
If I ever have the misfortune to become President of the United States, the man beside me at critical moments will be Charles Krauthammer. I will modify the Lincoln bedroom as necessary to provide the accoutrements needed by an extremely smart and talented quadriplegic.

This book is simply a rendition of his choice of his best columns and essays over the last 30 years. Every one is worth reading, and every one is thought provoking.

The book is divided into four parts: Personal; Political; Historical and Global. Personal is further divided into six chapters: The Good and the Great; Manners; Pride and Prejudices; Follies; Passions and Pastimes; and Heaven and Earth. Some of his logic begins to creep through, based on these divisions.

In the introduction, he points out the importance of a seemingly unimportant area of our lives, politics:

“Politics, the crooked timber of our communal lives, dominates everything because, in the end, everything—high and low and, most especially, high—lives or dies by politics. You can have the most advanced and efflorescent of cultures. Get your politics wrong, however, and everything stands to be swept away. This is not ancient history. This is Germany 1933. “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know,” every schoolchild is fed. But even Keats—poet, romantic, early 19th-century man oblivious to the horrors of the century to come—kept quotational distance from such blissful innocence. Turns out we need to know one more thing on earth: politics—because of its capacity, when benign, to allow all around it to flourish, and its capacity, when malign, to make all around it wither.”

Early in the book, he takes on the liberal versus conservative controversy:

“To understand the workings of American politics, you have to understand this fundamental law: Conservatives think liberals are stupid. Liberals think conservatives are evil. For the first side of this equation, I need no sources. As a conservative, I can confidently attest that whatever else my colleagues might disagree about—Bosnia, John McCain, precisely how many orphans we’re prepared to throw into the snow so the rich can have their tax cuts—we all agree that liberals are stupid. We mean this, of course, in the nicest way. Liberals tend to be nice, and they believe—here is where they go stupid—that most everybody else is nice too. Deep down, that is. Sure, you’ve got your multiple felon and your occasional war criminal, but they’re undoubtedly depraved ‘cause they’re deprived. If only we could get social conditions right—eliminate poverty, teach anger management, restore the ozone, arrest John Ashcroft—everyone would be holding hands smiley-faced, rocking back and forth to “We Shall Overcome.”

Liberals believe that human nature is fundamentally good. The fact that this is contradicted by, oh, 4,000 years of human history simply tells them how urgent is the need for their next seven-point program for the social reform of everything. Liberals suffer incurably from naïveté, the stupidity of the good heart. Who else but that oracle of American liberalism, the New York Times, could run the puzzled headline: “Crime Keeps On Falling, but Prisons Keep On Filling.” But?
How about this wild theory: If you lock up the criminals, crime declines. Accordingly, the conservative attitude toward liberals is one of compassionate condescension.”

He dissects the philosophy of our current leadership with the following statement:

“What divides liberals and conservatives is not roads and bridges but Julia’s world, an Obama campaign creation that may be the most self-revealing parody of liberalism ever conceived. It’s a series of cartoon illustrations in which a fictional Julia is swaddled and subsidized throughout her life by an all-giving government of bottomless pockets and “Queen for a Day” magnanimity. At every stage, the state is there to provide— preschool classes and cut-rate college loans, birth control and maternity care, business loans and retirement.

The only time she’s on her own is at her grave site. Julia’s world is totally atomized. It contains no friends, no community and, of course, no spouse. Who needs one? She’s married to the provider state. Or to put it slightly differently, the “Life of Julia” represents the paradigmatic Obama political philosophy: citizen as orphan child. For the conservative, providing for every need is the duty that government owes to actual orphan children. Not to supposedly autonomous adults. Beyond infrastructure, the conservative sees the proper role of government as providing not European-style universal entitlements but a firm safety net, meaning Julia-like treatment for those who really cannot make it on their own— those too young or too old, too mentally or physically impaired, to provide for themselves.”

He clearly identifies the futility of political correctness and the current state of our news coverage:

“But, of course, if the shooter is named Nidal Hasan, who National Public Radio reported had been trying to proselytize doctors and patients, then something must be found. Presto! Secondary post-traumatic stress disorder, a handy invention to allow one to ignore the obvious. And the perfect moral finesse. Medicalizing mass murder not only exonerates. It turns the murderer into a victim, indeed a sympathetic one. After all, secondary PTSD, for those who believe in it (you won't find it in DSM-IV-TR, psychiatry’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual), is known as “compassion fatigue.” The poor man— pushed over the edge by an excess of sensitivity.”

“Nor was this the only incident. “The psychiatrist,” reported Zwerdling, “said that he was the kind of guy who the staff actually stood around in the hallway saying: Do you think he’s a terrorist, or is he just weird?” Was anything done about this potential danger? Of course not. Who wants to be accused of Islamophobia and prejudice against a colleague’s religion? One must not speak of such things. Not even now. Not even after we know that Hasan was in communication with a notorious Yemen-based jihad propagandist. As late as Tuesday, the New York Times was running a story on how returning soldiers at Fort Hood had a high level of violence. What does such violence have to do with Hasan? He was not a returning soldier. And the soldiers who returned home and shot their wives or fellow soldiers didn’t cry “Allahu Akbar” as they squeezed the trigger.”

He even provides cogent discussion of the controversy over abortion:
“For some people, life begins at conception. And not just life— if life is understood to mean a biologically functioning organism, even a single cell is obviously alive— but personhood. If the first zygotic cell is owed all the legal and moral respect due a person, then there is nothing to talk about. Ensoulment starts with Day One and Cell One, and the idea of taking that cell or its successor cells apart to serve someone else’s needs is abhorrent. This is an argument of great moral force but little intellectual interest. Not because it may not be right but because it is unprovable. It rests on metaphysics. Either you believe it or you don’t. The discussion ends there.”

As you can see from these examples, Dr. Krauthammer has an amazing command of the English language. He also has an amazing ability to drill to the center of a controversy, elucidate both sides of the issue, and lead the reader to a logical well thought-out conclusion. You may not always agree with him, but his reasoning and thoughts force you to think thoroughly about your position.

This book is well worth your time and effort to purchase; borrow from the library; borrow from a pal … whatever is necessary to get it in your hands. Read it! And enjoy it!