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## THE NATION AS FAMILY

It's no accident that our political beliefs are structured by our idealizations of the family. Our earliest experience with being governed is in our families. Our parents "govern" us: They protect us, tell us what we can and cannot do, make sure we have enough money and supplies, educate us, and have us do our part in running the house.

So it is not at all surprising that many nations are metaphorically seen in terms of families: *Mother Russia*, *Mother India*, the *Fatherland*. In America, we have founding *fathers*, *Daughters* of the American Revolution, *Uncle Sam*, and we send our collective *sons and daughters* to war. In George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, the voice of the totalitarian state was called *Big Brother*.

As George Lakoff discussed at length in his 1996 book, *Moral Politics*, this metaphorical understanding of the nation-as-family directly informs our political worldview.<sup>1</sup> Directly, but not consciously. As with other aspects of framing, the use of this metaphor lies below the level of consciousness. But unlike other, more modest framings, the nation-as-family metaphor structures entire worldviews, organizing whole systems of frames in our brains. This was an empirical discovery about how people think about politics. Using cognitive modeling and the cognitive the-

ory of metaphor (see *Moral Politics* for methodological details), Lakoff formulated the nation-as-family metaphor as a precise mapping between the nation and the family: the homeland as home, the citizens as siblings, the government (or the head of government) as parent. The government's duty is to citizens as a parent's is to children: provide security (protect us); make laws (tell us what we can and cannot do); run the economy (make sure we have enough money and supplies); provide public schools (educate us).

This metaphor explains many of the profound differences between pure progressives and pure conservatives on all sorts of issues—from abortion to gun control, from environmental regulation to lawsuit restrictions, from “gay marriage” to the estate tax. Why? Simply put, Americans have two very different idealized models of the family: a “strict father” family and a “nurturant parent” family. This produces two fundamentally opposed moral systems for running a nation—two ideologies that specify not only how the nation should be governed but also, in many respects, how we should live our lives.

But we are all biconceptuals; both models are seared into our brains. Each may be used actively (in politics or everyday life) or passively (say, in understanding movies). The models are *cultural*, and, by virtue of living in the same culture, we become familiar with both models.

Being conservative in some aspect of life, say, religion, means that you use a strict father model to govern your functioning in that arena. Similarly, being progressive in some aspect of life means that you use a nurturant parent model to understand and function in that arena. Pure conservatives and pure liberals use one model to govern all aspects of their political life.

The two models contradict each other; they cannot be applied in the same situation at the same time by the same person. In neural terms, they are mutually inhibitory: activating one inhibits the other.

This is the *Moral Politics* model. It is a theoretical construct within cognitive science that explains many aspects of American political life.

It also explains the nature of ideological purity—why pure conservatives are anti-abortion, anti-gun control, for “tort reform,” against environmental regulation, for lower taxes, against “gay marriage,” and so on, while pure progressives have the opposite views. The *Moral Politics* model explicates the political visions of pure progressives and conservatives and the modes of reasoning characteristic of both.

The model also illuminates a very important political phenomenon. Why do fundamentalist Christians tend to be right-wing conservatives rather than progressives? For instance, why is James Dobson of Focus on the Family, a child-rearing educator from the Christian Coalition, a powerful force in right-wing politics? Dobson is a major proponent of the strict father family in actual family life.<sup>2</sup> Why is he a right-wing conservative rather than a progressive? The *Moral Politics* model explains why.

Fundamentalist Christians view God as a strict father, and the model that structures their religion and their family life also structures their politics. As we will see in Chapter 6, conservatives and progressives differ on the meaning of our most fundamental political concepts: fairness, freedom, equality, responsibility, integrity, and security. The strict/nurturant distinction in family models predicts these differences in the meaning of our most central political concepts.

It is crucial to distinguish between mental models and the names we use for them. Naming is an inexact art. In general, simple names cannot accurately characterize the richness of the models. For example, the strict father model refers to the strictness of the father in applying punishment to a misbehaving child. But the model is far richer than that. The term “strict father” does not capture the focus on the “free” market, the focus

on individual discipline, and many other aspects of conservative politics.

The same is true of the nurturant parent model. “Nurturance” characterizes the empathy and care aspects of the model, but the name is less clear about the responsibility aspect, the strength needed for responsibility, and the implications about protection, freedom, fairness, and so on.

Many other names for these models have been tried, but the inherent limitations on naming will always lead to a discrepancy between the name and model.

### THE NURTURANT PARENT MODEL

In this model, if there are two parents, both are equally responsible for the moral development of the children. Their primary duty is to love their children and nurture them to be happy in their lives. Nurturing has two aspects: empathy and responsibility, both for oneself and for others. Remember that to take care of others, you have to take care of yourself. Equally important, parents raise their children to nurture others, which requires children to have empathy for others, responsibility for oneself, and social responsibility. This is the very opposite of indulgence or spoiling.

Nurturant parents are *authoritative* without being *authoritarian*. They set fair and reasonable limits and rules, and take the trouble to discuss them with their children. Obedience derives from love for parents, not from fear of punishment. Open and respectful communication takes place between parents and children. Parents explain their decisions in order to legitimize their authority. Parents accept questioning by children as a positive trait but reserve the ultimate decision making for themselves.

Parents protect their children from external threats as a natural expression of their love and care.

## THE PROGRESSIVE VISION

Apply the nurturant parent model to politics, and what you get is progressive moral and political philosophy. Though progressive thought can be extremely complex when one gets into the details, it is actually quite simple at the highest level of moral values and general principles.<sup>3</sup>

Progressive morality, like the nurturant parent model, is based on *empathy* and *responsibility*.

*Empathy* is the capacity to connect with other people, to feel what others feel, to imagine oneself as another and hence to feel a kinship with others.

*Responsibility* means acting on that empathy—responsibility for yourself and for others.

From empathy and responsibility, a set of core progressive values follows. These are the values that define progressive thought and structure progressive positions on any issue. They all involve *acting on your empathy* to achieve the following:

- *Protection* (for people threatened or under duress)
- *Fulfillment in life* (so others can lead meaningful lives as you would want to)
- *Freedom* (because to seek fulfillment, you must be free)
- *Opportunity* (because leading a fulfilling life requires opportunities to explore what is meaningful and fruitful)
- *Fairness* (because unfairness can stifle freedom and opportunity)
- *Equality* (because empathy extends to everyone)
- *Prosperity* (because a certain base amount of material wealth is necessary to lead a fulfilling life and pay for enough shelter, food, and health)
- *Community* (because nobody makes it alone, and communities are necessary for anyone to lead a fulfilling life)

Remember that you have to take care of yourself if you are to act responsibly toward others. In progressive morality, there is no contradiction between acting to take care of yourself and acting to help others, since you can't take care of others if you are not taking care of yourself. The old dichotomy between self-interest and altruism is false, since extreme self-sacrifice can make it impossible to act for the sake of others.

Naturally flowing from these progressive values are four core political principles. These principles, largely unconscious, are found over and over again as the basis of arguments for progressive policies and programs.

*The Common Good Principle*

Franklin Roosevelt said in his second inaugural address, "In our personal ambitions we are individualists. But in our seeking for economic and political progress as a nation, we all go up, or else we all go down, as one people." In short, the common good is necessary for individual well-being. Citizens bring together their common wealth for the common good in order to build an infrastructure that benefits all and that contributes crucially to the pursuit of individual goals. (Warren Buffett has famously observed that he could not have achieved his wealth had he lived in Bangladesh, where the banking system and stock market leave much to be desired.<sup>4</sup>)

Here are a few things that taxpayer money—the common wealth—pays for: the interstate highway system, the satellite system, the security system (police, firefighters, the military), the banking system, the court system. Just about every business depends on bank loans (the banking system), contract enforcement (the court system), communications (the Internet and satellite systems), and the shipping of goods (the highway system).

The common wealth provides *protection* for the common good: police, military, firefighters, courts.

It allows for *fulfillment in life* and creates *opportunities*, thereby enhancing the common good: schools, universities, national parks, roads, a banking infrastructure to start a business. The more money one makes, the more one tends to use the common wealth, and the more responsibility one has to contribute to its maintenance. That is an important moral basis for progressive taxation.

The common wealth creates *freedoms* for the common good. Freedom is enshrined in our Constitution, is protected by the courts, and is enhanced by the common wealth. The social safety net and Social Security grant us *freedom from want*. The Bill of Rights grants us a host of other freedoms.

