



THE BRADLEY CENTER  
FOR PHILANTHROPY AND CIVIC RENEWAL

VISION AND PHILANTHROPY  
*A Bradley Center Symposium*

Wednesday, February 16, 2005  
8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
The Ritz-Carlton, 1150 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, N.W.

**Leonard A. Leo**  
*Executive Vice President, The Federalist Society*

God created man a rational being and conferred upon him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his actions. Individual freedom and personal responsibility are, therefore, essential attributes of our existence.

For government to be consistent with this human condition, there must be recognized and readily enforceable limitations on its power to control man. To be sure, freedom and personal responsibility cannot truly exist without a democratic government predicated upon consent. But pure democracy—the mere exercise of majority will—cannot in the end preserve the dignity of the human person. This is why the conservative movement has always placed a premium on the rule of law.

The American experiment in self-government is virtually unique. There have been many movements throughout human history directed at guaranteeing liberty or human dignity. The French Revolution comes to mind most readily. Yet, that political movement and most others have not fully recognized the need to limit carefully and explicitly the power of the state. Movements premised simply upon a desire for rights or entitlements, which lead to more government power with few legal constraints, inevitably lead to a loss of self-determination and personal responsibility. And this takes us very far from the relationship we are to have with God, and the relationship He wants us to have with our fellow man.

These fundamental truths about human freedom and the role of the state have driven the American conservative movement, and its understanding of our system of government. American conservatives have always demonstrated a great devotion to our Constitution precisely because the Founders forged it with a keen understanding of these important truths about the human condition. For conservatives, the structure of our government—federalism, the separation of powers, and the enumeration of specific powers—are just as important as the particularized enumeration of rights in guaranteeing human dignity. This is because constraining and delineating government authorities in ways that can be enforced ensures that the enumeration of rights is more than just hortatory. For example, our Constitution does not simply guarantee freedom of religious conscience—it prohibits the state from establishing a national church to which we must all swear allegiance. Similarly, our Constitution does not merely announce a right to own private property—it prohibits governments from confiscating such property for anything other than a public purpose, and even then, only upon just compensation.

HUDSON INSTITUTE

1015 18th Street, N.W.  
Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20036

202.223.7770  
202.223.8595 Fax  
pcr.hudson.org

How can conservative philanthropy best ensure that this vision of the public interest continues to thrive here and elsewhere in the world?

First, better communication of these core ideals about human dignity and the role of government. The ideas are fully developed. The challenge is to find new and exciting ways to re-articulate these ideas so as to captivate the excitement and imagination of new generations of citizens. This is a standard business principle—new marketing and packaging are needed on occasion to rebuild interest, enthusiasm and goodwill. Creative writers and thinkers within the university community need to be supported in this effort, producing a new round of readable and readily accessible scholarship.

Second, develop effective policy solutions that will extend these ideals to a targeted set of modern problems. This is an exercise in practicality. We should be looking for problems that, when identified and communicated, will generate a groundswell for reform. And, moreover, we should be coming up with very specific proposals for adoption by the political process or the courts. Think tanks and other policy organizations need to be engaged in this effort, and, importantly, their work needs to be scrutinized using clear, action-oriented benchmarks for success.

Finally, conservative philanthropy needs to support the creation of infrastructures that can implement the policy solutions we know will work. These might be organizations that mobilize public opinion and grassroots activists, directly incentivize or hold elected officials accountable, or otherwise directly pressure the key chokepoints for policy change in our society (for example, key professions such as the press, business leaders, and the organized bar).

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