Understanding The Right Wing

OVERVIEW:

Surprisingly little scholarship has been done on the social phenomenon pejoratively dubbed “the right wing”.This is odd if for no other reason than that right-wing forces play such a significant role in our society. A fair amount of work has been done on “fascism”—an extreme case of right-wing movements found mostly during the 20’s, 30’s, and 40’s in Europe.(Michael Mann’s 2004 work, **Fascists** was a notable example of such important work.)But significant sociology has not been done on “the right wing” per se.

In his landmark book, **Democracy Incorporated**, Sheldon Wolin (a political science scholar at Princeton) offered a plausible explanation of America’s right wing. He called it “inverted totalitarianism”, and provided a credible argument for the theory. But even this seemed to leave many questions unanswered, many phenomena un-addressed.

Scholarship on “fascism” proper doesn’t necessarily make it much easier to understand peculiar phenomena in contemporary America. Point in case: the corporate-orchestrated 2009-2010 “Tea Party” movement…which, in a colossal twist of irony, fought for the exact opposite things for which the original Boston Tea Party fought. The original movement was against corporate power and corporatism that abetted it (e.g. tax-breaks for large corporations). The 2009 incarnation put this cause it reverse: it was a pro-corporate power movement operating under the aegis of pupulism.

Nor does pre-existing scholarship directly explain figures like William F. Buckley Jr., Kristols Jr. and Sr., Karl Rove, Kenneth Starr, Phyllis Schlafly, Tom DeLay, the Koch brothers, George Shultz, Ted Olson, Paul Wolfowitz, etc.Finally, beyond general studies in propaganda, current scholarship fails to fully account for any of the (ultra-right-wing) celebrity bloviators found in today’s MSM. (See my essays, “The New Millerites”, “Right-Wing Impresarios,” and “Two Kinds of Academics” for more on this topic.)

All such things prompt one to ask: What on earth is going on here?

In order to answer this question, we must elucidate three aspects of the complete picture: the character traits underlying the right wing, the nature of the ideologies involved, and the sorts of people who end up participating in such movements.Only then can we formulate appropriate prescriptions for ridding the world of right-wing activity.A vision for the future will be informed by an understanding of what dysfunctions currently afflict our society.This means understanding the right wing.

This disquisition is comprised of three parts. First, I will assess the three main elements of right-wing movements (the underlying conditions on which such movements are predicated). I will then explore the three fundamental aspects–or facets–of the standard right-wing movement. Finally, I will address the two primary profiles of people who tend to be part of such a movement.

I

Upon analysis of trends here in the U.S. for the last century, it becomes quite clear that there is a tripartite logic involved in right-wing activity.A right-wing movement is consistently predicated on three symbiotic elements:

- Voracious anti-intellectualism
- Staunch (reactionary) ideological mindsets
- Ingrained hyper-dogmatism

Each element both fuels (and is in turn fueled) the other two.In order to see how each relates to the other, we can assess the elements individually.

Anti-intellectualism: The psychological disposition involves sanctimonious closed-mindedness, smug deluded-ness, and chronic credulity—coupled with a staunch antipathy toward genuine intellectual activity (i.e. bona fide scholarship).This is a degenerate mental condition based on a paucity of intellectual curiosity–coupled with a wonton mental lethargy.Such a disposition is accompanied by an utter lack of intellectual integrity and a paucity of analytical / critical thinking skills.The mere absence of these attributes would be immensely problematic—as such attributes are key features of a healthy mind.Yet the vehement anti-intellectualism of the far right involves an even more severe dysfunction than a mere absence of genuine intellectual activity; it is often a matter of outright hostility toward such activity.

One need only listen in on a right wing pundit for ten minutes for this particular trait to become flagrantly evident.Such figures literally pride themselves on blatant anti-intellectual posturing—using it as a badge of honor (i.e. a signal of fidelity to their

target audience).The target audience, as we'll see, fits a well-defined profile: the simple-minded, parochial folk, steeped in their local traditions and sanctified dogmas. Such a gimmick is especially appealing to those who resent others with more sophistication or higher education.These celebrity talking heads are performance artists who have mastered a marketable shtick.Theirs is a militant anti-intellectualism: a seething contempt for anything resembling intellectual activity (replete with a disdain for scholarship) disguised as "anti-elitism". Being against cosmopolitanism and intellectual "elites" is flaunted as a noble virtue (e.g. being "down-to-earth" and "one of us")…even as it serves the interests of an altogether more venal kind of elitism: economic elitism (a.k.a. plutocracy).

The anti-intellectual mind is fertile ground for dogmatic excursions—and serves as an incubator for ideology.Meanwhile, contempt for well-educated people and bona fide scholars is rendered a highly fashionable commodity.Anything that indicates intellectualism is either dismissed out of hand or it is denigrated as "elitist" (not one of us).

Resentment of scholarship (of Reality in general) is standard operating procedure in a right-wing milieu; such a disposition has become a full-blown pathology.Case studies seem endless: Dick Cheney, Bushes Jr. and Sr., David Horowitz, Norman Podhoretz, Sarah Palin, Clarence Thomas, Michele Bachmann, William Kristol, and on and on.The point is that each instance–as different on the surface as they may seem–is a separate manifestation of the exact same phenomenon.

Other instances aren't as blatant.Antecedents to contemporary neo-conservativism (e.g. Leo Strauss) were pseudo-intellectuals—odd cases that existed in a bygone era.The only case where a right-wing pundit made his name by masquerading as an "intellectual" was William F. Buckley Jr., who obfuscated his charlatanry by passing his ignorance off as profound erudition.

Buckley pulled off this stunt via quasi-eloquent locutions and didactic semantics delivered in a well-polished, high-British accent.This was purely a theatrical presentation, but the gimmick was startlingly effective.Such a clever shtick seemed to work well in the 60's and 70's, but would not go over well with many right-wing followers in the post-Reagan conservative climate—a time when anti-intellectualism had come to be worn with pride.(Buckley demonstrated that one can be both pedantic and ignorant at the same time.Prolix doesn't equal wise.)

Seeming “exceptions” to right-wing anti-intellectualism include odd figures like Antonin Scalia, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Robert Kaplan, and the “Sweet Sixteen” listed in my “Two Kinds of Academics”.The right-wing doctrine endorsed by such prominent pseudo-intellectuals is primarily accounted for by what is known as “intellectual capture”.Some of these men don’t even try to be intellectuals, as theyare overtly anti-intellectual.Paul Johnson and Thomas Sowell, for example, have based their very names on militant anti-intellectualism—exhibiting a pathological contempt (resentment? envy?) for our age’s greatest thinkers.

The primary tool of the charlatan has always been to pass himself off as a sage thinker dispensing pearls of wisdom.The Sweet Sixteen are hallmark examples of intellectual capture.These are men who’ve completely abdicated any trace of intellectual honesty and succumbed entirely to a coveted ideology…and been paid a lot of money to do so.Such figures masquerade as scholars—all to the benefit of the right-wing agenda and their own bank accounts.

These academics-for-hire essentially prostitute their clout. They thereby make fortunes for themselves by providing a veneer of scholarly credence to corporatist activity.Their vaunted words are used as ammunition for the propaganda mill.Mechanisms for this process include snazzy-sounding outfits like “The Law & Economics Consulting Group”, “Compass Lexicon”, “The Analysis Group”, and “Charles River Associates”.Such operations farm prominent academic figures out to corporate clients, who simply pay exorbitant fees for the designated “academic” to endorse the desired agenda.The conflicts of interest are almost never disclosed—and rarely acknowledged.(In fact, the very collusion that entails the most egregious cases is passed off as a virtue—such as “consultation” or “giving / receiving expert opinion”.)