The common good principle promotes *fairness* and *equality*. A progressive government guards against discrimination and works to prevent underserved communities. It operates on the principle that *we're all in this together*, not that you're on your own. Being in this together means that we get the benefits of everyone working for the common good, as well as the responsibilities.

Using the common wealth for the common good creates *prosperity* and fosters *community*.

In business, the common good principle results in ethical business practices. An ethical business does no harm—to individuals, communities, or the environment. It also contributes real benefits to the public as well as its employees and its community. A progressive government acts to support ethical business and to discourage, or even prosecute, unethical business.

The common good principle also means the preservation of common property, or the commons: national monuments; public parks and beaches; the oceans, rivers, and streams; the electromagnetic spectrum (used for radio, TV, and other forms of communication); scientific knowledge; our genetic heritage; and the Internet. These serve us all, and they must be kept public for future generations.

*The Expansion of Freedom Principle*

Progressive moral values lead—and have historically led—Americans to demand the expansion of fundamental forms of freedom. They include voting rights, workers' rights, public education, public health, consumer protection, civil rights, and civil liberties. These expansions reveal what traditional American values have been about.<sup>5</sup>

*The Human Dignity Principle*

Empathy requires the recognition of basic human dignity, and responsibility requires us to act to uphold it.

This principle provides baselines for a wide range of progressive arguments: against torture, for intervention to prevent genocide, for programs to meet the basic needs of the poor, for women's rights, against racism, and so on.

As a country, we need to decide where the boundary of human dignity falls. Food, shelter, education, and health care are all basic rights for all people. Progressives, acting on their belief in human dignity, feel it is necessary to secure these rights for all our citizens.

*The Diversity Principle*

Empathy—which involves identifying with and connecting socially and emotionally with the other—leads to an ethic of diversity in our communities, schools, and workplaces. Diversity fosters meaningful *communities* and creates a range of *opportunities* for citizens to lead *fulfilling lives*.

“Diversity” has become a progressive code word for measures against the effects of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual preference. Because these forms of discrimination have been so widespread and their effects so long-lasting, they have reduced the possibilities for societal enrichment through diversity.

Market diversity, say, in energy or agriculture, provides *protec-*

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tion, so that a shortage in one area can easily be dealt with by surplus or production in another. If we have access to a diversity of energy sources, we will not be susceptible to the difficult consequences of rising oil and gas prices. Biological diversity both guarantees against monocultures being wiped out by some pestilence and serves to promote appreciation of the wonders of nature. Artistic and musical diversity allows for the creation of new forms of art and music.

We will now take a look at the competing “strict father” model and the very different set of guiding values and principles that flow from it.

**THE STRICT FATHER MODEL**

A family has two parents, a father and a mother. We live in a dangerous world, where there is constant competition with inevitable winners and losers. The family requires a strong father to protect it from the many evils in the world and to support it by winning those competitions.

Morally, there are absolute rights and wrongs. The strict father is the moral authority in the family; he knows right from wrong, is inherently moral, and heads the household. The father’s authority and decisions are not to be challenged. Obedience to the father is moral; disobedience is immoral.

The mother supports and upholds the authority of the father but is not strong enough to protect the family or to impose moral order by herself. She provides affection to the children to show love, reward right conduct, and provide comfort in the face of punishment.

Children are born undisciplined. The father teaches them

discipline and right from wrong. When children disobey, the father is obligated to punish, providing an incentive to avoid punishment and helping his children develop the internal discipline to do right. This “tough love” is seen as the only way to teach morality. Children who are disciplined enough to be moral can also use that discipline as adults to seek their self-interest in the market and become prosperous.

Again, that is the ideal model. In real families, it is commonplace to have, say, a strict father and a nurturant mother. Siblings may identify with different parents and grow up with different ideal models.

Pure conservative philosophy is the application of the strict father model—and only that model—to politics. Many self-identified “conservative” voices have actually been biconceptuals of various sorts, e.g., economically conservative but progressive about civil liberties, economically progressive but socially conservative, or vice versa. Such divisions among partial conservatives defined the old fault lines within the conservative movement: libertarians, fiscal conservatives, social conservatives, religious fundamentalists, and more recently, neoconservatives.

What is relatively new in American conservative politics is the attempt to weed the partial progressives out of leadership positions so that pure conservatives are left as the dominant leaders, applying the strict father model to *all* issue areas.

Also new is the appearance of the *authoritarian conservative*, who applies the strict father model not just to all issues but to *governing itself!* The George W. Bush administration has placed itself above Congress (choosing which parts of which laws it will accept) and above the courts (fighting to avoid jurisdiction). Bush himself has been governing as the ultimate moral authority—the decider—not only in the administration but in the Republican caucuses in Congress, in the Republican Party itself, and even in much of the conservative media. A great many old-

guard conservatives were *not* authoritarians in their own community or in governing the nation. John W. Dean, for example, a Goldwater conservative who worked in the administration of former president Richard M. Nixon, considers the Bush administration so authoritarian as to border on fascism.<sup>6</sup>

### THE CONSERVATIVE VISION

Conservative morality centers on issues of *authority* and *control*, both self-control (discipline) and control over others.

Authority should be legitimate and morally good. Authorities have power and, since they are inherently good, use it legitimately to exert control. A political authority has been elected or chosen and thus has legitimate moral authority, which must be respected.

Other values follow from these fundamental components of authority and control:

*Discipline:* Self-control is an essential quality. Moral authority requires internal discipline, which is learned through punishment when one does wrong. The failure of an authority to punish for wrongdoing is a moral failure.

There are political consequences of such a view. Getting something one hasn't earned weakens one's discipline and hence one's capacity to be moral. Thus, if you are not prosperous, you are not disciplined enough to be prosperous and therefore deserve your poverty. Social programs, which give people things they haven't earned, lessen people's incentive to be disciplined and, hence, to be moral. Social programs thus serve immorality and should be abandoned.

*Ownership:* Property acquired through a market or other legitimate means is yours to do with as you see fit. You can spend your money better than the government can. The only use of the

common wealth for the common good is to provide *physical security*. The profit motive creates efficiency in business. Government, lacking a profit motive, is inefficient and wasteful—and gets in the way of the market via regulation, taxation, unionization, and lawsuits.

*Hierarchy*: Economic, social, and political hierarchy is natural because some people are more talented and disciplined than others and deserve to be higher on the totem pole. This is *equity*—higher position earned through merit (talent and discipline)—not equality. Equality of opportunity produces a hierarchy based on merit. And because the market is seen as natural and fair and as allowing the cream to rise to the top, success is an indicator of merit. This directly links democracy to a meritocracy.

Conservative philosophy does not recognize any of the progressive principles. For instance, the “common good principle” is seen as interfering with the free market, the system that rewards discipline. The freedoms that progressives want to expand—particularly freedom from want—are not seen as “freedoms” by conservatives. The “human dignity principle” is rejected by most conservatives because they believe humans do not have an inalienable dignity but must prove their self-worth through self-discipline. If they cannot provide for themselves, too bad. There are exceptions: God-fearing, churchgoing, hardworking people with conservative family values are the “worthy poor,” deserving of private charity. But “worth” is not conferred on just anybody by virtue of being human.

Finally, the “diversity principle” is not valued for its own sake—it is overridden by a merit-based market that confers success through competition.

In contrast to the progressive principles, conservatives have the following:

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*The Moral Authority Principle*

Morality comes from obeying legitimate moral authorities: God (or His minister or priest), the law, the president if you work in government, your parents if you are a child, your teacher if you are a student, your coach if you are an athlete, your commanding officer if you are in the military, and so on.

*The Individual Responsibility Principle*

All of us are individually responsible for our own destiny. If you succeed, it's because you deserve it; if you fail, it's your own fault. You're on your own, and you should be. No coddling.

*The Free-Market Principle*

The free market promotes efficiency, creates wealth, is natural and moral, and rewards individual discipline. Since wealth can provide many freedoms, the free market is a mechanism of freedom and there should be no interference from government. It interferes in the free market in four ways: regulation, workers' rights (worker safety, pensions, overtime pay, etc.), taxation (takes away the rewards of the market), and class-action lawsuits that cost money. People's needs—save physical security—should be met through the market.

*The Bootstraps Principle*

With enough self-discipline, *everyone* can pull himself or herself up by the bootstraps. The government has no responsibility to help people who have fallen behind, because it's their own fault, caused by lack of discipline and morality. Charity is an act of individual virtue, not a responsibility of government.

