

What Is Conservatism?

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The word is out that modern “liberalism” is very sick; maybe even dying by its own hand. What began as an effort to protect individuals from undue authority has through a weird internal logic somehow become the voice of big government. At the same time it is accused of elevating the ideal of the autonomous individual above all else and thus producing a hedonistic, self-contradictory, morally stuporous society that even die-hard supporters didn’t want and can no longer define or defend. The disappointed won’t admit to being “conservatives” yet - Heaven forbid! - but out of raw embarrassment a lot of them are quietly becoming non-liberals. Point being, they would cheerfully drop the wimpy liberal something if they could just find something better. This book aims to point them in the right direction. It is a distinctly unwimpy book.

Meanwhile, those who have consciously taken a position against modern liberalism and dare to call themselves “conservative” (however heavily qualified) cannot afford to be smug. For even modern conservatism - something said to be fleetingly visible in the occasional tough-sounding budget - has no public moral or philosophical presence whatsoever outside the minds of a few nostalgic academics, columnists, or party hacks. It is wimpy, too.

So as an antidote to both liberal and conservative wimpiness, I want to embark on a restoration project, to discuss what the word *conservative* means, not as a squishy punching-bag political label, but in its full and rightful sense. So I’ll use the term *true conservative* to make the case for an identifiable transhistorical human temperament that is at war with the radical temperament wherever the latter arises.

I am aware of the many objections to this exercise, and also of the argument that modern political conservatism only came into being with the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume.^[1] But I argue that the underlying human attitude has been around a lot longer. Like, since forever. Aristotle, to take the most famous example, was a prototypical conservative in most of the senses I wish to clarify. The distinctly conservative temperament was also felt everywhere in the community life of the Middle Ages, and again in debates against the social, moral, and political radicals of the English Civil Wars of the seventeenth century. Significantly for our time, it was ringingly heard under various labels in the founding debates that resulted in the American as well as Canadian constitutions, deeply influenced as these both were by the conservative principles of such as Edmund Burke.^[2]

Having said this, I don’t want all the fine writers gathered in this book to think I am going to present them as historical relics. On the contrary, much of their conservatism, seen in the light of the failure of conviction in our time, seems refreshingly *avant-garde*! By their insight and passion they sail boldly on an ocean of the uncommitted. And yet, although I am certain

they would all leap to defend themselves against a too-easy label of any kind and would prefer to define the term themselves before conceding to it, the word *conservative* is used in half the essay titles and in the body of most. I suspect they all might agree with enough of the ideas, principles, and assumptions I will describe to say they at least share a distinct intellectual kinship.

Space being at a premium, what follows seeks to gain in feeling and understanding what must be sacrificed in the historical details. Only the most common and hopefully least contentious points can be sketched out. First comes a description of the conservative concept of human nature, then the view of politics and government that necessarily flows from this, followed by the conservative complaint about radicalism of all kinds and a word about why conservatives defend certain key political, social, and economic institutions and moral beliefs.

Human Nature and The Self

The Liberal View ~ The cleavage between the modern liberal, and the true conservative notion of human nature and the self is as wide as the Grand Canyon. For the former, Man is naturally good and is ultimately perfectible by human means and reason alone, with no particular help needed from God, transcendent moral standards, or, for that matter the next-door neighbour. Human failings and ignorance are ultimately said to be rooted not in the individual but in badly flawed human societies. That is why “progressive” regimes are needed to engineer human perfection. Voltaire said if we want good laws the best way to get them is to throw out all existing ones and start over. That is the radical formula for earthly happiness.

