



"I'm a middle-of-the-roader."

ARISTOTLE, some twenty-three centuries ago, developed the idea of the middle way or, as he thought of it, "the golden mean." He used the term to describe certain virtues which consist of an intelligent moderation between the extremes of two opposite vices.

One concludes from his reflections that *courage* lies midway between cowardice and rashness; *liberality* between stinginess and extravagance; *ambition* between sloth and greed; *modesty* between the Milquetoast type of humility and the strutting dictator's kind of pride; *frankness* between secrecy and loquacity; *friendship* between quarrelsomeness and flattery; *good humor* between moroseness and buffoonery; *self-control* between indecisiveness and impulsiveness.

A century or so later the idea was given a perverse twist in *Ecclesiastes* — descending perilously close to the modern view.

"In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his evil-doing. Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself? Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time?"

In the twelfth century the eminent rabbi, Maimonides — again on the high road — was counseling his followers to choose the golden mean. His middle way, like Aristotle's, was that

ideal route which leads between two extremes of opposite vices.

In our day, "middle-of-the-road" is more an excuse for intellectual sloppiness than a guide to moral discipline. There is nothing golden about it and it does not qualify as a mean. For instance, there is no middle way, as George Schwartz put it, between monogamy and polygamy. Nor is there any golden mean that can be derived from subdividing a single vice. Halfway between the theft of a small amount and the theft of a large amount is robbery all the way, no matter how you slice it!

In the jargon of our times, "I'm a middle-of-the-roader," has only political connotations. It means, when the drift is socialistic, that its advocates waver midway between a modicum of socialism and whatever extreme of socialism happens to be in popular favor. Thus, the middle-of-the-roader always finds himself wherever the currents of opinion dictate; he has no other basis for judging where his stand should be. The more extreme the socialistic view, the deeper will he be engulfed in socialism.

Quite obviously, there is no virtue in being a political middle-of-the-roader. This position sounds something like the golden mean, but there the resemblance ends. What we have is a confusion of sound with sense. The former is not even a reasonable facsimile of the latter. Middle-of-the-roadism is but a platitudinous position riding inexcusably on the reputation of a splendid philosophical conviction.

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