The Age of Neoconservatism:
The Role of Ideology in Modern American Education

Adam M. Barish

Master of Philosophy – Politics, Development & Democratic Education
Supervisor: Dr. Ian Frowe
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Abstract

The pervasiveness of neoconservatism in government and culture has profoundly influenced the direction of American education. Neoconservatism has been the dominant ideology of the United States since the 1980s, having immeasurably affected political leadership and the social environment. Drawing upon literature and modern history, this treatise examines the theoretical and practical implications of a neoconservative America as contextualized by the state of education. Clarification about the meaning and significance of ideology provides a framework to better understand what neoconservatism is, how it works, and which strategies it employs to maintain ideological dominance. This analysis incorporates a representative case study that demonstrates the application of neoconservatism to issues of higher education. Numerous observations situate the educational questions of today in terms of their ideological shortcomings and social implications. Ranging from the 1980s to the present, this examination delves into the educational and economic deficiencies resulting from contemporary American political processes. The contention is that much of neoconservative practice as presently constituted is impractical, inconsistent, or unsustainable. The value of this study at this particular historical moment is to illuminate the impact of ideology on modern American education.

Declaration

I hereby declare this thesis to be an original document.

I further certify that the sources of which I have availed myself have been stated in the body of the thesis and in the references. The rest of the work is my own.

This thesis does not exceed 20,000 words.

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Adam Barish
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I: Introduction

"The problem with the West is not that its governing values are hollow. It is that it cannot help betraying them."[1]

At a time when gridlock in American politics has ceased to be the cost of doing business and is instead perceived to be business as usual, the cacophony of misleading noise makes information useful to public discourse harder to distill. It would be easy to assign blame to any number of usual suspects, and I should start off by admitting that I give in to this temptation as much as any otherwise levelheaded, rational person. Of course this accomplishes very little, but it could be argued that our frustrations are entirely self-justifying. There are potentially many explanations for this cultural displeasure, but, in trying to take a lesson from my own research, I shall save many of my views until after we discuss what is at the root of this widespread aggravation, a discontent made even less tolerable without the right words to articulate it. So I will ask a basic and highly unoriginal question: What is ideology?

The word "ideology" is loaded with definition and connotation, but its ubiquity in social and academic circles saps much of the word's depth in favor of simplicity. A simple definition of ideology cannot explicate the complexity of its substance; instead "ideology" can now be applied in the political sphere to any situation that we associate with bias or inflexibility. Inflexibility is one thing, but dismissing ideology because of its inherent bias is like dismissing cheese because you dislike cheddar. There are a number of implications and considerations regarding the inner nature of ideology, and bias is saturated throughout. It is therefore hard to reasonably condemn it for a relationship that is in no way denied.

Despite this unassailable connection, it remains a struggle to assign a universal and consistent meaning to ideology: "The debate over ideology has been made to refer to what we *can* know about our social and political life; to what we actually *do* know, but in a distorted fashion; to what we *think* we know but actually do not; or to the *impossibility* of knowing for certain" (Freeden, 1998, p.25). If we take for granted that there are particular things we certifiably "know," then this summary hints at one of the central uncertainties: the distinction between belief and knowledge. For the purpose of this written analysis, "knowledge" is

[1] Eagleton, 1991, p.xvii

indicative of unadulterated, indisputable fact. Of course facts have had a tendency – spanning the history of civilization – to change when needed (e.g. the sun used to orbit around the Earth), but this does not necessarily have anything to do with ideology. An ideological framework, generally speaking, absorbs knowledge in order to support a way of viewing the world. Several centuries ago, any ideological view of merit would likely have had to accept that the sun revolved around the Earth; after discovering this is not the case, any credible ideological view since would have to accept this development. Ideological battles are not meant to argue the verisimilitude of singular facts. So why argue?

> What, then, would be meant if somebody remarked in the course of a pub conversation: 'Oh, that's just ideological!' Not, presumably, that what had just been said was simply false, though this might be implied; if that was what was meant, why not just say so?… To claim in ordinary conversation that someone is speaking ideologically is surely to hold that they are judging a particular issue through some rigid framework of preconceived ideas which distorts their understanding. (Eagleton, 1991, p.3)

Within this intellectual crusade are questions of far greater import than truth or falsehood, since ideological differences are not defined along lines of individual facts. In the course of developing one's ideological perspective, one fact means very little. But one fact, and another fact, and another fact, and eventually the remaining breadth and depth of human knowledge are at some point connected by the thinker in a way that creates a unique illustration of the world. We do not inherit this illustration – we breathe life into it. Karl Marx, in his famous comparison to the "camera obscura," clarifies that we do not necessarily see the world as it is, but as we are able (or willing) to perceive it. We are prone to imagine that ideologies are "transcendental and independent entities, which human beings 'perceive', 'grasp' and 'live up to'," but this is an inversion of "the relationship between the human subject and consciousness [that] rests on a totally false assumption" (Parekh, 1982, pp.7–8). Ideologies are not timeless thought structures to be sifted through in the same way we select items at a supermarket. Ideologies are the result of human consciousness – not the other way around – thereby ensuring that each of our illustrations of the world is unique. The resulting diversity of ideologies yields questions of far greater import than whether an assertion is "simply false," but ideology cannot stray too far from an emphasis on fact so as to be unrecognizable to the truth. It is not meant to encapsulate "simple 'other-worldliness' or idly disconnected thought" (Eagleton, 1991, p.222). In order to

have any purpose, an ideology has to be grounded within generally acceptable parameters of our condition.

Many of our best thinkers point to the rise of secularism during the Enlightenment as the vacuum that created space for ideology.[2] There is a bit more nuance that such a blanket statement might gloss over, but in determining the function of ideology, there are important considerations reflected in organized religion:

> Traditional religious world-views owe their persistence to their ability to meet… basic needs. They do this by providing agents with approved models of action, goals, ideals, and values, and by furnishing interpretations of such important existential features of human life as birth and death, suffering, evil, etc. In addition to such basic existential needs, human agents and groups have more mundane needs, wants, and interests which a given set of habits, beliefs, and attitudes, a given 'culture,' can satisfy more or less adequately. (Geuss, 1981, p.22)

Searching for answers is a pursuit that makes us consummately human. This is due to our insatiable need to believe. "Belief" is another word that carries with it the baggage of subjectivity, but I will attempt to avoid this potentially intriguing distraction. As Eagleton suggests, "It is false to believe that the sun moves round the earth [*sic*], but it is not absurd" (1991, p.12). No matter the context, humans will choose to believe in something. Most of the time we choose to shroud our beliefs in, at the very least, our interpretations of things we know. It is because we base our beliefs on what we know that,

> if we come across a body of, say, magical or mythological or religious doctrine to which many people have committed themselves, we can often be reasonably sure that there is something in it. What that something is may not be, for sure, what the exponents of such creeds believe it to be; but it is unlikely to be a mere nonsense either. (1991, p.12)

Religions, which often deal with harsh and unpleasant certitudes of life, cannot retain their followings without attempting to answer our greatest questions in a potentially plausible manner. If we accept that the beliefs to which we subscribe attempt to explain the things we know to be true (including, in some cases, why we may *not* know something; e.g. if I have a disease, I know for a fact that I have it, but I may seek an explanation for why I have it, even one not based entirely or at all upon fact), then so far we have yet to associate ideology with a truly

[2] Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, highlights this change: "The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness… the suffering which belief in part composed did not disappear… What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning." (1983, p.11)

compelling purpose. Up to this point, ideology seems more reactive than proactive. But how could such a polarizing concept be a mere bystander, an entity off to the side of the many intellectual disputes it engenders? In short, this is simply not the case: "[Ideology] must figure as an organizing social force which… seeks to equip [human subjects] with forms of value and belief relevant to their specific social tasks" (1991, p.222). Ideologies may result from human consciousness, but subscribing to a particular ideological preference is both a reflection of our views and a prescription for our actions. As an "organizing social force," an ideology provides both a lens through which we critically consider our ongoing condition *and* the impetus to act in accordance with these considerations. It is theory, it is praxis, and yet its meaning is still somewhat unclear.

Ideology need not be defined in negative terms. Its most functional definition is merely a descriptive one, stating what a set ideology entails and to what extent it entails them. This definition simply provides neutral information, helping to identify the essential qualities and recognized associations within a given ideological perspective. It is also not hard to see how ideology can be employed for good; it provides a structure that identifies societal problems and proposes potential solutions. Vladimir Lenin, for example, used ideology as a rallying cry, crusading for a vision that would eventually become the USSR. More often than not, however – and seemingly with exclusivity now – ideology is used and understood in a pejorative sense. Ideology is by no means entirely negative; overlap with its positive and descriptive manifestations is essential in order to connect with the wants and needs of individual people. But the burden of negativity is radioactive: no one wishes to be seen as ideological. "Ideology is the thought of the *other*, the thought of someone other than oneself. To characterize a view as 'ideological' is, it seems, already implicitly to criticize it" (Thompson, 1990, p.5). As a term, "ideology" need not be such a pivotal focus of societal ire, but its usefulness in describing the modern state of affairs has ceased to extend beyond the negative.

For this reason, "ideology" will be employed throughout this written analysis in keeping with its pejorative and more universal understanding (unless otherwise noted). To better grasp this definition, we need to make sense of the underlying rationale behind such negativity. "Most people would now concede that without preconceptions of some kind… we would not even be able to identify an issue or situation, let alone pass judgement upon it" (Eagleton, 1991, p.3). But if we accept "preconceptions" as both an antecedent and consequence of ideology, and if

ideology is necessary just to be able to identify what we are looking at or dealing with, then where is the problem? The passage continues – "Perhaps *rigid* preconceptions makes the difference" (1991, p.4) – and in so doing suggests an answer, or at least a starting point in the search for one.

The rigidity associated with "being ideological" cannot be overstated. As Raymond Geuss points out, "in some cases there may be noncognitive beliefs, preferences, etc. which *require* to be accepted that they be mistaken for cognitive beliefs" (1981, p.29). He then goes on to say what should seem obvious, that "if the only reason we hold the belief is that we (falsely) think that it is a cognitive belief, then when we are enlightened about its epistemic standing, we will give it up." But he writes this second part in jest, because general preferences (and certainly ideological ones) are not always conducive to this sort of logic. Evidence that stands in contrast to an ideological opinion does not necessarily make that opinion obsolete; the two (evidence and ideology) do not operate on the same plane, as one is based solely on fact (knowledge) while the other fosters a kind of connective tissue between facts that cannot simply be undone by measurable realities (as odd as that may sound).

The even greater issue is that it is arguably harder than ever to prescribe appropriate responses to America's ails. Given the degree of modern social interconnectivity, identifying the source of a large-scale problem is not only exceptionally complicated, but often disputable. If we knew for certain which steps would be guaranteed to bring about the end of the current economic recession, we would have taken them several years ago. We face a similarly monumental yet equally vexing task in addressing the shortcomings of the public education system, which is falling behind despite tremendous overall efforts to regain its international footing. It is, at present, impossible to approve (with any certainty) of a scientific method to counteract either of these problems, and this lack of certainty opens the future up to argument and division. You and I may both have access to the same set of facts, but after arranging them our world views may not look at all similar. As a result of what we know as much as what we do not, our ideologies enable us to fill in the gaps and subsequently argue in favor of specific ideas and actions. Without knowing exactly what is needed to fix the economy or education, it is impossible to significantly impact believers of any ideological preference. And even if we did know what to do next, enlightenment for some may still be an impossibility. That is what we are talking about in terms of ideological rigidity.

Ideologies profess certainty when explaining the past, present, and future; all problems are transient and doubt is offensive. Yet the domain of the uncertain serves as the battleground for virtually every modern ideological conflict. Politicians are not entirely burdened when addressing great mysteries like public education and the economy because ideas for the future cannot be proved or disproved until they are the past. Only after discovering the success or failure of a specifically implemented plan can we pass meaningful judgment. Even then, many of these judgments are potentially divisive because of the impossible task of comparing our actual history to an alternative one in which events might have transpired somewhat differently. Political parties maintain power only to the extent that they can demonstrate the value of their associated ideologies in charting a course for the future.

