

## Understanding Enlightened Conservatism

### Defining Civilization

*A culture where every man accords every other man the same dignity and rights he deserves for himself. It is the society of the Golden Rule.*

—Tieman H. Dippel, Jr.

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*We do not influence the course of events by persuading people that we are right when we make what they regard as radical proposals. Rather, we exert influence by keeping options available when something has to be done at a time of crisis.*

—Milton Friedman

*Two Lucky People*

*Since I often use the term peacemaker but talk both of the values and the forces of society and how I define the term. My father was a Texas sheriff not a minister, so the perspective of judgment is probably similar to what Rev. Martin Luther King wrote in his Letter from Birmingham Jail in response to requests from other ministers that he cease in the search for peace. His letter noted that peace was not an absence of violence but was justice. Enlightened Conservatism is not absence of controversy gained by absolute toleration and relativity. It is instead a struggle for a culture of personal dignity and the Golden Rule that can sustain peace through the power of its ideas. Nearly all things can be brought into balance temporarily if you sacrifice from the future, but if you care about your children and stability of your own times, you face the necessity of being a realist on tactics and operations and an idealist in your vision of the future.*

—Tieman H. Dippel, Jr.

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Throughout all of life and society you have both bottom up and top down approaches to how systems operate. Quite often the bottom up activities fill our days with items that are much more tactical and demanding of time but are of much shorter focus. If driven by thought, the top down approach is a much broader spectrum that is often more strategic and can focus on considerations of what should be the best bottom up, short term choices if it has some appropriate connective mechanisms to put them in sync.

This connective mechanism would best be called an organizing principle—what it is from the top down strategic approach that fits into place such that short-term actions and decisions are organized in a way that they approach a more collective thought process. The method of thought determines what you think about issues and how you act. But it requires thought to control emotion.

For society as a whole this is often called civilization. The nature of the culture of that civilization provides the judgment criteria of how underlying interactions occur. When it is fragmented and diverse, the culture is weak and the organizing principles far less effective. Culture is the interesting component part because in every society, and indeed in different parts of society, it provides much of the guidance that affects both emotion and thought. The difficulty throughout history has been that civilization is often defined in many different terms depending on the individual's perspective of it. Today we have one of those periods that challenge the advance of civilization if we use that term to mean the positive advancement of all people. For many years the Cold War arranged advancement through and alliances. Today terrorism and corruption are affecting organizational thought and the future of civilization.

Defining civilization is difficult but extremely necessary. To some it is the issue of control by whatever guides them—be it religion, race, country, political persuasion or other operating principle mechanism. For the world as a whole civilization is a very general term that is often synonymous with physical or technological advancement as opposed to mental or cultural advance. But if you are to effectively find a common operating principle then you need to define it more specifically as to what civilization's goals should be. And those goals, to be successful, are more mental than physical because civilization is a cultural concept that involves men's rotation to each other. Technology is neutral in this since nuclear power is available for good or evil.

When I was asked how I would define civilization, my answer would be that the best civilization looked to how every family could live its highest standard of living with the highest level of personal dignity, and the knowledge that the future that they left their children would be improved over their era because of the actions that they had taken. Although we have an impression that civilization automatically goes forward because we sometimes judge it by the advances of technology and education that is not the truth of

history. Much of history has been the cycle of rising and declining empires, and eras of conscience and eras of convenience both dominate. Sometimes law rules, sometimes men. But history tells us a great deal about trends. The Dark Ages needed the Renaissance and today we see the impacts of terrorism, corruption, arrogance, and the pursuit of convenience. Corruption and terrorism are not defining ideologies but simply tactics. Machiavelli, in theory, took ethics out of politics and in ways empowered such tactics. Enlightened Conservatism is fundamentally an effort to put ethics and responsibility back into society.

