

MORAL POLITICS

How liberals and conservatives think

by George Lakoff

1996, 2002, University of Chicago Press, 426 pages

Moral Politics, a book whose message is considered prophetic, is the most recent pick of the book discussion group I belong to. In our previous gathering we discussed Fred Singer's remarkable *Unstoppable Global Warming*. The majority then seemed to revel in that what I regard as that book's perverse, demagogic endorsement of *carbonofilia* (love of choking on automobile fumes and smokestack emissions).

These are libertarians who, I'm sure for the most part, like to firmly plant their political value-judgments on reason and science. WHAT IS THE DEAL? Well, *Moral Politics* provides a clue; in fact it reveals an entire roomful of clues.

Within the libertarian movement—i.e. THE Movement (it's still relatively small but it's it)—we see discernible rifts caused by what are conventionally seen as conservative-liberal perspectives: Environmentalism is one, personal liberty (i.e. sex, drugs) another, corporation legitimacy another, and probably the key and most pertinent schism today has to do with US government warmaking.[1]

A "conservative" prowar libertarian tends to (I think, ironically) take the word of the government—a government, by the way, run by the Cartel—at face value when it says it must set loose the dogs of war:

"You say 19 hijackers (none of whose names were on the flight manifests and many of whom were identified by the BBC and other respected journalistic sources as being alive after 9/11/01), under direction of a diabetic hooked to a kidney machine in a cave in Afghanistan, flew airliners into WTC 1 and 2 and the Pentagon, leaving no trace of Boeing 757 or Boeing 767 airplane debris (or human remains); then a 47-story building, WTC 7, self-collapsed later without having been struck by an airplane because it felt just awful about losing its pals; and now we have to go to war against "terrorism," specifically attacking a country whose leaders absolutely despise(d) the diabetic in the cave?"

"Yeah, right."

"Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." — Voltaire

What is it, say, about the mind of a prowar "conservative"[3] that regards such hooey as compelling? If you put aside for the moment a complete lapse of basic rationality, you will find, argues *Moral Politics* a metaphor that explains practically every such conservative opinion. Lakoff calls that metaphor the "Strict Father" model. Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity take note!

The Strict Father (SF) model holds that the world is a dangerous place and you have to respect authorities, particularly patriarchal ones. If you don't conform to authoritarian dictates—which qua authoritarian are to be accepted uncritically—you must be punished severely. Another term for SF morality comes from people who have studied totalitarian systems: patriarchal collectivist. Puritanical also comes to mind.

On the other side of the coin, Lakoff identifies the model for people we generally consider liberals[4]: the Nurturant Parent (NP) model. The NP model advocates self-responsibility and a sense of "we're all in this together, so let's help one another out the best we can." The Nurturant Parent likes to see healthy development of intellectual and emotional independence, in a caring society where people are respected as individuals. Physical force should be avoided whenever possible.

I'm sorry, but I almost find myself laughing at how Lakoff so obviously stacks the deck in his terminology. The SF model for conservatives is clearly pathological right out of the chute, while the NP model for liberals is all sweetness and light. No wonder he ultimately asserts his NP liberalism against the SF model.

There is a model for liberals that would be comparably pathological to Lakoff's SF model, and I would name it something like Arrogant Social Meddler (ASM). ASMs are similarly authoritarian to the SFs, only the authority lies within a nebulous collective called society, the village, the school board, the people, etc.—to which the ASM is connected! The pathological incarnation of ASM is what has been termed by writers on totalitarianism: matriarchal collectivist. Communism comes to mind.

But I like the book, it's full of novel ways of looking at what divides us and hopefully what can unify us in understanding what can be good conservatives and good liberals. Lakoff brings up plenty of food for thought. My only real reservations are twofold:

- 1) Especially in the case of assailing excesses of the Strict Father approach, I would like to see rational argument employed to change people's minds vs. just making a learned observation "that's just the way they are."
- 2) Lakoff, like many modern liberals, doesn't seem to grasp the essence/importance of the core libertarian idea: the Sacred Nonaggression Principle. His realization along those lines would truly unravel many more political and moral conundrums than his otherwise intelligent analyses.

Perhaps in the next edition he'll fold in the central principle of political freedom.

[1] A cursory review of modern history shows the root causes of most wars lie in government-franchised central banks which, by virtue of their monopoly on money and credit, obtain huge returns on investment for large buildup of martial machinery—on both sides of a conflict. For example, from the beginning of Hitler's rise to power, the Nazi war industry was heavily financed by American and British bankers[2], while these same bankers also financed the US buildup. This is what G. Edward Griffin in *The Creature from Jekyll Island* calls the Rothschild Formula—finance both sides of a war and you hit the jackpot no matter what: your exorbitant interest rates are covered by spoils from the winners and reparations from the losers.

The point is from any objective assessment of the historical facts, war is not only the health of the state, it is nirvana for central bankers... and their good friends in industry and the deeper powers behind the whole enchilada. That's why we have wars. Including Iraq/Afghanistan.

[2] Prescott Bush, granddaddy of shit-for-brains, was one such Nazi bankroller well into the war until his company's assets were seized via the Trading with the Enemy Act.

[3] There is such a thing as a good conservative who is antiwar and anti central bank, e.g. Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul.

[4] A modern liberal who eschews government coercion is a classical liberal, i.e. a libertarian, i.e. a "good" liberal. Liberals who identify themselves as classical liberals are about as plentiful as conservatives who identify themselves as antiwar and anti central bank. (!) (Actually there are many more of both than most people realize.) A "good" liberal and a "good" conservative are essentially the same thing, libertarian... because they accept the Sacred Nonaggression Principle.

2007 September 19

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