Two things account for intellectual capture: hunger for money / fame and an inability to feel shame.Such figures only seem to “break” the anti-intellectual trend because of their well-honed pretense and dubiously-acquired academic reputation.The substance, however, amounts to nothing more than one would find with a Paul Ryan, a Michele Bachmann, an Andrew Breitbart, a Megyn Kelly, a Clarence Thomas, or a Dinesh D’Souza (all fascinating case-studies of charlatanry in their own right).After all, well-polished balderdash is still balderdash.

The point here is that the right-wing recruits its own breed of “intellectual” to provide itself with a veneer of scholarly credence. Such academics, having succumbed to intellectual capture, pose as “experts”…even as they represent the antithesis of intellectualism. Hawking themselves to the highest bidder as opportunity presents itself, they secure lucrative careers.

After David Halberstam’s renown book, **The Best & The Brightest**, we should be well aware that those in power—though sometimes operating under the pretense of sagacity—are often far from the best or the brightest.Those “at the helm” have often been anti-intellectuals of the highest order: Forrestal, Nitze, Nixon, Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld, Shultz, Feith, Cheney, etc. Not only were these far from great minds; they were all examples of humanity at its most degenerate. Nevertheless, they were able to procure dazzling careers as “wise men”.

There are rare anomalies to the anti-intellectual trend.Francis Fukuyama—a legitimate scholar—had temporarily identified with right-leaning thinking throughout the 90’s and into G.W. Bush’s first term (for reasons about which one can only speculate).However, pursuant to the disaster of the G.W. Bush regime (i.e. the catastrophes its right-wing policies clearly created), Fukuyama came to his senses and denounced the Neocon movement—as almost every bona fide scholar in the world has.(See my essays on intellectual capture and the Millerites for more on this point.)

Of course, it was common for certain “intellectuals” in Germany to “sell out” during the rise of the Third Kingdom.This can be attributed to shameless opportunism (i.e. plain old-fashioned careerism)—a scenario involving the lure of “being in on the action”.The trappings of power are too much for some to resist. In each case, being seduced by visions of augmented status (fame, wealth, prestige, etc.) leads to the prostitution of one’s mind.When an intellectual does remain honest, he is generally no longer useful to the “powers that be” in a right-wing regime. Such a thinker is summarily marginalized (or even demonized as un-patriotic, and thus persecuted, as we’ve seen in 30’s Germany, 70’s Cambodia, or in Russia and China even to this day).

The celebrity pundits of the far right do the most to flaunt anti-intellectualism, but one need not observe such extreme cases to see its presence throughout ALL right-wing activity.Anti-intellectualism is not always as flagrant as it is with the

Limbaughs, Coulters, Hannitys, Becks, Savages, Horowitzes, and Levins of the world.We should not limit a critical analysis to the nuttiest instances of right-wing fidelity, as we would risk failing to understand the right wing as a whole.

For example, the anti-intellectualism of right-wing “Democrats” like Rahm Emanuel and Joseph Lieberman is palpable: a contempt for anything that remotely resembles deontic (i.e. principled) or scholarly activity.Such men have a palpabile aversion to anything remotely resembling intellectual activity. They are simply shameless opportunists: businessmen, not public servants.So-called “Blue Dog” Democrats exhibit the trait quite clearly—as does virtually every Republican member of the Senate and the House. This is all attributable to the same right-wing penchant.

To reiterate, much of this can be accounted for by sheer, raw careerism.Here, abandonment of rectitude is employed as a strategy. Opportunists use this Machivellian approach in order to curry favor with those in power (i.e. the kingmakers).To be part of the in-club, one is required to become Faust.This move is tempting for the careerist, as it often pays off quite handsomely (ergo Rahm Imanuel).Some of these people are simply unintelligent men who want to cash in despite their mediocre capacities; yet sometimes we find otherwise intelligent men succumbing to the trappings of power (Henry Kissinger being the most famous example).For still others, it may well be because they are constitutionally incapable of engaging in anything that remotely resembles intellectual activity.Certainly the explanation varies from case to case, depending on the individual’s psychological profile.

Anti-intellectualism is a common thread throughout all right-wing movements simply because “getting in on the action” typically means “selling out” (i.e. toeing the line of those in power). This, in turn, entails forbidding any/all independent thinking, free inquiry, and open criticism of the established order.Fascinatingly, such a modus operandi has been standard for ALL right-wing movements, the world over, for the last century.The consistent incidence of vehement anti-intellectualism is difficult to ignore whenever one elucidates the tell-tale attributes of right-wing movements (including cult movements that have operated under the auspices of “leftist” rhetoric: Juche, the Red Cambodians, Stalinism, and Maoism).

Meanwhile, the thin veneer of academic credence provided by right-wing “think tanks” fools only the most credulous.When anti-intellectualism masquerades as scholarly activity, generally, there are careerist aspirations at play.“Think tanks”, we’ve come to find over the past three decades, are little other than right-wing

propaganda factories.The epitome of this is The Heritage Foundation—little other than a hive of brazen charlatanry.Academics recruited by such operations end up being nothing more than hired dogma-mongers: men who've prostituted themselves for cash and notoriety.

This is not to say that anti-intellectualism does not exist on the so-called "left"-leaning segment of the population.But the "leftist" version anti-intellectual attitude—when it occurs—is comparatively passive in nature.It is more of an antipathy toward intellectualism than a staunch hostility (accounted for by common folk who are simply unconcerned with scholarship). This antipathy is often attributable to the quotidian concerns and sheer pragmatism of day-to-day life. Indeed, for many working class people, scholarship simply lies beyond the scope of their everyday priorities.

With the right wing, on the other hand, anti-intellectualism is pathological and systematic.A militantly anti-intellectual mindset is endemic to the far right—whereas incidents of anti-intellectualism elsewhere on the political spectrum are circumstantial—a kind of de facto UN-intellectualism.(Indeed, one can mindlessly endorse anything…even Progressive policies.)

This is also not to say that anti-intellectualism is the same as "unintelligent".They often don't correlate.(One's attitude toward intellectualism is not equivalent to one's intelligence)There are, indeed, intelligent Republicans.From time to time, there have been very smart right-wing figures in recent U.S. history:Henry Kissinger—one of the worst war criminals of the post-war era—was extremely intelligent (ref. Christopher Hitchens' **The Trial of Henry Kissinger**).Even shameless right-wing ideologues like the Sweet Sixteen and the various Neocon icons (as well as Karl Rove, John Roberts, Samuel Alito, and Antonin Scalia) aren't dumb; they simply squander a latent intelligence on wonton idiocy.Such figures are calculated and scheming in a way that requires a dedicated anti-intellectual attitude.(Meanwhile, Clarence Thomas is an iconic example of what happens when vehement anti-intellectualism DOES correlate with low I.Q.)

(The best book to read on this point is Richard Hofstadter's Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the right wing in the U.S. during the first half of the 20th century: **Anti-intellectualism In American Life**.Susan Jacoby wrote what could be considered a sequel to this work—an attempt to apply its theme to contemporary America: **The Age of Unreason**.An amazing book on people's resistance to intellectual integrity is **Darwin's Dangerous Idea** by Daniel C. Dennett.)

Ideological mindsets: This primarily involves reactionary mental dispositions.The craving for (the illusion of) certainty often renders people vulnerable to the more seductive ideologies on offer in the memetic marketplace.Ideologies that appeal to our hopes and ameliorate our fears have an allure that is difficult to resist—especially if one is insecure and disoriented, frustrated and resentful.When one succumbs to the trappings of ideology, bull-headedness and defiance promptly ensue.Anything challenging the mindset is seen as heresy. Anything that offers counterpoint only prompts one to dig in one's heals–as with what I call The New Millerites.

