

Lakoff, George

Loc 125 | Highlight

Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As a result, they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or bad outcome of our actions. In politics our frames shape our social policies and the institutions we form to carry out policies. To change our frames is to change all of this. Reframing is social change. You can't see or hear frames.

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When you argue against someone on the other side using their language and their frames, you are activating their frames, strengthening their frames in those who hear you, and undermining your own views. For progressives, this means avoiding the use of conservative language and the frames that the language activates. It means that you should say what you believe using your language, not theirs.

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When we successfully reframe public discourse, we change the way the public sees the world.

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Conservatives in America have developed a very extensive and sophisticated communication system that progressives have not yet developed.

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Reframing, as we discuss it in this book, is about honesty and integrity. It is the opposite of spin and manipulation.

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learning to express what we really believe in a way that will allow those who share our beliefs to understand what they most deeply believe and to act on those beliefs.

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a great many people operate on different—and inconsistent—moral systems in different areas of their lives. The technical term is “biconceptualism.”

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How can inconsistent systems function smoothly in the same brain? The answer is twofold: (1) mutual inhibition (when one system is turned on the other is turned off); and (2) neural binding to different issues (when each system operates on different concerns).

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many progressives to the view that the facts—alone—will set you free. Progressives are constantly giving lists of facts. Facts matter enormously, but to be meaningful they must be framed in terms of their moral importance.

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When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame.

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When you are arguing against the other side, do not use their language. Their language picks out a frame—and it won't be the frame you want.

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tax relief

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we all have a metaphor for the nation as a family. We have Founding Fathers. The Daughters of the American Revolution. We “send our sons” to war.

strict father family and a nurturant parent family.

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The strict father model begins with a set of assumptions: The world is a dangerous place, and it always will be, because there is evil out there in the world. The world is also difficult because it is competitive. There will always be winners and losers. There is an absolute right and an absolute wrong. Children are born bad, in the sense that they just want to do what feels good, not what is right. Therefore, they have to be made good. What is needed in this kind of a world is a strong, strict father who can: • protect the family in the dangerous world, • support the family in the difficult world, and • teach his children right from wrong. What is required of the child is obedience, because the strict father is a moral authority who knows right from wrong. It is further assumed that the only way to teach kids obedience—that is, right from wrong—is through punishment, painful punishment, when they do wrong.

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Adam Smith said that if everyone pursues their own profit, then the profit of all will be maximized by the invisible hand—that is, by nature—just naturally. Go about pursuing your own profit, and you are helping everyone.

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immoral to give people things they have not earned, because then they will not develop discipline and will become both dependent and immoral. This theory says that social programs are immoral because they make people dependent. Promoting social programs

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But they are against nurturance and care. They are against social programs that take care of people—early childhood education, Medicaid for the poor, raising the minimum wage, unemployment insurance. That is what they see as wrong. That is what they are trying to eliminate on moral grounds. That is why they are not merely a bunch of crazies or mean and greedy—or stupid—people, as many liberals believe. What is even scarier is that conservatives are acting on principle, on what they believe is moral.

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Map this onto foreign policy, and it says that you cannot give up sovereignty. The United States, being the best and most powerful country in the world—a moral authority—should not be asking anybody else what to do. We should be using our military power.

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the rational actor metaphor.

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every nation is a person. Therefore there are “rogue states,” there are “friendly nations,” and so on.

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The rational actor metaphor says that every actor, every person, is rational, and that it is irrational to act against your self-interest. Therefore it is rational for every person to act to maximize self-interest. Then by the further metaphor that nations are persons (“friendly nations,” “rogue states,” “enemy nations,” and so on), there are adult nations and child nations, where adulthood is industrialization. The child nations are called “developing” nations or “underdeveloped” states. Those, again in this view, are the backward ones. And what should we do? If you are a strict father, you tell the children how to develop, tell them what rules they should follow, and punish them when they do

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

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The nurturant parent worldview

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gender neutral. Both parents are equally responsible for raising the children. The assumption is that children are born good and can be made better.

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What does nurturance mean? It means three things: empathy, responsibility for yourself and others, and a commitment to do your best not just for yourself, but for your family, your community, your country, and the world.

