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Toward Friendly Fascism? American Conservatism in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This essay reexamines the question of whether contemporary American conservatism is moving in the direction of authoritarianism, particularly what is sometimes called friendly fascism. First, the essay redefines friendly fascism as the conservative war on personal moral liberty, choice and behavior, as executed via government coercion and rationalized by a Puritanical ideology/rhetoric of individual ethical perfectionism and religious salvation. Then, it identifies and reexamines some recent tendencies and events highlighting the nature, operation and effects of neo-conservatism in American society. The essay's main finding is that at the beginning of the new millennium American neo-conservatism has steadily and consistently moved toward (re)establishing a sort of friendly fascism, as epitomized and culminated in the under-democratized and semi-theocratic South subjected to the "tyranny of Puritanism". The essay therefore implies a proposition and prediction that neo-conservatism is/will be the principal threat or negation of democracy and liberty in America contrary to conventional conservative wisdom. This essay contributes to detecting, understanding and explaining the intrinsic link between authoritarian outcomes and American neo-conservatism, a link that the current literature either overlooks or downplays.

The following is an attempt to address the question of whether at the beginning of the 21st century American conservatism is taking the path of authoritarianism, specifically what observers (Bonefeld 2002; Gross 1980) term friendly fascism¹ or neo-fascism (Swomley 1995). Before addressing that question, it is instructive to specify what is meant by the concept of friendly fascism. The current literature provides some guidance, though explicit uses and specifications of the concept are rare.

Some observers explicitly propose the concept of friendly fascism to describe the “new face of power in America” (Gross 1980). In this view, American friendly fascism is a “despotic order” based on “naked coercion” as well as “sophisticated manipulation” and constituted as a “Big Business-Big Government partnership” that seeks to preserve the privileges of the wealthy and “squashes the rights and liberties of other people both at home and abroad.” Reportedly, various crises in American society give “Establishment leaders” opportunities and rationales to establish friendly fascism in the form of a “repressive corporate society”. Following these early diagnoses and predictions, other analysts adopt the concept of friendly fascism and specifically argue that the “policies of the [neo-conservative] Bush administration” have made the concept newly relevant (McCleary 2002:64). Arguably, friendly fascism is not only a distant past or possible future but becoming “closer to reality in the present”, with America reportedly “slowly sliding toward a governmental/corporate oligarchy” in which Americans are willing to give up their liberties and rights in favor of “comfort and protection”² (McCleary 2002:64-5). This view finds the culprit in the “increasing alliance” between the US government and large corporations, and singles out the “Bush administration and its gallery of former Coe’s [as being] tailor made to reinforce [friendly fascism]” (McCleary 2002:65). Other writers (Wagner 1997), while not using the term, imply that neo-conservative friendly fascism relies on a “coercive strategy of punishment” of those failing to conform to certain moral norms, i.e. on a “personal politics” of repression and “behavior wars”, notably “temperance wars”.

For the purposes of this essay, friendly fascism is generally defined as the blueprint or outcome of the repression of and the war on personal liberty, choice and behavior, especially private moral choices. Thus understood, friendly fascism is established and sustained through government coercion and rationalized by a Puritan-based ideology and rhetoric of individual moral purity and religious salvation. If so, friendly fascism, as manifestly observed or latently

germinating in conservative America (e.g. the South), appears as an equivalent, or element, or result of what Max Weber calls the “tyranny of Puritanism” deriving from Puritanical “absolute moral rigor” or “moral absolutism” (Munch 2001:120/242). Hence, a moral dictate or coercion executed by government and justified on ethical-religious grounds is the essence of friendly fascism, just as political dictatorship is the hallmark of traditional “unfriendly” fascism (e.g. Nazism) in Europe. Friendly fascism via its Puritan-based moral absolutism abrogates or disdains the ethical (liberal) principle that the “freedom of action that is the condition of moral merit includes the freedom to act wrongly [or] moral esteem would be meaningless without freedom” (Hayek 1960:80).

One wonders as to what is “friendly” in such fascism and how it differs from its traditional “unfriendly” type, like Nazism, found in Europe and elsewhere. Presumably, a certain dose of friendliness, relative to European fascisms, especially Nazism, is present in this species of fascism in that the path to moral dictatorship is paved by “good intentions” such as attaining people’s ethical perfectionism and religious salvation. Friendly fascism is “friendly” because (if) it is designed and instituted for people’s “own good”, especially saving their souls via “coercive moral-indignation movements” or “voluntary purification rituals” (Wagner 1997:60) like those in Puritan New England and the “Southern Bible Belt” (Putnam 2000:75). In particular, since the term is mostly used in connection with the American South, “friendly” expresses small-town friendliness and “profuse hospitality” intermingled with hostile parochialism or “intense hostility toward strangers” (Putnam 2000:310), especially foreigners or xenophobia, in this region (and much of conservative America). Friendly fascism evokes and mirrors (to use Marx’s words) the friendly “idiocy of rural life” mixed with persisting traces of “barbarians” intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners” in the US South; and, most Southerners, notably conservatives, view this mix as part of their identity vs. the rest of the country/world, so with pride and joy.

Regardless of its degree of friendliness, Southerner friendly fascism represents a sacred or moral-religious (Bible-Belt) version and counterpart of secular, political and “unfriendly” European fascism. Historically, the mark of friendly fascism, especially its various “temperance wars”, has been “moral indignation, attempts at conversion, and coercive measures”, reflecting its “evangelical roots” in Protestant Puritanism’s “absolute moral rigor” (Munch 2001:120), while in recent times exploiting the “link between moral coercion and the historic role of the crowd in promoting social control” (Wagner 1997:62). Notably, friendly fascism evinces its

evangelical roots through a “Protestant sectarian bred propensity for [moral] crusades” (Lipset 1996:176). Reportedly, what some observers (Swomley 1995) call American “Neo-Fascism” is linked with the religious Right in recent times.

The essay explores whether and to what extent the concept of friendly fascism can contribute to better understanding, explaining and perhaps predicting the workings and effects of American conservatism at the beginning of the 21st century. It investigates the assumed link of friendly fascism, especially the “tyranny of Puritanism” observed in the US South (and beyond), with American neo-conservatism. The literature provides support for this assumption. A recent study shows that the authoritarian or absolutist “politics of Puritanism” (Wagner 1997:136), as exemplified in “moral coercion” and “temperance wars”, is closely linked with American social conservatism. Reportedly, in its victorious “behavior wars”, US conservative politics has revealed a preference for and practice of the “apple pie of authoritarianism” (Wagner 1997:162). Friendly fascism, with its “tyranny of Puritanism”, is a peculiar slice of this “apple pie of authoritarianism” in American neo-conservatism. Notably, by virtue of their “Protestant sectarian bred propensity for crusades”, US social conservatives reportedly “are much more aggressive in imposing their own morality on the body politic with respect to [various] issues than their ideological compeers elsewhere” (Lipset 1996:293). If so, the tendency to friendly fascism as a religiously-based war on moral liberty and choice may be inherent rather incidental to American cultural conservatism.

The rest of the essay investigates whether and to what extent American neo-conservatism has really moved along the authoritarian path of friendly fascism or the road to “moral serfdom”. It detects and analyzes certain social trends revealing a syndrome of friendly fascism beneath the democratic grandeur, rhetoric and façade of American neo-conservatism. If this is correct, friendly fascism³ constitutes the conservative war on personal moral liberties and choices in the US, especially the South with its mix of small-town friendliness and a “sadistic intolerance to cultural otherness” (Bauman 2000:106). Thus, the friendly “idiocy” of small-town life and the “sadistic intolerance” to differences are socio-psychological and cultural foundations of Southern friendly fascism. Hence, friendly fascism may not be just a transient, accidental and aberrant historical event, but a persistent, structural and regular social phenomenon deeply rooted in the collective “psyche” and “spirits” (e.g. the “true spirit of Texas”), notably, the conservative cultural climate (Burriss 2001:365), of the South, reflecting a sort of “normal pathology” of this

region. Further, observers imply that friendly fascism, epitomized in perennial temperance waves and cultural wars, or conservative authoritarianism overall represents a “sort of incarnation of America’s underlying nature” (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995:1). American conservatism has generated, sustained and exploited such socio-psychological and cultural traits of the country, notably the South, for its own political or sectarian purposes, making friendly fascism an ideological blueprint, political strategy and moral-religious form of authoritarian domination.

