

Two Kinds Of Academics

December 8, 2011 Category: Domestic Politics

Download as PDF

INTRODUCTION:

Two of my favorite philosophers, Arthur Schopenhauer and (the early) Ludwig Wittgenstein, did not like those whom they dubbed “professional” academics. Schopenhauer made a great point: Since he who pays the piper calls the tune, independence of financial means is a precondition of independence of thought. That is, a quarantining from conflicts of interest is necessary for genuine intellectual activity—and thus for honest scholarship. The quest for Truth, Schopenhauer recognized, is sullied insofar as *ulterior motives* come into play. This is no less true today than it was two centuries ago.

It is important to posit two (archetypical) kinds of academics. Let’s call them A and B. Each represents a pole on a spectrum. Being a spectrum, most academics operate somewhere between these two extremes. I’m making use of archetypes because doing so best illustrates a crucial distinction—a distinction that is not often made (publicly).

The archetypes are as follows:

TYPE A: Academics who have the fortitude (and rectitude) to maintain utmost intellectual integrity—*regardless of how inconvenient doing so may be*. They are thus *genuine scholars*. The *sine qua non* of a type A academic is to engage in honest inquiry—and thereby contribute to the on-going progress of human knowledge. Therefore, he / she can’t be bought.

TYPE B: Academics who succumb to the lures of intellectual capture, and are thus “sell-outs”. These are essentially ersatz-scholars. That is to say, they are academics who leverage their position for their own benefit—*even if doing so is destructive*. The *modus operandi* of a type B academic is sheer opportunism (a.k.a. Machiavellian careerism). Consequently, the pursuit of fame and fortune defines his / her professional career. Put another way: He / she is for sale to the highest bidder.

Happily, the majority of academics are closer to A than B (though, often-times, due to dubious pursuits of tenure and money, not close enough). This positive tendency is revealed by the clear trend of Progressivism in scholarship worldwide. It comes as no surprise, then, that the most glaring “exceptions to the rule” tend to be right-wing ideologues, as we shall see.

It is important to understand what this taxonomy is NOT. It is NOT a breakdown of those with whom I most agree vs. those with whom I most disagree. This is a crucial point to make, lest the essence of the dichotomy be missed. Nor are these categories static. Most careers are dynamic, so it is disingenuous to compartmentalize every academic. Finally, this is not an either / or. Indeed, the nature of spectrums entails *gradations between two extremes*. A and B are archetypes, not all-or-nothing categories. To reiterate, most academics operate somewhere between the two extremes—most often decidedly closer to A.

Though there is a clear pattern in where Progressives and right-wing ideologues tend to fall, the spectrum is not *based on* ideological bent: it is not a Progressive-to-right-wing spectrum. The difference between **A**

and **B** is not a matter of the positions an academic takes on any given issue. Rather, the difference is a matter of what an academic *bases his positions on* and *what motives him*. (To put it succinctly: The distinction is not based on WHAT each academic says, but WHY he says it.)

Bona fide scholars in any given field will invariably tend to converge on certain positions, as certain positions are more right than others. This is not called “bias”; it’s called erudition. There is only one Reality; some people explain it much better than others. These will usually be the (honest) scholars in the relevant field. It is vital that we understand *which people* those people are...and the reasons why they are who they are.

A BRIEF SURVEY:

A-type academics are primarily concerned with advancing mankind’s understanding of the world. Typically, this is done in the spirit of helping to make the world a better place. Such an endeavor trumps careerist ambition—though careerism may well often be an ancillary factor in any scholarly activity. Consequently, these figures tend to be unconcerned with accumulating spoils for themselves. (As one may expect, this sometimes means not going along with “the establishment”.) An iconic example of the intellectual immune from dubious motives—even at great cost to himself—would be Thomas Paine. Like Wittgenstein, Paine abdicated any and all fortune in the name of rectitude—literally giving vast amounts of his money away to worthy causes until he had nothing left.

