Moderation: The Noblest Gift of Heaven

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Books on political and social philosophy may be divided into three classes: (1) erudite books intended for the scholar and advanced student; (2) books in more simple language designed for the reading public, in which the author, as expert, essays to give an "objective" or non-partisan appraisal of human relations; (3) books written for everybody who cares to read a serious book in which the author takes a view frankly partisan.

Radicals and Conservatives falls into the third category. This book achieves its purpose so well, in this reviewer's opinion, that it merits an analysis more serious than a mere brief appraisal. In many respects, it is a model of popular political polemics. Its manner of presentation and its skillfully devised dialectics can be recommended to all who hope to exert influence upon public opinion.

The book is an essay, rather than a treatise. Its 174 pages barely exceed the length of John Stuart Mill's On Liberty, and are much shorter than Burke's Reflections or Paine's Rights of Man. It can be read between a late luncheon and tea-time, by a scholar. A college freshman ought to be able to absorb every page, without the aid of a dictionary, in an afternoon and short evening, and still have time for the last movie show. The average businessman can master its contents in a train ride from Chicago to Cleveland.

Aristotle, the most intellectually honest of philosophers, made definition the very foundation of logic. Too many modern writers ignore or evade this obligation that they owe their readers. Accordingly, it is refreshing to find that McGovern and Collier open their essay with a clear delimitation of the principal terms in a field of great political controversy.

The same pedagogic honesty continues throughout the essay. Every new term is defined by either a qualifying clause in the introductory sentence, or else by a following sentence, stating in simple language exactly what the authors mean by its use. This style, readable for the layman who may be untutored in political philosophy, is also satisfying for the scholar who is thus never at a loss as to the precise connotation intended by the authors. In this respect, this political essay is a model, all too rare, of intellectual integrity and clarity.

In a hectic modern age, when such expressions as liberalism, conservatism, and radicalism have become shibboleths or fighting words, it is instructive to place these terms in their historical context and...
to seek a definition of these concepts upon which all reasonable men can agree.

Obviously, the authors intend to propose a bi-polarization of political thought which places ultra-radicalism at one extreme and ultra-conservatism (Tory reactionary elements) at the other extreme. Thus, an ultra-radical, in simplest terms, would be an uncompromising theorist or politician who would make root-and-branch changes and reforms with little or no concern for tradition or mores. By the same token, an ultra-conservative would be one who resists all change regardless of human welfare. Between the two poles lies a vast stretch of conflicting political attitudes.

This is where liberalism enters the arena. A liberal may bend towards radicalism or he may bend towards conservatism. He cannot consistently bend both ways at the same time. The authors make no effort to conceal their profound respect for the liberal tradition which they briefly sketch in retrospect. Indeed, they identify themselves as conservative liberals. They classify both Burke and Bentham, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, as liberals. But Burke and Hamilton were on the conservative wing, and Bentham and Jefferson on the radical fringe of liberalism.

All of this, of course, requires a precise definition of liberalism, which the authors define as the “acceptance of both democracy and individualism as the basic doctrines in a political creed.” It would be difficult to quarrel overmuch, whether historically or philosophically, with this definition. The authors make no effort to conceal their profound respect for the liberal tradition which they briefly sketch in retrospect. Indeed, they identify themselves as conservative liberals. They classify both Burke and Bentham, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, as liberals. But Burke and Hamilton were on the conservative wing, and Bentham and Jefferson on the radical fringe of liberalism.

In this bi-polarization of political thought, where is the place of collectivism, Utopian Socialism, Marxist Socialism, Fabian Socialism, National Socialism, Fascism and Communism? Here, the authors, for once, drop their usual clarity. But the implication is that these creeds belong on the radical side because of their contempt for tradition and their tendency to use the state as the master of society.

In this adroit skirmish in the field of definition and historical development of political concepts, the authors win a resounding victory for the conservative liberals. By moving a short distance toward the center, they capture the most strategic redoubts of the enemy. Indeed, they are able to count among their battle gains most of the virtues of liberalism including the priceless possession of moderation, called by Euripides, the noblest gift of heaven.

The remainder of the book is a brilliant consolidation of their battle line and the development of a modern creed of “conservative liberalism.”

With a fine Aristotelian instinct, the authors begin to lay the foundations of their conservative-liberal creed upon nothing less than epistemology. They never mention this eminently respectable but terrifying term. To do so would drive the businessman reader to slumber, as it drives the average freshman to the gymnasium or the tennis court.