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So progressive politics focuses on environmental protection, worker protection, consumer protection, and protection from disease.

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Protection is part of the progressive moral system, but it has not been elaborated on enough.

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if you empathize with your child, you want your child to be fulfilled in life, to be a happy person. And if you are an unhappy, unfulfilled person yourself, you are not going to want other people to be happier than you are. The Dalai Lama teaches us that. Therefore it is your moral responsibility to be a happy, fulfilled person.

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You do not have very much freedom if there is no opportunity or prosperity. Therefore opportunity and prosperity are progressive values.

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Trust, honesty, and open communication are fundamental progressive values—in a community as in a family.

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six basic types of progressives,

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Socioeconomic progressives think that everything is a matter of money and class and that all solutions are ultimately economic and social class solutions. • Identity politics progressives say it is time for their oppressed group to get its share now. • Environmentalists think in terms of sustainability of the earth, the sacredness of the earth, and the protection of native peoples. And they recognize that global warming is the major moral challenge of our time, making all other issues pale by comparison. • Civil liberties progressives want to maintain freedoms against threats to freedom. • Spiritual progressives have a nurturant form of religion or spirituality. Their spiritual experience has to do with their connection to other people and the world, and their spiritual practice has to do with service to other people and to their community. Spiritual progressives span the full range from Catholics and Protestants to Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Goddess worshippers, and pagan members of Wicca. • Antiauthoritarians say there are all sorts of illegitimate forms of authority out there and we have to fight them, whether they are big corporations or anyone else.

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many of the people who have one of these modes of thought do not recognize that theirs is just one special case of something more general, and do not see the unity in all the types of progressives. They often think that theirs is the only way to be a true progressive. That is sad.

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accident. Conservatives, through their think tanks, figured out the importance of framing, and they figured out how to frame every issue. They

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The myths began with the Enlightenment, and the first one goes like this: The truth will set us free.

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If we just tell people the facts, since people are basically rational beings, they'll all reach the right conclusions.

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To be accepted, the truth must fit people's frames. If the facts do not fit a frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off.

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are what conservatives see as truths—presented from their point of view.

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remember that the truth alone will not set you free.

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There is another myth that also comes from the Enlightenment, and it goes like this: It is irrational to go against your self-interest, and therefore a normal person, who is rational, reasons on the basis of self-interest. Modern economic theory and foreign policy are set up on the basis of that assumption.

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This view of rationality comes into Democratic politics in a very important way. It is assumed that voters will vote their self-interest. Democrats are shocked or puzzled when voters do not vote their self-interest. "How," Democrats keep asking me, "can any poor person vote for Republicans when Republican policies hurt them so badly?"

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People do not necessarily vote in their self-interest. They vote their identity. They vote their values. They vote for who they identify with.

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A third mistake is this: There is a metaphor that political campaigns are marketing campaigns where the candidate is the product and the candidate's positions on issues are the features and qualities of the product. This leads to the conclusion that polling should determine which issues a candidate should run on.

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does not work. Sometimes it can be useful, and, in fact, the Republicans use it in addition to their real practice. But their real practice, and the real reason for their success, is this: They say what they idealistically believe.

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There is no ideology of the middle.

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This is very important to understand. The goal is to activate your model in the people in the "middle."

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Clinton figured out how to handle this problem. He stole the other side's language. He talked about "welfare reform," for example. He said, "The age of big government is over."

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It turns out that what is good for the goose is good for the gander, and guess what? When George W. Bush arrived, we got "compassionate conservatism." The Clear Skies Initiative. Healthy Forests. No Child Left Behind.

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recognize that they use Orwellian language precisely when they have to: when they are weak, when they cannot just come out and say what they mean. Imagine if they came out supporting a "Dirty Skies Bill" or a "Forest Destruction Bill" or a "Kill Public Education" bill. They would lose.

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Orwellian language points to weakness—Orwellian weakness. When you hear Orwellian language, note where it is, because it is a guide to where they are vulnerable. They do not use it everywhere. It is very important to notice this and use their weakness to your advantage.