If we seek the best operating system for a future environment that benefits our children and our present standard of life judged by our human dignity, then we need to create a culture of conscience as opposed to a culture of convenience. And the operating principles of such a culture need to be considered by all parties in evaluating the way they process information. How you think about issues determines to a very great extent what you think about issues. The method of your thought and how it processes the information received is critical. If it is made emotionally as a quick decision because of historical differences or slights, it is a quite different decision than if it is made with thought as to how the actual impact has a long-range effect on those goals of “civilization.” When we are in individual groups through the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity we automatically adopt a perspective that comes from that grouping. It is easy for us to feel in many cases victimized by others or envious of them where in reality if we instead decide to look at a situation through the development of character and the reality of what is best for the common good of which we are a part, our decisions may be significantly different. A thought process of “zero sum” that if others succeed they are the cause of my failure is very different from the creation of win/win scenarios, even if unbalanced. There is a great difference between victimization and acceptance of a responsibility.

If you wish to have a positive culture of responsibility, you have to determine what should be the operating system that is suggested to bring about this common good. To me, it is the Golden Rule because it is the one force of morality that is common throughout the world and our daily interactions. When I am asked to define the civilization I would like to see, I note that I feel the best civilization is one where each person gives the same level of respect and personal dignity that he claims for himself to every other

person. Such is a society of the Golden Rule. It is the basis of the concept of the common good. Frederic Bastiat, who 150 years ago wrote in his small book, *The Law*, a very appropriate concept he held that it is not the law that gives the culture, but it is the culture that gives the law. The individual rights that each man has are because they are part of the common rights that all protect. So if the ultimate civilization is the equality of personal dignity, then how is it to be implemented? The respect of courtesy, the appreciation of common values, and the recognition of the importance of conscience all play a major part.

Civilization is a cultural issue more than a political or an economic one. The three great powers (economics, politics, and culture) all have their mechanisms of enforcement and reality. But culture, the basis of civilization, very much affects the nature of politics and the nature of economics. Market systems work best when there is the most efficient competition, and competition only occurs at its best in honest markets. Politics results from a reading of a sense of the people because ultimately they are what contribute to the stability or instability of any government. So the values that become a critical part of that culture only gain power over time as they are taught to each generation. The advancement of civilization, as we have defined it, is determined greatly by what values are passed on from one generation to the next. And those values are what shape an individual's concept of his human dignity. It is similar to the concept of "face" and courtesy in the East. If we strive for equality and improvement, time can be on our side. If we let values deteriorate, it is civilization's adversary.

Many believe that such general top down philosophies are naïve in today's world, but the pursuit of wisdom is never naïve. The pursuit of knowledge alone without a method by which to organize it effectively often creates more confusion and more false trails of effort than a thoughtful and logical approach to problems.

*Enlightened Conservatism is nothing more than a philosophy of unifying people through the power of conscience, as opposed to convenience, and bringing harmony into cultures and between cultures by developing a common base of understanding that requires a system of integrity of purpose that we refer to as the Language of Conscience. Its goal is a civilization with an organizing principal of the Golden Rule to assure each man's willingness to give all others the level of human dignity he wishes for himself. It*

*recognizes that strength is built when individual responsibility overcomes victimization, when opportunity is given rather than supplements from statecraft, and where the government lives from the peoples' efforts rather than the people depending upon government.*

### **The Philosophy of Enlightened Conservatism**

To understand the concepts of enlightened conservatism it is important to understand their evolution through three decades of practical experiences which honed perspectives and insights into three major drivers of society: economics, culture, and politics. Rather than a political philosophy, it is primarily a cultural philosophy that uses the power of morality to shape the external environment. It recognizes that economics in its free market form and politics have become extremely competitive in nature, and that the real strength of a society often is not in its intelligence or its strength, but in its cohesiveness to be able to affect change. Without this unity or stability within society, the use of the intelligence or the strength within the society is limited. Culture is the one of the three great strategic drivers that is positioned to unify and, thereby, can provide the balance and stability necessary for the effective operation of the other two great powers. It recognizes that as a base the forces of change pit the enlightenment of technology and education in friction with existing cultural values and economic interests (conservatism). How that affects the individual and his "dignity" determines strategy.

