

Why Conservatives and Progressives Think Differently: Insights from Moral Psychology

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If politics is the art of compromise, or as Bismark wrote, “the art of the possible”, then how should we rate modern Western politics? A recent analysis of party polarization in the US from 1879 to 2014¹ notes that the distance between parties in 2014 was at an all time high, and substantially greater than the period from the mid 1930s to the mid 1970s. Various local commentators have observed increased polarization in recent Australia politics.²

No doubt there are many reasons for the increasing polarization and partisanship of recent politics arising from the changing nature of society, including changes in technology, education, journalism, law and religious beliefs. But can recent research in moral psychology, led by the distinguished US psychologist Jonathan Haidt³ (pronounced “height”), help us better understand the reasons for the growing divide between progressives⁴ and conservatives?

Moral Foundations Theory

¹ PolarizedAmerica.com – see especially http://polarizedamerica.com/images/polar_housesenate_difference_2014.png Another study about polarization in the US has shown that political animosity now exceed racial biases – see <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2014/october/dems-gop-polarized-10-08-14.html>

For example, at the end of 2013, a former Australian Federal Senator captured the local mood in this way when reviewing Haidt’s book²: “If you look back over the political year, undoubtedly hate will show up in a fairly prominent way. When the Howard Haters enjoyed their moments in the sun, the commentariat sat quietly by. Perhaps they enjoyed the petty little jibes about his eyebrows, or his lips, or whatever. Then the Rudd Haters emerged. It was a difficult birth for this group because so many of them were in his own party. Then we saw a new and energetic group coalesce as the Gillard Haters. They got more than their fair share of attention because there are some who apparently think it is fine to heap scorn on blokes but not so on women. Our political landscape is the poorer for all this. It is simply primal bloodletting. It adds nothing of substance to the discussion of issues. Nor is it smart. Why, then, do we see so much of it?” See <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/ditching-the-hate-would-improve-debate-20131222-2zsti.html>

³ Apart from the Haidt’s research described in this paper, he has also written about links between traditional religious ideas and positive psychology (see Haidt, J. *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom*. Basic Books, 2006) and other research on moral psychology not covered here concerning moral intuition and reasoning (see Haidt, J. “The new synthesis in moral psychology.” *Science* 316.5827 (2007): 998-1002, or Ch1-4 of *The Righteous Mind*). His latest research (not yet published), is on different moral narratives about capitalism: “Capitalism as exploitation” versus “Capitalism as liberation” – see <http://righteousmind.com/why-economists-dont-agree/>

⁴ This paper uses the categories “progressives” and “conservatives” to refer to voters who choose the views associated with Left and Right political ideologies respectively. In Haidt’s US context, he often uses “liberal” in place of progressive, but this can be confusing in an Australian context where the Liberal Party of Australia is a right-wing party.

Haidt provides a new psychological explanation for the problems of political partisanship in his 2012 book “The Righteous Mind”.⁵ The central concept of the book is that many of the divisions in modern politics and society arise from disagreements over underlying moral values – in particular, how progressives and conservatives prioritise different moral values compared to each other. Haidt and his colleagues’ core theory, called “Moral Foundations Theory”, describes six foundational moral values, each conceived as a continuum between opposites:

1. **Care/Harm**

Based on our ability to feel (and dislike) the pain of others. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

2. **Liberty/Oppression**

Based on our reaction to those who dominate others and restrict their liberty. The hatred of bullies and dominators motivates people to come together, in solidarity, to oppose oppressors.

3. **Fairness/Cheating**

Based on our desire for meritocracy and proportionality. People should receive the just rewards or punishments for their actions.

4. **Loyalty/Betrayal**

Based on our affiliations with groups, family and nation, it underlies virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice for the group. It is active anytime people feel that it's "one for all, and all for one.”

5. **Authority/Subversion**

Based on a recognition of hierarchy in social interactions. It underlies virtues of leadership and followership, including deference to legitimate authority and respect for traditions.