There was once an Oxford don who claimed that if he were told the epistemological views of any person he could immediately classify his political attitudes. There is considerable justification for such a pretentious claim. The sound scholarship behind Radicals and Conservatives is reflected in the fact that the authors boldly enter the forbidding field of epistemology. They take care not to frighten the reader by telling him that they are treading over the bottomless bog of the science of knowledge. Nevertheless, their intellectual integrity will not permit them to ignore the problem in spite of its intricacies and contradictions. The section on the limitation of science, drawing heavily upon J. W. N. Sullivan’s classic statement of the creative scientist’s approach to the unknown, is one
of the highlights of this remarkable essay. Thus, preparatory to their analysis of the nature of man and his world and of the importance of tradition in a political society, the authors give due regard to the nature of reason and human intuition.

Deftly the authors expose the fallacy of determinism as the sole explanation of human behavior. They refute a considerable amount of the anthropological nonsense regarding equality of men, heredity, environment and race, together with fallacious over-emphasis on Freudian analysis of society. As to the perfectibility of mankind, they are equally successful in demolishing the Benthamite thesis that all men are motivated solely by rational self-interest. They properly insist that conservatives have been right in insisting that "there is a great deal of imperfection and evil in human nature, and that any political philosophy which forgets this fact is guilty of a serious error." Finally, the authors lay proper weight upon tradition, emphasizing the correctness of Montesquieu and Burke both of whom held that a social or political institution to be effective must be in accord with the "spirit" (tradition) of the people.

In developing their creed for conservative liberalism, McGovern and Collier rightly lay stress on ethical foundations. They are eminently correct in saying that the scientific or empirical method cannot give us an adequate standard of values relating to human relations. They are also correct in holding that most men and women believe that there should be a standard of value. What standard is the question. Quite properly, the authors demolish the hedonism of Jeremy Bentham and the British utilitarians, and rely upon Aristotle's *eudaemonia* (search for the good life, or life in accord with reason) as well as Edmund Burke's "expedience" or the general sense of mankind. In other words, conservative liberalism would change Bentham's dictum that the purpose of the state is "to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number" to the Aristotelian notion—"to promote the good life."

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**Sightseeing**

Aloft on the salmon's home
At the worn rail we watched
The piers fade into frame
In the hour of the disattached.
Our eyes looked over the cold
Waves from a sunlit fold:
Father's, mother's and son's
And three motionless nuns'.
Skyscrapers shrank to pins,
The bay a fragile cup.
All of man's environs
From the Flood and the Sphinx up
Curl'd in the mountain chains.
As our eyes met the nuns'
We saw from sea to shore
The circle of ardor.

NELSON BENTLEY
latter goal, the authors connote with the expressed aim “to promote the general welfare” in the preamble of the United States Constitution.

One of the skillful sections of the book is the ten pages devoted to the history and modern use of the concept of natural law. Rejecting the fallacies of Locke and Rousseau regarding the origin of natural law, the authors adopt the Stoic definition of natural law as the “law of equity and of right reason” accepted by Roman Law and continuing to be accepted by millions of men and women in the modern age as a guide to positive law. In the present age when radicals insist that “natural rights” include the economic right of workers to control the national economy through central economic planning by the state, the authors conclude: “If the historic doctrine of individual rights is to mean anything at all, we must say that the state can and should promote the economic welfare of its citizens as far as possible, but only to the extent that this effort does not interfere with the basic rights of the individual.” Granted that the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union completely annihilated all rights of the individual, it is also self-evident that the Socialist government which ruled Great Britain in 1945-1952 sacrificed too many individual rights on the altar of central economic planning.

In a chapter on “Is There an Ideal Form of Government,” the authors generally agree with the answer given in John Stuart Mill’s celebrated essay in his Considerations on Representative Government. They bring his argument up to date. Representative democracy, in this modern world, is indeed the ideal form of government. But Mill was right, in following the postulate of Montesquieu that the best government for any people must be in accord with the capacities of the people. In many respects, representative democracy is the most difficult of governments to operate. For a given people at a given time, who lack the capacity for self-government, a more paternalistic government may well be preferable.

Indonesia and Burma are examples of the tragic consequences of a too abrupt introduction of democracy in countries unprepared for the highest form of self-rule.

More than once, democracies have proved to be as tyrannical as any oriental despot. The majority of the people can easily become a tyrant. To prevent the abuse of the minority by the majority, and the ruthlessness of egalitarian movements, Mill proposed such impractical devices as plural voting. In America, the founding fathers did better by building the Union on federalism and on Montesquieu’s separation of powers, together with their own refinements of checks and balances. All this meant a government of balanced forces. Conservative liberalism regrets the weakening of the federal system under the New Deal, and seeks the restoration of the constitutional balances. In conclusion, according to the authors, “if democracy is the embodiment of the principle of equality, and if individualism is the embodiment of liberty, it becomes clear that to achieve the best possible form of government we must strive for a system in which equality and liberty are equally equated.”

