

## **The Politics of Progress: The Left, the Right and the Jews**

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A recent series on BBC2 called *The Power of Nightmares* conjured up a chilling conspiracy theory. It featured a small group of sinister Americans called the neo-conservatives, or neo-cons. These people, it said, had somehow taken over American foreign policy and subverted it to their Machiavellian ends. Under the tutelage of their mentor, an obscure professor of political philosophy called Leo Strauss, these neo-conservatives had promulgated a series of lies about the world in order to terrify the American public into supporting them as defenders of good against evil. The first lie they promoted, it said, was that communism was a threat. The second lie was that Bill Clinton had bad morals. And the third lie was that radical Islam was a real and present danger to the free world.

The argument presented by this series was completely untrue. Virtually every single claim it made was itself a lie or a distortion. The picture it painted of the neo-conservatives was an outrageous and malevolent untruth in almost every single respect. The neo-conservatives have not promulgated lies. On the contrary, they have told the truth as they see it to a society that has subscribed to a set of potentially lethal fantasies.

The series did however leave out one fact that obsesses the enemies of the neo-conservatives. That is that the vast majority of them are Jews. This fact has been used to construct an updated version of the Jewish conspiracy theory which is being put about across the media – from *Panorama* to the *Times* and *Independent* – that a cabal of Jewish neo-conservatives has suborned American foreign policy into an insane display of armed power that has put the whole world in danger in order to do the bidding of Ariel Sharon.

The other part of this assumption is that the neo-conservatives sit on the furthest extreme of the political right. Yet this is surely all very odd. Most neo-cons are Jews. But American Jews are not right-wing. On the contrary, some 80 per cent of them vote Democrat.

In this country too, many Jews regard it as a duty to be concerned with social justice and community obligation, traditionally the preserve of the left. The right is associated by contrast with selfishness and greed. For many Jews, programmed since birth to regard conservatives as the enemy, it is therefore an act of treachery to be a conservative, neo or not.

But the neo-cons are not a Jewish aberration. Far from it. I suggest they represent a reassertion of core Jewish values. For Judaism is above all a moral crusade. It stands for duty and responsibility to others; authority and

tradition; the vital importance of self-discipline and family life. Above all, it upholds the dignity of each individual life.

The Left has turned away from all that; indeed, it is attempting to overturn it. On this side of the argument, morality has become a dirty word. So the more someone promotes morality, the more 'right-wing' they are said to be.

I suggest that with the neo-conservatives, Jews did not abandon the left. It was the left that had abandoned them. The neo-conservative disposition is simply an attempt to rediscover civic virtue through moral responses at home and abroad.

In this talk I shall first address first what happened to the Left. Then I will discuss the neo-conservative movement in America. Then I will talk about the conservative response here, where this leaves politics in Britain and where this leaves the Jews.

It is hard to overstate the Left's grip on our culture. It has managed to shift the centre of political gravity so that anyone who does not share its values is defined as extreme. Look at the reaction to the appointment of Ruth Kelly as Education Secretary. Ms Kelly, a devout Roman Catholic has the Wrong Views about issues such as abortion, euthanasia and stem-cell research (she's against) and the Wrong Views about traditional family life and marriage (she's in favour). As Education Secretary, she will now be in charge of the Government's teenage pregnancy strategy and its policy on sex education. Both feminists and the Frankenstein-industrial complex that regards human life as merely a warehouse of useful body parts are therefore extremely alarmed. More striking is their assumption that *their* view is *axiomatically* the neutral centre-ground, and that Ms Kelly's views are personal, idiosyncratic and extreme and therefore an imposition on the public sphere – simply because she is religious, and her views do not accord with the secular humanism that drives both the left and science-worshipping public policy.

For these views can brook no opposition whatever. The left believes that its secular, materialistic, individualistic and utilitarian values represent not a point of view but virtue itself. No decent person can therefore oppose them. To be right-wing is therefore not just an opposing philosophy; it is beyond the moral pale. Moreover, any opposing view is right-wing by definition. So there can be no dissent or argument at all.

This is, of course, deeply illiberal. But then the left has hijacked the word liberal and, cloaking itself in it, has transformed it into its opposite.

First, it interpreted the concept of liberty at the heart of liberalism to mean license – thus destroying the moral rules which make freedom a virtue. And then onto license it spliced the socialist doctrine of state-enforced equality.