6. **Sanctity/Degradation**

Based on striving to live in an elevated, less carnal, more noble way. It underlies the widespread idea that the body is a temple that can be desecrated by immoral activities and contaminants (an idea not unique to religious traditions).⁶

⁵ Haidt, J. *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. Vintage, 2012. For a wide range of articles, interviews and related resources, see the book’s accompanying website: <http://www.righteousmind.com/> One of the best starting points is Haidt’s interview with Bill Moyes – see <https://vimeo.com/36128360>

⁶ Text adapted from *The Righteous Mind*, especially Chapter 7 and <http://www.moralfoundations.org>

Haidt argues for this particular set of six moral values from both cross-cultural anthropology and evolutionary psychology perspectives.⁷ While different sets of foundational morals can be proposed, the set of six presented by Haidt and his colleagues⁸ is sufficient to illustrate some striking aspects of political polarization, and his survey results from over 100,000 people across many different countries provides quantitative depth for his findings.

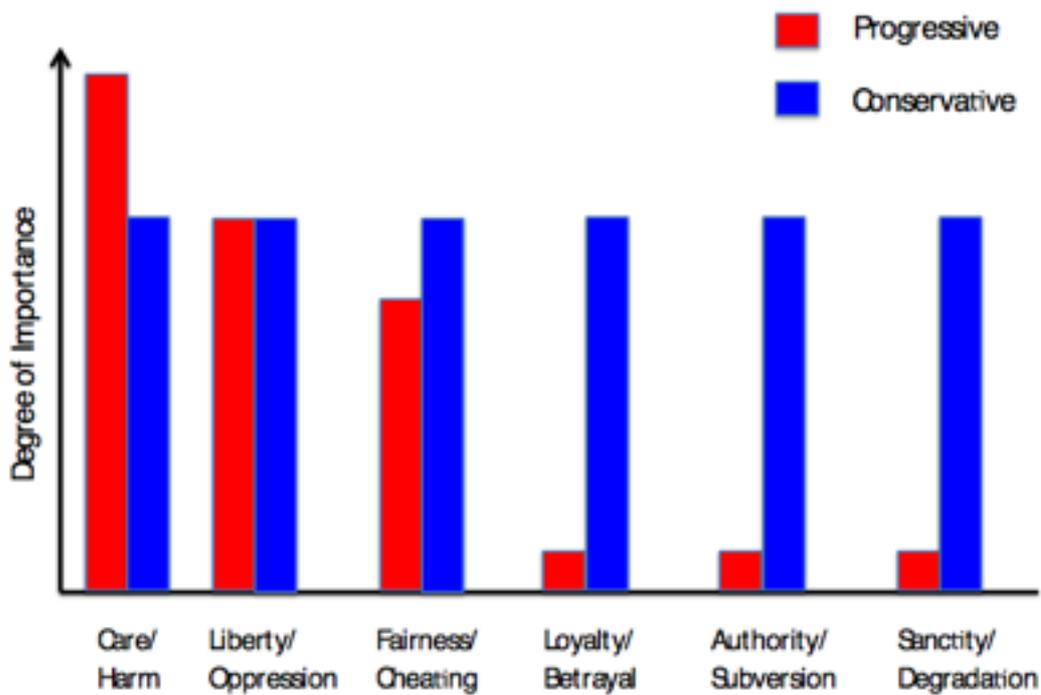


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the average differences between progressives and conservatives on the Moral Foundation Questionnaire.

⁷ While Haidt gives a detailed defense of the theoretical basis of Moral Foundations Theory in *The Righteous Mind*, I must admit I do not always find the arguments from evolutionary psychology to be completely persuasive – as with some evolutionary psychology (and evolutionary biology) arguments, these can be at risk of proposing theories about past development to explain current observed states which cannot be falsified (see Karl Popper, “The Logic of Scientific Discovery”). Also, there can be a tendency to implicitly ascribe a purposeful evolutionary teleology to current observed states, when a given state may be entirely a byproduct of some other unrelated development (see Richard Lewontin, “Biology as Ideology”). My view is that most of the moral behaviours that Haidt explains with evolutionary psychology can also be explained with a social learning theory (with the exception of some of Haidt’s research on disgust). However, the practical value of Haidt’s data for understanding political polarization remains even if some of the underlying theoretical model can be explained in different ways.