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It was Luntz who persuaded conservatives to stop talking about “global warming” because it sounded too scary and suggested human agency. Instead, he brought “climate change” into our public discourse on the grounds that “climate” sounded kind of nice (think palm trees) and change just happens, with no human agency.

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Luntz once wrote a memo for talking to women. How do you talk to women? According to Luntz, women like certain words, so when you are talking to an audience of women, here are the words you use as many times as possible: love, from the heart, and for the children.

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This kind of language use is a science. Like any science, it can be used honestly or harmfully.

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This kind of language use is also a discipline. Conservatives enforce message discipline.

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One of the major mistakes liberals make is that they think they have all the ideas they need. They think that all they lack is media access. Or maybe some magic bullet phrases, the liberal equivalent of partial-birth abortion. When you think you just lack words, what you really lack are ideas. Ideas come in the form of frames. When the frames are there, the words come readily. There's a way you can tell when you lack the right frames. There's a phenomenon you have probably noticed. A conservative on TV uses two words, like tax relief. And the progressive has to go into a paragraph-long discussion of his own view. The conservative can appeal to an established frame, that taxation is an affliction or burden, which allows for the two-word phrase tax relief. But there is no established frame on the other side. You can talk about it, but it takes some doing because there is no established frame, no fixed idea already out there.

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What is taxation? Taxation is what you pay to live in a civilized country—

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You can think of taxation metaphorically in at least two ways. First, as an investment.

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Our parents invested in the future, ours as well as theirs, through their taxes. They invested their tax money in the interstate highway system, the Internet, the scientific and medical establishments, our communications system, our airline system, the space program. They invested in the future, and we are reaping the tax benefits, the benefits from the taxes they paid. Today we have assets—highways, schools and colleges, the Internet, airlines—that come from the wise investments they made.

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There is no such thing as a self-made man. Every businessman has used the vast American infrastructure, which the taxpayers paid for, to make his money.

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And they are still thinking ahead. Progressives are not. Progressives feel so assaulted by conservatives that they can only think about immediate defense. Democratic office holders are constantly under attack. Every day they have to respond to conservative initiatives. It is always, “What do we have to do to fight them off today?” This leads to politics that are reactive, not proactive.

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In the right’s hierarchy of moral values, the top value is preserving and defending the moral system itself. If that is your main goal, what do you do? You build infrastructure. You buy up media in advance. You plan ahead. You do things like give fellowships to right-wing law students to get them through law school if they join the Federalist Society. And you get them nice jobs after that. If you want to extend your worldview, it is very smart to make sure that over the long haul you have the people and the resources that you need. On the left, the highest value is helping individuals who need help. So if you are a foundation or you are setting up a foundation, what makes you a

| good person? You help as many people as you can.

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| And so you perpetuate a system that helps the right.

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| But what has happened as budgets and taxes get cut is that the right is privatizing the left. The right is forcing the left to spend ever more private money on what the government should be supporting.

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| The right knows how to talk about values. We need to talk about values.

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| A strategic initiative is a plan in which a change in one carefully chosen issue area has automatic effects over many, many, many other issue areas.

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| they can calculate in advance the cost of paying victims and build it into the cost of doing business.

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| Unlike the right, the left does not think strategically. We think issue by issue.

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| First, notice what conservatives have done right and where progressives have missed the boat. It is more than just control of the media, though that is far from trivial. What they have done right is to successfully frame the issues from their perspective. Acknowledge their successes and our failures.