While becoming the “law of the land” in the proudly conservative South and the “middle” America, friendly fascism seen from a global perspective seems a “unique anomaly of the late 20th century” (Pager 2003:962) in light of the prevalent tendency to increasing moral liberty and choice, or ethical liberalization, in Western contemporary democratic societies. If so, friendly fascism is likely to remain as another, conservative-authoritarian instance and variation of American exceptionalism and its “double-edged sword” (Lipset 1996). Thereby, American exceptionalism may reach its tragic-comic pandemonium in the form of conservative ethical-religious absolutism as the essence of friendly fascism, while the world moving along the path of personal liberty and choice in moral conduct, including the individual “freedom to act wrongly”.

The Conservative Basis of Friendly Fascism: Blending Economic and Social Conservatism

The mix of economic and social conservatism, specifically, freedom in the economy and coercion in the moral sphere, provides a conservative basis, source, or rationale for friendly fascism defined as the war on individual moral liberty and choice. Insofar as it mixes with social conservatism, economic conservatism or libertarianism dominating the US political arena (plus rational-choice economics) permits individual freedoms and choices in the economy, but not, or to a less extent, in the moral sphere. Historically, the neo-conservative-libertarian mix of economic freedom and moral coercion is déjà vu, because traditional despotism sacrificed liberties, choices and rights to (as Simmel observed) “licentious libertinism” in the economy, combined with “disenfranchisement” in politics and society. Prima facie, the mix is dangerous to freedom and democracy, because (if) it supplies a design, instrument or rationalization for the US neo-conservative practice of friendly fascism combining the moral-religious “tyranny of Puritanism” with economic “free enterprise”.

In comparative terms, alongside US neo-conservatism, the blend of market-economic license and moral-social repression is exemplified by Chile’s hybrid of “free enterprise” and brutal military dictatorship supported by Chicago-trained “libertarian” economists and celebrated

by their mentors (e.g. Hayek, Friedman, Stigler) (Tilman 2001), as well as Asian authoritarian societies (South Korea and Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, China). Also, some mix of economic and social conservatism was a mark of European “right-wing totalitarianism (fascism)” (Giddens 1979:145). Though the free-market ideology or rhetoric is more prominent in friendly fascism than its “unfriendly” counterpart (e.g. Nazism), both declare and prosecute their own versions of a war on moral freedom or culture wars as “final solutions” to the perennial conservative problem of immorality or ethical corruption. While moral (plus military) wars demonstrate remarkable similarities or affinities between European fascism and American conservatism, the “on-going battles over cultural values distinguish America from other democracies” (Singh 2001:213). This highlights the observation that through its “sadistic intolerance to cultural otherness” and the consequent war on moral liberty, neo-conservatism has made conservative (or “middle”) America look more like traditional European authoritarianism or contemporary third-world dictatorships (especially Islamic theocracies) than Western democracies. In particular, the US South, where such cultural intolerance and wars assume the religious or theocentric form of the tyrannical “politics of Puritanism” (Wagner 1997:136), resurrects or evokes the theocratic Dark Middle Ages rather than liberal secular democracy; no wonder, cultural conservatives use the term “Bible Belt” with pride and joy to describe the region. If so, Southern friendly fascism driven by Protestant sectarianism looks like a version, remnant, or revival of medieval European theocracy ruled by Catholicism, though this assumption of continuity is a sacrilege for US neo-conservatives due to their ignorant picture and disdain of the “old Europe” supposedly replaced or transcended by their newly created “God’s Kingdom on Earth”.

The dualism between an under-regulated economy (including the work place) and an over-controlled moral or private sphere indicates US social conservatives’ preoccupation and even pathological obsession with other people’s private lives. This is exemplified in their perennial Puritanical obsession with and institutional criminalization of sins and vices (Wagner 1997) thereby converted into serious crimes (e.g. drug and alcohol use, prostitution and other sexual activities) deserving harsh punishment, including execution. As observers note, the American “puritan national imaginary not yet willing to relinquish its Oedipal taboos against pleasure and disobedience” (King and Murphet 2001:199), which particularly applies to the Southern Bible Belt. Overall, this region is characterized by an “unholy alliance” of political oligarchy (“good old boys”) or business plutocracy as the “dictatorship of the rich” (Niggle

1998) reducing workers to a powerless mass with no or restricted elementary labor rights (union organization) with neo-theocracy (“non-believers need not apply”) reinstated or consolidated by the resurgence of religious fundamentalism. On the account of this coalition between secular and sacred power, politics and religion, the South resembles or approaches less Western liberal democracies than Islamic theocracies or Europe’s Dark Middle Ages. Such are the “perversities” (Merton’s word) or “normal pathology” (Boulder’s expression) of US neo-conservatism with its apparent project and practice of a new Puritan theocracy, specifically what Weber calls bibliocracy in the form of a Bible Belt, thus eventuating into friendly fascism.

In general, if the blend of a free-market (or laissez-faire) economy and authoritarian (or totalitarian) society, including moral dictatorship, is its defining mark, US neo-conservatism tends to become, or is instrumental in, friendly fascism predicated on the theocratic “tyranny of Puritanism” epitomized in Southern bibliocracy (resurrecting or evoking New England’s Puritan theocracy). Historically, this disjuncture between market-economic freedom and moral-social un-freedom has been a key feature of traditional authoritarianism as well as its contemporary forms, most of which being instigated, promulgated or supported by American authoritarian conservatism (e.g. Chile, South Korea, Taiwan). Moreover, European fascism in part mixed “licentious libertinism” in the economy and “disenfranchisement” in the rest of society, almost like American conservatism, especially McCarthyism and its modern sequels like the “new social conservatism” (Wagner 1997:11). Thus, Italian fascism and German Nazism essentially retained capitalist (though not laissez-faire) economies based on private ownership and (as Mussolini put it) individual responsibility, mixed with moral-political oppression and ideological manipulation, thus evincing some “elective affinity” with American neo-conservatism. Thus, some analysts (Myrdal 1953:205) observe that, along with fascist Italy and communist Russia, conservative America in the 1920s “practice[d] most consciously political indoctrination”, as did perhaps even more during the post-WW II period, including the cold war, McCarthyism and its various remnants, notably the neo-conservative “war on terror” and the “axis of evil” in the 2000s. In retrospect, this, usually unsuspected, affinity of American conservatism with what Simmel calls political despotism evinces historical continuities within authoritarianism, totalitarianism, or dictatorship, which places Southern friendly fascism in proper perspective.

It might seem that by its peculiar blend of individualism, choice, and freedom in the economy with their opposites in moral-social life, mainstream American conservatism seeks to

create a Huxleyean rather than an Orwellian world, if this is consolation (assuming that the second scenario is more degrading)—i.e. moral but not political dictatorship, friendly vs. unfriendly fascism. Yet, extreme or fringe conservative ideologies and groups, increasingly gaining political legitimacy in recent times (Plotke 2002), may usher in an Orwellian society with features of unfriendly fascism⁴ (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995), insofar as they seek to institute Leviathan *both* in economy and society, e.g. economic nationalism, paranoid xenophobia, ethnic-racial hatred, coercive imposition of morality and religion, artistic censorship, anti-intellectualism. Still, both outcomes, friendly and unfriendly fascism, are but particular variations of a Puritan Utopia, a society based on (as Weber put it) the “unexampled tyranny of Puritanism” driven and rationalized by “absolute moral rigor” (Munch 2001:120).

Seemingly, such an authoritarian (Huxleyean) or totalitarian (Orwellian) outcome would be a supreme irony, since “mainstream” US conservatives, including libertarians, ritually reject fascism and especially communism. No doubt, the neo-fascist outcome is more likely, if not partly materialized, especially in the social sphere of morals and religion (plus politics), as the terms “friendly fascism” and “Bible Belt” (and oligarchic “good old boys”) describing the South suggest. As a symptom or taste of enforcing friendly fascism in morality, social conservatives in Congress and state-local legislatures increasingly re-criminalize, or increase legal punishments for, “moral turpitude” involving a wide range of what they see as immoralities or religiously-defined sins (abortion, adultery, use of drugs and alcohol, pornography, prostitution, indecency, sexuality, etc.) to the point of extending the death penalty (drug trafficking) or life sentences (“three-strikes-and-you-are-out” laws) to such vices *cum* crimes. What is “friendly” in this march of “fascism friendly” is that these conservative practices denying or restricting moral liberty are enforced for the “good” of the American people to be protected from immoral and irreligious foreign (e.g. European liberalizing and secularizing) influences or for America’s “moral renaissance”—i.e. Puritanical tyranny sugar-coated or wrapped in the “apple pie” of cultural authoritarianism. Further, they reveal or evoke some symptoms of “not-so-friendly” fascism in the political arena through violating with impunity, owing to their “populist majority” (Samuelson 1997:156) in Congress and beyond, elementary democratic rules and procedures (including restricting or obstructing discussions) to block many widely approved social reforms (e.g. the health system, gun control). Also, by promulgating their own ideologies and policies (welfare, immigration, national security), most conservatives exhibit anti-democratic symptoms

not just in formal-procedural terms often verging on the legislative “tyranny or the majority”, but also in the substantive (e.g. denial of basic labor rights to federal employees in the “homeland security” department, of welfare benefits to legal immigrants, of due process of law to “enemies” in the Patriot Act, etc.). This may be unexpected and shocking when taking neo-conservatives” or libertarians” claims (or self-delusions) to being the lone defenders of democracy and freedom in America at face value.