⁸ For a detailed discussion of Moral Foundations Theory, including comparisons with other moral theories, and exploration of other possible foundations beyond the six described, see Graham, J., Haidt, J., Koleva, S., Motyl, M., Iyer, R., Wojcik, S., & Ditto, P. H. (2013). Moral Foundations Theory: The pragmatic validity of moral pluralism. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 47, 55–130. I would agree with the authors that honesty/dishonesty looks promising as an additional foundation, and I would suggest another possibility in honour/shame, especially for understanding some historical (e.g., Ancient Roman) and non-Western cultures.

The first striking finding is the differences between progressives and conservatives across these six moral foundations, based on results from the Moral Foundation Questionnaire, a survey constructed using Moral Foundation Theory. Haidt has used a number of metaphors to describe the differences⁹, but I think the most useful is to imagine the six dimensions as being like sliders on an audio equaliser, with a higher slider setting representing a greater degree of importance. Figure 1 illustrates average differences between progressives and conservatives in this way¹⁰.

By way of clarification, the words liberty and fairness are often interpreted differently by progressives and conservatives. Concerning fairness¹¹, Haidt says:

“Everyone cares about fairness, but there are two major kinds. On the left, fairness often implies equality; but on the right it means proportionality – people should be rewarded in proportion to what they contribute, even if that guarantees unequal outcomes”¹²

Hence, fairness for progressives often means that those who have suffered (i.e., have experienced unfair life events) should be helped; whereas fairness for conservatives means people should receive the just rewards (or lack thereof) of their actions. Put another way, progressive fairness is about equality of outcomes, whereas conservative fairness is about equality of opportunity.

⁹ In *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt uses the metaphor of six moral “taste buds” (see Chapter 6) – but in my experience this metaphor can be unhelpful for those who are new to Haidt’s research, as it can imply a kind of trivial “menu-like choice” among moral values which sits uneasily with the powerful feelings most people have about moral values. On p297, 302 and 306 Haidt provides a different graphical representation to the “audio equaliser” metaphor, but it doesn’t convey the differences between political orientations in a single graphic. In my view, the best illustration of Moral Foundations Theory is Haidt’s “sliders on an audio equaliser” metaphor as used in his interview with Bill Moyes (see 17:30 and onwards) at <https://vimeo.com/36128360>. It is worth noting that Figure 1 is a summary and metaphor for the actual data – for details see Chapter 8 and related research articles. One criticism of the slider representation I have heard from progressive colleagues is that the total “amount” of space given to all progressive morals is less than the total “amount” of space given to all conservative morals, which visually implies that conservatives have “more morals” than progressives, which is an unhelpful byproduct of this representation. Further research is needed to explore this issue, and potentially a revised visual presentation is needed which shows equal total “amounts” of morality for both approaches (just distributed in different ways across the categories according to the pattern identified).

¹⁰ For further details, see Chapter 8 of *The Righteous Mind*. The survey is publically available at <http://www.yourmorals.org/>. Any given individual may have quite different scores and may not at all fit the pattern aligned to their voting preference, but the results illustrate typical averages across those who identify as progressive and conservative voters. Note that conservative in this case does not include libertarian, who have a quite different pattern with a lower average Care score and a very high average Liberty score. Interestingly, Haidt notes that the pattern exists not just in Western countries, but in all countries he has studied to date where he has sufficient data (see Chapter 8, footnote 5 and his 2008 TED talk).