Consider the division between Republicans and Democrats over President Barack Obama's healthcare agenda, a disagreement that remains as volatile as ever because neither side can absolutely guarantee its consequences. With so many unknowns, our leaders and our neighbors alike have resorted to an ideological foundation to inform their choices. This has significant consequences: a. abstractions like philosophy and morality are introduced into a debate that has concrete ramifications for the real world; b. because each side is aware of the *other's* ideological foundation in establishing its respective view, they are both in a position to claim to have superior ideas while denouncing the other's as fundamentally flawed; and c. the voting public is fully aware that neither party has a monopoly on truth, so it accepts ideology as a reasonable basis on which to decide the great questions of our time. In sum, elections are decided and policies implemented based on the party that seems to best argue the knowns *and* the unknowns. Every temporal culture in American history has absorbed some ideological tenets more than others (e.g. the current widespread emphasis on spending cuts), and the party that best connects with these will hold sway. From here, we begin to see the outline of a dominant ideology.

Given a perpetual uncertainty regarding the future, a dominant ideology is that which best articulates the most acceptable blueprint for success. "Success" may relate to a number of different metrics (e.g. economy, order), but sociopolitically it is far more elusive than in objective science. The blueprint need not be too specific (for many reasons, like objectivity, it cannot be), and it also need not be what is later classified (when historians look back) as the "correct" blueprint. It only needs to seem or feel correct in the context of its circumstances and

the then-present ideological zeitgeist. One of the primary functions of modern political ideology is to justify the powerful, or as Thompson pontificates, "Ideology, broadly speaking, is *meaning in the service of power*" (1990, p.7). Successful leaders of a successful political party are those who can employ an ideological framework to productive ends (i.e. electoral victory). Political strategists frame elections around more than a man, woman, or party; instead, a vote one way or another has to *mean something*. A vote is more than the selection of a course for the future – how you vote says something about who you are. While this opens the door to securing support by way of manipulation, the more significant storyline is that choosing on the basis of philosophy or morality is an act embraced by the American voter.

A dominant ideology becomes dominant and remains so by making sense of the knowns and unknowns in a palatable way. It goes without saying that dominant ideologies can achieve this "by falsifying social reality, suppressing and excluding certain unwelcome features of it, or suggesting that these features cannot be avoided" (Eagleton, 1991, p.27). Securing power in this way would seem largely unsustainable, but Eagleton suggests that if "dominant ideologies very often involve falsity… it is partly because most people are not in fact cynics." Cynicism may feel like part of the present-day national creed, but its prevalence is not so extreme that demand necessitates a change in practice, one in which expectations of clarity and honesty are more central. Again, it is because of daunting unknowns that ideological arguments function as rational currency, but in allowing beliefs to enter fact-based discussion, it is not hard to connect the dots that lead to generalizing and distortion.

> the language of indeterminate abstractions serves the ideological purpose in several different ways. It allows the discussion to be 'torn away from the facts'. It enables the ideologist to present himself as a champion of… 'basic human values'. It absolves him from the obligation to attend to specific social evils, since he is only interested in preserving perennial values… Further… the debates about abstractions are necessarily irresoluble, and hence the ideologist can never be cornered. Since the abstractions lack empirical content, the ideologist remains free to define them as he pleases. His critic is therefore forced to do battle with him on his terms, and obviously cannot win. (Parekh, 1982, p.141)

Ideological dominance is ultimately maintained because its "statements [are] true to society as at present constituted," even though they may be "false in so far as they thereby serve to block off the possibility of a transformed state of affairs" (Eagleton, 1991, p.27). In other words, the simplest way for power to be maintained is to fundamentally undermine the notion of alternative realities.

The elimination of conceptions of alternative realities, though certainly a bold strategy, can actually be taken a step further and has been in the form of cultural restorationism. The cultural restorationist not only denies the possibility of alternative realities, but actually denies the quality of different pasts and the merit of alternative futures. Cultural restorationism is predicated on accepting the present state of affairs – whatever that may be – as the pinnacle of existence. Any past that is not representative of the present was merely a stepping-stone, and any future that is not a continuation of the present is wholly misguided. But there is always a version of the past (usually the most recent version) that cultural restorationists will try to reproduce, which is the "past" to which Thompson here refers: "At the very moment when human beings are involved in creating their own history, in undertaking unprecedented tasks, they draw back before the risks and uncertainties of such an enterprise and invoke representations which assure them of their continuity with the past" (1990, p.42). Bold, brave, and new are shunned in favor of security. This security, however, is masked in the arrogance of claiming that we – society, the human race – have *arrived*. Fear of the unknown legitimates cultural restorationism, and cultural restorationism is the basis for America's current dominant ideology.

Before we call this dominant ideology by name, however, we should consider an example from the current political landscape. Little has been left to the imagination regarding whom the modern Republican Party looks to as the paragon: President Ronald Reagan. Reagan's name was evoked so often during the 2012 Republican presidential primaries that it ceased to carry with it any meaning beyond survival tactic. Every Republican candidate attempted to embody Reagan's approach to policy, his vernacular,[3] and his record, as though the hopeful candidate might be the second coming. Yet many of their views still do not necessarily reflect Reagan's. A notable example is taxation: despite the perception of Reagan as an anti-tax champion, he ultimately raised taxes eleven times; by contrast, any viable Republican in 2012 (and at least the short-term future) has to claim to oppose tax increases of any sort, this being certified by the near-full participation of the party in signing Grover Norquist's "Taxpayer Protection Pledge," which essentially forbids any practical tax increase. What this really means is that the association with Reagan is not about reflection – it is about the brand. "At the very moment when continuity is threatened, they *invent* a past which restores the calm" (Thompson, 1990,

[3] Anderson asserts that "nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language." (1983, p.145)

p.42). What matters is not that any of these men or women might have actually been Reagan reborn, but that we will ourselves into believing it. Fear of the unknown requires that we reach into the past (or distort it) for comfort; we aim to replicate this rather than boldly take on an unknowable future.[4] Such behavior is reasonably described as conservative, helping to illuminate America's current dominant ideology: neoconservatism.

[4] Marx put it best: "Men make their own history but not just as they please. They do not choose the circumstances for themselves, but have to work upon circumstances as they find them, have to fashion the material handed down by the past. The legacy of the dead generations weighs like [a nightmare] upon the brains of the living. At the very time when they seem to be engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, when they seem to be creating something perfectly new – in such epochs of revolutionary crisis, they are eager to press the spirits of the past into their service, borrowing the names of the dead, reviving old war-cries, dressing up in traditional costumes, that they may make a braver pageant in the newly-staged scene of universal history." (1926, p.23)

II: Neoconservatism – The Dominant Ideology

"…a social theorist may adopt a group's point of view… because of professional socialisation, the influence of the dominant ideology, or he is convinced of its validity."[5]

The relationship between a political ideology and a political party is often clear, but ideology and party are most assuredly not synonymous. This is a topic I will return to later, but for a brief moment forget what I just said in the name of an illustration. The bounds of neoconservatism are not at all the same as the bounds of America's major rightist party (the Republicans), but the overlap is significant enough to indicate the weight of neoconservatism on the current generation. During the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal ushered in over a generation of unabashedly active federal government and general election success for Democrats. However, ideological ebbing and flowing from one generation to the next is sewn into American history[6] – Democrats could not maintain control forever. Eventually there would be a high water mark to catalyze a profound ideological shift to the right because, of course, history repeats itself. And so it did under President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Johnson lost for Democrats when he championed an active federal presence in the Civil Rights Movement, pushing Southern Democrats to finally defect from FDR's odd Democratic coalition. But LBJ lost the ideological battle because of Vietnam. Democrats were already seen as somewhat weaker on defense and the fight against communism; a reasonable argument can be made to suggest that any Democrat in the White House of the 1960s would have decisively chosen to invade Vietnam to compensate. However, the calamitous nature of the conflict created a backlash that only confirmed the suspicions of many: Democrats cannot be trusted to wage war and beat communism. Undoubtedly this is a highly generalized explanation, but ever since Vietnam the American ideological zeitgeist has been a neoconservative one.

President Richard Nixon was not a prototypical neoconservative, nor did he do any favors for the cause with the Watergate scandal, but the foundation was already in place for a

[5] Parekh, 1982, p.45

[6] President Bill Clinton identifies the source of this phenomenon in his recent book, *Back to Work*: "Because we were founded in reaction to the unaccountable and overreaching power of British colonialism, we've often been of two minds: we don't want too much government, but we want enough. How much is enough but not too much is the traditional dividing line between liberals and conservatives." (2011, p.16)

neoconservative agenda to emerge. The Republicans finally got past the Watergate affair with Reagan's decisive victory over President Jimmy Carter in 1980. Yes, I know I said that ideology and party are not the same thing, but the correlation between the two is significant for at least one reason: if one party more or less retains dominance, fringe elements of the associated ideology will have more time and opportunity to become commonplace:

> [By the 1990s] the social model… presented by the USA was very different from what it had been [under and subsequent to FDR]. Then… it represented a creative compromise between a vigorous capitalism and highly wealthy elites, on the one hand, and egalitarian values, strong trade unions, and the welfare policies of the New Deal, on the other… However, during the Reagan years the USA changed fundamentally… US concepts of democracy increasingly equated it with limited government within an unrestrained capitalist economy (Crouch, 2004, pp.10–1)

The modern Republican Party is built on a coalition comparable in strangeness to FDR's Democrats. It marries Wall Street money to Main Street Christian fundamentalism, yet these distinct fiscal and social wings embrace in equal measure the notion that, as President Reagan declared in his 1981 inaugural address, "government is the problem." In response to this view, President Clinton would later write, "If government is the problem, the question is always, 'How can we get less of it?' " But Clinton continues with this warning: "If you ask the right questions, you may not always get the right answers. But if you ask the wrong questions, you *can't* get the right answers" (2011, p.17). Given the emergence and staying power of the current Tea Party movement, it is safe to say that antigovernment sentiment is alive and well in America. But if the dominant ideology of the United States supports as little government interference as possible, how can government effectively participate?

The short answer is that neoconservatism does not support as little government interference as possible – not entirely, anyway. Neoconservatism has absorbed many of the values of neoliberalism, and it is neoliberalism that advocates minimal government interference. Neoliberalism, which identifies primarily with economic considerations, is more of a classical liberalism: it emphasizes deregulation and in isolation would be better represented by modern libertarians than any other contingent. But there is more to neoconservatism than neoliberalism. Take drug policy, for example, and the distinction becomes much clearer. Neoliberals largely support drug legalization; the free market will yield the protections the public desires while minimizing government spending. Neoconservatives, however, ardently maintain the illegality of marijuana, let alone that of more serious substances. This is because neoconservatism also

advocates a social agenda, one in which certain virtues supersede an interest in deregulation. Neoconservatives are often vocal supporters of noninterference, but they are at least as vocal about the preservation of traditional values (i.e. cultural restorationism). They do not cast aside these values simply as a market cost, instead promoting a more socially conservative capitalism. Neoliberalism does form a large portion of the neoconservative platform, but the two are not one in the same.

With this in mind it is important that I elaborate, as promised, on my previous assertion that political ideology and political party are in no way synonymous or even causally related. Certainly the correlation is often profoundly illustrative, but the "postulation of a one-to-one relationship between ideology and institution has… produced considerable blindness to the multiplicity of ideologies espoused within each such grouping, as well as the large number of groups which entertain partially similar views" (Freeden, 1998, p.24). Ideological shifts across American cultural history have often held tight for many years, but that does not preclude the possibility of leadership from what would seem to be the "other" party. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was definitely a Republican, but he was a Republican in the shadow of the New Deal and would thus be unrecognizable to a modern Republican counterpart. In fact many Republican presidents and party leaders have acted in ways that might seem out of ideological character, but perhaps their actions were merely aligned with the times:

> Abraham Lincoln… got Congress to fund the transcontinental railroad and, in the heat of the Civil War, signed the Morrill Act, which set aside land in each station on which to establish public universities. Theodore Roosevelt used the power of the federal government to manage our transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, limiting monopolies' power to fix prices and to abuse women and children in the workplace and protecting vast tracts of western lands from private development. Dwight Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System with tax dollars and sent federal troops… to enforce the Supreme Court's decision on school integration. Richard Nixon signed legislation establishing the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the EPA, signed an executive order strengthening the federal affirmative action program, and… imposed wage and price controls to fend off inflation.
>
> Even after the dawn of the antigovernment era, President Reagan signed budgets that restored a sizable portion of the revenues lost to his big tax cuts, including a bill that stabilized the Social Security system for twenty-five years by adjusting benefits and raising taxes. President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act; strong amendments to the Clean Air Act to limit smog, acid rain, and emissions of toxic chemicals; and the budget reforms of 1991, which restrained spending… and modestly raised taxes. And President George W. Bush supported the No Child Left Behind law; the senior citizens' drug benefit; President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which provided unprecedented support for the global fight against AIDS and malaria; and large investments in nation-building in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Clinton, 2011, pp.30–1)

This passage written by President Clinton highlights two essential points. The first is that all of these men were willing to buck the ideological trend of their respective generations (or in Eisenhower's case, to fit right in with his) to achieve what they deemed necessary. And the second is a result of the first: none of them, including the more recent President Bush, is conservative enough to be a politically viable Republican in 2012.

