

Conservatism

I [Rex Allen Brewer] suspect that no definition exists that will satisfy everyone or even anyone, but here's one, with reservations (borrowed from folks smarter than me). The points are general, because the definition fragments when you go to specifics.

To begin, what a conservative is not...

“... men and women who tend to believe that the human beings *are* perfectible and social progress predictable, and that the instrument for effecting the two is reason; that truths are transitory and empirically determined; that equality is desirable and attainable through the action of state power; that social and individual differences, if they are not rational, are objectionable, and should be scientifically eliminated; that all people and societies strive to organize themselves upon a rationalist and scientific paradigm.” *William F. Buckley, Jr.*

Where did "Conservatism" come from?

“Modern American Conservatism was largely born out of *an* alliance between classical Liberals and Social Conservatives in the late 19th and early 20th Century. It comprises a constellation of political ideologies including Fiscal Conservatism, free market or economic Liberalism, Social Conservatism, Libertarianism, Bio-Conservatism and Religious Conservatism...” *From, "Anarcho-primitivism," an anarchist critique of the origins and progress of civilization.*

What is it?

“A political or theological orientation advocating the preservation of the best in society and opposing radical changes.” *Webster's Online Dictionary*

- “1. Belief in a transcendent order, or body of natural law, which rules society as well as conscience...
2. Affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of human existence, as opposed to the narrowing uniformity, egalitarianism, and utilitarian aims of most radical systems; conservatives resist what Robert Graves calls “Logicalism” in society.
3. Conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes, as against the notion of a “classless society.” With reason, conservatives have been called “the party of order.” If natural distinctions are effaced among men, oligarchs fill the vacuum.
4. Persuasion that freedom and property are closely linked: separate property from private possession, and Leviathan becomes master of all. Economic leveling, they maintain, is not economic progress.
5. Faith in prescription and distrust of “sophisters, calculators, and economists” who would reconstruct society upon abstract designs. Custom, convention, and old prescription are checks both upon man’s anarchic impulse and upon the innovator’s lust for power.
6. Recognition that change may not be salutary reform: hasty innovation may be a devouring conflagration, rather than a torch of progress. Society must alter, for prudent change is the means of social preservation; but a statesman must take Providence into his calculations, and a statesman’s chief virtue, according to Plato and Burke, is prudence.” ***Russell Kirk’s “Six Canons of Conservatism.” Edited by Jonah Goldberg***

"To my mind, conservatism is gratitude. Conservatives tend to begin from gratitude for what is good and what works in our society and then strive to build on it, while liberals tend to begin from outrage at what is bad and broken and seek to uproot it." ***Yuval Levin***