The Conservative View ~ For the true conservative, however, this is a prideful, catastrophic idea that paved the way for the mild despotism of gigantic welfare states and became the operating premise of all totalitarian regimes: if you can manage to produce the good society, you can produce good human beings. But the truth is the opposite. By definition, only God can be perfect. Man is by nature not so much evil as he is a flawed, and by definition imperfect creation with a great capacity for good or evil. He wanders always between the beasts and the angels, looking for a home. He suffers from a fatal dualism, a constant inner warfare between reason and impulse, hope and delusion. And so it follows that the governments he creates can only be imperfect, too. Even worse, they may do great evil because they are the only human institution with a monopoly on force. It is thus no surprise to a true conservative, it is axiomatic, actually, that the twentieth century, the most “progressive” of all, was also the bloodiest and cruellest in history. Obviously, more than our own naked untutored reason is required. To find the good and avoid the bad we also need the wisdom of the ages, to be found in tradition, wise customs, honoured beliefs, religion, and venerable moral standards.

How Is Freedom Used? ~ The true conservative has always been vitally interested in personal freedom, of course, because we cannot be moral agents, cannot choose between good and bad, unless we are free. But he is far more interested in knowing exactly what it is we wish to use our freedom for than in abstract freedom itself - a beguiling concept used mostly as

a self-serving personal or political rationale. Indeed he would argue that abstract freedom cannot exist because freedom is always *for* something concrete and particular. And for what? In contrast to the modern liberal theory of individualism as described by such as John Stuart Mill, he argues that the consequences of all our actions extend far beyond our own noses. For it is precisely by our personal freedoms and choices that we add to or subtract from the quality of life not only for ourselves but for our families, our friends, and our communities, and most often in ways not at first apparent. That is why the true conservative says we are first of all social, interdependent beings. Free, but also bound. And because human community can only arise from some prevailing unity, society always has a natural and logical primacy over the individual. What is needed is the freedom to bind ourselves to proper ends.

Man More Than Atoms ~ Flowing from this social ontology is the true conservative's refusal to accept the depressing materialist and mechanical idea - an idea essential to the secular and political aims of pure liberal philosophy - that we are mere atoms, genes, or quanta. Even a conservative with no fixed religion or church will generally believe that there is something of the sacred in the constitution of the universe. For certain, he will say that to comprehend human life and society we need to know how the mere parts form a living, organic whole. This means understanding that what is pre-rational in life and society is as powerful and significant as the rational. And most important for politics, he will see clearly that without some grounding in a transcendent source, the liberal claim that all morality and law are merely man-made automatically reduces life to a contest of political wills. If the conservative has to choose between God and Nietzsche he does not hesitate to choose the former.

The Search For Absolutes ~ Accordingly, the true conservative will seek out fixed truths, laws, and moral standards not as inventions of the Self (that all-purpose liberal grab-bag for the surrogate soul) but as enduring things discoverable outside us that must then be incorporated into daily life. All religions have done this in a remarkably consistent way, as did the classical "pagan" virtues rendered by the likes of Cicero. For at bottom such concepts as truth, courage, loyalty, justice, prudence, duty, and love, or treason, cheating, and lying, do not alter with the ages. Our difficulty in discerning or honouring standards is no proof of their absence, or relativity, but rather of our weakness. From this it follows that a true conservative is sensitive to the role of moral choice and standards in the formation not only of personal character, but especially of community. He refuses to hide behind the myth of the autonomous individual, or to believe that a collection of such individuals, each with a private moral agenda, who merely agree at most not to harm each other but otherwise may disagree on all things moral, could possibly constitute a thriving society, no matter how attractive and morally convenient to individuals this might seem.

In Defense of Inequality ~ He is also prepared to defend the full range of natural differences that arise from the free expression of talent and effort in each human being, and thus will refuse in principle to forcibly equalize society. He generally seeks local solutions to human problems rather than any homogenizing state action. He is naturally anti-egalitarian, and finds poisonous and immoral the idea of forcibly levelling society, of trying to raise the weak by weakening the strong. He believes that the only truly equal societies are to be found

in prisons, and that levellers who gain sufficient power will always turn the whole of society into a prison. He is not surprised that freedom sprouts social and economic inequality, nor is he worried about it as long as all are governed under the same rule of law, and decency and charitable instincts are encouraged everywhere, especially at home and in local communities. He believes that healing society begins with healing oneself and helping one's neighbour, and that if all followed this logic, most of the larger social grievances and crises would end. The modern liberal rush to government as a solution to social problems he deems an insidious and morally evasive device that infantilizes human beings by making them dependent and thus destroys the fabric of community.