At this point, the authors are prepared to formulate a credo of conservative liberalism in more precise terms. The pivot of their creed is a sharp definition of the aim and scope of the state. Briefly the creed is as follows:

(1) The Common Good: The aim of the state should be the promotion of the Aristotelian “common good” rather than Utilitarian hedonism. The scope should be contained in the formula: “As much individualism as possible, but as much state interference as is necessary to maintain the common good.” This proposition utterly rejects the Rousseau or Hegelian theory of freedom, as well as the concept of the all-guiding dictatorship under Fascism and Marxian Socialism. It calls for a “balanced freedom,” dictated neither by state compulsion nor by rampant individualism.

(2) Applied Freedom: Free speech is the basic freedom. The authors hold that
Milton and Locke were in error in claiming that because the employment of force will not prevent the spread of ideas, the persecution of heretical ideas is useless. They assume that suppression of free speech and press for forty years in the Soviet Union has already shown that by “brain-washing” the ideas and beliefs of men can be transformed within a single generation. But while free speech remains in free countries as the basic liberty, there are limits to this freedom. The necessity for restrictions on decency and public order are fully recognized limits. Incitement to destruction of the state by force, whether carried on by Fascists or Communists, is another limitation. Again, the holding of public office is a privilege not a right, and the state is justified in the dismissal of officials as loyalty or security risks. “In practical application, freedom of thought and expression must not be made absolute, but limited according to a philosophy of balanced freedom.”

3) Academic Freedom: The authors take the position that freedom of thought in the academic world is also a matter of balance. The attempt of faculties of colleges and universities to prevent the appointment of a non-Keynesian scholar to a professorship of economics, which has frequently occurred in the past, is as reprehensible as the refusal of a board of trustees to appoint a Keynesian scholar. The authors offer an eloquent plea to the academic world to show as much zest to protect moderate conservatives as they exhibit in the protection of moderate radicals.

4) Moral Freedom: Conservative liberals, the authors hold, agree with both Milton and Mill that state-enforced morality is no morality. When the state compels its citizens to perform certain acts it does not promote virtue; it merely transforms these citizens into pawns and puppets. Thus, while conservative liberals will approve prohibition upon the sale of narcotics because of their highly destructive effects, they oppose a complete prohibition of alcoholic beverages.

5) Economic Freedom: Finally, amidst the violent controversies over economic freedom, conservative liberals will conform to moderation. Socialism trespasses upon many precious rights of the individual. National Socialism and Marxist Socialism annihilate all rights. Nationalization of industry does not solve the problem of labor-management relations. As Mill correctly stated, the opposite of competition in the free market is monopoly. And state monopoly as found in Communist Russia has not increased the share of the worker in the national income. At the same time, extreme individualism as advocated by Locke, Jefferson, Adam Smith, and Bentham is no longer tenable. Bentham was at fault in holding that when each man worked for his own economic self-interest he automatically advanced the economic interests of all other men. On many occasions the self-interest of labor leaders as well as of capitalists have been in conflict with the good of the community.

Locke was certainly wrong when he limited the function of the state to repel foreign invasion and punish domestic crime, and insisted that the state should be unconcerned with the problem of how the total wealth of the nation should be distributed. Conservative liberalism again takes a lesson from Aristotle, who pointed out that a state is in an unhealthy condition when most of a nation’s wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few while the rest of the population remains poor. Aristotle postulated that stability of constitutional government requires a large and powerful middle class. Again, Locke erred in claiming that the individual has not only a “natural” but also an absolute right to possess property. Conservative liberals agree with Aquinas, who claimed that, while private property is indeed “natural” in man and must be zealously guarded, nevertheless every right entails a corresponding duty. The possession of property implies the duty of using property in a manner not detrimental to society.

Accepting these fundamentals, all of them conforming with reason as well as
moderation, conservative liberalism would have government intervene in business only to maintain the free market, to prevent monopoly and encourage competition, to prevent the abuse of labor by capital, and to insist on some form on compulsory saving such as social security with the intent that employees "will not become charges upon public charity when they are no longer able to earn a living." As to labor-management relations, the function of the state is to maintain a check and balance between employers and employees to see that neither takes unfair advantage of the other. The same check and balance should be maintained between all conflicting economic interests in the modern community.

(6) Balanced Freedom: The problem of liberty and authority is thus resolved by check and balance, and by power and countervailing power. In other words, that government is not best which governs least; rather that government is best that balances best.

It is obvious that this credo is expressed in a few short propositions for such a complicated problem as modern government. But any credo must be short if it is to attract and hold the attention of voters as well as scholars. The principles are general in character. But they must be general if they are to be comprehensive and apply to all phases of social control. To radicals and opponents of conservative liberalism, the credo may seem dogmatic. But its defenders can reply that its formulation has been founded on a careful analysis of human experience with due regard to scientific method. It has not neglected the findings of anthropology, economics, history, political science, psychology and sociology. The radical will complain that it over-emphasizes moderation. But the conservative liberal can reply that the Anglo-Saxon as well as Greek tradition insists on tolerance and moderation.

