

Plato, Relevant Still: The Concept of the Uniquely Appropriate

by Samuel Hux (December 2015)

Back when I was a socialist, a card-carrying member first of DSOC (Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee) and then its successor DSA (Democratic Socialists of America) and a regular contributor to *Dissent*. . . I was aware, fully so, of the darker possibilities inherent in the socialist vision. After all, one would have to be stupid not to know that what was often called (in contradistinction to ideologues' dreams of what might be) "actually existing socialism" (that is, Communism), was not merely a passing Stalinist aberration. One reason for the awareness was the observable mentality of some of one's colleagues (but not the best of them!), the arrogant and almost limitless certainty and impatience with nuance, that which is so observable today in the unearned confidence brooking no dissent of an Ivy-credentialed but un-cultured narcissist like Barack Obama.

The ellipsis in the preceding paragraph just before "I was aware" should indicate an interruption. Because I was about to say "Back when I was a socialist I was even then a conservative." I remember briefly calling myself a "Left Conservative." (I think it was Norman Mailer who invented the term, to distinguish himself from the young "New Leftists": "I'm not sure I want a revolution. Some of these kids are awfully dumb.")

That is, I thought democratic socialism would be more respectful of and conserving of what was best in Western civilization, in Judeo-Christendom if you will, in the "permanent things" as Russell Kirk used to say. Well, I have made my peace with democratic socialism's rival, capitalism—but it is a peace which has not dispensed with alert border guards. For now that I am a conservative without "left-" as an adjectival prefix, I am aware, fully so, of the darker possibilities inherent in the capitalist vision. I don't delude myself that I am alone among conservatives in this respect: I am fond of quoting that Hungarian-American Tory, John Lukacs, that conservatives cannot be capitalist

enthusiasts. But this is not precisely the focus of this essay. Rather:

On the American scene at least—which is where I am looking—there are several varieties of self-proclaimed conservatives. Not to make an uncontrollable list, there are “The Traditionalists” (I hold up my hand and announce “Present!”); there are “The Paleo-Conservatives” (*Paleo-Cons*) who have such contempt for “The Neo-Conservatives” (*Neo-Cons*