

# **The Origins of Enlightened Conservatism**

## **Understanding the Background of the Evolution of an Organizing Principle**

### **Looking for the Right Question Rather than the Right Answer**

Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom, must,  
like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.  
—Thomas Paine

There are four interrelated terms that are often used with conscience as an organizing principle. They are ethics, personal responsibility, morality, and character. If you wish to instill values, you need to define each more thoughtfully so you can concentrate upon its expansion. Ethics is the set of common rules as society places upon its acceptable behavior. It is the code by which to judge. Personal responsibility is the societal value that advocates positive and conscience-based action. Morality is the inner trait of a person that shows the enlightenment of their lifestyle, and character is the personal code or trait that enforces it. If you define the words in this manner, although they are often used more similarly, you find it much easier to instill values. The strategy is conscience, and the operational areas are the group and the individual. The tactics are values, and the techniques are education and enlightenment.

For example, if ethics is a code, you do not examine it. You must promote and teach it if it is to be a peer pressure. Ethics would say a man should not cheat, but morality is whether he cheats or not based upon his values and whether character restrains him. This helps to break down the arguments more clearly. Public policy addresses ethics and individual responsibility as goals. Morality and character are more personal enlightenments from the family. It shows a distinction between morality and moralistic public policy that is often counter productive because of the resentment to force rather than the enlightenment of the benefit of values. These are traits that discuss the conscience and obligations of man to other men.

Religion is separate. It tends to be defined as a higher conscience of a man's relationship to his God and is a related but separate issue. You can agree on the common grounds of the Golden Rule, the common good, and conscience, even if you choose different religions. But religions themselves fall into this same analysis since you have the balance of the organized church and the individual's free choice. In some religions only organized religion can save you. In others it is individual character that you must develop. Or you have the normal situation where conscience is developed within with the help of the organized body. The point to be made is that understanding the relationships between the parts is essential to developing not only each individual part but how they function together. Today much focus is on the individual parts such as business ethics, legal ethics, and many specialties. It is cultural ethics of defining values for society that is the real issue. You cannot just focus on the individual steps of an assembly line and improve each without seeing how they all fit together for the overall product.

Culture is the power of history moving forward. Modern culture is the version of the values that were passed forward to each generation on how their predecessors valued issues. For example, we today use in Western society many phrases that alone seem odd but make total sense when you understand the historical perspective in which they evolved. For example, we use the concept that someone “got someone else’s goat.” While it has a meaning of creating frustration, the history goes back to horse racing in early America where the best horses were often very high strung and it became the practice to put a goat with them from birth so that they adopted it as a friend and let it calm them. If you stole the goat before the horse race, it significantly interfered with the horse’s temperament. Just like the concept of “going the extra mile” meaning doing more than is required goes back to a time when the Jewish people were forced to carry other’s luggage for a mile and in a showing of cultural power they carried it an extra mile on their own to demonstrate the inequity of the situation. The concept of the farewell greetings “sleep tight and don’t let the bedbugs bite” meaning rest well goes back to the early South when the mattresses were of moss and often had chiggers so you had to tighten the ropes under the mattress not to sag and be bitten. In each case certain things passed on, but the times that formed the symbolism or meaning could give a better understanding to the modern ideas and the logic behind them.

It is that way in trying to understand modern approaches to thought. How you think determines what you think, but how you think is often a product of the culture, history, and economics/political situation that exists in the era. Machiavelli's thoughts of realism came from a respect for the power of Cesare Borgia, but they were based in large part on his desire for a unification of Italy and how you needed a strong leader to do so even if ethics were removed from the political equation. Eastern thoughts of obligation and group responsibilities go back to Confucius who at the time recognized that what had caused the demise of a great civilization was a lack of respect for obligation. Lao Tzu looked more at the unintended consequences of acts and with more skepticism that related to action in his time. The Chinese concept of Legalism might have been effective in a period of consolidation, but was not effective in a later period of government. These three concepts of Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Legalism became the Chinese synthesis of a basic set of cultural values. This Chinese synthesis of culture was then affected greatly by modern times. In the West you had similar historical episodes of the Athens of Pericles, of the Rome of Julius Caesar and Marcus Aurelius, of the Magna Carta, and eventually the American Constitution. All of which took some principles from former eras and brought them together in the combination of a synthesis that fit more modern ideas.