As neoconservatism pulls the Republican establishment further right with seemingly each election cycle, so the Democrats must follow. The more significant storyline as the Democrats controlled the federal government virtually throughout the mid-twentieth century is not that they controlled it, but rather that in doing so they pulled the Republicans – in keeping with the dominant ideology of the time, and also in an attempt to become viable – to the left. It is not that one of America's two major political parties dominates an era so much as all parties slide together along the spectrum to reflect that era's social psychology (with serious chicken-egg questions to consider). The same thing that happened to Republicans up until Vietnam is happening to Democrats right now.

Modern political ideology exists within two distinct paradigms. The first is a more general one; leaning in any particular direction on a basic political spectrum – and the extent of that leaning – is indicative of an ideological world view. The second, however, is far more relevant to actual political practice. As each generation fosters a unique, impermanent cultural perspective, both the relevant and relative political ideologies shift the focus of the era accordingly. This is where the connection between ideology and seemingly-appropriate political party is incongruent, because there is a fundamental difference between a timeless view of the role of government as well as its ultimate form, and a widespread national attitude that seeps into every cultural pore for twenty to forty years before swinging back with the predictability of a pendulum.[7] The former is what each of us holds as a utopian ideal, but it is always sacrificed to the latter in order to appeal to each generation's precise version of "being realistic."

You may, of course, choose to disagree, but I would encourage you to ask a Democrat how the gun control fight is going. Gun control is not a priority in keeping with the noninterference, neoconservative age. The cynic would suggest that the Democrats' lack of action is just more pragmatic politics, and it is hard to argue against that. But this begs the

[7] Hereafter I will refer to this second ideological paradigm or type as the "epochal ideology."

question, "Why is this politically pragmatic?" Political pragmatism is, at least in part, fancy terminology to describe the search for the course of least resistance. This means that the present course of least resistance does not incorporate a debate over guns because opposition to such an idea is either too large, too powerful, or both. But in defense of the politicians involved, recall this Eagleton quote from chapter one: "If dominant ideologies very often involve falsity… it is partly because most people are not in fact cynics" (1991, p.27). What would seem politically pragmatic – or in this case, "false" – is potentially far less sinister.

So ingrained in the current era, it is not just that Democrats do not wish to pursue the gun control fight; many of them, in keeping with Marx's and many other academic understandings of ideological tunnel vision, are acting in accordance with what they understand to be their ideological views. This does not necessarily make them fickle, obtuse, weak, or morally bankrupt – it just means that being a Democrat is different now. There are many Democrats who are completely pro-gun liberties, opposed to any government action to obstruct the rights of gun owners; that this may seem to be incongruent with historical party tendencies or what is perceived as a "Democratic" ideology simply does not account for a reality in which ideas evolve. The cynic may be partially right, but there is an abundance of evidence – including but certainly not limited to the gun control issue – to support the possibility that the ideology of the Democratic Party, if you will, has shifted relative to the neoconservative environment in which it exists. If you actually do ask a Democrat how they feel about gun control, you may encounter surprise and even disagreement if you assert that gun control has been and should be a Democratic priority. And that is the power of a dominant ideology, the ephemeral zeitgeist of every distinct era.

Since the US is currently trending neoconservative, it follows that both Republicans and Democrats are more neoconservative than they were before the trend. This does not necessarily reflect the outcome of elections,[8] but it does indicate that leadership from both parties – while certainly not interchangeable – is skewed further to the right:

[8] That being said, Republicans have (unsurprisingly) demonstrated greater executive staying power of late. Since Vietnam, Republicans have controlled the White House 28 years to the Democrats' 16, including three consecutive terms (very unusual) under Reagan and the elder Bush. Were it not for the liberal leanings of Republican-nominated Justices Stevens, Souter, and occasionally O'Connor, the US Supreme Court would have become overwhelmingly lopsided.

> Neoliberal philosophy encouraged… the withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision (such as welfare and other aspects of the social safety net that characterized economic policy making in the three decades after World War II)… [After Reagan's election] Republican and Democratic Presidents and legislatures alike subscribed to neoliberal goals (Anyon, 2011, pp.93–4)

Since the 1980s, Democrats and Republicans share a record of deregulation and a flair for welfare policy that stands in contrast to practices of the early and mid-twentieth century. By no means have the two parties governed in the same way, but the parties are always connected in some form or another, and the connection always reflects the larger epochal ideology. For instance, the current election cycle has seen President Obama, a Democrat, compare himself to President Reagan as often as Republicans might dream to do so themselves. Whether Democrats consciously acclimated to fit the neoconservative mold or unconsciously changed under the umbrella of modern political culture matters far less than that they have in fact changed. The power of the neoconservative movement is demonstrated not because resistance to it is akin to going against the grain, but because both major political parties have opted for adaptation over contestation.

It is important to remember amidst the maelstrom of politics that the priorities our leaders set and the choices they make impact real people. But these "real people" are just as likely to be willing participants (aware or not) in engaging with and acting as agents of the epochal ideology. Regardless of what a given dominant ideology espouses, the fact that it is dominant endows it with the power to supersede beliefs that might be better aligned with an individual's wants and needs. A dominant ideology, though not to be confused with a dominant class, nevertheless will work to the advantage of some more than others, and it is a misrepresentation by its advocates if argued otherwise. Ideologies often speak incontrovertible truth – without at least some degree of which they would serve no definitive purpose – but much of what is purported in political ideology is misleading, to say the least. Ideologies are not deliberately deceitful, but distortion is an inevitable byproduct of "their attempts to ratify and legitimate… political systems" (Eagleton, 1991, p.222). Yes, without a doubt it is the age of neoconservatism, but neoconservatism reflects neither truth nor reality. It is an ideology, and as such it can only provide a way of looking at and understanding reality, a guideline for our beliefs and actions. Theory is ideology in its purest form, but this purity is always mangled when put into practice. Neoconservatism – no more or less ambitious than any other attempt to organize a civilization – will never achieve all it claims

to, and it will never be able to provide for everybody. While all political ideologies should be judged with this in mind, neoconservatism is the dominant ideology of now. It is an essential responsibility that we know what ideas and applications make it so.

III: Strategies

"…that some beliefs… are used to legitimate some social practice or institution in no way implies that those beliefs are the only ones which could be used, much less that the practice in question would cease to exist if they could no longer be used to legitimize it."[9]

Marx would keenly remind us that our ideological constructs are products of the mind, yet each new person comes to learn of ideological staples in the same way he or she might come to learn the native tongue. For all that we presume to know to have happened across the history of mankind, there is knowledge to support these conclusions. I was not alive during the American Civil War, but I feel remarkably confident that I at least have a basic understanding of when, where, and why it happened, who was in charge, and what some of the ramifications were. Ideologies are simultaneously transient and permanent, for even if one framework ceases to be relevant, it is exceptionally likely that it will inform others. This effectively immortalizes all ideological thought as in a way forever relevant. In some form or another, all ideologies are either directly (as in it remains common practice) or indirectly (its value is either historical or assimilationist) passed down from one generation to the next.

At first this seems incompatible with Marx's claim that we construct our own world views – if ideologies are creations of human consciousness, then one cannot simply be implanted in a mind like a seed in a garden. And yet, somehow, they are. From our first sentient moments, the process by which we arrange and subsequently see the world is our own undertaking; no two world views are ever the same. However, many of them appear to be virtually indistinguishable. Think of the innumerable world organizations that labor to champion this cause or that – do we think each member or advocate arrived at the same conclusion independently? We know this is not the case because we are connected to each other. Unless each of us were to inhabit our own island – never venturing off, never considering an alternative, never aware of other human life – the influence of others, living and dead, will always remain pervasive. We do not live in isolation, thus even our greatest ideas can only ever be realized after the synthesis of others. It would be unwise to argue with Marx regarding the origins of ideology if for no better reason than because he is not wrong. In its purest form ideology is ours to design, but pure ideology is

[9] Geuss, 1981, p.16

not at all the same thing as practicable ideology. Applications of theory to life are almost always messy, never truer than in an ideological context. If Marx is right, if we are the makers of our own ideologies, how can we reconcile this with our predetermined absorption of the knowledge and beliefs of others? How can two practices that simultaneously require the subversion of the other both be true? Simply put, we have ways of getting around that fact.

In attempting to understand this inconsistency, it is useful to bear in mind the types of inconsistencies to which we are prone to succumb. Sigmund Freud's distinction between "errors," "delusions," and "illusions" provides a good foundation. An error is the simplest, as it is nothing more than the innocuous belief in something false. Humans are frequent victims of miscalculation, oversight, and omission, but these can be countered simply by providing contrary evidence – they are not misguided convictions. Groups cannot cultivate both an affinity for utter falsehoods and a substantive following, as the likelihood of truth emerging increases with the knowledge each additional person brings. Ideologies would be unsustainable were they simply erroneous, as the essence of their foundation is built on knowledge.

A delusion is "a false belief an agent holds *because* holding this belief satisfies some wish the agent has" (Geuss, 1981, p.39). This definition is more complicated because the mistaken belief is predicated on a completely separate motive. I might believe I am a mogul, a movie star, or a monarch – regardless of the absence of verifiable truth – entirely because I only wish it were so. That wishing is a necessary element does not mean delusions are unfit for the political sphere. Individuals from across history and the political spectrum are guilty of such behavior, which can be seen presently in the doubt surrounding President Obama's heritage. Obama lived in Indonesia for part of his childhood, his middle name is "Hussein," and his father is from Kenya. None of these things is constitutionally prohibitive to being the President of the United States, but that has not stopped a recalcitrant fringe from insisting that he is a Muslim, a terrorist, a foreigner, or all of the above. Though Obama has submitted his official American birth certificate, it is the nature of delusions to die hard (if at all). Ideologies are not based on the premise of delusional behavior or thought because they require a semblance of knowledge in order to establish a world view. To claim an ideological perspective is to claim far more than wishful thinking.

So if ideological inconsistencies cannot reasonably be associated with errors or delusions, perhaps there is something to the notion that they incorporate the illusory. An illusion is "a

belief which may or may not be false, but which is held by the agent because it satisfies a wish" (Geuss, 1981, p.39). As Freud himself writes, "the illusion need not be necessarily… unrealizable or incompatible with reality. For instance, a poor girl may have an illusion that a prince will come and fetch her home. It is possible; some such cases have occurred" (1928, p.54). It is not out of the realm of possibility for a prince to come and marry the girl, "but the reason she believes that she will marry a prince is that this belief satisfies some wish she has" (Geuss, 1981, p.39).

The fundamental difference between, on the one hand, errors and delusions, and on the other, illusions, is that illusions do not necessarily incorporate falsity. Errors and delusions operate on a different plane from ideology due to their clear association with the untrue. Illusions, however, may have false components, and they also may not. Either way, illusions are not deliberately designed to exist at odds with the nature of the surrounding world. Illusions are idealized versions of the world, versions that at worst do not ultimately come true. They are not false from the outset; rather, illusions run the risk of becoming false over time. The girl may yet marry a prince just as we may yet discover that a neoliberal emphasis on choice and competition will lead to better public schools across the board. It is easy to see how ideologies may contain strands of the illusory, as a given ideology must be practiced before it can be judged. The trick lies in accepting that ideologies require time to pass before this judgment, a concession which, though necessary, perpetually opens up for debate the possibility that not enough time has gone by (in some cases, it will never be enough).

Appreciating the peculiar nature of illusion is instrumental in dissecting the way we understand ideology, as it highlights an important distinction between *what* we think and *why* we think it. An ideology contains a "body of ideas," but a pejorative understanding of ideology would further qualify it as a "systematically biased body of ideas" wherein "bias is embedded in the basic structure of [an individual's] thought," thereby permeating his or her "perception and explanation of the world" (Parekh, 1982, p.30). Incorporated into this assessment are two separate variables, each uniquely worthy of evaluation: first, that which ideas themselves purport; and second, the rationale behind ever developing or accepting those ideas in the first place (and subsequently maintaining them). In consuming the ideological arguments of others, we must consider "the theoretical content of a body of thought," as well as "the thinker and… why he never became aware of and/or criticised his biased assumptions" (1982, p.46).

