



Overcoming Polarization by Evolving Both Right and Left

*How Polarity Theory Provides
a Path to Political Progress*

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I’m a first-generation American, and both my parents thought it was important for me to understand why they chose to become immigrants and why I am so lucky to be an American. I was accordingly raised to regard American democracy as something almost sacred. While keenly aware of America’s historical crimes and contemporary deficiencies, I nevertheless feel a strong sense of duty to help America’s government become more functional and more moral. Yet at this time in history American democracy is highly dysfunctional—it is plagued by the paralysis of hyper-partisan polarization.

In fact, American politics have not been this polarized since the civil war. In its contemporary form, polarization now extends far beyond the uncompromising logjam in the legislature. Numerous studies have shown that much of the American public is afflicted by ‘affective polarization’ wherein opposing political camps increasingly dislike, and even loathe, their opponents.¹ And this deep-seated cultural problem is negatively impacting the country on multiple levels, posing threats both short-term and long. As David Blankenhorn writes in *The American Interest*: “[Polarization] is crippling our politics, coarsening our culture, weakening our intellects, and making it harder to be good neighbors and good citizens.”² Even beyond our domestic concerns, America’s hyper-partisan polarization is also sending a message to the rest of the world that they shouldn’t try to emulate or strive for a democratic system such as ours.

When it comes to the problem of hyper-partisanship, there seems to be a kind of default thinking that assumes it is largely a matter of ‘politicians behaving badly,’ and that they should

simply compromise for the greater good of the country. Yet while bipartisan compromise is good when you can get it, centrism has proved to be a failed strategy and thus an inadequate remedy for our current political stagnation.³ Moreover, structural solutions such as open primaries and congressional redistricting reform, or process solutions such as promoting more civil discourse, are also inadequate because these well-meaning proposals presuppose the kind of cooperative political will that is missing in the first place.

As I argue in this paper, to overcome our nation's political gridlock, American political culture as a whole will need to mature into a more evolved version of itself. In short, the only way to solve this problem is to effectively *grow out of it*. While this proposition may at first seem unrealistic, or too much of a long-term project to be politically practicable, hyper-partisanship can be overcome relatively quickly by working to help each side see more of the value of the other. As I will show, by sharpening our focus on the core values that animate both sides of our political divide, we can make these foundational values more vivid, and thus more attractive and agreeable.

Overview of the Paper

The present paper builds on the analysis of The Institute for Cultural Evolution's ('ICE') acclaimed 2014 paper, *Depolarizing the American Mind* ('DAM'). In the DAM paper ICE advocated for a 'synthesis platform' under which the left would adopt some of the fiscal conservatism of the right, and the right would adopt some of the social liberalism of the left. However, in our work on the problem of polarization since 2014, ICE has found that under current cultural conditions the left and right sides of American politics are largely irreconcilable on most issues. And this means that our recommended synthesis platform is not realistically achievable in the near term. Yet progress on overcoming polarization can still be made in 2016 and 2017 by employing a strategy designed to develop both the right and the left independently and according to their own distinct goals and values, as a prerequisite to greater cooperation overall.

In furtherance of this strategy of developing each side independently, first I describe how polarity theory reveals the potential for a new kind of *deliberative polar alliance* that can better integrate the competing camps (opposing poles) that exist *within* both the right and the left. Then I argue that the American right can evolve by forming such a deliberative alliance between its conservative and libertarian poles. This is followed by a similar analysis of the American left, where an opportunity now exists to evolve this side of the spectrum by forming a more functional alliance between the liberal and progressive poles of the left. Eventually, as both sides of the overall political spectrum evolve culturally, the inherent virtue of each side's bedrock values will become more apparent, leading to greater sympathy and trust. It is thus through this kind of political evolution that ICE's previously recommended synthesis platform may eventually come about.

