

## **ON PREEMPTIVE APOLOGIES BY CONSERVATIVES**

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A disability afflicts nearly all conservative arguments today. Rather than being a robust picture of vigor and health, as they should given their firm ground in reality and the fantasies that underlie their opponents' cancerous and bankrupt ideologies, conservative arguments present themselves at the door like starving beggars clad in rags. This is bad, but even worse is the source of this weakness, for it is not imposed from the outside, but voluntarily, by conservatives choosing to cut themselves off at the knees. How? By crippling their arguments through larding them with preemptive apologies.

You may not have noticed the dull roar of conservative preemptive apologies, because they are white noise behind nearly all conservative writing (and other forms of communication), and so the background of all Left-Right political discourse today. But I can assure you that you will notice them, if you look around, after you are done reading this analysis. By preemptive apology, I mean any aside, great or small, in an argument that is meant to show the writer is aware of counterarguments based in leftist thought and acknowledges that those arguments have merit that cut against the conservative's claims. Often these apologies take the form of kowtowing to the existence of, and to the Left interpretation of, past events that the Left propaganda machine claims are related to the species of conservative argument being made and that supposedly exemplify something bad about conservatives (even though often the real historical fault, if any, is usually of the Left, or of nobody at all, very rarely of conservatives, and almost never of present-day conservatives). Other times the apologies consist merely of bowing and scraping to the outlines, coherently and respectfully presented in a positive light, of Left arguments against the conservative argument. Still other times they are simple abasement, in the form of acknowledgement that the Right also behaves badly in the same manner as for which the Left is being criticized, even though that is often untrue. (A variation on this is ascribing blame to both sides when only the Left is to blame for some bad thing.) Naturally, it will not surprise you to find, looking around, that the Left never engages in any of these types of apologies.

(It may appear that the Left sometimes offers apologies, but what appears to be apologies from the Left are never real apologies at all. This type of “apology” most often takes the form of showing one’s Left bona fides by shouting about one’s own “privilege” or unearned benefit. This is really just a way of claiming superiority through virtue signaling, crafted so as to be a form of reinforcement of the main argument, usually not through logic, but by calling down emotion. In no way does it ever cut against or undermine the argument of the writer, nor is it meant to suggest any actual fault on the part of the writer or weakness in his arguments. Such “apologies” are never found among conservatives, who have had it beaten into them that they have no virtue to signal.)

Real preemptive apologies are found exclusively on the Right, who offer actual, formal preemptive apologies of one of the types I outline above. They also offer a variation that is different enough in substance to be acknowledged as technically not the same. It’s the slight nod in the direction of alternative views, the acknowledgement that other views are possible and legitimate, and the recognition that everything has tradeoffs. This variation is conceptually different, because in a society where everyone is held to logic, it is merely a nod to reality. It results from training in valid discourse and in intellectual rigor, and should be unremarkable and without effect on the main argument. But in a society where emotivism and Twitter are dominant, it functions in practice as a merely less aggressive abasement than the other, more formal type. Both are forms of surrender.

Let me give you an example. Law professor Richard Epstein, a seventy-five-year-old eminence who taught me my very first class in law school, yesterday wrote a short piece in *Politico* on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. Epstein is a brilliant man, who thinks and speaks in whole paragraphs. He is no stranger to great controversy, on which he thrives. His position in the academy and in society cannot be threatened or changed and he is angling for no higher office. He wrote an aggressive piece attacking the clown show allegations against Brett Kavanaugh, including (correctly) calling them “a disgusting piece of political propaganda.” That sounds like he is flying the conservative flag high, and he certainly is, compared to the other semi-conservatives featured in the *Politico* article (which is why his

piece is placed at the very end, after nine others, in the position least likely to be read).

Yet of the 614 words Epstein wrote, the first 150 are primarily a series of apologies, capped off in the last sentence of the paragraph, which in a good writer should be the most powerful support for his own argument, by the bizarre, self-hating claim that “[T]he decision not to hold any hearings on [Merrick] Garland . . . spared Garland and the nation a similar disgraceful exhibition of intolerance that some conservative opponents of Garland may well have launched to tarnish his confirmation chances.” Not only do none of the (seven) Left commentators in Politico make any apologies at all, they don’t claim that conservatives might ever engage in a “disgraceful exhibition” of any kind, because such a claim is completely unmoored from reality, roughly equivalent to saying that William the Conqueror was possibly Brett Kavanaugh’s father. Even a moment’s thought would cause any person not insane to admit that zero conservative intolerance, in the form of anything that could be characterized as “disgraceful,” has ever been on display in any Supreme Court nomination. Such activity has always been only the province of the Left, originated in 1987, upon the nomination of Robert Bork. No Democratic nominee has ever been subjected even to aggressive questioning, much less character assassination or personal insults. And Epstein himself knows this, as his phrasing “may well have launched” shows, a locution nobody actually thinking something is true uses. That Richard Epstein, world-bestridding colossus, feels compelled to spin fantasies attacking his own position that occupy a quarter of his entire argument shows how deep the rot of preemptive apologies has gotten.