**CAUSATION THEORIES:  
POVERTY AND TERRORISM**

In surveying conservative and progressive arguments, we have noticed another important regularity. Conservatives seem to argue on the basis of direct, individual causation, while progressives tend to argue on the basis of systemic, complex causation. Two prime examples are terrorism and poverty.

Conservatives see terrorism in simple terms: evil people whose conduct is inexcusable and therefore unworthy of analysis. The most that conservatives will concede is that terrorists “hate our freedoms.”<sup>7</sup>

Liberals tend to ask questions about the deeper, systemic causes of terrorism. Though liberals agree that the conduct is inexcusable, they consider what factors cause hatred of the United States: our military presence in Islamic countries, the absence of schools other than religious madrassas in those countries, our support of authoritarian monarchies in many Arab nations, and our active support of Israel.

This different understanding of the cause of terrorism translates into different solutions. Conservatives respond with little more than meeting force with force. Liberals consider whether long-term solutions require something other than military action, such as engaging the “battle of ideas” in the Middle East. In such a battle, all sorts of options are on the table, ranging from pushing allies like Saudi Arabia to democratize their nations and working more aggressively to solve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Regarding the causes of poverty, conservatives lay the blame squarely on the poor. The American dream is available to anyone who is disciplined, moral, and enterprising. The poor are by definition lazy and immoral—simply not willing to lift themselves by their bootstraps.

Liberals see a more complex set of factors: Educational disadvantages, cultural biases, the vestiges of racism, entrenched institutions, as well as some government policies are all seen as

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contributing to entrenched poverty. Liberals deride the growing gap between rich and poor, while conservatives see it as a natural consequence of a just free market.

The same direct vs. systemic causation dichotomy occurs in a host of areas, such as crime, health care, environment, international relations, immigration, and more.

These different outlooks are predictable and flow from the different family models. In the strict father model, children get direct commands and are punished directly if they don't obey. Their transgressions are individual and so is their punishment. This is consistent with fundamentalist religion, where individual sins—or lack of them—determine whether one is headed for heaven or hell. In the nurturant parent model, children develop morally via attachment and empathy, which require an attunement to complex situations and contextual factors.

This presents liberals with a challenge, because in our sound-bite culture, it can be difficult to persuade with complex arguments. The answer is not to cede to a simplistic but ineffective solution to complex problems. In Chapter 8, we offer some suggestions for dealing with these complicated issues with consistent, authentic, values-based communications.

**IDENTITY ISSUES: GAYS AND ABORTION**

Why should someone in a long-term, stable, and loving heterosexual marriage be threatened if a gay or lesbian couple in a similar relationship were to marry?

Imagine that you are a pure conservative and your worldview is shaped by the strict father model applied to every aspect of your life. It defines your very *identity*: your notion of right and wrong, of God, of what makes a good parent, and of how to run a successful business. It even defines your maleness or femaleness, your sexual identity.

The strict father model is gendered. It has a male husband and a female wife. The parents in that model cannot be lesbian or gay. Legitimizing gay marriage *delegitimizes* the strict father model. The “defense of marriage” is really a defense of the strict father model. Being against “gay marriage” is symbolic of defending an identity defined by the strict father model—defending who you are at the very core of your being.

The abortion issue works in a similar way. In the idealized strict father model, the father is the moral authority; he controls reproduction decisions. He decides whether to use birth control, whether to have children, and whether his wife can have an abortion. He is responsible for his daughter’s sexuality, and he will decide whether she should have sex education, whether she should have sex, and whether she can use birth control. And if she gets pregnant out of wedlock, he decides whether she should have an abortion.

Even the notion of abortion as murder comes from the strict father model, where there is an absolute right and an absolute wrong. That means all categories that appear in moral law must have strict defining conditions, especially the category of a human being. In philosophy, those defining conditions are called “essences,” and they cannot change over time. So the essence of being human, which is there right at birth, must have also been there right before birth, and the day before that and the day before that, back to the moment of conception! Abortion must therefore be the purposeful killing of a human being for one’s own benefit—murder!

### CONSERVATIVE POPULISM

Liberals have generally failed to understand the nature of conservative populism. They tend to be puzzled that poor and middle-

class conservatives vote against their own economic interests. The stereotype is that conservative populists are not too bright, are uninformed, and are being bamboozled by rich conservatives. The cure, liberals think, is telling them the truth. Just get the right information and get them to understand the economic facts of the matter, and they will all become economic populists and vote with progressives. It's a pipe dream.

Conservative populism is *cultural* in nature. That's what the conservatives' "culture war" is about. Conservative populists have a strict father morality and an identity based on it. Accordingly, they tend to reason about politics with direct causation, not systemic causation. But most important, they have been convinced by the conservative message machine that they are being oppressed—by the liberal elite! They think they're being sneered at by the limousine liberals, the Hollywood liberals, the sushi-eating, latte-sipping liberals. They believe they're being lied to by the liberal media, that their money is being stolen by tax-and-spend liberals, that their private property is being endangered by liberal environmentalists, that their businesses are being squeezed by the liberal unions, that their religion is under attack by the godless liberals, and that their family is under threat from liberal feminists and gays. The word they use most to characterize their political aspirations is "liberty," which means freedom from the oppression of a political and cultural elite.<sup>8</sup>

Rational appeals to their economic well-being won't change them.

Here is the only hope we see: Reach out to those who are bi-conceptual and identify with their partial progressive values—values they genuinely share with progressives. On the basis of that identity, convince them of an important truth, that they are being oppressed by conservatives—the land they love is being destroyed by conservatives, their progressive Christianity is under severe attack by conservative fundamentalists, their very

bodies and their families' bodies are under attack by conservatives. There is no lack of arguments to make here.

Without an understanding of the role of strict father morality in American culture, there is no hope of activating progressive aspects of their being.

# 5

## MORALITY AND THE MARKET

You hear it all the time from conservatives: “Leave it to the market.” Health care: Leave it to the market. Social Security: Leave it to the market. The climate crisis: Leave it to the market. Campaign finance: Leave it to the market. Minimum wage: Leave it to the market.

The market even plays a major role in our foreign policy. The Iraq war was partly about bringing markets to Iraqis. Much of our government’s efforts in international relations are about fostering “free markets” through “free-trade policies.” Privatization and deregulation convey the same message: Leave it to the market. America is a market economy. Progressives function just fine in America’s markets, and a great many do very well in the marketplace and celebrate it. Yet progressives—even the wealthy ones—tend to disagree with virtually all of the leave-it-to-the-market arguments.

What’s going on? Do conservatives and liberals mean different things by “the market,” and, if so, what are they? And why are conservatives seen as the only—or at least the primary—champions of the market?

Interestingly, we’ve discovered that the family models discussed in the last chapter structure our understanding not only of government and national politics but of a host of other social in-

stitutions—global politics, schools, the church, and sports teams, for example. The market is among them.

There is a widely hailed conservative version of the market and a largely implicit, intuitively understood—but rarely articulated—progressive version. It is crucial to understand the difference.

Markets are institutions for the exchange of “goods and services,” which can be almost anything, including money or stocks. Other products include convenience, identity (intimately connected with branding), and risk insurance. Even one’s labor is conceptualized as a product that one—or one’s union—sells in a labor market.

The classical assumption behind markets is that everyone is trying to maximize profit, with sellers trying to maximize prices and buyers trying to minimize costs. This leads to the idea of the market as “determining value”—what the buyer is willing to pay and the seller is willing to accept.

The central idea, promulgated by Adam Smith, is that everyone is, or should be, trying to maximize his or her profit. By what Smith termed the “invisible hand,” that is, as a matter of nature, such a market maximizes profit for the totality of buyers and sellers and so helps everyone—including the nation.<sup>1</sup>

This is the idealization. It is seen as moral because it is seen as natural for everyone to maximize his or her own profit—the system Smith described is an accurate account of how the world, or at least the economic world, works.

The idealization makes many assumptions that economists know are not really true: There is near-perfect competition, there is perfect knowledge by both buyers and sellers, there is equal accessibility, there is no collusion by sellers to inflate prices, both buyer and seller are equally powerful, and both buyers and sellers act rationally.

These assumptions are false, and the fact that they are false raises serious questions about the natural and moral aspects of

markets of many kinds. Nonetheless, it is widely assumed—by both liberals and conservatives—that the idealization is true.