This paper is written from an ‘integral point of view,’ which seeks to promote evolution across the entire political spectrum. So rather than attempting to take a non-partisan or neutral stance, I will advocate alternatively for both a more evolved right and a more evolved left. While this unusually inclusive approach to politics can be potentially confusing or off-putting, I think championing both sides is warranted because, as I argue, the improvement of one is ultimately contingent on the improvement of the other. No matter how politically successful either the left or the right becomes, our democracy will always have some version of the other side. Therefore, instead of alienating or vilifying close to half of America, I think we stand a much greater chance of making things meaningfully better by actually helping both sides evolve into more mature and responsible versions of themselves.

The ‘Physics’ of Polarities

Polar dichotomies, of course, are an ever-present reality in politics. Indeed, the existential polarity of ‘progressive and conservative’ is a naturally occurring form of interdependent opposition that continues to reappear in new guise as societies change and grow. Some research even indicates that the left-right polarity we consistently find in politics is heritable—people are born with brains that find one side or the other more congenial, although life experiences can still influence where they end up.⁴ But even though our politics will always exhibit some form of left-right polarity, this natural oppositional relationship can take form as either a ‘stuck polarity,’ such as we currently face, or as a ‘generative polarity,’ wherein both sides work together, challenging and even occasionally supporting each other through compromise and cooperation.

This kind of generative polarity can be seen in recent history in the American ‘liberal consensus,’ as it has come to be known, which held sway in our politics from 1945 until about 1968. And although the liberal consensus is clearly a thing of the past, achieving a new kind of generative polarity in the years ahead begins to seem possible as we come to better understand the ‘physics’ of polarities themselves. Simply stated, the natural dynamics or ‘laws’ of polar opposition in human culture point to a method for moving from a stuck polarity to a generative polarity.

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Polarity Theory

Academic analysis of systemic polarities began in the 1960s in the field of international relations as political scientists searched for strategies to ameliorate the cold war. Then in the 1990s, management theorists began to recognize that permanently recurring polarities—such as ‘freedom-order,’ ‘competition-cooperation,’ ‘challenge-support,’ ‘individual-team,’

‘justice-mercy,’ and even ‘liberty-equality’—when properly managed and integrated, could enhance organizational performance and serve as systemic generators of value.⁵ Polarity theory has now become a thriving and even fashionable management tool promoted widely within the field of organizational development consulting.

The basic idea is that in almost every positive interdependent polarity, the strengths or virtues of each pole can serve to mitigate the downsides of its opposing pole in a dynamic recursive process resulting in synergistic progress. Polarity theory describes two basic kinds of polarity: ‘positive-negative’ and ‘positive-positive.’ Positive-negative polarities, such as ‘prosperity-poverty,’ present problems to be solved. However, positive-positive polarities, such as ‘masculine-feminine,’ are better understood as *systems to be managed*. In the case of positive-positive polarities, interdependent positions mutually enact one another by both contradicting and complementing their opposing pole. A common mistake, however, is to approach a positive-positive polarity as a problem to be solved rather than as a permanently-recurring dichotomy that must be worked with. According to polarity management consultant Barry Johnson, “Polarities to manage are sets of opposites which can’t function well independently. Because the two sides of a polarity are interdependent, you cannot choose one as a ‘solution’ and neglect the other. The objective ... is to get the best of both opposites while avoiding the limits of each.”⁶

The upshot of polarity theory is that interdependent polarities are *procreative*. Wherever we find naturally occurring forms of positive-positive existential opposition that continue to reappear in the course of human affairs, this points to the existence of a system of development. For example, in the existential polarity of competition-cooperation, the natural opposition between these two approaches provides an ongoing critique of one by the other. An overemphasis on competition can lead to a harsh dog-eat-dog environment that makes everyone defensive. Yet an overemphasis on cooperation can stifle individual excellence and initiative and lead to bureaucratic stagnation. But when these two poles are brought together in the context of an interdependent relationship wherein each pole is allowed, and even encouraged, to modify or restrain the downside of its opposite, each side becomes stronger and more effective than it would be on its own. As I discuss at length elsewhere in my work, processes that create value—and even values themselves—seem to naturally cohere in polar pairs. This principle was realized by Nobel Prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr who wrote, “the opposite of a small truth is a falsehood, but the opposite of a great truth is another great truth.”⁷

