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Procedure or dogma: the core of liberalism

by John Silber

Liberalism: has any other word been used in more senses? Is there another word whose definition is so constrained by time and context? I face the issue baffled, and my bafflement is personal as well as conceptual. I have almost always thought of myself as a liberal, yet in the marketplace of ideas I am almost always called a conservative. This seems an ill-fitting description for someone who remembers a time when members of the John Birch Society attended his public lectures and recorded them for transmission to the FBI as evidence that he was a Communist. I am, of course, familiar with present-day conservatives who became such by beginning with Communism and traveling through Trotskyism, socialism, social democracy and the whole breadth of the Democratic party. But along the way they kept changing their minds. As far as I can see, I began as a liberal and with no more adjustments than reality required have remained one.

Enjoying the advantages of hindsight, I see that I have been a liberal since I was a child. One day on a bus in San Antonio, I was sitting toward the rear when a black woman whom I as a ten-year-old perceived to be elderly got on. As she approached my seat in the crowded bus, I got up to offer it to her. This was simply what I had been taught to do by my father, who told my brother and me to offer our seats to the old, especially women, observing, "Your young legs are never as tired as theirs."

The woman thanked me and prepared to sit down. Suddenly there were shouts of "Sit down, nigger-lover," and "Nigger, keep going to the back of the bus." The woman moved on and I remained standing. I was furious at the violation of everything I had been taught in Sunday School. That woman needed my seat and those haters were wrong to deny her. I was morally outraged. What had happened to the Golden Rule? Weren't we supposed to learn something from the story of the Good Samaritan?

Looking back on this event, still as fresh in my memory as if it had happened yesterday, I think it was the first indication that I was a liberal. A year later, I knew I was a Democrat. The Depression was disastrous for my family. My father's flourishing architectural practice suddenly collapsed: he was forced to dismiss his staff and close his office. Unable to meet the mortgage payments on our house, we moved to a succession of rented houses, each smaller than the one before, until my mother took charge and bought a small house for \$25 down and her personal assurance that \$25 mortgage payments would follow each month. The size of the downpayment proved that the Depression had devastated property owners as well. My grandmother and my parents occupied the bedrooms and my brother and I got the sleeping porch.

As much as an exercise as anything, my father drew up plans for enlarging our house and making it livable, but there was

no money to carry out the plans. One day my father—a staunch Republican, remembering better times under Hoover and deeply disappointed in Roosevelt—announced happily that construction would begin. He had just received approval of a loan from the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, one of Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives. One Sunday, when guests had come to dinner, and my father had as usual held forth on the virtues of the GOP, I asked him after the guests had left, "Why are you against Roosevelt? Everything good that has happened to us has happened under Roosevelt." My mother agreed fully, and I knew from that day forward that I was a Democrat.

One New Deal program after another added to the quality of our lives and our community. Schools were built as WPA projects. Mayor Maury Maverick obtained federal funds for the restoration of the Spanish missions, including the Alamo, as well as La Villita, the original village of San Antonio. The WPA put men to work building Alamo Stadium, a football field for all the local high schools. Although my father had no political skills or connections, and thus did not win contracts to build any of the federal buildings constructed in the 1930s, the ripple effect of modest recovery brought him some small commissions.

I entered high school pro-Roosevelt, pro-labor, and pro-civil rights. The brilliant musician who directed our band, orchestra, and music ensembles was principal clarinetist in the San Antonio Symphony, and with a large family to support he also played in the evening with dance orchestras. From him I learned what James C. Petrillo and the American Federation of Musicians had meant to musicians. When a group of high school students organized a swing band that began to play major dances, he arranged for them to join the Musicians' Union without paying an initiation fee on the condition that from that time forward they would charge union scale. He explained that when high school kids without families to support

charged less than half union scale, they took bread out of the mouths of the families of adult musicians. This seemed right to me: I continued to be a liberal.