¹¹ In Haidt’s earlier five category moral framework, his survey questions about Fairness included aspects of Liberty/Oppression and more progressive concepts of fairness (fairness as equality, not just proportionality), which led to higher scores for Fairness by progressives than for conservatives in the earlier research (eg, Figure 8.2, *The Righteous Mind*, p161). However, once Haidt and his colleagues revised the theory and survey to incorporate Liberty/Oppression as a sixth category, the Fairness dimension was revised to make it primarily about proportionality. This is the basis for the moderate scores for progressives compared to the higher scores for conservatives in Figure 1, which is based on the later research. Some of Haidt’s early presentations on Moral Foundations Theory use the five category model and the earlier data, e.g., his 2008 TED talk – see http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en

¹² *The Righteous Mind*, Chapter 7, p138.

Concerning liberty, Haidt says:

“Everyone – left, right, and centre – cares about Liberty/oppression, but each political faction cares in a different way. In the contemporary United States, [progressives]¹³ are most concerned about the rights of certain vulnerable groups (e.g., racial minorities, children, animals), and they look to government to defend the weak against oppression by the strong. Conservatives, in contrast, hold more traditional ideas of liberty as the right to be left alone, and they often resent [progressive] programs that use government to infringe on their liberties in order to protect groups that [progressives] care most about.”¹⁴

Even allowing for various potential qualifications about definitions, the size of the differences between progressives and conservatives, and the consistency of the data over many different contexts and countries, suggests that Moral Foundation Theory is a valuable new “toolkit” for understanding differences in the thinking of progressives and conservatives.¹⁵

When Progressives try to Imagine the Moral Concerns of Conservatives

Haidt and colleagues conducted a fascinating follow-up study in which a subset of subjects were asked to answer the Moral Foundations Questionnaire as if they were a “typical [progressive]” or a “typical conservative”. In other words, progressive voters had to imagine how a conservative would fill out the questionnaire, and vice-versa. Haidt says:

“The results were clear and consistent. Moderates and conservatives were most accurate in their predictions, whether they were pretending to be [progressives] or conservatives. [Progressives] were the least accurate, especially those who described themselves as “very [progressive]”. The biggest errors in the whole study came when [progressives] answered the Care and Fairness questions while pretending to be conservatives. When faced with questions such as “One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenceless animal” or “Justice is the most important requirement for a society”, [progressives] assumed that conservatives would disagree.”¹⁶

¹³ I have replaced “liberal” in Haidt’s original text with “progressive” to make it clearer for an Australian audience.

¹⁴ The Righteous Mind, Chapter 8, p182. In a footnote at the end of this quote (56) Haidt explains this further as follows: “Berlin 1997/1958 referred to this kind of liberty as “negative liberty” – the right to be left alone. He pointed out that the left had developed a new concept of “positive liberty” during the twentieth century – a conception of the rights and resources that people needed in order to enjoy liberty.”

¹⁵ In one sense, the usefulness of this theory and data is independent of the researcher, but given that questions about political (and religious) orientation are so common when discussing this topic, it is worth noting that Haidt describes himself as coming from a progressive background, but as a result of doing this research, he now considers himself a centrist, and more importantly, that he has tried to step back from having partisan interests in politics in order to better understand the ideas of all sides. In terms of religion, Haidt identifies as an atheist, coming from a Jewish background raised in New York.

¹⁶ The Righteous Mind, Chapter 12, p287.

In other words, progressives find it more difficult to grasp the moral concerns of conservatives than the other way around conservatives on progressive moral concerns. Given that three of the six morals (Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity) rate low for progressives (to the point where some progressives do not consider these to be moral values in the first place), then a lack of understanding of these moral values might be understandable. But it is not only these values that are a problem, indeed the biggest divergence between what conservatives actually believe and what progressives think that conservatives believe was on the morals of Care and Fairness.

It is perhaps ironic that these findings suggest that progressives struggle to understand the moral concerns of their political opposites more than the other way around, particularly when some progressives see conservatives as less politically and intellectually astute than progressives.

