

This is hardly a new condition. Tocqueville noted it a century and a half ago. "No men are fonder of their own condition. Life would have no relish for them if they were delivered from the anxieties which harass them, and they show more attachment to their cares than aristocratic nations to their pleasures."

Moralism drives out thought

But in the interval this old disposition has had new consequences. What was once primarily a disdain for government has developed into a genuine distrust. It has made it difficult for Americans to think honestly and to some purpose about themselves and their problems. Moralism drives out thought.

The result has been a set of myths and counter myths about ourselves and the world that create expectations which cannot be satisfied, and which lead to a rhetoric of crisis and conflict that constantly, in effect, declares the government in power disqualified for the serious tasks at hand.

The style which the British call "muddling through" is not for us. It concedes too much to the probity of those who are trying to cope, and the probable intransigency of the problems they are trying to cope with. In any event, in so intensely private a society it is hard to get attention to one's own concern save through a rhetoric of crisis.

As a result, we have acquired bad habits of speech and worse patterns of behavior, lurching from crisis to crisis with the attention span of a five-year old. We have never learned to be sufficiently thoughtful about the tasks of running a complex society.

Elections are rarely our finest hour

The political process reinforces, and to a degree rewards, the moralistic style. Elections are rarely our finest hours. This when we tend to be most hysterical, most abusive, least thoughtful about problems, and least respectful of complexity.

Of late these qualities have begun to tell on the institution of the Presidency itself. A very little time is allowed the President during which he can speak for all the nation, and address himself to realities in terms of the possible. Too soon the struggle recommences.

This has now happened for us. We might have had a bit more time, but no matter. The issue is how henceforth to conduct ourselves.

As I am now leaving, it may seem to come with little grace to prescribe for those who must stand and fight. I would plead only that I have been sparing of such counsel in the past. Therefore, three exhortations, and the rest will be silence.

A company of honorable men

The first is to be of good cheer and good conscience. Depressing, even frightening things are being said about the Administration. They are not true. This has been a company of honorable and able men, led by a President of singular courage and compassion in the face of a sometimes awful knowledge of the

problems and the probabilities that confront him.

The second thing is to resist the temptation to respond in kind to the untruths and half truths that begin to fill the air. A century ago the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt foresaw that ours would be the age of "the great simplifiers," and that the essence of tyranny was the denial of complexity. He was right. This is the single great temptation of the time. It is the great corruptor, and must be resisted with purpose and with energy.

What we need are great complexifiers, men who will not only seek to understand what it is they are about, but who will also dare to share that understanding with those for whom they act.

And, lastly, I would propose that if either of the foregoing is to be possible, it is necessary for members of the Administration, the men in this room, to be far more attentive to what it is the President has said, and proposed. Time and again, the President has said things of startling insight, taken positions of great political courage and intellectual daring, only to be greeted with silence or incomprehension.

The prime consequence of all this is that the people in the nation who take these matters seriously have never been required to take us seriously. It was hardly in their interest to do so. Time and again the President would put forth an oftentimes devastating critique precisely of their performance. But his initial thrusts were rarely followed up with a sustained, reasoned, reliable second and third order of advocacy.

Deliberately or no, the impression was allowed to arise with respect to the widest range of Presidential initiatives that the President wasn't really behind them. It was a devastating critique.

A Bohemian Tory Reconsidered

Russell Kirk Of Piety Hill

W. Wesley McDonald

After the deaths of Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt, the themes of reflective, philosophical conservative thought would not be heard again until after the end of the New Deal era. Not that conservatism had become inarticulate and incomprehensible during the Roosevelt years, rather as Bernard L. Kronick wrote in 1947, "it had been drowned out by the clatter and confusion attendant upon the building of the 'Brave New World.' It was only when the resulting edifice demonstrated some alarming deficiencies that older themes were heard again."

Hard on the heels of the New Deal, during the late forties and early fifties, a great number of articles and books were published resounding the "older themes". Names such as Richard Weaver, Peter Viereck, Clinton Rossiter, William F. Buckley, Jr., and Russell Kirk became associated with a renaissance of conservative thinking. Yet, of all the books attempting to develop a conservative philosophy during this period, Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* (H.