The result is a toxic combination of egalitarianism and permissiveness: a marriage between the old left and the new nihilism. The resulting progeny might well be called neo-socialists, or neo-socs.

Their values — now our society's prevailing values — are deeply antithetical to both the Jewish and Christian moral codes which underpin western culture *and* the liberalism that sprang from them. For these were all moral projects based on differentiating between right and wrong. Liberalism, which stood for the freedom of the individual against clerical authority, nevertheless took for granted the constraints that religion placed on human appetites. But neo-socialism, which views all such constraints as an assault on individual autonomy, has declared war on religion and its moral codes.

Instead, it worships at the shrine of the individual, whose personal choice trumps everything else. When Nietzsche said God was dead, everything became permitted. The result was an attack on the concept of truth, and on the core institutions and values of western civilisation.

The authority of the Bible and its injunctions against sinful behaviour were repudiated in favour of a culture of individual rights and self-realisation. This in turn led to the philosophy of post modernism, the deconstruction of objective reality and the concept of truth. In their place came moral and cultural relativism, under which everything became a matter of subjective opinion, and duty and responsibility turned into an affront to individual choice and the sacred right to self-fulfilment.

Under the banner of individual freedom, morality became privatised. Every individual became his or her moral authority, and no-one had the right to say anyone else's lifestyle was wrong or inferior. With personal choice trumping everything, no-one could be in authority over anyone else.

On the great battleground issues of family, education and social order, the networks of formal and informal legal and social sanctions that restrain behaviour in the interests of others have thus been progressively dismantled. They have been supplanted by a culture of 'rights', in which groups designating themselves as marginalised or oppressed by the majority demand equal status and the end of moral 'judgmentalism'.

And what started out as an eminently decent impulse for tolerance has turned into something quite different. Because there is now an absolute taboo against hurting people's feelings, the very idea of normal behaviour has had to be abolished so that no-one would feel abnormal.

So behaviour such as sexual promiscuity or fatherless children became regarded as normal. On the other hand, those who advocate mainstream values such as fidelity, chastity or duty are accused of bigotry because it

makes people who do not uphold these values feel bad about themselves — the ultimate sin. So alternative lifestyles have become mainstream. The counter-culture has become the norm.

The family — the crucible of morality and social order — is where the most lethal damage has been done. Whereas single motherhood and divorce were once stigmatised, after ending a marriage was made blame-free it became wrong to object to lone motherhood and the damage to children was denied or ignored.

As the props of marriage have been kicked away, it has become progressively emptied of meaning and families break up ever more frequently. Feminism told women they could do without men and turned committed fathers into an optional extra.

Meanwhile, anti-social, harmful or illegal behaviour such as drug-taking or under-age sex is either tolerated or even promoted. Adult authority has been junked in favour of the 'rights' of autonomous children to make their own 'informed' judgments, relegating parents or teachers to neutral providers of information.

With personal choice and self-realisation trumping everything else, people have been taught that authority is bunk and that the most important consideration is that no-one's feelings should be hurt, including their own. As a result, it has become almost impossible to criticise anti-social behaviour without being damned in turn as 'authoritarian' or 'heartless'.

So we are told it is not wrong for teenagers to have sex, but it is wrong to tell them that premature sex is a bad idea. We are told it is not wrong to have a baby out of wedlock, but it is wrong to disapprove of lone parents. And we are told it is not drugs that cause crime and social destruction, but the law that makes them illegal.

The result is morality out of Lewis Carroll, in which the idea of responsibility has been twisted into its very opposite. That is why we have been treated to the spectacle of the Home Secretary claiming he is acting 'responsibly' in seeking to destroy another man's family, tear apart the two children in that family, and redefine responsible fatherhood as the 'McDonald's dad' version of weekly visits and financial support.

Meanwhile, the education system has been progressively emptied of knowledge, with an explicit animosity towards teaching British political history and transmitting the values of the nation. The very idea of a majoritarian culture, intrinsic to the identity of the nation, is now deemed to be racist. The only legitimate society is considered to be multicultural. And

political correctness means that this repudiation of majority values cannot be questioned.

So what's been the result? The creation of social and moral deserts in communities where there are no committed fathers, relationships are transient and children's lives are devastated.

Increasingly unstable cohabitations, with corresponding rises in domestic violence and mental and physical fragility.

