IS U.S. NEOCONSERVATISM DEAD?

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Abstract

It is now fashionable for conventional wisdom to write the obituary for neoconservatism. It is also fashionable to align the movement with a laissez-faire approach to capitalism. Both of these assumptions are highly questionable, since they ignore what has been primary and enduring to neoconservatism, the survival of traditional culture against the challenges of liberalism and the left. Neoconservatism entered the scene as a political and intellectual force in the 1960s and 1970s, combatting the New Left and exposing the contradictions of Great Society liberalism, while aligning itself with the Republican Party. The movement enjoyed considerable influence during the Reagan hegemony of the 1980s, but the exhaustive effects of the culture wars of that time as well as divisions within the GOP arguably left the movement adrift by the 1990s, when the White House returned to the Democrats. Despite some political successes in Congress during the 1990s (and the slim victory of 2000), it has been so far unable to return to past glory. Yet the prospect of a new cultural crisis, spurred on by globalization, might breathe new life into the movement.

Introduction

It is currently fashionable to entertain the demise of neoconservatism in the current American political scene. Even before the slim (and ambiguous) Republican victory in the 2000 election, the warning signs were appearing. The failure of the 1994 Republican Congress to implement its ambitious "Contract with America", as well as its inability to impeach Clinton, have spurred on this verdict. Additionally, the Republican embrace of "compassionate conservatism" appears to suggest a turn away from the harshness and divisiveness many associate with neoconservatism. No less an authority on American political cycles than Seymour Martin Lipset has put the situation succinctly: "Neoconservatism...has basically ceased to exist" (Lipset 1996: 200). A more sympathetic analyst, conservative commentator David Frum, has argued that the right-wing coalition put together by Reagan in the 1980s is largely in disarray and requires major surgery (Frum 1994). Political historian Mark Gerson, another fellow traveler of neoconservatism, has suggested that the very success of neoconservatism's influence has led to its disappearance, or absorption into the American political mainstream (1996: 26-27). A more critical historian, Gary Dorrien, has concluded that neoconservatism, though not dead, is seriously fractured and splintered, and has passed its "high-water mark" (1993: 368).

Perhaps the very term suggests that its life span was never indefinite. For "neoconservatism" (a term coined by the American socialist Michael Harrington in the 1970s) was essentially "new" to the 1970s and 1980s, and seemed to revive in 1994 with the conservative Republican sweep of Congress. Yet no political ideology can stay relevant forever, and so the supposed demise of neoconservatism was not totally unanticipated. Indeed, in the early 1980s, just when the Reagan hegemony seemed to grant neoconservatism extraordinary influence over public policy, it was predicted that neoconservatism would not succeed in the long run as an influence in American politics or even in the Republican Party (Phillips 1982: 46). Certainly, the slim Republican victory in the 2000 election gives little for neoconservatives to cheer about.

Obviously, these impressions cry out for a definition of neoconservatism before one pronounces the movement as truly dead. In order to thoughtfully speculate on its future, we need to comprehend the history of neoconservatism, its role in the Republican Party, and both its limitations and prospects.

Definition

It is generally agreed that neoconservatism first emerged as a response to the social upheaval of the 1960s, and that the first neoconservatives were not originally very "conservative." Such major apologists as Irving Kristol, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Nathan Glazer, and Daniel Bell were all traditionally supporters of the New Deal wing of the Democratic Party before the 1960s. Indeed, some of these figures had even more radical antecedents (Kristol was a Trotskyite as a young man). As liberal Democrats, they were staunch anti-communists and supporters of the Cold War (including the intervention in Vietnam), and were committed to American capitalism. Yet they were also sympathetic to the role of government as provider of Social Security for the elderly and relief for the unemployed. As Kristol has argued, there is no contradiction between conservatism and the welfare state, since it was a conservative, Otto von Bismarck, who devised it as a way of fending off the socialist challenge in Germany in the 1880s (1978: 126).