There is a symbiosis between anti-intellectualism and entrenchment in an ideological mindset.To wit: an ideological mindset is intellectually debilitating, while an anti-intellectual attitude fosters staunch ideology.To indulge in an ideology entails defaulting on the use of one's mind for critical analysis / reflection. Naturally, then, anti-intellectualism is the optimal incubator for hidebound dogmatism.

By now (at least for those who are well-educated and moral), both Neoliberal economic ideology and Neocon foreign policy have been relegated to the dustbin of history.The two memeplexes are sad missteps that have gone the way of alchemy, astrology, trickle-down economics, and phrenology.Yet…alas, due to the right-wing penchant for ideological mindsets, these two memeplexes stubbornly persist.Endorsement for them continues amongst the most ill-informed and credulous segments of our society…thereby giving the right wing its on-going ballast. The Tea Party is a case in point.

(Though he doesn't frame it in this way, **Moral Politics** by George Lakoff touches on this issue.Nancy Love's **Dogmas & Dreams** deals with this topic as well.**The True Believer** by Eric Hoffer addresses this phenomenon from a "crowd theory" paradigm.**Why People Believe Weird Things** by Michael Shermer is also insightful. Two landmark works on the psychology of the right-wing ideologue are **The Republican Brain** by Chris Mooney and **The Reactionary Mind** by Corey Rubin.)

(For a historical perspective of the last four decades, a few books stand out.Sean Wilentz's **Age of Reagan**, Pierson and Hacker's **Winner-Take-All Politics**, Colodny / Shachtman's **The Forty Years War**, and James Mann's **Rise of the Vulcans** are excellent accounts of the rise of right-wing ideology here in the U.S.)

(From a sociological point of view, Dan Sperber's **Explaining Culture** is very insightful.Carl Sagan's **Demon Haunted World** is a classic commentary on dogmatism in the U.S.)

Hyper-dogmatism: The confluence of two things accounts for this unfortunate dysfunction: Entrenched vested interests coupled with credulity. Together, they make the ideal recipe for right-wing proclivities.

Hyper-dogmatism is most blatant in right-wingers' penchant for fundamentalist religiosity and for believing urban legends.It also accounts for a chronic susceptibility to reactionary propaganda.Indeed, cult activity has been the hallmark of right-wing movements throughout history–be it Nazism or the Red Cambodians.Whenever people don't want to think for themselves (and thereby succumb to groupthink), dogmatism thrives.A vehement anti-intellectual posture primes a person for hyper-dogmatic excursions.

When one asks many right-wingers for the basis of their beliefs, one generally discovers that their stances are based on utterly specious sources. Such is the nature of sacrosanct dogmatic systems. The staggering fact is that it generally doesn't occur to the right-winger that the sources on which they base their views are, to put it lightly, highly dubious.

(The best book on hyper-dogmatism is Michael Shermer's **How We Believe**.For an overview of contagion theory via memetics, Susan Blackmore's **The Meme Machine** is excellent.Robert Cialdini's **Influence** is also very insightful with regard to methods for manipulating peoples' beliefs.Derek Parfit's **Reasons & Persons** is very insightful, as is the classic, **Judgment Under Uncertainty** by Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky.Extensive work in epidemiology and contagion theory has been done that sheds light on hyper-dogmatism.See also the sources listed above for ideological mindsets.)

Conclusion:

In order to develop a substantive understanding of the right wing, it is necessary to isolate each of its three basic elements. Now that all three elements have been articulated, it is easy to see their symbiosis. Anti-intellectualism sets the stage for harboring dubious beliefs. Indulging in hyper-dogmatism renders one an ideal host for whatever specious memeplex prevails. The tendency for one's thinking to calcify into a static mindset leads one to obstinately stick to those beliefs, no matter what. The anti-intellectual posture then offers an enticing rationalization for "sticking to

one's guns"–even in the face of irrefutable evidence that one's beliefs are ungrounded. With the reactionary mindset, fealty to the sanctified doctrine trumps all.

Any effort to counteract the right wing, therefore, is not a matter of fighting against any particular beliefs.Rather, it is a battle against anti-intellectualism per se, against ideological mindsets per se, and against hyper-dogmatism per se.It is the underlying elements that must be addressed rather than the overt symptoms.The intractable saga of "arguing over issues", then, is doomed to an eternal stalemate, as it wages war on symptoms rather than treating the disease.

II

Rather than fixating on specific beliefs, it is important to recognize the general facets of belief of which the right wing is comprised.There are three:

- Hyper-nationalism (embodied in Neocon foreign policy)
- Plutocracy / corporatism (embodied in Neoliberal economic ideology)
- Hyper-religionism (embodied in various fundamentalist strains of religiosity)

Here's the key point: Each facet is in a symbiotic relationship with the other two.All three involve groupthink and staunch fidelity to a sacred doctrine—thus exhibiting tell-tale attributes of cult activity.Rather than nit-picking seemingly disparate policy points, a prudent approach is to address the broader picture of the KINDS of belief–the underlying logic from which all right-wing stances emerge.

The symbiotic relationship is important to elucidate:

Hyper-nationalism is a matter of tribalism (in the form of national chauvinism or "super-patriotism"). Plutocracy is a matter of either being part of or endorsing a system of highly-concentrated power (in the form of private power qua wealth). Hyper-religionism is a matter of engaging in cult activity (i.e. groupthink, idolatry, and institutionalized dogmatism). Each feeds off of the other:

- The Neocon agenda involves corporate / economic hegemony: imperialism that doesn't involve colonialism (i.e. territorial hegemony), thus promoting corporate power (i.e. oligarchic power structures). Meanwhile, it invovles calls for loyalty and conformity–ensuring the masses "go along with" the powers that be.

- The Neoliberal agenda involves the promulgation of moneyed interests (most notably, the aggrandizement of corporate power) via corporatist activity–which translates to plutocracy (i.e. oligarchic power structures).
- Religionism (i.e. cult activity) is a matter of the herd being kept “in line” according to the dictates of the designated authority (which demands compliance and fealty)…the perfect recipe for oligarchy.

All aspects involve top-down control, with power in the hands of a well-positioned few (the insiders)–at the expense of everyone else (the rabble). The privileged end up being the ones who “matter” while the rank and file are relegated to subaltern status. This is the very definition of “right-wing”.

Of course, it is perfectly possible for a right-wing adherent to only endorse two out of the three belief systems mentioned here.For example, right-wing “libertarians” primarily proceed from a fanatical subscription to anarcho-capitalism—yet they vary widely on religionism (Ayn Rand acolytes are vehemently anti-religion—even as they unwittingly engage in their own cult activity). Moreover, contrary to Neocon agendas, they tend to eschew foreign entanglements (e.g. the hyper-isolationism of the John Birch Society). Such people are sometimes referred to as “paleo-conservatives”.

Many Neocons are not religious; many Neoliberal ideologues are not religious.(Sam Harris is an interesting case-in-point.He is a bona fide intellectual who champions free-thought…yet has sympathies for Neocon foreign policy—including, oddly enough, implicit support for Revisionist Zionism.Even Christopher Hitchens, perhaps the most irreverent intellectual on the planet, finds himself sympathetic to Neocon mentalities as well.)

Meanwhile, many very religious people embrace social justice, and thus eschew Neoliberal ideology—while varying in super-patriotism.Such cases involve people who somehow manage to parcel their dogmatism—essentially quarantining the rest of their thinking (which may well be non-right-wing) from their abiding religiosity. (For more on this, see may essay on The Judeo-Christian Right-wing.)