Prospects for personal financial gain was NOT the reason such men said what they said. They offered mankind what they offered because they sincerely saw it to be “the right thing to do”. Forty notable examples from contemporary scholarship are:

- Anthony Appiah, Sheldon Wolin, Peter Singer, and Sean Wilentz of Princeton
- Edward Herman of U. Penn
- Lawrence Lessig of Stanford (now at Harvard)
- Stuart Kauffman of the Sante Fe Institute
- C. Wright Mills, Edward Said, Victor Navasky, Todd Gitlin, Joseph Stiglitz, and Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University
- Ronald Dworkin and Tony Judt of NYU
- David Harvey of New York’s Graduate Center
- Andrew Bacevich of Boston University
- Robert Shiller and Jacob Hacker of Yale
- Robert Frank and Elaine Pagels of Cornell
- W.E.B. Du Bois of Atlanta University / U. Penn
- Douglas Dowd, Steven Chu, and Paul Pierson of U.C. Berkeley
- Chalmers Johnson of U.C. San Diego
- Cass Sunstein, John Mearsheimer, and Martha Nussbaum of U. Chicago
- John Kenneth Galbraith, John Rawls, E.O. Wilson, Amartya Sen, Elizabeth Warren, and Stephen Walt of Harvard
- Seymour Benzer of Cal Tech
- Clifford Geertz of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton
- Simon Johnson and Noam Chomsky of M.I.T.

- Pascal Boyer of Washington University

Of course, cases are not limited to those in this “Top 40”. But these are certainly many of the vanguard who embody the type A archetype. Meanwhile, overseas there are also some notable examples of A-types. Here are ten:

- Ha-Joon Chang of Cambridge
- Karl Popper and Meghnad Desai of the LSE
- Ilan Pappé of the University of Exeter
- Richard Wilkinson of the University of Nottingham
- Kate Pickett of the University of York
- Susan Blackmore of the University of West England
- Eric Hobsbawm of the University of London (later, The New School)
- Michel Onfray of the Free University of Caen
- Roland Barthes of the College de France

Other great scholars—though no less estimable—don’t embody the *archetype* of **A**. They don’t qualify as type A academics due to the fact that they didn’t buck the established order to quite the same degree as the 50 listed above. Though these other scholars aren’t archetypes, they are much closer to A than to B. They don’t illustrate the distinction between A and B quite as starkly as those just mentioned, but they are worth noting nevertheless. Thirty examples of such academics:

1. Pierre Bourdieu (College de France)
2. Erving Goffman (U.C. Berkeley / U. Penn)
3. John Maynard Smith (University of Sussex)
4. Robert Reich (U.C. Berkeley)
5. Ernest Becker (U.C. Berkeley)
6. Richard Feynman (Cal Tech)
7. Henry Allison (U.C. San Diego / BU)
8. Paul Guyer (U Penn)
9. Walter Kauffman (Brown)
10. Murray Gell-Mann (Santa Fe Institute)
11. John Holland (U Michigan)
12. Bernard Bailyn (Harvard)
13. Jack Rakove (Stanford)
14. Gordon Wood (Brown)
15. Robert Nozick (Harvard)
16. Stephen Jay Gould (Harvard)
17. Richard Dawkins (Oxford)
18. Eric Foner (Columbia)
19. Samuel Moyn (Columbia)
20. Bart Ehrman (UNC)
21. Paul Krugman (Princeton)
22. Daron Acemoglu (M.I.T.)
23. Benjamin Friedman (Harvard)
24. Laurence Tribe (Harvard)
25. Steven Breyer (Harvard)

26. Thomas Ferguson (U Mass)
27. Richard Posner (U Chicago)
28. Michael Mann (UCLA)
29. Daniel C. Dennett (Tufts)
30. Kai Neilson (U Calgary)

It is no coincidence that such figures—some our era’s greatest scholars—are almost always Progressives. (78 of the 80 just listed are / were Progressive. NONE of them ever supported ultra-right-wing policies.)

B-type academics operate in a different way. In a nutshell: They can be “bought”. Consequently, they often prostitute their “views” to anyone offering a robust pay-check (and / or prospects for enhanced social status). Their dubiously acquired (and dubiously based) prestige sometimes veils their true nature. In other words, their *abuse of clout* is often obfuscated by that very clout. Such is the nature of clout.