After college, I attended Yale Divinity School. As an assignment in Christian ethics I interviewed the relatives, undertakers, and ministers who had taken part in Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish funerals. I called my paper—anticipating Jessica Mitford by fifteen years—"The High Cost of Dying." I was deeply moved by the example of an Italian funeral director who said of infants' funerals, "I persuade the family to buy at my cost the least expensive casket and I urge them to lay the keel for their next child." I was equally impressed with the Episcopal priest of a fashionable New Haven parish who told me he always accompanied the family to the funeral parlor where he insisted that they see the less expensive caskets. He reminded them that he covered the casket with a black pall before it entered the church and that the parish provided the only flowers. He urged his parishioners not to waste huge sums on the dead but to spend on the living. His ethical standards were in contrast to those of a highly fashionable New Haven undertaker who argued that a man who drove a Cadillac should be buried in a bronze casket, his principle being—at least in the marketplace—"As a man lives so should he be buried."

In the spring of 1948, the presidential campaign was in full swing. As one might imagine, many of the Yale faculty and their graduate students supported Henry Wallace and his Progressive Party. Many of my fellow students urged me to support Wallace, and I always told them that a vote for Wallace was a vote for Dewey and a vote against every New Deal program they favored. For sticking with Truman and the Democratic Party I found my liberalism questioned—absurdly, I thought—by many on the left. I would not realize the full implications of these characterizations until many years later.

That summer I returned to San Antonio and worked as an enumerator for the Bureau of the Census on a survey of manu-

facturers. As part of this survey I found myself assisting the *patrón* of a tortilla factory with his forms. Leaving his small establishment, I entered a narrow doorway and was suddenly on the inside of the same block of buildings I had been reviewing from without. Behind all of the storefronts, unseen from the streets, was a fetid barrio of hovels occupied by scores of families, a barrio without proper sanitation and where all families drew water from a single spigot.

When September came I entered the Law School of the University of Texas. There I had the privilege of studying Constitutional law with Professor Jerre Williams, who completed his distinguished career on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Near the end of my first semester I told him I wanted to bring the rule of law to the families living in the barrios. The owners who rented those hovels violated sanitation codes, fire codes, and doubtless many others. Professor Williams was sympathetic, but he explained that if I entered the barrios to solicit business I would be committing barratry and be subject to disbarment. Two decades before they were invented, I was a premature storefront lawyer. A just society, I thought, must provide access to the law courts to all citizens; a society cannot be just if the rule of law is limited to persons of means. Those who cannot afford access to the courts do not live in a society of laws.

The following fall I returned to Yale to complete my PhD in philosophy. After joining the faculty I taught a course in the Master of Arts in Teaching program and for the first time I came face to face with the problems of the public schools. I was appalled by the treatment of minority and poor children at an elementary school in which Yale placed students for their practice teaching. I was brought face to face with the fact that poor and minority children were being denied equal educational opportunity. This experience alerted me early in my career to the lack of equal opportunity.

In 1955 I was back in Austin as an assistant professor of philosophy. In 1957, a spec-

tacular soprano named Barbara Smith was thrown out of the School of Music's production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* on the orders of the administration. The only objection to Miss Smith was that she was black. This objection had not been made by the faculty or administration, but by members of the legislature and by anonymous callers who threatened violence if Miss Smith appeared on stage with a white Aeneas. The University decided to knuckle under to threats of violence. I challenged that decision by presenting my objections privately and in writing to Chancellor Logan Wilson. He offered no moral or legal justification of the university's clear violation of Miss Smith's constitutional rights, now clearly defined by the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

I then took my objections to the floor of the faculty council where they fell on largely deaf ears. Despite the fact that Miss Smith's moral and legal rights were being violated, a committee of senior faculty, including Dean Page Keeton of the law school and other eminent "liberals," found that no reasonable person could disagree with the decision of the Chancellor. I observed then, and have never forgotten, that persons recognized as liberals sometimes behave as if they were autoimmune diseases designed to attack their own kind.