This last point is important, since critics of neoconservatism (Kintz, 1997; Jeffrey 1999; Lyons 1998) often contend that neoconservatism is committed to laissez-faire free market capitalism. The conventional wisdom is that neoconservatism is a species of 19th century classical liberalism. Even a seasoned observer like Lipset mistakenly calls Leo Strauss, a political
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philosopher of great importance to neoconservatism (as we shall argue), "the major modern theorist of classical liberal politics" (1996: 39). Yet this is not universally true of neoconservatives. They are certainly committed to corporate capitalism, and believe that big business has largely succeeded in providing unprecedented freedom and affluence for Americans (Kristol 1978). Yet classical liberalism, or the libertarianism of laissez-faire, has never appealed to this camp. There are two principal reasons for this.

First, neoconservatives are uncomfortable with the libertarian indifference to culture. Libertarianism or classical liberalism is often seen as the predominant conservatism in America (Hartz 1955). As represented by economic libertarians like Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, they tend to assume that economic and political freedom are the highest goals which any culture can strive for. Yet libertarianism in the cultural arena leads to libertinism. As Kristol has argued, human nature cries out for something more than freedom. This something is moral direction, and the libertarian compass leaves private ethics up to the individual, a situation which neoconservatives believe has left capitalism vulnerable to moral anarchy. In a very unlibertarian way, Kristol has denounced the "crass" materialism of American culture (Dorrien 1993: 107). For this reason, Bell (1976) and Kristol (1978) lament the capitalist undermining of traditional morals which once gave American society a stable foundation. The loss of these values has led to the current cultural crisis, a situation which libertarians ignore and the left exploits (Kristol 1978).

Second, neoconservatives do not believe that capitalism ought to act freely or unregulated. During the OPEC oil crises of the 1970s, Kristol exhorted oil firms to reduce the price voluntarily. Such an act would be evidence of "political thinking" which, while violating the profit motive, would improve the fragile reputation of the industry and capitalism itself (1978: 93-95). Indeed, Bell and Kristol believe that capitalism must turn away from the libertine (or libertarian) values of hedonism and irresponsible freedom to the old Protestant values of hard work, sacrifice, and self-denial.

Indeed, if anything unites the often diverse coalition of neoconservatives, it is a great concern for the survival of culture and its values. All other questions--political, economic, social--are subordinated to the question of culture. As James Q. Wilson put it, neoconservatives (unlike liberals, libertarians, or other conservatives) interpret social problems and policies "in light of their implications" to the questions of character and virtue (Wilson 1996: ix). It was the famous "cultural contradiction" between Protestant values of hard work and asceticism on the one hand and the hedonism of capitalism on the other which prompted the famous study of Daniel Bell in the 1970s (Bell 1976). The most famous representative of neoconservatism in America, Irving Kristol, shares Bell's concerns over the erosion of traditional culture by capitalism and liberalism (Kristol 1978; 1995). As we shall see later, the wing of neoconservatism shaped by the ideas of the political philosopher Leo Strauss is primarily concerned with the survival of the culture of the West in the face of liberalism. When conventional wisdom (particularly on the left) lumps the neoconservatives with libertarians, the emphasis on culture is not recognized. It is important to understand the historical antecedents of this concern.

History of the Movement

Until the 1960s, neoconservatives (or Roosevelt liberals at the time) felt that the Democratic Party still upheld the anti-communist and socially responsible capitalist ideals to which they were committed. Additionally, they felt that the Republican Party was too elitist, racist, anti-intellectual, and unimaginative, content to avoid developing any alternate vision for America. Moreover, since neoconservatives came from immigrant families, the waspish nature of Republicanism was even greater reason for suspicion. As Glazer later put it, "The definition of a neoconservative is someone who wasn't a conservative" (quoted in Phillips 1982: 44). Yet the protests against Vietnam, the race riots in American cities, and the counterculture's rebellion against American tradition all led to the fragmentation of the Democratic Party and the eventual neoconservative turn away from it. Moreover, the Democratic Party's expansion of the welfare state and affirmative action through the Great Society programs of the Johnson presidency struck the emergent neoconservatives as too quick, too expensive, and simply pandering to rebellious pressure groups like blacks and feminists. (As the Moynihan Report of 1965 suggested, the expanding welfare state was leading to a crisis of illegitimate births in the black underclass, due to the removal of the father as provider and the dependence of black women on big government.) Yet the neoconservatives remained in the Roosevelt wing of the Democratic Party. As Dorrien puts it, "The neoconservatives were trying to repeal the 1960s, not the New Deal" (1993: 16).