Rene Descartes, the French thinker who many consider the father of modern philosophy, used the equivalent of a scientific method as he thought through the use of reason. He conceptualized ideas and believed that there were two kinds of true ideas. These ideas are clear ideas that could be distinguished from others and distinct ideas that had parts that could be distinguished from each other. The purpose of a philosopher was to analyze these complex ideas and translate them into simpler ones. He distinguished between ideas of the mind and ideas that came from worldly experience, which he felt could not be as clearly defined. Enlightened conservatism uses both of those concepts as it applies them to forces and strategic driving powers. It breaks complex ideas into simpler groupings, but most importantly it is not primarily based on academic theory. It is based on practical experience and an understanding of the nature of power, the various

types of power, and the interactions that they have to enforce or diminish each other. It notes that the environment in which they operate, the peer pressure of the culture, is what implements the power of values or the lack thereof. It is not a concept of detailed research of past theories but of applying many of the lessons of different ages in a synthesis to a more modern combination that reflects the current friction between dramatically expanding technology and education (*enlightenment*) and the existing framework that has slowly developed to provide the value-based operating system of societies (*conservatism*). The balance between those two forces determines the stability of a society and its ability to change and adapt.

Enlightened conservatism uses individual dignity as the balancing point of how people view their position in their environment and their desire for change. As a synthesis, it has taken thoughts from various parts of history in comparisons and linked them together. A typical example would be the concepts of power. Seldom have you had more diverse synthesis than combining thoughts such as Thomas Paine's visionary concept on limited government in American society as compared to Frederick Engels'. Both understood the power of culture. Paine believed that if you had a society of individual responsibility you needed less government, less courts, and less interference with life:

*Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state every one is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor. In the ideal state, therefore, there is not political power because there is no state.*

To Paine, the individual responsibility of the people, if strong enough, limited the need for government. Bottom up values create strength.

Frederick Engels' observation of the nature of the Communist Manifesto parallels the powers of economics affecting culture, driving politics.

*The basic thought underlying the (Communist) Manifest is as follows: The method of production and the organization of social life inevitably arising there from constitutes in every historical epoch the foundation upon which is built the political and intellectual history of that epoch.*

To Engels' economics creates the culture which defines the politics. To him, top down ideas collectivize people.

Society is organized more fundamentally on an individual liberty basis in the West and a collective obligation basis in the East. How you blend those factors and examine them is critical to the emerging global world where they will interact. A framework for discussion, based on mutual respect and conscience, is a place to start. And one of the family observations of the Medici family that had imprisoned Machiavelli and for whom he wrote *The Prince* understood that the people by their actions or their inactions eventually determined those in power. Individual dignity in a consolidated form governs the intensity for change; it is a cultural issue in its base.

Enlightened conservatism simply changes the caveat that economic power controls the culture that controls the politics; with the thought in this era it may be the cultural power that is critical to the economics and to the politics. And it is the individual personal dignity, more than personal self-interest that should be the focus of building stability within society. It is a concept based on love and honor more than fear and corruption. But it makes an extremely strong case that there is a tipping point between those two competing concepts as defined by conscience and convenience. It is the peer pressure of the culture that is the deciding factor. Conscience often prevails at individual levels of action, but as you move up the scales of power, ambition, greed, and many factors give convenience a significant benefit. Therefore, the only way to put conscience into power within a society is to make it convenient to be for conscience by shaping the values of the society toward the common good. The eras of the 1950s and 1960s were very much dominated by political ideology with leaders such as Johnson, Kennedy, Brezhnev, and Mao. The 1980s moved to economics as technology put increasing pressures on centralized systems that demanded at least partial market responses. Economics became the critical issue with Reagan, Thatcher, Deng, and Gorbachev emerging as leaders. Because of the political threats of terrorism and the economic threats of corruption, this century will be one driven more by cultural power as is being seen in the Middle East and within the unity of individual nations. If internal stability and culture disintegrate, the strength of the society disintegrates and the common good is often lost. The Golden Rule of Christ and the Silver Rule of Confucius that look to treating others as you wish to be treated are cultural power, which give the base of the common good that is a political concept.

## **The Key To Enlightened Conservatism**

### **Conservatism's Thought Process**

If how you think determines what you think, and you assemble relevant understanding of issues, then several comparisons are helpful. A city council session is often emotional, based on issues that have a political impact and usually require quick decision. Compare this to a Supreme Court decision where all historical thought is assembled, advocates argue the most relevant points, and a group deliberation of all of this renders a final decision. While these are both dictated by other factors, the more you can move the most critical items toward the wisdom of thought the better society is.