Does Academia need more Ideological Diversity?

In 2011 in Texas, Haidt gave a presentation to the US-based Society of Personality and Social Psychology annual conference in which he noted that the field of social psychology (which incorporates moral psychology) sometimes conducts research on contentious political issues, such as race and gender. When Haidt asked the political orientations of his audience, approximately 800 identified as [progressives] (about 80-90% of those in attendance), 20 as centrists/moderates, 12 as libertarians and 3 as conservatives. That is, only a tiny fraction of social and personality psychologists identify as conservative, while a third to half of the general US population identifies as conservative.

Haidt argued that this is a problem, not for moral or ethical reasons (although this case could be made), but for scientific reasons. Critical review from a variety of perspectives is essential to effective science, but the range of critical perspectives in social psychology was limited by the lack of political diversity within the field – primarily due to the low number of centrist/moderate and conservative psychologists. Haidt also suggested that the range of topics studied within social psychology may be limited primarily to those topics of interest to progressives.

Haidt stressed that he was not making an argument for ideological equality (e.g., that half of social psychologists needed to be conservative), but rather that without a critical mass of competing viewpoints on contentious issues, any scientific field runs the risk of having insufficient critical thinking. This may limit detection of flaws in logic, experimental design and interpretation of data, leading to sub-optimal scientific outcomes for the field as a whole.

He concluded his presentation with a number of suggestions for addressing the problem, including a somewhat tongue-in-cheek suggestion of an affirmative action policy for appointing conservative psychologists, with a goal of 10% by 2020.

Following this talk, there was a significant response in the wider media, much of it highly critical, so Haidt decided to document the overall experience on a public webpage called

“Post-Partisan Social Psychology”.¹⁷ The website provides his original presentation, together with a wide range of articles responding to his ideas. Haidt then analyses the responses, and provides a variety of research evidence to address the various criticisms of his talk. Of particular note are a number of quantitative studies demonstrating discrimination against conservative academics and students in some areas of academia.

One of the most arresting aspects of the wider debate was negative comments posted on stories about the presentation. Haidt captures the essence of some responses as *"there's no discrimination against conservatives, and those stupid, narrow-minded creationists could never be scientists anyway."* He then notes:

"Megan McArdle, at The Atlantic, wrote a balanced blog post on the controversy: Unbiasing Academia¹⁸. But she was shocked by the vehemence of many [progressive] commenters on that post. She then wrote a second post (What Does Bias Look Like?¹⁹) in which she takes these commenters to task. This is a deep and nuanced examination of the nature of biased thinking. For example, she notes that many of the commenters select the narrowest possible definition of bias, use it to acquit their side of bias, and then go on to blame the victims of the bias for deserving the bias. She notes that this is the same rhetorical strategy normally used to deny and then justify racism. As she puts it: "So while in theory, it's true that you can't simply reason from disparity to bias, I have to say that when you've identified a statistical disparity, and the members of the in-group immediately rush to assure you that this isn't because of bias, but because the people they've excluded are all a bunch of raging assholes with lukewarm IQ's . . . well, I confess, discrimination starts sounding pretty plausible."

The message of Haidt's website, taken as a whole, could be paraphrased as follows: "Is there any better evidence for the problem of bias against conservative ideas in social psychology than the very response I received when I tried to point out the problem of bias against conservative ideas in social psychology?"

Haidt also noted that an interesting aspect of the experience was the number of academics and students who contacted him privately to share their own negative experiences with some progressive academics. In particular, conservative students said they often remained silent in class discussion, or felt discriminated against when they voiced their conservative views.

To take a December 2014 example, consider the US progressive academic (a Head of Department at a prestigious university) who felt comfortable to publicly write "I hate

¹⁷ <http://people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/postpartisan.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/02/unbiasing-academia/70955/>

¹⁹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/02/what-does-bias-look-like/71153/>

Republicans”²⁰ and to justify this view with reference to the psychological flaws of conservatives. As a progressive colleague said to me about this article “I typically have so little sympathy for US Republicans, but wow, imagine being a right-wing youngster in one of her classes.” It is perhaps understandable that conservative students find some aspects of modern academic life chilling.