B-type academics are virtually synonymous with not merely fraudulent work, but with the promulgation of right-wing propaganda. Since the right wing is *inherently* anti-intellectual, it is the right wing that typically needs to “buy” academics (paying them off via lucrative positions as lobbying “consultants” or via employment at so-called “think tanks”). Their high profiles often belie a covetousness of the limelight. (This is not to say that all academics in the employ of a lobby or think tank are of type B. Nevertheless, such employment should always raise questions regarding conflicts of interest.)

Not all academics are immune to the lures of a paycheck—though they adamantly profess otherwise. Feigning objectivity has thus become an art form. Cases of B-type academics are more difficult to come by, as scholars are generally credible people. Some of the most flagrant examples of intellectual capture are:

- George Stigler, Milton Friedman, Robert Lucas, Eugene Fama, Gary Becker, and Arthur Laffer of U. Chicago (a.k.a. The Chicago Boys)
- Angelo Codevilla of BU
- Robert Mundell, Glenn Hubbard, and Frederic Mishkin of Columbia
- Alan Dershowitz, Martin Feldstein, and Greg Mankiw of Harvard
- Thomas Sowell of the Hoover Institute
- Robert Rubin of the Brookings Institute
- John Taylor of Stanford

These are the most egregious cases. (They could be called, “*The Sweet Sixteen*”.) By now, each of these men is infamous for the damage his ideas have done to society.

There are less severe cases of disingenuousness in academia that don't quite qualify as archetypes of **B** (such as intelligent design apologist, Michael Behe, of my own alma mater, Lehigh University). Also notable are Chicago School sycophants like John Cochrane, Ed Conard, John Y. Campbell, and the cavalcade of charlatans at the AEI, Heritage Foundation, Mercatus Center, Hoover Institution, and Cato Institute. Luckily, type B academics are the exception, not the rule, here in the United States. Intellectual capture can only go so far while keeping a reputation in tact.

Overseas, type B academics are, thankfully, relatively rare. The most notable foreign B-types are Niall Ferguson of the LSE and Paul Johnson of Magdalen College.

Most of the B-types listed here are—by now—notorious for their academic transgressions. Many are also renown for being embarrassingly wrong about almost everything they say. Yet, predictably, they obstinately “stick to their guns” (and continue to garner esteem from their fan-base). Much of this can be attributed to false pride (i.e. ego) and vested interests. The ulterior motives involved are often quite plain to see.

Of course, the most infamous case is “The Chicago Boys”, a cabal of hidebound Neoliberal ideologues who are perhaps the epitome of intellectual capture (see my essays on *The New Millerites*). It is no coincidence that all of the “Sweet Sixteen” are extremely right-wing. A wholesale abdication of rectitude (coupled with the inability to feel shame) seems to be a prerequisite for their obstinate positions.

Though not full-fledged academics, figures like...

- William F. Buckley Jr. (National Review, Firing Line)
- Norman Podhoretz (PNAC)
- Henry Kissinger (Kissinger Associates)
- Richard Perle (WINEP, PNAC)
- Jeanne Kirkpatrick (Georgetown)
- Robert Kagan (PNAC, FPI)
- Irving Kristol (AEI)
- George Will (Michigan State)
- Paul Wolfowitz (Johns Hopkins, AEI)
- Robert Bork (Ave Maria, AEI)
- Antonin Scalia (U. Chicago, Federalist Society)
- Clarence Thomas (Monsanto, Heritage Foundation)
- Daniel Pipes (Middle East Forum, Hoover Institute)
- David Horowitz (NewsMax)
- Dinesh D'Souza (Hoover Institute, The Kings College, and the turnip truck)
- Rich Lowry (National Review)
- Paul A. Gigot (Wall Street Journal comic section)

...and Blackstone Group's own Reaganomics guru, David Stockman, are sixteen other well-known ersatz-intellectuals—often, vehement *anti*-intellectuals.

Such men masquerade as “intellectuals” in right-wing circles (flourishing within the insular communities from which they garner their prestige). Having been anointed and assigned marketable brand names, they are recruited to be promulgators of right-wing propaganda. They are, one and all, charlatans.