Combine this with the fact that society is so complicated that change is not manageable, so the option is to provide a vision of where you need to go. You try to migrate or lead the leaders of the process, the uncommon men and women who wish responsibility, toward it by defining it and providing the tools you can, such as groups organized to seek wisdom above. Technology did much to bring in market systems because of the pressures it placed on critical planning. Now culture can solve problems because it can be an organizing principle of a vision to be achieved.

Sometimes when problems are so complex and unsolvable, you have to expand them so they can become solvable. If a problem cannot be solved and is political, add economic issues. If it is still not solvable, then add cultural issues. For example, take the uninsured for health. The economic and political issues are stalemated, but putting them with cultural issues may allow redefinition of issues and different alignments for different reasons. What enlightened conservatism tries to do is provide more structure to what is really individual thought but becomes unified on a common value vision. It lets many different interests migrate toward a common goal without attempting to control change beyond the parameters of quality of thought, prioritization of excellence and importance, and the value orientation that unifies the vision.

## **The Triangles of Enlightened Conservatism**

### **Finding the Rosetta Stone of Common Cultural Values**

Enlightened conservatism positions a set of triangles that describe the more simplified ideas of the dynamics of society. At its core is the belief that conscience over convenience as the ultimate cultural issue by which an individual lives life and a society forms its combined cultural values. That choice requires character, which is the individual responsibility of choosing conscience over convenience and is the fundamental idea that must be addressed. Policy issues must include consideration of this fundamentalist concept. If conscience is an organizing thought, individual responsibility is its implementation vehicle. Enlightened conservatism looks to free markets as being the ultimate creator of the highest standard of living and recognizes the self-interest of competition necessary for them to function.

However, it also addresses two critical points often left out by free-market advocates. The first is the absolute need for an ethical and moral market place in order that there be the highest level of competition for the free market system to work. In a corrupt market, competition is not effective, and the system is vastly diminished. Secondly, the stability within society and the continued use of the market system itself is put into jeopardy if the society does not have a cultural base that has concern for those negatively affected by the system. Nonprofit institutions, which are a free market solution to accomplishing many of the functions provided by a central government, are absolutely essential in creating a culture of service, as well as policies that encourage individual responsibility, and recognize where legitimate charity and need should be addressed. The creation and maintenance of a strong middle class is necessary for the support of the common good.

In the arena of politics, the culture of responsibility limits the need for large government because peer pressure solves problems in the place of legal actions, police actions, regulatory mandates or government imposition into the economic system. The political concept is not right versus left, but more of an understanding of the common good that is found within the middle. Stability is what brings ultimate value because it allows planning and changes perceptions. It thus makes change a very critical issue in modern times because the level of change creates the friction between existing values and the next stages of economics, and often political perspective.

The term, enlightened conservatism, is not a political one, but is instead indicative of these two forces of the friction of change. Enlightenment, which is often driven by technology and education and the conservatism of existing political economic structures, and existing cultural values which have been built over many generations and do not adapt rapidly. The balance between these two is best judged by the concept of the individual dignity of the members of the society in which these forces play varying roles. Society's action or inaction depends a great deal upon the level of involvement of the people. The more educated they become, the more they may leave cultural values. The more support they give to cultural values, the less willing they may be to accept change. To balance these issues thought rather than emotion must reign. For example, it is not the quantity of education that gives value; it is the effectiveness in the modern world of the education provided. Understanding how a society thinks is a start, but you need common set of references to explain options and differences.

But in all cases one of the most powerful forces is the natural human desire to be correct that often both shapes, and is shaped by, how they look at the information presented to them. This is shaped by their existing concept of their personal dignity and it has a bias to reinforce their current evaluation. If they look at that information from a skewed perspective, it is used to rationalize their current positions. If they look at it with a broadened perspective, they may change. Thus, the language of conscience is particularly important because people are much more willing to listen and try to understand people that show respect to them than people that demand them to change or give them few alternatives.