A rising tide of child distress, ranging from depression to suicide, under-achievement and anti-social behaviour.

British teenagers with some of the highest levels of anti-social behaviour – binge-drinking, alcohol-related problems, drug use, teenage pregnancy and sexual infections – in Europe.

A school curriculum that has been progressively emptied of content. Knowledge and objectivity have been replaced by subjective opinion and feelings; overcoming obstacles and coping with setbacks or failure have been all but written out of the script; and what children are taught has to be 'relevant' to what they already know, instead of introducing them to experience beyond their own lives. So our education system has become the motor of the 'me' society, which appears hell-bent on committing social and cultural suicide.

The final twist is that, now that moral offences have been all but abolished, the cardinal offence is – to give offence. With 'what I feel' trumping 'what I do', people are vilified and even prosecuted for being offensive, while actual violence is ignored.

So for example Harry Hammond, a preacher who was assaulted by a crowd when he held up a poster calling for an end to homosexuality, lesbianism and immorality, was himself convicted of a public order offence.

After the murder in the Netherlands of the radical film-maker Theo van Gogh, who had offended the Muslims who apparently killed him by his work insulting Islam, *Index on Censorship* effectively blamed him for his own murder on the grounds that he had made a career out of insulting various groups. It was left to the gay rights activist Peter Tatchell – someone with whom I have my differences – to identify the real enemy of civilised values, when he said:

'In this current epoch of post-modernism and live-and-let-live multiculturalism, moral relativism is gaining ground. This article [by *Index on Censorship*] was one more instance of this relativism. Liberal humanitarian

values are under threat. Much of this threat comes not from the far Right, but from the Left's moral equivocation and compromises.'

In the 1970s Irving Kristol, the grand-daddy of neo-conservatism, had this insight. Liberalism believed that to be free was to be good. The New Left believes that to be good is to be free.

In other words, degraded liberal values mean that whatever freedom gives you – such as babies out of wedlock, or pornographic films – is good and cannot be criticised. Neo-socialism's values mean that the enforcement of behaviour approved as good, such as never hurting anyone's feelings, makes people free.

So behaviour that does harm, like fatherlessness, is considered good. Behaviour that punishes liberty, such as suppressing legitimate speech, is considered free. The first empties goodness of meaning; the second empties freedom of meaning. Transgressive behaviour becomes normal and virtuous. Preventing people from even saying it *is* transgressive is considered free and virtuous. But these are not virtuous at all but harmful. Morality, freedom and the concepts of right and wrong have been stood on their heads.

So how has this happened? How have progressive values come to represent their diametric opposite?

The term liberalism embraces two ways in which freedom is thought to lead to the good life. The first holds that liberty, however self-seeking, leads to happiness. The second holds that liberty has to be distinguished from licence – that only personal freedom set in the context of a moral framework based on the Bible can create a decent and good society.

The first characterised the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the era of licence and lotteries. A revolt against the excesses of that century brought in the second concept and led to the remoralisation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that great age of liberal idealism and progress.

The Victorians in fact weathered the crisis of faith caused by the rise of science by believing instead in religion and morality. George Eliot famously wrote that 'God was inconceivable, immortality unbelievable but duty nevertheless peremptory'. Subsequently Nietzsche – who thought George Eliot was an idiot – declared that duty was an illusion fostered by the Judeo-Christian 'slave morality'.

It took until World War Two for this negation of Bible-based morality to take root. After the war, authority was junked in favour of the consumer culture. Religion – the restraint on behaviour – was replaced by therapy, which diagnosed such restraint as unhealthy repression.

The slow death of Christianity meant a transfer of belief from messianic redemption to a secular utopia. St Paul was replaced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the doctrine of original sin was replaced by a doctrine of original innocence. Instead of fallen mankind redeemed by a saviour on the cross, the goodness of mankind had to be redeemed from the corrupting effects of authority of any kind. Instead of salvation by faith or by good works, the association of free and unfettered spirits would create heaven on earth.

But secular humanism had opened Pandora's box. Detaching values from religion meant there was no reason to adhere to any frameworks at all. The elevation of the individual and the attack on authority opened the way to an even more fundamental attack on the culture – the nihilistic doctrines of post-modernism, which reduced everything, including the concepts of truth and objectivity, to meaninglessness.

