

# On the Murder of Charlie Kirk: The Left and the Loss of the Tragic Sensibility

By Patrick Keeney

The news of Charlie Kirk's assassination reached me just as I



sent an email to my editor at C2C to discuss a submission regarding another subject. He'd been concerned it had "the air of someone attempting to play cricket against barbarians with rocket launchers and hand grenades." I countered that, though it may be a hopelessly outdated instinct, I remain committed to what the conservative philosopher [Michael](#)

[Oakeshott](#) called "the conversation of mankind". Oakeshott hoped that amidst the propaganda, ideology and raw partisanship of politics, reasoned voices of conviction and civility might still prevail.

Kirk embodied this conversational approach to politics. I was not his follower nor necessarily a fan of all his political views, but his presence in American politics was inescapable. As the founder of the grassroots organization [Turning Point USA](#), he brought hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of young people over to conservatism. He did so in an, for our time, unusual way: by touring university campuses, inviting

only to the microphone. In focusing on universities, Kirk strode into the lion's den: ground zero of the culture wars (as [we have described it](#)), the fountainhead of postmodernism, critical theory and wokism.



*The conversation of mankind: Charlie Kirk, the late founder of Turning Point USA, dedicated his life to spreading conservative values through engaging in conversations with students across university campuses – the ground zero of the culture wars. (Source of photos: Gage Skidmore, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0)*

As [Johnathan Turley](#), professor of public interest law at George Washington University, put it, “He was particularly hated for holding a mirror to the face of higher education, exposing the hate and hypocrisy on our campuses.” So for the many young conservatives who felt intimidated or dismissed on this increasingly unsafe terrain, Kirk’s model of calm and grounded civility was empowering. His message was: don’t be

afraid, stand firm and argue your point. Kirk clearly enjoyed engaging with others, taking even the most hostile questions seriously, listening sincerely and responding with a mix of good humour, confidence and reasoned argument rather than rancour. "Disagreement," he liked to say, "is a healthy part of our systems."

Kirk was a fan of Donald Trump, and Turning Point USA unquestionably helped get Trump re-elected last November, so Kirk was called all the predictable names: extremist, racist, anti-trans, Hitler, liar. He was routinely misquoted or had

He met such slurs with civility, striving to refute rather than retaliate. Habitually attacked as a “fascist”, Kirk vigorously defended Jews and Israel. He carried himself with a composure that belied his youth. His foray to the UK in May to [debate](#) at Cambridge and Oxford quickly became the stuff of legend.



**George Abaraonye**  
CHARLIE KIRK GOT SHOT LET'S F GO 🙏

**Mic Rex** 19h · 🌐  
**On Charlie Kirk:**  
**Thoughts & Prayers**  
**Oh, AND Kharma is a beautiful bitch.**

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Shooting is honestly too good for so many of you fascist c-----  
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JK Rowling next

*Kirk's assassination triggered a large wave of dismissive, heartless and outright repugnant posts. Some even called for the killing of other influential conservative figures, such as Matt Walsh, Ben Shapiro, J.K. Rowling and, of course, Donald Trump. (Source of top photo: JFeed)*

So the reaction from large swathes of the left around the world to Kirk's death by an assassin's bullet on September 10 at Utah Valley University in Orem, before an audience of 3,000 and beneath a banner reading "Prove Me Wrong", has been especially chilling and ominous. News and social media as well

as the political arena all swelled with callousness, self-righteous dismissiveness, gloating and even calls to arms, with some presenting the 31-year-old's demise as a model to replicate. "He got what he deserved" and "good riddance to the fascist" were some of the milder examples. [Some openly called for more killings](#), including of J.K. Rowling, Ben Shapiro, Elon Musk and Donald Trump. A conservative group began [tracking such utterances](#) and, within four days, had a list of more than 50,000.

A motion for [a minute of silence in Congress](#) to honour Kirk was booed by some Democratic members. Only a day earlier, Democratic Senator Chris Murphy had thundered that, "We're in a war to save this country," adding, "you have to be willing to do whatever is necessary" to win. Employees at a Michigan Office Depot [refused to print posters](#) announcing a prayer vigil for Kirk. A serving agent of the U.S. Secret Service was caught posting that Kirk taking a bullet to the neck, bleeding out on stage and leaving behind a wife and two young children, was "karma". And George Abaraonye – the Oxford Union President-elect and who supports the violent destruction of Western institutions – [in multiple posts](#) celebrated the murder of the man he had not only debated but whom he had met with first and shared drinks with afterwards, [including one reading](#), "Charlie Kirk got shot, let's f— go."