As another example, in the context of management, employees need both support and challenge from their supervisors. But too much challenge can create a pressured work environment of fear and anxiety that ultimately saps productivity over time. Conversely, an exclusive emphasis on management support with no corresponding challenge can result in the opposite problem of insufficient incentives to work hard and apply oneself to solve the problems at hand. And it is worth noting that this same polarity of challenge-support often

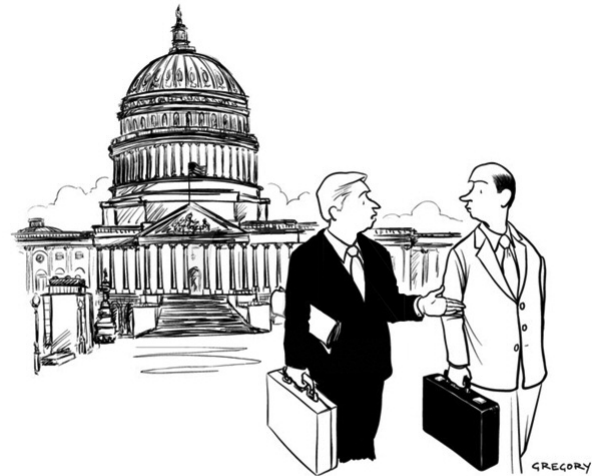
appears within the context of parenting. These examples show how, when both sides of an interdependent polarity work together, each side can ‘true up’ the other.

The Relevance of Polarity Theory for Political Progress

Applied to politics, wherever we find naturally opposing yet essentially interdependent entities, these related poles can be brought together and managed in a way that can refine and improve both sides. In other words, whenever two political entities exhibit an authentic positive-positive polar relationship, either actual or potential, an opportunity exists to bring these entities closer together—to acknowledge and promote their interdependence—so as to engage the systemic potential for progress that is latent within their natural dialectical relationship.

Polarity theory thus points to the potential for a new ‘deliberative’ approach to political agreement formation that can overcome the win-lose bargaining approach that often ends in paralysis. Within the discourse of academic political science, terms such as ‘deliberative negotiation’ and ‘deliberative democracy’ have recently come into vogue. In this context the word *deliberative* refers to “negotiations based on processes of mutual justification, respect, and reciprocal fairness.”⁸ When coupled with the insights of polarity theory, such a deliberative approach to politics can help bring about powerful new kinds of political alliances, as described below.

The basic argument is that the polarity of progressive-conservative is (or at least can be) a positive-positive form of permanently recurring opposition wherein the best of both sides are worthy of preservation. Even though exactly what constitutes ‘progressive’ and ‘conservative’ changes over time, history teaches that some version of this polarity will always be with us. So while there are certainly positive-negative versions of the progressive-conservative polarity, wherein one side is in bad faith or simply wrong, overcoming our nation’s polarized condition will require each side to see more of the virtue of the other.



“I consider myself bipartisan-curious.”

However, within our nation’s current conditions of hyper-partisan polarization, we are a long way from convincing progressives and conservatives to view each other in a more positive light. But here too, polarity theory shows how both the right and left can become stronger and more positive on their own terms and according to their own goals and values. As I argue in the sections ahead, by working to evolve both sides of the political spectrum in

this way, we can bring about the kind of functionally interdependent two-party system through which new political progress can be made.

Toward a New Kind of Deliberative Political Alliance

Natural polarities arise within practically all human cultural and political relations, so we would expect to find this form of polar opposition, not only *across* the political spectrum as a whole, but also *within* each side. Indeed it seems that polarities can be found at every level of organization, appearing as a kind of recurring fractal or self-similar pattern.

