

Rebuttal And  
Alternative:

Russell Kirk's  
Ten Principles of  
Conservatism

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



## One: 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.

**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.

## Second: The Past or the Future

**Kirk: The Conservative adheres to custom, convention, and continuity.**

*It is old custom that enables people to live together peaceably; the destroyers of custom demolish more than they know or desire. It is through convention—a word much abused in our time—that we contrive to avoid perpetual disputes about rights and duties: law at base is a body of conventions. Continuity is the means of linking generation to generation; it matters as much for society as it does for the individual; without it, life is meaningless. When successful revolutionaries have effaced old customs, derided old conventions, and broken the continuity of social institutions—why, presently they discover the necessity of establishing fresh customs, conventions, and continuity; but that process is painful and slow; and the new social order that eventually emerges may be much inferior to the old order that radicals overthrew in their zeal for the Earthly Paradise.*

*Conservatives are champions of custom, convention, and continuity because they prefer the devil they know to the devil they don't know. Order and justice and freedom, they believe, are the artificial products of a long social experience, the result of centuries of trial and reflection and sacrifice. Thus, the body social is a kind of spiritual corporation, comparable to the church; it may even be called a community of souls. Human society is no machine to be treated mechanically. The continuity, the life-blood, of a society must not be interrupted. Burke's reminder of the necessity for*

*prudent change is in the mind of the Conservative. But necessary change, Conservatives argue, ought to be gradual and discriminatory, never unfixing old interests at once.*

### Rebuttal:

I call this the ‘traditionalist’s clause.’ It is a common Conservative argument against almost any form of change, despite the recognition that change is crucial for the orderly progression of society. Fundamental societal shifts—such as those brought about by technological advancements, racial desegregation, the women’s movement, and the civil rights movement—have all disrupted established institutions and customs. Yet, in retrospect, these changes are widely regarded as essential and beneficial. Only after these events do societies often concede, “Yes, those were good changes.”

The claim that “Order and justice and freedom are the artificial products of a long social experience” contradicts the very founding of our country. By all standards, our Founding Fathers were progressives—bold liberals who dared to believe that a government rooted in individual rights and liberties could not only function but thrive. No historical precedent existed for such a revolutionary concept.

The idea that “The continuity, the lifeblood, of a society must not be interrupted” disregards the constant evolution inherent in dynamic human societies. When a society isolates itself from change, it does not achieve

stability but rather stagnates. What sufficed for one generation will not suffice for the next. No parent who wishes their child a long, prosperous life believes otherwise. History shows countless examples of good parents whose livelihoods, rooted in obsolete industries or societal norms, are no longer viable for their children. Change is inevitable, and resisting it only curtails personal freedom and liberties.

Lastly, the statement “Continuity is the means of linking generation to generation; it matters as much for society as it does for the individual; without it, life is meaningless” oversimplifies the concept of generational connection. My relationship with my grandparents, for my entire life, depended solely on my parents’ recollections. I live in a society that is profoundly different from theirs—in a different country, within a more technologically advanced and equitable community. The continuity that exists lies in my bond with my parents, not in an unbroken societal thread. My parents left their former society, breaking with its continuity, because they saw its limitations as detrimental to their children’s future. It is not societal continuity that gives life meaning but the freedom to choose, associate, and adapt that makes life truly meaningful.

I acknowledge tradition without establishing rituals.

When choices remain consistent across generations, we gain the opportunity to observe their outcomes and make informed decisions about the paths we choose. These repeated choices shape our traditions, creating a sense of continuity and connection between generations.

*"We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of its majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country."*

--Thomas Jefferson to John Wayles Eppes, 1813

*"[As to] the question whether, by the laws of nature, one generation of men can, by any act of theirs, bind those which are to follow them? I say, by the laws of nature, there being between generation and generation, as between nation and nation, no other obligatory law."*

--Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 1814

When choices evolve across generations, we must not merely avoid making decisions; instead, we ought to apply the wisdom passed down from our parents and history in innovative ways, striving to ensure that the outcomes benefit both ourselves and future generations.

I prioritize the individual's ability to make choices. It is insufficient to simply declare, "What worked for my father should work for me." Our ancestors endeavored to enhance the opportunities and freedoms available



for their descendants. A guiding principle is that the past often failed to provide the freedoms necessary for the full expression of inherent rights. Traditions are not pursued solely for stability; they are valued as a way of honoring the struggles and sacrifices of previous generations, which paved the way for prosperity. Traditions without purpose—performed merely for their own sake—are empty rituals, devoid of deeper meaning and understanding.