The thrust of the President's program was turned against -- him! For how else to interpret an attempt to deal with such serious matters in so innovative a way, if in fact the effort was not serious?

It comes to this. The Presidency requires much of those who will serve it, and first of all it requires comprehension. A large vision of America has been put forth. It can only be furthered by men who share it.

It is not enough to know one subject, one department. The President's men must know them all, must understand how one thing relates to another, must find in the words the spirit that animates them, must divine in the blade of grass the whole of life that is indeed contained there, for so much is at issue.

Serve...Pray...Understand

I am of those who believe that America is the hope of the world, and that for that time given him the President is the hope of America. Serve him well. Pray for his success. Understand how much depends on you. Try to understand what he has given of himself.

This is something those of us who have worked in this building with him know in a way that perhaps only that experience can teach. To have seen him late into the night and through the night and into the morning, struggling with the most awful complexities, the most demanding and irresolvable conflicts, doing so because he cared, trying to comprehend what is right, and trying to make other men see it, above all, caring, working, hoping for this country that he has made greater already and which he will make greater still.

Serve him well. Pray for his success. Understand how much depends on you.

And now, goodbye, it really has been good to know you. □

Regnery Co. Chicago, 1953) would enjoy the most widespread and enduring impact upon the character and direction of conservative thinking for the next two decades.

Dr. Kirk's thick book (478 pages in the Regnery hardback edition) was largely responsible for the revival of interest in the Eighteenth-century Whig, Edmund Burke. Before Kirk revived Burke's philosophical arguments this opponent of the fin-de-siecle French Jacobins was of interest only to the occasional scholar of the Eighteenth Century of the few men of humane letters moved by Burke's "moral imagination." At the turn of the Twentieth Century, Paul Elmer More could only shake his head sadly when a radical sociologist responded phlegmatically to the mention of Burke. "Ah, Burke! he's dead, is he not?"

Not only was Burke dead, but More feared that his political thought was about to be interred with him. A scant fifteen years ago, Peter J. Stanlis, author of *Burke and Natural Law* (University of

Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1958), quipped in a letter to Kirk that he suspected that books on Burke in the libraries were worn out not by the students' use, but by just plain old age. However, nowadays, it is plainly evident that the fortunes of Burkean studies have taken a turn for the better. The recent, proliferation of societies and journals focusing on Burke and the Eighteenth Century attest to growing interest in the philosophy and times of Burke. This sudden interest inspired Dr. Kirk to remark that Burke's reputation "as political philosopher and perhaps a man of letters never stood higher than it does today."

In *The Conservative Mind* Kirk defended Burkean principles tracing them through the works of Adams, Coleridge, Randolph, Calhoun, Santayana, Babbitt, More, Eliot and others—a powerful exercise in scholarship which most American conservatives are aware of. However, their acquaintance with Kirk has been largely limited to this single study. Even the few critical and interpretative essays upon Kirk have been almost universally hampered because their authors had not read the great bulk of Kirk's prodigious literary and scholarly output. Therefore, this short essay will draw together much that is not generally known of Kirk's moral and political thought nor known about his life. The material included here is drawn from his lesser known essays, his unpublished correspondence, and my private conversations with him.

In his essay, "Why I am a Conservative," Kirk establishes that he first felt the conservative impulses at the very hour he began to feel and reason. Having remarkably found conservatism while still a child, he would never trifle with the radical ideologies. Unlike even those famous converts from communism to conservatism, John Dos Passos and Frank S. Meyer, Kirk never flirted with Marxist dogma in the fever of his youth.

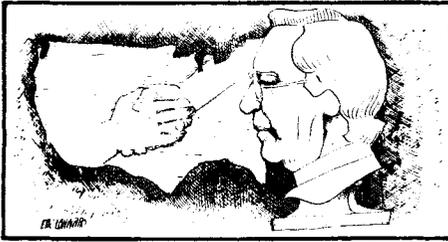
Kirk also revealed at an astonishingly early age this capacity to express himself lucidly and with passionate eloquence in his essays. At age seventeen, *Saplings*, a journal for high school student articles, published his essay, "Momentos." It was his first nationally published piece and indicated clearly that even while Kirk was a teenager he had formulated definite conservative principles. After pointing out the achievements and courage of his ancestors to the reader, he concludes with an observation that will strike the contemporary reader as the very essence of Kirkean philosophy. "Despite all the wealth and pride we have gained by the efforts of these men and women (our ancestors)," the young Kirk argues, "with all the luxury and culture which they have toiled to give us, can we hope to be the people they were."

