ENG 303: Edmund Burke, “Reflections on the revolution in France” (1790) Study Guide

*Below are the main passages from Burke that we covered in class.*

1. **Entailed inheritance**… We have an **inheritable crown**; an **inheritable peerage**; and a house of commons and a people **inheriting privilege**, franchises, and **liberties**, from a long line of ancestors. This policy appears to me to be the result of profound reflection… (188)
2. …The idea of inheritance furnishes a **sure principle of conservation**, and a **sure principle of** **transmission**; without at all excluding a principle of **improvement**. (188)
3. In this choice of inheritance **we have given** to our **frame of polity the image** of a **relation in blood**; binding up the constitution of our country with our **dearest domestic ties**; adopting our fundamental laws into the **bosom** of our **family affections**; keeping inseparable, and **cherishing** with the **warmth** of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulcher, and our altars. (188-9)

I see our political system as an intimate family. That’s what happens when your political system is based on the framework of inheritance. Note the alliteration (“dearest domestic ties”) and affectionate vocabulary choice (“bosom,” “cherishing,” “warmth”).

1. Far am I from denying in theory; full as far is my heart from withholding in practice…**the *real* rights of men**…Whatever each man can separately do, without trespassing upon others, he has a right to do for himself; and he has a right to a fair portion of all which society, with all its combination of skill and force, can do in his favor. In this partnership **all men have equal rights; but not to equal things**. He that has but **five shillings** in the partnership, has a good a right to it, as he that has **five hundred pound** to his larger proportion. But he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock; and as to the share of power, authority, and direction which each individual ought to have in the management of the state, that I must deny to be amongst the direct original rights of man in civil society…(189)

Yes, yes, I believe in equal rights for men. I’m not against it in theory nor in practice…but only if they are proportional to the wealth, prestige and influence that man had originally. I’m for no democracy. But you have a right to 100% of the power and authority that your wealth allows for you to wield.