The phenomenon of liberals attacking liberals was made clear when the *Texas Observer*, under the editorship of Ronnie Dugger, endorsed a young Republican, John Tower, for the U.S. Senate and excoriated his elderly Democratic opponent, Coke Stevenson. I pointed out to Dugger that time would soon defeat Coke Stevenson but that young John Tower would be a senator for decades to come. "Why," I asked, "do you want to be represented for many years by an extremely conservative Republican in order to avoid being represented for a few years by a moderately conservative Democrat?" I found no logical or causal nexus between Dugger's editorial policy and his professed objectives.

The defection of the liberals elected John Tower and greatly aided the development of a two-party system in Texas, but Dugger had not supported Tower on behalf of a two-party system. He wished to purge a Democrat whose liberal credentials he judged insufficient. The resentment of so-called liberals toward those who failed the liberal litmus test as they defined it led to the wholesale defection of liberal Democrats in the presidential race in 1968. They, not the Republicans, defeated Hubert Humphrey and elected Richard Nixon. There may have been good reasons to vote for Nixon, but there was no reason to believe that he was less committed to war in Vietnam than Humphrey, whose reservations about the war were well-known.

My credentials as a liberal were firmly established by my support of Barbara Smith and the fuller integration of the University of Texas. My standing was solidified when I helped organize the Texas Society to Abolish Capital Punishment and wrote, spoke, and testified in favor of ending the death penalty in Texas. My opposition to the death penalty was not based, however, on the mistaken view that it is wrong in principle to take a human life. The police, in order to save the lives of innocent victims, are frequently forced to kill persons intent on harming others. I also knew that there are serious crimes committed by rational people who deserve the death penalty. A man who bombs an airplane in flight to collect his wife's insurance offers an excellent example. But despite the need to satisfy the understandable public demand for vengeance, the death penalty as an appropriate means for dealing with murder is not so effective or so safe as the alternative of life imprisonment. It poses unacceptable risks of executing the innocent, of setting the guilty free by juries unwilling to expose the defendant to the possibility of the death penalty, and of inequitably imposing on the poor and the deranged, who are frequently sentenced to death not so much for their crimes, as for their inability to hire a competent lawyer.

Death row in Huntsville, Texas, I observed, was occupied by poor Blacks and Hispanics represented by court-appointed attorneys who, in most cases, had presented no evidence on behalf of their clients. These defendants had not received due process of law. Typically, their defense was nothing more than a closing speech to the jury. Quakers in Texas were disappointed that I did not oppose the death penalty in principle, but that did not lead them to expel me from the congregations of the righteous. They supported my work because they knew that on different principles we were working toward the same end.

Continuing my interest in the public schools, I wrote a short paper on the importance of preschool nurture in the home and pre-kindergarten programs in the schools. I sent this piece, which I called "Breaking the Cycle of Poverty," to Senator Ralph Yarborough, the doyen of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in Texas. As a result, I was invited to Washington to work with Sargent Shriver on the committee that designed the Head Start program. I also evaluated some proposals for Otis Singleton, the first director of the Job Corps, and was an occasional sounding board when he wished to review problems in its administration. These liberal initiatives were based on our duty as Americans to provide equality of opportunity and on the fact that equality was denied many children of the ghetto or from dysfunctional homes.

But later I opposed the movement by educators and legislators to confuse equality of opportunity with equality of achievement. That false doctrine destroyed the academic quality of many colleges and universities, including City College of New York, and led to the current classroom fad of treating self-esteem as an inherent right rather than as something to be earned. Television has gone still further, with one children's program having a theme song affirming "the most important person in the entire wide world is you, you, you."

