

*Excerpt*

Rebuttal and Alternative to  
Russell Kirk's  
Ten Principles of Conservatism  
*A Classical Liberal Approach*

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## PREFACE

First and foremost, the use of the term 'liberal' within these pages does not hold the same definition/foundation as is found in today's politically 'liberal' groups. At its most basic, the difference between today's liberals and myself is individual sovereignty. I demand responsibilities in return for liberties and place the individual (and the family unit) above, yes superior to, the state, the group, the common good.

While I offer an alternative principle, it is based on my understanding and not intended to speak for anyone else.

## INTRODUCTION

For most people, just getting through their daily lives leaves them little time to support, or even participate, in activism for any liberal or conservative ideology but the end points of both are anathema to a sense of equality that people hope, want, to see in one of the richest places in the world.

We see claims by the Left that society cannot interfere in the choices of the homeless and addicted. Imposing a societal norm is a violation of their rights. How can people claim to be for the liberty of personal choice, and then ignore, walk around people lying on the ground or in tent enclaves? How can people leave others to die in the streets of substance abuse and mental illness because that is their RIGHT?

Liberals argue that it is the responsibility of government to redistribute the wealth of the 'top' to the needs of the 'bottom'. The defining principle appears to be 'use government to eliminate disparity wherever and whenever it is found'. Inequality is the condition by which a society is judged immoral.

The Conservative position is government should not, nor does it have the authority to engineer society according to the dictates of the polity. Redistributing wealth does not make society more equal. Humans are not

equal. We have different situations, abilities and skills that make certain tasks easier for some, more difficult for others. Granting some more wealth, taking wealth from others, does not make us more equal.

I hold a more moderate position. Individual sovereignty is important, but to let others struggle, flail, fall when something can be done is immoral.

Our goal should be the same: we want everyone in our Nation to prosper. How we go about it will determine whether it is a just Nation or not.

Russell Kirk has created ten principles of Conservatism. I respond to them and then offer an alternative that I argue separates me from Conservatives and Liberals. I quote them extensively<sup>1</sup>, with a couple minor typographical changes.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kirkcenter.org/index.php/detail/ten-conservative-principles/>

## First: What form should society take?

Kirk: The Conservative believes that there exists an enduring moral order.

*That order is made for man, and man is made for it: human nature is a constant, and moral truths are permanent. It has been said by liberal intellectuals that the Conservative believes all social questions, at heart, to be questions of private morality. Properly understood, this statement is quite true. A society in which men and women are governed by belief in an enduring moral order, by a strong sense of right and wrong, by personal convictions about justice and honor, will be a good society—whatever political machinery it may utilize; while a society in which men and women are morally adrift, ignorant of norms, and intent chiefly upon gratification of appetites, will be a bad society—no matter how many people vote and no matter how liberal its formal constitution may be.*

Rebuttal:

Whose truths should define society? The issue with this formulation lies in its potential to justify oppressive systems, such as a Taliban-style society. This is why it fails as a universal argument for establishing a moral foundation for society. The moral order must be clearly defined and collectively agreed upon—not just within a single society but across all societies. To claim that “it will be a good society, whatever political machinery is used” reduces the principle to one of relative and subjective purpose.

In a diverse society, groups with distinct moral foundations can and often do exercise some freedom to act according to their values, even when those values conflict with the dominant culture. In the United States, for example, communities guided by Islamic moral codes sometimes find themselves at odds with the traditionally dominant Christian moral framework. As Islamic codes are applied and enforced within certain communities, individuals may face marginalization or penalties for violating moral standards that clash with the broader societal system.

If individuals consider their moral beliefs beneficial both to themselves and others, they are likely to want those morals shared universally, as they believe such values lead to positive actions. In a society governed by consistent moral codes, positive actions reinforce the enforcement of those morals, while attempts to change or extend the moral framework are often met with resistance. Even minor examples that argue for a shift in moral standards may be dismissed as amoral or harmful. The greater good, in such a system, takes precedence over addressing minor injustices or inconsistencies.

Relying on a moral code as the basis of laws introduces significant risks to individual rights, particularly if the dominant moral framework undergoes a shift—for instance, from Christian-based norms to Islamic ones. However, such shifts are not necessarily inconsistent with the principle of a moral order itself.

So, what should serve as the foundation for laws? The Constitution of the United States offers a clear answer: individual rights. These rights are innate, existing independently and above the authority of government. While the government is not powerless in the face of these rights, it must account for them in the creation and application of laws.

My Principle: I believe that rights are inherent in our existence.

The existence of rights for an individual is boundless in a state of solitude, limited only by their imagination, capabilities, and the resources at their disposal. These rights do not vanish or diminish simply because another person is present. A society based on inherent rights establishes clear boundaries for interactions between individuals, restricting its ability to interfere with the free exercise of those rights. The vision of our Founding Fathers was not to curtail personal freedoms but to restrain the authority of government, which could otherwise be used to infringe upon or suppress individual liberties. By asserting that governmental power is derived from the people, they affirmed the fundamental principle that the wellspring of both power and rights lies within each individual.

*"The principles on which we engaged, of which the charter of our independence is the record, were sanctioned by the laws of our being, and we but obeyed them in pursuing undeviatingly the course they called for. It issued finally in that inestimable state of freedom which alone can ensure to man the enjoyment of his equal rights."*

*--Thomas Jefferson to Georgetown Republicans, 1809.*