These are factual assumptions about how the economic world works. But when the question turns to values—how *should* the market function?—the answers informed by the strict and nurturant family models differ markedly. And problems with the idealization become more noticeable.

### CONSERVATIVE IDOLATRY

In the strict father model, the “free market” plays a significant, implicit role. The market is a competitive system where the disciplined are rewarded through profit, and the undisciplined (and hence immoral) are punished through poverty. The market is an instrument of morality. Because the “free market” is seen as being natural, moral, and fair, the following strict father logic applies: If you’re not prosperous, it means you’re not disciplined; if you’re not disciplined, you cannot be moral, and therefore you deserve your poverty.

The market is to fundamentalist economics what God is to fundamentalist religion—God rewards the disciplined people who follow His commandments and punishes sinners who are undisciplined or rebellious. As with fundamentalist religion, the conservative’s market is radically individualist. You and you alone are responsible for whether you go to heaven or hell and whether you succeed or fail in the market. Like God, the market rewards or punishes, depending on how disciplined you are.

There are a number of entailments that come along with this conservative view of the economy.

The profit motive is taken as ensuring maximum efficiency, so the market satisfies individual needs best. Government is seen

as wasteful and inefficient, interfering with the idealized “free” market. It interferes in four ways:

- *Regulation*, which limits what individuals or corporations can do to make profits
- *Taxes*, which are seen as taking profits away
- *Workers’ rights and unions*, which lessen corporate and investor profits
- *Tort lawsuits*, which can take away corporate and investor profits

That is why the right wing is for deregulation, against taxation, against unions and workers’ rights, and for “tort reform.”

Also, in conservative economics (as with conservative religion), the Earth is to be used by human beings for their profit. Nature is there for the benefit of man. Things that aren’t privatized and being used for production have no value. Therefore, as much as can be privatized should be turned over for development. There is no room for the idea of a commons—a common inheritance of all mankind in the natural world—that should be protected from being commoditized and used for individual profit.

### PROGRESSIVE MORALITY

For progressives—who start with empathy for others and responsibility for both themselves and others—markets should serve to make people free: free from want, free from harm, free from fear, free to meet one’s needs and fulfill one’s dreams. In short, the job of markets is to serve the common good; allow everyone who works to earn a decent living; help achieve freedom from want, illness, harm, ignorance, bigotry, and fear; preserve the natural world; and serve democracy.

Progressives are focused on where markets depart from the idealization, where markets fail to meet expectations, and where government is necessary. With these goals that define market success, progressives are acutely aware of what they see as real or potential market “failures” or “excesses” that require a government role to allow markets to function and serve the common good.

All the things that radical conservatives see as harmful government interference in free markets, progressives see as absolutely necessary government support for the *success* of markets:

- *Regulation* protects the public from harmful products and fraud by unscrupulous or irresponsible businesses.
- *Taxation* brings together the common wealth to build a common infrastructure that we all need to fulfill our individual needs and dreams. Progressive taxation is fair: Those who benefit most from the common wealth should pay the most to sustain it.
- *Unions and workers’ rights* help balance the unfair distribution of power in job negotiations and promote safe, healthy, and ethical workplaces.
- *Tort lawsuits* are the last possibility—the baseline of protection—for dissuading irresponsible companies from harming the public.

As mentioned above, the common good principle is central here: The common wealth has been used to build highways, develop the Internet and the satellite system, uphold the banking system, regulate the stock market, and support the court system, which guarantees contracts. No business functioning in the market could exist without massive use of the common wealth. It is crucial to the existence and flourishing of markets. And those who benefit from markets have a moral obligation to replenish the common wealth.

Progressives see markets as serving a moral purpose—a pro-

gressive moral purpose. And they recognize a truth that conservative ideology hides: Markets can't thrive and serve the common good without the constructive role of government. This is what conservatives ignore when they speak of the "free market."

### THE FREE-MARKET MYTHOLOGY

The conservative idealization of the "free market" falls far short of reality. Indeed, expectations of living up to this ideal are quite harmful. Here's what is in the conservative's free-market frame:

Markets are free when government doesn't regulate or interfere in the market. Through the "invisible hand," markets maximize efficiency and wealth for all. Government "intervention" in the market stifles freedom, creates inefficiency and waste, and inhibits profitability for all. Free markets are open and accessible to all. Seeking profit in the market is natural, moral, and fair. Because markets maximize profit overall, they contribute to freedom. Ensuring free markets is thus a moral cause.

Nice as this may sound, the "free market" is a myth, *and conservatives well know it!* They understand that government regulation of and participation in the market can be beneficial. For instance, the staunchest free-market proponents in Congress and the administration didn't bat an eye after 9/11 when they bailed out the airlines to the tune of \$15 billion on the basis that the airline industry is a vital part of the nation.<sup>2</sup> They send a large percentage of the federal budget year after year to private defense companies, shifting public wealth to private owners. They spend tens of billions to support the oil industry.<sup>3</sup> They maintain price supports for agribusiness to keep profits high and the price of

food low.<sup>4</sup> For generations, they have auctioned off or given public resources like the airwaves and land, water, and oil rights to corporations for development.

These are cases of the *upward redistribution of wealth*—transfers of wealth from ordinary taxpayers to wealthy owners, managers, and stockholders. These interventions in the market promote what conservatives believe is the vital national interest.

But when government intervenes on behalf of working people, consumers, or the environment, conservatives scream foul and invoke the “free-market” frame, because these interventions don’t mesh with their political philosophy. “Free market” is a slogan used to attack the essential rules that keep the market functioning for the common good. It’s time to end the “free-market” myths.

**Myth 1: A Purely “Free Market” Is Ideal.** Consider what a purely free market—that is, a market without government intervention—would look like. Drug companies could market drugs they haven’t fully tested, knowing they cannot be regulated or sued. A mining company’s only incentive to secure safety for its workers would be the fear that killing too many workers would decrease the labor supply and drive up labor costs or generate ill will. An oil company’s only incentive to strip gasoline of lead would be the potential PR problem from putting lead in our atmosphere. Indeed, the early days of the Industrial Revolution mirrored this world, and it was a very difficult time for workers. A “free market” means business can strip the commons of its wealth, making the rest of us pay for its profits.

**Myth 2: People Are Rational Actors.** A central assumption behind the free market is that consumers are “rational” and always act to maximize their self-interest. We now know from cognitive science and psychology research that people do not really think that way. Frames, metaphors, prototypes, and other non-logical cognitive mechanisms enter crucially into their decisions. Consumers don’t make decisions based on perfect cost-benefit

analyses; they also base them on simplifying assumptions, an unequal weighting of risk and reward, different attitudes about “found” money and earned money, and other factors. This puts consumers at a disadvantage in the market when dealing with maximally efficient corporations.

**Myth 3: There Is a Level Playing Field.** Companies have two kinds of employees—assets (upper management and creative people) and resources (people who are interchangeable and available in the “labor market”). Profits rise when the cost of resources falls; the pressure to increase profits correspondingly tends to drive down wages. From a market perspective, a job seeker wants to sell his or her labor, and the company wants to buy that labor for as little as possible. Unemployment helps profitability by producing competition among job seekers, which tends to drive down “prices”—that is, wages. In such a situation, individuals seeking work have very little, if any, leverage to increase their wages. The power belongs to the employer. Unions help to balance that power by cornering the market on labor and thus driving up the price that can be charged for it. The minimum wage sets a floor on how low employers can go in setting prices for labor. In the *ideal* “free” market, which doesn’t exist, there is no such power differential. Conservatives who oppose unions and the minimum wage argue that in such a “free market,” wages should be set by the market, and anything else is unfair. In real markets, the playing field between employees and employers is anything but level.

**Myth 4: A Company’s Balance Sheet Reflects True Costs.** It is commonplace for businesses to externalize costs and have the government or the public pay for them. Many companies do not pay to dispose of their waste but instead just pollute the air or water, passing on to the public the costs of doing business. Many businesses extract resources—oil, minerals, timber—on government-owned land for a fraction of what they would pay on the open market. These are publicly owned resources, and the

“true cost” is being borne by the public. Other businesses make the public work for them for free. When you make a “customer service” call and then have to wait interminably, *your* time is being used so that the company doesn’t have to hire more people to handle customer service calls. *You* are working for the company. The same is true when a company tells customers to look up information on its Web site. It is the customer’s time and effort being spent. These are ways to “externalize” true costs and make more profit. Progressives who want to ban the externalization of costs are ultimately working to make markets closer to ideal “free markets.”