There are, of course, many ways to divide up or categorize the American political spectrum. Most commentators agree that the idea of a horizontal linear continuum of left and right is too simplistic to capture the complexity of the many factions that now vie for influence on the national political scene. Nevertheless, as a result of both our historically ingrained two-party system, and the inevitable left-right framing imposed by the media, the first basic division, or primary overarching polarity in American politics, can still be accurately identified as left and right.

And at the next level of resolution—within the right and the left—comparable polarities can also be found. On the right, we can see such a polar opposition between fiscal conservatives and social conservatives. Yet unlike the hyper-polarization that exists between Republicans and Democrats overall, the opposition between fiscal and social conservatives is not as charged, with more shared values and ideological overlap in evidence. But even though this polarity within the right is not as pronounced as it is between right and left, and even though we can identify at least five distinct factions within the conservative-libertarian complex that now makes up the American right, few will disagree that fiscal and social conservatives often find themselves in opposition.

Likewise on the left, we can observe a seemingly natural polarity between liberal establishment Democrats and progressive countercultural (or ‘postmodern’) leftists. Figure 1 shows the basic political polarities that can be identified within the American body politic as a whole at the next level of resolution below the overarching polarity of left and right.

Although these polar factions within the left and right usually come together in national elections to vote for their respective sides, they also often work at cross-purposes or otherwise oppose each other on core issues. For example, social conservatives and fiscal conservatives are frequently divided on the proper role of government. And liberals and progressives usually hold opposing views on the merits of the free market. So if polarity theory is correct in its assessment of the generative potentials of such polar oppositions, a fuller understanding of this phenomenon may point the way toward a more functional political system.

Harnessing the potential of an interdependent polarity involves creating a conscious agreement or ‘relational container’ in which the legitimacy of each side, as well as each side’s

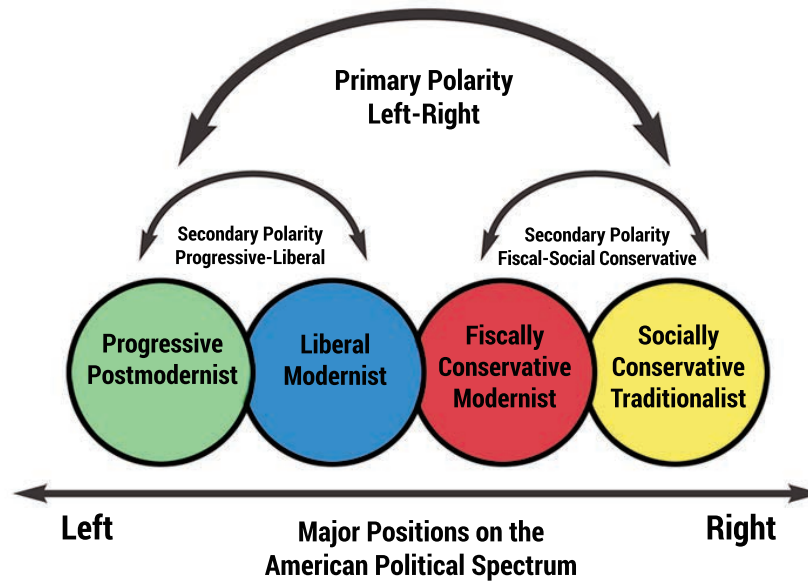


Figure 1. A simplified schematic of the fundamental polarities within the left and the right

need for moderation by the other, is acknowledged and encouraged. When working to enact and maintain the agreements through which such interdependent systems can operate, the trick is to define or otherwise identify versions of each pole that are sufficiently ‘positive’ so as to be acceptable to their opposing pole. In other words, when seeking to form a generative, deliberative polar alliance, each pole must present a version of itself that is potentially acceptable (even if with reservations) to its intended polar opposite. The potential for building agreement and generating political will that is the promise of such polar alliances can accordingly be realized when, like a magnet, the forces of attraction and repulsion are brought into balanced alignment.

