

Faced with the inconvenient truth that Republican Party has declared war on science, some conservatives have decided to retreat to false equivalence: yes, the GOP is the home of modern Luddism, but the Democrats are just as bad. This is a move perfected by many mainstream columnists, who condemn both parties for failing to adopt “sensible centrist” policy prescriptions, and [conveniently ignore the fact that President Obama has embraced these prescriptions](#).

Our exhibit this month is Michael Shermer, a thoughtful and insightful columnist at Scientific American, who this month has written [a thoughtless and insight-less column](#), entitled “The Liberals’ War on Science”. Here are the nut grafts from the piece:

[C]onsider “cognitive creationists”—whom I define as those who accept the theory of evolution for the human body but not the brain. As Harvard University psychologist Steven Pinker documents in his 2002 book *The Blank Slate* (Viking), belief in the mind as a tabula rasa shaped almost entirely by culture has been mostly the mantra of liberal intellectuals, who in the 1980s and 1990s led an all-out assault against [evolutionary psychology](#) via such Orwellian-named far-left groups as Science for the People, for proffering the now uncontroversial idea that human thought and behavior are at least partially the result of our evolutionary past.

There is more, and recent, antiscience fare from far-left progressives, documented in the 2012 book *Science Left Behind* (PublicAffairs) by science journalists Alex B. Berezhov and Hank Campbell, who note that “if it is true that conservatives have declared a war on science, then progressives have declared Armageddon.” On energy issues, for example, the authors contend that progressive liberals tend to be antinuclear because of the waste-disposal problem, anti-[fossil fuels](#) because of [global warming](#), antihydroelectric because dams disrupt river ecosystems, and anti-[wind power](#) because of avian fatalities. The underlying current is “everything natural is good” and “everything unnatural is bad.”

This is really quite pathetic. The argument is not so much false (which much of it is: liberals overwhelmingly support wind power subsidies, for example), as it completely misses the point. You can find nutcases on all parts of the political spectrum: but only on the Right can you find that these nutcases dominate politically.

Even Shermer must concede that the people he is talking about are “far-left progressives.” What power do they have? Whom do they influence? Who listens to them? Well, no one, really.

On the Right, however, not only have the nutcases taken over the GOP, they essentially *are* the GOP. Climate denial is the sine qua non of GOP leadership. In the 2010 election cycle, for example, not a single Republican nominee for a Congressional seat was willing to accept the theory of anthropogenic climate change. Did *any* Democratic candidate listen to “Science for the People”? Had any of them ever *heard* of Science for the People? The website listed for them is inoperative. This is evidence of the liberal war on science?

Or consider the issue of Genetically Modified Foods, which the right leaps upon as evidence of the Left’s anti-science-ism. Not only is the issue of GMOs completely tangential in the discourse, lots of Democrats and liberals think that they are okay (me among them). In deep Blue California, when a relatively mild initiative mandating disclosure of GMO status was on the ballot, it attracted barely a yawn from progressives, and lost badly with a majority of Democrats voting no.

So: on the single most important environmental issue perhaps of all time — climate change — the Republican Party has taken an uncompromising anti-science position that defines its membership. On a couple of completely tangential issues, a few people on the Left take crazy positions. And that is supposed to be equivalence. More accurately, it is desperation: desperation from conservatives who want to justify their ideological leanings.

Thus, one more problem on the Right: they don’t know what an equals sign means. Given the radical inegalitarian nature of the American Right, I suppose that that’s to be expected. One more place where conservative ideology trumps science.

UPDATE: [The Shrill One observes](#) that House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, in a supposedly major policy speech, also demanded an end to federal funding of social science research; he also notes that Republicans oppose comparative effectiveness research in health care, forbidden public health research into the effects of gun regulations, and lists several other greatest hits that have been officially adopted by powerful elected Republican leaders. But I’m sure that a few left-wing nutcases somewhere once said something stupid, so really both parties are the same.