**Myth 5: Everything, Even Life, Has a Fair Monetary Value.** How can a market assign adequate value to a human life? An endangered species? A healthy ecosystem? Aesthetics? In a purely free market, value is determined through supply and demand, with calculation done via cost-benefit analysis. Life insurance companies assign a dollar value to human life. Corporations use cost-benefit analysis to decide how safe to make a car or a drug. HMOs use cost-benefit analysis to determine whether it is “worth it” to send a patient to a specialist, or to have an MRI taken. The “free-market” frame assumes that these are “fair costs” and that the process is always moral. The fact is that there is no such thing as a “fair price” for these things.

**Myth 6: Markets Are Outside the Scope of Moral Judgments.** The conservative view is that unconstrained free markets are *inherently* natural and fair—and inherently moral, in that they maximize profits for everyone. But, as we have seen, business decisions affect human health and life, the survival of species, and so on. These are moral factors, and we cannot afford to ignore them.

**Myth 7: Everyone Can Pull Himself or Herself Up by the Bootstraps.** While it is true that any individual may, in fact, be able to pull himself or herself up by the bootstraps, it is *not* true that *all* people can do so. Our economy is structured by a cheap

labor trap—it depends on the people who flip burgers, wait tables, garden, clean up slaughterhouses, and pick fruits and vegetables. A lot of these workers cannot pull themselves up, because the jobs aren't there for everyone; neither is the start-up capital to employ all of them. And if they did manage to pull themselves up, who would do that work?

### GOVERNMENT VS. MARKET

The “free-market frame” is not an innocent description. It has major moral implications: Privatization and deregulation are seen as virtues that lead to “less government.” That is a fallacy. They lead to less *responsible* government.

Let's look at a new idea: the conservation of governance. In general, governance is about making decisions. In some spheres, governance is best solved through personal autonomy, allowing individuals to make choices to determine the course of their own lives—where they want to live, what they will read, what clothes they will wear, what food to eat—so long as these choices do not impinge on the ability of others to make those same choices. In other spheres, governance is best left to the market, to determine what prices we pay for typical consumer goods. Communist and socialist societies have shown that planned economies do not work very well. In the public sphere, decisions should be made through democratic institutions—who our elected leaders will be, where and how the government will spend its money, what our environment will look like, and what are acceptable standards for those participating in the market.

But a dangerous shift in decision-making power is taking place. This is being driven by the conservative emphasis on privatization and deregulation. HMOs and drug companies, for instance, are deciding what type of medical care people will have

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and how much it will cost. (The recent prescription drug bill *prevents* Medicare from even negotiating volume discounts with drug companies.) Car companies are deciding how much CO<sub>2</sub> we can put in our atmosphere and how fuel-efficient our cars will be. The energy industry determines what type of energy we have access to, its impact on the environment, and how much it will cost. Private testing companies determine what kids should learn and how they should learn it.

These are moral decisions that affect the common good. As such, they should be publicly discussed, and the decision makers should be known and accountable to the public. In short, they should be made by democratically elected government, not corporate government, so they are ideally made in the interest of the public (though government can be manipulated to benefit special interests). But when government functions are privatized and industries are deregulated, these decisions are made in boardrooms for the benefit of stockholder profits. Because corporations are legally bound to maximize profit for their stockholders, and since spending on public safety and other aspects of the public good takes away from profits, corporate governments have an incentive *not* to work for the common good.

Privatization and deregulation constitute *the outsourcing of democratically elected government with a moral mission* to corporations that have a profit-making mission. The effect is to turn *democracy* into *corporatocracy*.

**PROFIT AND HUMAN DIGNITY**

Unfortunately, the conservative view of the unregulated “free market” has captured the imagination of many Americans, because conservatives have effectively communicated this idea for some time. Terms like the “free market” or assumptions like “you

can spend your money better than the government can” establish the debate on conservative terms, making it difficult, if not impossible, for progressives to put forward their ideals.

What alternative frame can we use? How do we center the debate on questions that are important to us and not to conservatives?

On issue after issue, the counterpoints to the conservative principle of the free market are the progressive principles of *human dignity* and the *common good*. We are interested in a market that serves human values, not humans who serve a market.

Take the issue of health care. Conservatives believe that people should get as much or as little health care as the market provides based on your wealth. For conservatives, health care is essentially a commodity, like cotton or coal. Progressives believe that there is some basic acceptable standard of health care that must be available to all, by virtue of being an American and a human being. This is what it means to take human dignity seriously. A person’s health should not be left to the vagaries of the marketplace, particularly given the great wealth of this nation. Progressives also believe that healthy citizens will mean a healthy nation as a whole. Disease, after all, is transmittable. Failure to cure some of us can lead to the spread of disease to a great many of us.

In the conservatives’ worldview, even the environment is subject to market demands. They believe that the market should determine how much clean air and clean water is worth and that this determination should be subject to a cost-benefit analysis. A clean environment is simply another commodity. That overrides any responsibility as a community to preserve it for our children. Progressives believe that there is an inalienable right to clean air and clean water and that every human being deserves it—again as a matter of human dignity and the common good.

When it comes to education, conservatives believe that the market should decide how much of an education you get. No

free rides. They apply the issues of “competition” and “consumer choice” to schooling. Progressives believe that human dignity and the successful functioning of a democracy require that all Americans receive a decent education.

The same goes for welfare, for Social Security, for transportation, and so on. Again and again, the conservative free market says that there is no floor, that it’s inevitable that many people will be losers. This contrasts sharply with the progressive view that markets must respect human dignity and serve the common good while pursuing profit. Each person’s dreams depend on the common good.

### MARKET FAILURES

Thirty years ago, the richest 1 percent owned less than a fifth of America’s wealth. Now, according to a recent report by the Federal Reserve Board, they own over a third.<sup>5</sup> Is there anything wrong with that picture? Conservatives tend to say no—it is a natural consequence of the free market, which is fair. If you, or your ancestors, have accumulated \$1 billion or \$10 billion in the free market, that is fair.

But that assumes you have earned your money on your own, or that some of your ancestors have. But we know from the principle of the common wealth for the common good that no one makes it on his or her own in this country, and that the more you make, the more you have used the common wealth, and the more responsibility you have to pay to maintain the common wealth.

Another way to look at it is that not all of it is “your” money—money you earned all by yourself with no dependence on anyone. Great wealth can be accumulated only by using other people’s money—through infrastructure paid for by taxpayers

and through transfers of wealth directly from taxpayers to you, through government subsidies, writing off business expenses, tax breaks, no-bid contracts, and so on. These are transfers of wealth from ordinary citizens to the wealthy, and should be discussed as such. The common wealth infrastructure is one of the glories of American capitalism. It is there to be used by all, but if you make great wealth, you have a responsibility to pay back an appropriate amount to maintain that common wealth infrastructure so others can use it, too. The estate tax is the easiest way to pay back. You don't have to pay it till you're dead. And your heirs, who didn't earn it, still get half of that great wealth.

Some months ago Rockridge received a note from a thirty-year-old man in Hawaii, who grew up there and had always lived there. He can no longer afford to. So many wealthy people have bought second and third homes there that many ordinary working people can no longer afford to buy a home in that market, or in his case, even pay the rent on an apartment. In short, the wealthy are investing their money in scarce resources like second, third, and fourth homes in beautiful places. This tends to limit access to the nicer but scarce things in life to the ultrarich. When the tsunami wiped out beautiful fishing villages in South Asia, they were all too often replaced by resort hotels on the beach and mansions for the rich—and the traditional fishermen were left without their ancestral homes. The pre-Hurricane Katrina ordinary residents of the nicest parts of the Louisiana coast may be in for this fate as well. Again, these are transfers of wealth to the wealthy. The issue is more than the money itself—the issue is access to the wonderful but scarce wonders of everyday life, starting with real estate.

We began with the false idealization of “free markets” by conservatives who believe that near-perfect competition exists, that buyers and sellers are equal players, that there is free choice, and so on.

But deviations are everywhere. Corporate consolidation—

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“mergers and acquisitions”—in industry after industry has greatly limited competition and pushed up prices and profits by transferring more wealth from ordinary people to the wealthy. Deregulation has given corporations a great knowledge advantage over consumers; corporations, not consumers, know which drugs are harmful, or which cars will break down, or when the paint will peel off. Large corporations have much more market access—say, to supermarket shelves—than small businesses. Collusion on pricing is widespread and has become sophisticated. You don’t have a free choice about buying lifesaving prescription drugs. Wal-Mart is far more powerful than the people it hires in its nonunion shop. And every marketer knows that consumers do not act rationally. The “free market” isn’t free.