The upheaval on campuses struck some professors as a more ominous undermining of authority and America itself (Bloom 1987: 313-35). The selection of George McGovern in 1972 as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate largely was the last straw for old-style Democrats like Kristol, who saw in McGovern the decadent embodiment of the counterculture and its war against America. For McGovern questioned the intervention in Vietnam, seemed to favor the militant protest movements
over traditional constituencies like unions and working class Democrats, and fashionably attacked American big business. (Phillips 1982). In Kristol's phrase, the neoconservatives felt "mugged by reality" (quoted by Gerson 1996: 73). As the Democratic Party came apart at the seams, the neoconservatives had emerged as a new political force, though not one in the Democratic Party.

If not the Democrats, were the Republicans worth a look? While most neoconservatives voted for Nixon in 1972, they were still skeptical of the party itself. As Kristol put it, the Republicans were content on being the tax collector for the Democrats (1978: 128). While the Democrats were activist in setting the political agenda by developing social programs and policy initiatives, the Republicans were reactive, isolationist, and protectionist, lacking any positive agenda of their own. While Republicans were somewhat attractive because of their anti-communism, there was little evidence to show that they could develop an alternate conservative vision for America. The Republicans seemed fixated on rolling back the welfare state and unleashing capitalism, while ignoring the cultural crisis in which America was enmeshed. Neoconservatives like Kristol (1997: 283-87) also felt that the elimination of the welfare state was both unachievable and undesirable. The Republicans had to do better, and neoconservatives began to give advice. By the mid-1970s, neoconservatives were suggesting at the academic and political levels that the Republican Party had to change tactics if it ever wanted to succeed over the long term in American politics. This advice was two-pronged. First, the Republicans had to redefine the social role of government. Second, Republicans had to tackle the cultural crisis in which America was trapped.

With respect to the social role of government, neoconservatives believed that the GOP had to accept the general desirability of the welfare state and Social Security, and give up any pretension of returning to laissez-faire. However, the Republicans also had to wean Americans of their dependence on big government, and reduce the interference of big government with big business. The conservative welfare state was still a minimal one, providing support for the unemployed and the elderly, but discouraging the idea that Americans were naturally entitled to the largesse of society. By restricting the welfare state in this manner, Republicans would send the message that the welfare state and its many related programs were exceptional measures, not gifts to rebellious political movements. Big business has been grateful to neoconservatives for documenting the inefficiency and waste which resulted from government's regulation of industry in the areas of the environment, equity, and health and safety. This policy measure was not hard to sell to the Republican Party, which had opposed the expansion of big government and its regulation of big business for years.

Yet the tackling of America's Kulturkampf required more radical thinking on the part of the Republicans. This crisis was the primary concern of neoconservatives. Since the late 1960s, Republicans knew that America's traditional values and sense of superiority were under attack. Moreover, they felt that the academy and the "New Class" of professionals working in education and the public sector had a vested interest in attacking big business and the old ways, while supporting the expansion of big government. Yet, as Kristol and Bell lamented, Republicans could not comprehend the connection between this crisis and capitalism. For neoconservatives believe that capitalism fails to inspire people to strive for a higher cultural vision. Kristol (1978) famously gave capitalism "two cheers" for providing freedom and wealth for most people, because it lacks a moral vision which can combat the nihilistic emptiness of a consumer society. Thus capitalism was undeserving of "three cheers", since the assumption that self-interest and competition could make people happy and fulfilled was clearly vulnerable to attack by the left, who had lost the battle with capitalism on economics. The symptoms of this crisis were apparent: high crime rates, illegitimate births, hedonism and promiscuity, rising divorce rates. Neoconservatives warned the GOP that they had to articulate a vision of return to traditional values if they were to stem this crisis.

