

MC  
&LT

MAJOR CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERTARIAN THINKERS

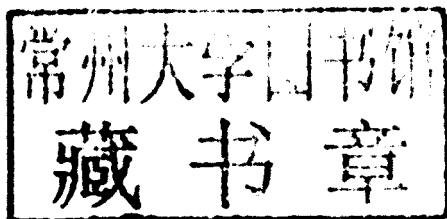
EDITED BY JOHN MEADOWCROFT

RUSSELL KIRK



# Russell Kirk

John M. Pafford



Major Conservative and  
Libertarian Thinkers

Series Editor: John Meadowcroft

Volume 12



continuum

2010

**Continuum International Publishing Group Inc**  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 704, New York, NY 10038

**The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd**  
The Tower Building, 11 York Road, London SE1 7NX

www.continuumbooks.com

Copyright © John M. Pafford 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publishers.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Pafford, John M. (John Monroe)

Russell Kirk / John M. Pafford.

p. cm.—(Major conservative and libertarian thinkers ; v. 12)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4411-9569-2 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-4411-9569-6 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Kirk, Russell—  
Political and social views. 2. Conservatism. I. Title. II. Series.

JC573.P34 20109

320.52092-dc22

2009053736

ISBN 978-1-4411-9569-2

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India  
Printed in the United States of America

**Russell Kirk**

### Series Introduction

The *Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers* series aims to show that there is a rigorous, scholarly tradition of social and political thought that may be broadly described as “conservative”, “libertarian” or some combination of the two.

The series aims to show that conservatism is not simply a reaction against contemporary events, nor a privileging of intuitive thought over deductive reasoning; libertarianism is not simply an apology for unfettered capitalism or an attempt to justify a misguided atomistic concept of the individual. Rather, the thinkers in this series have developed coherent intellectual positions that are grounded in empirical reality and also founded upon serious philosophical reflection on the relationship between the individual and society, how the social institutions necessary for a free society are to be established and maintained, and the implications of the limits to human knowledge and certainty.

Each volume in the series presents a thinker’s ideas in an accessible and cogent manner to provide an indispensable work for students with varying degrees of familiarity with the topic as well as more advanced scholars.

The following twenty volumes that make up the entire *Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers* series are written by international scholars and experts:

*The Salamanca School* by Andre Azevedo Alves (LSE, UK) and

José Manuel Moreira (Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal)

*Thomas Hobbes* by R. E. R. Bunce (Cambridge, UK)

*John Locke* by Eric Mack (Tulane, UK)

*David Hume* by Christopher J. Berry (Glasgow, UK)

*Adam Smith* by James Otteson (Yeshiva, US)

*Edmund Burke* by Dennis O’Keeffe (Buckingham, UK)

*Alexis de Tocqueville* by Alan S Kahan (Paris, France)

*Herbert Spencer* by Alberto Mingardi (Istituto Bruno Leoni, Italy)

*Ludwig von Mises* by Richard Ebeling (Northwood, US)  
*Joseph A. Schumpeter* by John Medearis (Riverside, California, US)  
*F. A. Hayek* by Adam Tebble (UCL, UK)  
*Michael Oakeshott* by Edmund Neill (Oxford, UK)  
*Karl Popper* by Phil Parvin (Cambridge, UK)  
*Ayn Rand* by Mimi Gladstein (Texas, US)  
*Milton Friedman* by William Ruger (Texas State, US)  
*Russell Kirk* by John Pafford (Northwood, US)  
*James M. Buchanan* by John Meadowcroft (King's College  
London, UK)  
*The Modern Papacy* by Samuel Gregg (Acton Institute, US)  
*Murray Rothbard* by Gerard Casey (UCD, Ireland)  
*Robert Nozick* by Ralf Bader (St Andrews, UK)

Of course, in any series of this nature, choices have to be made as to which thinkers to include and which to leave out. Two of the thinkers in the series – F. A. Hayek and James M. Buchanan – have written explicit statements rejecting the label “conservative”. Similarly, other thinkers, such as David Hume and Karl Popper, may be more accurately described as classical liberals than either conservatives or libertarians. But these thinkers have been included because a full appreciation of this particular tradition of thought would be impossible without their inclusion; conservative and libertarian thought cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of the intellectual contributions of Hume, Hayek, Popper and Buchanan, among others. While no list of conservative and libertarian thinkers can be perfect, then, it is hoped that the volumes in this series come as close as possible to providing a comprehensive account of the key contributors to this particular tradition.

John Meadowcroft  
King's College London

## Series Editor's Preface

Russell Kirk was one of the principal intellectual architects of the American conservative movement in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. In numerous works of philosophy and fiction published over five decades Kirk set out a vision of the United States in particular and Western civilization more generally as a social order founded upon an inherited tradition of values in which Christian theology played a crucial role. Kirk wrote of a moral order that transcended human judgment and intelligence; permanent moral truths did exist that if adhered to could create an inner harmony of the soul and an outer harmony of society. These truths were to be found within the customs, conventions, and continuities of societies that embodied the accumulated wisdom of many generations and reflected a divinely-inspired natural order.

