

Greetings,

March 30, 2009

I may have mentioned to you that, on the recommendation of Mark Nelson at the January Northwest Business Club meeting, I have read Jonah Goldberg's Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning. Here are a few impressions from it that may interest you.

Goldberg's motive for writing the book wasn't really clear to me until the last paragraph of the last chapter in which he described a confrontation between William F. Buckley and Gore Vidal. Buckley, a conservative, became fed up when Vidal, a liberal, accused him of being a crypto-Nazi. In a rare moment, Buckley lost his temper and publicly abused Vidal.

Liberal Facism, it turns out, is Goldberg's way of responding to similar accusations while controlling his temper and avoiding abuse. Goldberg (a Jew) is tired of being called a Nazi (understandably) by the left, so in Liberal Fascism he demonstrates how fascism is not an exclusively right-wing phenomenon. He points out that it is simply a strength-in-numbers idea (from the Italian "Fasces" meaning bundle, as of sticks) which, on the surface, may seem benign or even potentially good, but that it is easily abused by both the right and the left.

In Liberal Fascism he provides credible, historic examples of how the left has committed fascism, and uses these historic examples as warnings about the future, given the currently expanding role of government. It's a masterful opus of historical scholarship, replete with footnotes.

I pause to accept it at face value, however, for I too have often felt the urge to defend myself and publicly defeat my opponent(s) in debate through skillful use of facts and reason, and have sometimes yielded to the urge and acted, with mixed results. One mentor has called such efforts "the most brilliant speech you'll ever regret."

I have had a couple of unusual weekends. On the weekend of the 21st I participated in a workshop called "Reset for Excellence" which taught emotional intelligence, how better people skills can create both personal and professional benefits. The focus was on accepting 100% accountability, even for things that don't seem to be within one's control, like the weather. We learned that we filter factual data to create a story that justifies our opinions, and to examine the story and the filter, not just the data.

The accountability lesson was that when we accept less than 100% accountability, we descend a slippery slope of hair-splitting about where we are accountable and where we are not. Better to focus on one's self and err on the side of accountability than on the side of evasion.

The following weekend I attended a men's retreat at a monastery. There again, the message was about focusing inwardly, that the self is all anyone can really control.

Concerning filters and stories, the priest compared the fly with the bee: that flies focus on filth and rot, while bees focus on sweetness and beauty. Each has its filter; each processes data. Which, we were asked, do you want to be: the fly, or the bee?

So yes, Goldberg's book is chock full of historic facts. It's worth reading, but with caution - the same caution one should also use listening to the usual liberal "fascist" accusation of conservatives.

In all of it, the most compelling lesson for me is to look inward, determine what I must do to be a bee and not a fly, and study my filters and my stories as much as I study the data. (Late last year I finally had to get reading glasses, and I've quickly learned that to understand any data clearly, I must first clean my glasses and wear them.)

In conclusion, Liberal Fascism is a well-researched, worthwhile, and pertinent read that I recommend with the caveat that Goldberg, a Jew tired of being called a Nazi, has a score to settle. Fair enough. Regardless of his motive, I appreciate that he took the trouble to write the book. I'd recommend it to anyone interested in reconciliation.

Best wishes, Kris Freeberg

Making End\$ Meet