The destructive impact of these doctrines on the bedrock values of society offered a perfect opportunity to the Left. The fall of communism brought to an end its dream of class war. In its place, the Left hit upon the culture war. In the 1960s, the decade in which so many of our current leaders remain firmly stuck, the most influential thinker was the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci grasped that the most effective means of overturning western society was to subvert its culture and morality. Instead of mobilising the working class to take over the world, the revolution would be achieved through a culture war, in which the moral beliefs of the majority would be replaced by the values of those on the margins of society.

And this would be brought about by capturing all society's institutions – schools, universities, churches, the media, the legal profession, the police, voluntary groups – and making sure that this intellectual élite all sang from the same subversive hymn-sheet.

Gramsci's revolutionary aims have been accomplished to the letter. The intellectual class was overwhelmingly captured. The moral codes of society were profoundly subverted and weakened as all the barriers fell. Previously marginalised groups, such as never-married mothers or trans-sexuals, now became the arbiters of morality which was defined in their 'non-judgmental' image in order to spare their feelings.

As a result, we now have a victim culture enforced by a doctrine of human rights that is not about fundamental rights as much as the ruthless enforcement of a prevailing secular and nihilistic ideology by a body of self-selecting, unaccountable bureaucrats and judges.

In Europe, this assault upon Judeo-Christian values is being given teeth by supranational laws and courts which will impose this agenda upon member states, in particular through the new European Union constitution. This agenda was thrown into stark relief by the fate of the Catholic EU Commissioner Rocco Buttiglione, who was forced out of office on the grounds that he thought homosexuality was a sin and that women should play a traditional role at home. From this it became clear that no traditional Christian could hold office in a Europe whose agenda is to destroy both religious values and any expression of support for them.

This agenda is not merely a solvent of religion and morality. It is not merely an attack on democracy. It is also deeply anti-progressive and reactionary. For faced with mankind's tendency when unchecked to behave selfishly, anti-socially or even to commit cultural suicide, this approach adopts the path of least resistance. Instead of combating and trying to prevent destructive behaviour, it seeks to meet it half-way – and in doing so, sends out a crucial and fatal signal of approval. A graphic illustration of this is the prevailing 'harm reduction' approach to drug abuse, which does not seek to prevent drugs from being used but to reduce the harm this can do – thus undermining the key role of the law in sending out a consistent signal of social disapproval, and ensuring that drug use goes up rather than down.

Exactly the same reactionary appeasement of nihilistic destruction is also on conspicuous display in the Left's hysterical and irrational opposition to the war in Iraq and the wider war on terror. Instead of supporting a progressive cause by fighting against clerical fascism, tyranny and terror, the Left has joined forces with the reactionary right who want to keep those forces in place in the name of the sacred status quo, *and* is also marching shoulder to shoulder with radical Islamists against Israel and the Jews.

Neo-socialists now openly promulgate the view that Israel should not exist, that it is a Nazi state and that the Jews control America. This latter view is also being expressed on the isolationist right, but whereas the Left would once have denounced such bigotry, it is now itself leading the pack. It is publications on the Left which are updating some of the most notorious images and tropes of anti-Jewish prejudice associated in the past with the far right. And campuses here and in the States, where neo-socialists holds sway, have seen eruptions of vicious anti-Jewish hatred. An article in a student newspaper at Rutgers university, for example, said:

'Die Jew, die, die, die, die, die. Stop living, die, die, DIE! Do us all a favour and build yourselves an oven'.

So why has this happened? The first and most obvious explanation is that the Left demonises America and western capitalism, and lionises the third world and all liberation movements. With the fall of communism, the left's major

target issue changed from economics to western notions of race, ethnic identity and the nation state. The concept of a dominant culture has been denounced as racist. So for neo-socialists, the very idea of a Jewish state is anathema.

The second factor is the Left's embrace of Europe. For neo-socialists, European union – along with the growth of other supra-national institutions – has been taken up as a means of undermining democracy and the nation state.

Neo-socialists are also the heirs of communism; and communism always embodied a profound hatred of the Jews, and of America as the fount of capitalism which it saw as a Jewish conspiracy against the masses. Nazism pushed this prejudice underground, but now it has resurfaced and regrouped around the issue of 'Zionism'.

