

THE LIBERAL HERESY

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Anyone who has been caught up in the great drive for renewal, which characterizes our time, will know that there are forces working against him (sic).¹ There is something that does not like resurgence, that tries to defeat new life, and is out to destroy anything that speaks of hope or vitality of a human future. However mild or friendly he may be he finds himself in a life and death struggle with a vicious and malignant enemy that is out to destroy him. This has always been the case, and the enemy has won all kinds of titles for itself over the centuries, such as Satan, the Lord of the Flies, the Cloven Hoof, the Evil One, the Serpent, etc. This essay is no attempt to anatomize him all over again for our time, only to describe one of his more dangerous and insidious disguises. I've have called it the Liberal Heresy, because it bears the same relation to true Liberalism as the wolf does to Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother: it looks pleasant and harmless but in fact it is out to gobble you up, so that all your fine intentions and great expectations vanish without trace.

In the first place this heresy uses the Abstraction of the Good Idea. This is a kind of romantic rationalism or idealism that emphasizes fine ideas and admirable thinking at the expense of effective action. Thus this liberal might say, "All people should love one another", or "Freedom of the press at all costs", or "It is tyrannical to use the English language in Africa", or "All forms of air pollution, including driving and smoking should be made illegal", and so on. The ideas are not bad -- on the contrary they are very good ideas, often irrefutable, and that is that gives them their power to destroy. For instance, you know in the very depth of your being that people should love one another, but since they hate each other and always will it is hard to come up with a practical response to the love ideal: it would be much more logical to commit suicide or to sit very still for the rest of your life so that you at least do not hurt anyone. You don't have to go that route, of course, but there is something in the tone of such ideals when they come from the liberal heretic that encourages you to do so. In fact a valuable clue as to whether it is the enemy you are listening to is whether you are getting depressed and paralyzed: if you are, it probably is. He makes you feel terribly reluctant to soil yourself in the dreadful complexity of actual situations, and guilty about having ever gotten involved in something.

The problem with this kind of liberalism is evident. It quickly becomes a brand of hatred for life masquerading as compassion or honest thinking. It has the power to destroy while pretending to redeem. "Action", however, "will remove the doubt that theory cannot solve", which is why the man of faith is a man of action. This is the deep address of a Town Meeting or a Social Demonstration: one necessary deed has more life-giving power than a thousand good ideas.

In the second place, the liberal heresy uses the Weaponry of an Immediate Eschaton. An immediate eschaton of any kind provides you with enough weapons to destroy pretty much anything." Since the world is on the brink of extinction (through population explosion or nuclear warfare or insecticides or Communism or the fuel crisis or the beef shortage or the drought or galloping inflation or pollution etc.) it need not be taken seriously. Why would you build anything when the whole world is about to come crashing down about your ears? The best you can do is stock your basement with canned foods and wait for it to happen, or build up an arsenal and

¹ This is a reminder of the massive change in consciousness that has occurred since the time that this was written. Serious writers today avoid the unnecessary use of sexist language. Today's readers are urged to look beyond this historical artifact to the see the essence of the insight being discussed which otherwise remains extremely relevant today.

hope you can fight your way out when it happens, or bury your head so that a piece of debris doesn't dash your brains out, or just carry on unobtrusively getting the most you can out of the few days that are left." This approach to life could be relatively harmless, but it tends to crusade, and in doing so to negate everything that does not react the same way. For instance if someone says "Unless we introduce mandatory sterilization for every welfare recipient in the western world there is not going to be any future" he is implying that any other human undertaking is absolutely futile and pathetic and misguided. Thus a lethal attack has been launched, quite possibly without your even realizing it, and any hope or courage you may have had is massacred before you had a chance to do much about it.

Lucidity about inevitable doom is all very well, but when it invites you to base your decisions on fear or despair it has revealed itself as just another illusion, as hostile to new life as any complacency. The clue to the inauthenticity of this stance is that the liberal blithely hops from one eschaton to the next as time moves on. It proclaims a predestined, imminent, inevitable doom of the world. It bullies people into diving on the edge of catastrophe, either taking some emergency action or some special dispensation from action. It negates any serious responsibility by showing the way the uselessness of everything. It refuses to deal with existing structures since there is no time for this and they are all doomed anyway. Meanwhile Sisyphus continues to roll his boulder and the man of faith continues with inexorable patience to build the earth.