By the late 1970s, the Republicans followed this advice by allying the party with the Christian Right (Drury 1999). This move was not entirely new, since the evangelical Christians of the South had supported the party since the late 1960s, in reaction to the counterculture and the splintering of America (Phillips 1969). Yet the South was still traditionally Democratic, and evangelical Christians were still largely a working-class constituency which had voted for the Democrats. Moreover, the neoconservative constituency in the GOP had very little in common with the evangelical southerners. For neoconservatives had been traditionally on the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, were usually descendants of immigrants, and largely came from the eastern seaboard. Yet the neoconservatives like Kristol prodded the Republican leadership into capturing this mass constituency of voters by developing a vision for American culture. (This vision was largely informed by the ideas of Leo Strauss, whose political impact on neoconservatism we shall return to assess.)

Unsurprisingly, this vision called for a return to the past, back to America's greatness and a mythical time of strength and respect. The candidacy of Ronald Reagan most effectively articulated this promise of return, by singing the praises of the good
old days when crime was low, couples stayed together, people went to church, and America was strong. Reagan coupled this appeal with an attack on big government, for its interference not just with big business but with the lives of ordinary Americans. "Interference" here often meant the government's forbidding of school prayer, expanding access to abortion, and strengthening affirmative action for minorities. Evangelical Christians, along with conservative Catholics and other religious constituencies, deeply sympathized with these sentiments, despite their Democratic roots (often going as far back as the Great Depression). For they felt that the Democratic Party had abandoned them for the "New Class." Ironically, the Democrats now looked more elitist than the Republicans, a reversal of an attitude which had been a fixture of U.S. politics ever since the Great Depression. Under the Reagan hegemony, the Republicans had discovered that conservatism and populism could work together (Kristol 1995: 359-63). This alliance was largely the fruit of neoconservative thinking.

Yet the alliance between neoconservatives, the Christian Right, and other Republican constituencies was a fragile one. Naturally, most Republican camps here shared a common dislike for big government, Soviet communism, and the libertine drift of American society. Yet only on the area of Soviet containment was there substantial agreement. Neoconservatives, the Christian Right and so-called "economic conservatives" (libertarians like Friedman) defined "big government" in vastly different ways. Neoconservatives supported the Reagan administration's deregulation of business in the environmental area, and welcomed the administration's support of big business. Yet the neoconservatives also criticized the administration for cutting Social Security, ignoring a key conservative constituency such as the elderly in the process (Lipset 1996: 199-200; Gerson 1996: 358). In general, the neoconservatives were far less enthusiastic about the rollback of the welfare state than other camps in the Reagan coalition. The neoconservatives and Christian Right agreed that the state should take a more assertive posture in advocating traditional values, even if that meant restricting abortion, restoring school prayer, and holding back gay rights. Here the economic conservatives, who otherwise supported even more radical reductions in the welfare state, opposed this conservative form of statism, out of the fear that such measures would violate the individual freedoms of Americans. Finally, the Christian Right complained that libertarians were too secular and liberal on cultural matters (Frum 1994; Hardisty 1999: 177), while neoconservatives like Kristol (1978: 67-68) dismissed libertarianism as devoid of a moral vision, unable to counter the challenge of the New Left.