In sum, US neo-conservatism, including libertarianism, features divided or mutilated freedom and choice celebrated and promoted in economic behavior, yet suppressed or limited in personal moral decisions, which conflicts with the (liberal) assumption of indivisibility of liberty and exposes the conservative paradox or absurd of (to paraphrase some libertarian economists)--Anarchy in Economy, Leviathan in Society. And friendly fascism in the form of Puritan moral tyranny, coexisting with “free market enterprise”, is the logical outcome or part of this neo-conservative mix of economic freedom and social oppression, specifically, a facet of “Leviathan in Society”.

Friendly Fascism “Reborn” and “Born Again” Neo-Conservatives

Recent times have witnessed a revival or reinforcement of friendly fascism or Puritan moral repression by neo-conservatism in the USA, notably its Southern and other conservative parts (e.g. the “red states” in 2004 elections). Simply, friendly fascism was “reborn” thanks to “born again” US moral-religious conservatives in the Bible Belt and beyond. To reiterate, US neo-conservatism aims, through its permanent conservative (counter) revolution, suppressing or restricting liberty in moral-social relations, while advocating “free enterprise” in markets, thus resulting in or rationalizing friendly fascism. US neo-conservatives hail and enforce this dualism as the “renaissance” of American civilization, apparently neglecting the fact that the mix of market anarchy with moral tyranny has been the defining element of despotic or authoritarian societies, past and present⁵.

The recent aggregate outcome of the tendency to moral tyranny, sugar-coated in “free enterprise”, has been a society in which virtually every morally “wrong” conduct can be legally classified and punished as crime, so everyone--short of the plutocratic power elite and Bible-Belt saints--becomes a potential criminal by neo-conservative definitions and classifications. As even some libertarians admit, “one reason for the growth in crime is that the number of [immoral] activities that are classified as crimes has multiplied in recent years. There is hardly an individual

in the U.S. who could not be convicted of a crime, if prosecutors made a real effort to do so. There are so many laws covering so many activities that none of us know what they are in full detail” (Friedman 1997:194). This observation provides a workable definition of conservative-grounded friendly fascism, because (or if) radical uncertainty as to legal classifications and sanctions of individual moral choice and behavior is its defining mark. Simply, since everyone is potentially a criminal by virtue of having vices or committing sins, “no one is beyond the law”, including prison and the death row, though US neo-conservatives, through belonging or aspiring to the narrow club of plutocracy-oligarchy (“good old boys”) and theocracy (saints), seek to exclude themselves from this near-universal category of sinners cum criminals. If so, due to the neo-conservative “though on crime” political alchemy, modern America resembles or approaches the anti-utopia of *1984* or *The Brave New World*, where there is no one “who could not be convicted of a crime if prosecutors made a real effort to do so”, e.g. thought- and vice-crimes. Conservative America does appear as a “utopia achieved (Baudrillard 1986:75) but in a sense opposite to the American Constitution/Dream premised on “liberty and justice for all” and the individual “pursuit of happiness”. To that extent, America’s venerable ideals of liberty, equality and justice have, or are likely to, become the sacrificial lamb, collateral damage, or decorum of a “though on crime” alchemic formula that tries to convert morality and everything else (e.g. national security) into the conservative “gold” of political domination. This suggests that friendly fascism with its moral-temperance wars is a political project rather than an unintended effect of American conservatism, “an elite strategy reflecting a belief in the responsibility of the state and private powers (e.g. corporations) to regulate and restrain personal behavior” (Wagner 1997:7). And, not knowing the society in question, the description “there is hardly an individual in the U.S. who could not be convicted of a crime, if prosecutors made a real effort to do so” may be mistaken as describing traditional despotism, European fascism, Third-World dictatorships, or Islamic theocracies--all defined by extreme arbitrariness in legal classifications and sanctions of crimes and criminals--rather than a contemporary Western democracy.

As/if an elite political strategy of American conservatism, friendly fascism in its various manifestations--vices redefined by government as crimes, sinners qua criminals, presumption of moral guilt, individual uncertainty and fear⁶--is a sort of rational hysteria, a method in madness, from the conservative viewpoint. Such rationality of irrationality displays the “normal

pathology” (or pathological normality) of US authoritarian conservatism and so friendly fascism, by normalizing (criminalizing) what has been abnormality (normalcy) in American society before (e.g. the 1960-70s) or other Western societies currently. This normal pathology, historically always intense, has further intensified during the 2000s to the point of reaching near-totalitarian features or proportions (total surveillance, indefinite detention, torture) displayed in “homeland security” and the “war on terror” and “evil”, as the new symbols of conservative friendly (and not so friendly) fascism. In Merton’s terms, US neo-conservatives are sorts of innovators rationally using “get-tough-on-crime” social controls, including the legal reproduction of criminality *cum* immorality, as the institutional means to achieve the culturally valued goal of success, i.e. a mix of power and wealth. For them⁷, friendly fascism acquires a supreme rationale as the efficient or Machiavellian instrument of fulfilling the American dream defined by success, a “sacrosanct goal [that] consecrates the means” (Merton 1968:195-200)—no wonder, many US neo-conservatives are called “Mayberry Machiavellis.” Notably, their use of humans, via reclassifications of sinners as criminals to be harshly punished, even executed, so to vindicate a “tough on crime” agenda, as the means to their ends shows Machiavellianism as a set of “behaviors that involve manipulating others in one’s own interest and at cost to others” (Bowles, Gintis and Osborne 2001:1161).

The US “under-democratized South” (Amenta and Halfmann 2000), though an American and world leader (e.g. Texas) in incarceration and executions, has no monopoly to (the pride and joy from) such human punishments/sacrifices and other “tough on crime” practices in the service of political Machiavellianism and/or moral-religious purity. Moreover, recently such practices, mixed with others traditionally characteristic of this region (e.g. racial politics), have “infected” the country as a whole to the point that American democracy has been “heading South” and national political life placed “in the shadow of Dixie” (Cochran 2001). For example, extending the Bible-Belt mechanism of ritual human sacrifices to the tyranny of Puritanism, a conservative Congress passed a “tough on crime” federal law extending the death penalty not only to a myriad of conventional criminal acts not covered previously, but to many sinful activities (e.g., drug-related offenses). Curiously (and predictably), these extensions of executions or other harsh penalties (e.g. life sentences) to moral sinners display an affinity with practices in Islamic theocracies like Iran or secular dictatorships such as China rather than in contemporary Western democracies virtually all of which prohibit the death penalty or related Draconian punishments.

Ironically, the US federal government regularly criticizes and even punishes by various sanctions these countries for identical or similar policies--e.g. arbitrary indiscriminate applications of the death penalty to moral offenses, executions of the innocent--to its own, or those of repressive Bible-Belt states like Texas, Virginia, Alabama, Florida, Georgia and others. Yet, human rights organizations usually report such policies in the US and so expose the duplicity or self-delusion of the Federal government and these states about (as a Texan governor put it) the “swift and just” administration of the death penalty. Another curiosity is that some US conservative libertarians advocate the liberalization of drugs, for example, on grounds of individual freedom and responsibility against the vehement resistance of cultural conservatives or moral-religious entrepreneurs, with the latter having apparently an upper hand in this “family feud”.

In virtue of this salient disproportion between crime and capital punishment, fascist, ultra-conservative US and theocratic (Islamic) penal systems essentially converge on an arbitrary death-penalty penal system, despite their other differences in ideology, religion, and politics. Generally, they converge on “tough on crime” policies as their common property, which sheds light on and exposes US conservatives’ manifest or latent affinity with fascists and Islamic (and other) theocrats⁸. In essence, fascist, conservative and Islamic legal systems share a Draconian penal code, whose radical disjuncture between crime and punishment, notably the death penalty, rests on the primeval or barbaric “tit-for-tat” principle of vengeance. Many recent “tough” laws, passed by conservative Congress and state legislatures and driven by a variation of that principle in the form of Puritan retribution for sins defined as crimes, are symptoms of “Draconization” or “secondary barbarization” (Bauman 1997:23) of an already Draconian or semi-barbaric criminal justice system compared to other Western societies. A manipulated, misinformed, disinterested or apathetic public usually grants blank approval to “tough on crime” policies that a coalition of Machiavellian conservative politicians and moral-religious entrepreneurs, exemplified in the Bible Belt, strategically and/or fanatically design, impose and execute. Reportedly, the American public “has little knowledge about the criminal justice system, and a mobilized [conservative] minority with a special interest in crime control can influence policies independently of public demand” (Loftin and McDowell 1982:393-4). This implies, first, a sort of tyranny of the minority pervades the system; second, if the public knew more about US and other criminal justice systems, it might demand changes away from neo-conservative “tough on crime” policies⁹.