*"The Gothic idea that we were to look backwards instead of forwards for the improvement of the human mind, and to recur to the annals of our ancestors for what is most perfect in government, in religion and in learning, is worthy of those bigots in religion and government by whom it has been recommended, and whose purposes it would answer. But it is not an idea which this country will endure."*

--Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley,  
1800. ME 10:148

*"I am for encouraging the progress of science in all its branches, and not for raising a hue and cry against the sacred name of philosophy; for awing the human mind by stories of raw-head and bloody bones to a distrust of its own vision, and to repose implicitly on that of others; to go backwards instead of forwards to look for improvement; to believe that government, religion, morality and every other science were in the highest perfection in the ages of the darkest ignorance, and that nothing can ever be decided more perfect than what was established by our forefathers."*

--Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 1799

Society often relies on traditions for structure, using them to define acceptable behaviors and impose limits on freedoms. However, I reject the notion of clinging to outdated customs simply because they are familiar. Instead, they advocate honoring the past without being bound by it.

Meaningful societal change requires the establishment of new customs and conventions. Our Founding Fathers exemplified this by breaking away from entrenched traditions to create a representative democracy rooted in individual rights and freedoms.

When a society isolates itself from change, it does not achieve stability, it stagnates. Change is inevitable and attempts to resist its impact often result in the preservation of a status quo that restricts personal freedoms and liberties. The society we live in today is profoundly different from the one our grandparents experienced. Our parents, straddling this divide, recognized the shortcomings of the old ways and sought to create a freer world for their children by moving beyond the limitations of the past. It is not the continuity of society that imbues life with meaning, but rather the freedom of choice and association that allows individuals to find purpose and fulfillment.

## Third: Individual, Group, or Society?

**Kirk: Conservatives believe in what may be called the principle of prescription.**

*Conservatives sense that modern people are dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, able to see farther than their ancestors only because of the great stature of those who have preceded us in time. Therefore, Conservatives very often emphasize the importance of prescription—that is, of things established by immemorial usage, so that the mind of man runneth not to the contrary. There exist rights of which the chief sanction is their antiquity—including rights to property, often. Similarly, our morals are prescriptive in great part. Conservatives argue that we are unlikely, we moderns, to make any brave new discoveries in morals or politics or taste. It is perilous to weigh every passing issue on the basis of private judgment and private rationality. The individual is foolish, but the species is wise, Burke declared. In politics we do well to abide by precedent and precept and even prejudice, for the great mysterious incorporation of the human race has acquired prescriptive wisdom far greater than any man's petty private rationality.*

### Rebuttal:

The assertion that “The individual is foolish, but the species is wise” clashes with the principles of individual freedom and rights. If Conservatives truly believe that only society possesses the wisdom to dictate actions, then granting individuals freedom becomes

contradictory. While we undoubtedly benefit from the achievements of those who came before us, restricting our actions or liberties based on the limitations of the past denies us the full value of those advancements.

Equating property rights with their origins in antiquity confines such rights to interpretations bound by historical documents like the Constitution—a document that itself broke with historical traditions. This perspective attempts to frame morality as static and unyielding. However, the notion that no “new discoveries in morals, politics, or taste” are likely ignores the undeniable progress of history. Consider monumental shifts like the election of women or individuals of color as Presidents, the advancement of women’s rights, and the civil rights movement. These were not sudden revelations but gradual recognitions of past failures, acknowledging that earlier moral frameworks had systematically obstructed freedom and equality for all individuals.

**I am guided by personal responsibility.**

Every decision carries consequences, many of which can be anticipated before taking action. Emphasize the importance of understanding these outcomes in advance, choosing to act only when necessary to achieve meaningful objectives. When it is impossible to foresee the results, I do not shy away but proceed cautiously, mindful of the risks involved. The Founding Fathers highlighted the significance of questioning whether laws should be enacted at all, rather than simply how much

legislation is needed. Laws inherently limit individual rights, making restraint in governance essential. Accepting personal responsibility is central to this philosophy—each choice belongs to the individual who makes it, along with its consequences.