Second, remember “Don’t think of an elephant.” If you keep their language and their framing and just argue against it, you lose because you are reinforcing their frame. Third, the truth alone will not set you free. Just speaking truth to power doesn’t work. You need to frame the truths effectively from your perspective. Fourth, you need to speak from your moral perspective at all times. Progressive policies follow from progressive values. Get clear on your values and use the language of values. Drop the language of policy wonks. Fifth, understand where conservatives are coming from. Get their strict father morality and its consequences clear. Know what you are arguing against. Be able to explain why they believe what they believe. Try to predict what they will say. Sixth, think strategically, across issue areas. Think in terms of large moral goals, not in terms of programs for their own sake. Seventh, think about the consequences of proposals. Form progressive slippery slope initiatives. Eighth, remember that voters vote their identity and their values, which need not coincide with their self-interest. Ninth, unite! And cooperate! Here’s how: Remember the six modes of progressive thought: (1) socioeconomic, (2) identity politics, (3) environmentalist, (4) civil libertarian, (5) spiritual, and (6) antiauthoritarian. Notice which of these modes of thought you use most often—where you fall on the spectrum and where the people you talk to fall on the spectrum. Then rise above your own mode of thought and start thinking and talking from shared progressive values. Tenth, be proactive, not reactive. Play offense, not defense. Practice reframing, every day, on every issue. Don’t just say what you believe. Use your frames, not their frames. Use them because they fit the values you believe in. Eleventh, speak to the progressive base in order to activate the nurturant model of biconceptual voters. Don’t move to the right. Rightward movement hurts in two ways. It alienates the progressive base and it helps conservatives by activating their model in biconceptual voters.

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There are two common mistakes people make when thinking about framing. The first mistake is believing that framing is a matter of coming up with clever slogans, like “death tax” or “partial-birth abortion,” that resonate with a significant segment of the population.

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The second mistake is believing that, if only we could present the facts about a certain reality in some effective way, then people would “wake up” to that reality, change their personal opinion, and start acting politically to change society.

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But the reality is that certain ideas have to be ingrained in us—developed over time consistently

and precisely enough to create an accurate frame for our understanding.

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A pension is delayed payment for work already done. As a condition for taking a job, a pension is part of your earned salary, withheld and invested by your employer, to be paid later, after retirement.

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it is hard to shake the frame constructed over years by pundits on the right that pensions are pay for not working.

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hypocognition—the lack of the overall neural circuitry that makes common sense of the idea and that fits the forms of communication that one normally engages in, the things you are ready to say and that the people you speak to are ready to hear.

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Only sustained public discussion has a chance.

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working to provide frames—that is, automatic, effortless, everyday modes of understanding that we desperately need.

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This phenomenon is called reflexivity. The world reflects our understandings through our actions, and our understandings reflect the world shaped by the frame-informed actions of ourselves and others.

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In all too many cases, new frames—new forms of understanding—are required to comprehend the world so as to take advantage of reflexivity and make it a better place.

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No language in the world has in its grammar a way to express systemic causation.

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Any application of force to something or someone that produces an immediate change to that thing or person is direct causation. When causation is direct, the word cause is unproblematic.

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Systemic causation cannot be experienced directly. It has to be learned, its cases have to be studied, and repeated communication is necessary before it can be widely understood.

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With only the direct causation frame, the systemic causation facts of global warming are ignored.

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Systemic causation has a structure—four possible elements that can exist alone or in combination.

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A network of direct causes.

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Feedback loops.

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Multiple causes.

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Probabilistic causation.

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It was causation, systemic causation! Network causes, feedback loops, multiple causes—all acting probabilistically as part of the global weather system—have been systemically causing weather disasters.

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Systemic causation is familiar. Smoking is a systemic cause of lung cancer. HIV is a systemic cause of AIDS. Working in coal mines is a systemic cause of black lung disease. Driving while drunk is a systemic cause of auto accidents. Sex without contraception is a systemic cause of unwanted pregnancies, which are a systemic cause of abortions.

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causation in ecosystems, biological systems, economic systems, and social systems tends not to be direct, but is no less causal.

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systemic causation.

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Each day, the amount of extra energy accumulating via the heating of the earth is the equivalent of 400,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs. Each day!

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relationship between our politics and the concept of personhood is one of the hardest cases of systemic causation

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Each of us has a sense of personal identity: your sense of who you are as a person. Central to that personal identity is a moral sense, a sense of what is right and wrong, what justifies our actions.

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We have seen that all politics is moral, since political policies are assumed to be right, not wrong or irrelevant.

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That is no accident, since your family life has a profound effect on how you understand yourself as a person.

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One of the great discoveries of neuroscience is the mirror neuron system. Simply put, that system operates in our brains and gives us the capacity to connect with others, to know and even feel what they feel, and to connect with the natural world.