For more case studies of type B academics, one can simply survey the catalogue of figures associated with proto-fascist organizations like the Heritage Foundation or the American Enterprise Institute. Another worthwhile case study is the Templeton Foundation—the explicit purpose of which is to give charlatans the pretense of “scholarly” legitimacy.

The vehicles for dogma-mongering are myriad—from The Chamber of Commerce to the NRA. What emerges is an orgy of charlatanry—bountifully funded by the Koch brothers or the Scaife Foundation or the Olin Foundation or some other moneyed source. Again, the phenomenon is—by nature—almost exclusively right-wing for a simple reason: Right-wing ideology has—for the most part—never been able to buttress itself with genuine scholarship.

THE CONTRAST:

A-types do what they do because they want to contribute to mankind in an important way, not because they want to accrue personal benefit from their work. This is the antithesis of the B-type. Understanding the difference, it could be said that Noam Chomsky was the quintessential A-type academic of the 20th century...while the Chicago Boys were the quintessential B-types. In modern history, Baruch Spinoza could be said to be the epitome of A while Max Robespierre would be the epitome of B.

Nobody ever had to “pay off” a scholar to discover that the Earth was round or that drastic wealth inequality is antithetical to democracy. They determined “trickle-down” economics was balderdash the same way they determined alchemy was balderdash. They each discovered a certain thing to be the case *because it was true*; and Truth, it so happened, was exactly what they were looking for.

ANALYSIS:

Type A academics usually stand firm in the face of alluring (yet ignoble) opportunities for self-aggrandizement. They tend to avoid the trappings of career avenues that may have kept them in the good graces of the powers that be—but that would have compromised rectitude. In other words, they often went off on their own (“did their own thing”) because they saw that it was the right thing to do. It is no surprise, then, that *archetypes* of A are somewhat less than common.

That most scholars resist such temptations stands to reason: they do what they do because they’re genuinely interested in contributing to the weal of society—not in serving special interests. They do what they do because they care about TRUTH, and playing a role in helping mankind in whatever way they can. So while archetypes are rather rare, most academics tend more toward A than B. Almost every academic is somewhere in between. (After all, careerism is invariably a factor in most academic’s daily endeavors.)

Type B academics are SHEER careerists—Machiavellian opportunists with no integrity to speak of (not to mention little—if any—capacity to feel shame). Consequently, they tend not to resist the aforesaid temptations. B-types thus go from latent scholar to unapologetic dogma-

peddler...as opportunity presents itself. After all, intellectual integrity is not always the most lucrative path—as the Sweet Sixteen can attest!

B-types prostitute themselves because they covet the promise of celebrity (and kick-backs for their “cooperation” with their “patrons”). Such men are rewarded handsomely for their service.

It generally doesn't seem to bother them that not only are they patently wrong about much of what they say, but *the ideas they promote often do demonstrable harm to society*.

Points in case: Neoliberal and Neocon ideologies—each a haven for the type B academics (not to mention the source of untold damage to the world).

Due to the fact that right-wing ideology has almost zero credibility, those hell-bent on promoting a right-wing agenda encounter the need to imbue their dogma with a veneer credence.

That's where intellectual capture comes in. The pay-off for succumbing to i.c. can be profound. Lobbies and think-tanks love to boast “scholars” as members. They do this so that they can then pass propaganda off as the verdicts yielded by great minds. Thus, strategically-selected people are declared “expert” by fiat. In this way, the Chicago Boys were able to give a proto-fascist ideology the veneer of scholarly credence, under the auspices of “Neoliberalism”.

It is safe to say that genuine scholarship is almost always compromised (and even corrupted) by unbridled careerism. Cases of this sad turn in academia aren't unheard of. Again, the most common cases are, unsurprisingly, the promotion of Neoliberal economic ideology and Neocon foreign policy. (We typically find such hyper-careerism with religious apologetics as well.) This stands to reason, as it is precisely the platforms that have no real scholarly credence that must find a fraudulent way to boast scholar-backed legitimacy.