Ideas, Politics, and Society

Perfectible Man: Perfect Democracy ~ Sufficient scrutiny will reveal that different political systems are shaped utterly by different concepts of human nature, as outlined above. The bloody Jacobins of revolutionary France, a most visible example, forcibly structured their entire regime to reflect Rousseau's idea that evil comes from outside man, who is inherently good, even if temporarily ignorant. This is the still beating heart of modern liberalism, however served up. The formula says that if one man is good, a million must be better. That is why such optimistic radicals will always call for more direct democracy in all things, for the abolition or electoral control of any appointed upper house that might block the pure voice of the people (which they see as the voice of God: *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*), and will want every government official continuously subject to re-election or dismissal by the people.

Imperfect Man: Qualified Democracy ~ Such a scheme is enough to deeply frighten the true conservative who quickly sees in it a system that encourages mob rule, bitter factionalism, and oppression of the minority, with all the typical vices in attendance. For the conservative is moved by the exactly contrary persuasion: all government must be structured to protect man from his own worst proclivities. One man's cruelty is bad enough, multiplied by millions it produces tyranny. Therefore, because we know there is a wide range of abilities and intelligence, virtues and vices, the raw will of the people as a whole needs to be tempered, or "filtered," by the experience and prudence of the best and wisest among us. And this demand in turn arises from the prior idea that difficult standards of the good actually exist and must be sought by those best suited to find them. The democratic *representative* as a trustee of the people's will? Fine. But as a mere *delegate* of that will? A simple messenger-boy? A surefire recipe for bitter factionalism.

In addition to filtering, there must be sufficient checks and balances to frustrate abuses of power and encourage moral virtue, high character, and the development of wise institutions and laws. For there is really little difference between a tyrannical leader and a tyrannical majority, except that the latter is worse. At least you can ostracize or assassinate a single tyrant, but never a tyrannical majority. The true conservative thus tends to prefer a system of government with a judicious mixture of monarchical/presidential, constitutional, aristocratic, and democratic elements in a formula sufficiently complicated and self-checking to restrain the ultimate political vice from which the people cannot escape, which is unlimited power.

The Struggle Continues ~ In one way or another, all political debate in North American and the reality of our changing political systems have been and continue to be shaped by the struggle between such conflicting views: Man the Perfectible vs. Man the Flawed; Utopian vision vs. Realist vision; Rousseau vs. Burke; Radical Democracy vs. Parliamentary Democracy; Secular values vs. Judeo-Christian values; the Court vs. Parliament; and so it goes. Which leads to the problem of differing conceptions of order.

Organization Requires Order ~ The conservative knows that even the simplest form of organization is impossible without order, whether in the home, school, corporation, association, committee, sports team, or army, and all order requires rules, command, and obedience, however formal or informal. But where will order come from? The answer is that if a society is to remain free, it must either produce the many *voluntary* forms of legitimate authority, rank, duty, and obligation itself from non-government sources such as mentioned above, or these myriad foci of order will soon be absorbed by a single and very power-hungry coercive source - the state. The true conservative has thus most often stood for a judicious balance between freedom and order, and for an authoritative but never authoritarian government that understands the free and proper role of duty and obligation in cementing a free society.

Welfare State An Aberration ~ He faults the comprehensive regulatory welfare, or provider state as a political and moral aberration that far exceeds the proper duties of government. For it becomes powerful either intentionally or willy-nilly by entering into a deadly open or covert war of control against natural society, eventually taking over most of its organic, traditional forms of authority and community, and of course taking much of its income to do this. Although attracted to some of its tenets, he also faults the vision of pure libertarianism for weakening resistance to that welfare state by championing an atomistic philosophy that celebrates the priority of individual rights and pleasures over social and moral duty and obligation.