Social tension arises when change is both resisted and imposed. Using the analogy of a child pulling an adult's arm, the struggle persists until either the connection breaks or the adult moves forward in the child's direction, easing the strain. In society, remaining inflexible risks alienation, especially from future generations, unless there is a willingness to adapt incrementally. Gradual movement toward progress mitigates stress, whereas abrupt change often stems from the overdue recognition that stagnation can no longer persist. Stress begins the moment a rigid stance is adopted and intensifies when those holding that position fail to acknowledge that others have already moved forward. Even if the direction shifts, the status quo itself remains the heart of the issue.

Although American society has long championed individual rights, there has been a noticeable shift toward relinquishing personal responsibilities. Increasingly, government is seen not just as an enforcer of individual boundaries but as a caretaker of outcomes. Poor decisions are often excused, leading to a system that replaces judgment against a few with restrictions on all. The principle of consent by the governed is gradually eroded by standardized processes that, while well-intentioned, undermine freedom and liberty.

## Fourth: Choice and Risk

**Kirk: Conservatives are guided by their principle of prudence.**

*Burke agrees with Plato that in the statesman, prudence is chief among virtues. Any public measure ought to be judged by its probable long-run consequences, not merely by temporary advantage or popularity. Liberals and radicals, the Conservative says, are imprudent: for they dash at their objectives without giving much heed to the risk of new abuses worse than the evils they hope to sweep away. As John Randolph of Roanoke put it, Providence moves slowly, but the devil always hurries. Human society being complex, remedies cannot be simple if they are to be efficacious. The Conservative declares that he acts only after sufficient reflection, having weighed the consequences. Sudden and slashing reforms are as perilous as sudden and slashing surgery.*

### Rebuttal:

While I might sympathize with the idea, I struggle to agree. If careful reflection and thorough evaluation of potential consequences truly led to decisive action, society could benefit from such deliberation. However, this is rarely the case. When resistance to change dominates, it leaves little room for evidence to support either maintaining the status quo or adopting a new path, except the historical assertion that the current state is "sufficient."

The tension within a society arises when change is both demanded and resisted. Consider the analogy of a child tugging on an adult's arm: the child will keep pulling until either the connection breaks, causing the child to fall, or the adult begins to move in the child's direction, easing the strain. Similarly, a society that rigidly opposes progress risks severing ties with future generations unless it demonstrates a willingness to evolve. Even cautious steps forward can alleviate the strain. The realization that change is inevitable often seems sudden, but the stress associated with it starts from the moment resistance takes hold. This stress accumulates as proponents of the status quo refuse to recognize that others have already moved beyond their position.

I choose choice.

I value the freedom to make choices and strive to expand the range of options available to individuals and societies. I believe that restricting the rights and liberties of others ultimately diminishes these choices, leading to increased conflict. For any civilization to thrive, the freedom to choose must remain intact. Without it, the erosion of natural and institutional options results in an inevitable slide toward oppression. Guided by the principle that "all men are created equal," I celebrate the diversity of choices in society, recognizing that equality of opportunity does not require equality of outcomes.

## Fifth: Some are More Equal

**Kirk: Conservatives pay attention to the principle of variety.**

*They feel affection for the proliferating intricacy of long-established social institutions and modes of life, as distinguished from the narrowing uniformity and deadening egalitarianism of radical systems. For the preservation of a healthy diversity in any civilization, there must survive orders and classes, differences in material condition, and many sorts of inequality. The only true forms of equality are equality at the Last Judgment and equality before a just court of law; all other attempts at levelling must lead, at best, to social stagnation. Society requires honest and able leadership; and if natural and institutional differences are destroyed, presently some tyrant or host of squalid oligarchs will create new forms of inequality.*

**Rebuttal:**

This perspective appears to conflict with much of what was previously stated and seems to disregard the principle that "all men are created equal." It implies, as Kirk suggests, that inequality should not only be preserved but actively encouraged: "there must survive orders and classes, differences in material condition, and many sorts of inequality." Perhaps my own lack of understanding is causing some confusion here. Our society recognizes and accepts diversity in outcomes; we neither expect nor demand equality of results. However, we should not, and ideally do not, actively



promote inequality.

Kirk's assertion that "all other attempts at leveling must lead, at best, to social stagnation" raises questions. Isn't the imposition of a uniform moral code an attempt at leveling? Doesn't requiring universal adherence to specific norms constitute an effort to equalize?

Moreover, when liberties are restricted in the name of preserving social continuity, isn't that another form of leveling—a way to enforce a specific outcome that aligns with the broader society?

