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The Fallacy of Conservatism

by

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*A Voter's Guide to Seeing Through the Lies, Getting
Past the Propaganda, and Choosing the Best Leaders*

Conservatives are often ready to blame the poor for their own poor-ness as if poverty was a lifestyle choice. Simultaneously, they credit their own success and the success of the rich they admire to hard work, dedication, or almost anything other than chance. And, yet, chance has a lot to do with our lives. There is a lot about our lives that we cannot control.

The reality is that many of the most important events in our lives are out of our control or, at best, subject only to limited control. We do not choose where or when we will be born. We do not select our parents or grandparents. We have no control over the genes we inherit. Much of what happens to us during the early formative years, which has such enormous ramifications for our futures, is out of our control. Others control our nutrition and our mental stimulation during our early years. Others select the schools we attend or they are the happenstance of our parents' place of residence. If we are fortunate, we encounter teachers and other adults who stimulate our developing minds and provide us with much-needed counsel in social matters but we have little control over these encounters. In our personal lives, our choice of friends and lovers is restricted to a relatively small segment of the world's population. Likewise, our employment options are limited to employers in our local communities or elsewhere that we learn about and who happen to have a need for employees at the precise time we are looking for a job. Our choice of spouse is limited to those we are dating at the time we decide to marry. Likewise we have limited control over our ability to conceive, the number of children we have and/or their gender. Our financial fortunes during our lives are subject to a large extent to macro-economic forces that are largely beyond our control and often beyond our comprehension. A chance encounter with viruses or bacteria and/or an unfortunate and unpredictable accident can seriously impair our health. And, when our health is impaired our recovery and even survival is largely a function of who is available to give us care and how knowledgeable they are about our particular ailment. Finally, few of us have control over the timing or method by which our lives will end.

On the other hand, the quality and even length of our lives is not totally out of our control. While we don't control our genes, we do control how we make use of them. Hard work and dedication to accomplishing goals do matter. We can educate ourselves and, indeed, must do so since no one can do that task for us. We can take advantage of help we are offered in all aspects of our lives but not depend upon that help. While there are usually geographical limits to our contacts, we can expand our social networks by engaging with society rather than withdrawing from it. We can show up. We can travel and expand our horizons if only virtually and through sharing the insights and experiences of others. We can choose to be open to new ideas, even strange ones. We can read widely. We can study. We can manage our personal finances and prepare for rainy days. We can exercise, eat healthy food and avoid engaging in risky activities. We can be prudent in consumption and watchful of our steps. We can be kind to ourselves in sickness and in health. We can follow the advice of those who know more than we do provided we are sure they do know more. We can prepare for our death as carefully as we prepare for our living. Finally, we can have a healthy regard for the connectedness of things and recognize that anyone who claims to be "self-made" is either ignorant or, at the least, disingenuous.

Life is never easy or simple. We can never truly know who got the chance advantages that gave them an invisible hand up toward success or who was disadvantaged through no fault of their own. Without getting to know someone very, very well we can never be sure if their current state of affairs whether lofty or impoverished is the product of their own doing or the consequence of events largely out of their control. Indeed, we can never truly know if we are where we are largely because of our effort, intelligence, moderation, and dedication or because at one point in our life we reached an intersection and turned left instead of right.

So, the next time you hear a conservative argue that taxing him more than those who make less punishes his industriousness, remind him that at least to some extent he has been lucky. But for some fortunate circumstances and factors over which he had little or no control, he could be poor and in need himself. In fact, he might become needy at some point in the rest of his life. Bad things do happen even to the "Good People."

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