Sometimes, the activity of B-types precipitates cult activity—as has been demonstrated with the die-hard followings of Hayek (the progenitor of Neoliberalism) and Strauss (the progenitor of Neoconservatism). Celebrity “thinkers” like L. Ron Hubbard (creator of Scientology), Ayn Rand (the patron saint of anarcho-capitalism), and Deepak Chopra (the superstar “New Age” mountebank) have also depended on the kind of façade found in type B academia. Indeed, dogma-mongering is a booming business in many areas. In essence, what B-types do is not much different from what L. Ron Hubbard did. The difference is the connection to society's financial and political power structures. L. Ron Hubbard was a lone operator who simply went off on his own and started a cult; B-type academics plug into the incumbent Machine for their self-aggrandizement.

Short of being completely deluded by the ideologies they've been incentivized to adopt, B-types tend to know exactly what they're doing. In other words, they're often aware that they're full of hogwash. So long as they can somehow personally benefit from the *peddling* of that hogwash, they will have a vested interest in its promotion. Naturally, then, they will be touted as “experts” by their employers. (These days, “expert” is a common euphemism for “bought and paid-for ideologue”.)

In pop culture, NEITHER kind of academic is commonly recognized for what he is—as it is generally not even acknowledged that there is even a distinction to be made. A-types are rarely recognized as such—let alone praised and celebrated for being what they are—outside of their field. Often, they are unheard of in pop culture—and so go largely unmentioned in mainstream media. Meanwhile, B-types are rarely recognized as such—let alone shamed and indicted for what they are—and so are *often featured* in mainstream media. Let’s call this peculiar phenomenon, the “A-B Inversion”.

In other words, A-types are often *ignored* because they are not recognized for what they are, while B-types are often *put in the spotlight* because they are not recognized for what they are. When it’s all the same, this irrational treatment—on both counts—seems relatively unproblematic.

The irony is lost on most people simply because most people don’t know the difference. Naturally, those who do what they do because they’re seeking the limelight tend to GET the limelight...while those who aren’t doing what they do for fame often remain on the margins. (Notable exceptions, like Ben Franklin, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Albert Einstein, didn’t allow their fame to sully their integrity. Gladly, the limelight is not mutually exclusive with being an A-type.)

We’ve seen the A-B Inversion throughout history: when Thomas Paine was A while Edmund Burke and even John Adams were closer to B...or when Schopenhauer was A while Hegel and Fichte were closer to B...or when Nicola Tesla was A while Thomas Edison was B...or when some figures demonized John Maynard Keynes (who was A) while lionizing, say, Leo Strauss (a Machiavellian on steroids, who was B). When Max Robespierre was (briefly) controlling a nation while Thomas Paine was imprisoned, we saw the A-B Inversion gone haywire.

Underappreciated genius / rectitude has not infrequently existed in the shadow of celebrated charlatans—men who often enjoy the limelight for dubious reasons. Spinoza, Paine, and Schopenhauer were not driven by hunger for fame and fortune. (Admittedly, Tesla and Keynes were interested in making a fortune, but not by “selling out” on their inquiries. We saw the same approach with Ben Franklin: a man who enjoyed fame and fortune, yet would never sell out. Contrast this with the likes of Burke, Robespierre, Hegel, Edison, and Strauss.)

It is no coincidence that type-A academics are generally proven right about much of what they say; while type-B academics are almost always proven wrong about much of what they say. (It is also no coincidence that this divergence between the two types is often not brought to everyone’s attention. The “powers that be” would prefer the As be shunned while the Bs lionized...lest the desired veneer dissolve.) That Neoliberal economic ideology has been thoroughly debunked doesn’t stop the Sweet Sixteen from remaining in the limelight.

We should always remind ourselves that the A-B dichotomy involves a spectrum. There have been a few noteworthy cases of academics moving along the spectrum during the course of their careers, such as Francis Fukuyama and Richard Posner (happily, toward A) or Jerry Fodor and W.V.O. Quine (regrettably, toward B). There can also be a peculiar mix of A and B, as with H.L. Mencken, Lionel Trilling, Allan Bloom, Samuel P. Huntington, and John Lewis Gaddis.