Markets have moral functions, and they are constructed to meet moral values and principles. Conservatives have been defining markets to fit their moral worldview. Progressives are way behind. It’s time to speak out.

## 6

### FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

These two models of the conservative and progressive world-views show a drastically divergent set of principles. And yet over and over, we find that both conservative and progressive politicians talk about the same set of values—fairness, equality, responsibility, freedom, integrity, and security. Often, there is agreement about what they are saying. For all our political differences, we share far more ideals in common as Americans than one would think from all the harsh rhetoric of Sunday morning talk shows.

In some cases, though, conservatives and progressives have very different ideas about what a value means.

For example, Congressman John Murtha of Pennsylvania was seen by progressives as *courageous* for coming out in late 2005 against continuing the American occupation of Iraq. They saw him as supporting American troops in an impossible situation. They believed the occupation should end. But conservatives saw Murtha as a *coward* for taking what they labeled a “cut and run” position, which they saw as failing to support our troops. One person’s paragon of courage became another person’s coward.

Another example is what we might call the “freedom to marry” movement, which sees same-sex marriage as an issue of personal freedom. The government should not be involved in perhaps the most important moral and personal decision in your

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life: whom you marry. Progressives liken the situation to the expansion of freedom when the old laws banning interracial marriage were overturned.

George W. Bush also considers this a “freedom” issue, but he argued it to the opposite conclusion on June 5, 2006, when Congress took up a constitutional amendment to ban “gay marriage”:

In our free society, decisions about a fundamental social institution as marriage should be made by the people. The American people have spoken clearly on this issue through their elected representatives and at the ballot box. In 1996, Congress approved the Defense of Marriage Act by large bipartisan majorities in both the House and the Senate, and President Clinton signed it into law. And since then, 19 states have held referendums to amend their state constitutions to protect the traditional definition of marriage. In every case, the amendments were approved by decisive majorities with an average of 71 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In the progressive worldview, this is a matter of personal freedom beyond government rule. In the conservative worldview, the government has the moral authority to decide, and freedom is the exercise of the vote by elected officials.

What produces such cases is the fact that the concepts expressed by words such as “freedom” are *contested*. A contested concept is an idea that means different things to different people. The British political scientist W. B. Gallie, using examples like “art” and “democracy,” first described their properties in the late 1950’s.<sup>2</sup> Gallie and others, especially linguists, have noticed certain regularities about contested concepts:

- Each such concept has an uncontested core that is generally agreed on—an example or class of examples that there is no argument about.

- Each such concept is evaluative, that is, expresses certain values, and the contestation arises from value differences.
- Each such uncontested version of the concept has a complex structure, and contested versions are variations on that structure.

It used to be believed among philosophers and political scientists that if a concept was contested, it could have no clear logic. The situation was just a mess with different people having arbitrarily different views. But since people repeatedly use contested concepts in arguments in an understandable way, that itself suggests there is a logic where conclusions can be drawn. And indeed there is. The system was discovered by cognitive scientists Alan Schwartz and George Lakoff.<sup>3</sup>

Let's take a look at six crucial American values—and how the progressive and conservative understandings of them differ, as well as how these differences are structured by the family models and political principles discussed in Chapter 4.

### FAIRNESS

The following voting principle links fairness and equality: It is fair for everyone's vote to count equally. Nobody's vote counts twice as much as another's, and no person's vote is not counted.

This is a core principle that everyone agrees with—as long as we disregard the hard cases: Should absentee military votes in Florida have been counted in 2004 if they were sent in after the election ended, when it was known that the election was close? Should confusing butterfly ballots have been recast? Does a

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hanging chad count? The contested concept was that of a *vote*.

The logical statement of voting fairness is possible if we rule out the contested meaning of *vote*. Applying this more generally, we can state the uncontested core of the fairness concept: *Fairness is unbiased distribution*.

Most conservatives and progressives would agree on that principle. The idea of fairness contains other concepts, though, that are contested: *bias*, *a process of distributing things*, *things distributed*, *who they are distributed to*, and so on. What counts as “bias”? What is to count as an appropriate process for distributing things? What counts as an appropriate thing to be distributed?

Applying either the strict father (conservative) or nurturant parent (progressive) model to these questions typically yields different answers. It is these models that structure the contested category of *fairness*.

To see how this works, consider the issue of affirmative action in admissions to public colleges and universities.

To progressives, affirmative action is motivated by empathy and is fair and right.

First is empathy for African Americans and Native Americans, who often live in communities that are still suffering from past discrimination.

Second is empathy for poor minorities, who are often discriminated against culturally—given inferior educations or the lack of cultural knowledge necessary to succeed in the business world.

Third is empathy for minority communities that commonly lack adequate professionals (doctors, nurses, dentists, and lawyers), social services, and a business infrastructure (banks, stock brokers, real estate agents, and corporation offices).

Affirmative action is designed to meet the moral mission of colleges and universities by making sure that all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, can realize the benefit of higher educa-

tion. Universities are part of the common wealth—even private universities, which get much of their money from government grants and tax breaks from their nonprofit status—and should serve the common good. That means they should serve all sectors of society.

With affirmative action, colleges and universities can train students from a wide range of backgrounds, so they can return to their communities as doctors, lawyers, teachers, social service providers, and business owners and executives. This would raise the economic and educational levels, thereby helping to improve those communities over time. Affirmative action is about fairness, for redressing widespread *unfairness*.

Conservatives view fairness through the lens of the bootstraps principle. If you haven't made it, it's your own fault. If people work hard, they can make it. Everyone is subject to the same process, so everything is fair. To conservatives, affirmative action is simply unfair and immoral—a matter of giving people something (college admission) that they haven't earned.

Conservatives see college admissions in a different frame than progressives: a competition among individuals for a reward, namely, admission to a university that will allow one to make more money in the future. As a competition, it is a process that should be fair and unbiased. It should be about individual initiative and individual discipline. To be unbiased, colleges should use only “objective” criteria—grades on tests and in classes.

From such a perspective, progressive empathy is irrelevant. The needs of communities are irrelevant. Cultural discrimination is irrelevant. Past discrimination is irrelevant. The only things relevant are individual discipline, initiative, and achievement as shown by test scores.

This difference was highlighted in 1996 with Proposition 209—the “California Civil Rights Initiative.”<sup>4</sup> Here is the main provision:

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The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.

It sounds like it ends discrimination, and many progressives voted for it because they accepted the conservative frame for college admissions: a competition among individuals for a reward. Seen that way, affirmative action looks like discrimination.

But Prop 209 ended programs that were designed to remedy past discrimination. It sanctioned ongoing *systemic* discrimination. In short, Prop 209 was possible because fairness is a contested concept, and conservatives exploited its contested nature, while progressives fell into the conservative framing trap.

**FREEDOM**

We Americans have insisted throughout our history that certain freedoms be expanded: voting rights, civil rights, and the freedoms afforded by expanded systems of public education, public health, highways, parks, libraries, and scientific research. These are progressive freedoms.

But they are being turned back in the name of a very different concept of freedom—a radical conservative “freedom” that fits modern conservative ideology. Conservatives have taken over the words “freedom,” “free,” and “liberty.” Bush, in his second inaugural address in January 2005, used those words forty-nine times in twenty minutes.<sup>5</sup> Turn to the Web sites of Jerry Falwell<sup>6</sup> and James Dobson,<sup>7</sup> and it’s liberty this and liberty that—Liberty University, Liberty Counsel, Liberty Alerts.

This is because freedom is also a classic case of an essentially contested concept.

Uncontested freedom is (very roughly) defined as *being able to do what you want to do, providing you don't interfere with the freedom of others*. This includes physical freedom, freedom to pursue goals, freedom of the will, and political freedom, where citizens freely choose who runs the state and where the state, by law, cannot interfere with the basic freedoms of its citizens. This much is generally accepted.