While this is a helpful starting point, ultimately we must ask why those who are not ideological theorists – the vast majority of people on Earth – identify with the ideas they do. But to take that even a step further, a better inquiry than why these individuals adopt an ideology might require us to flip the onus of responsibility, instead asking how an ideology is sold to them. What mechanisms are successful in creating ideological followings? Why are they successful? What does this say about both the buyer and the seller? There are many questions we could and should consider here, but perhaps above all else we have to wonder: If ideologies are strategically organized, argued, sold, etc., are they accepted on their own merits? Is this at all deceptive? Is there an honest, unfiltered relationship between subscriber and subscription? All of these uncertainties are fair to keep in mind as we examine a number of these oft-utilized strategies.

There are many devices with which a compelling case is either made or given the appearance of having been made, but the first I will mention is *legitimation*, or "the process by which a ruling power comes to secure from its subjects an at least tacit consent to its authority" (Eagleton, 1991, p.54). What is remarkable about legitimation is there is no mention or hint of ideology – or ideas – in its definition. An ideology is not a "ruling power," but a dominant ideology is more often than not connected to one. If we accept this connection as being true at least some of the time, we are left with a disquieting prospect in which ideologies are creatively shaped in order to engender acceptance. Acceptance does not require adherence; "tacit consent" merely requires indifference, which can be achieved in a number of elementary ways as well as some dishonest ones.[10] And therein lies an important point, in that these strategies – especially when employed by advocates of the dominant ideology – are hardly used independently from one another.

[10] One of the great issues in American democracy right now is voter turnout, an issue made all the more problematic by the current vitriol between Democrats and Republicans. Democrats especially rely on minority voters, a heterogeneous contingent that is generally less likely to participate in elections for a wide array of reasons. Republicans have sought to address one of these reasons – possible illegal status – by requiring more stringent identification standards at polling places. While both parties make reasoned arguments, the Republican stance is relevant to this discussion because even the perception of discouraging voting can help foster the type of indifference needed to legitimate a standing power. Beyond the legislative realm, voter turnout in the United States is already so poor that election winners are arguably only "the legitimated." None of this, of course, is helped by biannual anecdotes and accusations of vote tampering and dishonest field operations, but that is a separate issue.

One such tactic that bears a significant degree of similarity to legitimation is *rationalization*, which is the process by which we explain an abstraction or a state of affairs in a manner that is plausible or desirable, though this explanation may bear little in common with the actual nature or cause (1991, p.51). Rationalizing is proof of our need for answers – our need to believe – and the motives behind it are not always clear. We seem to instinctively grasp the recipe for rationalizing, and oftentimes we show surprising indifference to the knowledge that we are dealing with a rationalization and not a certainty. If a school's student council holds an unprofitable bake sale, its ineffectuality might be dismissed on the grounds that it rained for twenty minutes in the afternoon. This definitely sounds plausible, and it certainly makes everyone feel better. The rain may or may not have altered the turnout for the sale, but we will never know – hence the power of rationalizing. That rationalizations are so often misleading does not make them inherently deceptive, for deception typically carries the weight of foul play. Still, rationalizations are often employed when the employer wishes for others to remain ignorant of the true explanation. Rationalizations are successful because the faulty premises on which they are often based are reflective of human foibles, the same foibles that make us all the more likely to then accept a rationalization. In short, rationalization – so long as we are human – is never going out of style.

The forms that legitimation and rationalization may take are varied,[11] and this can even look as simple as minimizing the meaning of certain realities – a convenient way of getting around unpleasant truths. This is where we come across comments like, "It's not that bad," or attempts by some among us to discredit the source more than the content. But a particular emphasis of legitimation and rationalization is placed on separating ideas from reality, enabling a cultural non-expectation for social consciousness to line up with social practice. I am not so delusional (in the Freudian sense) as to suggest that social consciousness in and of itself is enough to produce an exact replica in reality. However, the reason we accept that the two are not mirror images of one another is because we legitimate and/or rationalize accordingly; the more we concede, the greater disparity we can expect between what is imagined and what is achieved. This is why we are happy to accept maxims like, "government is the problem," because we justify it as the cost of doing business: of course government is inefficient; of course we do not

[11] The wealth of available literature goes into great detail on many strategies and forms not included here, but the second chapter of Terry Eagleton's book, *Ideology: An Introduction*, provides an expressly useful overview.

trust politicians; of course there is no point in voting. This kind of thinking has the power to fuel an irresponsible agenda while simultaneously engendering apathy among its potential victims.

Despite the prevalence of legitimation, rationalization, and similar ideology-sustaining exercises, there are far more powerful mechanisms at work. Much of this power is derived from the mystery that often shrouds them; our cognizance of rationalization, for instance – that all of us rationalize when the situation requires it – makes it easier to detect. When ideology is communicated by less obvious strategic means, it tends to produce in each of us the more organic sensation that we believe whatever it is we believe because we independently drew our own conclusions from available knowledge. However, strategies – like the ideologies they support – are not exclusively built on knowledge. In a vacuum where only facts survive, sustainable arguments would be entirely logic-based. We live in no such vacuum. Ideologies take what we know and then must convince us the rest of the way; strategies that promote an ideology would be unnecessary if the value of the ideology truly spoke for itself. Since all political ideologies incorporate staples which garner our belief but not our certainty, we must remember: strategies are not knowledge.

One of the most appealing selling points for an ideology derives from universalizing its views. *Universalization* disregards the notion that "values and interests" are "specific to a certain place and time," instead declaring them "the values and interests of all humanity" (Eagleton, 1991, p.56). Even though the United States is a country that proudly claims to have been built on the backs of immigrants, diversity often takes a backseat to the false belief that we are all somehow the same. To suggest there are things we all believe is incorrect; to then frame this suggestion so that anyone who disagrees is out of touch or out of mind is antagonistic, maybe even venomous, but nevertheless effective. In the age of the "college for all" agenda, one of the great universalizations is the assertion that all people should – and should want to – go to college. This belief fails to consider a number of extremely important variables (Are all of us universally able? Universally interested? Is there a universal supply to meet a universal demand?), but to suggest fallacy or promote alternatives may invite the wrath of certain idealists. In some circles, opposition to this lofty ambition is deemed un-American, no matter the facts.

Universalization tends to stress the collective over the individual, even though it often masquerades as doing the opposite. That "college for all" is ironically undemocratic in its consideration for the unique woman or man speaks to one of the more identifiable traits

associated with universalization: regardless of the ramifications, it all sounds good. To successfully universalize a belief, the contention has to appeal to a generic semblance of wider morality. I want my children to earn college degrees, so working to ensure everyone can earn a college degree sounds like a nice idea. "College for all" also helps to identify another touchstone common to universalizations: they are all eventually trumped by evidence. Claiming that any belief or agenda is universal is like the Bat-Signal for contrarians, and perhaps rightfully so. With enough time and energy (it can take a long time before there is an academic and social focus on a particular universalization), eventually enough holes will be poked in the balloon to make it universal no more. The underlying morality may still be good, but this only further speaks to the fact that universalizations are based primarily on belief. If they were based on more than belief (i.e. knowledge), they would cease to be universalizations. Then, much like how we universally *know* the temperature at which water freezes, we would simply classify them as facts. "College for all" is now being taken to task in many academic circles; theoretically, at some point the wind will start blowing a different way, stripping this universalization of its hold on our social imaginations.

If universalization transcends space, declaring that all of us – the entire citizenry of the United States (and occasionally the world) – believe in the same idea or cause, then it should come as no surprise that *naturalization* is the process by which ideologies transcend time. Naturalization proposes that some beliefs are "natural and self-evident," that "nobody could imagine how they might ever be different" (Eagleton, 1991, p.58). Defining a value, ambition, or practice as natural builds up that which is claimed to be natural while condemning that which stands in contrast. There is no way to circumvent the fact that once something is deemed natural, anything incompatible or oppositional is, by definition, unnatural. A blow to all forms of diversity, this "obliteration of the distinction between history and nature" is often argued as "the most common and effective device employed by the ideologist" (Parekh, 1982, p.137). The removal of history from humanity is possible only if we connect all eras of civilization by certain timeless characteristics and principles; in so doing we effectively close off "the gap into which the leverage of critique [can] be inserted" (Eagleton, 1991, p.58). To naturalize is to designate the naturalized an unassailable truth, which eliminates all fallibility.

The removal of fallibility makes interpretation illegitimate and negotiation unnecessary. The neoconservative movement, like many others before it, has tried to paint its values as natural

to human society. Many left-leaning theorists and practitioners have taken issue with neoconservative assertions about the free market and deregulation, but it could be argued that this has fallen largely on deaf societal ears. Epochal ideology since the 1980s has taken on a moral tone, even and especially in an economic context. The neoliberal antigovernment stance intrinsic to neoconservatism is often framed as harmonious with existence, rationality, and human nature;[12] regulation is associated with unnatural social involvement, whereas deregulation is painted as a more accurate reflection of humanity in nature. Political philosophers have argued for centuries about our state in nature, but there is a general consensus that socialization and community have removed us from it. Before language and cognizance of other individuals, it is safe to say that regulation did not extend very far. So when neoliberalism argues for greater deregulation, the grounds on which it argues is, in part, as close to a return to the state of nature as possible. Dominant ideologies maintain themselves by seeming to be the most natural (timeless) way of approaching life, as well as the ideological apex for achieving the re-creation of nature.

The obvious flaw in this line of logic is that ideologies cannot simultaneously reflect our natural state *and* the most advanced system we have thus far achieved. If a dominant ideology is representative of humankind at the height of its powers, then it cannot be representative of our natural state because: firstly, we work hard (perhaps unnaturally) to attain whatever it is that we attain; and secondly, as I mentioned, we are no longer in the state of nature. This incompatibility is reflected in neoconservative market policies, which are in turn distributed across our current approaches to education:

> Education has always been considered in terms of its intellectual, social and cultural benefits – in addition to its training component as a preparation method for employment – rather than its unit cost to the individuals. The values inherent in consumerism as an ideology are therefore in conflict with those on which public education was founded and has operated (Kelly, 2007, p.55)

If education has always been valued because of its "intellectual, social and cultural benefits," then why is the almost exclusive focus of the neoconservative education agenda on jobs and economics considered natural? Moreover, the ambition of universal education was never a staple of American society until it was a staple of American society. How, then, can this value be called natural? While this latter point bears less reflection on the current epochal ideology than it

[12] See Parekh, 1982, p.30.

does on general, seemingly-era-transcendent politicking, it does indicate just how unfounded most associations between education and naturalization really are.

In combination, naturalization and universalization are as appealing to the eyes and ears as they are irreconcilable with logic and history, and they are both used with tremendous success to support dominant ideologies. As a general maxim, Geuss writes that a "form of consciousness is ideologically false if it contains a false belief to the effect that the particular interest of some subgroup is the general interest of the group as a whole" (1981, p.14). Geuss' assertion can be taken a step further to introduce an interesting wrinkle into the discussion: the content of a universalization, naturalization, or similar device may be entirely in the interest of the contending group, but the very fact that a view is seen as universal or natural – meaning it will be popular – provides further motivation for the defenders of the view. In political terms, a party that runs on a platform of popular ideas is serving its own ends by broadening its popularity. The party establishes itself as an agent acting on behalf of a populist agenda, solidifying its power in the process.

Eagleton writes that "a true liberal must be liberal enough to suspect his own liberalism" (1991, p.61). This quote may shed some light on both modern political liberals and conservatives (as classified in contemporary political discourse). Liberals tend to be connected in some form with guilt (or something like it) – it is this sensation that would seem to motivate a fair number of their approaches to social welfare (e.g. affirmative action). Conservatives are often connected with the opposite – not that they are morally dubious or indifferent to others, but that they encourage the individual to shoulder greater responsibility for achievement (especially, in the neoconservative age, regarding financial issues). A broad and porous generalization it may be, but conservatives are potentially less "suspicious" of their own behavior because they adhere to edicts of universalization and naturalization, *and* because they are more in step with the dominant ideology of now. If an ideology is spaceless, timeless, and representative of civilization's pinnacle, then no alternative is worthy of consideration. Modern liberals are constantly aware of alternatives because they are presently out of step with the epochal ideology. Neoconservatives do not experience this, and are thus far less likely to see past the ideological tunnel vision that universalization, naturalization, and others reinforce. "That ideologies should be thought always naturalizing and universalizing naturalizes and universalizes the concept of

ideology" (1991, p.61), which, in this case, props up neoconservatism by virtue of propping up neoconservatism.