Much of this history can be looked upon like the proverbial philosophical river. You look at the scene, and there are certain things that remain because they are more permanent, and there are certain things that change quickly even though the appearance may be similar. The water in the river that was there the day before is long gone, but the more permanent river course is only changed gradually by great events like floods or by the constant erosion of change in time. Separating these components is not unlike trying to reorganize short-term economic cycles in longer economic waves. All history is a battle of the force of change and powerful structure of established interests. Most of the time change is restrained in channels of gradual erosion, but episodes of instability emerge to give change great impact.

Within *The Language of Conscience* book series, two phrases that are similar codes for understanding exist that connote particular concepts. They are older phrases from Texas that convey serious meaning. The first is the example of the "pellets of a shotgun versus the bullet of a rifle." The pellets are an example of a shorter term more superficial

solution that makes noise and has impact for a shorter distance. However, they do not have a long-term distance or effect that a carefully aimed rifle bullet would have. In simple terms, much of modern media and analysis is superficial, and if you want to make real change in a competitive world, you have to get to the serious thought of a more distant perspective. You need to look at the long cycles as well as the short-term cycles within. This is why visions of philosophies need to be created versus the short-term tactics of politics. For a society to ultimately succeed, depth and structure in thought are required. The second phrase is that “you should judge a man not by his handshake and smile, but by his heart and mind.” This similarly points out that many things are done in the short term for appearance with a shorter-term set of goals. But the character of a man and his ultimate value rests more on the true intents of his heart and the strategic thinking within his mind. It is based upon an understanding that trust and sacrifice are what bring about change. Trust comes from the respect and understanding of ultimate common interests, often through common values, so gaining support for an enlightened and visionary thought structure are both key components of success.

Enlightened Conservatism as a set of ideas is not that of any one person but simply a chronicle with a synthesis of a number of thoughts that have been interjected into a structure by a variety of organizations that have played a part in the evolution of modern Texas over twenty-five years. To understand it, you need to understand its thought origins.

To understand Texas you need go back to the times of Stephen F. Austin and particularly Washington County, Texas. Austin lived in San Felipe nearby in Austin County. Sam Houston lived nearby at Independence. The family of William Barrett Travis of the Alamo were involved near Chappell Hill. Baylor University began at Independence, and a number of Texas cultural and educational institutions expanded from a small area that was early populated by immigrants from a variety of cultures. But they were not necessarily men running from civilization that were pushed out from its margins. In most cases they were people who saw a new world, opportunity, and a desire to build something of consequence. They had an attitude and an inner spirit that looked at challenge and saw the potential to build something truly significant and give their families a better life. They had to come a long way to a hostile environment but did so

knowingly. That attitude was probably best expressed at Washington on the Brazos as the Alamo was falling when the delegates there wrote the Texas Declaration of Independence and spent the time to determine that for which they fought rather than rushing emotionally to defense. It was not an effort of Mexicans against Americans; Lorenzo de Zavala was Vice President and was a Mexican who had come to fight Santa Anna because he believed in principles, as did others. It was about the Constitution of 1824 and the rights and dignity that it gave men that Santa Anna no longer recognized. Texas was a province that gained its independence and was the only independent nation to join the United States under its own terms and of its own free will. That attitude set a stage and an understanding of the development of a culture that was the long wave of Texas history and values. The Civil War devastated its economy. In the next century its reliance on agriculture, particularly cotton and cattle, and its great size, made it a rural economy that put in its values that stayed with the culture. The rules of the frontier were not easy ones, but when survival makes you care about the courtesy of others, the Golden Rule becomes much more important. When you feared Comanche Indians, droughts, and the problems of survival on a frontier, you became more appreciative of the relationships with others. If you did not have a great deal in the tough times, it made you more appreciative of those things when you received them, and you often had religion as a key part of the backbone of society and in philosophy. It became and was a value-based culture that looked upon individual responsibility as paramount. It had no kings and in a sense was a meritocracy depending on how well you seized opportunity.