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but also with someone we can imagine, remember, read about, dream about, and so on. That is why we can be deeply moved by a novel or a movie, or even a newspaper story.

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The prefrontal cortex has regions particularly active during the exercise of judgment.

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The well-being system and the empathy system can interact in complex ways. Some people feel satisfaction both when they are personally satisfied and when those they empathize with feel a sense of well-being. Other people do not have the two systems connected in that way. (1) They may have the well-being system overriding the empathy system—with their interests overriding the cares and interests of others. Or (2) they can have a complex interaction in which they maintain their own well-being and balance it with contributing to the well-being of others. Or (3) they may be self-sacrificing, always placing the well-being of others ahead of their own well-being. Or (4) they may be part of an in-group, and may place their well-being and that of in-group members first, without empathizing at all with out-group members. This can vary, depending on what counts as a given person's in-group.

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Psychopaths can sense what someone else is feeling, not be affected themselves, and then manipulate the other for their own benefit or enjoyment.

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What should an ideal person be like? Conservatives and progressives have largely opposite views, given their different views of morality.

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The progressive (nurturant parent) moral system maintains a delicate balance between the empathy and the personal well-being systems. At its core is empathy for others and the responsibility to act on that empathy, but it is modulated by the proviso that you can't take care of anyone else if you're not taking care of yourself. That is, it centers on empathy and includes both personal and social responsibility. The conservative moral system centers on the well-being system—on personal responsibility alone, on serving your own interests without depending on the empathy of others to take care of you and without having empathy and responsibility for others.

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unlike empathy, sympathy involves distancing, overriding personal emotional feeling.

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The word “compassion” can be used for either empathy or sympathy, depending on who is using the word.

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Progressives tend to believe that society as a whole has a responsibility to aid those in real material need and that the government should be a major instrument, with support from taxes. Conservatives tend to prefer charity, delivered through nongovernmental organizations, and tend to believe that real help for most people in material need is a refusal of aid, to give them an incentive to help themselves. Hence the conservative motto: It is better to teach someone to fish than to give him a fish to eat. Incidentally, charity for the “deserving” few costs a lot less than taxes to provide resources for the benefit of all.

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Can linguistic framing change the kind of person someone is?

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Extreme conservatives (estimated at about 25 to 30 percent of the US population), it appears, cannot be changed by reframing and setting up an effective communication system that operates full time, not just at elections. Yes, this means that some people cannot be “reached” (an inaccurate progressive metaphor) or “woken up” (another inaccurate progressive metaphor).

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That is the power of the conservative messaging system: It is reflexivity in action. Over time, someone’s very personhood can change, and with it her ideal of what other people should be. And, of course, who they should vote for.

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Once in office, conservatives can not only say that government cannot work and has to be minimized and privatized, but by being in the government, they can also stop it from working, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. How? By cutting taxes, by cutting funding, by passing laws, and, in the Supreme Court, by reinterpreting laws. In contemporary America, politics and personhood are inseparable—and apparently moving in a conservative direction.

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Whose Freedom?, progressives and conservatives have very different views of freedom. Conservatives talk about their version of freedom, which does not include either equality or the role of government in securing it. They also attribute their view to the Founding Fathers. And though conservatives seek radical change, they use the term “conservative” as if it conserved the values of the founding of our nation.

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From the beginning, America provided public education, public hospitals, public roads and bridges, an army to protect the union, a legislature to make laws regulating and maintaining the union, an executive to carry out those laws, a justice system to enforce those laws, a national bank, a patent office, means to promote interstate commerce, and above all, a system for the public to choose those who govern us. Without such public resources there could have been no satisfactory private life and no functioning business community in America—and no democracy!

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Understanding this requires noticing and appreciating those public resources, appreciating the civil servants who provide them, and understanding that we as citizens take on the responsibility, both through paying for them and providing political support.

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The private depends on the public. Public resources make private life possible.

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There used to be signs on public projects: “Your tax money at work!”

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But for conservatives, the very idea that the private depends on the public is anathema—immoral.