By the end of the Reagan presidency and well into the Bush presidency, cracks were beginning to appear in the old Republican coalition of libertarians, neoconservatives, and Christian Rightists. The death of the Soviet Union had removed a common enemy against which the fragile coalition could ally its many parts. Kristol openly worried that the disappearance of the USSR had left a void in American foreign policy, that the collapse now removed a major inspiration for intervening in global affairs (Dorrien 1993: 126). A fierce economic recession in the early 1990s, which ultimately capsized the Bush presidency, also delegitimized conservative economics. The GOP had played divisive race and populist cards, culminating in the Buchanan "hatefest" directed against gays, minorities and other "enemies" of America at the Republican convention in 1992. Indeed, the culture wars of the early 1990s might be attributable to the neoconservative anxiety over the collapse of the USSR, and the need for a new struggle to engage in (Dorrien 1993: 132). Yet Bush himself had not clearly articulated a vision which could unite the various conservative camps effectively. For all of these reasons, the White House returned to the Democrats in 1992.

When Republicans swept both houses of Congress two years later, this supposedly heralded a new Republican hegemony. Yet the "Contract with America", devised by Newt Gingrich, did not capture a great deal of support, despite its moralistic neoconservative underpinnings. The Contract's positions on withdrawing monies for public education, ending welfare for immigrants, and eroding the separation of church and state were met with staunch opposition (Jeffrey 1999: 35). Moreover, the Republican promise to reduce big government had largely been assimilated by the Clinton Democrats into their policies. As Clinton regained the White House in 1996, Republicans were dispirited. The Democrats had accepted the neoconservative analysis of the welfare state's limits, and decided to roll back or at least keep under control the expansion of social government. Clinton accepted the neoconservative goal of ending welfare "as we know it", declaring in 1996 that welfare is meant to be "a second chance, not a way of life" (quoted in Ansell 1998: 186). The Democrats also left to the Republicans the divisive issues of culture wars and debates over family values, which had alienated a great deal of the US electorate. By the end of the 1990s, even personal scandal could not remove Clinton from power, and the Democrats seemed poised to take the White House again.

As it stands, the most popular issue of neoconservatives--big government--has been accepted and captured by the Democrats. Since the deficit's elimination and the biggest economic boom in US history happened under the Democrats, the GOP has been robbed of its most effective issues. The GOP under George Bush Jr. is no longer interested in fighting the culture wars of Buchanan and the Christian Right. Where does neoconservatism go from here?

If one reduces neoconservatism to the reaction of old-style liberal Democrats such as Moynihan and Bell to the excesses of the 1960s, then it is indeed dead. As mentioned, the Democrats have accepted this analysis of the welfare state and big
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(1995: 360-61; Drury 1999: 152). As Dorrien observes, Norman Podhoretz worried about the "loss of a defining foreign demon" always a positive sign when the American people are prepared to go to war, and to get over the memory of the defeat in Vietnam. 

Carl Schmitt, a philosophical opponent of liberalism as well as a supporter of Nazism, argued in his 1932 work The fight, so that they can be reminded of the meaningfulness and precariousness of their culture and polity. Leo Strauss's teacher, ideological lineage of neoconservatism can be traced back to this simple belief that a populace is always in need of an enemy to serve as a convenient enemy whose threat to the American way of life could guarantee popular support for American capitalism and democracy. Although the tragic intervention and defeat in Vietnam seriously shook this belief in America's legitimacy and spawned a powerful leftist challenge to this belief (which then provoked the neoconservative reaction), it was possible for the Reagan administration in the 1980s to return to the pre-Vietnam faith in American glory and higher purpose by reiterating the belief in the threat of the Soviet Union (especially with the breakdown of detente in the 1970s and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979). By the end of the 1980s, communism in the Soviet bloc had almost completely collapsed, and the American model of liberal democracy seemed to be on the ascendancy.