The variations are endless.The “catch” is that by endorsing one facet of the right wing agenda, people (unwittingly) end up endorsing the other two by default.This is due to the fact that each facet is symbiotic with the other two.(Attempts to divorce, say, Neoliberalism from Neoconservativism are, at best, quixotic.)Meanwhile,

tribalisms map to each other: racism and hyper-nationalism for example (Nazism), or racism and militant religionism (the KKK), or all three (Revisionist Zionism).The symbiosis between the modes of tribalism is palpable in prototypical cases.

The American Heritage Dictionary has defined “fascism” as follows:

A system of government that exercises a dictatorship of the extreme right, typically through the merging of state and business leadership, together with belligerent nationalism.

The confluence of these conditions involves highly concentrated power in the hands of a few oligarchs, systems of domination and exploitation, lockstep adherence to the anointed creed, as well as marginalization (and vilification) of any / all dissent (a.k.a. subversion).In other words: cult activity (a.k.a. submersion). We can assess each facet individually:

Hyper-nationalism is a matter of national chauvinism.It involves hallowed militarism—via what could be called exceptionalism-gone-haywire.The mentality is based on collective false pride (characterized by hubris, braggadocio, self-righteousness, and sanctimony).Such “super-patriotism” generally incorporates a combination of mass mania (e.g. saber-rattling, jingoism, triumphalism) and mass hysteria (engineered fear / insecurity) as a means to mobilize support.

Exploiting fear / insecurity by positing a menacing “threat” from which the in-group needs to be “protected” by a bold regime: this is the main justification for militarism. For, under such circumstances, a “Long War” against a diabolical nemesis (determined to take over the world, of course) may be rationalized–be it in the form of a “Cold War” or a “War on Terror” or a “War On Drugs”. As history has demonstrated time and time again, “national security” is the quintessential rationalization employed to justify even the most appalling human rights abuses.The process involves drumming up patriotic fervor via jingoism and agit-prop.Here, those in power demand loyalty to the Machine and its sacred cause.Dissent is not tolerated. Subversion is a form of heresy called “treason”. (We saw this during the G.W. Bush regime when anti-war sentiments were conflated with anti-Americanism and disloyalty.)

Being swept up in mass mania (“Ra ra ra, we’re the best!”) while being taken in by mass hysteria (the need for “national security” to protect us from the nemesis that is hell-bent on global domination and, thus, our destruction): these two factors account for much of the mentality found in right-wing foreign policy.Such reactionary

thinking engenders both false pride and groupthink—the hallmarks of tribalism. The worldview is predicated on seeing the world through a Manichean prism: the forces of “good” (by definition, us) pitted against the forces of “evil” (by definition, anyone who undermines our agenda) in a glorious cosmic battle. This is used as justification for waging a forever-war against “the bad guys”. (For more on this point, see my essays on “The Meaning of ‘Patriotism'” on this website.)

As Orwell illustrated in his classic novel, **1984**, eternal war (i.e. waging a perpetual, open-ended “long war” against “the enemy”) is an integral part of “Totalitarianism 101”.The militarism and exceptionalism exhibited by the contemporary Neocon movement here in America, then, parallels the features exhibited by Oceania’s INGSOC as well as Germany’s Third Kingdom. “National Security” is infinitely appropriate-able for the desired purpose.

Hyper-nationalism is simply a form of tribalism.Consequently, it is easy to get swept up by (and deluded by) ambient super-patriotic attitudes.Simmering resentment (especially when repressed) is the ideal incubator for submersion in this form of tribalism.Here, false pride serves as an ersatz antidote for repressed shame.The lure of braggadocio and triumphalism is too much for some people to resist.Jingoism is what “sells” people on hyper-nationalism, and gets them “hooked”.Indeed, super-patriotism is seductive, as it appeals to the most primal human instincts.It incorporates a simple-minded, Manichean worldview, while catering to our innate penchant for tribalism.(See my essays on tribalism for more on this point. Also, refer to the Foreign Policy section of this website.)

Being reactionary, the right-wing mindset offers the allure of Providentialism. The notion of “doing god’s work” or “being chosen by god” (carrying out the will of god; claiming that god is on our side, staking our claim by divine right) has almost irresistable appeal. Consequently, Providentialism is as intoxicating and as addictive as a potent drug. Carrying out an agenda by divine ordinance, after all, is the epitome of self-righteousness. Patriotism-junkies are ubiquitous throughout right-wing movements for this very reason.A brief survey of right-wing propaganda, here in the U.S. and elsewhere, reveals that the allure of Providentialism is at the root of most militaristic regimes.With right-wing activity, this attitude is often pathological in nature.A fetishization of “the national interest” forms—a handy rationalization for even the most atrocious acts (e.g. Vietnam, the IG’s policies in Palestine, etc.)

The one quasi-anomaly to this right-wing penchant is the foreign policy approach endemic to right-wing libertarianism–an approach that has sometimes operated under the rubric, paleo-conservatism. This couples right-wing economic ideology with isolationism instead of with militarism. Essentially, it spawns from a laissez-faire mindset on steroids (amounting to a kind of inverted militarism). This involves an insular (domestic) nationalism as opposed to an outward-looking (imperialistic) nationalism. Instead of engaging with the global community, it demands isolationism as a matter of course: a nation focusing exclusively inward. This comports well with right-wing libertarian ideology. We saw this strain of right-wing movement with the John Birch Society and the Robert A. Taft Club. The key is that it spawns from the same mentality as hyper-nationalism: nativism (anti-cosmopolitanism). The attitude here is: We are the center of the world, so why should we care about anyone who isn't "one of us"?

(The best book to read on the social psychology involved with hyper-nationalism is **Bloody Revenge** by Thomas J. Schiff.**Nations & Nationalism** by Ernest Gellner is also very insightful.)

(Regarding the history of hyper-nationalism in America during the post-war era, James Carroll's **House of War** is a must-read.An excellent compliment to **House of War** is Andrew Bacevich's **Washington Rules**.Endless descriptions of the horrific consequences of this phenomenon can be found in the dozens of books written by Noam Chomsky.Excellent commentary on recent right-wing foreign policy can be found in Rachel Maddows' **Drift**, as well as books by Chalmers Johnson: most notably, **The Sorrows of Empire** and his collection of articles, **Dismantling the Empire**. Also note Steven Glain's **State & Defense** as well as James Ledbetter's **Unwarranted Influence**–two excellent works on the topic.)

(Documentaries on American hyper-nationalist policy in the last decade like **Why We Fight**, **The Fog of War**, **No End In Sight**, and Frontline's **Bush's War** are also very informative.For a concise analysis of the American hyper-nationalist mentality, see Andrew Bacevich's **The Limits Of Power**. For more on this, see the essays on "Patriotism" on this site.)

Plutocracy has largely taken the form of corporatocracy here in America. It proceeds from hyper-capitalism (i.e. Neoliberal Ideology; a.k.a. free market fundamentalism, anarcho-capitalism, right-wing libertarianism). In this scheme, private wealth / power is concentrated in a few hands—at everyone else's expense.This is carried out via a process commonly referred to as

corporatism&&nblt/em>: the collusion of moneyed interests (corporate power) and those in government positions. (The best account of this is Pierson / Hacker's **Winner-Take-All Politics**.)