Kirk's first acquaintance with the political principles of Edmund Burke came while he was a graduate student at Duke University. Burke, the thinker and statesman would remain "thereafter my guide in much...." Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* would provide the intellectual means to convert "prejudice into principle, and confused love of the past into an apprehension of the wisdom of our ancestors." After a brief

flirtation with the political doctrines of Jeffersonian democracy, Kirk turned to the writings of Jefferson's most profound critic, John Randolph of Roanoke. "I am an aristocrat," said Randolph in 1829. "I love liberty, I hate equality." Kirk was so moved by Randolph's brilliant Burkean insights that he committed himself to writing a Masters thesis upon him. The thesis later became one of the few published works upon that early nineteenth century Southern aristocrat.

After serving with the U.S. Army during World War II, Kirk resumed his graduate studies at St. Andrews University in Scotland. Provided with the leisure to read widely and reflect upon what appeared at the time to be the political and philosophical defeat of his beloved conservatism by ever advancing liberal dogmas, Kirk wrote his doctoral dissertation, *The Conservatives' Rout*. The manuscript was later retitled and published as *The Conservative Mind*. He acquired, in 1952, the Doctor of Humane Letters degree from St. Andrews, the only American to ever earn this eminent degree from that ancient Scottish seat of learning.

Here, within the fog and gothic unreality of Scotland, Kirk added still further depth and wisdom to his convictions as a conservative. "In Scotland and England I found, as Hawthorne had found a hundred



years before, the metaphysical principles of continuity given visible reality. British society and the face of Britain were for me the expression (as they had been the inspiration) of Burke's principles of social immortality and social reform: the past ever blending with the present, so that the fabric continually renews itself, like some great oak, being never either wholly old or wholly young."

"Mine was not an Enlightened mind....," he observes, "It was a Gothic mind, medieval in its temper and structure. I did not live cold harmony and perfect regularity of organization; what I sought was variety, mystery, tradition, the venerable, the awful." The ideologists of reason and cold intellect, Bentham, Mill and the contemporary proponents of Utilitarianism, who would quantify the world making it scientifically rational became for Kirk the *betes noires* of history. This hatred of enthroned Reason and abstract doctrines led him to the subsequent suspicion of ideologists and intellectuals. "Out of the infinite mercy of God," he states, "I never have been an intellectual; and, if Providence continues kind; I never shall be an ideologist." If forced to label himself, he prefers to be called a Bohemian Tory. His Bohemian peregrinations have taken him from the skid rows of Detroit and Los Angeles to the literary circles of London and Madrid, from the backwoods of Beaver Island to Morocco. Like Samuel Johnson, his Toryism is that of a man "attached to orthodoxy in church and state."

Kirk's career as a university professor was short-lived. Until 1953, he was a professor of Humanities at Michigan State College. Although he had held this position only a few years, he soon found that he was unable to abide with the lowering educational standards at MSC. "It was with much dismay that I viewed the growth of certain unfavorable tendencies in the Basic College," he reported at the time of his resignation. "These tendencies are the lowering of standards in the policy of grading, and the influence of the so-called objective examination in lowering the college reading and writing standards. I feel that these errors, although by no means confined to MSC, were sufficient for my departure." Aligning himself with the great traditional, classical theorists, Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt, Kirk would do battle with all these "unfavorable tendencies" in his book, *Academic Freedom* (H. Regnery Co. Chicago, 1955), and ten years later in *The Intemperate Professor* (Louisiana State University Press Baton Rouge, 1965).