While this happens naturally in many political coalitions, polarity theory’s insights into how a generative polarity can best be formed and maintained by agreement can make the ongoing process of mutual challenge and support more conscious and deliberate. That is, in almost every situation where an opposition between innovative and prudential values appears—either across the spectrum or within each side—this natural polarity can provide the magnet-like energy that can lead to the mutual improvement of both poles.

In this way, as each pole works to true up the other, the underlying principles and intrinsic values that form the bedrock of each side’s political identity and political will can become more visible and influential. Unlike negative political will—the motivation to keep the other side from winning—positive political will is more powerful and sustainable. And positive political will emerges when people invest their loyalty and identity in a cause or set of principles. So by bringing together opposing yet interdependent sets of principles in a way that makes those principles more dynamic and responsive, deliberative polar alliances can produce political positions that are more worthy of such loyalty and that can thus generate more powerful political will within their constituencies.

Evolving the Right Through a Generative Polar Alliance Between Conservatives and Libertarians

Our examination of how such deliberative polar alliances might be formed in the context of contemporary American politics begins by focusing on the right side of the spectrum. Political commentators have identified and labeled numerous factions on the right, such as center-right moderates, libertarians, religious conservatives, neoconservatives, and paleoconservatives. Yet when we set these labels aside and attempt to discern the foundational



“On the other hand, we could join forces and attack the media.”

propositions of value that engender loyalty and provide political identity for partisans on the right, the natural polarity of values that appears in this context is perhaps best characterized as the ‘heritage value complex’ and the ‘liberty value complex.’

As illustrated in figure 2, the heritage value complex includes a patriotic love for the American nation. This set of values takes great pride in America’s historical achievement of democratic government;

its constitutionally-guaranteed rights and freedoms; its Judeo-Christian roots; its role as an ethnic melting-pot and the opportunities for upward mobility it provides; its scientific, artistic and economic contributions to the modern world; and its heroic liberation and rehabilitation of Western Europe during World War II and its subsequent stand against communism during the Cold War. Affirming and preserving these positive aspects of America, and the underlying values of Western civilization for which it stands, serves as a value foundation for a significant percentage of Republican voters.

Conversely, the foundational right-wing ‘liberty value complex’ points in a somewhat different direction. This set of affirmative values includes the sovereign right of every individual to think and act according to their own lights, free from the interference or dictates of the collective. The liberty value complex celebrates the spirit of entrepreneurship, individual self-sufficiency, and the spontaneous order that arises when people are allowed to freely pursue their natural interests. Moreover, this position stands for limited government, unfettered economic opportunity in a free market, private property, personal privacy, and freedom from censorship of any kind. While this complex of values is most often associated with libertarians, most of these values are also generally affirmed by the wider constituency of fiscal conservatives.

The rise of Donald Trump, of course, clouds this picture. His popularity among a large constituency on the right cannot be smoothly identified with the heritage value complex.

	Liberty Value Complex	Heritage Value Complex
Political Goals and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect sovereign rights of individuals to think and act as they choose Champion spontaneous order that arises from free markets Promote entrepreneurship and economic self-sufficiency Champion limited government, private property and personal privacy Protect individual freedom from interference by the collective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote patriotic love for America and its national interests Champion America's Judeo-Christian heritage and focus on family Encourage ethnic assimilation and opportunities for upward mobility Stand against threats to Western civilization Promote industriousness, proportionality, and equitable just deserts
Potential Deficiencies and Pathologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for indifferent elitism and selfish exploitation Can promote anti-government anarchy Can drift toward social Darwinism Cultural cognition and tribalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bigoted nativism, racism and sexism Jingoistic warmongering Oppressive authoritarianism Parochial resistance to greater inclusion and moral evolution Anti-science and penchant for fundamentalism Cultural cognition and tribalism