One would think that neoconservatives are happy about the death of their old enemy. Yet Kristol has argued that it is not that anymore. The so-called Buchanan nationalists, a movement which defies globalization, free trade, immigration, and the power of big business, has split from the Republican Party. Buchanan's leadership of the Reform Party poses no serious challenge to the Democrats or Republicans, having garnered only 3% of the vote in the 2000 election. Moreover, conservatives like Frum (1994) want the Buchanan nationalists to stay out of the party. They will not be welcomed back. Neoconservatives and Buchananites generally dislike each other (Frum 1994: 125; Lipset 1996: 197). Yet the departure of this wing causes as many problems as it solves, for it opens up a huge populist hole in the GOP constituency. The Buchanan wing was able to tap into the working class vote, so needed by the GOP. Moreover, Buchanan appealed to the Christian Right with his strong brand of conservative moralism, opposition to abortion and gay rights. The GOP and the neoconservatives in particular need to find a new way of becoming populist to fill up the hole left over by Buchanan's populists.

Additionally, the agenda of Christian conservatives is unpopular with the GOP and the majority of Americans. They remain a powerful constituency for the party (Phillips, 1982; Frum 1994). Yet they have not been able to implement any of their agenda even under Republican administrations (Frum 1994: 171-73). Moreover, economic or libertarian Republicans are hostile to their moralizing and love of big government's intrusion into the public morality of people. As a result, Frum has strategically suggested that the GOP attack big government as the common enemy of libertarians, neoconservatives and religious conservatives, faulting it for undermining America's values and economy. This strategy would presumably win over all constituencies (1994: 3, 190, 201). Yet focusing on the effects of big government does not ideally make a coalition stick, for these different constituencies dislike big government for different reasons; whereas libertarians oppose statist intervention in public morality (cf. Brittain 1997), neoconservatives and the Christian Right call for more regulation of this sphere. Moreover, this strategy does not work unless the GOP has an effective enemy which symbolizes big government, and the Democratic Party is not that anymore.

Additionally, there are problems which have emerged since the end of the Cold War. Since neoconservatives worry about cultural and political legitimacy of the American regime more than anything else, they search for a common front which can unite and inspire the American people. During the Cold War, most Americans united at least ideologically against the Soviet Union, which represented everything the United States opposed (atheism, communism, tyranny). From 1945 to 1989, the USSR served as a convenient enemy whose threat to the American way of life could guarantee popular support for American capitalism and democracy. Although the tragic intervention and defeat in Vietnam seriously shook this belief in America's legitimacy and spawned a powerful leftist challenge to this belief (which then provoked the neoconservative reaction), it was possible for the Reagan administration in the 1980s to return to the pre-Vietnam faith in American glory and higher purpose by reiterating the belief in the threat of the Soviet Union (especially with the breakdown of detente in the 1970s and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979). By the end of the 1980s, communism in the Soviet bloc had almost completely collapsed, and the American model of liberal democracy seemed to be on the ascendency.

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Whatever the validity of Schmitt's views, these ideas have been filtered down through Strauss's influence on the neoconservative movement (Drury 1999: 81-96). Prominent neoconservatives have lamented the fact that the defeat of the USSR in the Cold War was a "Pyrrhic victory" (Gerson 1996: 267-339), which did not win their movement a victory in the "culture wars", the wars for America's soul. Kristol believes that "secular elites" in America still control the media and consciousness industry of the nation, thus marginalizing the traditional conservative values of the nation. Indeed, a "class war" is shaping up between cultural conservatives in the working classes and secular liberals in the upper classes (1995: 371). It seems...
as if neoconservatives in the 1990s were still looking for a common enemy, this time in the secular liberal elites, to unite the American people against.

Refighting the culture wars which began in the 1960s, when America's values gradually became more liberal, is a risky strategy for the neoconservative movement, and even more so for the GOP, if it adopts it. Searching for an "internal" enemy in America, as some neoconservatives have done (Drury 1999: 132-33), is divisive enough, pitting Americans against each other. Additionally, culture wars are divisive and hard to win, since many Americans support the "secular liberal elite" views on sexual freedom, abortion and gay rights. (The recent nomination of John Ashcroft, an evangelical Christian, for Attorney General was bitterly fought.) For this reason, the GOP convention of 2000 steered clear of any reference to divisive cultural issues which could hand the White House back to the Democrats. In addition to the popularity of liberal values, America is prosperous and at peace, with no enemy in sight.

