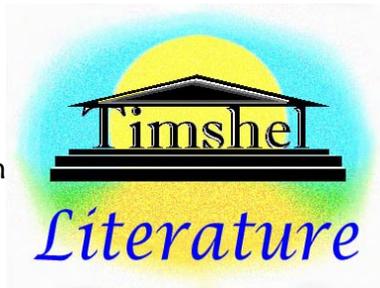


Justin Katz

Timshel Literature

jkatz@timshelarts.com



www.timshelarts.com

P.O. Box 751

Portsmouth, RI 02871

401-835-7156

Conservatives, Beware Your Reaction

by Justin Katz

When I was a teenager in the days of the Bush-Clinton transfer, I fell for the line, promoted by most of the counter-cultural icons (of the previous generation, for the most part) after whom I modeled my opinions, that all that was “liberal” was right and fair and all that was “conservative” was selfish and oppressive. Since then, I have come to the conclusion that the reality is quite the opposite: liberalism, as it has become defined over the past 30 years, is a belief that allows its adherents to be lazily selfish. I don’t mean laziness in the sense that career welfare recipients are lazy, nor do I mean the type of lazy greed that is satisfied by the easy answer of a lawsuit. The core laziness of *en masse* liberals (OK, I’ll say it: modern Democrats) is that their politics amount to a series of shallowly conceived, knee-jerk reactions to a world that is never — not rarely, but never — enduringly blissful (which would, in my opinion, make it a much less enjoyable world to inhabit).

This conclusion is, of course, nothing new; in fact, it’s such a cliché that, as a slight, it is as easily dismissed as claims that doomsday is just around the corner. A slightly less cliché extension of this statement is that an inherent element of a tendency toward knee-jerk reactions is a lack of concern about the objects of those reactions. For a great number of the vociferously Democratic, this element is manifest in the conviction that voting “liberally” is all that’s required to be a good person; after the election, they can go back to their self-involved lives, motivated

only to recite the occasional party line, as culled from sound bites, to remind those around them of their voting records. All of their causes, in short, are secondary to the cause of self-exaltation.

This self-interested indolence became embodied for me around a corporate lunch table when a female Product Manager — who was prone to insulting George W. Bush with whatever insults she had read in the headlines — stated that “charity is what religion is for” (that from a woman who would undoubtedly rail against “faith-based initiatives”). She also bragged that, as she and her husband had begun to earn decent money, she had ceased to help out her prodigal brother. “Teach a man to fish,” she said, while not indicating that she had done more than kick him out of the pantry. Both of these statements seem to evince a superficiality in her party affiliation since Democrats tend to vote as if charity is what *government* is for and the underlying panacea of their philosophy would be “more fish” if that phrase weren’t reflected so exactly in scripture. But it is another of this middle manager’s statements that has prompted me to write this essay. She seemed to conveniently defend the greed and mammonistic philandering of the ultra-rich so that she would not prove to be a hypocrite if she were ever to become ultra-rich herself. Somehow, though, spurious defense of the wealthy had been one of the deplorable activities that I had learned to despise in Republicans as a teenager.

Whatever the political moniker of the person laying a moral groundwork for retaining a ridiculous fortune one day, the chance of ever leaning actual wealth upon this groundwork is illusory, even as a fantasy, let alone as a tangible enough possibility to merit holding one’s tongue among peers. Being disillusioned on this count must ultimately lead to a confession that, despite so many “converts to conservatism,” I have never heard among modern conservatives: there is much that is appealing about socialism, even communism, philosophically. As an

underlying concept, “give what you can, take what you need” ought to be the official watermark on the stationery on which all policies are written.

If it is true that liberals make emotional demands without thinking, perhaps it is also true that conservatives, being more concerned with process, have deemed humanity’s greed to be so indomitable that the only way to curb it is to harness it as society’s driving force. This is why, as much as I would like to direct my entire store of scorn toward the left, discrepancies of class are pivotal in keeping me from losing my individuality to any point along the political spectrum. It is just wrong for a company to “eliminate the positions” of thousands of people only to subsequently grant a CEO a multimillion-dollar-per-year retirement package (on top of undoubtedly gargantuan savings and assets). It is just wrong for a company’s top executive to be so disproportionately wealthy that he or she could give everybody in the company a year’s worth of entry-level pay at the same ratio as an entry-level worker giving the same number of people two cents each (which, it bears mentioning, is not something that I tend to object to doing myself).

