



## **‘Conservative’ anti-Trumpers still don’t get it**

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I am amused by the NeverTrump conservatives who’ll support Hillary, or at least do what they can to ensure her election, because they say Trump isn’t a real conservative. They’re a little like the people who go on a KFC diet in order to lose weight, but at least they’re asking the right question, even if they’ve come up with the wrong answer.

So just what makes someone a conservative? I might have thought that nationalism had something to do with it, and certainly conservatives of the past would have found it odd to object to a preference for native Americans over non-Americans. The Open Borders crowd might be good libertarians, but there’s nothing especially conservative about their beliefs.

Then there’s the idea that, in crafting policies, we should be looking at how they’ll affect Americans across different groups, rather than at growth in the abstract. Trump has championed the left-behind people, the low- or middle-class Americans who have seen their wages stagnate or their jobs disappear.

We’re all in favor of per-capita GDP increases, but if they’re only going to the people at the top, that has to be a concern — at least to any party that hopes to win an election. Nothing un-conservative about that.

Ah, says the NeverTrumper, you’ve misunderstood me. I like Americans, but Trump doesn’t want to touch Medicare, he’s said nothing about entitlement reform and I suspect he might even be prepared to support a national health scheme. We ideologues have 57 different little right-wing boxes, and while Ted Cruz had ticked off every single one of them, Trump has simply ignored them. And us.

There’s something to that, I admit, but the objection reveals the right-wing ideologue’s intellectual poverty. What he’s not grasped is what makes economies free, and how we’ve declined on freedom rankings.

Take a look at what’s happened to us on the measures of economic freedom, as given by the eminently conservative Heritage Foundation and the very libertarian Cato Institute. We’ve been

falling like a rock, and have been overtaken by many other First World nations — all of which have socialized medicine.

The perfect Republican idiot draws lines in the sand over entitlement reform, while ignoring the deeper rot in our economy.

The wholly unelectable Ted Cruz might have demonstrated a perfect fidelity to a plethora of right-wing principles, but the proper question is why we've declined on freedom rankings as compared to other countries. It's obviously not health care.

We must be comparativists, then, and follow Samuel Johnson's advice, in "London":

"Let Observation with extensive View / Survey Mankind, from China to Peru."

And doing so, we'll find that what distinguishes us from the Denmarks and Canadas — from the country that older Americans were born in — is a deeper kind of rot, of departures from the rule of law, of corruption, of a regulatory state on steroids, of broken educational institutions, of a demented immigration system and of a constitutional structure that lacks a reverse gear and that has given us wasteful laws that seem impossible to repeal.

We've become economically immobile, relative to other countries, and it's not because of the move to an information economy. They're not living in the Stone Age in Denmark.

You want to fiddle with entitlement reform? Raise the retirement age to 67, perhaps? Splendid stuff, but have you realized that we spend more per capita on welfare than almost every other country in the world, and that whatever you do, that's not about to change?

Understand all this, and you understand Trump's appeal, and the deep conservatism of his supporters. If they're dismissive of the ideologue's petty little reforms, it's because they're more, not less, conservative than he. When we have strayed so far from the Idea of America, of liberty and opportunity for our children, then true conservatism requires a radical return to first principles.

At some level, the NeverTrumpers begin to understand this, for they've begun to say that things are not so bad after all. For years they've complained about a country in decline, but now they tell us, I'm all right, Jack!

If you're psyching yourself up to vote for Clinton Cash, I guess that's what you have to say, but it's a sad reversal. The mild young NeverTrumper boasts of his integrity, and asks to be respected by progressives, who know a white flag when they see one.

Say he's prudent, say he's well-behaved, but don't tell me that he's conservative.