

# Edmund burke a short biography biography example

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What if Edmund Burke were alive today? London and Washington D. C. are bound together in so many ways whatever his modern views might be he would be an influence on the politics of both countries. Would he still be the conscience of morality for conservatives? In this essay we will look for insight to his moral and political perspective on the East India Trading Company and the French Revolution.

We neither think of the modern American ‘celebrity’ conservatives as having empathy for workers nor as being particularly fiscally responsible. Maybe that is why Edmund Burke’s reputation as one of the first true conservatives has been shoved to the side by the Republican Party. This essay speculates on Burke’s unique insistence for justice from the conservative side of the House of Commons. Today it would be considered unique but during his lifetime were his views were respected although not always supported. Edmond Burke was considered a great intellect and even a genius of his time. Born in Ireland as an adult he settled in London where he found his calling as a member of the House of Commons. Trained as a lawyer he felt himself called to writing, oratory and politics. He became the moral compass for the conservatives. He is still honored as being one of the first true conservatives who demanded fiscal and moral responsibility from business institutions. It was his belief that business must show an empathy and humanity to workers. This belief made him an enemy of Hastings, the head of the East India Trading Company from 1772 when Hastings became Bengal’s Governor.

Ireland the home of Burke’s birth has been very proud of their intellectual son. Sir Prior in his biography of Edmund Burke begins with an exclamation

of pride in the very first sentence of the first chapter (1891). “ Edmund Burke, the most distinguished statesman perhaps of an age fertile in extraordinary men, and in genius and acquirements the greatest whom Ireland has produced, was descended from a respectable family long settled in the county of Galway.” (Prior 1891)

Edmund Burke was born to a prominent Protestant Irish barrister, Robert Burke. His Catholic mother, the former Miss Nagle, raised her surviving children in the Catholic religion. Except for Edmund, two brothers named Garrett and Richard, and one sister named Juliana the remaining “ fourteen or fifteen children” died very young (Prior 1891). The four siblings grew into highly respected, well-spoken adults.

Juliana married a man from Galway County named Mr. French and she “ possessed no ordinary talents (Prior 1891). Prior reports that a gentleman of the Irish bar described her this way, “ Mrs. French had nature destined her for the other sex, would have been as great an orator as her brother Edmund. In her conversation there was so much of elegance as well as ability, that I often remarked it would have been difficult to transpose a word to advantage” (Prior 1891 p. 3).

Edmund and his brothers were worldly men with professional careers. After growing up with a sister having talents matching his own perhaps Edmund understood the unfairness of society to his sister. She married and stayed in the Irish Galway County where they were born rather than have her own career as an author and orator. This idea is mentioned in passing as it might help understand Burke’s dedication to economic justice and just laws.

Edmund left Ireland and started his career in London where he wrote a “ well

received political satire and an esthetic treatise” (Blakemore & Hembree 2001) which established his reputation. In 1756 his “ A Vindication of a Natural Society” was published anonymously. A second edition was published in which he introduced himself as the author and indicated that he had written it ironically and as a satire (Burke 1999). This article made an argument against the beliefs he held. He wrote about a society without the organization of his contemporary time; this natural society was without “ the civil government, church, and significant private property” (Burke 2010). Here is an example that shows his ability to see different perspectives and how he used argument to resolve complex issues.

Burke was a member of the House of Commons from 1765 to 1794. His support was behind progressive causes until he shocked the House and London by standing against the French Revolution (Blakemore and Hembree 2001). His article about the French Revolution are still being discussed today . . . after 200 years. According to his “ Reflections on the Revolution in France 1790” he wrote that on October 6, 1790 revolutionaries entered the French Queen’s bedroom and tried to assassinate her by stabbing her to death. Since Maribeau and the duc’d’Orleans were the purported leaders of the revolution they could be considered responsible for the act if it could be proved that their followers had attempted the assassination (Blakemore and Hembree 2001). If in the investigation they could be implicated the French Revolution would lose credibility.

Burke must have thought this a distinct possibility from the information he received from his correspondent in Paris. He, like all of England, had supported the French Revolution from afar. So when he came out with his

condemnations, they reverberated all the way to the Americas. He wrote a dramatic reenactment of the events of October 6 in the Queen's bedroom. Although only one paragraph is devoted to the subject it is the most discussed part of "Reflections on the French Revolution." (Blakemore and Hembree 2001)

The "Reflections" angered Thomas Paine, who accused Burke of making everything that happened before October 6, forgotten by everyone and therefore not given its due relevancy to the whole motivation and purpose of the revolution. Blakemore and Hembree write that "Thomas Paine, for instance, accused Burke of suppressing the causes of the march to Versailles and its attendant aftermath and hence of writing a dramatic counterrevolutionary tragedy rather than a true, authentic history."

When the colonists in North America started revolting, at first against the Stamp Act, Burke was essentially supportive but not supportive enough to forget his conservative ideals. His ideas were idealistic just as his support for legal justice now seems painfully idealistic. He proposed to the House of Commons that Empire was still viable. To keep Empire intact it was necessary to allow the American revolutionaries some civil liberties. He agreed that it was legal to tax but just as legal not to tax. (Burke 2010). The economist Adam Smith was one of Burke's close associates. Robins suggests that together their concept of a just economy was made whole. "For the modern corporation and the East India Company in particular – Adam Smith remains one of the most powerful enquirers into its flawed metabolism. What his world-view lacked was sufficient attention to how the 'laws of justice' could be made to work in an anarchic global marketplace.

This would be the obsession of Smith's friend, Edmund Burke." (Robins, 2006, pg 116)

Edmund Burke did not sit by and watch patiently as Hastings became head of the East India Trading Company in 1772 and began raising property taxes unfairly. This is not to say that the East India Trading Company's behavior was morally any better before Hastings tenure. It only means that the past "corruption and spiraling military expenditure" had not resulted in profits for the company and Hastings acted rashly in trying to make it profitable.

Robins, reports "Parliament once more sought to bring the Company to account in the early 1780s the philosopher/politician Edmund Burke was savage in his criticism" (2006). The Company continually needed assistance from the government. For Burke the worst was the way the people of India were being treated by the country, they were not shown any justice. What depressed him the most was that his friends and society didn't care.

His argument with the East India Trading Company was that he saw it as a "revolutionary threat to the established order in Britain and India. "Every rupee of profit made by an Englishman' Burke told parliament, 'is lost forever to India'" (Robins, 2006, pg xi). His criticism of Hastings was about economic and moral right over wrong. "Ultimately, the question that Burke would put before the world in his dramatic impeachment of Hastings was: can the Company and its executive be brought to justice?" (Robins, 2006, pg. 119).

Because Edmund Burke was a man with a complex mind and a capacity to think about issues in detail as well as globally he will always be a respected

intellectual. That does not mean everyone will agree with him all the time. It means that the way he thinks and the subjects he thought about are still not only interesting but relevant today.

Justice and fairness were hallmarks of his suggested solutions to problems. Maybe he was affected because he saw a capable person, his sister, left behind as he went into the world to claim recognition. Maybe it was a combination of observation of how his society worked and the religious, charitable teaching from his mother. Whatever it was he did not state his opinions without a careful consideration of every detail and angle. This is evident from his writing.

If he were alive today I think he would be explaining to his conservative colleagues why the Occupy Wall Street protesters have a right to be angry at Wall Street and corporations and also why the protesters have a right to their civil liberties including freedom of speech.

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