In the 1900s after the Depression, Texas had the benefit of having many military installations and its development as the center of the oil industry. The increased value of oil gave a great boost to Texas education for when Texas joined the United States, it had kept much of its public lands with the oil below that in part were dedicated to education. This began an evolution in Texas because of the tremendous appreciation of the value of education. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Texas also reaped the benefits of many of these investments as it became more competitive in research through its universities and through its economic development in attracting major technology and computer-oriented companies by providing talented workforces. While the state has traditionally had a small government oriented philosophy that does not have state income tax and has been

sensitive about spending, it did begin to look at methods and ways that it could expand the state's future opportunities. Over these years a number of different study groups played a significant part in helping educate people and coordinating the knowledge of the various institutions. At the time, the ideas were referred to as a "Third Coast of Thought" because they differed from the approaches of the East and West Coasts.

In 1980 the Texas Lyceum was formed involving a significant part of the cultural, business, and political leadership of the state. They brought in speakers from outside the United States and helped serve as a catalyst for many of these thoughts in explaining them from the development of perspectives. They looked at issues such as the impact of regulation, the impact of oil on inflation, the methods of economic growth and what had been successful in other states and localities. They looked at Texas' future over twenty-five year periods. By involving people from government, from industry, media, and cultural activities, it tended to help serve as a blend of thought. It was an interesting time because Southwest Airlines had begun to make the state smaller where people could coordinate more easily, and the Lyceum's meetings in varying parts of the state helped in a small way to give an orientation to the problems. By having one meeting in Dallas, a few months later in Fort Worth, and then a seminar in the Valley, you could not help but see the differences that existed. A meeting in El Paso provided a perspective totally different from one in Nacogdoches. In part the Lyceum helped bring about more of a cultural appreciation and through the participation of Texas Business Magazine, which covered different activities in working with the Lyceum, you had a group of people that developed more of an expertise of understanding that answers are oftentimes not as important as the right questions, which had been the lesson of Aristotle and Socrates to history. This broadening of mindset evolved with public policy and had effects because the focus of many of its public programs looked at economic development and brought in alternative ideas as well as working with the state's universities. Dean George Kozmetsky was an early cosponsor of the Lyceum with his Institute of Constructive Capitalism and to a great extent showed the significance of having clusters of technology and showed how technology and education could impact economic growth and standards of living. The Lyceum helped Texas leaders appreciate the value of research and look at the future and trends to identify priorities for spending. At the beginning they understood

the need and strategies of economic growth but then moved to understand unifying people. Seeing the future demographics of the state created an understanding of why the right education with opportunities mattered.

The Lyceum created an environment that had both Democrats and Republicans and all races, colors, creeds, religions and picked its leadership by no criteria other than an interest in the values of the organization and its vision. It gave the Stewardship of Texas Values Award to those people that embodied this Texas spirit. After six years people left with a much broadened perspective to make room for younger leaders and as they left they spread in Texas society into many other areas of service. The Lyceum also led to the formation of many other groups as these trained leaders focused on issues. Texans for Quality Education was formed by many of these leaders who looked at the problems of the school systems involving all parties as catalysts. With three independent studies it reviewed the impacts and discussed refinement issues of the 1980s educational reform in Texas. A point it emphasized was the significance of funding and the conflict that often occurred between equity and excellence. Do you spend money for ten different books for one great library for excellence or for the same book for ten different libraries for equality? That became a focus of the need for accountability and vision as to how funding could responsibly be positioned to accomplish both ends since both were needed. It was an example of the shotgun pellets and the rifle bullet coming together. Great interest was shown in the arts and humanities in Texas recognizing much of the work in the Texas Commission on the Arts of the uniqueness that Texas had and how arts and culture, as well as history and its appreciation, could bring people together and unify them on a cultural base even though they might disagree on political or economic issues. The culture of Texas was more appreciated and brought into the mix of understanding of the various organizations. Cultural values were as important as cultural arts. The involvement within the Lyceum of the East Texas Chamber of Commerce, later the Texas State Chamber of Commerce, and over the years various business organizations also presented more of an understanding of the problems of business, particularly small business that often was the greatest employer. Quality of life was often whether you had a job and how good that job was. Many of these leaders served on the boards of universities, agencies, and charities. As such, you had a perspective that grew by

association because once people see ideas, they tend to not forget them, and once you take the level of understanding of issues to higher planes, that level of comprehension often remains. One well educated person on a board or commission can often have a significant impact because of the power of ideas and the creativity involved in knowing where you can find information and how you can consolidate resources and efforts. Organizations like the John Ben Shepperd Forum, the Texas Leadership Institute, and the YO Gathering, as well a numerous other venues, were places where people exchanged ideas.