There are, of course, cases today where academics covet the limelight, though—like Ben Franklin—do so without sacrificing intellectual integrity (as we’ve seen with such celebrity

academics as Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker). When fame goes to someone's head, it doesn't necessarily make them any less of a scholar.

It is important to note that someone not being correct about things they say doesn't necessarily make them a B-type. Freud, B.F. Skinner, and Charles Taylor weren't frauds, though they were mistaken about many things. It is also important to note that great intellectuals have not always been Progressives (Frege and Heidegger had fascist sympathies). Even today, every once in a while, a bona fide scholar supports right-wing policies (Thomas Schelling, for instance).

The degree to which a B-type is being honest with himself, let alone with others, is often difficult to discern. After devoting all that time to studying the subject matter, does he REALLY believe what he's saying (even after it's been shown to be wrong)? Well, yes, sometimes he does. Money talks. Meanwhile, it's up to the rest of us to subject alleged "scholars" to critical review. Unfortunately, As and Bs don't come conveniently labeled.

OTHER THOUGHTS:

Those who fail to make the crucial distinction between the two types of academic often wonder how it is that the vast majority of bona fide scholars tend to be further "left" on the (conventional) political spectrum—as if it were some massive coincidence (or even an elaborately orchestrated, world-wide conspiracy). Such observers don't understand how such a state of affairs comes to be. The fact of the matter is that there is a correct answer to certain questions, and genuine scholars eventually tend to hone in on it...more or less. The Earth revolving around the sun, not vice versa. Supply-side economics is a sham; economies are stimulated from the demand side. Organisms evolved via a gradual process of natural selection. Etc.

It seems not to occur to many befuddled observers of this trend that a better understanding of the world inevitably entails a convergence on certain (general) positions. This convergence does, indeed, involve a "bias"—namely: a bias toward Truth. After all, there is only one Reality, and the people who understand it best will invariably be the best scholars (i.e. type A academics).

Just as most of the great journalists are "to the left" *, the explanation for the "left"-leaning trend amongst scholars is quite straight-forward...though many right-wing ideologues remained puzzled as to how this could possibly be so. Their befuddlement belies their delusion. Those of the right wing are, predictably, exasperated by (resentful of?) this trend. (Point in case, David Horowitz.)

Right-wing media is often infuriated by the verdicts of scholarship, as it almost never corresponds with their desired conclusions. Unsurprisingly, in an attempt to discredit bona fide scholars, so-called "liberal" professors are caricatured as veritable Emmanuel Goldsteins. Even as right-wing ideologues denigrate the "liberal" (read: intellectual) elite, they vociferously support the *moneyed* elite—an approach that betrays their actual priorities. Power.

CONCLUSION:

In a world where Newt Gingrich is seen as a "scholar", Rudy Giuliani is called an "expert", Dinesh D'Souza is touted as some kind of "intellectual", and Paul Ryan is considered a "smart

guy”, we simply need to step back and re-evaluate what we mean by “scholar”, “expert”, “intellectual”, and “smart”. It’s not that we’ve entered the Twilight Zone; it’s that many of us have lost the ability to ascertain who knows what the heck they’re talking about. (Ergo many of the featured speakers on CNBC and Fox News.)

Faux intellectualism has become a big business in America—which has severely degenerated our public discourse. As we’ve seen time and time again, when “knowledgeable” is unwittingly employed as a euphemism for “ignorant”, severe problems arise. All too often, *entertaining* is misconstrued as *erudite*—a perception that misleads the audience into endorsing ridiculous positions even as it provides a lucrative career for the entertainer. (It’s safe to say that if we lived in a well-educated society, almost every celebrity pundit currently dominating media would be out of a job. Their ample market-share, it would be revealed, is predicated on widespread ignorance.)

Each one of us encounters the following question: Who is worth listening to and who isn’t? We often answer this question in different ways—depending on the criteria we use to measure credence. The “catch” is that there are legitimate criteria and illegitimate criteria. Some of us are on the right track; some of us are well-intentioned yet stupendously wrong-headed. And for some of us, our standards have become so low as to be question-begging.

Elucidating the A-B spectrum may help us be more discerning.