There are many other strategies we see at work in day-to-day politics, but I will only mention a few relevant ones. These first two are particularly commonplace in today's Republican Party. *Euphemization*, according to Thompson, takes place when "actions, institutions or social relations are described… in terms which elicit a positive valuation" (1990, p.62). Some of Thompson's examples demonstrate extremes (e.g. "the violent suppression of protest is described as the 'restoration of order'"), but the Republican Party is the same organization that assigned "death panels" to healthcare legislation; that renamed a standard estate tax the "death tax"; that disregards the fact that capitalism – which it vehemently defends on moral grounds – requires the failure of some, in order to then purport unfeasible relationships like "the haves and soon-to-haves"; and that recently rejected all proposals to raise taxes on the wealthiest Americans because these individuals are the "job creators." Republican policies are rightfully up for debate, but questioning whether the party euphemizes is not. Education is not sheltered from this – just as money collected to wage war is "actually" allocated to promote democracy and human rights, higher student fees, for example, are merely indicative of fairer distribution (Cohen, 2010). The language of business so often adjoined with neoconservative policy has transformed the language with which we advocate for better public education:

> 'resource units' for what used to be subject disciplines and their professors; educational 'consumers' for what used to be students and learners; 'uniform standards' for what used to be the search for quality, depth and originality; 'program packages' for what used to be curriculum; 'products' for what used to be graduates; 'buying' ideas for what used to be the search for truth. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the educational process has been so pervasively subordinated to the aims and practices of business that its agents can no longer comprehend their vocation in any other terms. (McMurtry, 1991, p.211)

This lexicon simultaneously euphemizes and dehumanizes, thereby offsetting educational shortcomings as business prioritization, not as human cost.

The second of the strategies mastered by the modern Republican Party is what Thompson calls the "*expurgation of the other*," which entails the construction of an enemy that must be resisted by means of a united front (1990, p.65). This enemy can take many forms, and, as President Clinton warns, the enemy might even be the government itself: "Over the last three decades, whenever we've given in to the temptation to blame the government for all our

problems, we've lost our commitment to shared prosperity, balanced growth, financial responsibility, and investment in the future" (2011, p.14). The problem is that this view does not actually unite Americans against an enemy – it unites factions of Americans against each other. This has made for successful electoral strategy, but at the cost of partnership in governing.[13] Designating an enemy incites fear, and this fear trickles down into the media as one of the most surefire ways to secure, for example, good television ratings. There is potentially no political end in sight:

> Fear is there – and drawing on its seemingly inexhaustible… supplies in order to rebuild depleted political capital is a temptation many a politician finds difficult to resist. And the strategy of capitalizing on fear is also well entrenched, indeed a tradition reaching back into the early years of the neoliberal assault on the social state. (Bauman, 2007, p.17)

Education has seen its fair share of enemies (e.g. teachers, unions, the older generation, the newer generation, etc.), and these enemies tend to bear far more responsibility for our fears than a fear that might better serve our ends: falling American educational proficiency on the international stage. Of course, acknowledging shortcomings is not in keeping with dominant ideological strategizing. The inability to distill strategies from reality may only yield larger problems, which will likely lead to further strategizing. It is a cycle that, with each revolution, further distorts reality.

The final strategies I will mention I do with the intent to warn, not to engage in hyperbole, but because it is important to foster appropriate skepticism in the face of power. It is particularly common practice for ideologies to defend their own virtues because they are responsible or realistic. The "authority of experience, facts, common sense, and conventional wisdom" are then used to "discredit" the critics. In these instances it is essential to remember that "common sense and conventional wisdom are built up from the experiences within the ideologically constituted world," and are accordingly "shaped by the dominant ideology. They are not neutral, but partisan" (Parekh, 1982, pp.141–2). The difference between *reality* and *defining reality* is that the former is comprehensive, undeniably true, and superhuman. Defining reality is a human exercise, and as with any human exercise it cannot be comprehensive, is rife with oversight, and cannot avoid taking a view. Being realistic, then, is no less ideologically

[13] "A crisis is never bad news for a shrewd politician: it is an opportunity to implement an agenda." (Cohen, 2010)

driven than a political agenda, and in fact is a device often used to support one *because* it seems nonpartisan. Nobel laureate Paul Krugman, in considering the current recession, puts it thus:

> So now we're in another depression… And, once again, authoritative-sounding figures insist that our problems are "structural," that they can't be fixed quickly. We must focus on the long run, such people say, believing that they are being responsible. But the reality is that they're being deeply irresponsible. (2012b)

Whether or not you agree with Krugman's economic argument, he is able to successfully illustrate the manifestation of ideologized authority. Biased authority figures and true field experts look similar to the untrained eye, and it generally takes a field expert to distinguish between the two. The practice is self-sustaining because the only individuals who are potentially influenced by clamors for unique versions of realism and responsibility are neither authorities nor experts. They are the people.

Lastly, as a timeless observation on discourse, it is often far better to be first than to be better. Setting the terms of an engagement imposes a sort of ideological framework around the engagement itself, making it easier for the most clearly aligned ideologist (the one who initially sets the terms) to emerge. And if first position has come and gone, then arguing to fundamentally alter the way we understand certain things may yield the greatest long-term dividends. Freeden discusses this practice in the context of an observation from Clinton Rossiter's *Conservatism in America*[14]:

> Rossiter astutely observed that a major struggle was over political terms: 'While the Left fought for social reform in state and nation with words like *democracy, liberty, equality, progress, opportunity,* and *individualism,* the Right struck back from its privileged position with the very same words.' The mirror-image technique in this case [was]… an attempt to wrest… the main political concepts out of progressive hands by endowing them with meaning that rendered them safe for conservatism. Democracy, for example, was decontested as *laissez-faire* capitalism, that is, it was stapled to notions of economic liberty that suggested open markets of talent and enterprise. Equality was permitted to make an appearance as equality of economic opportunity, or as equality in self-reliance. (1998, p.369)

Much like the attachment to President Reagan as a brand, we are socially connected to a fabric of words that defines our creed. Though your definition of "democracy" may not agree with mine, we nevertheless stand by the word itself as a desideratum. Words, perhaps far more than ideas,

[14] 1955, p.132

constitute our American brand. Given this base level of almost universal agreement, the path forward can never stray from our staples.

Even if modern reality – in the truer, unknowable sense – is vastly different from the past, we protect ourselves with the familiar, indeed at the expense of submitting to fundamental misunderstandings. Ideologies that become dominant and remain that way are not necessarily those that put forth logically superior ideas, but those that sell their ideas best. The aforementioned strategies and countless others are used in tandem to compound the illusion of rationality on top of the already illusory ideological construct. The overall ideological illusion is so profound that we are generally unaware of its existence, but when we do come face-to-face with this secret we are often unfazed. We are unfazed because mere evidence cannot shake the relationship we have to our world views – that is the value of ideological strategizing. We create devices to speak for our ideas so that in turn our ideas appear to speak for themselves.

IV: Higher Education – A Case Study

"Memories of the university as a citadel of democratic learning have been replaced by a university eager to define itself largely in economic terms."[15]

While the primary function of this study is to better understand certain sociopolitical ideas, we cannot truly understand the connection between ideology, neoconservatism, American government, and education without testing thought against context. There are numerous educational settings worthy of deeper analysis – school choice, local-national divergence, unions, etc. – but the current election cycle has so far placed a greater focus on the university than any other educational form or condition. It is for this reason that I have decided to discuss higher education at length, but this is just a single example of many. The impact of neoconservatism on education across the board is unremarkable given the inherent vertical integration – virtually all educational considerations fall under the purview of the government, a government that operates in an era of dominant neoconservatism. Yet the following look at higher education in this age will highlight some of the most important issues and questions for American education as a whole.

The United States maintains a strange relationship with higher education. Its strangeness is multifaceted, as we have struggled to arrive at clear answers for seemingly every phase of implementation: conception, practical application, cost, purpose, etc. In situations of such significant uncertainty, we tend to fall back on the dominant ideology as a means to achieve clarity. Because of this, higher education is not at all impervious to the consequences of noninterference and fringe politicking. Krugman offers this brief historical summary:

> Americans have always been exceptional… in our support for education. First we took the lead in universal primary education; then the "high school movement" made us the first nation to embrace widespread secondary education. And after World War II, public support… helped large numbers of Americans to get college degrees. But now one of our two major political parties has taken a hard right turn against education… Remarkably, this new hostility to education is shared by the social conservative and economic conservative wings (2012a)

[15] Giroux, 2011

Throughout the 2012 Republican presidential primary, higher education was lambasted by many of the candidates for its cost to the government and its social function. In generations past these comments might never have occurred to the candidates and their strategists for fear of uttering blasphemy. But "an invigorated political Right has pushed both America and its schools in conservative directions. Education… [has] been weakened by the rise of an organized, well funded politically conservative movement" (Anyon, 2011, p.60). In a neoconservative age, perhaps it is less surprising that higher education is a source of ire than that it took so long to take issue with such a massive, partially government-funded program.

Higher education is particularly problematic because of the impossible demands it shoulders: "to be practical as well as transcendent; to assist immediate national needs and to pursue knowledge for its own sake; to both add value and question values" (Faust, 2009). While the university would, according to this observation, seem a perpetual and universal disappointment for all nations, the nature of the US beast constitutes a mess uniquely our own. The US may have achieved higher education on a grand scale before most other nations, but its pioneering spirit shackled it to a system rife with issues (though certain alternatives are as rife if not worse): we have private universities and public ones; we have certain responsibilities that fall to state government and others to federal government; we have mixed approaches to university governance and funding (Ansell, 2010, pp.208–9). It is convoluted, and we cannot look to other places or times for guidance because no other system like ours exists either on the map or in the past.

Given that much of the systemic complexity is of our own making, it is important to justify and focus our higher education labors by asking, "What's the point?" There are many romantic answers I could provide from some of our greatest thinkers and leaders, and I could also articulate my own idealistic rationale. But none of this will help to distill sense from the confusion, nor will it contribute real knowledge to the debate. Let us try to avoid being ideological in this moment (to the extent that such a state of mind is even possible), long enough to accept that there is a purpose to higher education for which we cannot completely account. Even attempting to think this way goes against ideology at a basic level, as ideology always attempts to provide an explanation. Dominant ideologies are, if anything, far more adherent to the need to provide answers even in the face of doubts. Predictably, neoconservatism follows

suit, leaving its profound mark on higher education by searching for an alternative, more tangible purpose.

The history of ideological theory and critique is filled with references to the bourgeois class and way of life. The bourgeoisie was at least reasonably meritocratic to start, in that those who worked hard and had talent were often successful. Once the bourgeoisie was more established, a bourgeois parent would often just pass the torch to bourgeois children, stripping the class of some of its former meritocratic quality. While the origins of the bourgeoisie are more nuanced and its eventual status less degenerative than I have indicated, many of the characteristics that identified the bourgeoisie are shared by graduates or potential graduates of modern tertiary schooling. I mention this because ideological literature brings up the bourgeoisie much more frequently than even a passing reference to higher education, yet there are still important lessons to be learned about the latter from discussion of the former.

Consider the following passage in light of academic elites:

> if some aspects of the bourgeois public sphere were a veiled and disingenuous expression of class interests, nevertheless it embodied… the idea that a community of citizens, coming together as equals in a forum which is distinct both from the public authority of the state and the private realms of civil society and family life, was capable of forming *public opinion* through critical discussion, reasoned argument and debate… the personal opinions of private individuals could evolve into a public opinion through the rational-critical debate of a public of citizens which was open to all and free from domination. (Thompson, 1990, p.112)

There are several elements here to bear in mind (separated by the ellipses included above). First of all, the idea of a "community of citizens," coming together to hear views and share views, learning through discourse, being free from outside influence to think or act a certain way – this sounds very much like the professed aim of higher education from within the academic community. Second, higher education is not a genuine universalization. Behind its lofty idealism sits a less palatable reality in which the services provided by education of this variety are much more accessible to families and classes that already have it. Its very existence helps to maintain certain class interests at the expense of others. And third, being "free from domination" – both in terms of individuals and ideas – aligns with one of the noblest ambitions of higher education. Yet our dominant ideology has left patent imprints on institutions of higher learning nationwide. No facet of American life can live outside a given era's epochal ideology, and universities have proven no exception.