The dignity of man is not just his political rights. It is not just his economic position. It is, as in the concept of the Greek Stoics, what man is willing to accept or is willing to endure sacrifice to achieve, that ultimately matters. This inner set of values is in reality the battle between conscience and convenience. Does he care about others more than he cares about himself? It is recognized as the bottom line of stability within a society and the basis of unification or the basis of disintegration. Will society be ruled by common principles of men's interaction with men that are ruled not just by laws but also by the common morality that goes beyond laws, which are the ethics of enforcement of the Golden Rule, the common good, and the concept of service to others? The more men are

driven into groups by politics and by economics, the more they need to find cultural bridges that let them understand each other so the frictions can be more easily abated.

The most important understanding of enlightened conservatism, is that it recognizes that change is often glacial and that the issues may not be the politics of the moment, but instead the nature of the value system that is evolving with the education of the future generations. Children take the values of the parents and of the society. It is not just what they are taught but also what is instilled in them by the actions and the operations of a society as a whole. At any time, society is but a tipping point away from going to conscience or convenience. To move it to conscience often takes actions to maintain the common good and stability. This makes the family the most important single point of focus for it is where the ultimate values are taught. But as you move into society if those values are different from society as a whole, the children are either corrupted to new values or they are put at a significant disadvantage. Therefore, society also needs to have similar perspectives.

The battle between whose values and what those perspectives should be, often creates frictions within a society. Toleration is critically important as is diversity, but if you have absolute toleration and total diversity you lose the commonality of the culture, and it deteriorates through division. The other alternative is to unify both diversity and toleration into the common points which cultures jointly recognize. There is a difference between morality and religion because morality deals with men and their interaction to each other while religions deal with a man's individual relationship with the God of his choice. Therefore, one of the great challenges of current times will be how to build a framework of respect and understanding where men can disagree, but at the same time can work to agree on how they fundamentally treat each other. Civilization has been built on an advancement of concepts such as the Golden Rule, the common good, and the acceptance of individual responsibility with a concern and toleration of others. These very values can be lost if a society deteriorates into an anarchy of convenience.

The concept of enlightened conservatism takes these fundamental thoughts and divides them out in a series of triangles for better discussion purposes at different levels of intensity and helps provide an education as to the interaction of these forces both on an individual basis and for public policy discussion and understanding. The culture to be

sought moves through three stages. The first is the discipline in the society as exemplified by the common coeds of conduct to which all agree, and are justly enforced. It makes the rule of law above that of individual men. The next culture is that of the morality, or the Golden Rule, where we move beyond what is required to what we expect of each other. It is a culture of mutual obligation. The final culture develops these two to a higher level of service and compassion when you do things for others you do not expect in return because of your values. It is the ultimate concern for others from both philosophy and many religions. The methods by which you look at the creation of these cultures as not only analytics and trends but also measurements with prioritization. The three great powers (economics, politics, and culture) are the component parts that must be directed where possible into policies that are coordinated and consistent with the purpose of conscience and character with which you begin.

It is necessary to understand that it is a concept at different levels. On the individual level it operates much as a course on Western classics and the Chinese cultural synthesis of Confucius, Lao-tzu, and legalism. By the choice of quotations from many different eras and thinkers, it helps to formulate an understanding of the background necessary to consider the higher levels of thought. Far from an academic text that quotes innumerable sources, the books and writings that comprise it have to be viewed as an original synthesis of thought supplemented by observations of history that tend to broaden the thought, as well as refine it in making points. For example, Aristotle's belief in a moral life may be particularly relevant today, although his perspectives of the earth being the center of the universe may have been disproved by future science after his time. The critical thing to recognize as the books are read is that they are not attempting to prove specific points as much as endeavoring to bring about understanding of the concepts in terms of realism as opposed to theory. They are not intended to tell anyone what to do, but to present a set of observations that can be adapted to a common format. They are helpful if you want to promote a sense of honor and integrity, believe in individual responsibility, and favor morality as a value system over relativism. The books take the realism of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and combine it with Maimonides (Rambam) and his Eight Levels of Charity. They understand, like the Greek Stoics, that man's inner self is key to his perception of all else.

