

# Who's Really Conservative?

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**R**arely has the debate between right and left been more vibrant than it is as we enter this election year, a year when the very soul of the country is at stake, and will be decided in the November election.

The Republican candidates each tell us how they are more conservative than the other guy, while the President, running 24/7 for reelection, juggles his constituents on the left while trying to persuade voters in the middle that he is no leftist, just trying to help the vast middle class at the expense of “the rich.”

It is no easy task, on our side, to know which is the imposter and which the real conservative. I find it useful, therefore, to go back and look at the fundamentals, the philosophy and ideas that make up the foundation of conservatism, and then to try to assess where each of these so-called conservatives really stands. To do so should take considerable more space than this short editorial allows. Dozens, if not hundreds, of books have been published on the topic (some by me). But let's look quickly at the basics.

Conservatives believe in four essential things:

The first is liberty, as established by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It means to be free of oppressive government power, to have the ability to pursue one's dreams, to participate in a free market, and to worship and speak out for or against what one believes.

Second is the rule of law: a set of equitable and predictable rules to promote prosperity and to preserve liberty, rules that are based on natural law and won't be changed by the whims of a ruler, politician, or judge. Rules, as well, that apply equally to the governed and to the government.

Third is tradition and order: belief in the norms that have been built over centuries and reflect human nature. They include honor and reason, and help maintain an orderly and virtuous society.

Fourth is God, or at least a power greater than man. It is the moral order that transcends politics, establishes limits to our self-importance, and dampens what we think we can do to or for our fellow man. These four pillars are all interdependent, and virtually all conservative philosophy flows from them.

To the liberal, security is more important than liberty. To him the law is a means to an end rather than an end in itself and subject to change to meet the requirements of the day. Tradition and order are old-fashioned concepts that simply impede the liberal's desire to do good. And finally, he believes that liberal man is infallible, has all the answers, and through his genius can use the power of government to create heaven on earth.

How does any of this apply to the current crop of candidates? Probably not very well, and I doubt that even the most conservative politicians think much about the fundamentals. And besides, policies are so muddled, and most politicians so ingrained in the system built by liberal elites, that it is hard to know what their political philosophy really is. But it may be worth a shot to try to discern it, which I will leave up to you, our readers.

The good news is that in the long run, it is ideas, not politicians, that prevail--which is why the debate that we are now engaged in, and that will be so vigorously exercised during 2012, is so important.