

R. S. Downie (U of Glasgow). "Reform."

In *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 753.

**reform.** The attempt to improve social, political, or legal institutions or policies without altering what is fundamental to them. The distinction between reform, as described above, and change (which does attempt to alter what is fundamental) was introduced by Burke and made by him central to \*conservatism. The distinction can be used to defend the politics of modifying tradition against those of revolution. Yet the distinction between reform and change can be hard to defend in many political contexts, partly because it is not always clear what is of the essence and what is simply an accident, and partly because of uncertainty about how long a change has to be in existence before it ceases to be a change and becomes a new tradition. Moreover, even if the distinction can be clarified, it cannot be used to characterize all forms of conservatism because some, such as the New Right in the United Kingdom, are in favour of certain kinds of revolutionary change.

R.S.D.

E. Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796).

A. Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection: The Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in England from Hooker to Oakeshott* (London, 1978).