In particular, besides US conservatives' peculiar obsession with other people's vices and sins, including their intimate lives, a sort of perverse logic lies behind this conservative-driven-and-exploited hysteria of "sexual crimes". This is the logic of creating a moral climate of generalized uncertainty, guilt, and fear such that "no one is above the law" resembling the fascist equivalent atmosphere in ideological-political terms. Further, US conservatives often combine this climate of moral guilt with one of generalized political suspicion, fear and oppression, as witnessed by McCarthyism and its sequels, including various "Patriot Acts" in the service of the "war on terror", often verging on grotesque, immaturity, or childishness (e.g. the House of Representatives renaming "French fries" into "freedom fries"). If these measures often limit and violate fragile civil liberties and rights (despite "freedom fries"), on the moral level naturalness and spontaneity in social interaction have decreased, with suspicion and fear increasing, in many work, educational and other settings, as the result of a conservative (and feminist) crusade driven by an obsession with (other people's, but not own) sins and vices. Virtually everything done or said in such settings can be construed and exploited by US social conservatives (and feminists) as "sexual crimes" subject to both Puritan moral-religious expiation and criminal prosecution.

Notably, like German fascists or Islamic theocrats, US conservatives exploit deviant sexual mores and behaviors as "one of the more important footholds for intolerance" (Bauman 2000:106). For example, in Islamic theocracies adultery is subject to severe punishments (stoning or execution) just as is illegal in many states of the Southern Bible Belt. In addition, these states have consolidated the criminal status of or re-criminalized many other immoral acts (homosexuality, same-sex marriages, sodomy) since the 1980s, though many such measures--e.g. "dumb laws" a la "only in conservative America", particularly the South--are legal antics with a long tradition rooted in Puritanical "absolute moral rigor" (Munch 2001:120) (as the Supreme Court indicated by ruling against the Texas sodomy law, for example). Alongside Islamic theocracies, comparable instances of a Draconic disproportion of crime and punishment are historically or presently found in secular authoritarian societies (e.g., Albania, China, Singapore), in which, like in US conservatism, sins are usually intermingled with political "thought crimes".

In socio-psychological terms, the "sadistic intolerance to cultural otherness" is linked with (to use Mannheim's term) the conservative mentality's obsessive attribution of sinfulness and viciousness to the religious, ethnic, or political Other, combined with its hostility to

theoretical reasoning and its anti-intellectualism. This intolerance generates or sustains the tyranny of Puritanism implemented in America through Southern bibliocracy and enforced by self-righteous saints seeking to convert and “save” the souls of sinners by “whatever it takes”, including long imprisonment (life sentences for “three strikes” like drug offenses) and execution. To realize the magnitude and intensity of the conservative mentality’s imputation of and obsession with the sinfulness of the *other*, one only needs to look at the American media owned or influenced by economic and/or cultural conservatives. For instance, allegations, speculations, or rumors that someone has been sexually “assaulted” or “molested” are bigger news than the hard economic facts that, say, almost 40 million Americans continue to live below the poverty line, that between 45-75 millions do not have health insurance permanently or at some point, that economic disparity has dramatically widened, while the real income declined or stagnated for most people, since the 1980s. They are also bigger than the salient political “news” that half of an “increasingly ill-informed and ill-tempered” electorate, due to “increasingly impoverished” debate¹⁰ (Frank and Cook 1995:203), usually (with exceptions like the 2004 election) vote in Presidential (and less in Congressional) elections, that millions of citizens (ex-prisoners, minorities) are denied voting and other political rights and liberties by conservatives, and so on. US conservatives’ “sadistic intolerance of cultural otherness” while inflicting harm, suffering and death to the representatives of this “otherness” can also be self-destructive, as shown by the Civil War and other experience of the South. In particular, their obsession with the imputed sinfulness of the *other* is frequently observed to be hypocritical¹¹. Resorting on and exploiting the asymmetry or alchemy of moral “tough on crime” rhetoric, conservative hypocrisy consists in committing various sinful acts (including sexual offenses), while preaching and fighting with “word and sword” against them.

A symptom of the neo-conservative mix of “licentious economic libertinism” with moral repression defining friendly fascism is the expansion of the prison capacity and population in the US in recent times. The driving force behind this expansion seems the conservative “intolerance of cultural otherness” rationalized as “tough on crime” polices targeting moral deviance by harsh laws and government coercion, including the police and even the military (the war on drugs). The neo-conservative revolution of the 1990-2000s pursued and elevated such policies to a (patho)logical pandemonium, with prison construction, including capital punishment, becoming the fastest growing industry in most Southern and Western states, especially Texas (and even

California), perhaps mirroring the Wild-West mentality and practice of government repression and brutality. Generally, conservative social control has evolved into an industry or business, American style, thus becoming just another sphere for “free enterprise” or private profit-making, as indicated by the increasing privatization of the penal system, including prisons. Hence, alongside “tough” US conservative politicians and Bible Belt moral-religious crusaders, private business has vested interests in retaining high levels/growth rates of the prison population, which represents an additional obstacle (Rutherford 1994) to sensible and rational crime control via the enlightened minimal use of criminal law. The US prison population has grown dramatically by more than 6 times, reaching more than 2 million in the early 2000s since the resurgence of conservatism in the 1980s, making the conservative “toughness” on crime and vice mainly responsible for the skyrocketing incarceration rate.

In comparative terms, during neo-conservative political hegemony, America has become the “country with the highest incarceration rate in the world” (Pager 2003:938), seemingly much to US conservatives’ nationalist “pride and joy”. Also, the conservative toughness on moral deviance qua crime has contributed to the country having, besides the highest incarceration rate, the largest prison population (or second only to China, the regular suspect for human-rights abuses), and assuming global “leadership” in the death penalty, including executions of mentally retarded and juveniles¹² (until the early 2000s when the Supreme Court outlawed these acts), not to mention innocent people (as the Illinois governor dramatically admitted).

And, as even some economic conservatives (Friedman 1997) admit, the comparatively unrivaled growth of the US prison, including capital punishment, system is mainly due to neo-conservative official (through government capture, control or influence) or other (via spiritual-religious condemnation) reclassifications and multiplications of crime. This process has enfolded through re-criminalizing a wide range of immoral behaviors, ranging from alcohol and drug use (“dry” counties, the war on drugs) to intimacy (sexual harassment, adultery), and then penalizing them with extreme and unparalleled, within Western democracies, harshness or inhumanity, including life sentences and executions. As observers note, in this country “recent trends in crime policy have led to the imposition of harsher sentences for a wider range of offenses, thus casting an ever-widening net of penal intervention” (Pager 2003:938). It seems as if the logic, structure and operation of American conservatism required that some, ideally the politically weak, have to be sacrificed at the altar of the neo-conservative institutional reproduction of crime and social

deviance (including insanity, cf. Sutton 1991), via a Draconian criminal-justice system and policy (or promise) of being “tough” on crime and “moral decay” for the Machiavellian political expedience of power, mixed with intolerant moralism and religious-ideological fanaticism. This does not mean that the silent, especially non-enlightened, “moral majority”, invoked and glorified by US social conservatives, in the Southern Bible Belt and beyond is always right or reasonable; suffice it to mention the rise and fall of Prohibition, not to mention the slavery and segregation. At any rate, all these “good intentions” and perverse or (charitably interpreted) unintended consequences of social conservatives and their coercive imposition of (their own version of) private morality and decency are implied, even predicted, by the concept of friendly fascism.

The Legal Framework of Friendly Fascism: Democracy vs. a Draconic Penal System

The aforesaid suggests that the legal framework of friendly fascism, manifested in the non-democratic “politics of Puritanism”, is an essentially Draconian penal or criminal justice system defined by the extreme harshness, cruelty, and inhumanity of its punishment of moral sins as well as crimes. In turn, a Draconian criminal justice system is in part the indicator or mirror of the degree of harshness, inhumanity and cruelty (so immaturity) of a polity and society overall. Consequently, the question arises as to whether a harsh, inhuman and cruel (so immature) polity and society, indicated by a Draconian legal system (re)created by American conservatism, can really be democratic and free. A second question is if (formal) democracy--in the sense of Weber’s legal-rational authority or power legitimation via electoral procedures--in America and other Western societies is a sufficient safeguard against Draconian intolerance and punishing severity as a form of penal injustice, or, alternatively, for legal “justice and liberty for all.”