I recount my activities at this length to

show how unlikely it would be for anyone to regard me as anything but a liberal. But I forgot that some persons equated liberals and Communists. I noted that John Birchers had begun attending my classes to record them. These thought police, defining political correctness in their fashion, brought a little innocent merriment to my classes when I would refute their curious notion that the United States could not be a democracy because it was a republic. I pointed out that a republic is a kind of democracy, just as a collie is a kind of dog. There was no question that the Birchers thought that, far from being a liberal, I was a Communist. I suspect my FBI file contains transcripts of those lectures, sent thither by the Birchers in aid of their claims that I was a dangerous man. And I have no doubt that many conservative Texans who would never have joined the John Birch Society suspected that I was a fellow traveler.

I began to learn that ideologues, whether left or right, have great trouble in recognizing liberals because they don't know what liberalism means. They confuse the pursuit of goals believed to be liberal with the rigorous procedure of thought and observation by which the genuine liberal discovers his goals.

In 1967 I became dean of the College of Arts and Sciences just as the student protests at Berkeley, Columbia, and Cornell began to erupt. Eventually the movement came to Austin along with the SDS. By 1968 the democratic idealism of the Port Huron Statement had been severely compromised. Forgetting they were students for a democratic society, the SDS assaulted the intellectual integrity of the university and academic freedom by using pressure tactics in an effort to determine administrative policy.

I observed the heady effects of "power" on Larry Caroline, a promising young philosopher whom I had myself recruited. He had learned that if he addressed a crowd of protesters with outrageous and highly inflammatory statements, he was cheered on the spot and got his name in the papers.

And for this purpose, lies were as good as truths. Lies were often better, because contrary to conventional wisdom, although truth is sometimes stranger than fiction, this is not the way to bet. Among the lies he told students was that there were five concentration camps in the state of Texas posing a threat to his black brothers who were naturally fearful because of the camps' existence. When I asked for locations of these camps, he had no answer, but he did not retract the claim.

This and other false statements aroused the ire of Frank Erwin, chairman of the Regents, who demanded that Caroline be fired. I responded that Caroline should not be fired. His contract had only a year to go, and his appointment had been conditional on his completing his dissertation, on which in the event he had done nothing. This fact alone would have made it extremely unlikely that the contract would be renewed, even had his political behavior been such that Erwin would have considered him a desirable son-in-law. Moreover, I considered his cynical abandonment of the pursuit of truth in favor of notoriety gained by lying to large crowds of students in the presence of the media as a violation of his obligations as a faculty member under AAUP principles.

As might have been expected, of course, Caroline's claimed status as a political martyr gained him the support of activist junior faculty and even the support of some senior faculty who viewed his political views with amused contempt or downright detestation and regarded him as an academic layabout. The Department of Philosophy, over the objections of the chairman, voted by a small majority to extend his contract. I, as dean, vetoed the reappointment.

My friend Ronnie Dugger, reflecting the views of many others, argued that Caroline's place at the center of a political brawl in which conservatives were howling for his blood entitled him to a reappointment they would have admitted he did not deserve on academic grounds. Put bluntly, they were saying that the enemy of our enemy is our

friend. Outside the academy, the right wing had long engaged in such politicization of the search for truth; now, with seeming enthusiasm, not merely leftists but those who considered themselves liberals joined in.

In his recent book *The Politics of Authenticity*, the historian Doug Rossinow writes that I, "the most prominent liberal on campus since the mid-fifties . . . started moving toward [my] later neo-conservatism and worked to get Caroline fired." Aside from the erroneous claim about my having worked to fire Caroline when in fact I had argued before the Regents that he not be fired, this statement encapsulates the now widespread view in the academy not only that there can be no enemies on the left, but also that no careers should suffer for academic deficiencies. It is largely forgotten that the AAUP stressed responsibility in the exercise of academic freedom, and few universities and colleges hold a professor speaking *ex cathedra* to a higher standard of truth-telling and respect for his special obligation to his students than when he is speaking merely as a citizen. By widely accepted current standards, as long as one holds views currently accepted as politically correct, there can be no justification for removing him even if that person fails to complete his dissertation, falsifies evidence, or encourages drug use by his adolescent students, all of which Caroline did.¹

This is a curious inversion of the liberal commitment to academic freedom, which defends the right of individuals to be politically incorrect. That quaint notion is in deep trouble, as is brilliantly and depressingly demonstrated by Alan Kors and Harvey Silverglate in *The Shadow University*.