At a deeper level still, neo-socialism's embrace of post-modernism and victim-culture has meant that it now tends to confuse truth and lies, right and wrong. The repudiation of truth meant that there could be no such thing as lies, which paved the way for belief in untruths and propaganda which could no longer be disproved by any appeal to the facts. Given this way of thinking, it is hardly surprising that the left has taken up the Palestinian cause. For the Palestinians are the embodiment of victim culture, blaming others for their own misfortune and turning victims into aggressors and vice versa.

Since these doctrines have captured the intelligentsia, they have now become the general orthodoxy. Accordingly, our society has become gullible and credulous towards lies and propaganda, which it is unable to distinguish from logical argument based on evidence. Prejudice and lies have achieved the status of unchallengeable truth. The outcome is that public debate in Britain is now marked by a collapse of objectivity, truth, fairness and balance. Logic and morality have been turned upside down. Terrorist victims are portrayed as oppressors, while mass murderers have to be understood and sympathised with.

The resulting moral equivalence between terror and its response quickly mutates into a moral inversion, in which the 'suicide' bomber is a hero while his victims had it coming to them. This is why Index on Censorship could blame Theo van Gogh for his own murder because he had 'abused' free speech, and it said 'we should applaud Van Gogh's death as the marvellous piece of theatre it was'.

The grotesque result is that neo-socialists are now on the same side as not merely anti-Jewish terror but violent prejudice against causes they themselves hold dear. Thus Ken Livingstone literally embraced Sheikh Yusuf al Qaradawi, a leading follower of the extremist Muslim Brotherhood, who has

openly supported Islamist terrorism, voiced extreme prejudice against Jews, *and* justified the execution of homosexuals under Islamic rule and domestic violence against women.

Equally grotesquely, neo-socialists have been co-opted into an effective alliance not just with pre-modern Islamists but also with far right. The anti-globalisation backlash united all elements along the political spectrum in common cause and with a common enemy – the Jews. The French-Jewish leader Roger Cukierman has dubbed this an anti-Jewish ‘brown-green-red alliance’ among ultra-nationalists, greens and communist fellow-travellers. Matt Hale, leader of the US white supremacist World Church of the Creator, praised the 1999 anti-globalisation protests in Seattle for helping ‘shut down talks of the Jew world order WTO and helped make a mockery of the Jewish occupational government around the world. Bravo’.

And the same ironic bravo too, surely, to the many Jewish intellectuals on the left, including Israelis, who are so shamefully complicit in the onslaught of prejudice against Israel, and who deny that there is a resurgence of anti-Jewish hatred in Europe. For a variety of reasons, these Jews – who accuse Israel of being a Nazi or apartheid state, and distort the facts about the Middle East – meet what Natan Sharansky has dubbed ‘the 3-D test’ to differentiate prejudice from legitimate criticism of Israel: demonisation, double standards and delegitimisation.

Historically, there have always been Jews who have identified with the anti-Jewish doctrines of the day. Jews are no different from everyone else in their susceptibility to propaganda – even when it concerns their own people. There are several explanations for this phenomenon. Maybe Jews internalise the hatred that surrounds them. Maybe the implications of that hatred are so unthinkable that it’s more comfortable to blame themselves. Maybe it’s the persistence of ‘ghetto mentality’, or the less than heroic figure of the ‘court Jew’.

But perhaps the most significant factor is the pervasiveness of the post modern, post-moral world-view of the Left to which many Jews subscribe, particularly those who are either secular or who belong to progressive synagogues. And since anti-Jewish prejudice is rooted in that post-modern, post-moralism, these neo-socialist Jews deny that such a prejudice exists at all. To admit its existence would unravel their whole political philosophy, which they identify with virtue. So they shut their eyes, dismiss Jewish paranoia or culpable Israel worship, and blame Ariel Sharon instead.

All this is not progressive politics. It is rather the politics of prejudice and hatred, and of a reactionary appeasement of harmful behaviour.

In America in the 1970s and 80s, a group of people decided to challenge this collapse of morality and social order among those who called themselves liberals. These radical challengers were the neo-conservatives. Many, if not

most of them, were Jews. This was surely no coincidence. For the neo-conservative project effectively reclaimed Jewish ethics from the nihilistic onslaught, and in alliance with what is called the Christian right thus reinvented progressive politics. Taking on reactionary Republicans, they gave the Republican party an agenda for social justice and, because of the success they had in areas such as crime or welfare, also managed to drag the Democrats behind them.

