

# *Idéologie* has taken over.

By Jeffrey Hart

With 9/11, George W. Bush was reborn (again). Until then, his presidency had been undistinguished and his poll numbers low. He had also made one particularly ominous decision. In August 2001, using an executive order, Bush blocked federal support for stem-cell research. In substance that was bad enough—like many people I oppose disease and early death—but equally disturbing was the mindset. Bush summed it up in 2004, when he described stem-cell research as a project “to destroy life to save life.”

Wait a minute. Here Bush was using the same word, “life,” to describe not only a minute clump of cells known as a blastocyst but also an actual human being. In this flagrant disconnect between words and actuality were the early indications of a profoundly ideological mindset.

Edmund Burke was the original enemy of ideology. In the slogans of the French *philosophes*, Burke saw something new and alarming in politics, and he struggled for language to describe it, writing of “abstract theory” and “metaphysical dogma.” Burke was seeking a way to describe a belief system impervious to fact or experience, and he brought to bear a permanent-



ly valid analysis of human behavior and the role of social institutions. William F. Buckley once summed up Burke's outlook when he called conservatism the "politics of reality."

But that was then. Today, the standard-bearer of "conservatism" in the United States is George W. Bush, a man who has taken the positions of an unshakable ideologue: on supply-side economics, on privatization, on Social Security, on the Terri Schiavo case, and, most disastrously, on Iraq. Never before has a United States president consistently adhered to beliefs so disconnected from actuality.

Bush's party has followed him on this course. It has approved Bush's prescription-drug plan, an incomprehensible and ruinously expensive piece of legislation. It has steadfastly backed the war in Iraq, even though the notion of nation-building was once anathema to the GOP. And it has helped run up federal indebtedness to unprecedented heights, leaving China to finance the debt.

Perhaps most damaging to the ideal of conservatism has been the influence of religious ideology. During the fight over whether to remove the feeding tube of Terri Schiavo, a Florida woman who had been in a vegetal state for 15 years, politicians began to say strange and feverish things. "She talks and she laughs, and she expresses happiness and discomfort," Majority whip Tom DeLay said of a woman for whom cognition of any kind was impossible. (Oxygen deprivation had liquefied her cerebral cortex.) Senate Majority leader Bill Frist examined Schiavo on videotape and deemed her "clearly responsive." As Schiavo's case fought its way through the courts, Republicans savaged judges for consistently sanctioning the removal of Schiavo's feeding tube. "The time will come for the men responsible for this to answer for their behavior," threatened DeLay.

That members of the judiciary were being chastised for responding to the law as written rather than looking, presumably, to some sort of divine guidance was hardly surprising. In 2002, Bush himself had said, "We need common-sense judges who understand that our rights were derived from God." In this chilling use of the word "God," the president made his views on the rule of law all too clear. The conservative writer Andrew Sullivan has aptly coined the term "Christianism" to refer to this merger of religiosity and politics.

As Bush's ideology leads from one disaster to another, one might ask: How far can it go? It has already brought us to Baghdad, an adventure so hopeless that Buckley recently mused, "If you had a European prime minister who experienced what we've experienced, it would be expected that he would retire or resign." The more we learn about what happened behind the scenes in the months leading up to the war in Iraq, the more apparent it becomes that evidence was twisted to fit preconceived notions. Those who produced evidence undermining the case for war were ignored or even punished. It was zealotry at its most calamitous.

On the subject of democratizing Iraq and the Middle East, Bush has voiced some of the most extraordinarily ideological statements ever made by a sitting president.

"Human cultures can be vastly different," Bush told an audience at the American Enterprise Institute in February 2003, shortly before the invasion of Iraq. "Yet the human heart desires the same good things, everywhere on earth...For these fundamental reasons, freedom and democracy will always and everywhere have greater appeal than the slogans of hatred and the tactics of terror."

Happy thoughts, breathtakingly false. If this amounts to a worldview, it's certainly not that of Burke. Indeed, Bush would probably be more at home among the revolutionary French, provided his taxes remained low, than among Burke's Rockingham Whigs. (Burke would of course deny Bush admission to the Whigs in the first place, as Bush would be seen as an ideological comrade of the *philosophes* — if a singularly unreflective one.) It's no surprise that long-time conservatives such as Francis Fukuyama, George F. Will, and William F. Buckley have all distanced themselves from Bush's brand of adventurism.

The United States has seen political swings and produced its share of extremists, but its political character, whether liberals or conservatives have been in charge, has always remained fundamentally Burkean. The Constitution itself is a Burkean document, one that slows down decisions to allow for "deliberate sense" and checks and balances. President Bush has nearly upended that tradition, abandoning traditional realism in favor of a warped and incoherent brand of idealism. (No wonder Bush supporter Fred Barnes has praised him as a radical.) At this dangerous point in history, we must depend on the decisions of an astonishingly feckless chief executive: an empty vessel filled with equal parts Rove and Rousseau.

Successful government by either Democrats or Republicans has always been, above all, realistic. FDR, Eisenhower, and Reagan were all reelected by landslides and rank as great presidents who responded to the world as it is, not the world as they would have it. But ideological government deserves rejection, whatever its party affiliation. This November, the Republicans stand to face a tsunami of rejection. They've earned it.

Meanwhile, as we wait out our time with this president, we can look forward to the latest in a stream of rhetoric that increasingly makes Woodrow Wilson look like Machiavelli. "One, I believe there's an Almighty," Bush declared this April, "and secondly I believe one of the great gifts of the Almighty is the desire in everybody's soul, regardless of what you look like or where you live to be free. I believe liberty is universal."

Well, it is certainly taking a long time for the plans of the Almighty to show results in the actual world. As I write this, sectarian violence in Iraq is escalating. I'd call my skepticism "conservative," but Bushism has poisoned the very word.

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# The show must not go on.

By Richard A. Viguerie

With their record over the past few years, the Big Government Republicans in Washington do not merit the support of conservatives. They have busted the federal budget for generations to come with the prescription-drug benefit and the creation and expansion of other programs. They have brought forth a limitless flow of pork for the sole, immoral purpose of holding onto office. They have expanded government regulation into every aspect of our lives and refused to deal seriously with mounting domestic problems such as illegal immigration. They have spent more time seeking the favors of K Street lobbyists than listening to the conservatives who brought them to power. And they have sunk us into the very sort of nation-building war that candidate George W. Bush promised to avoid, while ignoring rising threats such as communist China and the oil-rich "new Castro," Hugo Chavez.

Conservatives are as angry as I have seen them in my nearly five decades in politics. Right now, I would guess that 40 percent of conservatives are ambivalent about the November election or want the Republicans to lose. But a Republican loss of one or both houses of Congress would turn power over to the likes of Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid. Dare we risk such an outcome?

The answer is, we must take that chance. If Big Government Republicans behave so irresponsibly and betray the people who elected them, while we blindly, slavishly continue backing them, we establish that there is no price to pay for violating conservative principles. If we give in, we are forgetting the lesson that mothers teach their daughters: Why buy a cow when the milk is free?

And it may take a Republican defeat to bring about a complete change in the GOP leadership in Washington. Without such a change, real conservatives will never come to power. We are like the Jews who wandered the desert for 40 years until their old, corrupt leaders passed away; we will never reach the Promised Land with these guys in charge.

Yes, on the morning after the 2006 election, if liberal Democrats have won big, it will sting. Many in the media and in the GOP establishment will lay the blame on us for the Republican defeat. The party line will be that Republicans would have done better if they had been less conservative.

But the last 42 years have taught conservatives a simple lesson: If defeat comes because you stand firm for what you

believe, and if you learn lessons that will help you win in the future, a defeat can hold the seeds of a hundred victories.

In 1964, conservatives created a national campaign for a somewhat reluctant Barry Goldwater, pushed his nomination through the Republican Convention—and suffered a disastrous defeat at the polls. Defeat came at the end of a campaign in which the media, at every opportunity, seconded liberals' charges that conservatives were bigots, neo-Nazis, and reckless crazies who, given political power, might destroy the world in a nuclear holocaust.

We were as thoroughly defeated as anyone can be in American politics. Remember that, following a 49-state defeat for the Democratic presidential candidate in 1972, Democrats still controlled both houses of Congress, and that, following another 49-state landslide defeat in 1984, they still controlled the House of Representatives. In 1965, conservatives had nothing—not even control of the Republican Party, whose establishment assigned us the full blame for the loss.

But we had planted the seeds.

Logistically, an estimated four million men and women had taken an active part in the Goldwater campaign. This was unprecedented in modern American politics. LBJ had only half as many workers, even though the Democratic voter pool was 50 percent larger.

In fundraising, the difference was even greater. The Goldwater campaign was the first popularly financed campaign in modern American history. The 1960 campaign, with between 40,000 and 50,000 individual contributors to Nixon and some 22,000 to Kennedy, was typical of the approach from previous years. Estimates of the number of contributors to Goldwater in 1964, combining federal, state, and local campaign groups, range from 650,000 to over a million. As you'd surmise from such an explosion in the number of contributors, individual and smaller contributors became hugely important. Only 28 percent of the Goldwater federal campaign contributions were for \$500 or more, compared to 69 percent of the Democratic contributions.

We were learning how to mobilize grassroots Americans for door-to-door campaigning as well as raising money.

Meanwhile, we were learning how to get around the establishment media. We created our own channels of communication, using publications like *National Review* and *Human Events*, Goldwater's book *The Conscience of a Conservative*, and underground bestsellers like Phyllis Schlafly's *A Choice, Not an Echo*,