



# LEFT AND RIGHT DIFFERENCES: HOW DO WE MAKE SOCIETY BETTER?

DENNIS PRAGER

A major difference between the Right and the Left concerns the way each seeks to improve society.

Conservatives believe that the way to a better society is almost always through the moral improvement of the individual – by each person doing battle with his or her own weaknesses and flaws.

It is true that in violent and evil societies such as Fascist, Communist, or Islamist tyrannies the individual must be preoccupied with battling outside forces. Almost everywhere else, though, certainly in a free and decent country such as America, the greatest battle of the individual must be with inner forces – that is, with his or her moral failings.

The Left, on the other hand, believes that the way to a better society is almost always through doing battle with society’s moral failings. Thus, in America, the Left concentrates its efforts on combatting sexism, racism, intolerance, xenophobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, and the many other evils that the Left believes permeate American society.

One important consequence of this Left-Right distinction is that those on the Left are far more preoccupied with politics than those on the Right. Since the Left is so much more interested in fixing society than in fixing the individual, politics inevitably becomes the vehicle for societal improvement. That’s why whenever the term “activist” is used, we almost always assume that the term refers to someone on the Left.

Another consequence of this Left-Right difference is that, since conservatives believe society is changed one person at a time, they accept that change happens gradually. This isn’t fast enough for the Left, which is always and everywhere focused on social revolution. An excellent example of this was a statement by the then-presidential candidate Barack Obama, just days before his first election in 2008. To a rapturous audience, he declared: “We are five days away from fundamentally transforming the United States of America.”

Conservatives not only have no interest in fundamentally transforming the United States of America, they are strongly opposed to doing so. Conservatives understand that fundamentally transforming any society that isn’t fundamentally bad – not to mention transforming what is one of the most decent societies in history – can only make the society worse. Conservatives believe that America can be improved, but should not be transformed, let alone fundamentally transformed.

The Founders of the United States recognized that the transformation that every generation

must work on is the moral transformation of each citizen. Thus, character development was at the core of both child rearing and of young people's education – from elementary school through college.

As John Adams, the second president, said: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

And in the words of Benjamin Franklin: “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom.”

Why is that? Because freedom requires self-control. The freer the society, the more self-control is necessary. If the majority of people don't control themselves, the state – meaning an ever more powerful government – will have to control them. From the founding of the United States until the 1960s, schools – and parents – concentrated on character education. But, with the ascent of left-wing ideas, character education has all but disappeared from American schools. Instead, children are taught not to focus on their flaws but on America's. Social issues have replaced character education. An example is a new K-12 science curriculum, the “Next Generation of Science Standards,” which will teach young Americans – starting in kindergarten – about global warming.

And when they get to college, American young people will be taught about the need to fight economic inequality, “white privilege,” and the alleged “rape culture” on their campuses. Ironically, if there really is a rape culture that permeates American college campuses, the only reason would have to be that there is so little character education in our schools, or for that matter, at home. Fathers and religion, historically the two primary conveyers of self-control, are nonexistent in the lives of millions of American children.

We are now producing vast numbers of Americans who are passionate about fixing America while doing next to nothing about fixing their own character.

The problem, however, is that you can't make society better unless you first make its people better.

I'm Dennis Prager.