Figure 2. The natural value polarity on the right

While most of his supporters ascribe to heritage values to some degree, there are also numerous ways in which Trump’s candidacy runs counter to these values. This seemingly unprincipled populist surge on the right is explained by *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat in his op-ed of February 18, 2016 entitled “How to Break a Party.” In the op-ed, Douthat relies on the political typology of the Pew Research Center, which identifies “a complicated partnership among business-friendly conservatives, social conservatives and a more inchoate populist cohort, for whom liberalism seems like an enemy but ‘big government’ is not necessarily a dirty word.”⁹ The Pew typology cited by Douthat accordingly confirms the value polarity between fiscal conservatives and social conservatives, while identifying Trump populists as generally attracted to the right side of the political spectrum, but not committed ideologically to either pole.

Another relevant analysis of values within the context of American politics is found in the work of prominent social psychologist Jonathan Haidt. Haidt’s Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) identifies six basic moral concerns labeled: “empathy,” “proportionality,” “liberty,” “loyalty,” “authority,” and “sanctity.”¹⁰ According to this theory, relative preferences among these six basic value priorities can be used to determine where voters and candidates stand on the overall political spectrum. While there are some differences between the findings of MFT and the conclusions of polarity theory, there are also many consistencies and affinities between these two ways of understanding the values that animate American politics. Polarity

theory's identification of the right's heritage and liberty value complexes can thus claim partial support from both the analysis of MFT and the findings of the Pew Research Center.

According to many commentators, Trump's candidacy is effectively destroying the Republican party. So as the right attempts to regroup and rebuild after Trump's likely defeat in the general election (assuming he wins the nomination), a clearer understanding of the positive and enduring values that form the bedrock of right-wing loyalty will be indispensable. Moreover, a necessary aspect of the soul-searching that responsible citizens on the right will inevitably have to undertake in the wake of Trump must include coming to terms with the downsides and potential pathologies of all of its constituent ideologies, with special emphasis placed on the heritage value complex.

As also shown in figure 2, the downside of the heritage value complex can be recognized in bigoted nativism, jingoistic warmongering, oppressive authoritarianism, and parochial resistance to greater inclusion through the evolution of human morality. Similarly, the downside of the liberty value complex includes the potential for indifferent elitism, the encouragement of anti-government anarchy, and the creeping specter of social Darwinism. The potential pathologies of each side, however, are often overlooked or whitewashed by those whose loyalties are invested in the positive features of these respective value complexes. The blind spot that supporters within these camps usually exhibit to the inherent downsides of their own positions points to the ongoing need for push-back and moderation. And this moderating and challenging function can best be performed by a critical yet supportive form of opposition that can more clearly see both the best and the worst of its own natural polar antipode. For instance, those who value liberty above all are highly sensitive to the potential downsides of the heritage value complex, and are thus in the best position to constructively critique its policies. And this, of course, is also true of the inverse relation.

From this perspective we may begin to see how these two basic value foundations of the right—the heritage value complex and the liberty value complex—each require ongoing refinement and management to ensure that their positive features can continue to effectively influence government policy, even while their negative features are kept at bay. And each value complex's need for both 'challenge and support,' as illuminated by the insights of polarity theory, is best fulfilled by a form of opposition that recognizes its own inherent interdependency with the political counterpart it seeks to moderate. In other words, the ability to influence and potentially persuade a given political constituency is almost always tied to an acknowledged degree of sympathy for that constituency's positions. Stated yet another way, the partisans of any given position are far more likely to listen to and respect the opinion of opponents who are willing to affirm at least some of the strengths of their position.

Consequently, this crucial function of challenge and support ideally requires conscious awareness by both sides of the needed role played by what might be termed a 'friendly other side'—a form of opposition that is able to recognize a common goal or binding element that

serves as a higher purpose for both poles, thereby bringing them into an interdependent relationship in service to this higher purpose.