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conservatives believe only in personal responsibility. This yields a completely different view of

democracy, that democracy provides what they call “liberty” — the ability to seek one’s own interests without the responsibility of others to help them, without any responsibility to help their fellow citizens, and without interference from the government.

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Progressive and conservative worldviews contradict each other.

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you have contradictory neural circuits in the same brain? Easy. The answer is mutual inhibition, a very common kind of brain circuitry: When one circuit is active, it turns off the other. Which is turned on at a given time is a matter of context.

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The honest strategy is to use only your language and avoid using the other side’s language. That will maximally activate your moral system in the moderates on the other side. The Orwellian strategy involves using the other side’s language in an attempt to “reach” those with moderate or opposing views. But if you use Orwellian language, you will be activating the other side’s moral system, making it stronger, and shooting yourself in the foot.

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It is vital that progressives understand why just citing the facts doesn’t work, and why attention to public discourse must be constant, not just focused on elections.

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Public resources allow for freedom in case after case, opening up all kinds of opportunities in life.

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One of the major mistakes made by the Democratic Party is to focus on election campaigns but not on the constant framing of public discourse. All politics is moral. Voters vote on what they implicitly, automatically, and unconsciously believe to be right.

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Conservatives have come to own the words freedom and liberty.

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conservative movement in favor of preconditions or caps, or against having your college-age child on your plan. Instead, conservatives understood that politics is a matter of morality and decided to attack the plan on moral grounds. They chose two moral domains: Freedom and Life. On Freedom, they attacked it as a “government takeover.” On Life, they said it contained “death panels.”

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If you have cancer and you don’t have health care, you are not free.

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Ill health enslaves you. Disease enslaves you.

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Access to healthy food is a freedom issue.

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State-run colleges and universities used to be the gateways to education for poor and lower-middle-class students.

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Education is a freedom issue. But that is not now being said in public discourse. Without education you are not free in many, many ways. Education tells you about the world and the possibilities in life.

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Public education is publicly accessible. It gives educational access to more people, and so increases their freedoms.

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- Public education is publicly accountable education.
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Poverty is a freedom issue. It is obvious. People who are poor have a lot less freedom than people who are rich. As we have seen, people who are poor have less access to health care and education than people who are rich.

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If you are homeless or cannot find a decent place to live for yourself and your family, you are oppressed and limited, you are not free.

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Yet many people in poverty often vote for measures that make their lives worse, not better, because continual conservative framing has activated a conservative worldview even in those whose lives could be essentially ruined by it. Conservatives see being poor as a personal failure, a failure of individual responsibility.

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By now, our history has made clear that racism is a freedom issue. It can impose poverty, lack of education, ill-health, and worse.

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All people should be free to marry whoever they love and want to be committed to for life.

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- Body control. The right of human beings to control their own bodies is a freedom issue. • Respect. The right of human beings to be treated institutionally with respect as a human being is a freedom issue.
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Sex education. For women especially, sex education is required for control over one's body,

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Control of reproduction.

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Women need to be in control of whether or when they reproduce.

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Forced ultrasounds and attacks on family planning.

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Humiliating victims of sex crimes.

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Equal pay for equal work.

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Equality in the rating of ability for a position in an institution.

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Equality and freedom are not separate issues. Discrimination is a denial of freedom.

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Strict father morality is partly about preserving male authority over women by claiming protectiveness and support of women—anything but a war against them. Conservative women, too, tend to see male authority as protectiveness, or support for motherhood as the basic female function.

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Workers are profit creators. Conservatives like to speak of wealthy company owners and investors as “job creators,” that they “give” people jobs, as if they just create jobs as gifts for people who are out of work.

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no one gets hired unless they contribute to the profit of owners and investors.

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pension is a delayed payment for work already done.

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Unfortunately, framing enters in here. Pensions and health care are called “benefits,” as if they are generous gifts to employees. They are not gifts. They are earned as deferred payments for work done.

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Large companies—and some small ones—have two kinds of employees: the assets and the resources.

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The “resources” are interchangeable workers that can be hired from an employment pool.

| Unionization is a freedom issue.