The Real Voice of The People ~ For all these reasons and more, the true conservative listens deeply to the lessons of history as he strives to protect enduring political, moral, and social institutions. He is moved by “the voice of the people,” of course, but in a far different way from the radical. He is attuned, to borrow G. K. Chesterton’s fine phrase, to “the democracy of the dead,” though this might be even better described as “the democracy of the living dead.” Namely, all that has been thought, felt, and passed down to us, and lives on in the concrete forms, customs, habits, principles, and symbols of the best of our ancestors. When the conservative acts to change a thing, it is with the knowledge circumstances will soon alter yet again. So he must change with prudence, not merely for his own time, but with due respect for the future generations to which he feels we must all be responsible.

Social Contract A Myth ~ He thus despises the radically anti-social belief that society and political life may be based on a mere *contract*. The bald idea of Locke’s solitary “individual” in some “state of nature” streaking naked through the forest, contract in hand, lecturing the trees and the little rabbits on his “right” to freedom is absurd and childish. The conservative does not see abstract individuals. He sees a certain quiet village carpenter, a

curmudgeonly pharmacist, an unappreciative sister-in-law, an ailing but courageous mother. Abstract individualism is as denaturing and dehumanizing a concept as abstract freedom. As for the idea of contract which it was invented to support? Mere contract, as a basis for society, delegitimizes all government and all authority and order by making these things forever conditional and ephemeral, a set of momentary commitments that may be reversed or ripped up tomorrow by the most powerful faction of the day. Contract as a basis for society is a formula for permanent social revolution.

Charters Most Vulnerable To Political Manipulation ~ Worst of all, the idea of contract as a basis for society usually ends up in a list of abstract terms and “rights” much like Canada’s *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The people often think such a list is a guarantee, never asking who is to provide these rights besides their neighbors? They at first do not see that because written constitutions cannot be self-interpreting, they soon become instruments for political and social engineering in the hands of radicals empowered to interpret them (those who win the struggle of political will). Namely, some tyrant, a shadowy “human rights tribunal,” a Supreme Court - or, as Robespierre was astonished to see just before they took off his head, a Committee of Public Safety. To this alternative, the conservative prefers a transgenerational unwritten constitution more like the common-law, a constitution so deeply embedded in the hearts, minds, practice, and experience of all society that it cannot be written down in any one place. To this day, for example, England, from whence have flowed so many of our concrete common-law rights, has no written constitution (though radicals are pushing for one). Far from a contract, the true conservative cherishes something more like a *compact* (Burke again) between the dead, the living, and the yet to be born. This compact is a set of inherited customs, experiences and actionable (as distinct from abstract) concrete rights, which comprise the terms of a truly vital and historically-embedded constitution that *conserves* the best that has been said and done. Freedom in this perspective, is not a right, but an achievement, something acquired and refined over many generations that has become the practical and unconscious reflex of an entire society. Something very difficult for tyrannical leaders or majorities to root out. The concrete and actionable common-law writ of *habeas corpus*, for example, that prevents police from detaining a person without warrant, and is historically derived from centuries of English legal practice, is worth any number of glorious-sounding abstract paper constitutions. Few constitutions have ever sounded as fine as France’s *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, or the *Constitution* of the former Soviet Union - and few regimes were as cruel and bloody.

Complaints About Radicalism

No change For Its Own Sake ~ For all these reasons, the conservative, while he is not, as his enemies like to think, opposed to change, is certainly opposed to radical change for its own sake. At a minimum, he sets a high standard: *the burden of proof is on the innovator*. For a good society is like a delicate spider’s web, an intricate and wholly connected creation that is hard to create, easy to wipe away. Unless the virtues of a proposal can be overwhelmingly demonstrated as superior to what is customary - superior, that is, to the voice of the real people, as defined above - then it is always better to go with the true than the

new.