Haidt and a number of colleagues have just written a detailed analysis of the problems of bias in social psychology for a leading psychology journal.²¹ This article expands on the ideas covered on the website, and provides more examples of how the dominance of progressive political views can affect the scientific quality of social psychological research. They note that universities have successfully addressed discrimination and promoted diversity in many other areas, but are struggling with fostering “ideological diversity”. The irony is that ideological diversity is unpalatable to a growing number of progressive academics, and yet it would seem an essential kind of diversity for a university.

While it is beyond the scope of the current article, it is worth noting that psychology is not the only field where the dominance of progressive views has recently been discussed, e.g., Christian Smith’s critique of sociology²² and the backlash against Mark Regnerus (Smith’s PhD student) about a study showing, on average, poorer adjustment outcomes for children of same sex couples compared to heterosexual couples.²³ Other disciplines where similar concerns to those identified by Haidt in social psychology could include anthropology, education²⁴, various fields with the title “[topic] studies”, and some areas of the humanities. By contrast, there has been a significant debate in economics about the perceived conservative bias of parts of this discipline (e.g., the history of political economy at the University of Sydney²⁵, and the recent student walkout from an Harvard economics course by leading economics professor Greg Mankiw²⁶).

At the conclusion of their recent article, Haidt and colleagues note that psychology, of all disciplines, should be well placed to address bias within its own field, as psychological research provides tools for addressing bias:

Fortunately, psychology is uniquely well-prepared to rise to the challenge. The five core values of [the American Psychological Association] include “continual pursuit of excellence; knowledge and its application based upon methods of

²⁰ http://inthesetimes.com/article/17426/we_cant_all_just_get_along

²¹ http://journals.cambridge.org/images/fileUpload/documents/Duarte-Haidt_BBS-D-14-00108_preprint.pdf

²² Smith, Christian. *The sacred project of American sociology*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

²³ <http://chronicle.com/article/An-Academic-Auto-da-F-/133107/>

²⁴ Given my own research interests in the past decade have been primarily in education, it will be interesting to apply Moral Foundations Theory to issues in schooling and higher education. For some early ideas on using Moral Foundations Theory in teacher training, including the use of online training resources, see Dalziel, J. (2014). Implementing Developing Scenario Learning with Branching for Moral Values in Teacher Training. <http://lams2014.lamsfoundation.org/docs/paper3.pdf>

²⁵ <http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/86is/JonesStilwell.html>

²⁶ <http://harvardpolitics.com/harvard/an-open-letter-to-greg-mankiw/>

science; outstanding service to its members and to society; social justice, diversity and inclusion; ethical action in all that we do.” (APA, 2009). If discrimination against non-liberals exists at even half the level described in section 4 of this paper, and if this discrimination damages the quality of some psychological research, then all five core values are being betrayed. Will psychologists tolerate and defend the status quo, or will psychology make the changes needed to realize its values and improve its science? Social psychology can and should lead the way.

The debate over ideological diversity in academia is not limited to the research conducted in specific disciplines – it is also at the heart of a growing number of cases where academics, students and invited guests with non-progressive views have been prevented from speaking at universities. In some cases they have been disinvited from giving a graduation speech, in other cases seminars to debate a controversial issue have been stopped by university administrators, often due to a concern that discussion of controversial non-progressive views may cause offence or be harmful to some students. Where controversial debates do go ahead, conservative speakers are sometimes unable to speak (or finish speaking) due to loud or violent protests.

There has also been a rise in the use of “trigger warnings” for some university courses, to warn students of content that some may find distressing (e.g., some of the cases considered in a legal course on sexual assault), and some students now demand the inclusion of trigger warnings on all courses.