State-corporate collusion is, in part, facilitated by the notorious "revolving door" between public office and corporate positions (Bill Gramm, a Senator from Texas, is one of the most blatant cases, though the examples are legion: from Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld to Hank Paulson and dozens of alum from Goldman Sachs).An Establishment phalanx is thus forged, a phenomenon the Japanese call "amakudari" (literally, "descent from the heavens").Here, retiring government officials take on top jobs in Big Business, companies they were once charged with either regulating or passing legislation for.The quid pro quos involved entail egregious conflicts of interest. This essentiall amounts to the institutionalization of an extremely dysfunctional incentive structure–not to mention a systemic incidence of ulterior motives.The State is thereby rendered a free-for-all of favors-swapping (essentially, legalized graft).This shadow government of quid-pro-quos between public officials and moneyed interests is typically called "crony capitalism".It is one of the primary vehicles for corporate socialism (a.k.a. the "socialism" the right-wing promotes under the pretense "economic freedom" and "free markets").

A fetishization of "the market" and "private enterprise" is a sure recipe for a plutocratic order.In this scheme, corporate rights trump human rights (again, in the name of "economic freedom").State-corporate collusion enables the agenda of centers of highly-concentrated private power to be carried out under the aegis of laissez-faire capitalism. (For more, see my essay, "Corporatism In A Nutshell".)

So long as the general populace is be persuaded to rally around this agenda—under various pretenses—plutocracy can be orchestrated with impunity…in the name of wonderful-sounding things like "growth" and "prosperity".(See my articles on Neoliberal Newspeak for an in-depth analysis of these pretenses.)Another crucial tactic for rallying the rabble around policies that will only hurt them is: eliminate civic-mindedness.(See my essays on civic-mindedness for more on this important point.)

Systems of highly concentrated private power (often in the form of highly-concentrated wealth) must be understood if one is to understand how / why right-wing activity is promoted.Such systems operate based on a simple logic: Those IN power will generally USE that power to PROTECT that power.This m.o. is so obvious, many lose sight of it in everyday life.

In a nutshell, Neoliberal ideology involves something quite straight-forward: the accumulation of highly-concentrated power / wealth in the name of “freedom” and “property rights”.This is generally done by way of hyper-financialization of the economy, favors to Big Business, and the dissolving of the separation of corporate interests and public policy. Rampant war profiteering is another prime manifestation (ergo Neocon foreign policy).Notorious examples of this are legion: Blackwater / Xe, Vinnell Corp, MPRI / L3 Communications, Kellogg Brown & Root / Halliburton, DynCorp, SAIC, BDM International, Cubic Applications, DFI International, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, etc.The symbiosis between Neoliberal economic policy and Neocon foreign policy is embodied in this billion-dollar racket.The entrenched, vested interest in open-ended, on-going war (i.e. “The Long War”) is, then, integrally connected with right-wing economic ideology. In America, it has gone beyond anything Orwell could have imagined.

In short, Neoliberal economic policy involves “growth” and “prosperity” exclusively for the well-positioned few (i.e. at the expense of everyone else).This is carried out via hyper-financialization of the economy, hyper-privatization, maximized de-regulation of industries, lack of State oversight (or State-enforced accountability) of corporate activity, lack of transparency in all large institutions, systematic corporate socialism, and massive tax-cuts / tax-loopholes / tax-exemptions for the super-rich and for large corporations. It also requires the utter disregard for the long-term collateral effects of such things on the rank and file. This is why chimerical “trickle down” effects need to be sold to those who get screwed by this regimen.

The iniquitous policies enacted to facilitate such processes have gone under various names: Reaganomics, supply-side economics, trickle-down economics, Rubinomics, etc.It is predicated on (now defunct) economic theories such as the (now infamous) Efficient Market Hypothesis and so-called Rational Choice Theory—idealizations that have been proven wrong time and time again.

Neoliberal ideology has operated under various rubrics: free market fundamentalism, laissez-faire capitalism, right-wing libertarianism, and—in its most extreme form—fascism.(Indeed, the anarcho-capitalism promoted by the right-wing here in the U.S. is essentially proto-fascism, a fact that becomes quite plain once we marry Neoliberal policies with Neocon foreign policy.) As mentioned earlier, the implementation of right-wing economic policies is effected via a process generally referred to as “corporatism” (a.k.a. crony capitalism), essentially: state-corporate

collusion.This involves legalized graft as well as the “revolving door” between positions in private industry and public office. The process entails an orgy of conflicts of interest and dubious incentives.

This is seen most flagrantly in the treatment of corporations as persons—a ruse that allows economic / property rights to trump human rights.The fall-out from such policies can bee seen by the atrophy of basic social services and neglect of public infrastructure, the primary role of money in elections, and the use of public funds to subsidize private interests (e.g. corporate power). (When influence / access is proportional to financial power, we don’t live in a democracy, we live in a plutocracy–which is precisely what right-wing ideologues want.)

(Hands down, the best book written on this topic is **The Power Elite** by C. Wright Mills.For a review of corporatism, **Unequal Protection** (2nd ed.) by Thom Hartmann is the best book on the topic.**The Shock Doctrine** by Naomi Klein, **Winner-Take-All Politics** by Pierson / Hacker, and **A Brief History of Neoliberalism** by David Harvey are excellent recent histories of the ideology and its policies. Robert Frank’s **The Darwin Economy**, Douglas Dowd’s **Capitalism & Its Economics**, John Quiggin’s **Zombie Economics**, Gerard Dumenil’s **The Crisis of Neoliberalism**, Colin Crouch’s **The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism**, Marjorie Kelly’s **The Divine Right of Capital**, Lawrence Lessig’s **Republic Lost**, Ha-Joon Chang’s **23 Things They Don’t Tell You About Capitalism**, Jon Schlefler’s **The Assumptions Economists Make**, Chris Harman’s **Zombie Capitalism**, as well as **American Capitalism** by J.K. Galbraith are all immensely informative. As mentioned in the introduction, Sheldon Wolin’s **Democracy Incorporated** is a must-read.)

(For a historical analysis, **Wealth & Democracy** by Kevin Phillips and Benjamin Friedman’s **The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth** are very insightful books.For an excellent account of the recent consequences of Neoliberal policy, Joseph Stiglitz’s **Freefall** is the best source.Also worth reading: Charles Ferguson’s **Predator Nation**. Charles Ferguson’s excellent documentary, Inside Job, is also very informative, as are the Frontline documentaries **Inside The Meltdown** and **The Warning**.Matt Taibbi’s **Griftopia** is a worthwhile polemic on the fallout from right-wing economic policies and the corporate-state collusion that enable them.)

(For other perspectives on this phenomenon [the consolidation of power in a few hands and how the well-positioned rig the system for their own benefit], see: Kevin Phillips’ **Bad Money**, David Kay Johnston’s **Free Lunch**, Ted Nace’s **Gangs of America**, Alperovitz / Daly’s **Unjust Deserts**, Janine Wedel’s **Shadow Elite**, Chris

Hayes' **Twilight of the Elites**, Dean Baker's **The End of Loser Liberalism** and **The Conservative Nanny State**, Clyde Prestowitz's **The Betrayal of American Prosperity**, Robert Frank's **Pity The Billionaire**, Barry Eichengreen's **Exorbitant Privilege**, and Noreena Hertz's **The Silent Takeover**. David Rothkopf's **Superclass** addresses the phenomenon from an international perspective.Centers of power don't count on books like this being written—which is precisely why all of us should read them.)

(Highly concentrated power—especially in private form—is a vast topic. **Power** by Bertrand Russell offers some key insights.History's best diagnosis of systems of domination / exploitation is Marx's essay, **On Wage Labour & Capital**.**Capital & Its Discontents** is a recently released collection of critical essays on the subject.Michael Mann's 2-volume **The Sources of Social Power** is an important work on the formation of power structures.)