In addition, there is a logic of what counts as interfering with one's freedom, a logic that includes such notions as *coercion, harm, property, opportunity, fairness, justice, rights, responsibility, nature, and competition*. Here is a sketch of that logic:

- *Coercion* and *harm*, and the fear of them, interfere with one's freedom.
- *Property* and *money* add to one's freedom. Conversely, the taking of your property or money is an imposition on your freedom.
- *Opportunity* is necessary for freedom.
- *Unfairness* interferes with freedom by taking from you what is rightfully yours.
- *Justice* contributes to freedom, since it deters unfairness, coercion, and harm.
- *Rights* give you access; to take away access is to interfere with freedom.
- *Responsibility* must be exercised, usually by others, to make your rights possible. Freedom of access thus requires that others exercise *responsibility*.
- *Nature* cannot interfere with freedom; only people can. If your legs are broken in an earthquake, the earthquake has not interfered with your freedom. But if they are broken by a Mafia enforcer, then he has interfered with your freedom.

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- *Competition* does not involve freedom: The winner in a competition is not interfering with the freedom of the loser.

That is the basic logic of *uncontested* freedom—as long as you stick to the uncontested meanings of coercion, harm, property, nature, competition, and so on. Freedom becomes contested when these concepts become contested.

To get a sense of the contestation, consider what constitutes “interference” with freedom. Do I have a right to say what I want, even if it’s obscene, or do you have a right not to be offended (interfered with)? Do we have a *responsibility* to extend freedoms to others to give them *opportunities*? If I have no clothes, no food, and no shelter, am I free? How much *property* is necessary for adequate freedom? Should we collect taxes from those with the most to enhance the freedoms of those with much less? As you can see, the uncontested notion of freedom can get quite complicated very quickly.

These questions indicate that freedom is highly contested. But, as with fairness, there is a logic to the answers. They are filled in by the parent models discussed in Chapter 4. Typically, application of one model or the other to these questions will yield different answers, so you get two very different forms of freedom.

Apply “strict father” morality to the components of uncontested freedom, and you get conservative freedom; apply the “nurturant” morality, and you get progressive freedom.

For instance, progressives and conservatives both recognize that *property* can enhance one’s freedom. Progressives, based on the “human dignity principle,” recognize freedom from want as a fundamental freedom: Acting on *empathy* for people who are down and out requires that we have a social safety net to secure their freedom. So progressives see Social Security, welfare, and universal health care as increasing freedom.

Conservatives take the opposite approach. They start from the idea that *self-discipline* is fundamental. A lack of property to conservatives indicates a lack of discipline, and hence a lack of morality. Therefore, giving people things they haven't earned creates dependency, which traps people in welfare programs and poverty and thus robs them of their freedom. Not only that, but the taxes that pay for programs like Social Security and universal health care infringe on the freedom of the taxpayer, since taking his money is imposing on his freedom.

What progressives see as essential freedoms, conservatives see as essential interferences.

Consider different approaches to the market.

#### *The Progressive Argument*

Progressives empathize with people suffering economic hardship in the world's richest nation and believe that economic pressures can deny people their freedoms. For instance, if you have to work eighty hours a week at the minimum wage of \$5.15 to earn poverty wages, the market is interfering with your freedom—freedom from want, freedom of opportunity. So progressives see regulation of the market as an issue of freedom. In accordance with the “common good principle,” progressives also believe that Social Security, universal health care, and access to a college education—all part of the common wealth—can help the impoverished improve their finances, thereby contributing to freedom from want.

#### *The Conservative Argument*

Conservatives, on the other hand, believe that the market is a “natural” system. As a “natural” phenomenon, the market—like an earthquake or a rainstorm—can't interfere with people's freedom. The government should not set “artificial” prices for the market. A statute that says an employer and an employee can't engage in a contract for less than \$5.15 an hour is interfering

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with the natural functioning of the market and thus inhibiting freedom. So regulations of the natural free market are interfering with freedom.

Conservatives' "strict" morality also dictates that discipline is what the market requires. It is the mechanism by which property is acquired. Property adds to one's freedom. A lack of discipline means a lack of property. A lack of property means a lack of freedom.

Lakoff's *Whose Freedom?* goes explicitly through the details of these and many more cases of how strict and nurturant morality yield opposite versions of freedom.

## EQUALITY

In simple cases, equality is fairly straightforward. Two plus two equals three plus one. "Two plus two" and "three plus one" characterize the same amount. When you're dividing a pie equally among six kids, each kid gets a wedge of the same size. If a relatively small group of people is voting, equality means one person, one vote.

Therefore, in simple cases, equality has an uncontested core: *Equality is sameness of distribution.*

The *contested* issues are *what is distributed, who things are distributed to, what the process of distribution is, what counts as the same, who does the distributing, and on what basis.*

Things get even more complicated in social, legal, and political equality, where the *things distributed* are votes, rights, property, pollution credits, use of bandwidths, college admissions, jobs, access to legal counsel, marriage licenses, medical treatments, and so on. In religion, equality has to do with equal access to God versus access only through a priest or minister, the right to become a priest or minister, and so on. In politics, it is

the question of which votes count, how they should be counted, who has the opportunity to run for office, who has access to office holders, and so on. Equality before the law means that everyone should be treated the same in the legal process, regardless of wealth or position.

To get a sense of how equality is contested in politics, consider the constant struggle between liberals and conservatives over what equality means: equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome.

Conservatives accept equality of opportunity—but it assumes the conservative deep frames, i.e., the market is open to everyone, so nothing further needs to be done except to get the government out of the way. It is all a matter of individual initiative and individual responsibility and individual accomplishment. Conservatives speak of “equity”—a hierarchy of merit, where merit is defined by success in the market. Equity replaces equality of outcome with a hierarchy of merit.

For progressives, empathy leads us to identify with the needs of others. A perfect example is President Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1965 speech at the Howard University commencement:

It is not enough to open the gates of opportunity; all our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. . . . We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result. . . . To this end equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough.<sup>8</sup>

Because progressives empathize with the other, we see the other as like us. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. Not the same abilities but the same range. Equality of outcome is therefore not identical outcomes but the same range of outcomes regardless of race. So we would expect that given *equality of opportunity* (as there should be in a

democracy, and in a fair capitalist system), there would be equality of distribution of outcome. That is, if there were an equality of opportunity, there should be the same number of doctors, lawyers, scientists per capita in the African-American community as in the population at large. Or the median income in African-American households would be the same as in the population at large. But this is not the case. Given the assumption of the same range of abilities, this indicates that there must not be real equality of opportunity.

The “same range of abilities” frame is commonplace among liberals. It has a crucial use in classic liberal arguments. First, it defines the boundaries of racism: To deny it, to say some races have a greater range of abilities than others, is de facto taken as racist. Second, given this frame, it follows that different outcomes are de facto evidence of the effects of racism, past or present or both. The outcomes are documented in statistics—the rational presentation of a laundry list of statistical facts regarding infant mortality rates, income disparities, unemployment rates, and so on.

To counter the conservative argument that we should conclude from such facts that there is a racial difference of inborn abilities that have nothing to do with racism, LBJ, in his Howard University talk, spoke of the effects of racism on ability. Note that he took causes as not individual but as systemic and complex, both present and past:

But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.

We know the causes are complex and subtle. . . .

First, Negroes are trapped—as many whites are

trapped—in inherited, gate-less poverty. They lack training and skills. They are shut in, in slums, without decent medical care. Private and public poverty combine to cripple their capacities. . . .

We are trying to attack these evils through our poverty program, through our education program, through our medical care and our other health programs, and a dozen more of the Great Society programs that are aimed at the root causes of this poverty.

But there is a second cause—much more difficult to explain, more deeply grounded, more desperate in its force. It is the devastating heritage of long years of slavery; and a century of oppression, hatred, and injustice.

For Negro poverty is not white poverty. . . . These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice.

The reason we picked the LBJ speech was to show how much the progressive issues, the frames, and the equality arguments have remained the same over four decades, despite all the changes.

One big move on the conservative side is toward having equality replaced by equity—distribution on the basis of merit, or *deservedness*. Conservatives and progressives differ in their understanding of *deservedness*, as one would predict, by the application of their respective moral systems.

For conservatives, *deservedness* is understood as the result of discipline. Since their moral system advocates that reward should be proportional to discipline and ability, *deservedness* reflects discipline and ability: hours worked, widgets manufactured, or bold entrepreneurship, all of which hinge on being a disciplined person and so qualify as fair means for distributing resources *equitably*—by the market, not the government.