## **We are imperfect, freedom is messy.**

No single choice is universally suitable for everyone. It is impossible to find a perfect decision applicable to all individuals. While societies often attempt to restrict choices to those deemed acceptable within their norms, this form of control is no different from the oppressive demands of a dictatorship. The scope of viable options should be limited only by imagination and resources, allowing each person to make decisions that are unique to them—even if they mirror repeated patterns. Errors and unintended consequences from these choices are an inevitable part of human experience. Shielding individuals from making mistakes stifles growth, as people—like children—need the opportunity to learn from their errors. Imperfection is inherent to humanity, and poor decisions are a natural byproduct of this reality. Neither governments nor societies can protect individuals from making bad

choices without infringing on their freedoms.

It has often been argued that the best society humanity can hope for is one that tolerates “some evils, maladjustments, and suffering.” But why settle for such limitations? Why not strive to eliminate these issues rather than merely accept them as inevitable components of imperfect humanity? While acknowledging our flaws, we must not use them as an excuse to ignore opportunities for improvement. Worse still, we must not allow the institutions we create to perpetuate evils, maladjustments, and suffering by design. Recognizing such flaws and doing nothing to address them is a failure of our collective moral responsibility. Passively accepting systemic shortcomings not only denies our ability to confront them but also perpetuates the cycle of harm.

## Sixth: For the Common Good or Evil

**Kirk: Conservatives are chastened by their principle of imperfectability.**

*Human nature suffers irremediably from certain grave faults, the Conservatives know. Man being imperfect, no perfect social order ever can be created. Because of human restlessness, mankind would grow rebellious under any utopian domination and would break out once more in violent discontent—or else expires of boredom. To seek for utopia is to end in disaster, the Conservative says: we are not made for perfect things. All that we reasonably can expect is a tolerably ordered, just, and free society, in which some evils, maladjustments, and suffering will continue to lurk. By proper attention to prudent reform, we may preserve and improve this tolerable order. But if the old institutional and moral safeguards of a nation are neglected, then the anarchic impulse in humankind breaks loose: “the ceremony of innocence is drowned.” The ideologues who promise the perfection of man and society have converted a great part of the twentieth-century world into a terrestrial hell.*

**Rebuttal:**

If human imperfection is inherent, does that justify succumbing to it and embracing it unconditionally? This is the moral dilemma that the Apostle Paul seems to have considered—a potential acceptance of flaws as unavoidable. If society, too, is imperfect, are we to merely resign ourselves to this reality, assuming that

any attempt to address its flaws would lead to either unattainable utopias or, worse, stagnation borne of complacency? The claim that we should expect “some evils, maladjustments, and suffering” as natural components of life raises an important question: why must we accept these flaws without striving to mitigate them?

Acknowledging our imperfection does not absolve us of the responsibility to confront it. Worse still is the societal failure to address institutional flaws that perpetuate injustice by design. To recognize the existence of such evils and yet choose inaction under the guise of accepting imperfection is, in itself, a denial of our moral responsibility to challenge the wrongs within us and the systems we create.

The Rebuttal stands on its own.

## Seventh: Property or Properly?

**Kirk: Conservatives are persuaded that freedom and property are closely linked.**

*Separate property from private possession, and Leviathan becomes master of all. Upon the foundation of private property, great civilizations are built. The more widespread is the possession of private property, the more stable and productive is a commonwealth. Economic levelling, Conservatives maintain, is not economic progress. Getting and spending are not the chief aims of human existence; but a sound economic basis for the person, the family, and the commonwealth is much to be desired.*

*Sir Henry Maine, in his Village Communities, puts strongly the case for private property, as distinguished from communal property: "Nobody is at liberty to attack several property and to say at the same time that he values civilization. The history of the two cannot be disentangled." For the institution of several property—that is, private property—has been a powerful instrument for teaching men and women responsibility, for providing motives to integrity, for supporting general culture, for raising mankind above the level of mere drudgery, for affording leisure to think and freedom to act. To be able to retain the fruits of one's labor; to be able to see one's work made permanent; to be able to bequeath one's property to one's posterity; to be able to rise from the natural condition of grinding poverty to the security of enduring accomplishment; to have something that is really*

*one's own—these are advantages difficult to deny. The Conservative acknowledges that the possession of property fixes certain duties upon the possessor; he accepts those moral and legal obligations cheerfully.*

### **Rebuttal:**

According to conservative principles, the possession of property should ideally be accessible to as many individuals as possible within society. However, this notion deserves scrutiny when considering historical contexts. While personal property and individual freedom are undoubtedly linked, the mere act of owning property does not inherently create freedom. In history, examples abound where property owners, such as European landowners or Southern plantation owners, exercised authority over others who were neither free nor able to acquire property themselves. Rather, it is freedom that enables the acquisition of property. The assertion that “great civilizations are built upon the foundation of private property” might be more accurately reframed: great civilizations are built upon the foundation of freedom, which subsequently allows for the holding and protection of personal property.