In the same year as his resignation from MSC, his *Conservative Mind* appeared. Although, it received spotty reviews from the liberal journals, the book enjoyed an immediate and widespread popularity which at first Kirk neither expected nor could explain. Whittaker Chambers, who greatly enjoyed the book, but did not know Kirk, encouraged *Time* magazine to give the book its surprisingly favorable review. Kirk soon thereafter emerged as one of America's leading conservative thinkers and writers. "In the teeth of Liberal assertions that conservatives are superannuated and inarticulate," wrote M. Stanton Evans seven years later, "Kirk hurled a monumental defense of the conservative philosophy. He was young (then thirty-five); he was obviously well-read; and he wrote with an eloquence and power that could neither be ridiculed nor ignored."

In 1955 *National Review* began publishing and its editor, William Buckley, Jr., invited Kirk to take an associate editorship with the magazine. Kirk declined the offer, preferring not to be associated on the masthead of a magazine that included articles from authors Kirk considered libertarian or Benthamite. These cold, abstract theoreticians and ideologues Kirk felt to be the very antithesis of his own thought. Any association with them would only hurt his reputation as a Burkean conservative. "I had much rather sacrifice the support of ten ossified Benthamites," he wrote Buckley, "than the support of one real conservative." His association with *National Review* would, therefore, remain limited to his occasional book reviews and fortnightly column, "From the Academy." The dispute between libertarian and traditional conservative thinkers lingers, however, as a reminder of the deep intellectual abyss that lies between these two important strands of conservative thinking.

Kirk soon turned his energies to the creation of yet another conservative journal, one that would maintain high scholarly standards and humane values. Observing that there existed no monthly magazine "of a reflective, leisurely, imaginative, serious and good-natured

character" widely circulated in America, he began plans in 1954 for the creation of *Modern Age*. This journal would maintain, he wrote at the time, an appreciation of religious and ethical values, a respect for conservative social principles, and would be an "expression of the culture of the Middle West and the heart of the United States generally...." The first edition of the magazine appeared in 1957. Kirk was its editor until 1960 when he resigned as a result of what he termed "serious internecine disputes over policy and control" with other members of the journal's staff. After Kirk's departure, the journal continued to thrive and grow, maintaining its reputation as one of the most respected conservative journals of scholarship and opinion in America. Soon thereafter, Kirk founded and edited *The University Bookman*, a thin quarterly which primarily reviews college textbooks.

In 1964 Kirk married and became a convert to the Roman Catholic Church. Living with his wife, Annette, and their three children at his ancestral home, "Piety Hill," located in Mecosta, Michigan, Kirk maintains a household that is remindful of the style of life that would be expected of the English manor home of the last century. Large and Victorian in character, his house is designed for a family that enjoys the pleasure of company with many friends. His associates and friends have included a wide range of conservative thinkers and writers, such as Raymond English, the late Richard Weaver, Henry Regnery, Thomas Molnar, and numerous others who have made pilgrimages to Mecosta. Yet, despite the diversions of friends and family, Kirk is still capable of awesome literary productivity. While working on his latest books, *Eliot and the Follies of Our Time*, and a college text, *The Roots of American Order*, his seventeenth and eighteenth books, he concurrently writes his daily columns, and maintains a world-wide correspondence. His nocturnal habits permit him the leisure of working between the hours of midnight and eight in the morning, a period which virtually guarantees him the peace to write without interruption.

Nowadays, Kirk is considerably more optimistic about the success of his conservative principles in America than he was when he originally penned *The Conservatives' Rout*. History's recent turn of events have made the conservatives' lot appear a great deal more promising. As Kirk notes, the conservatives today have an opportunity to regain ground as they have "not seen since that day when modern radicalism issued its challenge to traditional society by decorating 'this hell-porch of a Hotel de Ville' with human heads on pikes." The nomination of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and the election of Richard Nixon to the presidency in 1968 encouraged Kirk to observe recently in a newspaper column that American conservatives "are in the middle of their journey," and in "about 12 years from now, they may be at the height of their influence." Most observers of American politics turn to such political and popular personages as Barry Goldwater, William Buckley, or President Nixon when they

seek to describe the tenor and direction of current conservative thinking. However, the wells of intellectual conservative thought from which these men must draw have been immeasurably enriched by Kirk's elegant and lucid defense of conservative principles. By reviving the memory of an Anglo-American conservative moral and political tradition, Kirk has clapped onto what was once just a mere instinctual distaste for the policies and philosophy of New Deal liberalism a profound and abiding set of principles. His shelf full of books have once again inspired Burke's "moral imagination" to a nation which had nearly forgotten Burke while embracing notions of positivism, pragmatism, and sentimentalism into its politics.