The relationship between political neoconservatism and public education was spurred into fruition particularly as a result of 1983's *Nation at Risk*, a report from within the Reagan administration that brought attention to the dire state of American schooling. In addition to more aggressive standards, a greater emphasis on testing, new perspective regarding accountability for educational professionals, and more active overall involvement, the "college for all" agenda came about as one of the major philosophical consequences of *Nation at Risk*. Neoconservatism, as personified by the Reagan administration,

> situated schooling as the lever to move workforce preparation to the front in the era's rapidly globalizing economic competition… "college for all" resonated with the deeply egalitarian and democratic aspirations for public schooling… This enabled the conservative movement to position itself as a champion of improved schooling… without giving ground on its strategic aims of restructuring the curriculum to meet the needs of global capitalism and of privatizing public schooling through vouchers, charters, and other market-based mechanisms. (Glass & Nygreen, 2011, p.3)

In addition to providing a degree of cover from the Left while pursuing vouchers, charters, and the like, "college for all" gave neoconservatives further ammunition in their fight to secure a market-focused education agenda. Since that time, the aim of higher education has ceased to consist entirely of idealistic opportunities for improvement of the individual; now it is largely about how those opportunities can feed a larger collective ambition. The value of the individual has taken a backseat to goals for a more advanced workforce; neoconservative theory seems to argue that the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The application of this philosophy to American education has sewn a chasm into the fabric of its function, a breach separating educational idealism from social pragmatism. Whether this chasm is bridgeable – and whether this idealism is too idealistic or this pragmatism at all pragmatic – is the great educational question of the early 21st century.

Our ideological preferences may set the educational agenda, but – because a successful education system is far from a science – no political ideology is safe from failing its own preferred means or ends. Political parties are always at risk when acting (or not acting) on education. This is especially true given that a major staple of the epochal ideology since *Nation at Risk* is that American education is in a perpetual state of failure. In a bizarre (but fitting) response to ideological shortcomings, political parties choose to capitalize on prevailing educational unknowns, doubling down to justify ideological arguments one way or another.

These arguments have far more to do with philosophy (belief) than fact (knowledge), which is perhaps why, despite sitting "at the apex of the educational establishment," higher education "is hardly insulated from partisan politics" (Ansell, 2010, p.164).

Since all parties and ideologies are prone to substantial educational missteps, it is worth remembering that left-leaning approaches have, in their own way, been demonstrably shortsighted. A more liberal understanding of higher education's potential emphasizes impact on the quality of individual lives. Educational attainment, in all likelihood, will directly influence the livelihood of most men and women, which

> determines the amount they earn, the number of hours they work, the conditions under which they work, the security of their job, the contingency of their livelihood, the amount of leisure they enjoy, the scope and interest they have to develop their capacities, their home environment, the education they can give and the time they can spend with their children, the physical risks they run, the diseases they are likely to develop, their longevity, and so on. (Parekh, 1982, p.24)

To accept higher education as a gateway between living and good living is to see the market as merely responsive to the caliber of employable individuals. But this understanding assumes a fallacy, because greater educational attainment does not necessarily result in better jobs and higher pay. There are actually "very few jobs that pay well or that demand high cognitive and technological skills," as a likely "77 percent of new and projected jobs in the next decade will be low-paying" (Anyon, 2011, pp.70–1). Higher education may empower the individual man or woman, but that does not mean there will be available jobs commensurate with their knowledge or abilities upon completing their studies. But in defense of this egalitarianism, other approaches (like vocational training) certainly come with their own shares of unique baggage. At the very least higher education does not eliminate the possibility of career advancement,[16] unlike many alternative trajectories.

Yet in the neoconservative age, the corollary ideological expectations for higher education tend to outstrip left-leaning shortcomings (and achievements) because of their superior influence. To become the dominant ideology, after all, neoconservatism has had to dominate our discourse and our practice. It could be argued that the failures of neoconservatism in higher education indicate fundamental ideological oversights. Due to the subjectivity of this argument, I shall simply say that dominance has provided neoconservatives with more opportunities to fail,

[16] Consult p.150 (as well as much of the fifth chapter) in Ansell's *From the Ballet to the Blackboard* for a more thorough economic analysis.

and in a field as far removed from science as education, such opportunities are seemingly limitless. This is only further enhanced by and scrutinized under the present-day economic circumstances. Neoconservatism strongly advocates that we pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps, a sentiment that appears to align with a pragmatic belief: Are there simply too many bootstraps for government to assist in picking up? But much of the opportunity afforded by tertiary study has succumbed to this pragmatic concern:

> For the past couple of generations, choosing a less expensive school has generally meant going to a public university… But these days, public higher education is very much under siege, facing even harsher budget cuts than the rest of the public sector. Adjusted for inflation, state support for higher education has fallen 12 percent over the past five years, even as the number of students has continued to rise… One result has been soaring fees. Inflation-adjusted tuition at public four-year colleges has risen by more than 70 percent over the past decade. (Krugman, 2012a)

It is one thing for private schooling to be unaffordable for many potential students, but weighty cuts to public higher education are closing off opportunities across the board. Conservative academicians are quick to point out "a delicious irony… that if you have the ability to benefit from a degree, the cost of fees will be far outweighed by longer-term financial returns" (Buckingham et al., 2008, p.13). Not only is this a classic rationalization, but it is inconsistent with a reality in which, as of 2005, somewhere between 8.8% and 11% of students who had completed their bachelor's degrees made minimum wage or just slightly more (Anyon, 2011, p.72). Undoubtedly part of the problem continues to be the oft-purported myth (by both of the major political parties) that all college degrees yield great professional and financial opportunities,[17] but the more important lesson is that college does not exist in a vacuum. Higher education is not possessed of a magic that can circumnavigate all storms, and our current economic circumstances have played an enormous role in the long-term effectiveness of advanced study for the individual. "Without robust economic expansion to fuel growth, job shortages are inevitable, even for the educated" ("The Class of 2012," 2012). While the most highly educated members of society are more insulated from hardship in a relative sense, a college degree cannot be counted on to shelter the individual from true adversity.

[17] "40 percent of working recent graduates are in jobs that do not require a college degree," which would seem to be largely the fault of the current economic recession except that before 2007, that number was still a considerably high 30% ("The Class of 2012," 2012).

Conservative assumptions regarding the aforementioned "delicious irony" are hardly universalizable, only further undermined by reduced spending on higher education. If universities are to advance the national economy, then cuts of a certain magnitude would seem at odds with the goal: "cash-strapped educational institutions have been cutting back in areas that are expensive to teach – which also happen to be precisely the areas the economy needs" (Krugman, 2012a).[18] Surely neoliberalism, which subscribes dogmatically to the free market, must recognize that eventual dividends are directly related to initial investments; to take from higher education (if we accept this model) is to minimize its subsequent impact on the market. Even if money were no object, the university structure is not fully conducive to market treatment and conditioning.[19] Approaching academia through this lens often sacrifices "the values of disinterested inquiry and respect for the integrity of the subject matter" in order to relieve the pressure "to 'dumb' courses down" (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p.326). In other words, the neoconservative demand on higher education to produce a bigger and better workforce generally reproduces the same stratified workforce, only now advanced degrees mean and illustrate far less (i.e. credential inflation), and many of those who have them face tremendous debt.

Burdensome debt partially recreates old – but still thriving – class issues when it comes to the accessibility of higher education. Returning for a moment to the bourgeoisie-higher education connection, it is worthwhile to note that

> the bourgeois public sphere was *in principle* open to all private individuals, [but] it was *in practice* restricted to a limited selection of the population. The effective criteria of admission were property and education… [which] tended to circumscribe the same group of individuals, for education was largely determined by one's entitlement to property. (Thompson, 1990, p.112)

Debt might mean very little if a university degree could ensure a reasonably prosperous end. But debt incurred from advanced study has the power to rekindle arguments pertaining to bourgeois and general class interests because it demands certain professional opportunities – opportunities that are increasingly challenging to find.[20] The greater issue plaguing Americans with student

[18] Krugman contextualizes: "For example, public colleges in a number of states, including Florida and Texas, have eliminated entire departments in engineering and computer science."

[19] Cohen goes even further by declaring, "universities are in no sense a true 'market.' In fact, it would be hard to find a worse case for the application of such principles." (2010)

[20] The US Senate recently passed a deal to prevent interest rates on student loans from doubling – barely beating the deadline – but now subsidized loans will no longer be available to graduate students, and all

loans is not "the future burden of debt… [but] the lack of jobs, which is preventing many graduates from getting started on their working lives" (Krugman, 2012b). The clear exacerbation as a result of the current recession makes these setbacks all the more likely to forever derail the otherwise ambitious: "Even after the economy strengthens, many recent college graduates may never catch up… early bouts of joblessness and low pay can damage career prospects and earnings over a lifetime" ("The Class of 2012," 2012). The simultaneous neoconservative emphasis on, first, "college for all," and second, picking ourselves up by our own bootstraps negates much of the feasibility of the latter due in part to the problematic implications of the former.[21]

For all the disagreement over whether and how to make college more accessible, what is perhaps even more remarkable is the lack of clarity that surrounds its meaning. Human beings may need understanding, vision, and a cultivated sense of curiosity, but none of these is a measurable commodity or an item available in the marketplace.[22] However, neoconservatism is, again, not neoliberalism in that neoconservatism incorporates social considerations as well as fiscal ones. While running for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination, former Senator Rick Santorum, a committed social conservative, spoke out strongly against much of the higher education establishment. He attacked President Obama's stated goal of making universities more accessible, and he accused the collegiate structure of indoctrination and opposition to religious faith (Bruni, 2012). What is ironic is that the "commodification of education" so often associated with neoconservatism "rules out the very critical freedom and academic rigour which education requires to be more than indoctrination" (McMurtry, 1991, p.215). Within higher

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others must "start paying as soon as they graduate, instead of six months later, despite the rugged job market." ("The Deal on Student Loans," 2012)

[21] Glass & Nygreen, regarding "college for all": "[it] provides an ideological velvet to soften the education policy talk that actually carries big sticks that punish the very students proclaimed to be the beneficiaries" (2011, p.4).

[22] Recently, the University of Virginia (one of the most prestigious public universities in the United States) saw its relatively new president, Teresa Sullivan, removed due to philosophical differences that pertained at least in part to financial considerations. Sullivan defended herself by saying, "We are all aware that the UVA needs to change. Apparently, the area of disagreement appears to be just how that change should occur and at what pace. Sweeping action may be gratifying and may create an aura of strong leadership, but its unintended consequences may lead to costs that are too high to bear." Much of her removal was centered on the desire for more open online courses, a move that is financially enticing and in keeping with some of the university's chief rivals, as well as other similarly enticing monetary maneuvers. Sullivan provided the following warning: "Corporate-style, top-down leadership does not work in a great university." While the aftermath is still unsettled, much of the students, faculty, and surrounding community have rallied and protested in Sullivan's defense. (Webley, 2012)

education, the neoconservative fiscal agenda serves to undermine part of the neoconservative social agenda, both of which are comprised within Santorum's (and others') ideological views. The inconsistencies in neoconservative ideology necessarily create a higher education system that is both a disappointment and, over time, more and more often under siege.

That institutions of higher learning are so doomed is at least partially the fault of neoconservative indecision; the theory and subscribers behind today's dominant ideology have been unable to reconcile their divergent ambitions. Whether the focus is on supporting the untenable ("college for all") or chastising the fundamental nature of the institution (as Santorum has done), issues of higher education seem to be problematized further and further at every turn. There is certainly something to be said for the aspiration behind "college for all." There is also something to be said for some of Santorum's assertions.[23] And though ideology does its best to connect the dots, there is something to be said for facts. The facts pertaining to the impact of neoconservatism on higher education indicate a necessity to actively sort out our priorities and subsequently commit more fully to them. The unknowns in higher education have allowed ideology to run more rampant than might otherwise have been the case, which explains why we have legitimated a system that simultaneously works for and against the realization of its proclaimed goals. So in charting a course for higher education, we must start with the little we do know about our present and future:

> The ten occupations with the greatest growth in the 2008–2018 period will be in the following sectors: food preparers and servers, customer service representatives, long-haul truck drivers, nursing aides and orderlies, receptionists, security guards, construction laborers, landscapers and groundskeepers, home health aides, and licensed practical nurses… It turns out that employers… assume that they can teach workers necessary skills. (Glass & Nygreen, 2011, p.5)

Higher education must serve to prepare students for the world we have and the one we can make, not the one we merely wish we had.[24] If the preceding list reflects the best available knowledge about occupational opportunity, then it is probably not in America's interest to blindly continue the push that began in earnest in 1983. It is even less wise to deny the gap

[23] "[Santorum is] right to feel that our higher education system isn't friendly ground for current conservative ideology. And it's not just liberal-arts professors: among scientists, self-identified Democrats outnumber self-identified Republicans nine to one." (Krugman, 2012a)

[24] Consider this relevant maxim from the great educational philosopher, John Dewey: "We cannot set up, out of our heads, something we regard as an ideal society. We must base our conception upon societies which actually exist, in order to have any assurance that our ideal is a practicable one." (1916, p.79)

between skills attained at a university and those necessary to a workforce that is more corporate and more internationally ambitious than at any other point in our nation's history. Higher education is not designed to produce ready-made worker bees: "Most employees in the market are not… selected for their autonomous, critical, or dialogical thinking… In systematic contrast, none of these restrictions… can be ruled out of higher education without gross violation of recognized standards of academic freedom" (McMurtry, 1991, p.215).[25] Neoconservatism misleads by pretending that advanced study provides a direct link to career practice, which is then compounded by the ideological misperception that all individuals and professions stand to gain from a universally college-bound population. A university degree cannot protect each of us from the economy. Nevertheless, it is worth asking, "if young people with college diplomas cannot prosper in America, who can?" ("The Class of 2012," 2012).

