,* iii, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Burke to Shackleton, 25 May 1779, *Correspondence,* iv, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Portland to Windham, 11 Jan. 1794, BL Add MS 37845, f. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Portland to Windham, 11 Jan. 1794, BL Add MS 37845, ff. 20-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Portland to Windham, 11 Jan. 1794, BL Add MS 37845, f. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Portland to Windham, 11 Jan. 1794, BL Add MS 37845, f. 18. Whigs frequently lamented that the sharp rise in ennoblements in the late eighteenth century was part of a conscious attempt on the part of George III and Pitt to weaken the independent aristocracy; see Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World* (2005), 22-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Portland to Windham, 11 Jan. 1794, BL Add MS 37845, f. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Portland to Fitzwilliam, 14 June 1794. WWM, F.31b. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Fitzwilliam to Portland, 15 June 1794. WWM, F. 31b. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Mitchell, *Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party,* 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Portland to Burke, 11 June 1794, *Correspondence,* vii, 549. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Burke to Loughborough, 13 Jan. 1794, *Correspondence*, vii., 517-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Portland to Fitzwilliam, 30 Nov. 1792, WWM, F.31a. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Gregory M. Collins, *Commerce and Manners in Edmund Burke’s Political Economy* (Cambridge, 2020), 337-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. The Whig response to the French Revolution is more one-sidedly summarised in Mitchell, *The Whig World,* 86-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Wilkinson, *The Duke of Portland,* 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Cited in Wilkinson, *The Duke of Portland*, 139 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Mitchell, *Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Holland to Caroline Fox, 9 Nov. 1792, BL Add MS 51731, f. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Mitchell, *Fox and the Disintegration of the Whig Party,* 166, 183, 205-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Sack, ‘The Memory of Pitt and the Memory of Burke’, *HJ,* 30 (1987), 623-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Fox to Lord Holland, 5 Oct. 1794, *Fox Memorials*, iii, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Fox to Lord Holland, 5 Oct. 1794, *Fox Memorials*, iii, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Fox to Lord Holland, 5 Oct. 1794, *Fox Memorials*, iii, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Fox to Lord Holland, 5 Oct. 1794, *Fox Memorials*, iii, 91. Burke’s inscription at the Rockingham Mausoleum, Wentworth, actually says: ‘his virtues were his arts.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Burke to Bishop Hussey, 27 Nov. 1795, *Correspondence,* viii, 352. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Richard Whatmore, *Terrorists, Anarchists, Democrats and Republican* (Princeton, 2019)*,* 337. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Burke to Fitzwilliam, 2 Sep. 1796, *Correspondence,* ix, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Burke to Fitzwilliam, 2 Sep. 1796, *Correspondence*, ix, 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Smith, *Whig Principles and Party Politics*, ch. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Emily Jones, *Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism: An Intellectual History* (Oxford, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Jones, *Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism*, 73-9. See also Russell, *Essay on the History of the English Government and Constitution* (1823), 178-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. *Remarks on the posthumous works of the late Right Hon. Edmund Burke; and on the preface published by His Executors, the doctors French Laurence and Walker King* (1797), 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. E.A. Smith, *Whig Principles and Party Politics* (Manchester, 1975), 366, 369. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Mackintosh, *Vindiciae Gallicae: A Defence of the French Revolution and its English Admirers, Against the Accusations of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke* (1791). [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Cited in Robert James Mackintosh (ed.), *Memoirs of the life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh* (2 vols, 1835), i, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Gregory Conti, *Parliament the Mirror of the Nation* (Cambridge, 2019), 18-23. For the *Edinburgh Review,* see Biancamaria Fontana, *Rethinking the Politics of Commercial Society* (Cambridge, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-155)