In the past year there have been a growing number of popular articles that describe and analyse this rapidly spreading phenomenon, such as by Jonathan Chait²⁷, Steven Hayward²⁸, Wendy Kaminer²⁹, Edward Schlosser³⁰ and the Economist.³¹ Jonathan Haidt, together with Greg Lukianoff, have addressed this in “The Coddling of the American Mind” in the September 2015 issue of The Atlantic.³² These articles provide examples of how the dominant progressive views of many university academics, students and administrators are affecting the opportunities for discussion of controversial non-progressive ideas in some areas of academia.

Given that “Care” is the dominant moral value of many progressives (see Figure 1), it is not surprising that Care will sometimes trump Liberty (in the form of free inquiry and free speech) when the two come into conflict in the university world of today. While the

²⁷ <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/01/not-a-very-pc-thing-to-say.html>

²⁸ <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/413675/grievance-school-steven-f-hayward>

²⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-progressive-ideas-behind-the-lack-of-free-speech-on-campus/2015/02/20/93086efe-b0e7-11e4-886b-c22184f27c35_story.html

³⁰ <http://www.vox.com/2015/6/3/8706323/college-professor-afraid>

³¹ <http://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21654157-student-safety-has-become-real-threat-free-speech-campus-trigger-unhappy>

³² <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/>

dominance of progressive views in academia is not a new phenomenon (although it does appear to have increased recently³³), the many examples given in the articles cited above suggest that universities are currently changing in a profound way as “harmful” ideas become unspeakable, not just undesirable.

It is troubling that society’s institution for the pursuit of truth and understanding, the university, has reached a point where the dominant moral value of many of its members is not Liberty, in the form of free inquiry, but Care. Going further, moderates and conservatives who might provide an alternative view to this ideological milieu are under-represented in some discipline areas³⁴, and according to Haidt’s data, conservative academics and students experience active discrimination.³⁵ This poses a problem not just for universities, but for the societies they serve.

Controversial Social Issues and Moral Foundations Theory

Finally, Moral Foundations Theory can be used to analyse controversial social and political issues in contemporary society, as many of these issues arise from a conflict between two (or more) moral values where progressives and conservatives prioritise these values in different ways. Figure 2 provides a graphical way of thinking about where these conflicts lie.

³³ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/10/24/survey-finds-professors-already-liberal-have-moved-further-left>

³⁴ There is considerable debate on the reasons for this under-representation. Apart from a discrimination-based argument, there are other compelling arguments such as self-selection: Neil Gross provides a detailed exploration of this view in *Why are professors liberal and why do conservatives care?*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

³⁵ See <http://people.stern.nyu.edu/jhaidt/postpartisan.html> While it is beyond the scope of the current article, it is also worth noting other groups that potentially experience discrimination at universities are conservative religious groups, e.g., Yancey, George, and David A. Williamson. *So Many Christians, So Few Lions: Is There Christianophobia in the United States?*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

Conservative

	Care/ Harm	Liberty/ Oppression	Fairness/ Cheating	Loyalty/ Betrayal	Authority/ Subversion	Sanctity/ Degradation
Care/ Harm						
Liberty/ Oppression						
Fairness/ Cheating						
Loyalty/ Betrayal						
Authority/ Subversion						
Sanctity/ Degradation						

Progressive

Figure 2: A table for analysing conflicting moral values between progressives and conservatives on moral issues, based on Moral Foundations Theory.

Consider a contentious issue in the US – that of gun control. Debate over gun control is primarily a matter of Care for many progressives, while it is primarily a matter of Liberty for many conservatives, and hence debate on this topic can be located in the second cell of the top row of the table. Many other political and moral debates between progressives and conservatives can be analysed using this table to better understand the primary moral drivers of each side of a given debate.

