

Can America be Fixed?

By [John Kozy](#)

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“Washington tends to enforce a foolish consistency. If you are someone of some prominence whose views are known publicly, then everything you have ever said in the past tends to be projected forward and everything you say today is projected backward. Any discrepancy potentially brings charges of flip-flopping or hypocrisy or selling-out or whatever. Certainly, these charges are valid in many cases, but the simple possibility that circumstances have changed or that experience or new evidence has caused one to change one’s mind seems never to be seriously entertained. The result is to force people to stick with positions they know are wrong because they less fear being foolishly consistent than being attacked for flip-flopping.” ([Bruce Barlett](#)),

When Americans adopted the notion that acting on principle, standing up and fighting for what one believes in, is virtuous, while changing one’s mind, even on sufficient evidence, is unprincipled flip-flopping and unseemly is not known, but it surely has its foundation in the American addiction to ideology which places greater value on belief than on knowledge. This notion’s absurdity should be obvious, but apparently it isn’t. Acting on erroneous principles leads to disaster, and why anyone should be willing to do that is an enigma. Yet even more sinister consequences follow from this notion. Since no prominent person, especially one holding elective office, wants to be labeled “unprincipled,” people are loath to change their views even when they know those views are wrong. Once they have decided that being “principled” is more important than being right, they have no inclination or desire to question the validity of their views by seeking the truth. The result is that these so-called principles become ossified dogmas, debate degenerates into vituperation, government becomes ineffective, and society disintegrates.

But the adoption of this notion along with the American addiction to ideology does not prevent inconsistency, and Bartlett’s comment reveals another trait of what passes for America’s intelligentsia—the curious inability to think past the first level of consequences.

What Bartlett misses is that people hold “principled” views on numerous issues. Holding a “principled” view on one issue can conflict with the “principled” views held by the same people on other issues, and if the “principled” people have no inclination or desire to validate any of their views, the inconsistencies never become apparent to them.

Two such contradictory views are held by the American political status quo, especially on the political right, but often by those termed moderate and liberal as well. One is the view that the family is the fundamental unit of society. The other is the ideological belief in the capitalist system.

The United States of America does not have anything that an anthropologist would recognize as a true society. America consists of a mere cluster of people and groups with various and often opposing beliefs who often have little tolerance for the beliefs held by the others. It has been said that Americans do not live together, they merely live side by side. These individuals and groups openly seek to promote their own interests at the expense of the interests of all. Freedoms of all sorts are being restricted and those people who fall outside of the dominant groups are left to their own devices or abandoned entirely. No true society operates this way, and Americans have obviously never understood Mill's On Liberty.

In primitive societies, the family, especially extended, is the individual's support group. When a young mother dies or becomes infirm, when a person becomes ill or incapacitated, when children are orphaned, when people become elderly, the family provides the needed support because it is often not possible for an individual "to operate within his own societal space, assume his responsibilities, and exploit his potential." [See Steyn below.] Reality is not so benign. But two dogmas of the capitalism practiced in America, what the French call *capitalisme sauvage*, destroys families—the mobility of labor, and the subsistence wage (or the lowest wage that will buy the labor required).

The insufficient income that results from low wages is a major cause of divorce and when family members are dispersed by having to move to where jobs are, the extended family disintegrates. A year or so ago, a study on divorce rates showed that divorce was highest in those red, conservative states in the Bible belt. Protestant clerics bemoaned this finding, attributing it to their own failure to instill Christian values in their flocks, but they failed to notice that per capita income is also lowest in these same Bible belt states. As the extended family disintegrates, the needed support groups collapse, and the individual who is unable "to operate within his own societal space, assume his responsibilities, and exploit his potential" is abandoned. Abandoning one's children is considered by conservatives to be criminal, but apparently they do not consider a nation that abandons its people to even be wrong.

