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Advice for Conservatives

Posted By [Ryan Young](#) On April 30, 2009 @ 2:43 pm In [Culture](#), [Personal Liberty](#), [Politics as Usual](#), [Zeitgeist](#) | [3 Comments](#)

Cato Institute President Ed Crane says to conservatives, [you're doing it wrong](#) ^[1]. I couldn't agree more.

Conservatives are supposed to be the opposition to progressives. Their problem is that opposing something requires philosophical disagreement. At heart, left and right are variations of the same theme.

There are three main currents of conservative thought. All three have their progressive analogues:

Supply-side conservatives have a laser-like focus on tax cuts and economic growth. Both are good things, true. But they forgot about spending, and about philosophy. Means became ends. Hence the Reagan deficits and the Bush spending explosion.

Look at the deficits, philosophical as well as fiscal, of the new administration's First One Hundred Days. Congress and President Obama have quickly established serious supply-side credibility.

Then there are neo-conservatives. Crane says, "All they give us is a war against a country that never attacked us and schemes for 'national greatness' like going to Mars."

Not too different from progressive clarion calls for our country to unite under a common purpose, however vaguely defined. Or the push for mandatory volunteering programs, formerly known as the draft.

Finally, there are social conservatives. Often deeply religious, they can sometimes be less than tolerant of other people. They are the right-wing equivalent of the green movement.

Environmentalism is really a conservative philosophy at heart, anyway. At a fundamental level, greens want to *conserve*, both in the Rousseauian sense and in the Burkean sense.

Conservatives are in no shape to be a viable opposition movement. They resemble their enemy too much.

Where else to turn, then? Crane sums up his own philosophy in two sentences. "Politics is about man's relationship to the state. That relationship, to be healthy, should be minimal."

I think we've found a winner.

That's exactly why CEI, Cato, Reason, and other classical liberal groups are so important. We see through the left-right false dichotomy, and we get the word out. Nowhere does this matter more than in a democracy. In the long run, the people get what they want, good or bad.

The last several elections have proven that in some years, people want bad conservative policies. In other years, people want bad progressive policies.

We can do better. CEI, and our philosophical allies, exist to see that we do.

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[1] you're doing it wrong: http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10158

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