Given the controversial nature of many potential topics, the many conflicting issues that may be involved, and the wide range of differences in personal views compared to broader ideological groups, the purpose of this table can be easily misunderstood. Its goal is simply to attempt to identify where two moral values may be in conflict over a contentious issue, and which moral value is most important to different groups in society. In some cases an issue won't be able to be reducible to a single cell within the table (although even then, it may be possible to gain better understanding of the views of others from the process of attempting to locate the focus of the debate on the table).

The Constitution, Law and Moral Foundations Theory

How, then, might the insights of Moral Foundations Theory be applied to the Australian Constitution (and by extension, other countries' constitutions)?³⁶ From the perspective of

³⁶ Given my limited legal expertise, these comments are made tentatively, and should be regarded with considerable caution until legal scholars can evaluate the ideas presented.

Moral Foundation Theory (especially Figure 1), a Constitution has an implicit collection of settings on the “audio equaliser” of moral values. Indeed many debates on moral issues in legal contexts arise from conflicts between two or more moral values, and hence judges are required to weigh up the relative importance of each relevant moral value in order to come to a decision. Ultimately, these decisions rely on individual and collective legal interpretations of the relative priorities of different moral values implicit, and sometimes explicit, in a Constitution.

Human rights laws may pose an interesting challenge for this process. Nick Cater has provocatively argued³⁷ that the importation of human rights laws into the Australian legal system has set up potential conflicts between the Constitution and existing laws, and the new human rights laws, which are often adopted due to extra-territorial legal developments (such as United Nations declarations). It is possible that the implicit audio equaliser settings of moral values are different between the Constitution and existing laws and the new human rights laws, and if so, how are the differences in prioritisation of moral values to be resolved between potentially competing legal frameworks? Moral Foundation Theory may provide a new “toolkit” for analysing these legal issues in Australia (and elsewhere).

Conclusion

Chesterton, writing in another context over a hundred years ago, captured much of the modern challenge arising from conflicting moral values:

“When a religious scheme is shattered (as Christianity was shattered at the Reformation), it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. Thus some scientists care for truth; and their truth is pitiless. Thus some humanitarians only care for pity; and their pity (I am sorry to say) is often untruthful.”³⁸

Like Haidt, it is my hope that Moral Foundation Theory provides a new toolkit for understanding moral differences in society. By fostering greater understanding of the moral perspectives of others, it can lead to a more harmonious society, where care and truth (and other moral values) can co-exist. It may also provide a framework for thinking about the relative moral priorities implicit in the Constitution and other laws.

³⁷ Cater, Nick. "The Lucky Culture: and the Rise of an Australian Ruling Class." (2013) – especially Chapter 12.

³⁸ Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. *Orthodoxy*. Moody Publishers, 1908/2013.

Moral psychology is a field of study in both philosophy and psychology. Historically, the term "moral psychology" was used relatively narrowly to refer to the study of moral development. Moral psychology eventually came to refer more broadly to various topics at the intersection of ethics, psychology, and philosophy of mind. Some of the main topics of the field are moral judgment, moral reasoning, moral sensitivity, moral responsibility, moral motivation, moral identity, moral action, moral Big differences in the ways conservatives and liberals think about solving the nation's most pressing problems couldn't be more apparent during this presidential election cycle. But political ideas aside, people who hold conservative versus liberal perspectives appear to differ in everyday thinking processes and problem solving, according to new research. Share: FULL STORY. Big differences in the ways conservatives and liberals think about solving the nation's most pressing problems couldn't be more apparent during this presidential election cycle. advertisement. Why Conservatives and Progressives Think Differently: Insights from Moral Psychology James Dalziel th Paper for the 27 Conference of the Samuel Griffiths Society 29th August 2015, Canberra NOTE: The proceedings from this Conference have not yet been published. These are the presenters notes.Â By way of clarification, the words liberty and fairness are often interpreted differently by progressives and conservatives. Concerning fairness¹¹ , Haidt says: "Everyone cares about fairness, but there are two major kinds." But it is not only these values that are a problem, indeed the biggest divergence between what conservatives actually believe and what progressives think that conservatives believe was on the morals of Care and Fairness.