Despite what has been said about them, the neo-cons were not from the conservative tradition at all. They were not Republicans but Democrat voters. Some were ex-Trotskyites; others were disillusioned liberals – or in the famous quip, liberals who had been ‘mugged by reality’. Their campaign – which expressed itself through magazines such as *The Public Interest* or think-tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, which were conceived as a direct challenge to the intellectual stranglehold of the Left – was prompted by two major factors: their horror at the social and moral wasteland they thought had been created by Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ welfare programmes, and Democratic senator ‘Scoop’ Jackson’s hard line approach to the Soviet Union.

Some of them were influenced by the work of political philosopher Leo Strauss, who was so badly traduced in the BBC documentary. Strauss was a refugee from Nazi Germany who taught at the University of Chicago. He was preoccupied not with current policy but with promoting the philosophy of the ancient world. From this, he taught that politicians had to create the means for people to live a good life. After the war, he warned that the universities were in danger of being taken over by pre-war German thinking, which he identified with moral and cultural relativism, and he championed the language of virtue out of concern that the politics of liberty could degenerate into a dangerous libertinism.

The essence of neo-conservative thinking, developed by Strauss’s students and others, was a hard-headed attitude towards harm and evil at home and abroad, based on a reassertion of distinctions between right and wrong and ‘tough love’ policies which wedded compassion to personal responsibility and the moral traditions of western culture. Traditional Republican conservatives sought to appease such harm. Neo-conservatives, appalled by the damage being done by epidemics of anarchic crime on the streets, unwed motherhood, collapsing educational standards and discipline and ever more degraded pornography, stood instead for upholding and defending the good against the bad.

They thus reclaimed progressive politics from the permissive. They believed that human nature could be rescued, and the world repaired. Explicitly opposing secular humanism, they re-introduced moral distinctions based on Jewish and Christian values. Their crucial insights, though, were Jewish. For

they understood that public signals through law, custom and tradition were the key to getting people to behave well. They realised that people could not be motivated to do the right as opposed to the wrong thing unless they were told in terms what the right and wrong things were.

The founder of neo-conservatism, Irving Kristol wrote that the welfare system should express the moral values of the civilisation and should produce satisfactory human results rather than merely humane intentions. The neo-cons realised that through a series of perverse incentives, welfarism had acted as a solvent on morality by dissociating actions from their consequences. This was a principal source of Bill Clinton's welfare reform which withdrew welfare benefits from lone mothers unless they went out to work.

They realised that non-judgmental sex education and family policies had resulted in the disaster of epidemic fatherless families and teenage pregnancy, the harmful consequences of which were either glossed over or exacerbated by yet more judgment-free sex education and family policies.

The outcome was the promotion of abstinence education and committed fatherhood, with the result that teenage pregnancy was reduced and the rate of babies born out of wedlock stabilised.

Crime had risen with material prosperity. The neo-socialist response was to say that crime was the result of poverty and inequality. But the more they tried to alleviate the poverty and inequality, the more crime rose. The neo-cons realised that the real cause lay in the prevailing zeitgeist that there were no absolute values or principles and that everyone could choose how to behave. The result was the toleration of the intolerable, in the words of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, by 'defining deviancy down' so that the transgressive and abnormal became normative and normal; and then defining deviancy up, whereby what had been normal and mainstream was reclassified as intolerant and extreme. The neo-cons' insight was to counter this by sharply defining *all* deviancy as intolerable. This was the impulse behind the 'broken windows' theory of law and order, by which small scale disorder – such as abandoned cars, graffiti, begging, urination in the street and the eponymous broken windows themselves – were all ruthlessly addressed, which reclaimed the streets and transformed the climate so that large-scale crime was at last effectively tamed.

This battle against pseudo-liberal fanaticism was not just a neo-conservative phenomenon. The neo-cons rode the crest of a revival of Christian religious feeling. As Samuel Huntington documents in *Who Are We?*, his brilliant book about American national identity, in the last decades of the last century a growing number of Americans came to realise that what most worried them – the decline in morality and standards – was caused by the failure of secularism. Religion thus became a key factor again in American public life.

And although the Christian coalition failed in its key objectives to prohibit abortion or remove Clinton from office, it won hands down the argument that morality and religious virtue had to be reasserted in public life.

