



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on March 12, 2014

Most “Conservatives” Are Secretly Neoconservatives

A colleague of mine has drawn my attention to a *Washington Post* blog post — “Why Most Conservatives Are Secretly Liberals” — by a Professor John Sides, a political scientist at Georgetown University.

Sides agrees with fellow political scientists Christopher Ellis and James Stimson, co-authors of *Ideology in America*. Ellis and Stimson contend that America is, at bottom, a “center-left nation,” for while “30 percent” of self-described “liberals” are consistent in endorsing “liberal” policy prescriptions, the same sort of consistency can be ascribed to only “15 percent” of “conservatives.” And another “30 percent” of “conservatives” actually advance “liberal” positions.

In short, Americans may talk the talk of “conservatism,” but they walk the walk of “liberalism.” That is, they favor Big Government.



Sides, Ellis, and Stimson, it seems clear to me, are “liberals.” It doesn’t require much reading between the lines to discern this. That they associate “liberals,” and “liberals” alone, with such virtues as “consistency” and such lofty ideals as “a cleaner environment” and “a stronger safety net” is enough to bear this out. Yet in peddling the ridiculous, patently absurd notion that “conservatives” see the media as promoting “conservatism,” the verdict regarding their “liberalism” is seen for the no-brainer that it is.

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There is, though, another clue that unveils Sides’, Ellis’, and Stimson’s ideological prejudices: They equate the term “liberalism” with a robust affirmation of Big Government. They treat “liberalism” synonymously with its modern, “Welfare-Statist” incarnation. There is no mention here of the fact that, originally, “liberalism” referred to a vision that attached supreme value to individual liberty, a vision in which government played, and had to play, a minimal role in the lives of its citizens. And there is no mention of the fact that, if “liberalism” is now “an ugly word,” it is because the very same socialists who made “socialism” an ugly word hijacked “liberalism” when it enjoyed a favorable reception and visited upon it the same fate that they secured for “socialism.”

In other words, if Sides himself wanted to be bluntly honest, he’d have to admit that “liberals” are secretly socialists.

Still, though their premises are bogus, Sides and his colleagues draw the correct conclusion that most “conservatives” are nothing of the kind. The truth of the matter is that the vast majority of contemporary “conservatives” are neoconservatives.



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Now, “neoconservatism” is a term that hasn’t the best reputation. It has always been controversial, and most of its proponents have disavowed it to the point of, preposterously, condemning it as an “anti-Semitic” slur. But George W. Bush and his party inflicted potentially irrevocable damage upon the label. “Conservatism” is a more marketable label.

Nevertheless, the reality is that neoconservatism is indeed a distinct school of political thought. Beyond this, it is fundamentally different in kind from classical conservatism. Irving Kristol, the so-called “Godfather” of neoconservatism, an appellation that he readily endorsed, admits this in noting both that neoconservatism exists and that “conservative” “can be misleading” when used to describe it.

Neoconservatism, you see, is the invention of leftists like Kristol himself. When the Democratic Party began veering too far to the Left in the 1960s, Kristol and more moderate leftists began turning toward the Republican Party. So as to distinguish themselves from traditional conservatives, they coined the term “neoconservatism.”

Neoconservatives, Kristol asserts, are “not at all hostile to the idea of a welfare state” — even if they reject the “vast and energetic bureaucracies” created by the Great Society. Neoconservatives endorse “social security, unemployment insurance,” and “some kind of family assistance plan,” among other measures. But what’s most interesting, particularly at a time when ObamaCare has divided the country, is that Kristol reminds us that neoconservatives support “some form of national health insurance.”

In all truthfulness, however, neither a degree in political science nor an IQ above four is required to know that neoconservatism has always championed Big Government, for it is its foreign policy vision more than anything else that distinguishes it from its competitors. For neoconservatives, America is “exceptional” in being, as Kristol puts it, “a creedal nation,” the only nation in all of human history to have been founded upon an “ideology” of equality, of “natural rights.” The U.S.A., then, has a responsibility to promote this ideology throughout the world.

And it is by way of a potentially boundless military — i.e. Big Government — that this “ideological patriotism” is to be executed.

Had the foregoing political scientists been looking in the right places, they would be forced to conclude that most “conservatives” are secretly neoconservatives.



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