When the people so abandoned clamor for societal support, conservatives often berate them for their "indolence" and accuse them of wanting to become "wards of the state." See Mark Steyn [http://www.hillsdale.edu/news/imprimis/archive/issue.asp?year=2009&month=04]. But the concept of a state is an abstraction, and becoming a ward of an abstraction is impossible. States do not provide people with anything. States merely function as means. Governments consist of people who enact and collect the funds needed to fund the execution of laws. The money comes, at least in fiscally responsible nations, from the nations' peoples. When social programs are created to care for those in need, it is not the state that provides the programs, it is the society. It is society that is the village that is needed to raise a child, not the state. People do not become wards out of indolence, they become wards out of necessity. And the economic system is largely to blame. When people lose their jobs in economic downturns, it is not because they are indolent. When people fall ill or are injured and cannot afford medical care, it is not because they are indolent. When the value of their investments falls because of poor decisions made by corporate or even political leaders, it is not because the people are indolent. It is because the economic system has destroyed the family and is itself unreliable and designed to regularly fail. The economic system then compounds the problem by the idiotic dogma that the only groups that corporations are responsible to are their shareholders. [See my piece, Dumb Claims that go Unquestioned http://www.jkozy.com/Dumb_Claims_that_go_Unquestioned.htm].

What results, of course, is an assemblage of people that resembles what Locke and Rousseau describe as a state of nature, an *état sauvage*, which civil governments are theoretically created to tame. But capitalism not only makes taming the *état sauvage*, impossible, it destroys the family and along with it the basis of society itself. So any “principled” conservative who believes both that the family is the fundamental unit of society and also in capitalism holds fundamentally contradictory views even though s/he holds each “principled” view consistently. So the foolish consistency of the so-called “principled” is not consistency at all. And since the American status quo is assumed to be both ideologically addicted and “principled,” what passes for an American society is afflicted with numerous irresolvable contradictions. Sooner or later it must crash headlong into reality.

The difficulty arises when one asks how one would go about fixing things. True believers and “principled” office holders cannot be influenced by rational discussion, facts, or even the horrific consequences of implementing their erroneous beliefs. If one believes that these beliefs cannot be wrong, when they go wrong it is always because they have been misapplied. If people are poor, it is because they are indolent, if businesses fail, it is because their directors are inept or corrupt, if government policies fail, it is because they are underfunded, not enforced, or inefficiently applied. The belief is never questioned; the system is never reformed. It is merely incessantly patched. But contradictions cannot be removed by patching.

So the broken healthcare system can't be rebuilt fundamentally, it can only be patched. Failed foreign policy practices cannot be altered fundamentally, they can only be patched. The political system that allows deep-pocketed lobbyists to corrupt the system cannot be reformed, it can only be patched. And most importantly, the capitalist economic system, *capitalisme sauvage*, cannot be transformed, it can only be patched. The more things are patched, the more things stay the same. What passes for a society continually unravels, no social problems are ever solved, the people are abandoned for the sake of institutions founded on erroneous beliefs, and eventually the nation collapses.

This is the logical explanation, but there is another nefarious one. Perhaps the claims of ideological purity and consistency on the part of the status quo's elite are mere marketing. Perhaps the members of this elite are committed to no ideology at all. Perhaps all they care about is their own self-interest. Perhaps they will espouse any position at all if they believe it will be profitable. Perhaps they are the proverbial progeny of Cain and the mark they bear is a capital S with a vertical line drawn through its center. Perhaps they are merely scoundrels. Many people, people like Bruce Bartlett, make the unwarranted assumption that the “principled” true believers are well meaning but misled, irrational, ignorant, or foolish. But perhaps Bruce Bartlett and those like him are the ones who are wrong.

There is empirical evidence for this view—all the promises politicians have made to get elected that have never been fulfilled. People who lie regularly to further their own ends are rogues and rogues are not principled people.

So has the United States of America doomed itself by the addiction of its people to ideology and foolish consistency and by developing a political economy managed by rogues? Is it now impossible to fix? Unless the people rise up and demand fundamental change, the answer appears to be, “Yes!” Can the people be expected to do this? Not given the status quo's ownership of the media, because the vast majority lacks even a hint of what is really going on.

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who blogs on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. He has published a textbook in formal logic commercially, in academic journals and a small number of commercial magazines, and has written a number of guest editorials for newspapers. His on-line pieces can be found on <http://www.jkozy.com/> and he can be emailed from that site's homepage.

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