This all transformed conservative politics in America, and has caused people to talk about the new conservative century. Yet as Irwin Stelzer has noted, in three crucial respects the neo-conservatives differ sharply from old style – or ‘paleo’ – conservatives. Unlike those primeval conservative beasts, the neo-cons are not worried about the size of the state; they just want it to be made to work for good rather than bad. They are not worried about the deficit, or balancing the books; they want to get public provision right and then worry about the cost later. Most famously, they believe in the doctrine of pre-emption against rogue states that threaten America.

If the neo-cons aren’t really conservative, they differ even more strikingly from their Christian co-counter-revolutionaries. For the neo-con view of the world is a demonstrably Jewish view. Christians see man as a fallen being, inherently sinful. The neo-cons have the Jewish view that mankind has a capacity for both good and ill. Christians believe humanity is redeemed through Christ on the cross; the neo-con approach is founded on the belief that individuals have to redeem themselves. Christians believe in transforming fallen humanity through a series of mystical beliefs and events. Neo-cons believe in taking the world as it is, but encouraging the good and discouraging the bad.

It is this impulse for *tikkun olam* or repair of the world, this belief that the world must not be allowed to fester but can be persuaded to change for the better, that gives the neo-cons the optimism that so distresses old-style paleo-conservatives when these principles are applied to world affairs. For it was the neo-con belief that good can prevail over evil, that pre-emptive strikes against rogue states are justified and that regime change into democracy can transform a terrorist state into a model world citizen, that lay behind the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq.

Paleo-conservatives, however, revere stability and the status quo above all else – even if that stability has nurtured global terrorism. Neo-cons, by contrast – not all of whom, incidentally, agree that democracy can be transplanted into cultures which have never had it – believe in the duty of a society to defend itself and its people, and believe in defending the nation and its values against either terrorist attack or world government. Thus they have managed to get up the noses of both the paleo-conservatives *and* the neo-socialist, nihilist Left.

In 1993, Irving Kristol predicted that a renascent neo-conservatism at home would be accompanied by a renascent neo-realism in foreign policy. By this, he meant that America would eventually come to realise that turning away

from duty and responsibility in the world had fomented anarchy and deadly disorder abroad just as it had done at home. With 9/11 that doctrine, hitherto largely ignored, suddenly came in from the cold because that seminal event forced the non neo-cons in the Bush administration to arrive at an identical conclusion.

They all realised that the old realpolitik of persuasion and diplomacy was no longer possible because multinational institutions like the UN no longer worked as a bulwark against terror. Diplomacy should certainly be tried; but it had to be ultimately backed up by the use of force. As Irwin Stelzer sums it up in his new book *Neo-conservatism*, the neo-con position is diplomacy if possible, force if necessary; the UN if possible, ad hoc coalitions or unilateral action if necessary; and pre-emptive strikes if it is reasonable to anticipate hostile action on the part of America's enemies.

What they are not prepared to do is go along with the convenient fictions of international law or multilateral alliances if this amounts to an appeasement of terror which puts the lives of Americans at risk. Yet that is precisely what the neo-socialist opponents of the American war on terror wish to do.

So why has this influential way of thinking not crossed the Atlantic? Why have the Tories not had their own neo-con epiphany?

Unlike in America, conservatism and religion have parted company in Britain. While Republican middle America is staunchly Christian and the churches are vigorous in their promotion of conservative values, the Church of England is the *Guardian* at prayer. Its response to a culture which worships at the shrine of instant gratification is itself to genuflect before it – and then wonder why its pews are empty.

As for the Tories, the real division is not between left and right as conventionally defined. Indeed, these definitions have been emptied of meaning. The real division is between social and cultural conservatives on the one hand and wannabe nihilists on the other, who are fighting for the soul of the Tory party – and the wannabe nihilists are winning. The Tories are still in the throes of a collective nervous breakdown, as they vainly attempt to become more 'relevant' and go with the flow of social and moral collapse. They cannot see the crying need instead to defend a culture that is under sustained attack.

So where do the Jews stand in relation to all this? The neo-conservative revolt is a quintessentially Jewish project: a re-sanctification of daily life and the achievement of human potential through virtuous practice. In an ingenious adaptation Irving Kristol has defined himself as neo-orthodox – non-observant, but in principle very sympathetic to the spirit of orthodoxy. The neo-cons are to Judaism what people like the 19<sup>th</sup> century campaigners

against slavery, alcoholism and prostitution were to Christianity – social reformers whose desire to repair the world is rooted in the religious tradition whose values they are trying to defend.

