

William F. Buckley, Jr. on Collectivism, Morality, and Power

Today is the tenth anniversary of the death of William F. Buckley, Jr., founder of National Review and the [father of postwar American conservatism](#). In his honor, here are six quotes by the inimitable writer on collectivism, freedom, and power.

[On government power \(I\)](#): “The government can’t do anything for you, except in proportion as it can do something to you.”

[On government power \(II\)](#): “[A] democracy can itself be as tyrannical as a dictatorship, since it is the *extent*, not the *source*, of government power that impinges on freedom.”

[On collectivism](#): “Back in the thirties we were told we must collectivize the nation because the people were so poor. Now we are told we must collectivize the nation because the people are so rich.”

[On majoritarianism and freedom](#): “We are so concerned to flatter the majority that we lose sight of how very often it is necessary, in order to preserve freedom for the minority, let alone for the individual, to face that majority down.”

[On laws and morality](#): “All that is good is not embodied in the law, and all that is evil is not proscribed by the law. A well-disciplined society needs few laws, but it needs strong mores.”

[On freedom and power](#): “I will not cede more power to the state. I will not willingly cede more power to anyone, not to the state, not to General Motors, not to the CIO. I will hoard my power like a miser, resisting every effort to drain it away

from me. I will then use my power, as I see fit. I mean to live my life an obedient man, but obedient to God, subservient to the wisdom of my ancestors; never to the authority of political truths arrived at yesterday at the voting booth. That is a program of sorts, is it not? It is certainly program enough to keep conservatives busy, and Liberals at bay. And the nation free.”

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Joe Carter is a Senior Editor at the Acton Institute. [This Acton Institute article](#) was republished with permission.

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