Could "big government" return as the new common enemy? Certainly the American populist distaste for government always provides potential fodder for neoconservatism. Yet neoconservatives themselves often believe that big government can be a positive force. The influence of Strauss on Kristol et al have convinced many in the GOP that the state must take responsibility for the character of the people (Frum 1994: 117). Other conservatives have argued that curbing government is the solution to America's ills, especially in the social welfare area. David Frum is right to argue (1994: 204) that the "emancipation of the appetites" cannot be repealed, and that the cultural conservatives like Kristol should drop this idea. Yet Frum's alternate solution of curbing government and blaming it for most of America's ills would work only against a Democratic Party committed to big government. This solution flies in the face of the Democrats' disinterest in expanding government since the Clinton ascendancy. Consequently, the conservative movement is divided between those who want to curb government and those who want to expand it in the moral sphere. It is hard to demonize big government in a context like this.

On the world stage, are there any common enemies left? "Rogue states" like Libya, North Korea, or Cuba hardly constitute a major threat to America's safety, let alone its culture and way of life. Islam is often touted as the most significant enemy to security of the United States, but neoconservatives admit that even radical Moslem fundamentalism has failed to spread beyond the traditional borders of the Islamic territorial heritage; thus, it is hardly a threat to the American hegemony (Fukuyama 1992: 235-37). Are there any dangers to American culture and legitimacy left?

Yet in the 3rd millennium, neoconservatives may have an opportunity to redefine American culture in their own image, if only because liberal conceptions of culture are vulnerable. Neoconservatives can exploit the weakness of the liberal treatment of culture. The Clinton-Gore administration's avoidance of cultural issues may be a risky strategy for liberals as well. The weakness of liberalism lies in its laissez-faire idea that the culture can take care of itself, leading to what conservatives see as a lowering of the sights. The liberal emphasis on pluralism and tolerance has been exploited by the right as an agenda committed to the least "virtuous" (that is, libertine) constituencies of US society. The liberals espouse freedom as if it can solve the problem of culture.

Yet the threat of globalization could provide the neoconservatives with an opportunity. As consumerism erodes the old traditional ways, neoconservatives could take advantage of the discontent over globalization. Instead of attacking globalization head-on as Buchanan did (and alienating the free trade wing of the GOP), the neoconservatives could become quite popular again as Americans, weary with globalization, begin to politically connect it to immigration and multiculturalism.

Politically, anti-globalization could be rewarding. The Christian Right could certainly oppose the new enemy of globalization, since it has always feared the ascendancy of a new world government, which could be made possible by globalization. Yet neoconservatives might be less convinced, given their ties to big business and the GOP, both of which support globalization. Moreover, neoconservatives tend to be quite cosmopolitan, and might avoid the parochialism of an anti-global agenda. But how important are these corporate and cosmopolitan biases?

Ultimately, neoconservatives care more about the direction of American culture than political biases (Bell 1976; Kristol 1978). If the history of the movement is any indication, the neoconservatives tend to flourish when a Kulturkampf takes place. Globalization potentially threatens the cultural sovereignty of the United States, and could provoke neoconservative responses. Neoconservatives are primarily interested in culture, not political alliances with business or the GOP. Besides, the business community has often suspected neoconservatives of being too nationalistic to embrace internationalism (Dorrien 1993: 394). The fatigue over globalization might ironically give the neoconservatives an opportunity to redefine traditional American values. This soft nationalism, which does not condemn globalization outright, could catch the liberal Democrats off guard, who call for globalization in tandem with immigration and multiculturalism. An economic downturn could provide the opportunity.

