



It is very difficult for me to issue prepared remarks, even on the most solemn of occasions. As I have said about myself more than once, I have a good deal of trouble in giving the same speech once. So if I wander off topic, understand that I am just keeping in type.

A great honor like the Bradley Prize has had the uneasy consequence of forcing me to think about the arc of my life, both personal and professional. Clearly I must have done something right. But the question is what and why.

Answering that question takes you back to your earliest roots. That starts often times with the environment at home. Mine was a good environment. My earliest memories were of the X-Ray machines on the ground floor of the house in which I was born in 1943 on Union Street, where we lived upstairs. My father was the doctor and my mother ran the office.

That involvement with medicine had two effects. It persuaded me that I do not want to be a doctor, and my father that I had to become one. This fully resolved itself in my favor only 21 years after my birth when at dinner one day, my mother remarked, "Bern dear, your son does not know how to hold a knife and fork, what makes you think that he will be a great surgeon?"

Prior to that time, I had good intimations to believe that my skills such as they were lay elsewhere. In some sense, it was a process of elimination. I was not adept in the

laboratory to say the least. Indeed when I did a stint at Stanford in the summer of 1962, my supervisor, Dr. Norman Kretchmer, said to me on parting, "Young man, you like to talk, why don't you become a diplomat?"

Right idea, wrong profession. Be that as it may, it gave him a hint that my skills lay in the talking professions. History was out because I could not sit still long enough take notes or record documents. So I studied philosophy and sociology with an eye to law school, and had the great fortune of receiving an excellent high-school and undergraduate education from great teachers -- Riva Feldman and Franklin Watson, come to mind -- and from college. Daniel Bell and Ernest Nagel were major influences at Columbia College.

So it was off to law school first at Oxford and then at Yale. It was a lucky combination. I still trade on the Roman and medieval law. The great advantage that I had was no strong mentor, so I went off at my own pace in my own direction. The combination of philosophy, ancient law, and some economics that I picked up along the way set the stage for my work.

If asked to name my comparative advantage, it was a combination of curiosity and superficiality, both which led me to teach pretty much anything. One of my early University of Southern California colleagues, the late Gary Bellow, cautioned me against this approach, saying that "no utility infielder ever made it into the Hall of Fame."

I disregarded his advice, and have taught a bewildering array of courses on a lick and a promise, nothing more. The challenge of integrating new information to old theories was I think the real spark for what I did.

In this regard, the early work that I did, without distinction, in the physical sciences really helped. It reminded me that rigorous answers are possible and cautioned me against accepting an easy form of cultural relativism that accepted answers that weren't quite right. So it was off to find some central theorem that linked together private and public law, and the one that I have hit comes squarely out of the classical liberal tradition: coercion is justified against individuals who have done no wrong only if it leaves them better off than before.

I shall not elaborate here how that plays out with disputes between ordinary individuals and those with the state. But it was the single engine that linked the disparate parts together.

But rather than belabor the point, I would like to end with something that should be obvious. Good luck and fortune have a lot to do with any success. In my case, it came from two sources. The first was that I have for virtually all of my life been in good health and have had the energy to do what I wanted. The second is during my professional life, I have had the ideal wife, Eileen, and three wonderful children, Melissa, Benjamin, and Elliot, a wonderful son-in-law, Daniel, and two wonderful grandchildren, Bella and Noah, which somehow make it all worthwhile.

So my thanks to the Bradley Foundation, and my thanks to all the many friends that I have in the audience, many of whom I have known and worked with for large stretches of my professional life.