(Extensive literature has been written in the sociology of structural inequality—and on the dire effects of severe inequality itself.Wilkinson / Pickett's **The Spirit Level**, Jonas Pontusson's **Inequality & Prosperity**, James Galbraith's **Inequality & Stability**, Richard Wilkinson's **The Impact of Inequality**, Tim Jackson's **Prosperity Without Growth**, Kenneth Arrow's seminal work, **Ameritocracy & Inequality**, Joseph Stiglitz's **The Price of Inequality**, Donella H. Meadows' **The Limits to Growth**, Timothy Noah's **The Great Divergence**, and Douglas Dowd's **Inequality & The Global Economic Crisis** are all informative books on this subject. For more on these points, see the essays on right-wing "Libertarianism" and "Neoliberal Newspeak" on this site.)

Religionism: This phenomenon is a matter of four things:

1. Poor education (systematically-enforced ignorance)
2. Institutionalized dogmatism
3. Groupthink
4. Entrenched hyper-traditionalism (formalized archaism)

Religiosity proves extremely useful for right-wing movements, as cult activity is the primary means to get people to "go along" with the established order (and to keep people "in line").Not only is hyper-religionism based on groupthink, it FOSTERS groupthink. For groupthink, it is important to note, can be mapped to other contexts. After all, dogmatism is dogmatism–be it in the form of religion or political ideology. Reliosity translates very well to reactionary thinking.

To wit: Cult activity can be leveraged to serve an oligarchic economic / political structure.Understanding religion to mean institutionalized dogmatism elucidates how this third facet of right-wing movements arises from the three underlying elements (discussed in part I of this essay). How is this so? The corollaries of institutionalized dogmatism are systematic enforcement of ignorance and the suppression of intellectual curiosity / individual autonomy.

The background of this aspect of the right wing catechism is quite straight forward: Edmund Burke vs. Thomas Paine.Burke, progenitor to the modern right wing, was a hidebound monarchist and staunch hyper-traditionalist–not to mention a fan of an oligarchic order.Consequently, it could be said that he was the pre-eminent icon of the counter-Enlightenment.Contrast him to the progenitor of Progressivism, Paine, the quitissential icon of the Enlightenment.This juxtaposition illustrates much of what one needs to know when understanding the right wing.

The right-wing domestic agenda largely involves the dissolving of the separation of church and state, conflating sacred doctrine with public policy.Religion and governance are consolidated, emulating a theocratic modus operandi.We've seen this most flagrantly with the treatment of abortion as somehow immoral based on iron-age religious dogma.(Sanctified superstition is the best friend of ideology.)

As history has demonstrated time and time again, fundamentalist religion is the optimal way to coral people, to rally them around the desired cause, and to control their thinking en masse.Americans seem to so readily recognize this with Nazism, Salafism, Juche, and—of course—Soviet-style "Communism"…yet often can't seem to recognize the exact same phenomenon with respect to right-wing movements here in America. (Alas, when indulging in dogmatism, mirrors are difficult things to use.) As has been clearly demonstrated in the American heartland, fundamentalist Christianity is the perfect bedfellow of super-patriotism.Why is that? Cult-activity translates across contexts.

(For a historical account of the role religion plays in the public psyche, **The Closing of the Western Mind** by Charles Freeman provides an excellent illustration from distant history.Books on the Enlightenment—such as Ernst Cassirer's **The Philosophy of the Enlightenment** as well as Jonathan Israel's **Radical Enlightenment** and **Enlightenment Contested**—illustrate this point as well.Thomas Paine's **Age of Reason** shows how progressivism and religionism are antithetical to one another.)

We need not go into the ubiquitous correlation of fundamentalist religion and right-wing proclivities; the concordance is well established both psychologically / sociologically and by raw statistics.(**American Fascists** by Christ Hedges is an excellent book on this correlation.Also see Kevin Phillips' **American Theocracy** as well as Jeff Sharlet's **C Street** and **The Family** for accounts of recent church-state collusion here in the U.S.)

(For a sociological analysis of religion's role in social systems, see Durkheim's **The Elementary Forms of Religious Life**, Weber's **The Sociology of Religion**, and Walter Kaufmann's **Critique of Religion & Philosophy**.Works by Feuerbach are also helpful.)

(Pascal Boyer's **Religion Explained** is the best explanation of religion in terms of evolutionary psychology.Though it doesn't address the role of religiosity in fostering right-wing proclivities, it does reveal how innate human tendencies can be exploited by systems of manipulation.Scott Atran's **In Gods We Trust** is also very insightful regarding religiosity's role in how people think and conduct themselves.See also **Darwin's Cathedral** by David Sloan Wilson.)

Conclusion:

Each facet of a right-wing movement feeds off of the other two—even as each fosters the other two.The antitheses of these facets, respectively, are: cosmopolitanism, social justice, and secularism (free-thought).(In other words: the facets of Progressivism.)The antithesis of fascism, then, is social democracy (a.k.a. liberal democracy; civil society).In other words, a right-wing order is based on the opposite of that on which a genuine participatory, deliberative democracy is based.

The sales-pitch for a right-wing order (be it proto-fascism or full-fledged fascism, as the case may be) consists of the following (eminently enticing) features: national honor, glory, certainty, predictability, order, security, simple-minded explanations, the promise of better days ahead, and vengeance against the designated "enemy".Such tempting offers—married with an appealing narrative—proves quite seductive for many people.

Religion and hyper-nationalism are a fantastically effective way to mobilize people, rally them around the desired cause, and thereafter keep them "in line".People want a narrative that resonates with them.Invocations of Providence (a shining city on a hill) and manifest destiny (American Exceptionalism) are typical in right-wing boilerplate simply because such things are tremendously alluring.They tell a story

that’s simple and straight-forward, memorable and captivating…a story that SOUNDS eminently plausible at first blush, while appealing to the adolescent in all of us.

Those WITH power will LEVERAGE that power to MAINTIAN that power.A right-wing order is the optimal means by which this is done.As discussed in part I of this essay, accomplishing this depends on three conditions prevailing amongst the general populace: anti-intellectual sentiments, hyper-dogmatic dispositions, and—of course—a willingness to be completely committed to the (prescribed) ideology.Those in power will engineer and anoint an ideology that is easy to digest without much thought, and one that is CATCHY (i.e. stupendously enticing…so long as it isn’t subjected to penetrating critical analysis).

Here in America, then, Neocon foreign policy, Neoliberal economic policy, and fundamentalist religiosity go hand-in-hand, simply because they are symbiotic.This is the modus operandi of right-wing movements because it is the most efficient and effective way to serve the ultimate end: keep those WITH the money and power IN PLACE (while subordinating everyone else—with their engineered consent).

III

But WHO ARE right-wingers?The answer to this important question is not simple.However, a comprehensive demographic breakdown—replete with regression analysis—isn’t necessary to reveal salient trends.Participant observation shows that the right wing generally consists of two kinds of people.Right-wing apparatchiks tend to accumulate within two demographic intersections:

- The nexus of avarice and wealth (the impresarios)
- The nexus of ignorance and credulity (the loyal followers)

The “pushers” exist within the intersection of two demographics: those who will benefit from a right-wing order (the very affluent) AND those who are iniquitous enough to actually try to bring it about. Each is a necessary yet insufficient condition. After all, there are MORAL rich people (just as there are immoral working-class people).

The nature of such impresarios was illustrated more blatantly than ever by the Koch brothers’ funding of the 2009-2010 Tea Party movement.There exist those with tremendous wealth who are more than happy to deprive the rabble (i.e. the subaltern population) of vital social services and basic public infrastructure in order

to fund tax-breaks for themselves and subsidies (read: corporate welfare) to Big Business.That is to say: they marginalize the general populace so that they can hoard even more wealth for themselves…even as the rank and file suffers as a consequence.

