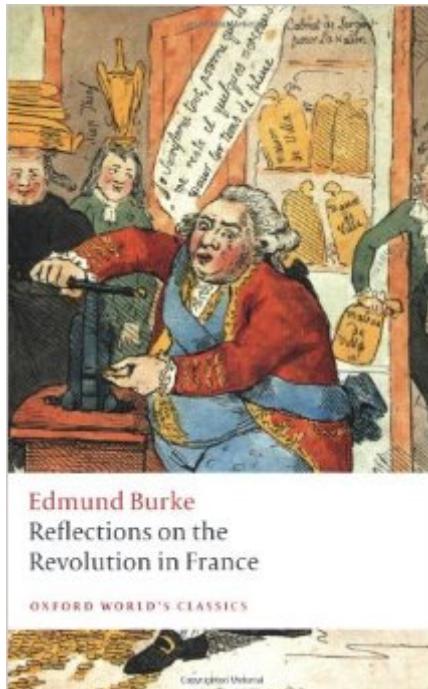


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Reflections On The Revolution In France (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

This new and up-to-date edition of a book that has been central to political philosophy, history, and revolutionary thought for two hundred years offers readers a dire warning of the consequences that follow the mismanagement of change. Written for a generation presented with challenges of terrible proportions--the Industrial, American, and French Revolutions, to name the most obvious--Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* displays an acute awareness of how high political stakes can be, as well as a keen ability to set contemporary problems within a wider context of political theory.

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Customer Reviews

Edmund Burke (1729-1797) wrote *REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE* in 1789 which was four years before the rise of the fanatical Jacobins and the execution (murder) of Louis XVI. This book was not only well written but very prophetic on the tragic events that were part of the French Revolution. Burke showed historical insight and warned both the British and the French what was going to happen. Burke cited conditions in France prior to the French Revolution. He certainly

did not give a false representation of the economic and social conditions in France, but he was clear that, while not perfect, the French had advanced culture and tolerable living standards. He also warned the French that abrupt changes without recourse to tradition and legal norms were dangerous and would end in tyranny. Readers should be aware that Burke's assessment of the French political system was that the French had reasonable political freedom and prosperity. To destroy this political system would end in political disruption, social and political violence, lack of law-and-order, and the rise of tyrannical military leaders. One should note Burke's assessment of the members of the French National Assembly which was vacillating and subject to the whims of any "political interest group" was serious. He suggested that military officers would be among those "pleaders" would be military officers who would be difficult to control. He also warned that when someone who understood the art of command got control of the military officers, the days of the French Republic and the National Assembly were over.

"Reflections" is ostensibly a tract attacking the French Revolution of 1789 but in reality its importance is its case for conservatism. The polemical nature of the book means that it is not a systematic analysis so one has to search for Burke's conservative principles. One of his most important principles is "prescription", by which the possession of property and authority are given (at least some) legitimacy by the passage of time. Burke did not oppose all change but believed that if things are going well then they are best left alone. He wrote "A state without the means of change is without the means of its conservation", but believed that change should be for "proved abuses". Burke saw society as organic, as a "partnership" bridging all generations. In typical Burkean language he wrote that citizens "should approach the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude." As in any natural organism change must be slow and gradual. He observed that "I do not like to see anything destroyed, any void produced in society." He was, of course, opposed to abstract theories that he thought at best irrelevant and at worst dangerous. Society, thought Burke, needed not abstract reasoning but practical and pragmatic statesmen. He was even more opposed to revolution for it leads to excesses and unintended results. Not surprisingly Burke stresses the importance of codes of conduct, custom and what he called "prejudice". He writes of the "pleasing illusions" that constitute "the decent drapery of life". These "antient opinions and rules of life" include politeness, deference, the chivalrous treatment of women, the "spirit of a gentleman" and the "spirit of religion".

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