Dan is absolutely right to distinguish between real think tanks and what I called "fake think tanks" (and what he calls, more generously, "advocacy tanks."). But what we need is some criterion for distinguishing the two: one key move of the modern Conservative Movement has been to dismiss all study as simply being the product of ideology. No wonder that Josh Marshall, in a wonderful piece, described George W. Bush as "The Postmodern President."

So how does one judge? My UCLA colleague Mark Kleiman offers this test:

> When you hear of a think tank producing a study, do you know what the result will be without reading the study?

I think that just about sums it up. You don't need to read a Heritage Foundation report to know what it will say; ditto with a Sierra Club report on the environment. Of course, the Sierra Club freely concedes that it is an advocacy group; Heritage, or the Cato Institute, deny it. But that sort of mendacity is also very postmodern.