More To Reality Than Appearance ~ Further to this, in the same way that the conservative looks beyond the present voice of the people to hear the voice of the ages, he likes to peer through the surface of things present to perceive their real, deeper meaning. Just because we do not fully, or as moderns would say, “consciously” understand the function of a ceremony, a myth, a symbol, an institution, or tradition, is no good reason to eliminate it. It could mean, rather, not that the tradition is useless, but that we have been useless in comprehending it. That we ought to dig a little deeper. For the deepest meanings of what we do and signify are often somewhat obscure, if not often unconscious to hasty reflection. At the least, the fact of their endurance over a great span of time suggests they have a hold over us in ways often mysterious, and ought to be upheld for that reason alone. The true conservative is wary of reacting to anything too soon, or basing his reaction on the mere appearance of things, which he senses is always a trap. Culture in this very broad sense, conscious and unconscious, serves as an invisible armour to keep the state of nature and its primitive manifestations at bay. It is our way of protecting ourselves from ourselves.

Unintended Consequences ~ Finally, while the radical tendency, based as it is in fervour and zeal, always yields to impulse and grasps reflexively at the first promise of some ideal “solution” or abstract utopia, the conservative watches policy after policy founder by producing perverse moral, social, and economic effects opposite from those intended. Liberals feel sorry for unwed mothers, for example, and so pay them more to support each child, and are then anguished and uncomprehending when this results in more illegitimate children. The conservative says sufficient reflection would have predicted such a result, and there have always been better means to prevent such effects. However, they are likely to be means that first demand that politicians and their policy wonks give up the liberal understanding of human nature. This, most liberals cannot do, for it would mean surrendering the ideological basis underpinning all their other beliefs.

Favourite Institutions

To summarize, for the true conservative there is a connected stream of values and institutions that must be distinguished and protected from all others. At the base of things is the freedom to act as a *free moral agent*, adding to or subtracting from the fabric of *society as a whole*. (As distinct from increasingly taking cradle-to-grave moral direction and economic security from governments, or acting merely with regard to oneself alone.) Next in importance is the freedom to form and sustain vital *voluntary associations*, especially a *natural family*, defined as a *married mother and father living together with their dependent children*, an institution crucial for the protection and nurture of each new generation. (In contrast to the liberal notion of the family as something defined by the weekend live-ins.) Next are required the *economic institutions and laws* supporting *free markets* and *private property*, through which free persons and their families may work hard to create a good living and secure future. (In contrast to the welter of government regulation, suffocating taxation, and control of enterprise beyond normal laws against force and fraud.) Not least are the reasonable freedoms *to think and to speak within the bounds of decency*, also *to worship* a higher source of morality than the

state itself, and here below to be treated *equally under a rule of law*, and not of men. (In contrast to a modern liberal regime that preaches moral “neutrality” yet is deeply zealous to control speech and thought with multifarious codes and punishments, and as deeply mired in myriad forms of arbitrary governance that impose laws and programs utterly contrary to our ancient customs.)

The feast of essays in this book begins with Janet Aizenstat’s arresting constitutional scholarship in which she challenges many misconceptions concerning the founding and present status of Canada. In a gracious and easy style she points out, among other things, that the country we live in has for some time - from the beginning, actually - been endangered by political thinking energetically opposed to our long and successful tradition of parliamentary democracy. What is new at present, she tells us, is the intolerance for the sort of political give-and-take that has for generations been the earmark of a healthy liberal democracy (“liberal” here used, I think, in the earlier, more classical sense before the word got connected with the party of statism). Today, she warns, parliamentary democracy, most of all the *idea* of parliamentary democracy, is in crisis, reeling before the widespread belief that “the institutions of liberal democracy are not compatible with justice.” She convincingly demonstrates that Canada’s founders, as supporters of a tolerant system in which good government was defined in terms of security for dissent, were profoundly conservative in ways we would do well to remember and imitate.