**I am persuaded that it is freedom and prosperity that are linked.**

It is not property, but freedom and prosperity that are deeply interconnected. When freedom is restricted, the potential for prosperity diminishes. A society thrives

when its people have the liberty to act, explore, and make unique decisions. This freedom not only fosters creativity and innovation but also teaches individuals to embrace responsibility. Freedom is both a privilege and a duty, accepted willingly and with purpose. Prosperity emerges as a natural outcome of a society grounded in freedom. It is upon this foundation of liberty that great civilizations are built.

## Eighth: Common Good?

**Kirk: Conservatives uphold voluntary community, quite as they oppose involuntary collectivism.**

*Although Americans have been attached strongly to privacy and private rights, they also have been a people conspicuous for a successful spirit of community. In a genuine community, the decisions most directly affecting the lives of citizens are made locally and voluntarily. Some of these functions are carried out by local political bodies, others by private associations: so long as they are kept local and are marked by the general agreement of those affected, they constitute healthy community. But when these functions pass by default or usurpation to centralized authority, then community is in serious danger. Whatever is beneficent and prudent in modern democracy is made possible through cooperative volition. If then, in the name of an abstract Democracy, the functions of community are transferred to distant political direction—why, real government by the consent of the governed gives way to a standardizing process hostile to freedom and human dignity.*

*For a nation is no stronger than the numerous little communities of which it is composed. A central administration, or a corps of select managers and civil servants, however well-intentioned and well trained, cannot confer justice and prosperity and tranquility upon a mass of men and women deprived of their old responsibilities. That experiment has been made before; and it has been disastrous. It is the performance of our duties*



*in community that teaches us prudence and efficiency and charity.*

### Rebuttal:

The value of federalism is undeniable, but it is also important to consider the observations from \*On Liberty\*:

*“Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them.”*

Communities, too, can become oppressive, enforcing their own rules, standards, and expectations that may infringe on individual freedoms. It is not sufficient to merely accept that a community has the authority to dictate and enforce norms upon all its members. True freedom allows individuals the ability to occasionally diverge from societal norms and express their individuality without fear of undue restriction.

I understand that change happens in a prosperous society.

I embrace change as an intrinsic part of human life and societal evolution. To resist change is to restrict freedom, a strategy that cannot endure indefinitely. A

civil society's role is not to block change but to support those most impacted by it, helping them adapt. Greater freedom of choice enables individuals to evolve and adjust, fostering growth and avoiding stagnation.

Thus, I seek to harmonize change with liberty, promoting progress not for its own sake but to expand the realm of individual freedom. Change brings opportunities to innovate, develop, and redefine choices, limited only by one's imagination, abilities, and resources. However, these freedoms must always respect the boundaries of others, maintaining a just and respectful balance.

Often, institutions are established to resist or regulate change. Yet, such mechanisms rest on unstable ground, as attempts to control the natural flow of change often destabilize their very foundations. I recognize that freedom thrives in an environment where change is embraced, thoughtfully managed, and respected.

## Ninth: Not IF, But How Much Government?

**Kirk: The Conservative perceives the need for prudent restraints upon power and upon human passions.**

*Politically speaking, power is the ability to do as one likes, regardless of the wills of one's fellows. A state in which an individual or a small group are able to dominate the wills of their fellows without check is a despotism, whether it is called monarchical or aristocratic or democratic. When every person claims to be a power unto himself, then society falls into anarchy. Anarchy never lasts long, being intolerable for everyone, and contrary to the ineluctable fact that some persons are more strong and more clever than their neighbors. To anarchy there succeeds tyranny or oligarchy, in which power is monopolized by a very few.*