I have often been perplexed why it is that those who most loudly proclaim their devotion to abstract virtues like love, tolerance, diversity, inclusivity, social justice and anti-fascism habitually justify cruelty and violence in the name of their ideals. It is as if the louder one speaks of one's love of humanity, the easier it becomes to ignore and even reject – sometimes gleefully – simple human decency. As Sasha Stone [wrote on her Substack](#), "The Left has been hijacked by the modern equivalent of the Manson Family."

How did it become practically a mark of *virtue* to cheer for the death of a fellow human being? Part of the explanation, I

believe, lies in what the literary critic [George Steiner](#) called the death of the tragic vision of human existence. In [The Death of Tragedy \(1961\)](#), Steiner argued that tragedy, once the supreme expression of human grandeur amid inevitable suffering, had perished in Western culture. Its loss, he insisted, was not merely aesthetic but civilizational.

The tragic view holds that suffering is not accidental but essential to the human condition. Fate, chance and defect cannot be mastered or abolished by will, only endured with dignity. Chance, flaw and necessity are woven into the fabric of existence. This recognition sets the tragic sensibility apart from utopian political schemes of collective redemption. Enlightenment rationalism imagined the world as scientifically knowable and thus, in theory, perfectible; Marxism reinterpreted conflict as class struggle destined to culminate in utopia; the managerial state promised that expertise, data and regulation would eliminate disorder.

But when we forget life's finitude, suffering and intrinsic, immutable flaws, politics ceases to be the art of prudence and compromise, becoming a fever dream of utopia. And once utopia is the goal, violence is reimagined as purification, cruelty as the ticket to redemption. History offers grim reminders. The French Revolution's Reign of Terror claimed untold lives in the name of liberty. Stalin's gulags promised the dawn of equality. Mao's Cultural Revolution and Pol Pot's killing fields styled themselves as pathways to purity. Each horror arose from the refusal to accept what late 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant so memorably expressed: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever built."



Literary critic George Steiner observed that Western culture has lost its essential, civilizational component – tragic sensibility; yet, by forgetting life's finite quality and our immutable flaws and limitations, we risk abandoning the path of humility and compromise for the sake of utopian goals. Depicted at right, *The Last Day of Pompeii*, by Karl Brulov. (Source of left photo: [Mikel Agirregabiria Agirre](#), licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#))

The tragic sensibility is not equivalent to fatalism, let alone nihilism; it does not regard human life and history as accumulations of catastrophes. The tragic vision *does* recognize limits and, thus, tempers ambition with humility. It teaches that our motives are mixed, our victories partial, our knowledge flawed, and that human beings are capable of nobility and depravity, generosity and cruelty, great insight and blinding ignorance. To acknowledge this crookedness is not despair but clarity. Only those who accept the tragic limits of the human condition can hope to build anything that lasts.

“Tragedy speaks of the dignity of man as he is, not of man as he might wish to be,” Steiner wrote. Kirk himself frequently urged against seeking utopianism and for recognizing limits. Losing this perspective means forgetting our limits and opening the door to the cruelties of those who believe themselves pure. Politics thus becomes a substitute religion. It ceases to seek compromise and instead promises salvation through power. Opponents turn into enemies, compromise becomes betrayal, disagreement breeds enmity, and violence follows. Those who see themselves as righteous feel justified in demonizing and destroying.

This impulse is not confined to the left, though its current expression there is particularly striking given its rhetoric of compassion. What is cloaked in the language of virtue is often little more than the intoxication of self-righteousness. And self-righteousness untempered by humility is lethal. This danger is not abstract but immediate, made chillingly clear in the figure of Charlie Kirk's accused assassin, 22-year-old Tyler James Robinson.



*Although raised in a conservative family, Kirk's accused assassin, 22-year-old Tyler James Robinson (left), later drifted leftward and embraced strong anti-conservative and pro-trans views. At right, Kirk speaks before being shot during Turning Point's visit to Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah, September 10, 2025. (Sources of photos: (left) Utah Department of Public Safety; (right) Tess Crowley/The Deseret News via AP)*

Although some media sources initially attempted to portray Robinson as “right-wing” or “MAGA” – at least one outlet even claimed Robinson attacked Kirk for not being right-wing enough – a large body of facts was quickly accumulated. Robinson was raised in a stable, middle-class, politically conservative family with two parents married for more than 25 years, who were actively engaged in their three sons' lives. In recent years, however, Robinson drifted noticeably leftward. He enrolled on scholarship in Utah State University, reportedly earning a 4.0 grade-point average, but soon dropped out.

His outright radicalization was, apparently, quite recent, and seems to have been driven or at least influenced by his roommate and lover, Lance Twiggs, who recently began

transitioning to a female self-identity. Robinson recently described himself as a leftist and expressed his hatred for Trump. The shell casings on the murder weapon – an ordinary bolt-action rifle – were minutely engraved with symbols, abbreviations and sayings indicating hard-left, anti-conservative and/or pro-trans sentiments. None of the aforementioned facts are social media speculation; all were provided in [public briefings by Utah's Governor, Spencer Cox](#) or other public officials. On Tuesday, Robinson was arraigned and [formally charged](#) with aggravated murder, a capital offence in Utah.