Aizenstat’s historical perspective is followed by F.L. Morton’s just as bracing and detailed, indeed, quite disturbing, account of what has happened to liberal democracy at the hands of the law - or should I say what is taken to be the law - of our 1982 *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In exposing a series of “myths” about the Charter that dominate the public mind, Morton gives us a piece that should be read aloud before the Supreme Court. He demonstrates that contrary to what is believed and was originally expected, the Charter does not protect basic rights and freedoms; ordinary citizens cannot easily avail themselves of Charter protection; it does not enhance liberty or limit government action, nor does it prevent the tyranny of the majority; and worse, by its very existence it establishes judicial supremacy over Parliament and therefore over the people. The fox is controlling the chickens, but no one is controlling the fox. Morton proposes a number of ways to do so.

Of the next essay, my own, I will say little here except that it explores the tension between two strong concepts - democracy and the family - of which many citizens, including many conservatives, are passionately fond, and which they proudly defend. Hence the perceived offensiveness of my title, “Democracy Against the Family,” and the disturbed reaction I have often noticed when people first hear it. They react as if such a conflict were impossible. Regrettably, it is not. The essay explores the manner in which the very language of democracy (freedom, rights, choice, and equality) has become combined with a gnostic concept of the higher self that has deep historical roots in the West and that, when backed by legal legerdemain has badly weakened the natural family.

Allan Carlson, our first guest American writer, has a wide reputation for his use of penetrating and bold arguments studded with hard research results to embarrass virtually every leftist social program that has been tried, just about wherever it has been tried. There is fascinating historical material here about the “family wage” legislation of a few generations ago, about the intricate complexities this “cultural” (as distinct from government) attempt at family justice and protection brought about, and how it fared well compared to today’s government policies. Especially scary are his explanations of how in America, federally-subsidized mortgages for single-parent and divorced families virtually came to sustain a housing industry that “needed” high divorce rates to survive; how the feminist gender wars evolved into a choice for unmarried mothers between “private or public patriarchy”; and not least, how the opposing demographics of the “Youth State” and the “Elder State,” imply a kind of social war for resources between generations.

From here we move to the business of putting old heads on young bodies. I am pleased to say it would be difficult to find another non-ideological essay that so thoroughly and calmly rebuts and disputes every aspect of the liberal educator’s canon. “A conservative Education,” by veteran educator Mark Holmes provides a sound formula, or rather a sound conservative way, to educate based on a grounding in order, in substantive content, in the organic classroom, in a true values community, in leadership, and in many other things that need to be remembered and practiced. What he has to say holds hope for any parent whose children have survived, or should I say suffered through that manifestly inadequate experience called the “education system.”

The barrier that separates the present from the past, and all the forgetting this implies in the anti-conservatism of a modern liberal society, where information and knowledge have come to mean the same thing, is manifest in Peter Stockland’s wide-ranging essay, “Contact Conservatism,” which is next. With a deft hand he juxtaposes the modern fever for immediate raw information against the still immensity of real meaning, and shows how we have suffered as a civilization from - in one of Peter’s memorable formulations - “the triumph of the disembodied present over the substantial past.”

In “Who’s Right, Who’s Left, and What’s Left Over” Michael Walker is clearly enjoying himself as he exposes the inadequate and self-serving nature of contemporary political terminology. Some of it is not so humorous. Our notion of a placid and politically tolerant Canada is mightily disturbed by accounts of ridicule, bombings, and death threats at his home and place of work. But the stories of label-switching according to whose oxen has just been gored are instructive, to say the least, and give a Swiftian sense of how ludicrous are the media and its mavens when riding their own hobby-horses. Readers will enjoy testing themselves on his World’s Smallest Political Quiz.

Another dose of realism follows from Tom Flanagan and Stephen Harper who give a short lesson on the travails, not so much of conservatism, as of conservative party politics in Canada for most of this century. We gain insight into how a political competition held under our first-past-the-post system tends to produce an outcome-bias, and how conservative wins have

generally been due to “throw-them-out” coalitions. The distinction between “economic” and “social” conservatives is explored here, as well as the split in theory and practice between populism (“democratic monism”) and traditionalism (Burkean “trustee” conservatism). Of great interest is how a change to something like a “preferential ballot” system, would help create conservative clout in Canada and greatly alter the political landscape.