Neoconservative inconsistencies have yielded unsustainable relationships in higher education: decreased funding and increased expectation; greater efforts toward "indoctrination" mixed with shock at the possibility of indoctrination; and, among other examples, substantial energy expended to create a workforce ill-suited to available employment. There is, at present, no coordinated view of higher education in neoconservative ideology, not one in which all cogs of the ideological and practical machine move in the same direction. Higher education in a neoconservative America is either a failure due to its inconsistent identity, or, for the same reason, an unknowable reality. To some, this may only be a semantic distinction.

[25] McMurtry highlights this distinction with practical examples, as employees thought to be selected for "autonomous, critical, or dialogical thinking" are a "management minority" that is "not permitted to be autonomous, critical and dialogical in any way that might challenge the firm's right to maximize its profits, that might expose its practices of unfairness or pollution, that might question the social need for its products, that might recognize others' goods as of better value, that might criticize the firm's or a firm superior's policies, or that might independently publish research findings achieved on the job." (1991, p.215)

V: Final Thoughts

"…to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination."[26]

Public policy achievements and failures over the last thirty years say as much about modern American society as they do about the timeless, classless nature of ideology. The dominance of neoconservatism fits the ideological paradigm like a glove, contextualizing the abstractions of political theory and adhering to the major staples of a pejorative definition of ideology. In considering Marx's theoretical framework, Parekh outlines four necessities in order to overcome these staples, the first of which demands honesty, impartiality, and a recognition of "the inner structure of society rather than its phenomenal forms" (1982, p.143). Generational discourse will always lean toward the dominant ideology; in our case we foster euphemisms like "the haves and soon-to-haves" and other strategic evasions, untenable circumstances that emphasize the phenomenal. These ambitions demonstrate fundamental misunderstandings about the balance that capitalism requires, aligning ideological unknowns ever closer with the unknowns of organized religion: "The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join the nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet" (Anderson, 1983, p.7). The present epoch is imbued with part of this Christian tenet, which is perhaps unremarkable considering that neoconservatism is an ideological haven for Christian fundamentalism. But what is important here is that personal philosophy has altered the meaning of terms like "honesty" and "impartiality" (To what or whom are we being honest or impartial?). Public education is only one of many social projects burdened by ignorance and self-contradiction.

The second necessity requires a critical awareness of our place in society and how this impacts our relationship with our world views and our fellow citizens (Parekh, 1982, p.143). One of the fascinating developments among neoconservatives is that the relationship between its own supporters is often unclear, let alone that with the rest of the country and the world. The social and fiscal wings of neoconservatism do not necessarily overlap at the most basic ideological levels. In political terms, what is the connection between Wall Street and the average

[26] Thompson, 1990, p.56

conservative voter? For that matter, what is the connection between Christian faith and the average American? There are many, many American Christians, and most of the people on Wall Street are also American. How many of the latter are also the former I do not know, but I would be willing to bet that most neoconservatives are *either* Christian fundamentalists *or* wealthy elites, but not both (and a minority may be neither). For neoconservative leadership to present its ideas as foundationally superior seems somewhat dubious given these internal differences of opinion.

If this can be overcome (or at least overlooked), many neoconservatives are still faced with relating to the whole of society while maintaining cognizance of their own biases. To be clear, this is the responsibility of all ideologists, but especially so for those who subscribe to the dominant ideology. A broad generalization though it may be, many if not most of America's political leaders are disproportionately wealthy in comparison to roughly 99% of the population. Money typically carries a strong correlation with education; most public officials have a tertiary degree (one at the very least). The challenge, then, to connect with the plight of everyday people is arguably more subject to a leader's personal characteristics (e.g. empathy, background) than to the ideology he or she maintains. The neoconservative leadership certainly touts its own paragons, individuals who picked themselves up by their own bootstraps, attained a quality education, and worked hard enough to become responsible public figures. But the existence of such individuals does not prove that American education has previously or is currently providing opportunities for all people to enjoy similar success. It is almost always easier to receive a quality education when money is not a primary concern. In light of the recession, neoconservatism is an especially problematic lens through which to view the world if a requirement is relating to America's "soon-to-haves."

The third mandate for students of society necessitates a "rigorously critical attitude" when examining the social environment (Parekh, 1982, p.143). Neoconservatism, like any dominant ideology, has not always been friendly to this value. During the administration of the second President Bush, opposition to foreign policy objectives (especially in Iraq) was met with hostility disguised as morality: "You're either with us or against us." This is a tangent off American exceptionalism, or the belief that the United States is somehow different from and superior to all other nations, past and present. Opposition to US leaders is equated with opposition to the US, thus legitimating the leadership and painting the opposition as morally

bankrupt. Dominant ideologies are typically indefatigable when arguing their universal and natural superiority, and the cultural restorationist element of neoconservatism works strongly against the advance of a critical attitude.

How this potential criticism manifests in social discourse is a matter of perspective. First Lady Michelle Obama's initiative encouraging children to eat well and be physically active has been criticized for its impact on, for example, school lunches. Someone with a critical attitude might take issue with the removal of certain elements of choice and noninterference; alternatively, they might demand action to combat a potential epidemic of childhood obesity. Recall the previous chapter's exploration into higher education – viewed simultaneously as the key to the future and the backbreaker of the present – wherein the surrounding discussion shuns certain unpopular potentialities altogether: "Schooling in general and 'college for all' in particular do not address the fundamental structural issues related to the nature of global capitalism, which requires many minimally educated, unskilled workers" (Glass & Nygreen, 2011, p.6). Whether the fear of political consequences is too great or the ideological tunnel vision too impermeable, many questions in education are not scrutinized with an appropriately critical attitude.

Without a doubt, universities develop many of our most talented individuals; it is these individuals who will make up the vast majority of the next generation's movers, shakers, and occasionally dream makers. But, by definition, not everybody can be among the most talented. For that matter, not everybody can be successful in college. And for that matter, not everybody need be successful for education in general to contribute to economic growth:

> Education for economic growth needs basic skills, literacy, and numeracy… [Equality], however, is not terribly important… The results of this growth have not trickled down to… the rural poor, and there is no reason to think that economic growth requires educating them adequately… [this] paradigm of development… neglects distribution, and can give high marks to nations or states that contain alarming inequalities… so long as they create a competent technology and business elite. (Nussbaum, 2010, pp.19–20)

In light of increasingly demanding international competition, education is seen now more than ever as the competitive arena in which all industrial nations seek an edge. Despite the impracticality and ambiguous clarity of their causal relationship, a large percentage of the public would declare the pursuit of universal education as a means to economic advantage an American conviction. That this can be so draws attention to the highly ideological nature of education as

both practice and service, and – in combination with alternating social perceptions of education as at times virtue and at times vice – demonstrates a near-schizophrenic regard for critical attitudes.

The fourth and final necessity for a social evaluator or practitioner requires a complete grasp of "the historical specificity of the prevailing social order," disregarding "ahistorical concepts and methods of investigation" (Parekh, 1982, p.143). Cultural restorationism, which winds so effortlessly across the landscape of the present dominant ideology, renders neoconservatism highly ideological, thus largely incompatible with this final demand. As Paulo Freire observes, it is the "rightist sectarian" who "attempts to domesticate the present so that (he or she hopes) the future will reproduce this domesticated present" (2000, p.38). This attempt, however, is as misguided as it is futile. The guarantee of an imperfect society is what leads us to study the past for guidance, but the "past is the past precisely because it does not include what is characteristic in the present" (Dewey, 1916, p.73).

Neoliberalism, as absorbed by neoconservatism, tends to treat deregulation as a long-standing characteristic of successful Western democracies. Former Governor Mitt Romney, the presumptive Republican nominee for president in 2012, has "denounced virtually all forms of regulation" pertaining to banks, the environment, healthcare, and various other sociopolitical affairs ("The Political Contrast," 2012). Education is far from impervious, as evidenced by his strong endorsement of vouchers and expanded school choice. Romney's critics suggest his interest in stronger application of market philosophies to education is "shaped by ideology more than evidence" (Gabriel, 2012), but this accusation is anything but groundbreaking. Deregulation is a foundational value of neoliberalism, as wishfully timeless an ideal as the ideology that embraces it. It is a philosophical belief in the power unleashed by lesser regulation, though evidence of historical success (which would in turn justify its "restoration") is limited in a country that thrived in times of stronger regulation (e.g. New Deal America) than that which characterizes the present. Arguing for education reform through deregulation is theoretically no better or worse than any other ideological rationale – it is no less indifferent to historical specificity and facts than the ideological alternatives. Simply put, this approach was not conceived as a byproduct of knowledge. The power of this argument is derived from cognitive and personal biases, as well as a longing to connect with and build on, among others, the perception of Reagan philosophies.

With that, neoconservatism fails all four litmus tests. To be fair, these litmus tests assess whether an individual is too hamstrung by ideology to be a worthy social critic – an actual ideology was bound to fail through this lens. Nevertheless, this should hopefully give at least a clearer picture of what exactly neoconservatism is and why its impact on education is profound. Ideology is created but also manipulated by people – it is unfair to blame our failures entirely on ideology when it takes a person to act. Anderson discusses at length the act of ruling, specifically highlighting the difference between being a leader and being a leader of a specific people (e.g. being King v. being King of England).[27] Declaring leadership of a specific charge is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it means the leader is not a credible leader of others, and on the other hand, it makes the leader susceptible to betraying those who fall under his or her purview (betrayal can only happen in the aftermath of allegiance). Applying this principle to modern American politics seems to explain a great deal: the United States is at war with itself. This is not uncommon among democratic nations that allow for disagreement, but the extent of this disagreement and the cynicism it engenders is noteworthy.

> Vast majorities of Americans don't trust their institutions. That's not mostly because our institutions perform much worse than they did in 1925 and 1955, when they were widely trusted. It's mostly because more people are cynical and like to pretend that they are better than everything else around them. Vanity has more to do with rising distrust than anything else. (Brooks, 2012)

The source of such vanity, if that is the problem, is unclear. Perhaps the power of the internet and the rise of the individual who can wield it as a weapon has generated a strange combination of indifference – as we lose ourselves in worlds entirely our own – and suspicion – a result of our exposure to more and more of the world's (and the internet's) most malevolently motivated individuals. Perhaps this is just part of the evolution of society. But even members of "the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983, p.6). How, then, can we explain the political-cultural divisions that appear to have thrown the United States into grave disunion? The nation to which Anderson has referred could easily be contextualized as a "Republican nation," or a "Democratic nation," especially given the way elections work under the microscope of near-limitless media. It has not been smooth sailing in

[27] Consult p.85–6 of *Imagined Communities* for Anderson's analysis of this idea.

the first term for President Obama, who, despite his proclaimed desire to lead more than just red states or blue states, is a Democrat at a time when party seems paramount. Governor Romney has already struggled to convince the rest of America he is more than just a Republican because of one important detail: he is a Republican. Republicans have united under a Republican banner, Democrats under a Democratic one. Campaigning in 2012 largely reflects Anderson's concerns about declaring leadership of a specific contingent: expanding the support base without betraying the "nation" is exceedingly difficult when every word and misstep is instantly available for mass consumption. Politics is now a conflict among these nations, increasingly grounded by ideology, reveling in division.

It is only ever a matter of time before campaign practice seeps into government practice. Commitment to ideals came to an almost cataclysmic head during the 2011 budget negotiations, wherein Republican leaders patently refused any modifications to the tax code aimed at raising revenue.[28] This unyielding position brought them dangerously close to losing for themselves the 2012 elections (at least), but "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die" for their nation (Anderson, 1983, p.7). The US credit rating may have been downgraded, but the Republican nation stuck to its ideological guns, nearly dying a political death in the name of this shared belief.