One can imagine Robinson, cloaked in the illusion of righteousness, seeing himself as a moral agent striking a blow against evil. In such a mindset, the opponent is no longer a fellow mortal – flawed, finite and vulnerable – but a cipher, a symbol of oppression, a barrier to redemption. The act of murder is seen not as malice but as necessity, the price of purity. Ideology masquerading as virtue – what Steiner warned would emerge when societies deny the tragic condition of mankind. Thus the logic of the post-tragic mind: the refusal to recognize in one's adversary crooked timber like oneself. On the urging of his family, Robinson turned himself in to the authorities, who say his roommate/lover has been cooperating with the investigation.

Canadians often imagine themselves immune to such eruptions. We flatter ourselves as a kinder, gentler people, protected by compromise, multiculturalism and tolerance. Yet our history tells another story. The October Crisis of 1970 saw a cabinet minister murdered in the name of Quebec independence. The Air India bombing of 1985 was instigated in Canada and killed 329 people, most of them Canadians. In 2021, following the unproven claims of unmarked graves at former Indian Residential Schools, more than 70 churches – Catholic, Anglican and others – were vandalized or burned across the country. For the past two years, nearly continuous protests

have signalled a desire to demonize and even kill Jews.

Violence dressed as righteousness, then, is not alien to the Canadian soul. Such episodes show that our self-declared creed of multiculturalism, politeness and tolerance is no vaccine against extremism. Indeed, Canadian self-satisfaction may itself be a dangerous ideology, one that blinds us to alienation, dislocation and the erosion of shared meaning. We “celebrate” “diversity” as the left defines these terms, but neglect the moral and civic formation that makes genuine diversity, including of belief and opinion, sustainable.



*Kirk's death serves as a reminder that Canada, despite its multiculturalism and self-proclaimed tolerance, is by no means immune to ideological destructions. At top left, the body of Pierre Laporte, deputy premier of Quebec, who was kidnapped and later killed by Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) terrorists during the October Crisis, 1970; at top right, the remains of victims from the Air India Flight 182 catastrophe, June 1985; at bottom, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church (left) in Chopaka, B.C and St. Jean Baptiste Catholic Church (right) in Morinville, Alberta destroyed by arson. (Sources of photos: (top left) CP Wirephoto; (top right) Cork University Hospital)*

It is noteworthy that Canadians have matched Kirk's worst American enemies in ghoulish hatefulness and vitriol. "Shooting is honestly too good for so many of you fascist c--," [posted Ruth Marshall](#), an associate professor of religion

and politics at the University of Toronto, just hours after Kirk's slaying. (Marshall had previously referred to mainstream conservative Canadian media outlets as "fascist".) An acquaintance of mine tells of how her granddaughter's school classmates erupted in cheers and applause upon learning of Kirk's death, while the teacher watched impassively. A Toronto teacher went one better, [showing](#) a roomful of elementary kids the graphic assassination video and reportedly declaring that Kirk "deserved" what he got.

Although terror attacks, murders and assassinations are nothing new to either country, I believe our present moment is uniquely vulnerable. Wokist ideology continues to march through Canada's institutions, dispensing its toxic brew (though it is being broadly resisted in the U.S.). Social media amplifies outrage, rewarding fury while punishing restraint. Every disagreement becomes an "existential crisis". Every opponent to the right is cast as Hitler. The language of "emergency", "racism" and "genocide" saturates politics. The path from rhetorical violence to physical violence grows short. Politicians, journalists and, now, private citizens face death threats – and more. To borrow from Ernest Hemingway's famous line about bankruptcy, the corrosion of civic peace happens gradually, then suddenly.

What is to be done? I believe the antidote is not panic or repression, let alone a resort to popular violence as some are intimating on the right (and as some on the left are already practising), but recovery of the tragic wisdom that tempers politics with humility. This requires cultural renewal. We need to cultivate the virtues that allow citizens to live with difference, making civic peace possible: prudence, courage, humility and charity. The humanities, once guardians of civilization's fragility, must reclaim that role.



