

The concept of dignity in Edmund Burke's writings on the French revolution

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This paper argues that the concept of dignity played an important role in the political thought of Edmund Burke. It seeks to show that, in contrast with the egalitarian and individual version of dignity associated with Immanuel Kant, Burke devised a conception of dignity that rested on reverence, grandeur and formality, to be manifested through institutions, customs, and social relations. Burkean dignity was thus closely linked with the ancient constitution. In his thought, dignity played an essential role in maintaining social stability and ensuring wise governance. This conviction informed Burke's opposition to the French Revolution, which he feared would destroy the conditions necessary for dignity to thrive. Unpicking Burke's understanding of dignity thus gives us new insights into the intricacies of his political thought and another perspective on his opposition to the French Revolution.