

United States have consulted the United Nations and gotten its permission to invade Iraq? An adult does not “ask for a permission slip”! The phrase itself, permission slip, puts you back in grammar school or high school, where you need a permission slip from an adult to go to the bathroom. You do not need to ask for a permission slip if you are the teacher, if you are the principal, if you are the person in power, the moral authority. The others should be asking you for permission. That is what the permission slip phrase in the 2004 State of the Union address was about. Every conservative in the audience got it. They got it right away.

Two powerful words: permission slip. What Bush did was evoke the adult-child metaphor for other nations. He said, “We’re the adult in charge.” He was operating in the strict father worldview, and it did not have to be explained. It is evoked automatically. This is what is done regularly by the conservatives.

Finally, there is the conservative view of the moral hierarchy. As we have seen, the rich and those who can take care of themselves are considered more moral than the poor and those who need help. But moral superiority on a wider scope is central to conservative thought. The basic idea is that those who are more moral should rule. How do you know who is more moral? Well, in a well-ordered world (ordered by God), the moral have come out on top. Here is the hierarchy: God above man; man above nature; adults above children; Western culture above non-Western culture; our country above other countries. These are general conservative values. But the hierarchy goes on, and it explains the oppressive views of more radical conservatives: men above women, Christians above non-Christians, whites above nonwhites, straights above gays.

Thus, disobedient children in southern states can be “paddled” in school with sticks by teachers; women seeking abortions must undergo embarrassing medical procedures, and notification of husbands and fathers; African Americans and Hispanics have voting rights taken away; legislation against gay marriage is passed by conservative legislatures. In short, the moral hierarchy is an implicit part of the culture wars.

Now let me talk a bit about how progressives understand their morality