But such apologies, by conservatives, are everywhere. Like the 1980s movie *They Live*, where wearing special glasses shows that aliens control everything, once you see, you can’t unsee. Everything Jonah Goldberg and his crowd of go-along, get-along conservatives says is hedged around with apologies, along with everything said by every other conservative aspiring to be accepted on the national media and cocktail party scene, which is nearly every Republican or “conservative commentator.” It is true of discussions other than pure politics, such as history, as well. Any book on the Crusades, when mentioning Muslim atrocities, in every instance hastens to compare them to Christian atrocities. But when

Christian atrocities are the topic at hand, Muslim atrocities are never mentioned at all. Similarly, the American Left never apologizes for their century-long enabling of Communism and their active participation in the killing of a hundred million people, yet the Right must constantly apologize for a long list of less effectively murderous rightist tyrants to whom they had no ties and whose behavior has no relevancy at all to today, unlike Communism. Try framing a controversial argument to yourself, if you're conservative. You will quickly find that the impulse to add preemptive apologies will creep up on you, if it does not sweep over you. You will have trouble resisting—but the first step is admitting you have a problem.

The only very prominent person who rarely offers such apologies is Jordan Peterson, which is one reason he is so hated by the Left, though I suspect the reason for that hatred is not realized by them. It is because they feel the power of a conservative who refuses to cripple himself by apologizing, and instead throws back in their faces any demands to apologize preemptively. He sees and names them for what they are, corruptions of the truth. They know, in the marrow of their bones, that if all conservatives adopted this approach, it would shake the pillars of their halls of power.

So why does the Right engage in this heinous and self-harming practice? It is like seeing a man hitting himself in the head with a hammer. One wonders why, and doubts there is a good reason. It is not, as one might think, a result of actually attempting to address weaknesses in one's argument. If that were true, any apology would typically come after the main argument, and each part of an apology would be directly and simultaneously addressed with the best counter-argument of the writer, or, failing that, an attempt to minimize impact, importance, or relevancy. Or, as a fallback, an appeal to emotion, or an attempt to change the topic. Instead, conservative apologies are put front and center, highlighted, and then often repeated throughout and at the end, and no attempt is made to argue them. They are public abasement, as in the Cultural Revolution. Their unanswered presence is the reason they exist. Nor are the apologies meant to insulate the writer's arguments against obvious objections, lest his main arguments be rejected out of hand as inadequately thought out or motivated by feelings rather than reason. Again, if that were the case, the writer would attempt to

counter the perceived need for apologies, since after all, any unanswered attack contained within the body of a writing weakens the arguments contained in it.

So why is it? I think it is because such apologies have been conditioned for decades, probably since the 1960s, into conservatives. The Left discovered, as the quality of their own arguments and reasoning declined as they became more ideological and less educated, that “What about X?!” was an effective response to put conservatives on the defensive and not require the Left to actually offer reasoning or facts, as long as “X” was perceived as bad enough to be incapable of being ignored. (It is really a form of *ad hominem* attack, recognized for millennia as a logical fallacy used by inferior minds or those with inferior arguments.) Conservatives reacted, knowing this response would be made, by trying to get ahead of it by acknowledging it, so as to keep their arguments on track. By itself this would probably have been a side matter, occasionally seen and of limited impact. But it expanded to swallow all conservative argumentation, through the mechanism of social pressure, reinforced by financial pressure, because the Left has since the 1960s effectively controlled all organs of public discourse, and preemptive apology allows conservatives to buy a ticket to not be dismissed outright by those who decide what is news and what is allowed in public discourse. And, after all, nothing delights most conservatives in public life today like winning the favor of the Left. What a thrill to eat a few crumbs dropped from the table, to earn through self-abasement and servile cringing the ability to say that you are approved by the tastemakers in New York and Washington, that you are not a member of the “dregs of society,” as Joe Biden this week referred to Trump supporters! What a refreshing feeling when your social superiors, who also claim to be and assume they are your intellectual superiors as naturally as they breathe, deign to acknowledge your presence on the social or political scene, or offer you a job, contingent, of course, on knowing your place! What a sinking feeling when you are deemed too far beyond the pale for them to acknowledge you exist! What a keen resultant need to signal up front, as if you were a neutron, a non-gang-affiliated man in a prison, that you will limit your claims and submit to what they do to you! And it’s so easy—just pack your discourse with preemptive apologies of the type you’ve been reading for decades.

There is no answer to this other than to break the spell. But as Jordan Peterson shows, that can be done. What has been conditioned can be de-conditioned, and if conservatives get a taste of the vigor and strength that comes from rising from one's knees, no longer crippled, they may get to like it. This is a main reason the Left is so desperate to censor to destruction conservatives on digital media (though as I say, I doubt they realize this particular need, to maintain the miasma of preemptive apology, explicitly). Alternative media channels allow conservatives a relatively easy way to get the self-reinforcing sugar high of unapologetic victory, which cannot be permitted. Thus, this is the coming battle, yet another reason the Lords of Tech must be brought low, though a battle in which, given the quisling state of the Republican Party, conservatives have limited weapons. Finding and using better weapons is, therefore, the order of the day.