*The Conservative endeavors to so limit and balance political power that anarchy or tyranny may not arise. In every age, nevertheless, men and women are tempted to overthrow the limitations upon power, for the sake of some fancied temporary advantage. It is characteristic of the radical that he thinks of power as a force for good—so long as the power falls into his hands. In the name of liberty, the French and Russian revolutionaries abolished the old restraints upon power; but power cannot be abolished; it always finds its way into someone's hands. That power which the revolutionaries had thought oppressive in the hands of the old regime became many times*

*as tyrannical in the hands of the radical new masters of the state.*

*Knowing human nature for a mixture of good and evil, the Conservative does not put his trust in mere benevolence. Constitutional restrictions, political checks and balances, adequate enforcement of the laws, the old intricate web of restraints upon will and appetite—these the Conservative approves as instruments of freedom and order. A just government maintains a healthy tension between the claims of authority and the claims of liberty.*

### Rebuttal:

The Conservative viewpoint is often characterized by the belief in the necessity of prudent restraints—not only on human passions but also on liberties and freedoms. This perspective raises an important question: are these restraints truly aimed at protecting individuals, or do they serve as a means to impose limitations that go beyond what is justifiable?

While it is understandable to restrict actions that infringe upon the rights and freedoms of others, the assertion that a “just government maintains a healthy tension between the claims of authority and the claims of liberty” runs counter to the foundational ideals of this country. For the Founding Fathers, any governmental infringement on individual freedom was inherently suspect. Government, in their view, was a servant to the people, not an equal or a master. Even a benevolent and just government, if positioned as a master, remains unacceptable within the framework of

true liberty.

The tools mentioned, “constitutional restrictions, political checks and balances, adequate enforcement of the laws, the old intricate web of restraints upon will and appetite”—were designed primarily to limit the powers of government, not to curtail the inherent rights of individuals.

The claim that “when every person claims to be a power unto himself, then society falls into anarchy” is at odds with the principle of individual sovereignty, which is the cornerstone of this nation. In the United States, rights are inherent; they do not flow from society or government. Individuals have the freedom to pursue their desires, imagination, and aspirations based on their resources—provided they do not infringe, harm, or limit others. It is this foundational belief, the sovereignty of the individual, which secures the essence of freedom and defines the true spirit of this nation.

**I perceive the need for prudent restraints upon power.**

Politically, power refers to the ability to act according to one's will, regardless of the desires of others. I believe in the right to exercise personal freedoms but acknowledge the responsibility to respect the boundaries of others. When a government, driven either by its own ambitions or external influence, restricts individual freedoms, it ceases to serve its

people and instead becomes their master. A thriving society depends on individuals embracing both their rights and responsibilities. When personal accountability is abandoned, the freedom to exercise individual rights diminishes, leading to societal decline.

I strive to maintain a balance between freedom and the responsibility to respect the rights of others. This balance is tested with every generation, as the pendulum swings between unrestricted individual liberties and governmental overreach. Attempts to enforce a single standard through government intervention often signal the failure of other efforts to promote consensus.

Understanding human potential for both good and harm, I am wary of trusting good intentions alone. I advocate for constitutional restrictions, political checks and balances, and the enforcement of laws to prevent government abuse of power. While recognizing the necessity of government, I emphasize that a just government must strike a careful balance between enforcing boundaries and protecting individual liberty.

I accept that some limits on freedom are necessary to prevent one person's actions from infringing upon another's rights. However, we should be deeply skeptical of any government action that restricts individual liberties. To view government as a servant to the people, not an equal or a master. Even a benevolent and just master remains a master, which is fundamentally unacceptable.

I, and others argue that individual rights are inherent and not granted by society or government. These rights include the freedom to pursue desires, explore imaginations, and utilize resources—provided such actions do not harm, limit, or infringe upon others. These individual rights form the foundation of a just and free society. To deny them is to deny the essence of freedom itself.