There are no "gained causes" wrote T.S. Eliot once because there are no "lost causes." Each cause merely struggles to keep alive the enduring normative wisdom of the past. Therefore, even if some new radicalism were suddenly ushered in, sweeping aside all that now exists, we could still expect to find Kirk steadfastly defending Eliot's "permanent things" against the "follies of the time." The conservative is realistic and "expects until the end of all things the world will be a battleground, a place of testing; and in every generation the permanent things will be challenged afresh."

"Therefore, I am a conservative," Kirk concludes in one of his essays. "Quite possibly I am on the losing side; often I think so. Yet out of a curious perversity, I had rather lose with Socrates, let us say, than win with Lenin." □

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Cinema

The Sad State of the Movies

Wick Allison

The rumor has been confirmed by the *Washington Post*: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which has been suffering lately from a case of advanced senility, may soon die altogether. The reporter phrased it gently in a publicity story about a soon-to-be-released film by saying that "M-G-M desperately needs a hit, a new lease on life." If the trade gossip is true, we should underline desperately. For those who feel compelled to shed a few tears at the passing of a modern institution, let's quickly review three of M-G-M's most touted recent releases:

Zabriskie Point: Antonioni's version of young America was so incredibly simplistic and pretentious that even the *New Yorker* was forced to pan it.

The Strawberry Statement: According to *Playboy*, "uninhibited sex plus anti-

establishment attitudes equal box-office bonanzas with the under-25 audience, or so reasoned the producers." The producers were wrong.

The Magic Garden of Stanley Sweetheart: This attempt to explain the life of a typical Columbia student evoked nothing but yawns.

After bankrolling films of this stature M-G-M's financial collapse might be regarded as a mercy killing (The latter two films were pet projects of M-G-M president James Aubrey, whose last job - interestingly enough - was as president of CBS). Of course M-G-M is not the only corporation providing the American people with such haute entertainment. In addition to the disasters listed above, movie-goers in recent months have been subjected to this extraordinary selection: *Getting Straight*, *The Revolutionary*, *Performance*, *Up in the Cellar*, *Ice*, and *R.P.M.* (Revolutions Per Minute - get it?).

In their mad dash to cash in on the New Left and its hip sympathizers the studios are only following the lead of two other major media. The large publishing houses have long been in the business of subsidizing the "Movement" with the publication of such books as Jerry Rubin's *Do It!*, Bobby Seale's *Seize the Time* and Abbie Hoffman's *Revolution For the Hell of It* (a title which tells it like it is). The magazines run a close second, as Professor Nathan Glazar recently pointed out:

Violence is extolled in *The New York Review* which began with only literary ambitions in 1962; Tom Hayden, who urges his audiences to kill policemen, is treated as a hero in *Esquire*; Eldridge Cleaver merits an adulatory *Playboy* interview.

At this point only television seems undecided, although personally I view such programs as *The Storefront Lawyers* with growing suspicion.

The more detached among us will grasp the irony of capitalists publicizing the virtues of those who seek the destruction of capitalism. It is an irony, and a flaw, to which we have become accustomed. The quest for profits is not hampered by such irrelevant factors as integrity. That idyllic vision of the free enterprise system which we inherited from our forefathers pales by comparison with this tainted real-life version. As a sad fact, capitalism brings with it as an unfortunate consequence a phenomenon known as the commercial mentality, a remarkable shortsightedness which is incapable of seeing beyond the projected profit margins on the ledger sheet. Thus our movie theatres have become nothing more than temples to the Almighty Dollar; if a revolution will sell tickets, modern priests such as James Aubrey are willing to embrace it with open arms.

Of course, another element is involved in his flood of turned-on movies: a pathological fear of being out of style. In one of his more perceptive moments (of which there are many) essayist Tom Wolfe found that white liberals have assumed a new identity which he termed "radical chic." The phrase is self-explanatory. People with this rare urban disease seem