Kirk's conservatism, then, can be located firmly in the Burkean tradition that warns of the dangers of destroying social institutions that may not satisfy the demands of rational analysis but nevertheless perform an important social function that may not always be easily identified or articulated. For example,

although gradations of status and class may upset modern egalitarian sensibilities, Kirk warned that the destruction of such natural distinctions disturbs the natural order of things and may leave a vacuum to be filled by oligarchs and tyrants. Hence, for Kirk, reason was an important human quality, but it is a mistake to place so much faith in reason that we become blind to the presence of an over-arching and transcendent moral framework that orders human affairs.

In this excellent book, Professor John Pafford of Northwood University, a former student and friend of Russell Kirk, sets out Kirk's thought in the context of Kirk's life and times. He shows how an appreciation of Kirk's careful synthesis of theology and philosophy is crucial to an understanding of modern American conservatism and contemporary conservative thought more generally. The author also sets out the sometimes strained relationship between Kirk's conservatism and libertarian ideas. By so doing, this volume makes a crucial contribution to the *Major Conservative and Libertarian Thinkers* series. It is a book that will prove indispensable to those unfamiliar with Kirk's work as well as more advanced scholars.

John Meadowcroft  
King's College London



## List of Abbreviations

<i>American Cause, The</i>	TAC
<i>America's British Culture</i>	ABC
<i>Conservative Constitution, The</i>	TCC
<i>Conservative Mind, The</i>	TCM
<i>Creature of the Twilight, A</i>	COTT
<i>Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning</i>	DAR
<i>Economics: Work and Prosperity</i>	EWP
<i>Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered</i>	EB
<i>Eliot and His Age</i>	EAHA
<i>Enemies of the Permanent Things</i>	EPT
<i>Politics of Prudence, The</i>	POP
<i>Princess of All Lands, The</i>	PAL
<i>Program for Conservatives, A</i>	PFC
<i>Reclaiming a Patrimony</i>	RAP
<i>Redeeming the Time</i>	RTT
<i>Roots of American Order</i>	RAO
<i>Sword of Imagination, The</i>	TSI
<i>Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written on the Sky, The</i>	WMK

# Contents

<i>Series Editor's Preface</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 The Life of Russell Kirk</b>	<b>5</b>
Early Years	5
Life in Academe	12
Scholar and Squire	15
Politics	19
Evening	23
<b>3 Russell Kirk's Beliefs</b>	<b>27</b>
The Conservative Mind	27
Intellectual Influences	35
Education	48
Economics	51
Libertarianism	56
Neoconservatism	58
Foreign Policy	61
Multiculturalism	64
Kirk's Christianity	68
Church and State	74
Natural Law	79

Democracy, Aristocracy, and the American Founding	83
Summation	87
<b>4 Reception of His Writings</b>	<b>96</b>
Kirk vs. Jaffa	110
America's British Culture	113
The Sword of Imagination	117
Negative Responses	119
Fiction	125
Epilogue	134
<b>5 The Relevance of Kirk</b>	<b>138</b>
The Relevance of Kirk as Seen by Others	138
How and Why	139
Keeping Lit the Flame	150
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 157
<i>Index</i>	161

## Introduction

Assuming that the person being evaluated is honest, what that individual has to say about himself or herself should be the beginning point for the study; the words then should be analyzed in the light of what is known concerning how that person lived. With people of integrity, there is consistency between profession and practice. Anyone who knew Russell Kirk knew such a man. Although those who write about themselves are trying to shape how future generations will view them, the Russell Kirk who is found in his memoirs as well as in his fiction and nonfiction writings does not differ from the man known to his family, friends, and colleagues. In my case, I not only read Kirk's works, but the privilege was mine to have had him as a mentor and as a friend.

I first encountered Kirk's writings in 1968. At that time, I was teaching history at Highland College, a now defunct Christian institution in Pasadena, California, and working part-time as a research analyst at the Christian Freedom Foundation in Los Angeles. Howard Kershner was the president and G. Edward Rowe the executive director—the man who hired me. One of my assignments was to read Kirk's *Enemies of the Permanent Things* and give Rowe a synopsis of it. This book made a deep impact on me. Here were clear and profound thoughts on our past and

present; I experienced a sense of intellectual excitement, of understanding with greater lucidity what hitherto had been more dimly perceived.