This line of thought does not conflict directly with the broad agenda of the right and actually blends into conservatism when it is recognized that the government isn’t the right tool to combat this excess. Not only does government power make it possible for individuals to feel as if they don’t have to give because they gave in votes and taxes, it also absolves them of personally working against wrongs in the corporate world (among other “worlds”) because the law becomes the ostensibly objective point of arbitration. It is a whole lot easier (and profitable) to sue than to organize a boycott or a watch group, even if “objective” litigation makes plausible the inane nyaa-nyaa-you-can’t-touch-me conclusion of “it may be wrong, but it’s not illegal.”

Even worse than the extra work and longer requisite commitment to change when circumventing big government, though, is the possibility that a failure to gain popular support might force a cause's proponents to face the possibility that they were wrong. When the Supreme Court, as one government entity to which people appeal, makes the decision, one need never confront his or her own imperfection, win or lose. Beyond it being a much less daunting proposition to convince a majority of nine people than to petition to larger group of peers, it is much easier, on the level of self-reflection, to discount such a small group, ideologically, should they rule against the cause.

However, while a statement against a too-powerful government can be comfortably made among conservatives, I find the comfort with which others encourage the primacy of corporations disturbing. Arguing against the Supreme Court's poking its fingers into the sport of golf, for example, does not absolve the arguer of the obligatory decision about whether the PGA was right or wrong in the first place. It should always be remembered that upholding a right to make a decision is an entirely separate action from agreeing with the decision itself — and vice versa. Likewise, for commentators to feel the need to establish themselves as “pro-corporation” to counter the tyranny of radical academics forewarns of potential zealotry when the pendulum of cultural power swings elsewhere. For international conservatives to look forward to the day when multinational corporations effectively eliminate borders suggests that an important historical lesson, perhaps the *most important* historical lesson, has simply not been learned, even by those conservatives who have identified the tactics of historical fascists and totalitarians in today's liberal dogma. Just as the core beliefs of one group of people — the honest, reasonable, and caring — have shifted from tinges of liberalism to shades of conservatism (whether or not they know or will admit it), so will the social niche that now espouses government oppression

under the name of liberalism become that which positions itself within and promotes oppressive companies under the name of conservatism — which the intelligent will have worked so hard to define and prove as right and just. Conservatives trying to wrest power from big government should be wary of where they propose to redirect that power. Witness the recent finding that corporate donations are left-leaning, and the Product Manager's own hypocritical politics have context. Even the California energy giants have in recent years donated more to the Democrats.

I consider it to be a truism, at this point in history, that any semi-intelligent person who looks at the evidence with an unbiased eye and is honest with him or her self cannot do otherwise than take those positions that have become viewed as “conservative” on the majority of issues. However, the key to honoring the intelligence and, yes, compassion that leads to those positions is to not tug so hard on the right end of the political/philosophical rope (by digging fingers and feet into all of the steadfast dicta) that the momentum swings the sides around before the actual changes in thought can be made and lessons learned. The danger is not government per se — let alone specific types of government, let alone political parties within a government — just as it was not religion itself in the days of its corruption and just as it will not be “corporatism” itself. The danger is in the focus of power.

This is what I've been so dying to hear that I've had to say it myself: the ideology upon which the United States of America was founded, the beauty and majesty of its heritage, has little to do with the specifics of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court or owning a gun or localizing education or, certainly, playing golf, but with the broader issue of dispersion of power. This dispersion is not only necessary within the federal government or across state and local governments or even, strictly speaking, as it filters down to individual rights of self-governance; it must spread across every aspect of human life, from government to economics to religion to

science to arts. To unite too many of these human conventions toward the same end — other than respect for others, which is the parent of all ideals of justice, peace, and love — is to endow too much power to too narrow a belief. Conservatives today ought to know this at least as well as it has ever be capable of being known throughout history, considering the pervasiveness of “liberalism” in almost all of these conventions and the degree to which its adherents try to marginalize and discredit areas that it cannot influence.

Right now, the force of intelligence — and compassion — is on the conservative side of the middle line. Let’s see if, this time around, we can really learn from the past and the mistakes that we love to point out in liberals.