*As wokist ideology continues to march through the West, it destroys civil conversation and fuels rhetorical violence; from there, the path to physical violence becomes increasingly shorter. At top left, Donald Trump immediately after an assassination attempt, July 2024. At top right, Ukrainian refugee Iryna Zarutka was stabbed to death on a train in Charlotte, North Carolina, a victim of woke-inspired weak law enforcement. At bottom left, Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Lynn Milgrim, who were killed outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C., May 2025; at bottom right, students board a bus following a shooting at the Abundant Life Christian School, December 2024. (Sources of photos: (top left) Hu Yousong/Xinhua via ZUMA Press; (bottom left) Embassy of Israel to the USA; (bottom right) AP Photo/Morry Gash)*

We need a civic ethos that balances rights with responsibilities, freedom with duty, diversity with shared norms. Without restraint, pluralism degenerates into tribalism. Religious faith – or at least the metaphysical imagination it nurtures – once reminded us of mystery and of limits, engendering (and in Christianity’s case, actively urging) humility. Even for the secular, the recognition that reality exceeds our grasp can serve as a check against hubris. As the Anglo-Irish philosopher and novelist [Iris Murdoch](#) observed, the moral life begins in attention, in looking outward toward something beyond the self. That act is

itself an antidote to ideology. The tragic sensibility makes one much less likely to exult in another's death, instead recognizing the helplessness that, in the end, we all have in common.

We must also speak frankly about the dangers of utopian extremism. Cold War-era Russian dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose suffering gave him every excuse to hate the other side and elevate his own to purity, put it eloquently in his magisterial [\*The Gulag Archipelago\*](#): “[T]he line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” Such understanding powerfully counters ideologies that would divide the world into a binary of the pure and the impure, oppressor and oppressed, enlightened and benighted. The battle is not merely political but spiritual, within each human heart – and that recognition both demands and engenders humility.



*"The movement my husband built will not die": In her first public appearance following her husband's death (top), Erika Kirk promised listeners that she would continue Kirk's movement and help amplify his voice. At bottom right, Charlie and Erika Kirk with their young children, 2025. (Sources: (top screenshot) @charliekirk11/X); (bottom left photo) Gage Skidmore from Surprise, AZ, United States of America, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0; (bottom right photo) @MrsErikaKirk/X)*

I see hope in the soul-stirring response of Erika Kirk, who, even in the wake of her husband's assassination, insisted that civility, dialogue and courage are not relics of a vanished

past but imperatives for the present. As she declared in her first public address after his death, [“The movement my husband built will not die. It won’t. I refuse to let that happen.”](#) In the 48 hours following Kirk’s death, Turning Point USA [reported over 32,000 inquiries](#) to start new campus chapters.

The worldwide outpouring of sympathy and support for Kirk (including from the Cambridge Union) has been similarly heartening. Canadians took part in this as well, with vigils in multiple cities and a [powerful tribute](#) in the House of Commons by Conservative MP Rachel Thomas, with some Liberal MPs and ministers joining the Conservative caucus in a standing ovation. And a hopeful sign that at least some on the other side understand the situation’s gravity are the widespread disciplinary actions, including firings, levied against some of the more vicious gloaters.

Amidst these glimmerings, however, Kirk’s murder remains a warning. It was, after all, on a campus, the landscape where Kirk chose to engage, where he thought the campaign for the minds of young people would be won or lost, that he was killed. Was Kirk himself attempting to play cricket against barbarians? One wonders. Notwithstanding Erika Kirk’s outstanding magnanimity, numerous younger American conservatives are warning that this event will radicalize them and that dialogue is even less likely than before.



*Heartfelt outpourings of sympathy and support for Kirk have spread across the world. At top, Calgarians gather at their city hall for a vigil honouring Kirk; at middle, Britons hold a banner in memory of Kirk during the Tommy Robinson-led Unite the Kingdom march in London, attended by more than a million people (bottom). (Sources of photos: (top) @TheRealKean/X; (middle) Jamie Lashmar/PA Wire; (bottom) @Worldsource24/X)*

And for Canadians to think “it can’t happen here” is the surest way to guarantee it will. The erosion of civic peace stems from ideological righteousness, the loss of the tragic

sense and the abandonment of humility. Winston Churchill once mocked the “bloody-minded professors” whose grand theories paved the road to ruin. His words echo in our present, as we’ve seen.

Every destructive ideology cloaks itself in virtue, granting permission to demonize opponents and demand sacrifices. And when the tragic vision is forgotten, those sacrifices are always paid in blood. Canada’s responsibility, like that of every free society, is to confront its history honestly and protect the delicate experiment of ordered liberty with the sobriety taught by tragedy. As history has demonstrated – from Athens to Paris, from Moscow to Beijing, and now in the 21st-century West – when the tragic sense is lost, the unrestrained rhetoric of virtue turns into the justification for violence.

Charlie Kirk’s assassination reminds us of these truths with terrible clarity. It exposes the left’s troubling embrace of ideological righteousness and the peril of a politics that forgets humility. His death lays bare the fragility of civil discourse and the dangers of a political imagination that refuses to acknowledge human limits. When the tragic wisdom is abandoned, utopian illusions rush in, promising paradise but delivering blood. The tragic vision counsels us to temper politics with humility, without which freedom cannot endure. Perhaps I *am* attempting to play cricket in a war zone, but that is who I am.

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