Examples of plutocrats are legion: John Paulson, Rupert Murdoch, John Thane, Hank Paulson, Larry Silverstein, Stephen Schwarzman (nay, most hedge fund / private equity managers), the Koch brothers, Arthur Pope, Dick Fuld, Lloyd Blankfein, etc.These are some of the highest paid people in society…even as most of them have never done anything beneficial for human society in their lives…and even cause far more damage than most people could in a hundred lifetimes.

The profile of such men is easy to encapsulate: we know that they typically are not very intelligent, have little sense of anything remotely resembling probity, and are among the wealthiest people in the country. It is not merely that they embody avarice, they exhibit a miraculous inability to feel shame.

Plutocrats typically act as the kingmakers of the ruling class, the Svengalis of politicians, and the power-brokers behind the scenes.They are the gate-keepers of what C. Wright Mills called, The Power Elite. They are the impresarios of the plutocratic order from which they and their cronies benefit—with complete disregard for the collateral damage that may be caused to the rest of society.For examples of such figures, one need only survey the Board of Trustees / senior fellows at the notorious Heritage Foundation, the (now defunct) PNAC, Americans for Prosperity, The Club For Growth, The Business Roundtable, or the infamous AEI.Each is a hive of corporatists.

(There has been extensive scholarship done on this scam, most notably Naomi Klein's **The Shock Doctrine**. For more on this topic, see the books listed above about the consolidation of power.In terms of how the scam is legally perpetrated on behalf of corporate power, the best book to read is Thom Hartmann's **Unequal Protection** 2nd ed.The best analyses of the political mechanism employed to facilitate plutocracy are Wolin's **Democracy Incorporated**, Harman's **Zombi Capitalism**, and **Winner-Take-All Politics** by Hacker & Pierson.)

The "followers" are of an entirely different sort. Right-wing followings metastasize due to the confluence of two key characteristics: credulity and ignorance.They are therefore found at the intersection of two groups: Those credulous enough to actually "buy" the right-wing sales-pitch AND those who are uneducated enough to

find the claims plausible.This follows logically from the following simple insight: If one is NOT extremely wealthy (and is thus NOT going to benefit from right-wing policies) and yet STILL opts to endorse right-wing policies, one must be duped. This means that one must be dupe-able.

The ruse involves the most basic law of business: in order to hawk a product, one must create demand for it—which often involves creating the perception of a “need” for it. Unsurprisingly, hyper-dogmatism and adamant anti-intellectualism play spendidly into this sham–which is precisely why right-wing movements are predicated on both.

Polls that have repeatedly shown that those who watch FoxNews are, clearly, the most misinformed people in the country.Typically, they are ASTONISHINGLY misinformed.A paucity of analytical / critical thinking skills and a dearth of knowledge are the prerequisites for the aforesaid dupe-ability. This has been corroborated over and over again, in study after study. Recent manifestations of this tragic phenomenon are quite glaring.Since Reagan’s inauguration, if one is affluent and yet supports the right wing, one is—at best—egregiously ignorant.

EXAMPLE: The scam perpetrated by the deficit hawks has been swallowed hook, line and sinker by tens of millions.

The deficit hysteria of 2009-11 is a corollary of the “Big Government” gimmick touted in right-wing propaganda.In a vulgar twist of irony, the hysteria was fueled by the very people who supported the policies that caused the deficit.Based on their proposals, none of these politicians genuinely care about reducing deficits; they’re only concerned with diminishing the power of organized labor (while abetting the corporate power they’ve been paid to serve).They propose that the best way to “fix” the State’s fiscal problems is to privatize everything under the sun while de-funding basic public infrastructure and depriving the rank and file of vital social services (investments that are portrayed as “socialism”). Meanwhile, eminently democratic provisions like universal public healthcare or universal access to quality education are caricatured as some nefarious “government takeover” of our lives.

Instead of targeting the obvious ways to increase the Federal budget (ending massive tax-breaks / exemptions / loopholes for the super-rich and for corporations), the impresarios claim that the only way to curb the deficit is by curbing investment in public services.Instead of proposing obvious places for massive spending cuts (corporate socialism, the bloated budget of the military-industrial complex, and the

subsidizing of a disastrously inefficient FPSTI), they are targeting programs that empower the rank and file (investments that have a far higher fiscal multiplier than tax-cuts for the affluent and Big Business). The rationalization employed: trickle-down economics. In this scheme, the wealthiest Americans are–preposterously–depicted as “the producers” and as “the job creators”.

To not recognize the flagrant flaws in such proposals is to be astonishingly un-informed.That so many right-wing legislators can persuade so many that this is a remotely good idea indicates that the country boasts a horrendously misinformed general populace.The **pushers** have successfully duped tens of millions of credulous, ill-informed **followers**.

Regarding the issue of stimulating the economy in a way that benefits the general populace (while creating jobs), one need only have a basic knowledge of economics to see what needs to be done.One can start with the simple fact that the fiscal multiplier for **State investment in basic social services and public infrastructure** is much higher than **tax-cuts for the super-rich and hand-outs to Big Business.**It is outlandish that any politician would pretend to be concerned about stimulating the economy for everyone (and reducing yearly deficit spending) by under-funding public works…while doing gigantic favors for the most affluent.That anyone would take such a claim seriously is astonishing. The scam also involves convincing people that the economy is stimulated from the supply side instead of the demand side, and that reasonable ROTA of corporate activity is tantamount to inhibiting free enterprise and depriving the entire country of liberty.

The majority of those who opted to partake in the 2009-10 “Tea Party” movement are well-meaning people with legitimate grievances. Many of them are would-be Progressives…if only they had a basic understanding of the issues.

Getting people to endorse patently absurd policies that have repeatedly devastated them is quite a stunt to pull off.The **Pushers** have mastered the art of the ruse—exploiting the ignorance and credulity of millions of un-informed, disoriented, frustrated civilians.This is nothing new.Millions of people didn’t learn the (obvious) lesson about Neoliberal economic policy when it caused the S & L crisis in the late 80’s (costing taxpayers $124 billion).Millions still failed to learn that lesson after the same policies caused the 2008 economic catastrophe.How is this possible?The explanation is simple: Millions of people are completely un-informed about exactly what happened and why it happened.

Credulity + ignorance + propaganda = voting against one's own best interests in order to unwittingly support the very corporate power that is screwing one over.The most glaring—and infamous—case of this exasperating phenomenon is the notorious series of "Harry & Louise" advertisements (run in 1993-4).In a stupendous Orwellian feat, these ads successfully duped millions of people into thinking that State assistance (in making healthcare more available to everyone) was actually a diabolical government take-over of everyone's private lives—depriving them of "choice".This sham was repeated during the right-wing propaganda blitz of 2009-10, convincing tens of millions that the State's empowerment of people was a nefarious plot to have State control over people.

(There has been extensive scholarship done on the peculiar phenomenon of getting people to vote against their own self-interests.Robert Frank's **What's The Matter With Kansas?** is a well-known book on this point.From a sociological point of view, Kazin's **The Populist Persuasion** is a hallmark work on the subject.Paul Street's **Crashing The Tea Party** is a very insightful look at recent right-wing cult activity.Reference my own essays on Neoliberal Newspeak for further explication and analysis of right-wing propaganda tactics.)

In summation, the right wing is comprised of two types of people: those who are rich AND greedy (stand to gain from plutocracy while WANTING to gain from plutocracy)…and those who are ill-educated AND gullible (both ignorant and susceptible to indoctrination).

The former are the impresarios (e.g. the Koch Brothers, the Chamber of Commerce, the Club For Growth, the Business Roundtable, the Financial Services Roundtable, the AEI, the American Hospital Association, AMA, AHIP, PhRMA, the countless corporate lobbies, and—of course—all plutocrats).