This essay does not seek to fully answer the question of how compatible democracy and a free society are with a Draconian or conservative criminal justice system observed in America during recent times, but only to give some ideas. As to the second question the idea or tentative answer is “not necessarily”, judging from such phenomena in American history as the coexistence of formal political democracy with slavery¹³, segregation, discrimination, labor exploitation and repression, and other forms of intolerance or injustice, including Draconian severity in punishment. (Recall, Tocqueville visited and wrote about “democracy in America” before the abolition of the slavery.) Since the second question is the flip side of the first, the latter yields the same idea/answer, supported by the observed adverse impact of such forms of

intolerance, injustice and Draconian punishment on political democracy and civil liberty. Hence, the above dilemma is not just an academic question, as US conservatives in their venerable anti-intellectualism claim, but a practical issue with far-reaching consequences for the lives of the real people, including those two million-plus prisoners and thousands more on the death row. This especially holds true since (or if) most of them are victims of some kind or degree of “sadistic intolerance to cultural otherness” in the sense of being convicted, incarcerated or (likely to be) executed for moral deviance like drug-related charges (Friedman 1997) rather than for conventional crimes. In Amnesty International’s terms, they are “prisoners of conscience” rather than criminals, which is precisely what the concept of friendly fascism assumes or predicts.

As to the relation between the growth in prison capacities and that in incarceration (and executions) in the USA, the question may be raised as to what is the cause and what the effect. Conventional wisdom suggests that the growing incarcerated population causes the growth of prison construction rather vice versa, which seems true for liberal criminal justice systems, but not for their Draconian, including fascist and conservative, opposites. Given the authoritarian or conservative (patho)logic of “sadistic intolerance”, total control and permanent surveillance of the people’s private lives, the opposite path from constructing prisons to populating them with humans may also be plausible. Thus, “what if the state builds more and more prisons and then (surprise!) begins to fill them up with more and more prisoners?” (Wagner 1997:175).

This is exactly what has happened in the USA, especially the Southwest, during recent times, with states like Texas and others first building new (often private) prisons and then reportedly searching for prisoners—as both a material to fill up the capacities and slave-like prison labor--throughout the region (and the entire country) to fill them up, seemingly manifesting the Wild-West syndrome of (sheriffs and cowboys) “shooting first and asking questions later.” For instance, ultra-conservative would-be-president Barry Goldwater has been portrayed as a “reactionary cowboy [i.e.] someone “who shot first and asked questions later”” (Schuparra 1998:xvii), as have other “tough on crime” neo-conservative crusaders (including Reagan and Reaganites), proclaiming “certain and swift justice” via exponential prison construction followed by mass incarceration and executions. Moreover, in Texas and other Southwestern states prison construction and management has become a booming private industry, an extension of “free enterprise”, a sort of business speculation, i.e. an economic investment in the expectation of profits to accrue from imprisoning more and more people,

including, alongside criminals, moral sinners and even the innocent (innocence?--just an irrelevance or nuisance to this “get rich quick” scheme, the conservative American way). Simply, to quote an observation from Weber’s *Protestant Sects in America*, US state-sponsored prison-building-and-managing entrepreneurs “make money out of humans”. These Orwellian practices admonish that virtually everyone in America (minus oligarchic good old boys¹⁴ and theocratic saints), especially the South, is now in the danger of becoming (in the US military’s notorious term) a “collateral damage” of the neo-conservative crusade against “crime” and “evil” (e.g. the wars on drugs and terror) via prison construction, incarceration and execution. In particular, they suggest that US record incarceration and execution levels are a political construct or project and so a self-inflicted wound, if not an exercise in criminal justice masochism, thus epitomizing the institutional reproduction of crime and criminals by US conservatism, notably Southern friendly fascism premised on the project of a Puritan bibliocracy.

In addition to “tough-on-crime” Southern US states, fascist criminal justice systems furnish a historical case in point by their totalitarian apparatus of control and punishment, including incarceration and execution, combined with their need and institutional reproduction of ideological-political enemies or their “vested interest in their opponents” existence” (Moore 1993:508). Extreme examples are Nazi concentration camps with their apparent economic irrationality or anti-utilitarian, not to mention inhuman, character and, some may add, their US equivalents or proxies during the neo-conservative war on terror (e.g. Guantanamo's prison for suspected foreign terrorists as the proxy for a concentration camp in virtue of indefinite detention and denial of legal counsel¹⁵). However, Nazi camps were irrational or anti-utilitarian “only by normal standards of utility maximization. By Nazi standards [their] usefulness consisted in their capacity both to exterminate “objective enemies” and to fabricate the “model citizen” of the totalitarian regime” (Baehr 2002:810). Still, Nazi camps and other fascist forms of crime control only carried to the extreme the tendency for most Draconian or conservative criminal justice systems to be inherently irrational or anti-utilitarian in economic terms. Notably, in virtue of their common hostility to liberalism or the principle of liberty, European fascism, including Nazism, American authoritarian conservatism and Islamic theocracy appear as “brothers in arms” or “bed fellows”, despite their other differences. Alternatively, by comparison to Western liberal democracies, in America at the beginning of the 21st century the neo-conservative criminal justice system based on massive incarceration and widespread executions constitutes a

“unique anomaly” (Pager 2003:962), an anomalous symptom of American exceptionalism sustained and celebrated by US conservatism.

The preceding intimates or predicts that US economic conservatives or libertarians (will) tend to rely on “free enterprise”, fiscal prudence, or cost-benefit calculus, thus to convert the penal system into a prison industry, business undertaking, and private profit-making. Private prisons based on profit-making are the outgrowth and emblem of this criminal-justice economic libertarianism. In turn, social conservatives or moral-religious entrepreneurs from the Bible Belt and beyond, while not ignoring such considerations, put a premium on the extra-economic project of eliminating “objective enemies” via “tough on crime” policies, including the death penalty, and reinventing the “model citizen” in their own image (perhaps minus hypocrisy). Analogously, Prohibition (including the Southern “dry” countries), the war on drugs, the sexual harassment mania, indecency laws, etc. are the products and symbols of this conservative moral-religious entrepreneurship. Those being both economic and cultural conservatives seek to blend free business enterprise with moral-religious entrepreneurship, even if sometimes displaying socio-psychological ambivalence or “split personalities”, e.g. libertarians’ discomfort with the war on drugs and related culture wars (e.g. on abortion) or “tough on crime” policies. However, judging from the prime non-rational mover of the US penal system, the moral-religious side of conservatives’ “soul” has split, prevailed over or controlled the economic, especially in the Southern Bible Belt--i.e. irrational passions dominated rationalist interests (*pace* rational choice theory). Libertarians’ persistent failure to stop or even mitigate the war on drugs and related culture wars by social conservatives is a telling example of this triumph of moral-religious entrepreneurship driven by cultural intolerance in the penal system at federal and state levels, notably the South. While this outcome is an anomaly or paradox for the rational-choice model or economics of crime and punishment, it is not in sociological comparative-historical terms, on the contrary, that is exactly what to expect of a Draconian legal system premised on the conservative coercive imposition of moral purity. Overall, the above implies that by virtue of attempting “to exterminate “objective enemies” and to fabricate the “model citizen””, most Draconian penal systems, be they fascist, conservative or theocratic, tend to be economically irrational, while having a social rationale. America’s conservative criminal justice system, exemplified by “tough on crime” laws and policies, conforms to this common pattern, which means that the above outcome is consistent with the observations and expectations about Draconian penal systems.

An exemplar of the neo-conservative “asymmetry of fiscal rhetoric” is the frantic prison construction at the expense of social services in America, especially the South as the historical and current vanguard in these and other undemocratic or exclusionary tendencies (Cochran 2001). *Prima facie*, this dualism indicates a sort of fiscal duplicity or contradiction of US neo-conservatives. Specifically, if US cultural conservatives often display moral hypocrisy, most economic libertarians reveal fiscal duplicity in the form of a dualism between parsimony or frugality in public expenditures on welfare, education, health care, or related human services and generosity to the point of prodigality in spending on mechanisms of social control (and the military), including prison construction. In historical terms, this conservative-libertarian fiscal hypocrisy resembles the fascist (and communist) economically irrational pattern of public spending, e.g. Nazi (and Soviet) profligate expenditures on social control and the military in defiance of economic considerations, and contrasts with those of Western liberal democracies. US conservatives’ standard objection that these countries do not spend “enough” on defense and “too much” on welfare compared with America illustrates neo-conservatism’s fiscal divergence from liberal democracy and its convergence or affinity with fascism (and communism).