In the third place the liberal heresy is characterized by a propensity to live in The Romanticism of the Democratic Principle. Here the liberal prefers to poll the opinions, reasoned or haphazard, of every Tom, Dick and Harry, rather than take the awful step of actually deciding about something. "Since there is nothing to be done we can at least make the situation less unpleasant by agreeing about something." In this case political justice takes precedence over everything, and if someone is upset about what is happening you should stop or sabotage the whole program until they are happy about it. "Every human being is important, therefore we must ride roughshod over no-one." A real dyed-in-the-wool liberal heretic will not be deterred by any paralysis or chaos or even disaster that may ensue from this approach to polity, since to him anything is better than oppression, and therefore it is in fact probably preferable to abandon an enterprise before someone gets hurt. By the same token, he will not co-operate with any unjust government. This means of course that his hands are rather tied for the moment in America, India, Italy, the Philippines, China, Russia, Rhodesia, Scotland, and so on, but even if his hands are tied at least they are clean.

Since the ideal of one-man-one-vote is very dear to him, and since it is consistently impracticable, one of the liberal heretic's more characteristic states of mind is outrage. He swells with indignation, his eyes flash with scorn: "How can you say that India's doing well now the Emergency has taken hold?" "How can it be good if Mayor Daley thinks it's good?" "So you just went ahead and wrote proposals without a single anthropologist on the team? Without even speaking the seven dialects they speak there?" This kind of attack can effectively wreck your whole operation if you don't look out. By some tragic irony the cry of liberty and equality that once was used to set men free, and still can be used that way, has become a weapon to kill initiative. And the one who is using it will probably look better than his opponent. The man of faith, however, cares for the world; his reverence extends to all of life. He will not tie his destiny to a political principle, however noble it may be, and he will not condemn whole sections of the world to starvation or chaos because they seem to contradict his favorite truth about life. He reads the signs of the times, he discerns what is necessary in order that life and still more life may be given back to the world, and then uses whatever political mechanisms may be needed for the work to continue.

The fourth device used by this liberal heretic is a safe one -- Criticism of the Detached Observer. His three best ways of doing this have already been described, but you cannot rely on him to limit himself to these: he can find fault with any plan of action, for a boundless variety of reasons, and furthermore he will, since this is the only way to justify his own immobility. Thus you may come under vicious attack at any time for serving bananas too often or getting up too early or speaking too plainly or too deviously or with too much of a nasal twang or too academically or too inaccurately. No matter how effective or even miraculous a community program may be, if it falls outside the pale of his ethical piosity he will shoot to kill. This may come in the form of a suave academic critique, or a choking denunciation of your techniques, or a withering description of your wall decor, or some spine-chilling hints about your possible political affiliations. Since he is always more or less justifiable in this activity, and since he is sniping from a bullet-proof ivory tower, it should be said plainly here that he is very dangerous.

Fortunately, however, the hope that renews community is a hope that does not disappoint; it cannot be destroyed. Thus, although it is constantly taking the necessary precautions against sabotage it continues relentlessly to do its work. This does not mean that someone involved in this work is safe -- on the contrary he is extremely vulnerable and can be wiped out at a moments notice, and will be if he doesn't take care. It just means that he can put his trust in nothing but the power of being itself, and when he does he and his work are indestructible.

Now the liberal heretic has one last trick up his sleeve to thwart the forces of renewal, and it is liable to catch you off guard, since it seems so out of tune with the other four. It is called the Activism of an Innocent Helper. Just when you were beginning to think he suffered from some kind of chronic inertia he swings into action. He jumps up from the table saying, "You can just spend another year figuring out how to win the whole war if you like, but while you are just sitting around I'm going to be out there doing something.." So he goes off to help someone with something or to visit some old folk or teach someone to read or dig a flowerbed. This is a thinly disguised invitation to abandon the Long March of Care for the sake of some more reasonable or acceptable kind of activity. The liberal heretic would rather be doing something, anything, than the whole thing. Since winning the war is such an overwhelming responsibility he opts for engaging in a couple of skirmishes instead. He does not actually want to win, he just wants to be busy, busy enough to be innocent. In the name of hope he perpetuates the despair which says, "I knew it was just another do-good project." Under the banner of action he promotes a rebellion whose goal is in fact the same as before: inertia.

The man of faith however knows the song which goes, "To only to is less/ Than forming humanness," and though he may share the unbearable impatience to be out getting killed in a skirmish he continues to watch over the whole war and pray over the whole world.

The liberal heresy often poses as heroism, but is in fact a cowardly retreat from life's slings and arrows, for underneath it is a profound negativism, an assumption that real life the way it is is bad. The opposite approach to life releases human creativity. But the contemporary campaign for human development often finds itself in peril at the arrival of this enemy in one of its guises. However, as the general says, "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril." In this case if you know just one of these you will probably know the other well enough.

https://wedgeblade.net/gold_path/data/ldrt/100201.htm