Canada’s landscape may, after all, be altered against the will of the vast majority of the population by a very small number of the people - say, by my estimate, somewhere around 12 percent of the Canadian population needed to win a Quebec referendum on secession. The latent conservatism of Scott Reid’s essay, “The Quebec Question: Debt Division and the Rule of Law,” lies in its persuasive appeal to prudence, the rule of law, and impartiality as means to avoid chaos and potential violence in the event of a “Yes” vote in Quebec. Reid fingers the apportionment of debt between Canada and a departing Quebec as a problem akin to a boundary dispute. He describes how a special international five-member Court of Arbitration, established through binding legislation by both parties in advance, could be properly structured to avoid repudiation both of the debt and of the arbitration itself, and thus could peacefully settle this nation’s most potentially inflammatory situation in advance.

Our book closes with two essays that return us to the moral ground with which true conservatism has historically been most deeply concerned. That is not because all true conservatives are moralizers, but rather because they see keenly that all social, political, and, yes, even raw economic policies rest at bottom on preferences, and these in turn rest on some more deeply planted moral axiom. On some preference for the way the world ought to be. This appeal to the future, to how we ought to behave tomorrow, next year, or indeed for life, is inherent in human freedom. It is part of the struggle for self-transcendence that forms the basis of community. So it is better to ferret those axioms out than to pretend they do not exist. Or, as liberals do, to pretend that all axioms may happily co-exist, even if in direct conflict.

Michael Coren certainly grasps the nettle on such matters, and expresses an emotional defence of “social conservatism” that demarcates it as clearly as we need from libertarianism and neo-conservatism. He is persuasive that one cannot be a true conservative without being “social”, and I suspect he would agree that the term itself is somewhat tautological. What is enjoyable here is how after laying out the conservative view, or feeling, or position on a variety of topics such as homosexual rights, the family, and abortion (this, I believe, the most obvious and unbreachable divide between economic and social conservatives), he nicely forces a confrontation with the so-called “economic conservative.” He does this by showing how in many instances past (slavery), and present (lap-dancing), the “free market” and its economic wonders can produce the economic good of some, but through its rotten spillover effects, the morally bad for all. Economic freedom, he writes, “does not necessarily guarantee a good and fair society and is not an end in itself - nor, in a moral vacuum is it even a means to an end.”

We end our *tour d'horizon* of the conservative landscape with the second of our two guest American writers, Jay Budziszewski. I have never met Jay except by e-mail, the occasion for contacting him and inviting him to participate having been the prior enjoyment of several of his arresting and challenging essays. I was struck by the moral courage, insight, and lucidity - I might even say the daring - of what he had to say, especially given that he is saying it as a professing Christian to a smug and condescending modern liberal culture. The hungry lions of the philistine legions rage and claw away, and Jay is down there in the pit with his intellectual and moral weapons driving them back. His essay on conscience in this collection makes the case that the natural moral law is permanently "written on the heart," and that resistance or evasion or repression of conscience does not so much weaken as divert, so that by a series of moral self-deceptions, we end up going from doing bad, to doing far worse, in a diversionary and compensatory downward spiral. In essence, we eventually get hunted down and, hopefully, humbled by the truth.

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With great pleasure I close with a few words of appreciation: to my wife and children for their constant support and their understanding of the writer's woes and satisfactions; to Don Bastian of Stoddart Publishing, for his continued and so capable assistance and advice; and not least, to the Canadian writers and our American friends whose work is gathered in this book. They made this editor's job a rewarding one.

William D. Gairdner  
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[1] A very useful modern anthology with instructive supporting text and notes that has proved a refresher for this Introduction, is Jerry Z. Muller, **Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought From David Hume To The Present** (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[2] See especially the highly readable and informative book by Christopher Moore, **1867: How The Fathers Made A Deal** (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1997)