It is a well-known fact, except for US neo-conservatives or they try to hide it from the manipulated and often uninformed American public: compared with democracies, dictatorships tend to spend more of public revenues on social control, internal (police, prisons) or external (military), including wars against their domestic “liberal enemies”¹⁶ (Habermas 2001:44) and foreign “evildoers” from the “axis of evil”¹⁷. This general tendency furnishes a proper historical perspective on neo-conservative attempts at crime-moral control by seemingly unlimited expenditures of resources on the prison industry and Draconian punishments, as well as the military and global aggressive wars, in contrast to prevention and rehabilitation, including education. The dualism between frugality and profligacy dispels US conservatives’ myth that they, unlike “tax and spend liberals”, are the exemplar of financially competent governance pursuing fiscal prudence¹⁸ through balancing budgets, while fighting budget deficits and excessive government spending. In particular, such fiscal hypocrisy¹⁹ sheds light on the explosion of budget deficits by a neo-conservative government, due to its ever-expanding crime-control (and military) spending during the 1980s, and their resumption (after converted into balanced budgets and surpluses by “fiscally irresponsible liberals”) under its successor administration for the almost same reasons in the early 2000s. One wonders what happened to

balanced-budget fiscal prudence in light of the déjà vu exploding budget deficits and other symptoms of (as some leading economists described its “tax cut” plan) “fiscal madness” of a staunch fiscally conservative government of the early 2000s. This fiscal hypocrisy-turned-madness exemplifies the normal pathology or regularized anomaly of American conservatism, including libertarianism.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the association of friendly fascism, as grounded or manifested in what Weber calls the “unexampled tyranny of Puritanism”, with modern American conservatism. The preceding analysis leads to the conclusion that US neo-conservatism has reached or approached the threshold of friendly fascism at the beginning of the 21st century. In this sense, friendly fascism constitutes the conservative culture war on individual moral liberties and private choices, conducted via the government coercive apparatus criminalizing sins and vices, while couched in the rhetoric/promise of ethical perfection and religious salvation. Apparently, US conservatives have been, so far, “victorious” (Wagner 1997:162) in this war, driven by Puritanical “moral absolutism” (Munch 2001:242) with its “zero tolerance” of sins and religious fundamentalism, against personal human freedom and choice, just as in other culture wars. .

A radical case in point is the neo-conservative re-conversion or consolidation of the US South into Weber’s bibliocracy called with pride and joy a Bible Belt characterized by the moralist “tyranny of Puritanism” as the religious source and essence of friendly fascism and American social conservatism overall. If so, friendly fascism and consequently neo-conservatism is the underlying explanation for the consistently--and even increasingly (Cochran 2001)--non-democratic and near-theocratic features of this region resembling more third-world dictatorships and theocracies as well as the Dark Middle Ages than Western democracies. In historical terms, friendly fascism, as especially culminating or germinating in the US Bible Belt, represents a moral-religious functional equivalent or proxy of traditional “unfriendly” fascism in Europe, thus more than a figure of speech or exaggeration. If conventional fascism (e.g. Nazism) involves political totalitarianism, including the imposition of ideological purity, friendly fascism consists in social authoritarianism or moral dictatorship, exemplified in the “sadistic intolerance to cultural otherness”, grounded in Puritan moralism and fundamentalism. In this respect, in the US South the social history of fascism repeats itself not as a farce, but in a different, moralistic and semi-theocratic, form (the “Bible Belt” perfectly captures this aspect) due to the conservative

war on moral liberty, private choice and cultural tolerance. Alternatively, via this war American conservatism in the South and beyond contradicts or violates the principle of human liberty that the “freedom of action that is the condition of moral merit includes the freedom to act wrongly” (Hayek 1960:80). So, if hegemonic cultural conservatism in the South and elsewhere in America is (about) democracy and liberty, one wonders what exactly is moral dictatorship and un-freedom?²⁰

Overall, these conclusions confirm the findings of prior research that modern (and old) American conservatism harbors and wields a sort of “apple pie of authoritarianism” as its inherent feature or consequence. In particular, they corroborate the observed link between American conservatism with the authoritarian “politics of Puritanism” premised on “absolute moral rigor” (Munch 2001). Further, these conclusions lead to the assertion and prediction that neo-conservatism, owing to its “apple pie of authoritarianism”, is likely to represent the major threat to American democracy in the 21st century. One can expect that in the future American democracy will be in crisis or danger in direct proportion to the political ascendance of authoritarian cultural conservatism, and conversely. The near-totalitarian darkness or under-democratized light of the US South ever-increasingly ruled by authoritarian social conservatism, including friendly fascism, may adumbrate the future of America as a whole, if American politics (and culture) continues to be in the “shadow of Dixie”. If so, while the North won the “civil war”, the South may win--and apparently is wining as shown in the 2004 election--what US neo-conservatives call “culture wars” raging for long, thus exacting a sort of moral victory and revenge; such are the peculiar workings and effects of American conservatism heading toward friendly fascism at the start of the 21st century. At the minimum, American conservatism, including its “Establishment leaders” has greatly contributed to friendly fascism or a “repressive corporate society” in America.

In comparative terms, friendly fascism as a conservative war on personal moral freedom in America seems a “unique anomaly of the late 20th century” (Pager 2003:962), especially when compared with Western democratic societies permeated by the opposite trend to expanding liberties in individual morality, i.e. ethical liberalism. If so, friendly fascism is likely to remain an isolated aberrant case of the “double-edged sword” of American exceptionalism. This holds true unless US neo-conservatives persist in their missionary zeal to export friendly fascism, as an example of their “universal values”, to the world through the creation of an “empire of liberty”

by means of preemptive wars on “terror” and “evil”, religious “missions” and “crusades”, political “liberation” and “democratization”, and the like. Such persistence confirms the observation that friendly fascism, as the product of US neo-conservatism, in the form of a Big Business-Big Government alliance “squashes the rights and liberties” of people not only at home but also abroad (Gross 1980). This means a scenario a la Wal-Mart: mass sale of cheap and low-grade friendly fascism “proudly made in the USA”, though most of the world shows little taste for this conservative export and says “No Thanks” in favor of more sophisticated cultural products such as individual moral liberty or ethical autonomy. To finish on a lighter note, friendly fascism may remain just another episode of American cultural conservatism’s permanent grotesque or tragicomedy (and revolution) as a regular “international laughingstock” (Hill 2002:24). Elements of comedy and Shakespearean tragedy are typically co-present and intermingled in the play and players of US cultural conservatism and its friendly fascism, as enacted in the singularly bizarre and oppressive moral-religious stage of conservative America, above all the Bible-Belt South.

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NOTES

¹ Informally, the author first heard of “friendly fascism” about ten years ago when attending a university in Florida, where some faculty used the term in reference to the US South or Bible Belt. At first, the author regarded the term as a mere figure of speech or exaggeration not deserving much scholarly attention. Yet, recent observations that American neo-conservatism offers the “apple pie of authoritarianism” (Wagner 1997:162) suggest that the concept of friendly fascism in America may be more than a mere metaphor.

² McCleary (2002:64) adds that when referring to the US governmental/corporate oligarchy or the ties between public policy and the corporate agenda, “the Enron mess and Cheney’s secret “Energy Commission” are the first things that come to mind here”.