There are, of course, short-comings in both the argument and the credo itself. It is regrettable that the only reference to Mr. Justice Holmes' contribution to the philosophy of free speech is made second-handedly in a dubious quotation from Walter Lippmann. The authors imply that the obligation of property-owners to observe the duty of using their property in the interest of the community comes from Aquinas, whereas St. Thomas took this concept straight from Aristotle's Politics. Again, in referring to Professor Galbraith's American Capitalism, the authors miss the main point of this significant treatise, namely that American capitalism now rests on two countervailing powers, namely the great financial and industrial corporations on the one hand, and the labor unions on the other hand.

These are minor faults. A more serious blemish is found in what the book omits. Of course, limitations of space in a slim volume, which is an essay rather than a treatise, compel the elimination of many ideas pertinent to the general argument—ideas which the authors may consider less important than do the critics. To the writer of this review, however, the authors have failed to give proper emphasis to the influence of dialectical materialism and Marxian Socialism, and in particular to the impetus toward radicalism engendered by the cult of the economic interpretation of history. Thus, although two pages of the essay are devoted to Fabian Socialism, the essay fails to take note of the great influence of Marxian Socialism on many British Fabians whose philosophy has driven Britain into central economic planning and in the direction of communism. They also fail to point out the fact that American "liberalism" at the turn of the present century, became considerably saturated with admiration for the Marxian economic interpretation of history. The sneers of college professors, primed with study of Charles A. Beard's Economic Interpretation of the Constitution, dishonest history-writing as it was, has turned more college youth to the Communist fringes of radicalism than the reading of the Communist Manifesto.

Russell Kirk has suggested that the mark of conservatism is the lack of fanaticism.
and violence. On the other hand, radicalism has been frequently coupled with both fanaticism and violence. These characteristics are typified by the difference between Tom Paine and Burke, or between the British Fabians, such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb (who lauded the Soviet Russian regime founded on the most brutal violence), and Gerhard Niemeyer, who rejects the mentality that produces such a regime of violence. Messrs. McGovern and Collier have much to say about the moderation of the conservative liberal. Indeed the Golden Mean seems to be the prime virtue of their conservative liberalism. They fail, however, to move forward to the logical conclusion that moderation rejects fanaticism and violence. They seem to imply that the counterpart of the conservative liberal is the radical liberal. But what about this counterpart? Is he less moderate? Is he more prone to fanaticism and violence? Presumably, yes. Human nature being what it is, we should not forget that in the realm of political philosophy there are friends of creeds and enemies of creeds. If moderation leads to justice and peaceful change, we should be told what lack of moderation leads to.

There are limits, of course, to polemics in order to guard against unbridled verbal assaults. By the same token, there are also limits to an urbanity that refrains from depicting the evils of opposing ideologies. Certainly Aristotle and the Greek tragic dramatists, like Euripides and Sophocles, who preached moderation, never failed to point out the evils of their political opponents. The literary suavity of the authors (almost to the admonition of “Think no evil”) carries moderation too far in refraining from following the analysis of the radical liberal as well as the unadulterated radical to its logical conclusions.

Again the authors give considerable space to the necessity, in modern society, to curtail individualism in the business world in order to prevent monopoly and unfair business practices. They give meager attention to the problem of govern-mental regulation of powerful labor unions in order to prevent labor monopoly and the many abuses of unscrupulous labor leaders. The findings of the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field have greatly changed the climate of public opinion on this subject.

The authors of this almost impeccable essay have rightly listed religion and belief in the existence of a deity as attributes of conservative liberalism. But what about radical liberalism? Many critics hold that radicals tend to de-emphasize religion and belief in a Divine Providence. Again, how far does conservative liberalism insist that the state should go in the encouragement of religion? It is not sufficient to leave this question only with a defense of tolerance and religious freedom. The authors unhappily fail to give even casual attention to such philosophers as Jacques Maritain, to say nothing of the dictum of the Supreme Court in the case of Zorach v. Clauson, namely, “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.”

Again, in their brilliant discussion of the nature of man and his world, the authors valiantly assay the problem of epistemology and the limits of scientific method. But they neglect the problem of objectivity in the formulation of judgments on standards of value.

Even so, all phases of political philosophy cannot be crammed into an essay which is driving forward to the presentation of a political credo. In respect to comprehensiveness, the essay is far superior to any of the famous essays of John Stuart Mill, or to the whole collection of speeches and tracts of Edmund Burke. Seldom, in the history of political philosophy, has a credo been introduced with a more balanced and complete analysis of ideologies. The authors have not attempted to offer a Summa, but rather an introduction to a creed for conservative liberalism. Their efforts in this direction conform in all respects to the moderation which they insist is the foundation of sane political thought.