



Edmund Burke -- Appalled
By a High Discount Rate

Now that the Republican Party is set to take control of the House, and maybe the Senate, we might want to ask what we might mean by a “conservative” environmental policy. I was thinking about this question the other day, and then by chance came across this passage from Russell Kirk’s major work, [The Conservative Mind: From to Burke to Eliot](#).

First, here’s a little of Burke:

One of the first and most leading principles on which the commonwealth and its law are consecrated, is lest the temporary possessors and life-renters in it, unmindful of what they have received from their ancestors, or of what is due their posterity, should act as if they were the entire masters, that they should not think it among their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance, by destroying at their pleasure the whole original fabric of their society, hazarding to leave to those who come afthe them a ruin instead of a habitation....

Suffice to say that Burke was no fan of a high discount rate.



Russell Kirk -- Closet Earth Day
Supporter

And neither was Kirk. In case you needed to put a finer point on it, Kirk comments:

If men are discharged of reverence for ancient usage, they will treat this world, almost certainly, as if it were their private property, to be consumed for their sensual gratification; and thus they will destroy in their lust for enjoyment the prosperity of future generations....*The modern spectacle of vanihsed forests and eroded lands, wasted petroleum and ruthless mining...is evidence of what an age without reverence does to itself and its successors.*

(Emphasis mine). It’s important to note that Kirk had no use for libertarian conservatives;

indeed, perhaps the only thing that libertarians and traditionalists like Kirk have in common is their abiding love for inequality.

But you might keep these quotes and ideas in mind the next time someone insists, as Ronald Reagan did, that the root of “conservative” comes from “conserve.” We’ve come a long way from there.