My meeting Kirk did not happen until November 1976 after my family and I moved to Midland, Michigan where I began my still continuing association with Northwood University as a professor of history. We arrived in August of that year. It took me several weeks to settle in and attempt to contact the man who had become my intellectual hero. I supposed that someone of his prominence either had an unlisted telephone number or, if not, would be difficult to approach. On both counts I was wrong. After getting his number from information, I called his home, asked for him, and introduced myself. He thereupon invited my wife and me for Sunday afternoon tea, commencing almost two decades of inspiration, guidance, and friendship.

The one hour drive from Midland to Kirk's residence in Mecosta was enjoyable, especially going by the farmland, open fields, and scattered groves of trees in the rolling countryside between Mount Pleasant and Mecosta. The latter is a small town, now past its prime which was back in the 1880s when lumbering in Michigan was at its peak. Today the village stretches a couple of blocks along both sides of a wide part of Michigan route 20. Those who drive through the village heading west go up a slight rise, at the top of which on the left is the Kirk residence, Piety Hill, a large brick edifice with gargoyles, out of place in this community of smaller, mostly wood frame homes. Down the side street by the Kirk residence are several houses owned by a foundation supporting Kirk and his library which housed about 12,000 volumes.

Kirk himself turned out to be a genial gentleman of medium height and slightly rotund. In social settings he was rather shy although he could be coaxed into telling stories, he being a gifted raconteur. Generally, though, he did not control the flow of conversation, his wife Annette and frequently voluble guests handling that.

A couple of years later, Kirk informed me of his connection with International College in California, an institution with no central campus which brought together outstanding scholars and students, the students traveling to wherever the master tutor lived and spending as much time as necessary in residence to complete a prescribed course of study for a degree. Associated with International College, in addition to Kirk, were such luminaries as Eric von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Anais Nin, Buckminster Fuller, Laurence Durrell, and Yehudi Menuhin.

For somewhat over 4 years, I studied under Kirk for my Ph.D. in history. Generally I stayed in my office at Northwood weekdays after completing my teaching assignments, reading and writing until dinner and devoted most Saturdays to further research and writing. One or two Saturdays each month I drove to Mecosta to report on my progress and to sit enthralled in the Kirk library while he continued to amaze me with the breadth and depth of his knowledge and wisdom. Between sessions we had lunch, sometimes with other people visiting Piety Hill. Among those making pilgrimages to Mecosta were the grandson of the last Austro-Hungarian emperor, and people who had fled Communism such as two young members of one of the Ethiopian noble families, a Polish professor, a government official from Croatia, and former members of the South Vietnamese armed forces. Also well-known

individuals such as William F. Buckley and Malcolm Muggeridge journeyed there. Warm hospitality always was to be found at Piety Hill as were informative and stimulating seminars. Suffusing everything there was a palpable aura of Christian civilization.

## The Life of Russell Kirk

### Early Years<sup>1</sup>

Russell Amos Kirk was born on October 19, 1918, just over 3 weeks before the allied powers forced Germany to acknowledge defeat, bringing World War I to an end. The empires of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Turkey were no more. In their places were chaos and/or newer, smaller, weaker countries with the exception of the Turkish Empire whose sway over most of the Middle East was replaced by British and, to a lesser extent, French dominance. The victorious European powers—the United Kingdom, France, and Italy—were battered physically and psychologically in the wake of 4 years of bloody conflict. But, the United States into which Kirk was born had emerged stronger economically, militarily, and in terms of overall power and prestige. It was filled with vibrant, confident people. Yet, this time of great technological advancement also was a time when many foundational beliefs of Western Civilization increasingly were being challenged. Dull times did not lie ahead.

Kirk's parents were of middling means, his father a railroad engineer with less than 6 years of schooling, his mother the daughter of a restaurateur, later bank manager. The family home was near the rail yards in Plymouth,



Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. Seven years later, a sister, Carolyn, joined the family. They lived in a bungalow-style house on a tree-shaded street, a solid middle-class community with, by and large, honest, hardworking family people.

Coming close to death from nephritis, a serious kidney inflammation, Kirk was a sickly child until age 7. At first read to by his mother and her father, Frank Pierce, he later became a voracious reader. Young Kirk and his maternal grandfather became close, taking long walks together and discussing serious matters. Frank Pierce, a bank manager in Plymouth, had attended college for only one term, but had educated himself quite extensively, being especially interested in history. His home had the works of Macaulay, Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Mark Twain. Kirk, encountering great books and being given copies of them at early ages, became enthralled by the world of ideas and imagination. He retained happy memories of his childhood, especially of generations of family members interacting.

He attended the public schools of Plymouth beginning in 1922, a time when public education was substantially different. Kirk commented on his experiences there, writing that:

From kindergarten to graduation day, he<sup>2</sup> took it for granted that schools were orderly, safe, and reasonably pleasant places—an assumption that would be dispelled swiftly in most public schools seven decades later. (TSI, 25)

On a deeper level, even though the public schools did not seek to inculcate Christian verities, Kirk recalled: