

Second Stars: *****

PART 12: REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC SELF VIEWS AND WORLD VIEWS

Four parts of this essay come together here as a set: this part and the three parts after this part. After this part, the following three parts describe how Republicans and Democrats see the world so you can get a feel for what they say and so you can assess for yourself. The four parts here support the simple assertions of the first two parts at the start of this essay. Also, in writing these parts, I allowed that the reader skipped material between the first stars and here. So, you will see repetition between the start of the essay and the material in this set of four parts. This first part of the set-of-four gives background for the later three parts of the set-of-four. You may skip this part if you wish. If anything in the later three parts seems fuzzy, you might have to come back to this part.

Real Politics: Support Groups

I think most politicians are smarter than average, fairly well educated but not enough, decent, mostly moral, not degenerate, not weird, have fewer sex issues than most of us, have sympathy and empathy, love America, would like to do the best for America that they can, prefer fairness and social justice, dislike unfairness and injustice, and can figure out the sane middle ground that works even if they will not fight for it. They are also caught up in a morass of their own making, don't know how to get out, can't see what to do, and are obsessed with re-election. They are good guys who dug a pit far deeper than their heads.

Democrats and Republicans don't make sense unless we know of changes in the economy as described above and we know the implications.

Democrats and Republicans need their own support groups among voters, and the groups have to be big enough to win elections. Democrats and Republicans choose groups of citizens that they can appeal to for reliable support. They give these groups both public values-and-worldview and coded values-and-worldview. The values-and-worldview (simply "values") lead client groups to believe their situation will remain secure and might get better or will get secure and might get better. The values lead clients to believe a political party will advance them and will protect them against others. Democrats at first used labor and the middle class while Republicans used the upper middle class and upper class. Although a minority, the upper middle class and upper class held power because they already had power and wealth, and they got numerical support from some of the secure working and-or middle classes; see the role of the Republican Party in the TV show "Boardwalk Empire". After about 1970, alignment changed to become:

Democrats: ethnic minorities such as Blacks, Hispanics, and some Native Americans; educated middle and upper middle class people who have fairly secure positions and wish to contribute to social justice in terms they understand social justice; people who care about nature and the environment; people with no jobs or only poor jobs; people who benefit from social programs; people who hoped to benefit from future social programs or hope to benefit more from future social programs; and people who do not think of themselves as traditional Christians. Democrats lost much of the working and middle classes, especially White, East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Southern Asian.

Republicans: working class and insecure middle class people who feel their economic base eroding and feel the economic future of their children at risk; White, Asian, and Indian (South Asia) people who feel social programs have failed; White, Asian, and Indian people who feel ethnic minorities got overly favorable security from the state and the privileges of ethnic minorities hurt the future chances of the children in other groups; people who put their short-term welfare above the needs of nature and the environment; business people of all scales; upper middle class people who think they need not support minorities or poor laborers to contribute to social justice and to general welfare; wealthy people; powerful people; people who want an excuse (want to be enabled) to seek wealth, power, and display without feeling guilty; people who see themselves as traditional Christians even though they would have disagreed with other similar groups only a few years ago (both Protestants and Christians now where in 1950 it would have been mostly Protestants); people who are suspicious of people in other religions; people who fear the economic and political rise of nations other than America.

Neither Party knows how to recruit from among people born after about 1990, the “Millenials”. Where these people go will determine American political future. In the 2008 election, they went with Barack Obama and the Democrats, but then abandoned both. Donald Trump and the Republican Party in 2018 contradict most of the values of this group. They have alienated those in this group who are not afraid and so who do not seek help from Republicans. That does not mean this group will go for Democrats.

As I have said many times, groups of potential party members can conflict both internally and between groups. That conflict led to working people and middle class people leaving the Democratic Party for the Republican Party after about 1972. Conflict among client groups led to the Tea Party and to Trump Republicans fighting with Mitch McConnell, Paul Ryan, and what Trump-ets called the “Republican Establishment”.

The Most Important Value-and-Goal Now for Both Liberals and Conservatives

See Part 2 of this essay, an optional part on the family.

In the economic situation since the 1970s, both Democrat and Republican individuals and families hold the following goal highest. They approach it in different ways, but it is still the highest goal-and-value for both.

For the vast majority of people, the most important goal, by far, is that my family achieves economic success and security in the next medium term (up to 30 years), even at the expense of nature and the planet, even at the expense of other people and their families, at the expense of my descendants should nature suffer seriously or should social-and-economic chaos ensue, even if striving for family success leads to ever greater disparities in wealth and power, even at the expense of my nation, the expense of truth, even if I have to disregard all religion and religious teaching, and even at the expense of the welfare of any social whole. Do not fool yourself. Family success is now the supreme value among all but a few religious people, philosophical people, and artists.

Current emphasis on family success goes along with a rise after about 1980 in the religion of the family and in renewed emphasis on the family in standard religions. In effect, the standard religions have been converted back to a form of the religion of the family. This is modern paganism.

In your “wild youth”, or once you have achieved a great deal of family security, you can be somewhat giving and gracious toward other people, political causes, and other causes. Which causes you chose to favor depends more on who you think can support you and can suppress your rivals than on any intrinsic value of the cause or to any intrinsic value to the stated ideals.

Unfortunately, to protect your family, usually you have to protect a socio-economic class and usually an ethnic group as well, such as working Whites or middle class Blacks.

To help your class or your ethnic group, often you must see similar groups as rivals for a small pie. These days, socio-economic classes and ethnic groups don't send out armed thugs as often as they did in the past, although it still happens. Race-gang war in urban areas is an example even if the race warriors don't know why they do it.

To protect your family, protect your group, and hurt other groups, you need political support. A group seeks help from a political party not only to promote its family interests directly but also to insure potential rivals don't get ahead. Working Whites and working Blacks don't want Hispanic families to get an economic beachhead, for example by educating their children, and so working Whites and Blacks look to a political party that can control access to good schools, family planning, and family support. Whites look to a political party that can attack family planning and abortion, as long as Whites can get access to family planning and abortion, to keep Blacks and Hispanics off balance and not competitive. Blacks and Hispanics seek their own versions of hurting opponents such as through differential access to programs and to legal protection. Political parties offer these services to get secure votes.

In strained political and economic situations, everybody striving to protect the welfare of his-her own family alone, and to undermine the welfare of other families if needed, leads to less for everybody and undermines the whole. That, in turn, leads families to strive ever harder for themselves first-and-alone and to hurt others, and so on. In these situations, unlike the idealized free market or idealized American sports, strong competition does not lead to the best but leads downward to the worst. As far as I can

tell, families stress the family, and convert to the religion of the family, usually only when they feel times are bad, and so already they are in a situation where family first is likely to start the downward spiral.

It all can work the other way around. When families feel secure, instead of seeking ways to hurt rivals, they seek ways to help others and to make it better for everyone. If ever families feel secure enough, a lot can be done on better education in general, health care, social acceptance of people such as gays, and helping nature and the environment. We get that sometimes in America as in the 1950s and 1960s and briefly for a time after Barack Obama was first elected.

There are times when people focus strongly on the family not because times are bad but because times are changing or for other reasons that I can't go into here. For example, the Victorian middle class and upper middle class likely laid the roots for our current wave of family religion but they did not worship the family primarily because times were tough for them. Even so, I do not go into those alternatives for putting the family first-and-only. I think the main concern now in America is how families see times, as tough or good, and how their view leads them to protect themselves first-and-only or allows them to cooperate with others.

Similar Strategy of Democrats and Republicans, with Different Results

News commentators refer to the "base" of a party. This section is about that. Parties try to recruit into their base, as clients, the groups described above.

(A) Both parties have a base or core of voters that likely support the Party no matter what. Each party hopes this base is large enough to carry all elections but that is rarely true. So, to win elections, each party has to appeal to voters outside the base. (B) Both parties have a group of voters that commonly vote for that party and to which they can appeal; often we can see these people as "clients". (C) Both parties appeal to the near-but-not-core voters (clients) by giving them "stuff": programs, handouts, tax breaks, legal favors, legal protection, jobs, and education. They indirectly serve the base and the near base (clients) by punishing competition. The stuff does not necessarily make sense in the way that original Liberals wished political action to make sense but does make sense in terms of holding marginal voters. I give more details below. (D) Both parties hope that the combination of base and near base (clients) will be enough to win an election. Sometimes the win goes one way and sometimes the other. (E) Sometimes it is hard to tell the base from near base (clients), and they do sometimes switch roles. When the base and near base (clients) switch roles so that the near base (clients) becomes the base, the Party still has to give the new base (former clients) "stuff" as it did in the past.

Originally, the base (core) of the Democratic Party was people with good jobs, especially moderately educated (some college or full college) middle class and upper middle class people. Originally people with good jobs included many working class and lower middle class people. Even educated business people supported the Democratic Party because the Party was not against business and it was creating the kind of social changes needed to keep America competitive in the future. The near base (clients) was ethnic minorities such as Blacks, Jews, and Native Americans, marginalized groups such as gay

people, and a large group of women. After about 1970, any self-styled victimized group could appeal to the Democratic Party and could expect to receive support in exchange for votes.

Then much of the working class, lower middle class, the rest of the middle class, many formerly Liberal upper class people, and most business people, left the Democratic Party. For a time, the base remained educated middle and upper middle class people and the near base (clients) remained victimized people including non-White non-Asian ethnic people and women. Over time, support of the educated middle class could not be counted on. The Democratic Party worked to get clients committed to it. Then the core base of the Democratic Party became the former clients while the near core became some of the educated middle class and upper middle class. The Democratic Party could not give the educated middle class and upper middle class many benefits that mattered other than help with education and the self-satisfaction of helping victims with little cost to themselves. The general view was that the Democratic Party is the Party of ethnics, angry women, migrants, “eco-freaks”, and others outside the system; and that the Democratic Party is against all business because it sees all business people as bad guys. By the middle 1980s, this political stance failed to win many elections. As the Party failed to win elections and deliver favors, some groups get angry about the relation, as when Blacks say the Party can no longer take them for granted.

This stance is far from the stance envisioned by original Liberals of the 1700s and by Democrats of the labor movement and of the 1950s and 1960s.

The original core of the Republican Party was some of the middle class, the upper middle class, and the upper class. In the 1970s, when workers with steady jobs and much of the middle class moved to the Republican Party, they became the near core. Then began an interesting dance that is not resolved yet and that has dramatically shaped American politics. The working class and middle class in the Party now outnumber the upper middle and upper class. The working and middle classes brought fervent religion, the base of the Religious Right. Rather than passively receive favors from the upper middle and upper class, the working class and middle class now often dominate the Republican Party. They push policies and legislation designed to favor them and to hurt rivals such as ethnic groups and self-styled victims. The upper middle and upper classes have to go along. Of course, the upper middle and upper classes always make sure they benefit from whatever programs urged by the working and middle class. In fact, usually the upper middle class and working class are able to “bamboozle” the working class and middle class and benefit more lose as with the Reagan, Bush, and McConnell-Ryan-Trump tax packages. To make sure both core and clients get as much as needed to hold the Party together and to keep power, the Republican Party happily promotes deficit spending and national debt. The Republican Party is happy to use Conservative rhetoric while not using Conservative fiscal policies at all.

This result is far from the ideals of original Conservatives. It is hard to see what Republicans are trying to conserve other than to put anti-abortion laws back on the books. It is hard to see knee-jerk unrealistic stances on crime, abortion, birth control, taxes, prison sentences, anti-science, and anti-environment as trying to conserve anything social or natural. All these stances do is conserve the political alliances of various groups with the Republican Party.

Common Failing of Democrats and Republicans

When younger, I believed that a political party needed a realistic, but also idealistic and inspiring, vision of a nation to govern well and to hold power a long time. It had to give people something to see and to believe in, and it needed to produce good results for the nation as a whole. I was wrong.

The Democratic Party has not had a believable vision of America or a believable vision of how America fits into the world since about 1965. In 2016, Bernie Sanders, a sincere man, was a throwback to 1964. The Democratic Party has not been able to muster a vision because it does not have realistic ideas of how capitalism works and how subgroups benefit or not benefit from a real capitalist national economy. It does not have a realistic idea of how subgroups can see other subgroups as rivals and wish for help against rivals. Without a realistic vision, the Party can only double down on promises to ethnic groups, gender groups, age groups, and to other needy groups or victim groups. That program has long since lost its viability. To make it work well, it would have to be tied to a vision of how a real economy works in the real world, a vision in which people could reliably figure out their fair share and reliably see that nobody cheated. Democrats are from that.

The Republican Party has not had a realistic vision since before 1929 but it has been able to present a working vision that people will believe for as long as believing even a false vision benefits them (listen to the Who song "Pictures of Lily"). The presentation vision: "Let rich people guide the country and let them do it for you through their business firms. When business firms do well, everyone, absolutely all, we guarantee, does better, including you personally and your family. All of us can have the American dream if we live it through business. To live it through business, we have to kill programs for ethnic minorities and for other groups that complain." The working class and middle class buy into this vision because it helps them and hurts rivals, at least for a while.

Republicans do not have a realistic view of capitalism or America's place in the world capitalist economy but they do have a more realistic view than the Democrats. They understand well enough to deliver on token promises to the working class and middle class well enough to keep their allegiance, as with a few tax breaks and de-regulations. Carried out over more than a few years, the Republican vision necessarily demands deficit spending and a large national debt, but the working and middle classes seem willing to put up with that fault as long as they think they can keep an edge over rivals and they can dream about "making it".

Without a vision that is realistic, idealistic, inspiring, and believable, a party can govern only by using "us versus them". Both parties have used this way. The results are the American culture wars, ethnic strife, war on the police, religious strife, class strife, and more debt.

Thresholds: One Reason why it is so hard to find a Sane Workable Middle Ground.

Finding the right size for a program, Left or Right, is like making pancakes, drinking booze, or hiring the right number of police officers. (A) If you add only a bit too little milk to the pancake mix, you get thick, unevenly cooked, excessively lumpy pancakes. If you add only a little too much, you get thin, burned, uniform, uninteresting, chewy-in-a-bad-way pancakes. It takes practice and the willingness to make mistakes to find the right amount. (B) Suppose you have 12 bottles of beer and you wish to stay happily-buzzed-but-not-drunk for the evening. If you drink only one bottle, you might get a light buzz but the buzz goes away soon, then you have to drink another, then the buzz from that goes away, and so on. You end up feeling icky. If you drink steadily until you can really feel that you are really buzzed, then you have drunk too much already, you will soon feel drunk rather than buzzed, but you won't be able to stop because you are drunk and have lost your common sense. It is hard, and it takes experience, to learn to pace yourself, drink enough, but not drink too much. (C) If you hire too few police officers, they will make hardly a dent in crime, and it will appear as if the police force does nothing for its pay. If you hire too many officers, they will almost obliterate crime, and, again, it will appear the force does nothing; but this time it also seems the police cost a huge amount of wasted money. If you hire the right number of officers, you will contain crime within well-known and acceptable limits, and you will see that the force does a lot of good for its pay. Moreover, with the right number of officers if you take away an officer, you will notice the difference because of increased crime; and, if you add an officer, you will notice the difference in decreased crime. It takes a lot of experience, willingness to learn from other cities, and courage, to hire the right number of police and to be able to explain it to the citizens.

The relation in the middle where a couple of drops of milk, a few sips of beer, or one more or one less officer, makes a clear difference, about in proportion to what is added or taken away, is unusual. It is called "linear" or "the linear zone". Most of the time, this is where you want to be. If you hire police officers, you might wish to hire so many as to obliterate crime but, in all honesty, the citizens you wish to protect won't stand for it because of the cost. Aim for the linear middle. Most of the time, officials think they and their programs are in this area but they are not.

State programs are the same. If you keep them small, they do very little good and still cost a noticeable amount. If you let them go, they balloon up, cost a lot, and you can't see how benefit is in proportion to cost. It takes a lot of experience, willingness to listen to others, ability to compromise, an understanding of human nature, reading history, and much courage, to decide what is the right size for a program, how to get it there, and how to hold there. Benefit programs such as welfare and Social Security Disability quickly blow up. One simple statue to a war veteran quickly turns into a park and a museum. To save one endangered species, you have to lose a hundred jobs but if you don't save any endangered species, you lose all your forest, your natural heritage, and millions of jobs in the future. The United States likely has at least twice as many military bases as we need and we are far overcommitted in the world.

Both the Left (Democrats) and Right (Republicans) suffer from this problem and suffer from it in similar ways. They choose different programs to suffer from but the problem is the same regardless of the program. Both sides tend to let their programs explode. Both sides want to trim the programs of the other side to the point where the other side says the programs will be useless. If you have little welfare, you might as well have none at all. If you have too few military bases, you might as well have none at

all. We fight endlessly over how much medical care to give veterans, and, sadly, usually we err on the side of far too little.

Because a little too much tends to become a lot too much, it is easy to point to errors on the other side of the Left-Right spectrum and criticize. Likewise, because a little too little tends to destroy even a good program such as Head Start, school lunch, and care for veterans, it is natural to resist any trimming even when the trimming is justified. Everyone becomes blind to every middle area.

Except for medical care to veterans, overall, programs suffer more from being too big than too small. Please use your imagination to figure out why. This result might lead us to think Republicans are right: a smaller state and smaller programs is the way to go. But that is not how it turns out. Republicans want Democratic programs be smaller and want the imaginary Democratic state to be smaller but don't want Republican programs or the imaginary Republican state to be smaller. They want it as big as it can balloon up to be. Republicans might say they want all programs and the state in general to be smaller but they don't act that way, and I have to judge according to how they act. Republicans too err on the side of too big; Republicans too tend to get drunk quickly and stay too drunk too long, as long as the drink only Republican beer. Ronald Reagan was not right about this situation and he did not have the answer to the problem. Slogans cure very little.

Ideas can wither or balloon as well. When they do, usually it is because of the programs that are used to express the idea as when the idea of "fairness" is expressed in Affirmative Action or the idea of defense is expressed in a huge military. Still, ideas often take the blame for the failure of the program that is used to express them as when people blame an excess desire for fairness or an excess desire for being prepared to fight.

Note on Terms to Describe Classes

I grew up in the insecure working class so I consider the secure working class part of the secure middle class, especially if the secure working class has decent pay with benefits. In contrast, commentators, most, academics, and people who want to be in the middle class, distinguish the middle class from the working class. So, despite my personal experience, I follow that trend. The insecure working class has jobs with no benefits and job that are seasonal or are prone to turnover, such as fast food workers. The insecure working class is more like the poor than like the middle class. Middle class people who are not self-employed, who work regular hours, get salaries, and benefits, are really part of the secure working class even if they don't work in a factory, even if they work in an office, and even if they are teachers, police, or fire fighters. You should see the gap between the secure working class (and secure middle class) with good jobs versus the insecure working class with bad jobs. Good-jobs-with-benefits (whether working class or middle class) versus bad-jobs-with-low-pay-and-few-benefits (whether poor or working class) is the real distinction. To help you remember, I describe which working class and which middle class I write about.