

Speech given at the Bradley Prize Ceremony on June 3, 2015

Larry P. Arnn
President, Hillsdale College

Honor

Thank you Mr. Will.

Honor being complex and social, it matters who gives it. The Bradley Foundation is qualified especially by its rejection of an easy path to fame. If it would only give a matching grant or two alongside George Stephanopoulos, then Michael Grebe could bounce on the bed in the Lincoln bedroom.

Instead Bradley is here with us, sorry ineligibles for the *Washington Post* style section.

This is my way of saying that I am humbled by the regard of the Bradley Foundation; humbled to be included with Jim Caesar, General Keane, Hirsan, and those who come before us; humbled before the worthy and famous people on the selection committee.

Thank you.

The Bradley is given for achievement, but I do not find it easy to feel a sense of achievement tonight. The decisive achievements lie before us, and it is no good to speak of victory when the battle still rages.

I think rather about privilege, about commitment, and about hope.

Privilege



I live a privileged life.

But for Providence, I might have been born to rich cosmopolites. Instead I was born to an Arkansas school teacher and to his loving and very tough wife. They both liked books. They said the best thing they could give us was knowledge of right from wrong. I told my Dad before he went that I had learned complicated reasons why he was right.

I am privileged in my teachers of more than 40 years, the two chief of whom died almost together this very year.

One of them, Harry Jaffa, studied political philosophy. He was stubborn, polemical, often arrogant. But he was never arrogant about Aristotle or the classics, about the founders, Abe Lincoln, Winston Churchill—or about his own teacher or his wife. Jaffa taught that political philosophy begins with the question of the good, and it may end there. He taught that our world is threatened with an ideological annihilation of the good. He defended it by defending America, especially its Declaration of Independence. His mind was high and his heart strong.

My other chief teacher is Sir Martin Gilbert, a recipient of this prize. He taught me what it is to study history. Professor Jaffa introduced me to Martin, and they shared a love of Winston Churchill.

On the surface they are so different. One of them could find a political theory in Lincoln's laundry list; and the other wrote the facts, wrote them on a staggering scale, and wrote them entirely from original documents. He continued for fifty years through exhaustion, opposition, and illness; he defied the modern standards of the profession. His mind was high and his heart strong.

Despite differences, they were the same. Gilbert believed that history was real and could not change, and one can find it if he looks hard enough. Never use the word "perhaps," he would say: find out. Professor Jaffa quoted Aristotle and St. Thomas that "this alone is denied even to God: to make what has been not to have been."

I am privileged in my family. I met my wife Penny working in the home of Martin Gilbert in Oxford. She is English, full of grace and manners, loving

and resilient. The goodness and greatness of Katy, Henry, Alice and Tony, now adults, owes so much to her, and to her and them owes my happiness. Now we have a son-in-law, Dan, and it looks like he is going to work out.

Stand up please.

I am privileged in my friendships. I learned what friendship is studying Aristotle with three people who would become co-founders of the Claremont Institute. We kept on our desks the *Gree, koina ta ton philon*, the things of friends are in common.

I am privileged in the same way at Hillsdale College. Real friendship requires an object, higher than any person, to which all give their lives. I get to work with such people. Hillsdale was built by people who helped to build and fight for the cause of Abraham Lincoln. At Hillsdale we know that the word college means partnership and includes all its members. Though it proceeds only by argument and proof, its purpose is the knowledge and practice of the good. Knowing this, we think we can run the college better than could the Department of Education, which would not recognize an education if it bit its bottom.

I will not name these friends tonight for want of time and for fear of missing one. They know that they have done the work, and I have only been here to take the credit. They know that I love them.

These are my privileges.

Commitment

After privilege I think of commitment. When young we adopt principles that then take possession of us. We owe them and must pay.

Today is not the triumphant 1984, when Lee Greenwood sang his song at the convention that nominated Reagan for the second time. This is a dangerous time. That ideology I mentioned is reigning, the enemy of the people, their freedom, their humanity. It wears down their characters. It undermines their families. It mortgages their nation to feed itself. The nation grows weaker, and its enemies multiply abroad.

This seems a trial like the great ones, the Revolution, the Civil War, and 1940 in Europe. If this be true then we will have to do what our fathers did: never despair.

Hope

So finally I think about hope.

Why, for example, was 1940 not fatal to the West? Churchill did not think it was not only he. It was the power of the thing that called to him. When he described this thing, the British remembered themselves and became heroes, and that gave time for us to do the same.

What was it?

Churchill once imagined a future, like the one here now or approaching. Technology had replaced the virtues, we could live as long as wished, we had limitless pleasure. We could design and manufacture more people when and as we wished, and we could do this without any trouble to ourselves.

Churchill saw that this meant despotism. Among the few greatest things he wrote:

But what was the good of all that ... to them? What did they know more than we know about the answers to the simple questions which man has asked since the earliest dawn of reason-'Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Whither are we going?' No material progress, ... can bring comfort to [man's] soul. It is this fact, more wonderful than any that Science can reveal, which gives the best hope that all will be well... our hearts will ache, [our] lives will be barren, if [we] have not a vision above material things.

Freedom is a spiritual cause. We must teach it to the young. We must stand by it come what may, in faith that all will be well.