

## How We Lost Our Vision

If you think wisdom, integrity, and new ideas are missing in our government leaders, you are not alone. Confidence in national leadership is at a low point. That's because both major political parties have lost their understanding of the four values America is centered on: freedom and responsibility, opportunity and equality.

America's promise has always been that you can determine the quality of your own life. Where you start in life does not determine where you finish. This is very different from the lives people led in eighteenth century Europe, or in many poor nations today. In "old world" conditions children endlessly relived the lives of their parents. There was no social mobility. There was little access to education and almost no access to real assets. Power and corruption kept it that way. America has always stood for something different. We strive to be a society that promotes the key conditions to help us optimize our quality of life no matter what our circumstances. Doing that isn't easy. It requires constantly balancing four distinct priorities: freedom and responsibility, opportunity and equality. If any one of these values are lost or even de-emphasized, our system is thrown out of balance. People lose confidence and our national mood sours. Today, lots of us are in a sour mood.

Maybe we're nauseated because we've lost our balance. When leaders govern from the center, they do it from a balance point that gives all of us the best chance for life, liberty and happiness. That's why, most of the time, leaders who advocate policies that respect all four values simultaneously make the most sense to the most of us.

But recently we have been out of whack. Way out. Politicians say the right things, but they don't do them. More and more, it's the people on the fringe who determine the debate and push the agenda because they either deliver the cash or the votes.

These days, the loudest voices shout from the lower Right or the lower Left. On the lower Right, the Right wing of the Republican Party, all we hear are the values of opportunity and freedom. Our ideals are reduced to the single notion that everyone should press their self-interest and leverage their advantages to the max. That's America!

Their mantra insists only on low taxes and few regulations. Their ideal nation would have no capital gains taxes, would have open borders and would keep us neck-deep in maids, nannies and day laborers. Their prophetess is economic philosopher, Ayn Rand, who actually wrote a book entitled, *The Virtue of Selfishness*. Their high priest is Milton Friedman, who claimed, "The social responsibility of business is to make a profit."<sup>11</sup> In their perfect world, economic and social Darwinism creates the best society. The strong, the smart, and the clever win. The lazy and stupid suffer through their own lack of effort. That's the natural laws of cosmically ordained economics working. The market rules. The market is perfect. If you aren't rich, well educated, healthy and well-connected, you are to blame. Period. If you want it to be different—get off your butt.

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11 Collins, David. (2004). Tylenol Revisited: Friedman and the current CSR debate. In David Collins (Ed.), *Corporate integrity and accountability* (p.20). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Lower Right thinking is how the wealthy justify their neglect of everyone else.

The lower Right also manipulates the millions of Americans with traditional religious values even as they privately ridicule them as intellectual hillbillies. These corrupt politicians, many with sordid personal lives and vulgar private opinions, tout their “religiously correct” views to radicalize their followers and pick their pockets with no intention of changing anything.

On the lower Left, we hear the weak voices of recycled liberalism. This whiny crowd focuses on protecting the weak instead of educating, empowering, and holding them responsible. It promotes freedom as the excuse to choose continuing irresponsibility as a viable way of life. Higher taxes, cumbersome regulations and more bureaucracy always seem to result from the ideas of the lower Left. This line of thinking leads to everyone waiting in line, sharing equally in scarcity.

Meanwhile, the extreme Left twists the idea of Liberty into social chaos. An MTV world. Anything anybody wants to do is okay. It’s all just an expression of personal choice. We must respect and honor every lifestyle choice, every form of “artistic” expression. Everything is normal. This belief is so pervasive, you might actually mistake it for liberty. But is it?

Are there really victimless crimes if we live in a society where individual human beings matter? We don’t live in a vacuum; we live in a connected human community. Are there perhaps decisions we make, behaviors we engage in that we think is only our own business that spews out psychological “second hand smoke” that is extremely toxic to our children, our family and friends, or to society as a whole?

Are we not all diminished by the failure of another’s life? Should we stand by with our arms folded if people voluntarily engage in behavior that degrades, exploits, or attacks the fundamental dignity of other human beings even if they “consent” to it? Do we even know what human dignity is? Are we so afraid of irrational fundamentalists who insist their version of morality is the only one that we give up all standards? Would we rather have no moral boundaries at all? Is that really our concept of liberty?

The lower Left morality seems vacant of real substance. When tolerance is your only value, anything goes.

## TAKE ACTION

### The Core Problem of the Right and Left

The far Right believes in a virtue-free capitalism. That is, if I pursue and push my self-interests, expand my personal power, status and resources the best public good will magically happen. I have no moral obligation to reduce collateral damage I cause because the invisible hand of the economic gods will ensure everyone gets what they deserve. There is nothing real about this viewpoint. It only enthrones narcissism. Today the “invisible hand” is not connected to the arms of virtue.

The far Left believes you can have public virtue without private morality. The Left has been taken over by post-modern intellectuals who insist on trying to reduce unfairness by increasing tolerance and acceptance of everything. But their “values” of unrestrained self-expression and personal autonomy dictate there is no absolute personal morality. This thinking would have us believe that there is no moral imperative not to abandon your family to pursue your career, your lust or your supposed bliss. Your guiding standard is your own flawed feelings.

Both of these points of view enthrone selfishness. Has selfishness ever been a force for good in the world? So, what are we trying to accomplish? What is the vision for America?

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