The importance of being able to distinguish between genuine scholars and academic frauds can’t be over-emphasized. The distinction is colossal—analogous to the difference between bona fide journalists and professional bloviators (i.e. celebrity political pundits). After all, a charlatan is a charlatan, regardless of the context of his celebrity. So long as we listen to charlatans (while under the impression we’re heeding sage counsel), we will continue to be woefully misled.

EPILOGUE: The Rationalizations of True Believers:

Instead of seeking to understand why the vast majority of scholars are “liberal” (and secular, and cosmopolitan, and humanist, for that matter), right-wing ideologues diligently try to explain the trend away. They chalk it up to a nefarious conspiracy of X (where X is the *epithet du jour*). That is, they invoke whatever derogatory scare-term is currently en vogue: “communist” or “infidel” or “heathen” or “socialist” or “anti-American” or “intellectual elitist”.

Conservative commentators simply rationalize the inherent NON-right-wing nature of scholarship as some kind of “bias” that “infects” both journalism and academia. (This often involves what psychologists call “reaction formation”, as when Angelo Codevilla calls Progressives “the ruling class” while keeping a straight face.)

It is, of course, no coincidence that the most educated people in society are overwhelmingly positioned to the so-called “left” on the conventional political spectrum...while the greatest minds in the world are almost entirely Progressive (i.e. secular / cosmopolitan / humanist / intellectual). The (very notable, and very few) exceptions prove the rule. It is no wonder that this obvious trend has become a contentious issue in conservative circles: It irks right-wing ideologues to the point of distraction. After all, THEY want to be the smart guys—just as they were deemed “the best and brightest” in LBJ’s proto-Neocon cabinet.

The wisest of us are Progressive. The explanation for this trend couldn’t be clearer: Erudite people and great thinkers understand the world...and tend to exhibit at least a modicum of intellectual integrity. Invariably, then, they will converge toward a point that reflects a genuine understanding of the world. The apparent anomalies to this overwhelming pattern (the type B academics) can be almost entirely accounted for by instances of intellectual capture.

The tragic proliferation of B-types accounts for the emergence of conservative “think tanks” (i.e. propaganda-factories). Upon scrutiny, we come to find that the prevalence of right-wing propaganda depends on systematically-enforced intellectual capture.

Someday, we can pray, mainstream media will pay more attention to A-types while rendering B-types irrelevant to our public discourse. In the meantime, it is incumbent upon all of us who care about Truth to be discerning with who we listen to and who we ignore.

* I’ve already evaluated a list of some of today’s popular political pundits and propaganda-mongers, such as Frank Luntz, Mark Levin, Karl Rove, and Bill Kristol, who are the most egregious cases of charlatanry (for an extensive list, see my *Right-Wing Impresarios*). To illustrate the contrast, let’s note a dozen of the best contemporary social commentators:

Steve Coll

Chris Hedges

Lawrence Wright

James Carroll

Louis Menand

Kevin Phillips

William Greider

David Kay Johnston

Thomas Frank

Matt Taibbi

Jeremy Scahill

Naomi Klein

John Cassidy

James Surowiecki

Jane Mayer

These are journalists of the highest caliber—the benchmark by which all commentary can be measured.

Richard Hoftstadter may well be the epitome of the great commentator of the 20th Century.

One can contrast the caliber of Hoftstadter's disquisition with the banter issuing from popular talking heads of the present day—be it on network news, or in the pages of right-wing propaganda rags. The juxtaposition between most of today's celebrity pundits and *real journalists* is as striking as the juxtaposition between type A and B academics.

Even the higher quality commentators (Eleanor Roosevelt, George Orwell, Molly Ivins, Robert Kuttner, Mark Shields, John Nichols, Hendrick Hertzberg, Gore Vidal, Bill Moyers, Barbara Ehrenreich, Tavis Smiley, Joan Walsh, Chris Hayes, Glenn Greenwald, Eric Alterman, Robert Reich, etc.) are light-years beyond most of the celebrity pundits that dominate MSM. Again, the former are almost entirely Progressive, while the latter are generally right-wing. This is no coincidence. The reasons are quite clear.