For progressives, *deservedness* is understood through the lens of

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*nurturance*, which says that someone *in need* deserves assistance. This satisfies the “human dignity principle,” making sure no one falls too far behind. It also fulfills the “common good principle,” since the needs of the commons are counted as valid needs that merit attention, besides just the needs of an individual.

The most recent conservative take on equality is via culture and family values. John McWhorter argues that the reason for a lack of African-American achievement is black culture, which does not respect learning, and so African-American kids grow up not doing well in school or in life.

David Brooks sees two cultural problems standing in the way of equality of outcome. The first is the breakdown in the nuclear family, which, he claims, has led to a lack of attachment between children and their parents. The second is that the culture does not support the delay of gratification. Both of these are conservative arguments that the government has no role to play in equality for African Americans. The cultural message is that the African-American community has to get its act together itself, learn to just say no, and start glorifying entrepreneurs, political leaders, and intellectuals over basketball players, hip-hop musicians, pimps, and criminals. The sneaky part of the McWhorter and Brooks argument is that they use nurturant values—responsibility and a respect for knowledge—as an argument *against* a progressive role for government.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, Brooks’s recent discovery of attachment does not lead him to attack conservative child-rearing practices, e.g., James Dobson’s *Focus on the Family*, which teaches strict father child rearing and its link to conservative politics.

**RESPONSIBILITY**

The difference in the conservative and progressive understanding of *responsibility* is conveniently reflected in a difference

between two surface frames English speakers have for understanding the word. This is instructive since the surface frame difference is one we can all understand and doesn't *necessarily* have to do with one's moral system. Consider the following two ways of talking about responsibility:

- Carrying the weight of a responsibility
- Fulfilling a responsibility

In the first, responsibility is a load carried by a single person as she goes through life. This load makes moving through life more difficult, and if the person is too weak to shoulder the responsibility, it is her fault and she alone is the failure. In the second, there is a void that needs to be filled. If the person can't do it, then she isn't the right person to fill the void, and someone else more appropriate should be taking on the responsibility.

Progressive responsibility is connected with the surface frame of fulfilling a need through empathy and using the common wealth for the common good. An illustrative example of this is Hurricane Katrina.

When disaster strikes, progressives generally react with empathy for those affected. In Katrina, it meant empathy for the victims of the hurricane and the ensuing breach of the levees. The progressive vision has everyone helping in whatever capacity they can. Our government has the powerful capability to harness our collective resources. One way that we fulfill our responsibilities to be nurturant of others is by paying taxes. Part of these taxes is to be used by government to be the immediate responder in the aftermath of any disaster. When government does so, we can also carry on with our personal responsibilities—working, taking care of families, etc. The taxes we pay should have also been spent responsibly ensuring the safety of the levees in the first place.

The conservatives' response to Katrina was strikingly different. Instead of holding Bush and Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff responsible, they pushed blame downward

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to the point where they blamed the victims themselves for choosing to live in and near New Orleans. Under the conservative principle of “individual responsibility,” you are responsible for only yourself, so blaming the victims makes sense in their view. Bush can’t be blamed if the government isn’t supposed to be responsible for keeping the levees secure. For example, Joe Allbaugh, former FEMA director and Bush/Cheney campaign manager in 2000, argued before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that FEMA was an entitlement program to be phased out, not an agency essential to the safety of Americans. No responsibility was assumed.

Conservative responsibility also has two sides—the people making the rules and the people following the rules. It is the responsibility of our leaders to enforce discipline (moral authority), which means making rules and doling out rewards and punishment. For the rest of us, our responsibility is simply to follow the rules and otherwise maximize personal well-being—for ourselves and others.

The Katrina example has become such a major political touchstone because it highlights the two different attitudes about the role of government in our lives and about the contested concept of *responsibility*.

**INTEGRITY**

The basic logic of integrity is twofold. First, it means saying what you believe and then acting on it consistently. Second, it means the consistent application of a principle:

- Progressive integrity is the consistent application of nurturance.
- Conservative integrity is the consistent application of strictness.

It may seem simple, but these statements lead to an interesting difference in the understanding of integrity.

With discipline, constancy is critical. Discipline must be applied the same way every time, regardless of circumstance. The person being disciplined needs to understand that there is a direct and immediate consequence for all actions and that the consequence is the same. The focus is on the constancy of the process, the identicalness of action.

To consistently apply empathy, however, the needs of the person receiving nurturance must be addressed, not the process itself. So to remain empathetic, the same degree of care must be applied. Sometimes this care requires different actions or different approaches, depending on circumstance.

Moving back to politics, we can see this difference in the understanding of integrity in the conservative and progressive reaction to John Murtha's call to bring the troops back home. To progressives, Murtha was courageous and speaking out of empathy for the Iraqi people and, even more so, out of empathy for our troops. He knew he would receive withering criticism for doing so, but even still, he said what he believed. This unwavering dedication to nurturance and to his beliefs exemplifies the progressive view of integrity.

To conservatives, Murtha's initial commitment to the war and then his reversal were the exact opposite of courage and completely lacking in integrity. They see the Bush administration's unchanging vigilance in Iraq as a sign of integrity. What they fail to see in Murtha's case is that his initial support for the war was based on being misled to believe that it would protect Americans and protect Iraqis. In this respect, Murtha's commitment didn't change—his call for withdrawal reflected a continued interest in the safety of Americans, as did the initial decision to go to war based on flawed information.

So just as with fairness, equality, and freedom, integrity can be understood differently by conservatives and progressives be-

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cause of a difference in worldview. The conservative worldview applies discipline to integrity to get an understanding of integrity that is unchanging action, regardless of changing circumstances. Progressive integrity comes from applying the idea of nurturance to integrity, the result being an unchanging commitment to nurturance, which may call for charting a different path when circumstance requires.

**SECURITY**

Progressives have been accused of being weak on security. However, this comes not from an objective assessment of progressive policies but rather from the fact that the conservative understanding of security has dominated public discourse. This is possible because *security* is a contested concept.

The uncontested core of security is *providing protection through strength*.

But strength itself is a contested concept, as can be seen in contrasting two different scenes. For the first scene, imagine a wall surrounding a city under attack. If the wall is strong, it will hold up against the attack, protecting the people inside. This is strength in the sense of protection against the use of force.

For the second scene, imagine a fist trying to punch through a board. If the person is strong, he or she will break through the board. This is strength through the use of force.

The first scene is representative of progressive security: security through protection. The second scene is representative of conservative security: security through the use of force.

The response of both ideologies to the threat of terrorism highlights this difference. The progressive response is to make sure our ports, our landmarks, our infrastructure, and our troops are protected. Progressives advocated for federal funds to be used

to increase port security, for example, and wanted the Department of Homeland Security to protect possible targets of terrorist attack, not to turn itself into another pork-barrel slush fund.

The conservatives' strategy differed markedly. Their idea of security was to attack.

Some progressives voted for the use of force in both Afghanistan and Iraq because it was presumed that both wars would provide protection for Americans. When the Iraq attack turned out not to be about protection but about a show of force, progressives who supported the war felt duped. And as the Iraq war ended and was replaced with an occupation, it became even less about protection, and progressives have been calling for a pullout—to *protect* the troops.

The conservative idea of strong security at home is based on a justice system that inflicts harsh punishment on criminals—another example of a show of force. Punishment is required to enforce discipline, and that's why conservatives advocate for policies like three-strikes laws.

Progressive security is based on nurturance, so domestic protection takes on a very different form. The best way to prevent crime is not harsh deterrence—at least in the case of the death penalty, this clearly does not work. Instead, security comes from the broad application of progressive principles.

Crime is lower when poverty is lower, so ensuring secure communities requires providing opportunity and a decent living for all its members—extensions of the “human dignity principle.” Therefore, broad prosperity is crucial to security.

The “common good principle” requires that secure communities come from having a well-funded infrastructure. This means funding not only police and fire departments but also departments like FEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service, and a public health infrastructure—as well as good schools and universal health care. Thus, a strong infrastructure is crucial to security.

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So security looks like all the other contested concepts we have discussed. Progressives and conservatives have different points of view as to what security—and the related values of strength and protection—means, and the difference in meaning comes from their different views of the world.

In this chapter, we've articulated the basic progressive values. The discussion of each value should have shown that it's not enough just to say "equality" or "responsibility" in a speech, because conservatives and progressives each have their own understanding of what these values mean. You have to talk about *your* understanding of each of these words. Doing so allows progressives to reclaim the values that have been co-opted by conservatives and advance our vision for America.