³ Since the early 2000s, especially September 11, 2001, the (in)human face, executor, or symbol of neo-conservative friendly fascism has probably become Attorney General (2000-04) exploiting the “war on terror”, “homeland security”, “the US Patriot Act”, and other measures for re-establishing the moral-religious “tyranny of Puritanism”, via Draconian punishments, including executions, of sins redefined as crimes. For instance, Attorney General ordered federal prosecutors to pursue maximum criminal charges and sentences, including death penalties, for crimes and sins “whenever possible”. In the “war on terror”, a “reckless” Attorney General said that “if you dare question the government’s actions, you’re adding the terrorists” (McCleary 2002:65). By analogy, the US warlord *cum* “defense” secretary has become the personification of the resurrected ghost of conservative imperialism, as has a fortiori (alongside a hard-line vice president) the “compassionate” conservative president whose demeanor—a mix of superficial friendliness and folksiness with deep-seated moral intolerance and missionary zeal—in many eyes also personifies the Bible Belt’s friendly fascism. If so, the description of ultra-conservative would-be president Barry Goldwater “as a reactionary cowboy, especially in regard to foreign affairs—someone “who shot first and asked questions later”” (Schuparra 1998:xvii) applies to these embodiments of friendly fascism and its global extension in imperialism. Incidentally (or maybe not), these personifications (and many other from Congress or the federal government to state legislatures and beyond) of friendly fascism come from the US South. Apparently, they seek to spread the Bible Belt’s Puritan tyranny to the entire country by “whatever it takes”, including “maximum criminal charges” for immoral conduct, thus placing America “in the shadow of Dixie” (Cochran 2001), as well as under the rule of what seems like an institutionalized (Texas-based) *cosa nostra* exemplified in mafia-like Enronism, or a narrow exclusive clique of plutocrats-oligarchs and theocrats (including the vice-president, the House majority leader). As a Methodist minister publicly observed in the 2000s, “what we are seeing is an authoritarian assault on US society, through theocratic ideas and the power of the military. It is the most perilous danger America faces, especially since millions of Americans don’t see the tyranny”. This observation implies that US democracy is increasingly endangered by friendly fascism, based on the theocratic “tyranny of Puritanism” personified by Southern “good ol’ boys” or “cowboys” in control of federal/state governments, joined with an imperial military force seeking to create a world “empire of liberty” perceived by most non-Americans as the opposite just as the conservative American dream “looks more like a nightmare to other countries and cultures” (Beck 2002:40). As in the past, in recent years American conservatism has tried to export the moral “tyranny of Puritanism” to the world. For instance, a conservative US ambassador in a Balkan country expressed outrage at what he saw as its government’s lenient punishment of an ethnic Albanian accused for organizing prostitution to the point of influencing it to apply harsher sanctions, even offering a reward for his capture [sic!]. By contrast, US ambassadors

in this country not only did not press for harsher punishments of the ethnic Albanian terrorist “thugs and murderers” (as NATO secretary general called them) committing heinous criminal acts ranging from ethnic cleansing to civilian murders in the early 2000s, but overtly or covertly protected and supported them as “freedom fighters”. Here, immoral or sinful behaviors like prostitution apparently awoke US conservatives’ Puritan sensibility, but crimes such as ethnic cleansing and murders did not, or not so much. Overall, one can predict that the moral “tyranny of Puritanism” will be an increasingly important “export commodity” for US social conservatives, especially if the latter continue to dominate the government and politics, even if the world shows no enthusiasm for it.

⁴ Bourdieu and Haacke (1995) imply that the projects of the likes of Buchanan or Helms in Congress and beyond would result in “unfriendly” fascism. Some recent political events in the US South and the rest of the country, including even California (anti-immigrant and anti-minority referenda, governor recalls resembling a coup d’état) and New York (a previous conservative mayor-turned-hero was compared with Mussolini), give a taste of “unfriendly fascism”. A recent exemplar or symptom of “unfriendly fascism” in the US South is the brutally coercive redistricting of Texas by state (and even Congress) conservatives, with all the tragedy (“primitive power grab”) and comedy involved (most non-conservative lawmakers fleeing into a neighboring state’s hotels); another, Enron’s mafia-style or cowboy-capitalist practices implicating many state/federal politicians. Overall, if there are any US states where politics reaches or approaches the model of “unfriendly fascism”—i.e. brutal, near-barbarian, or fascist-style domination by conservatives—they are, alongside Texas as the seeming “vanguard”, probably Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma, Utah, or Virginia (the list is probably longer), especially in recent times. Consider only the state of Texas: it alone has conducted more than one-third of the all the executions in the US since the reinstatement of capital punishment. No wonder, this state, essentially owned and politically ruled by an (oil-based) narrow plutocratic-oligarchic clique of “good old boys” and “cowboys-capitalists”, has become the symbol of the worst and ugliest in American politics (and culture). Moreover, this state’s political elite has attempted to expand to the entire country, via control of the presidency, Congress and other branches of the federal government, its “unfriendly fascism”, thus exemplifying the observed tendency for American democracy to fall under the Southern authoritarian “shadow of Dixie”. It remains to be seen whether in the future American democracy will completely succumb to the temptation of this anti-democratic, particularly Texas-style, politics, with its mix of “unfriendly” and “friendly” fascism, but so far signs are not encouraging: e.g. Southern conservatives dominate the federal legislature and executive, and try to capture the judiciary. If so, that would be the victory of the conservative South in America’s perennial ideological-cultural wars, thus its ultimate revenge for the lost civil war.

⁵ Yet, as classical sociologists like Mannheim implied, for US conservatives, just as European fascists, knowledge of history and the present, theorizing and other intellectual activities are luxuries they “cannot afford”, even ideological “enemies”. Notably, a common trait of American conservatism and European fascism is virulent anti-intellectualism; thus McCarthyism and Nazism are “brothers in arms” in this regard. This holds true especially of their treatment of social science, unless the latter allows and promotes the conservative control of society, including imposition of moral-religious and ideological purity by coercion. To the extent that they exploit this science to serve the goals of authoritarian conservatism, for both US conservatives and Euro-fascists social-scientific knowledge *is* really power. Hence, they emphasize practical applications of social science and dismiss or disdain its theory (plus philosophy); consider fascists’ and conservatives’ discomfort, suspicion or enmity *vis-à-vis* intellectuals, especially those holding different ideas (“liberals”). The anti-intellectualism of American conservatism manifests the disinclination of, as Mannheim observed, the conservative mentality for “theorizing”. In particular, the 1980s-2000s conservative counter-revolution re-opened this Pandora’s box of anti-intellectualism and carried it to the limit (e.g. “plain talk” by US conservative presidents in the manner of “Wild-West cowboys”). Overall, such anti-intellectual inclinations of US conservatives reflect an “unreflexive, rigid thought process” (Miller, Slomczynski and Kohn 1987:442-4), as well as “rigid conformance to the dictates of authority and intolerance of nonconformity” (Kohn et al. 1997: 616). This built-in negative attitude to social science partly explains their suspicion of, if not outright hostility to, (higher) education, as expressed in actions ranging from budget cuts as (often) sanctions for “un-American” views to direct moralist-ideological-religious attacks ever-escalating since Fall 2001. For example, even a putatively moderate conservative, e.g. with a zero coefficient of right-wing ideology (Levitt 1996), such as the presidential candidate in the 1996 election, intended to abolish the Federal Department of Education by invoking, like most US conservatives, various Paretian rationalizations: individual freedom, choice and responsibility, small government, more power to states, people and families, fiscal prudence.

⁶ This condition resembles Orwellian-like hypothetical or historical totalitarian societies, in which individuals are in a permanent uncertainty and fear about what kind of “thought crime” and other ideological-political delinquency they have committed or will be imputed by the guardians of correctness.

⁷This applies to “pragmatic” US political conservatives rather than their moral-religious counterparts or “true believers” for whom friendly fascism, underscored by the Puritan oppression, may be an end in itself dictated by putative Divine reasons and realized in a sort of “heaven on earth”, not just an instrument to secular goals. In this case, friendly fascism becomes a project, part, or result of Christian neo-theocracy in the form of a Bible Belt, where, like in the Dark Middle Ages, politics or state tends to be the servant of religion or church.

⁸ Counterfactually, if the American public knew that “tough on crime” policies, including legislating morality, are the hallmark of authoritarian, fascist and theocratic rather than democratic penal systems, it might give a pause to the neo-conservative alchemy of moral rhetoric in its currently unstoppable march. Yet, due to their vast and effective apparatus of brain washing via ideological indoctrination and political propaganda, US neo-conservatives have been remarkably successful in hiding this fact from the public, so to perpetuate (to paraphrase Merton) the “reign of error” and ignorance in the society. Thus, such ignorance is not exactly bliss for most Americans but has a positive “function” for neo-conservative “tough on crime” practices by sustaining and even reinforcing them.

