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# Permanent Things



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## Kirk Center Participates in Summit for Conservatives and Progressives



The Kirk Center continues to enjoy an engaging partnership with the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies at Grand Valley State University that brings conservative and liberal intellectuals together to explore not just what they disagree on, but where they might find common ground. The “Common Ground” initiative at Grand Valley has successfully introduced thoughtfully conservative voices into the predominantly progressive culture of the

modern university, allowing the foundational ideas of conservatism and progressive liberalism to be seen in juxtaposition to each other.

For several decades, Russell Kirk frequently engaged in civil discourse with thinkers taking opposing views. One of his most famous debates was with Arthur Schlesinger Jr, a leading liberal historian of the last century. Kirk and Schlesinger engaged in a conversation about the meaning of conservatism and liberalism both in print and in person. The inset picture was captured from a video recording of a fire-side conversation in 1980. It is the kind of model the Hauenstein Center is promoting in its Common Ground Initiative.

The Kirk Center co-sponsored the “Common Ground Summit: Progressive/Conservative” in April, 2016. Annette Kirk, President of The Russell Kirk Center, is seen here signing and exchanging books with E.J. Dionne, liberal political commentator and op-ed columnist for *The Washington Post*. Over the course of three days, participants explored the question: Is common ground possible between liberals and conservatives?



On this occasion, Gleaves Whitney, Director of The Hauenstein Center, sought to bring “together thought leaders from the right and left, and from inside and outside the academy, to discuss how the collision of progressivism and conservatism in America shapes our national identity.”

(continued on page 3)

## Student Seminars Flourish at the Kirk Center



Graduate students who earned fellowships from the Intercollegiate Students Institute (ISI) gathered for a long weekend seminar to discuss some of the key figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. Conducted in partnership with the Liberty Fund, sixteen participants considered the legacies of Adam Smith, David Hume, and Adam Ferguson. Taking a coffee break are graduate students Michael Skiles (UCLA/Philosophy), Thomas Bell (UTX, Austin/Government), and Christine Basil (Baylor/Political Science). Professors Nick Capaldi and David Walsh guided the lively discussions.

A weekend at Piety Hill always includes a visit to the Mecosta Book Gallery. It is not unusual for students to leave with at least an arm-full of books.

This unique used bookstore has over 100,000 books which “fill shelves from the sloping floor to the pressed tin ceiling. Books are stacked on the bygone soda fountain and on the round stools...”, as the *Grand Rapids Press* put it in a recent feature article.



The Hillsdale College Collegiate Scholars visit the Kirk Center twice a year for a four-day seminar that includes Socratic discussion, informal conversation, and the many delights on offer at Piety Hill. This past seminar marked the final one for Dr. Richard Gamble as director of the program. Dr. Gamble has been an able mentor to the students and a great champion of the Kirk Center experience. Everyone toasted Dr. Gamble as he heads to Turkey to develop programs and publications, as well as continue his important work at Hillsdale.

## Two Generations of Kirk Center Archivists

For the last fifty years, Charles C. Brown has been the part-time archivist at the Kirk Center. Author of *Niebuhr and His Age: Reinhold Niebuhr's Prophetic Role and Legacy*, Brown compiled and edited *Russell Kirk: A Bibliography*. This spring, Alex Meregaglia, a graduate of Indiana University with a master's degree in both History and Library Science, worked alongside Brown on the archive. The Kirk library and archive remains a central part of the residential experience for student and faculty visitors.

While in residence at the Center, Meregaglia created a new finding aid for the collection. He was delighted to have the opportunity to work with an archive that contained several rare books including eighteenth century editions of the writings of Edmund Burke, correspondence from several U.S. Presidents, and also from famous literary figures of the twentieth century. Meregaglia recently accepted a position as Archivist and Assistant Professor at Boise State, but will make regular visits back to the Kirk Center to continue digitizing the archive.




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## Return to Civil Discourse (continued)

Whitney observed, "Today, the widening gap between the left and right, as well as the fractures inside the Democratic and Republican parties, have caused widespread political confusion and upheaval. Ideological gridlock dominates the headlines, while reasoned and substantive political discussion often devolves into talking-head repartee and triumphalist chest thumping."

The conference was filled with lively debates and discussions on topics including:

- ♦ William F. Buckley, Jr. and Norman Mailer: prolific writers on the right and left
- ♦ George Nash: "The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America"
- ♦ Liberal Stalwarts: John S. Mill, John Dewey and Jane Addams
- ♦ Cultural Conservatives: Russell Kirk, T.S. Eliot, and Peter Viereck
- ♦ A Keynote Discussion between E.J. Dionne and David Hollinger on religious liberalism and secular liberalism

Pictured here with Annette Kirk are Gleaves Whitney and Noreen Meyers, Chair of the Progressive Women's Alliance of West Michigan, also a sponsor of the event.



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Recent Books and Articles on Kirk Reframe his Contributions



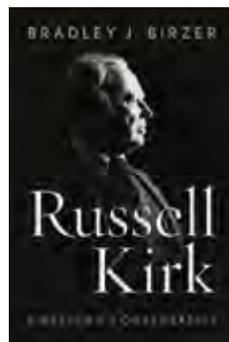
**Russell Kirk: A Critical Biography of a Conservative Mind**  
James E. Person, Jr.

Person surveys and analyzes Kirk's writings and thought with such enthusiasm and so appealingly that many readers may conclude that another conservative revival is devoutly to be wished for.

Ray Olson, Booklist

A concise, lucid tour of the writings and wide-ranging ideas of the American regarded in many quarters as "the founder of the modern conservative movement." . . . Person offers an excellent guide to his legacy.

Kirkus Reviews



**Russell Kirk: American Conservative**  
Bradley J. Birzer, PhD

Birzer's penetrating look at the life and thought of Russell Kirk places him at the fountainhead of the conservative movement we have inherited today. Love or hate Kirk, this should be required reading for conservatives who wish to rediscover their roots, and perhaps refurbish our politics with the permanent things.

Daniel Davis, The Washington Times

Birzer calls "The Conservative Mind" a "postmodern hagiography." It is an apt description. Kirk's mighty intelligence was, in retrospect, that of a curator or anthologist, not that of a creator. To say so is not to demean him. Kirk's guiding principle was that when the subject is human nature, nothing is ever really created. Institutions, traditions and wisdom are either handed down or, if need be, rediscovered.

Christopher Caldwell, The New York Times Book Review

This biography serves to show how conservatives like Kirk sought to recover civilization from the ashes of war and collapse: one book, one line, one thought at a time.

Daniel McCarthy, The American Conservative

The latest **Michigan Historical Review**, includes two research articles on Kirk:

- ♦ "An Experiment in the Moral Imagination: Russell Kirk, Clinton Wallace, and Conservative Hobohemia," by Andrina Tran, winner of the journal's 2015 Graduate Student Essay Prize. Tran investigates the devoted friendship between one of Michigan's most prominent intellectuals and a hobo named Clinton Wallace.
- ♦ "No Refuge from Modernity?: The Intersections of American and Japanese Conservatism, Russell Kirk and Shirasu Jirō," by Jason Morgan

To purchase a paper copy of *The Michigan Historical Review*, spring 2016, Volume 42, No. 1, send your request, with name and address, along with a check for \$10.00 to:  
Susan Paton, The MHR Park 139A -  
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