The latter are the suckers (primarily: rural, provincial folk who—while generally meaning well—are stupendously misinformed).

The former ensure the latter remain ill-informed so that the latter will continue to enable the former.Right-wing propaganda is the primary means by which this is accomplished.(Other ripe combinations exist for a right-wing mindset: those who are affluent AND utterly oblivious…or those who are poor AND irrational / deluded / delusional.But such instances are not as common.Regardless, the only way to support right-wing policy is to be tremendously mislead, for some reason, in some way.)

It comes as little surprise, then, that the right-wing following here in the U.S. is comprised primarily of the least-educated segment of the population…while those who are both well-educated and humanistic tend to be largely immune to right-wing proclivities.(The rare exceptions are bizarre aberrations.Nevertheless, there is always an explanation for any given person's position.)Wisdom and probity serve as immunizations against right-wing tendencies precisely because such conditions stymie the anti-intellectualism, hyper-dogmatism, and ideological mindsets on which such tendencies depend.

Essentially, if one is a staunch "Republican", one is either a person who is quite rich and lacking morals (thereby RATIONALLY having a vested interest in right-wing policies)…or one is horribly misinformed while having succumbed to the trappings of the right-wing's Siren call (due to the appeal of the narrative being hawked).There are, indeed, some fascinating exceptions to this trend, but the exceptional nature of such anomalies only serves to reveal the logic of the more widespread tendencies.

Conclusion:

To mitigate the metastasization of right-wing movements, it is necessary to accomplish two things:

·Educate the citizenry much better

·Defuse the malignant influence that avaricious opulence has on the electoral process and on public policy.

There is a catch-22 involved here.It is difficult to achieve the former without first effecting the latter.Meanwhile, it is difficult to mobilize support for the latter without first achieving the former.The two must be done in tandem.

PRESCRIPTIONS:

Equipped with the preceding understanding of societal dysfunction, a viable way forward may be forged.Formulating prescriptions is a complex task.Some helpful work already exists that may guide us in ways to counteract right-wing activity.

As far as religion goes, we must recognize that there is a basis for a rock-solid ethical framework (and thus a way to be genuinely moral) without recourse to sacred doctrine (i.e. without resorting to religion).The best classic work on this is Immanuel Kant's brief and accessible, **Groundwork Of The Metaphysic of Morals**.Thomas Paine's **Rights of Man** and John Stuart Mill's **On Liberty** are also

landmark works.The best contemporary work on this is Kai Nielson's **Ethics Without God**.Also helpful is Mark Johnson's **Moral Imagination**—which addresses secular means of morality, however it does so in terms of relativism (an approach I find fundamentally flawed).Finally, Peter Singer's **Writings on an Ethical Life** offers valuable insights (another secularly-based morality, though from a neo-utilitarian perspective).

Though Kant is the ultimate source, there has been much recent work done in evolutionary psychology on a natural basis for morality (and thus for a secularly-based ethical system).E.O. Wilson, founder of Sociobiology, has done work on this (**Sociobiology**, **On Human Nature**, **Consilience**).There are also numerous excellent books by Marc Hauser (**Moral Minds**), Frans de Waal (**Primates & Philosophers**), Michael Shermer (**The Science of Good & Evil**), Matt Ridley (**The Origins of Virtue**), and Robert Wright (**The Moral Animal**).

Regarding secularizing society, the best book to date on overcoming religiosity is philosopher Daniel C. Dennett's **Breaking The Spell** There is extensive literature on humanism as well—material that may prove helpful in any effort to counter right-wing mentalities.(For a worthwhile memoir of de-religion-ization, see **Godless** by Dan Barker.)

As far as social justice goes, John Rawls (a neo-Kantian) sets the standard with his classic, **A Theory of Justice**, and the follow-up, **Justice As Fairness**.Regarding civil law, Kai Nielson's **Equality & Liberty** is insightful, as are books by Ronald Dworkin (**Taking Rights Seriously**, **Law's Empire**, **Freedom's Law**, **Sovereign Virtue**).Rawls' **Political Liberalism**, Madison Powers' **Social Justice**, and Amartya Sen's **The Idea of Justice** are important works as well.For a great book on the Constitution, Laurence Tribe's **The Invisible Constitution** is an insightful read, as are books by Stephen Breyer and Richard Posner.

William Greider's **Come Home, America**, Gar Alperovitz's **America Beyond Capitalism**, and Tony Judt's **Ill Fares The Land** offer a wonderful vision in terms of contemporary political issues—though most books concerned with politics are more polemical than scholarly.

As far as foreign policy prescriptions go, one need look no further than Kant and the humanist literature mentioned above.Most books on foreign policy are either critiques or apologetics: few offer bold visions.For an anti-tribalistic (i.e. cosmopolitan) vision, see Anthony Appiah's **The Ethics of Identity**.For the best

book on why war is indicative of dysfunction, Chris Hedge's **War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning** is a must-read.The insights of this last book alone may be sufficient to counteract right-wing foreign policy thinking.

As far as prescriptions for economic policy go, landmark works by John Kenneth Galbraith (**The Affluent Society** and **The Good Society**), the writings of John Maynard Keynes, and—more recently—books by Jeffrey D. Sachs (**Common Wealth** and **The Price of Civilization**) are very helpful.**Mis-Measuring Our Lives** (Joseph Stiglitz) is an important current work on how to assess the virtue of our economic policies.

For other helpful resources, John Dewey's **Freedom & Culture** and Timothy Ferris's **The Science of Liberty** are insightful works (thought the latter mis-characterizes "libertarianism" and "progressivism"). **Ill Fares the Land** by Tony Judt is a must-read for a bold vision for social democracy (i.e. the antithesis of a right-wing vision).As a general resource, PBS's Frontline was usually very worthwhile. The Nation magazine is a vital resource for those who wish to stay well-informed week to week.The New Yorker also has excellent weekly commentary, and offers the world's best investigative reporting.

For the purpose of countering revisionist (read: fraudulent) U.S. history promulgated by the right wing, the following resources are recommended.First, for a general overview, Howard Zinn's classic, **A People's History of The United States** is indispensable. For each of the following three major periods, I have listed some of the key works.

The Founding:

The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789 –Robert Middlekauf

The Radicalism of the American Revolution –Gordon S. Wood

The Creation of the American Republic –Gordon S. Wood

Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815 –Gordon S. Wood

Original Meanings –Jack Rakove

The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution –Bernard Bailyn

American Creation –Joseph Ellis

Early 19th – Early 20th Century:

The Rise of American Democracy –Sean Wilentz

What Hath God Wrought: 1815-1848 –Daniel Walker Howe

Freethinkers –Susan Jacoby

American Colossus: 1865-1900 –H.W. Brands

The Lords of Finance –Liaquat Ahamed

1929 –John Kenneth Galbraith

Freedom From Fear: The American People In Depression & War, 1929-1945

–David M. Kennedy

The Cold War & After:

The Age of Reform –Richard Hofstadter

Grand Expectations: The U.S., 1945-1974 –James T. Patterson

The Dead Hand –David E. Hoffman

The Devil We Knew –H.W. Brands

House of War –James Carroll

The Great Cold War: A Journey Through the Hall of Mirrors –Gordon Barass

Vietnam: A History –Stanley Karnow

The Pentagon Papers –George Herring

Restless Giant –James T. Paterson

The Age of Reagan –Sean Wilentz

The four **The Age of…** books by Eric Hobsbawm are also thought-provoking, as are books by Tony Judt, **From Colony To Superpower** by George Herring, and **The March of Folly** by Barbara Tuchman.

Such contributions will inform a vision for a non-right-wing world.