¹ It is relevant to note that I was to hear from Caroline again. In 1987 he wrote me that he had returned to Judaism, become a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and the father of six children. Now looking back at his earlier career, he said, "I truly and literally thank G-d for giving me the opportunity to make amends for the damage I did then. In retrospect, I too would have tried to remove me from the university."

Shortly after the Caroline case, I found myself fired as dean of my college over reasons unrelated to my political views or indeed any academic issue. But the justifications for my firing never failed to mention my left-wing views, and I came to have the reputation of being not merely a card-carrying liberal, but, in the views of some who saw this as even a higher distinction, a card-carrying Marxist. This reputation, entirely undeserved, eased my way into the presidency of Boston University. My refusal to bow to the irrational demands of the SDS and the black power advocates and my refusal to overlook the incompetence of Larry Caroline were all forgotten.

My name was called to the attention of the trustees of Boston University in the fall of 1970 by Professor Robert Cohen, who was one of the fellow graduate students who had solicited my support for Henry Wallace. He was a leading member of the Boston University faculty, having joined the university in the 1950s along with several other professors of Marxist or socialist persuasion. He wielded considerable influence on the search committee, which included two Marxist undergraduates, two graduate students sympathetic to radical student movements of the time, and faculty representatives including more than one Marxist, in addition to a handful of trustees and administrators.

After having met with the committee on several occasions and with other groups of students, faculty, administrators, and trustees, I was invited in November to a dinner meeting with the search committee and some others. Among these was a strongly anti-Marxist industrialist and intellectual named Arthur Metcalf. I later learned that in view of my strong support from left-wing faculty and students, he was there to determine if I was a Communist. My support by some of the best-known Marxists on the faculty had alarmed some members of the board. They wanted Metcalf, the most knowledgeable trustee on the subject, to determine my political affiliation.

That evening, answering questions about

my opinion of the revolutionary movement, I revealed my knowledge of Marxist argot and won the approval of the Marxists and activists. Metcalf recognized my answers not as advocacy but as the informal responses of a well-informed teacher; he reported that I was not a Communist, and in due course I was offered and accepted the presidency.

Many students and faculty would have disagreed with Metcalf's assessment. Some of my most enthusiastic supporters eagerly anticipated the proclamation of the People's Republic of Boston University. Ideologues, as the Marxists were, do not listen carefully; otherwise, they could never have been confused about my position. Within months, however, the truth began to out, as bit by bit I was incrementally exposed as a liberal, or, to use their term of art, a fascist.

I was committed to an open campus on which all invited guests could speak without regard to their point of view, a campus on which any company or institution engaged in a lawful enterprise could recruit, including all branches of the United States Military. My administration would not tolerate the occupation of university buildings or the blocking of their entrances by student mobs.

I was also opposed to allowing minorities a tyranny no one would accept from majorities. The university had for a half century hosted the ROTC. A guerrilla campaign by a minority of the faculty eventually led the Department of Defense to conclude that there were campuses where the Army and the Air Force could have a quieter life, and both units were withdrawn. I determined to see what the faculty really wanted, by having Price Waterhouse ask each of them, one by one, and in confidence. It turned out that two-thirds of the faculty were in favor of restoring the ROTC. I and most faculty members believed that civilian control of the military is better ensured when a significant percentage of officers are civilian in orientation and educated in civilian institutions rather than in military academies. We also believed that our students in financial

need had the right to be eligible for ROTC scholarships. In due time, two units were restored and a Navy unit added. But, of course, it was widely believed that no real liberal could support ROTC.