The reach of this unflinching neoconservative brand of governing has unsurprisingly touched education, but not always in the most direct ways. Education is a unique case, as its scope and potential are often employed to compensate for tangential social failures – a band-aid for other ails. These expectations may be understandable given its power to fundamentally alter the trajectory of individual lives, but "education did not create the problem of wide-spread poverty and low-wage work, and education will not solve the problem" (Anyon, 2011, p.75). Neoconservatism, in its adoption of capitalism and the free market, tends to accept at least a degree of economic stratification, but the resulting social stratification seems amiss and off-putting. Neoconservatives do not run for office on a proud platform of class division, so this unpleasant side effect is left to education to solve: "Neither Democratic nor Republican

[28] For some Republicans, this was merely pragmatism in response to having signed Grover Norquist's "Taxpayer Protection Pledge," which (as mentioned at the end of chapter one) essentially forbids any practical tax escalation. The vast majority of Republican representatives in the federal government certified at least a claimed opposition to any and all tax increases by signing it.

administrations seem willing to fight for economic reforms that would substantially benefit low and middle income employees" and households. "Instead, education reform replaces needed economic change" (2011, p.68). It is a neoconservative age – that neither of the major political parties is willing to tackle economic issues without first delegating as much of the responsibility as possible to education is indicative of just how neoconservative the moment is. There is hardly another arena in which American political leadership thirsts as mightily to be the savior and fears as pusillanimously to be the underachiever as in public education. Some combination of fear and ideological change has prevented Democrats from acting in a way that might irritate the sensitivities of noninterference, but – if I am being fair – I suspect there is far more of the latter than we might have imagined only a few years ago.[29]

Taking a broader, abstract view, Geuss suggests that the "effect of a successful critical theory is supposed to be emancipation and enlightenment" (1981, p.58). Is this possible when politics disintegrates into truncated, decontextualized phrases and schools are meant to function like factories? It seems almost certain that emancipation is ill-suited; an environment of the emancipated would likely exhibit a greater willingness to negotiate, compromise, and attempt. As for enlightenment, achieving this sacrosanct ideal does not at all mean eased systemic frustration: "If anything enlightenment is likely to make awareness of frustration rise" (1981, p.75). This interpretation more closely resembles modern America, where movements like Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party "try to dispense with authority altogether. They reject hierarchies and leaders because they don't believe in the concepts" (Brooks, 2012). The frustration is broad and its forms many. That education has not solved many of our problems does not necessarily mean we look elsewhere for solutions – more often than not this simply makes us more impatient with education.

Where, then, will frustration take us? As a cultural status quo, it is entirely unsustainable – by definition, it is the outward display of an unendurable feeling. For this and several other reasons, I am optimistic about its demise. To overcome our dissatisfaction, however, we need to

[29] Former Senator and Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart recently contributed an opinion piece to *The New York Times* in which he writes, "For more than four decades most Americans identified the Democratic Party with a social contract and safety net, equality of justice and opportunity, and progressive – yes, even liberal – causes. Sometime in the last 30 years, the party of progress and change… became the party of reactionary liberalism. This phrase would be an oxymoron were it not for the fact that merely defending social programs, liberal programs, is reactionary." These programs, he continues, were "often supported and occasionally created by what were then moderate Republicans." (2012)

gain a little perspective on a few important ideas. The first of these counteracts a fundamental misunderstanding: ideological theories are not classified simply as true or untrue – nor are they conclusively proved or disproved – based on their merits. This is because ideology has a proclivity for participating in its own evaluation. Historically, for example, "the working classes internalised the image others had created of them, aimed low, rarely stretched themselves and over the years became inferior. As a result… what was once no more than a prejudice later *became* a truth" (Parekh, 1982, p.194). Ideologies do not cease to impact their own "correctness" or "incorrectness" once their ideas are put into practice. Instead ideologies engage in a dialogical relationship with their own implementation – each adapting to better fit the other – with people as the middlemen and interpreters. An ideological theory "does not helplessly attend upon reality and passively await its judgment; it enters and shapes the world, and participates in the determination of its own truth and falsity" (1982, p.194). Members of the working class, who arguably have been shaped more by their lack of consistent access to education than elites have been by the opposite, have consistently demonstrated that "performance and behaviour in an educational task can be profoundly affected by the way we feel we are seen and judged by others. When we expect to be viewed as inferior, our abilities seem to be diminished" (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010, p.113). Once more education fails to balance an imbalanced social structure, but it cannot simply eradicate inadequacies of this nature because they are of society's own making, perpetuated by society as a whole; education cannot step outside of society to fix these because education is produced by, included within, and inextricably attached to society itself.

The second focal point where we are in need of a little perspective pertains to funding and the free market, the latter of which I will address first. One of the most important responsibilities of a free market advocate is to acknowledge that a truly free market, left entirely to its own devices, may not produce a society that would benefit a majority of Americans. Success cannot be universalized in the market because the market is fundamentally competitive. Instead we see a small contingent of very successful people and a large contingent of everybody else (with varying levels of success). At the very least, the market will always yield some results we cannot predict and some anomalies we cannot envision, hence why "the appropriate role and reach of markets cannot be predetermined on the basis of some grand, general formula" (Sen, 1999, pp.123–4). In our current structure, it is unwise (and arguably irresponsible) to completely

distrust the marketplace, but putting all faith into a science we do not fully understand is far more ideological than scientific. There is a substantial amount of evidence that supports the accuracy and utility of the free market, but there is a difference between support and blind support, between support and unconditional support, between adoption of an idea and submission to that idea.

As has been discussed, shortcomings of market ideology are often passed on to education with apparent ease. Employing any number of ideological strategies, neoconservative dialogue surrounding this issue very often sounds like this: "Good schools constitute a far more potent weapon against poverty than welfare, food stamps or housing subsidies" (Kristof, 2009). The problem with this statement and others like it is not what you might think – this statement is mostly if not entirely true. The problem is that, theoretically, good schools can achieve the exceptional, but so far the US has in no way universalized good schooling. If all students had access to good schools, perhaps there would be no need for welfare, food stamps, housing subsidies, and the rest of the social safety net. Unfortunately this is not the case, and in framing the argument this way the relationship of causal responsibility is flipped upside down. Economically sound communities are more likely to have good schools; schools rarely determine the economy and structure of the surrounding community. Moreover, removing elements of the social safety net indicates a preference for self-reliance, increasing the role of competition (in the style of capitalism) in the development of good schools. Of course competition has winners, but necessarily it also has losers, thereby guaranteeing that good schooling is not universalized. No matter how the argument is framed, education almost invariably reflects the overarching economic circumstances, not the other way around.

Despite their burdensome expectations of education, the elephant in the room is that neoconservatives often deem education too expensive, which brings up the issue of funding. In 2008, just "eight weeks after the financial implosion, at least 25 states… had cut or proposed to cut K-12 and early education, and at least 30 states had implemented or proposed cuts to public colleges and universities" (Anyon, 2011, p.88). Education cannot be relied upon to make the economy solvent, but it is bizarre that proponents of this idea can slash the education budget and later be surprised and disappointed with the outcome. The US spends eighty-five cents of every federal tax dollar on Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, the defense budget, and interest on the debt. The remainder (15%) is directed at American quality of life and our future, including

funding for education (Clinton, 2011, p.54). The current Republican brand of neoconservatism has attempted to trim a fair amount of the budget from the 15%, even though the real money is elsewhere.[30] Cuts of this magnitude are not enough to ferry us across the recession and are inharmonious with employing education for economic strength. Neoconservatives want education to be the silver bullet, and they want to spend less on it – ignoring various other concerns for a moment, this relationship simply is not mathematically sound.

With that in mind, it is important to remember that, as a whole society, we do not generally value being wrong. Perhaps there are exceptions, but I would suggest we do not deliberately take action or make choices that we *know* are definitively not in our shared best interest. It is one thing for specific individuals and ideological followings to employ fallacious logic, but it is quite another for society at large to collectively agree to do the same. "However widespread 'false consciousness' may be in social life, it can nevertheless be claimed that most of what people say most of the time about the world must in fact be true… Our practical knowledge must be mostly accurate, since otherwise our world would fall apart" (Eagleton, 1991, p.13). As a final note on perspective, having this bare amount of faith in people is, I believe, as much a virtue as it is a desideratum. In a practical sense, accepting this assertion would tend to confirm that most of what we think, how we plan, how we govern, and ultimately how we get along is fairly good. Distinct political ideologies that may not appear to share governing philosophies are only qualified as distinct after agreeing on the basic premises of government, culture, and society. The term "ideology" should not just be employed "as a crude slogan to discredit inconvenient ideas" (Parekh, 1982, p.219). If mistakes and disagreement are the cost of doing business, then, at an ideological level, the American governing business is potentially not as bad as it might sometimes feel.

Ultimately American political thought winds its way back to the constitution; the left-leaning tend to view it as a neutral document requiring rational interpretation, the right-leaning as "a particular historical embodiment of proven political wisdom" (Freeden, 1998, p.370). Education in its present form was never an imagining of the Founding Fathers, so as both

[30] For example, Republican representatives have generally refused to decrease the defense budget despite calls for cuts from former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, a Republican appointed by President George W. Bush and later retained by President Obama; the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform (i.e. Simpson-Bowles); high-ranking military leaders; Democrats; Grover Norquist; and many others.

abstraction and institution it is entirely open to existential debate (mirroring the aforementioned constitutional interpretations and potentially others). But intellectual inexactitude of this kind is a feeding ground for the ideologically zealous:

> [The] constitution was designed by people who were idealistic but not ideological. There's a big difference… fervent insistence on an ideology makes evidence, experience, and argument irrelevant: If you possess the absolute truth, those who disagree are by definition wrong… Compromise is weakness. (Clinton, 2011, p.28)

One of the most important aims to which we must actively and philosophically commit is learning more about education, enabling us to eventually assign it a more coherent set of objectives. It may be easy to identify inconsistency, incompatibility, and the completely unsatisfactory within neoconservative approaches to education, but the far more significant issue is that we simply do not know enough about education in general. Ideology will always aim to answer our questions, regardless of whether enough knowledge is available. Ideology that surrounds universal education is easy prey to massive human error because universal education remains a relatively new and unequivocally ambitious idea. "The bridge either holds up when the truck drives over it, or it collapses" (Geuss, 1981, p.88), but in education, we lack consensus on what a collapse looks like and even what a bridge looks like, let alone how and why it works and then how to reproduce it.

I would propose we reevaluate our epochal ideology long enough to recognize that we cannot expect education to be the silver bullet in isolation. American money is heavily concentrated at the very top while welfare recipients are better educated than ever[31] – how can this be? Pinning all our hopes to education would seem a telltale sign of delusional consciousness – the implications simply do not add up.

> If businesses were mandated by law to create jobs for those who need them – and if businesses had to pay decent wages and benefits – the costs to business owners would be enormous… When the federal government and the business communities rely on education to reduce poverty, the social costs of the failure of such an approach are enormous, and taxpayers shoulder the burden. (Anyon, 2011, pp.76–7)

There is a profound distinction between what education can do to change the life of an individual and what education can do to change the entire society. This distinction will remain profound as

[31] See Anyon, 2011, pp.72–3.

long as capitalism retains its natural limitations (without which it would cease to be capitalism) and humanity retains its natural talent differential (which is a requisite element of civilization and being human). At an ideological level, neoconservatism does not maintain education as the key to broad success so much as it resorts to education to counter its practical shortcomings. It is only later, when this inexorably fails, that education also serves as scapegoat.

Support for self-reliance and the free market is not antithetical to support for a larger governmental commitment to education, but balance is a value too often deemed too idealistic in modern governing: "It is hard to think that any process of substantial development can do without very extensive use of markets, but that does not preclude the role of social support, public regulation, or statecraft when they can enrich – rather than impoverish – human lives" (Sen, 1999, p.7). All nations are always in one phase or another of perpetual development, and we are still just beginning to learn about structures and practices that can improve education in the United States. No matter our progress, education alone will never be the difference between where society is and where we may want it to be; neoconservatism will either evolve and adopt this or risk becoming obsolete. If certain evidence and an incompatible ideology are two ends of a balanced scale, it is always unclear when the balance will tip in favor of the evidence because our unique world views – our ideologies – make this moment different for each of us. Yet our history has shown that, at some point, rational minds can tip the scales toward a society built increasingly on knowledge.

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