Enlightened Conservatism is no more than a chronicling of the synthesis of many of these organizations and the interaction that took place in Texas and from it into other states, which focused upon a culture of service. Those people that became involved were primarily people who understood that for their own personal dignity and their own self worth they felt that they owed a great deal to society and were willing to take the time and effort to accomplish these ends. Their ultimate goal was one of compassion and for all intents and purposes the evolution of a service-oriented philosophy. They had worked their way through a culture of understanding the Golden Rule and the importance of values and the dignity of fellow men. They knew that to truly gain respect you had to give respect and that the only real way to solve problems was to discuss them rather than argue about them. The Lyceum's formats had been ones of discussion even though people differed greatly, but they showed respect for opposing views, and they thoughtfully focused questions to the ultimate issues. They were people who started with an understanding of the importance of the rule of law and fairness within the discipline in society with which it was enforced.

Enlightened Conservatism is best defined by those three cultures, the appreciation of the value of the rule of law and its fair enforcement, the significance of the Golden Rule in providing common dignity to all men with the recognition that the rights given to men carry with them obligations that you must honor, and the final understanding that if you have a culture of compassion, it is one that provides opportunity for others and creates a focus on growth and opportunities more than a focus on redistribution and division.

The essence of Enlightened Conservatism recognizes the importance of free choice. Its core is not moralism by which others enforce their codes upon you, but it is morality

that is an internalized code of values by which we live. It also recognizes that there are significant disagreements on how you arrive at common policies and that the very nature of society is such that you must bring people together because unity is what allows you to bring about change, which allows your survival and allows the growth for the next generation. Changes to technology were difficult because many of the supporting efforts required moving money from one vehicle to another. But it focused on accountability, intelligence, and decision, and coming up with compromises of a lot of shotgun pellets that were not simply political but were at least more difficult ones formed at shooting far more permanent longer term goals.

In a modern world where the economic benefits are leveling, America needs to find a set of ideas that can help unify its people and make it highly competitive by reallocating resources and by understanding that many of the concepts that evolved into Enlightened Conservatism are important. There were always differing views of the benefits of government. There are things that only the government can do because it is the consolidated society, but the level to which it becomes involved in the private sector was often determined at best to be limited. However, you had to combine that concept with a very strongly supported nonprofit and governmental policy that provided opportunity for those negatively affected. The more responsibility assumed by citizens the less the government and the courts needed to undertake. Individual responsibility and character was the key to making government function because the culture was one of independence, not of dependence or victimization. But most of all, the creation of catalysts were particularly important. There needed to be organizations that could develop and build visions for the state in many different areas. What Enlightened Conservatism depended upon was teaching a leadership style that developed the ability to create and focus nonprofit institutions upon specific problems as they existed and as they arose. It involved how to think about the repercussions of the problems involved and from that how to explain it to the ultimate affected parties to secure funds for research. In most cases, it was not done in an effort to force individual issues but to provide alternatives from which legislators could choose. What is often lacking today are methods by which to take all of these thoughts and place them into a more appropriate format by which they could be discussed and decided.