## Tenth: Diversity of What?

**Kirk: The thinking Conservative understands that permanence and change must be recognized and reconciled in a vigorous society.**

*The Conservative is not opposed to social improvement, although he doubts whether there is any such force as a mystical Progress, with a Roman P, at work in the world. When a society is progressing in some respects, usually it is declining in other respects. The Conservative knows that any healthy society is influenced by two forces, which Samuel Taylor Coleridge called its Permanence and its Progression. The Permanence of a society is formed by those enduring interests and convictions that gives us stability and continuity; without that Permanence, the fountains of the great deep are broken up, society slipping into anarchy. The Progression in a society is that spirit and that body of talents which urge us on to prudent reform and improvement; without that Progression, a people stagnate.*

*Therefore, the intelligent Conservative endeavors to reconcile the claims of Permanence and the claims of Progression. He thinks that the liberal and the radical, blind to the just claims of Permanence, would endanger the heritage bequeathed to us, in an endeavor to hurry us into some dubious Terrestrial Paradise. The Conservative, in short, favors reasoned and temperate progress; he is opposed to the cult of Progress, whose votaries believe that everything new necessarily is superior to everything old.*

*Change is essential to the body social, the Conservative reasons, just as it is essential to the*



*human body. A body that has ceased to renew itself has begun to die. But if that body is to be vigorous, the change must occur in a regular manner, harmonizing with the form and nature of that body; otherwise change produces a monstrous growth, a cancer, which devours its host. The Conservative takes care that nothing in a society should ever be wholly old, and that nothing should ever be wholly new. This is the means of the conservation of a nation, quite as it is the means of conservation of a living organism. Just how much change a society requires, and what sort of change, depend upon the circumstances of an age and a nation.*

#### Rebuttal:

The concept of permanence is an illusion. It does not truly exist, and any attempt to enforce it denies the natural progression of change, both for individuals and society as a whole. While human biology has remained relatively consistent over centuries, nearly everything else—culture, technology, values—inevitably evolves, often independent of intentional effort. Institutions are not necessary to preserve unchanging aspects of humanity, such as the instinct for procreation. Instead, institutions are frequently created to resist change or to control its pace in a specific way. However, any institution founded on the principle of human freedoms ultimately rests on unstable ground. The more it tries to dictate or restrict change, the weaker its foundation becomes, as demonstrated by policies like China's one-child rule, which caused profound societal harm before

its eventual collapse.

The argument that “the Conservative favors reasoned and temperate progress” assumes that if progress were truly measured and thoughtful, calls for more rapid change would diminish. Yet, too often, the emphasis on “reasoned” leads to stagnation rather than meaningful progress. Change is an inherent part of human existence and societal development. Attempts to prevent or tightly regulate it only create unnecessary tension and fractures within society.

The amount and type of change a society needs cannot be predetermined or dictated by theoretical discussions or debates. Change is inevitable, and it is only through open, reasoned dialogue that society can adapt in a way that benefits all its members—both those resistant to change and those eager to embrace it.

**I am part of a diverse society.**

While the individual is sovereign, they are not isolated. Members of society often make diverse choices based on their unique abilities and resources. I appreciate and support these differences, provided they do not harm others. In recognizing the sovereignty of others, we should refrain from imposing limits on their freedoms or choices. Government intervention, in this view, is a measure of last resort, employed only to safeguard freedom and liberty, not to curtail or negate it.

An individual's freedom is partially relinquished to

ensure that everyone in society can share in the benefits and opportunities of liberty. Over time, laws have emerged to define the extent to which individual liberty may be sacrificed for the common good. However, as society evolves, these laws must be reassessed. No person or group should manipulate laws to restrict the freedoms of others for their personal gain.

## Final Thoughts:

Kirk's principles attempt to define conservatism in a way that restricts society. The notion of boundless freedom often unsettles people. In a debate, someone challenged my definition of rights—described as anything one can do within the limits of their abilities, imagination, and resources—arguing that it gives individuals a license to do anything. They were correct, but only under the vital condition that these actions cannot infringe upon, limit, or harm others. This understanding lies in the very foundation of our country. Individual rights, freedoms, and liberties are limitless, except where they interfere with the rights of others.

How does this get us to a better country where freedom to choose is balanced with a moral obligation to help those, for whatever reason, who are not successful or even surviving?

*The point is that government cannot enforce or replace morality in people; it must come from within. Any government that attempts to do so must resort to tyranny at a minimum. With a population committed to self-interest and taking all they can for themselves, regardless of the moral or legal issues, they will overwhelm those that act morally or legally or with respect towards others. If they can use the power of government on top of that, we have all the necessary requirements for the type of nightmares we have seen in country after country that have descended into tyranny.*

*You could have a society with no laws if people were capable (someday maybe) of acting with respect towards others. This is the issue 'all at war with each other'. Why? We have the technology now to satisfy the needs of everyone on the planet. We do not now, nor are we ever likely to have the ability to satisfy the wants of everyone.*