⁹ For instance, various new laws dealing with sexual offences at federal and state levels are essentially Draconian by lacking a reasonable proportion between crime and punishment. Many of them criminalize such vague and ill-defined crimes or sins as sexual harassment, indecency, and others. This (seemingly) deliberate vagueness of legal definition advantages frequently untrustworthy accusers and zealous government prosecutors to the point of often acting as persecutors, while being detrimental to, in many cases innocent, defendants and convicts. Recent waves of the conservative-generated hysteria about such private behaviors have led to just as fed back on such legal redefinitions of criminality, as witnessed by the sexual harassment craze since the 1990s. Sexual harassment and related immoral acts, re-criminalized by cultural conservatives, are legally so vaguely or broadly defined that leave a large room for, as the concept of friendly fascism predicts, arbitrary abuses of power by government and for conservative (and feminist) manipulation of and interference in private life dictated by the “politics of Puritanism”. In doing so US cultural conservatives often enter in various unlikely coalitions with militant feminists. Thus, in the early 2000s the neo-conservative administration (Education Department) teamed with a militant feminist organization (the American Association of University Women) to produce a report on the “prevalence of sexual abuse in schools”. Admittedly, the report was based on this organization’s surveys of students and was delivered to an ultra-conservative Congress. Predictably, this conservative-feminist report claims that “sex abuse is prevalent in schools”. In turn, as reported, “some educators took issue with the way the report combines sexual abuse with other behaviors, such as inappropriate jokes, in one broad category of sexual misconduct”. As the spokesman for the National Education Association said, lumping such behaviors together with serious sexual misconduct “does more harm than good by creating unjustified alarm and undermining confidence in public schools.” It seems as if this “unholy alliance” of US social conservatism or friendly fascism with militant feminism (often branded by conservatives as “femi-Nazism”) sought to recreate an Orwellian world of “thought crimes”. This alliance is hardly surprising since (if) the social-conservative (anti-teacher) agenda converges with the militant-feminist (“anti-male”) crusade in the academia and beyond. The outcome of the report is likely to be another set of Draconian (“tough-on-crime”) conservative laws and policies (enacted by Congress and state legislatures), further intensifying the “tyranny of Puritanism” in America. At any rate, as defined, sexual harassment often covers what seem exercises of free speech, as politically incorrect or misunderstood utterances are in (too) many cases subject to a criminal treatment making those pronouncing them criminals in accordance with the conservative equation of verbal (and other) improprieties and indecencies with crimes. Such conservative (and feminist) practices negating the venerable American principle of freedom of speech resemble or usher in Orwell’s world of “thought crimes.”

¹⁰ Frank and Cook (1995:203) describe “increasingly impoverished” political debate, including an “increasingly ill-informed and ill-tempered” electorate, in modern America as “yet another cost of [US] current cultural trajectory” (e.g. obsession with celebrities).

¹¹ In classical novels, among the most vivid depictions of conservative Puritan hypocrisy include Dickens’ picture of English Puritans and well as Balzac’s historical-sociological (as recognized by Marx and Engels) anatomy of their functional equivalents or proxies in France’s *ancien regime*.

¹² Only a few authoritarian countries execute mentally retarded and juveniles: Amnesty International reports that the US is among those rare countries in the world that still apply the death penalty to these offenders. According to Amnesty International, since 1990 there have been 34 executions of people who committed a crime while being under 18 years old: 19 in the US and the remaining 15 in China, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Congo. And of those authoritarian countries, all but Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, have changed (or considering changing) their laws in the last decade to ban the execution of minor offenders. Amnesty International comments that the US “promotes itself as global human rights champion [but] as other violators drop away [it] could be said to

be the least progressive country in the world on this issue.” Rather, the country has become the world leader in children executions; not surprisingly peculiar and proud Bible-Belt or Wild-West states like Texas account for the majority of such cases. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice’s reaction to Amnesty International’s criticism was, as usual, self-righteous and hostile: “Foreign countries [sic!] would be better off leaving Texas to be run as Texas citizens want to see it run, and that includes carrying out the death penalty.” The message seems to be: the world should accept this neo-barbarism of children executions in Texas/America--or else!

¹³ In addition to notorious sweat shops, a sort of modern slavery has, thanks to neo-conservative “tough on crime” policies, reappeared in America in the form of the government’s coercive use of prison inmates for slave-like labor. For instance, most Southern (and other) US states routinely coerce their prisoners into more or less degrading work, which is either paid at a slave-like rate (e.g. \$1 per hour) or unpaid, with some prisoners even forced to pay a kind of rent (sic!) for their imprisonment. Oddly enough, most Americans, far from seeing these conservative practices as a new of form or variation of slavery, approve them as Divinely-ordained sanctions for sins or crimes; recall, most of US prisoners are kinds of sinners like drug users. In its legendary exhibition of moral hypocrisy, the US conservative government righteously chastises the coercive use of prison inmates by other states (e.g. China) as a kind of slavery or slave labor. And, deceived or blinded by the neo-conservative brain-washing propaganda, most Americans are said to be “shocked” by these same practices they support or fail to recognize, in their own country in the ethnocentric belief that if something, including prison labor, is “made in America” it must be “good” or simply the “best “. The above case indicates that US friendly fascism tends to evolve into a sort of new slavery for imprisoned sinners and other moral deviants, not to mention traditional or violent criminals. This new slavery, like the old, is justified by politics (“tough on crime” policies) and ideology (“Americanism”), as well as fundamentalist religion (“born again Christians”). Simply, the “tyranny of Puritanism”, as the driving force of friendly fascism, logically or inexorably leads to this new form of slavery in which sinners are forced to pay for their sins by hard labor. Given venerable Puritan self-righteousness, friendly fascism or neo-conservatism does all this with a “perfectly clear conscience” of its representatives by treating what is virtually everywhere seen as slavery, e.g. the coercive labor of prisoners, as a virtue or God-given necessity. This case illustrates the “perversities” or “normal pathology” of conservative friendly fascism (and ethnocentrism) that tends to convert the pathological like slave-style labor by prisoners into the normal or virtuous, and conversely: individual moral liberty into sin.

¹⁴ For example, media reported that a conservative congressman (from South Dakota) was sentenced to 100 days in jail for killing a motorcyclist. At first sight, given the typically Draconic character of the US penal system, “100 days” might seem to be an error and “100 years” to be the correct sentence—after all, the congressman was found guilty of manslaughter, speeding and running a stop sign (a pattern of behavior repeated many times before)--for a collision that killed the motorcyclist. Compare this punishment of a murder by a repeated offender from the “top heavy” power elite with the harsh punishments, including life sentences, routinely handed down to other classes for minor offences like writing “hot” checks, stealing pizzas or vitamins (“three-strikes”), not to mention their execution for similar murders. If so, the conservative Draconian penal system does not really apply to the rich, powerful and famous but only to the masses or those who cannot afford proper and exorbitantly expensive legal assistance denying or mocking the American ideal of “justice for all” or “equality before the law” (“all men are created equal”?). But, as cynics say, how could one expect otherwise if the rich and powerful create or use the conservative criminal justice system as the weapon of their social control and domination.

¹⁵ Ironically, that Guantanamo's prison for “foreign terrorists” or “unlawful combatants” may resemble a Nazi-style concentration camp is implied in a US appeals court ruling that they *cannot* be held indefinitely and denied lawyers, as well as by their egregious physical and mental abuses by the American government. Notably, as *The Future of Freedom Foundation* states, the “president now has the unrestricted power to round up unlimited numbers of American citizens within the United States and incarcerate them in military brigades or concentration camps for the rest of their lives and keep them from ever again communicating with friends, families, and attorneys.”

¹⁶ No wonder, in 1994-2004 elections, conservative electoral strategy and rhetoric were based, with the help of expensive advertising campaigns paid for by almost unlimited political contributions of their rich constituencies, on the vilification of the political enemy. No doubt, some of their liberal adversaries adopted the same (“smear”) tactic, but due to the pertinence of financial constraints in a political system based on what Weber and Pareto call “naked” and “demagogic” plutocracy (simply money), its effectiveness was lower. Further, many conservative congressional and other victories between 1994 and 2004 were due to the Machiavellian mix of negative political advertising--in which the opponent is first vilified as an enemy and then destroyed as a human personality--with the money contributed by political action committees in most large corporations which historically have overwhelmingly

contributed to conservatives. Simply, in conjunction with the asymmetry-turned-alchemy of their virulent moral-political rhetoric, most US conservatives win these elections because they over-spend their political rivals.

¹⁷ McCleary (2002:64) observes that in the early 2000s “in order to stay united and fight the “axis of evil”, Americans seem fully prepared to give up some of their rights to a free press in the spirit of rallying behind the idea that you’re “either with us or you’re against us.”“

¹⁸ This was stressed many times by James Becker (a former secretary of state) and other financial conservatives in the elections during the 1990s.

¹⁹ Fiscal hypocrisy also highlights the 1990s balanced-budget advocacy of a conservative “populist majority” engaged in religious-like crusades in and outside Congress and state legislatures to enforce its financial, as well as moral, duplicity via constitutional amendments and other laws.

²⁰ *The Future of Freedom Foundation*’s president asks the question “If This Is Freedom, What Exactly Is Dictatorship?” in reference to the US as a whole due to the neo-conservative “war of terror”. The answer is implied in the question as well as the suggestion that the American people should be freed “from dictatorship”.

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