When Angela Davis was invited to speak on campus advocating revolution, there was no opposition. But when Urie Bronfenbrenner was invited to speak, the situation proved quite different. Professor Bronfenbrenner had published an article in 1967 in which he argued that the brutally inadequate prenatal and postnatal care available to many Black Americans resulted in grave physical and psychological damage. One would have thought that this attempt to document one of the most vicious consequences of racism would have made Bronfenbrenner something of a hero to the left. But a group of SDS members demonstrated determined opposition to hearing from that mild, thoughtful scholar. How, I asked, could any true liberal or one respectful of free speech justify disrupting a speaker on the campus of a university?

Robert Cohen, then dean of the College of Liberal Arts, urged me to cancel the invitation on grounds that there might be violence. I told him, as years earlier I had told Chancellor Logan Wilson when he canceled the opera performance of Barbara Smith, that civilization does not abdicate in the face of barbarians: it calls the police. I arranged for a dozen or more police officers to be stationed on each side of the lecture hall while Professor Bronfenbrenner spoke. It was a nonviolent but sad affair. In response to hostile questions from the crowd, Bronfenbrenner recanted the views unpalatable to his audience, confessing his errors in the manner of a defendant in a Moscow show trial. It was not enough; a leftist academic present at the lecture announced that Bronfenbrenner's recantation was insincere. Andrei Vyshinsky, Stalin's prosecutor in the purge trials, would have approved.

The student left attempted to suppress another basic right, that of free association, when recruiters from the Marine Corps came to campus. A small mob blocked ac-

cess to the building where some of their fellow students wanted to meet with the recruiters. I went down to talk with the protestors. I explained that they were violating the First Amendment rights of other students and said that they could continue to protest peacefully as long as they respected the rights of others. When they continued, I said that I would make a civilian arrest for trespass and they could make their case in court. They were outraged by the suggestion and continued the blockade. At that point, I called the police to the campus to remove them and restore the rights of their fellow students. This civilized use of force was a liberal imperative, necessary to assure an open campus on which First Amendment rights are respected.

Our administration kept an open campus to ensure the exercise of First Amendment rights and the right of free assembly no matter how hard activist faculty and students tried to shut it down. One eminent and thoughtful captain of the Thought Police was Howard Zinn. When our Latin-American development center organized an international conference attended by, among others, Presidents Eduardo Frei of Chile and Lleras Restrepo of Colombia, Zinn attempted with the help of his students to disrupt it. The police had to be called to restore order and remove the disrupters. It was, however, a civilized use of force to preserve academic freedom and our rights to free speech and assembly. The Zinn principle could be summed up as holding that all academics were entitled to academic freedom, but that some academics were not.

The example of Howard Zinn shows how far we have come from the liberal ideal practiced by Socrates and developed by Milton and Mill. Socrates taught us to prize those persons of knowledge, candor, and good will who challenge our views, and to be especially grateful when we are shown to be mistaken. For then we exchange a false opinion for a truer one. The Socratic dialectic is not dissimilar to the scientific method,

which proceeds by proposing hypotheses to be tested by logical analysis for their conceptual coherence and tested empirically for their confirmation or disproof by relevant facts. Apart from divine revelation, to which I am not privileged, there is no means of attaining absolute truth. Our confidence in the outcome of a Socratic argument or a scientific experiment derives not from direct proof of its truth but rather from the absence of its disproof. We never reach the truth, only the likeliest account, which may require revision or even rejection on the basis of subsequent evidence and argument.

It follows that those who seek the truth as closely as is humanly possible will not begin with conclusions and then look for arguments and facts to support them. Rather, they will examine all relevant facts and arguments in the hope of finally arriving at the truest account of the subject of their inquiry. Those who follow the former procedure have abandoned the search for truth in the defense of an ideology from which they will not deviate no matter what contravening arguments or evidence may be presented. Those who seek the truth, by contrast, will follow the second procedure of inquiry and their conclusions will in consequence be subject to change.