In China the Central Party School looks to developing the Harmonious Society by taking many of the same identical problems and looking at what shall be the organizing principle for them. The choice of the “Harmonious Society” tells much about their organizing principle of seeking unity. In the West, the decision is what type culture you ultimately choose. Is it a commercial one that often is the convenience of the individual person or a culture of service in which you try to train each generation that one of the values of life is the benefit of serving others and that ultimate character is the benefit you seek? Such a society often takes care of the economics on its own because it brings about a limited political system that grants rights and most importantly gives each generation the opportunity to build its own future. Enlightened Conservatism is simply a matter of thought of how to go through these processes thoughtfully and with a more distant target in mind for the rifle bullet approach of more distant vision. It is not theoretical but is honed more from the experiences over periods of time of a number of different organizations that have injected ideas into the process and that have been absorbed. The triangles are but representations and chronicles of the experiences of a number of people within Texas society over a broad base of time. Today words become icons and it is important to distinguish the most critical terms. Enlightened is not the comparison of science and religion in the Western sense but is used in the Eastern sense to recognize change and that constant education and focus is necessary to understand and adjust to it. Conservatism is not the political philosophy but is symbolic of its recognition that an existing structure resists change and that existing values must be equally considered. Modernity often has benefits but it also has costs. Enlightened Conservatism is simply a thought method to bring understanding and balance.

Two other terms are used differently in its concepts. Realism and idealism are often philosophically used in the extreme similar to judgment of evil and good—Machiavelli or utopian. Enlightened Conservatism treats them differently as conscience or convenience. They are not judgmental factors from one’s perspective as much as they are a part of all people. And it is emphasis given to one over another depending on the time. An enlightened conservative, by their analysis, can be a realistic idealist or an idealistic realist. Men that are realists normally have an ultimate goal or they have no strategy. Idealists need reality to temper their thoughts. These are not exclusive, and indeed cannot

be if you see success. The Enlightened Conservative example is the lawman who meets others with a handshake and courtesy hoping for the best but who carries a gun and awareness. If you look for an enemy you will find an enemy, but you trust only from experience.

To understand the origins of Enlightened Conservatism it becomes important to understand the history of a method of thought. It has certain fundamentals within it that provide like the river with the slower changing boundaries. But at the same time it has the ability to recognize that the water of the current day changes and it may be both have floods or droughts, and you need to consider both issues. It recognizes that here are things that you can change. But change is difficult and often takes time and usually results in crisis. It recognizes the reality that forces and powers often determined history and that you must understand them and work through them in order to make an impact. It recognizes the fact that ideas have to replace former ideas to bring change and that the development of them normally requires a system of thought that involves a broad discussion rather than an argument. In doing so it does not automatically disagree with the opponent but accepts the hypothesis and then discusses what is seen as potential problems rather than an immediate rejection. *It looks ultimately to a final goal of changing culture and building culture through three levels, that of the rule of law and its enforcement that provides the discipline in society, the Golden Rule of obligation that you owe to others that creates the ethics within society, and the culture of compassion or service by which you look to the importance of society as a whole and the future and how you can make contributions to it. In one sense it is the bottom up of realism, in the second it combines with the ultimate top down goals of idealism.*

Each society finds itself in a different historical mix and may have to take a different route in order to reach its set of goals. An undeveloped society that does not have resources has a totally different set of situations than an emerging society in which people are focused on the provision of opportunity or an advanced society that has less pressure and is more interested in certain social goals. These create different cultures and environments that have to be understood. Knowing the right questions to ask in each of these circumstances is, however, common to each of the situations. How you think about an issue can be more similar than people would believe if your ultimate goal is the

creation of a culture of conscience as opposed to a society of convenience. Whether you search first for similar relationships to your values in order to do deals or do deals hoping to eventually find an appropriate partner is a tactic of realism that ties back to the choice of perspective. Different fact situations get different answers. Emotion may make differences harder to understand, but the wisdom of logic lets you agree on the right questions. The idealism of Enlightened Conservatism is its culture; the realism is its process of thought.

The lessons of history show that guns of power can be used for good or bad, and it shows the influence of “the winds and the weather” of time and ideas may similarly produce virtue or evil. But the corrosion of the influence of time and weather always corrode the existing guns of power. So ideas, which are spread by the wind, matter and if men during their brief time on earth can remember not only history but modern Chaos Theory that recognized the important of small but significant acts that are leveraged by independent factors, they can make a positive difference. They can then work toward the ultimate goal of Enlightened Conservatism that every man grants to every other man the same dignity and rights that he expects for himself and an even greater evolution of expectations of both for his children.

Such was the base of reason that most people moved to Washington County, Texas in the 1800s.