Jews are among the least likely people to go in for unmarried motherhood, crime, drugs or the other social pathologies arising from the breakdown of moral authority. So why are most Jews not neo-cons but still incline to the left, both here and in America where some 80 per cent still vote Democrat? Why haven't more of them become more conservative as they have become more affluent? Why are they to be found instead among the most passionate advocates of the anti-religious and socially destructive fallacies of the age?

In 1979, Irving Kristol suggested a reason why socialism, the modern, secular version of messianism, had become increasingly attractive to Jews in the last century and a half. He identified the strain of prophetic Judaism, by which he meant a revolt against rabbinic or orthodox law which was seen as stale and decadent, in favour of a belief in a historic Jewish mission to usher in a transformation of the world. Socialism, the secular equivalent, was thus attractive to Jews who also valued its emphasis on community, and for whom the decline of any belief in an afterlife made the remedy of injustice here on earth even more urgent.

These Jews, in other words, rejected the binding nature of moral and religious law, and bought heavily instead into the secular humanist project of liberal values. So they subscribed to the left both in religion and politics. That was why the vast majority belonged to progressive congregations. And the reason why they were still so wedded to this doctrine, said Kristol, was because they thought it protected them. Secular humanism made a nonsense of antisemitism and permitted Jews civic equality. Thus American Jews, he said, may belong to Jewish institutions and proudly identify themselves as Jews, but in terms of the religion they are Jewish only in externals. But as Kristol asked, given the rate of intermarriage and assimilation among American Jews, the urgent question was whether this really was as good for them as they fondly believed.

He wrote:

'And of course, there are an awful lot of Jews, young and not so young, who are less interested in Jewish survival than in the universal sovereignty of secular humanism, under which sovereignty Jews and Christians can live in fraternal peace, even though some may persist in older religious rituals which they find to have a therapeutic value as they cope with the stresses of secular modernity. One sees many such Jews in Reform and conservative synagogues during the High Holidays.

'But it is becoming ever more clear that what we are witnessing is not the advent of a brave new world in which religious orientation, like sexual orientation, will be largely a matter of taste. We are seeing, rather, the end of a major phase of American Jewish history, and of the history of western civilisation itself. American Jews, living in their suburban cocoons, are likely to be the last to know what is happening to them.'

Kristol wrote that in 1991. How much worse is it today now that secular humanism — along with its offshoot, post-modernism which is in the process of destroying the liberal creed which gave it birth — has shown that its concept of the brotherhood of man and establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth unfortunately does not include the existence of a Jewish national home.

And how much more so is it in Britain, where there is no neo-conservative activism at all; no Christian resistance to secular humanism or its post-modern nemesis; and where *minhag anglia* (the customs of British Jews) is to keep your head down and never so much as squeak in public when the Jewish people is attacked.

Many Jews feel instinctively that conservatives stand for selfishness, greed and an indifference to harm. But all that has now become true of the left. And both sides have succumbed because of the loss of the habits of the religious heart.

The fact that America is still such a religious society has protected the mainstream population from the full effects of such de-moralisation. It has enabled it to mount a fightback against the influence of these ideas, drawing a line in the sand for personal responsibility in areas such as crime, welfare and the family and then, after 9/11, standing firm against global terror. It is no accident that those who back majoritarian values in the domestic sphere tend to be the same people who back both Israel and the war in Iraq. This restoration of a degree of responsibility and self-discipline has arisen from the neo-con and Christian religious influence over domestic policy, and its role in fighting the culture wars. It is no accident that so many neo-cons are Jews, just as it is no accident that, in Britain, one doesn't have to scratch a lifestyle relativist very hard to discover a prejudice against the Jews and the Jewish state.

To reject these barbarisms is not to be illiberal or reactionary. On the contrary, to resist them is to be progressive because a forward-thinking world view is one that genuinely cares for the improvement of individual human beings. If we don't want a savage war of all against all, we have to encourage good behaviour and socially useful attachments and discourage the bad and socially harmful. In other words, moral distinctions are crucial. Progressives

therefore have a duty to resist the 'happiness above all' philosophy which collapses those distinctions and takes heavy casualties.

The economic argument which defined my parents' and grandparents' view of politics is dead. Instead, today's political battles are moral and cultural. Jews should always be on the side of truth, justice and real (rather than sentimental) compassion. The politics of progress is Jewish politics. Only its location on the political compass has changed.