For this reason no liberal—unless he abandons the search for truth—can be found on the left of every issue. He will rather be led either to the left or to the right by evidence and argument. He will find his position not at the outset but only at the end of his search. If a liberal holds fast to any set of doctrines without regard to the existence of contravening arguments and evidence, he betrays his liberalism and ceases to be a liberal. E. B. White provided a useful guide for liberalism: "To pursue truth, one should not be too deeply entrenched in any hole."

This is not to suggest that the liberal will have no fixed opinions, for there are some facts that never change and some arguments that are not refuted. But it is generally true, as the old hymn puts it, that "time makes ancient good uncouth." The world is in flux

and if one is an honest seeker of truth one's views must change as experience dictates.

But there are limits on how far one can change one's views and still deserve the name of liberal. One is not a liberal but an ideologue if one joins the thought police to enforce political correctness in society and especially in academe. One abandons liberalism for ideology. A liberal defends and sometimes exercises the right to be politically incorrect in the Socratic and Millian pursuit of the truest account. Whether evidence or argument leads him to the left or right, he remains a liberal and has every right to object when he is pejoratively described as a conservative.

Paradoxically, it may be that those of us—whether on the left or the right at any one time—who adhere to the Millian procedure of inquiry in the development of our positions are all conservative in the sense that we conserve a methodology begun by Socrates and essential to all scientific thought. But since this mode of thought was systematically presented by Mill, those of us who follow that method are justified in calling ourselves liberals and may expect to be recognized as such. The procedure defines the essence of liberalism.

Many today who wear their liberalism on their sleeves are far from liberal. The rigidity of their adherence to dogmas exposes them as ideologues. And their use of "conservative" as a pejorative epithet is without justification. Many conservatives adhere to the liberal procedure of inquiry but, while following evidence and argument, arrive at conclusions that are right-wing. But there are also ideologues on the right who use evidence and argument to support only antecedent conclusions. They are more accurately described as dogmatic reactionaries.

If we follow the prevalent but mistaken practice of identifying "liberal" with left-wing objectives and "conservative" with right-wing objectives, we will find persons, such as myself, called conservatives who, on the basis of evidence and argument, support

politically correct liberal objectives such as the abolition of capital punishment, early childhood education, and affirmative action. But we may be called conservatives because the same procedures of thought lead us to reject as nonsense the views of those who claim privileged access to truth, some unique power of understanding based on gender, race, ethnicity, or some other special dispensation from the hard work required to arrive at the truest account.

Whenever one uses a set of beliefs as a liberal litmus test, one has confused liberalism with dogmatism. The anti-abortionist who is prepared to kill those who support abortion is not a conservative, but a revolutionary. Those who, like Herbert Marcuse, are tolerant only of the positions they accept are not liberals but revolutionaries. In "Repressive Tolerance" (1969), Marcuse advanced the notion that there was no freedom to be wrong and that right could be determined by the voice of a mass meeting however nonrepresentative or small it might be. Thus Marcuse rejected the liberal concept of a free marketplace of ideas in which all positions are allowed to compete on the basis of evidence and argument. He proposed instead to permit only liberating tolerance, that is, only "toleration of movements from the left [extending] the scope of this tolerance . . . to the stage of action as well as of discussion and propaganda, of deed as well as word."

The ideologist of the left is no more liberal than the ideologist of the right, for neither believes in humility before the facts and logic, respect for the experience and views of others, and the importance of making a supreme effort to avoid irrationality. Reactionaries and revolutionaries betray conservatism and liberalism alike. Those who move with some tentativeness and uncertainty as experience and judgment guide them to the best and wisest conclusions of which they are capable, they alone deserve to be called liberals and may claim that name with pride.