This critique of globalization is not incompatible with the ideas of neoclassicism. Two famous symptoms of globalization, immigration and multiculturalism, are highly unpopular with many conservative constituencies. In the past, the survival of US culture has even led some to criticize big business for eroding traditional values like asceticism and the work ethic of Protestantism (Bell 1976). In a famous exchange with Alexandre Kojève, the prophet of the "End of History," Strauss...
expressed concern over the related rise of the "universal homogeneous state" (Strauss 1963: 223-226) for with the end of History (culminating in the triumph of liberalism over its rivals), this universal homogeneous state results, which erodes difference and conflict in favor of a mindless complacent consumerism; it also eliminates, as Schmitt predicted, the political need for an enemy. Nations and cultures drown in the icy water (paraphrasing Marx) of consumerist calculation. History is over because it offers no meaning, no conflicts left to participate in.

The Strauss-Kojève exchange is of great interest to neoconservatives (Fukuyama 1992), since they see these prophecies unfolding with the end of the Cold War and the return of America to its place as the world's only superpower. This triumph could be short-lived, for the universal homogeneous state is globalization itself, a threat to the sovereignty and culture of the United States. Many conservatives fear the prospect of corporations and even globalist governments disrespecting national sovereign institutions (witness the negative reaction to the idea of a World Court which could put on trial American soldiers for "war crimes" committed overseas). An "American Jihad" on the Right, protesting the secular and commercial biases of globalization, has been anticipated (Barber 1996: 211-215). Could globalization become the new enemy of neoconservatives, uniting the disparate coalitions of the Right and eventually the American people?

It all depends on how one defines globalization and the threat it poses to culture as well as sovereignty. Strauss and his followers have always insisted that the civilization of the West is in decline, having lost a sense of its unique moral purpose. The West has slipped into a nihilistic abyss, encouraged by an embrace of progressivism, which sees the West as no more than one of many civilizations in the march of history. A defense of the West on ideological grounds is nothing new in the conservatism of the past 40 years (cf. Burnham 1985). From a Straussian perspective, such a progressivist attitude sounds the death knell of a culture. Even though the West tends to be aligned with globalization (Barber's "McWorld"), neoconservatives could grow worried over the prospect of the West itself, embodied by American modernity, losing its identity in the morass of the global village. Thomas Fleming, a prominent figure in the movement, controversially called for immigration quotas in the late 1980s to counter the "cultural pluralism" which often results from Third World migration to America; in turn, Podhoretz has portrayed multiculturalism as a "vulgar plot" to subvert Western civilization (Dorrien 1993: 346, 355).

Indeed, relativism could be seen as the by-product of globalization: the reduction of American or Western culture to just one of many identities on the global scene. As Strauss ironically puts it, "the values of barbarism and cannibalism are as defensible as those of civilization" (1989: 269; cf. Bloom 1987: 194-216). Moreover, globalization celebrates consumerism over citizenship (Barber 1996). As Strauss argued, the role of the citizen is primary in the political realm, the love of one's culture and nation. Globalization clearly encourages an oppositional construct, that of the consumer who shops for goods or even identities, without commitment to any particular root or culture. Indeed, even a celebrant of globalization such as Fukuyama (1992: 299) has warned that forces on the Right will be quite unsympathetic to the consumerist, rootless egalitarianism of global liberal democracy.

Summary

At present, the future of neoconservatism is in doubt. Emerging as a reaction to the excesses of the New Left and the failure of liberal in the 1960s, it arose as a vital force in the 1970s, encouraging the Republican Party to embrace traditional conservative morality in order to address the cultural crisis of America. Neoconservatives understand this crisis to be rooted in the decision of "liberal elites" to gradually embrace hedonism, sexual libertinism, and cultural relativism. Whatever the merits of this critique, it was taken up by the GOP when it won power in the 1980s and changed the political landscape of the United States, by embracing the causes of the Christian Right. Yet neoconservatism began to falter in the 1990s, as the threat of communism receded and Americans grew tired of culture wars between traditionalists and "secular liberal elites." Although America is at peace and no cultural crisis is in sight, neoconservatives could likely capitalize on the fragmentation and disorientation posed by globalization to the American identity, as a way of reviving their cause.

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