The three books that are included were written over perhaps a twenty-five year period. *The New Legacy* was written in 1986 and excerpted by *Texas Business Magazine* as a book of insight on much of what was learned in the Texas Lyceum Forums. But it is a book that talks about public policy only after talking about the critical impact of family values emphasizing that considerations on personal levels are often much more important than theoretical interactions. Family structures may determine economic success as much as education because the habits taught to children and the thought processes given to them, matter. *The Language of Conscience* was a book written for three leadership organizations in Texas and as a bridge for the Confucian Museum in China to the West. It was never intended to be a popularly read book because it largely focused upon how you built nonprofit organizations and how you had to inject the concept of conscience into what you do to succeed with nonprofit efforts. It was a handbook for leaders in understanding not only *what* to do and *how* to do it well but most importantly, *why* you did what you did. *Instilling Values in Transcending Generations* is the most significant book because it brings together the concepts of family and of public leadership found in the first two with a much closer explanation of why culture is absolutely essential to the common good. None can be fully understood without understanding the author's background and how it shaped those perspectives.

As the three books are read, in reverse order, you see the evolution of thoughts not of one person, but of a generation with values based on a heritage of honor and how that honor perspective came from preceding generations. Family values transcend into public values.

While the concept of enlightened conservatism is more recognized by think tanks and political leaders than universities, the website [www.thelanguageofconscience.com](http://www.thelanguageofconscience.com) contains a wide variety of comments from all sides of the political spectrum. The uniqueness of the concept in being able to transcend different groups by unifying them on a sense of honor, morality, and mutual respect is perhaps best shown by the rainbow of endorsements of the political spectrum, but also of organizations. *The Language of Conscience* was supported and distributed by a number of conservative American value-oriented think tanks. Because of its support of ethics, morality, and cultural values, the Press of the Central Party School of the Communist Party of China secured the rights to

the book and published it with its existing cover for distribution in China. This has made it a potential critical bridge for Chinese and Western scholars in the realms of morality, ethics, and cultural values.

The past century in science will probably be remembered for three great theories. The first, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, deals with the universe and the laws of physics for large systems. The second, The Theory of Quantum Physics, looks to the small atomic items and their distinct operational theory. The third is the Chaos Theory that describes the motions and dynamics in sensitive systems, which are mathematically deterministic but often unpredictable. Within the chaos concept is a "butterfly effect" that encapsulates the theory's technical notion of sensitive dependence on the initial conditions. The concept is that a small variation in the initial environment of a system that is dynamic may produce significant variations in the long-term behavior of the system.

Edward Lorenz, who first promulgated the theory, understood better there is a significant difference over a long term in a dynamic system with whether your starting number would be 2 or 2.000001. If there is a Theory of Relativity to enlightened conservatism it is the importance and power of morality, character, and individual responsibility in the creation of a culture, which is a strategic driver for almost all else. If there is a Theory of Quantum Physics in the inter-relationship of smaller items, it is how economics, politics, culture, enlightenment and change, historical and systemic values, and a host of other factors all inter-relate and affect each other. But the concept is far more appropriate to be judged by the Chaos Theory in that it attempts to find order in the alternatives selected through analytics, trends, and measurement with prioritization. And most important of all it understands that small changes, particularly when placed in public policy and in cultural evolution, over time, have tremendous effect in changing the nature of the outcome of systems. A butterfly's wings may have a small effect, but if they are amplified by thoughtful direction of public policy and by the peer pressure of a strengthened culture, the distant impacts are highly significant.

Perhaps the most basic understanding of the concept lies in an understanding of the importance of personal dignity and how much it affects human motivation. It looks in summary at the highest level of Rambam's Eight Levels of Charity, which is that giving a loan or a job so that a man can become financially independent is far greater than giving

a subsidy. Independence, which is a part of a man's dignity, is only accomplished when he is given ample opportunity by the environment that surrounds it. That environment is one created by the culture that is an interplay of various factors. These factors are very much inter-related and support or hinder each other. There will never be perfection, and there will always be a battle between conscience and convenience. But values that are embedded within the system are those that shape the future. Enlightened conservatism is nothing more than an examination of the effects of those factors with a perspective that civilization is best served by moving forward in a positive manner in a culture dominated by conscience as opposed to one of convenience in which strategies are driven by corruption and terrorism and responses to them.