In his analysis of the future of the right, centrist political commentator Michael Lind has argued that social conservatism, which is largely synonymous with the heritage value complex, is on the way out. Lind contends that because millennials on both the left and the right are uniformly socially liberal, it won't be long before social conservatism is politically irrelevant.¹¹ Polarity theory, however, reaches a different conclusion. While the heritage value complex will inevitably evolve as the millennial generation comes to power—becoming more friendly to same-sex marriage and other social issues which it currently opposes—there are nevertheless enduring features of the heritage value complex that will remain foundational to the American identity of a politically significant number of voters for the foreseeable future.

Therefore, for the American right to reclaim its role as the champion of liberty and heritage, and as a check against the excesses of the left, it will need to effectively carry forward the best of the heritage value complex while leaving behind its more backward aspects, such as bigotry and authoritarianism. In other words, many of the values associated with a traditional worldview—such as decency, modesty, and respect for the wisdom of the past—are indeed foundational for a moral civilization. So as the American right seeks to rebuild after the 2016 election, it will need to become more effective at teasing apart the “dignities from the disasters” within its heritage value complex. And in this important cultural and political project, the insights of polarity theory will prove highly relevant.

The Future of the Right

It seems to me that under current conditions the American right and left are largely beyond reconciliation because both sides fail to sufficiently appreciate the core values of their opponents. Therefore, rather than continue to pursue the failed strategy of centrism, the best way to restore the functionality of the left-right polarity overall is to start by making each side more functional on their own terms by working to enact more deliberative, and thus more generative, polarities on each side. Once the essential value propositions of each side have been trued up by this strategy of refinement, the universal appeal and enduring necessity of each side's values will become more apparent. And as each side becomes more sympathetic to the positive values of their opponents, they will then be able to work together more effectively.

This process of working to bring about a more evolved version of both sides can start on the right where the potential to enact a generative polarity is strong and where a fresh approach is clearly called for in the wake of the Trump upheaval. Again, polarity theory shows how the overarching political polarity of progressive-conservative is a kind of fractal pattern that continues to reappear across scale. And as this self-similar pattern shows up within Republican politics, it continues to take this progressive-conservative form. In this context, the heritage value complex occupies the conservative or prudential pole, and the liberty value

complex occupies the progressive or innovative pole, even while both poles remain essentially on the right.

These value poles, however, are not demographically equal in size. The prudential pole on both the right and the left is usually larger (notwithstanding the even circles shown in figure 1 above). Yet according to polarity theory, the innovative pole serves the necessary function of refining and energizing the prudential pole, keeping it from becoming too stagnant or complacent. For example, the millennial generation evinces little enthusiasm or loyalty for either the conservative pole of the right or the liberal establishment pole of the left. Millennials are usually more attracted to the innovative versions of the right and the left, as represented by libertarianism on the right and postmodern progressivism (defined below) on the left. And this helps explain why both poles need each other. The innovative pole needs the prudential pole's voter base and the prudential pole needs the innovative pole's loyalty-generating energy.

Therefore, consciously forming a deliberative polar alliance between the right's conservative heritage value complex and its more progressive liberty value complex is not about the tactics of bringing together equal voting blocs. Rather, the political function of such a deliberative alliance is to better illuminate

and refine the essential principles that attract loyalty and provide identity for those on the right. At the moment, however, the alliance between conservatives and libertarians is ill-formed, and the main thing it lacks is an understanding of how an interdependent polarity can function as a system of development.¹² That is, proponents of both right-wing value complexes could improve the right overall by better acknowledging the role that each pole can play in refining its polar counterpart through mutually agreed challenge and support. Through this process, the inherent moral strengths and wisdom that are the provenance of the right can become more clearly visible and thus more influential. And by employing this strategy, the right can evolve and overcome its current crisis in American politics.

Those on the right know they have a big problem and thus have a strong incentive to follow this improvement strategy by working to form a more conscious and deliberative alliance between the right's essential poles of value. For those on the left, however, the opportunity to form such a deliberative alliance between the left's essential value poles is not as straightforward. So it is to the question of how to evolve the left that we now turn.



“When my distinguished colleague refers to the will of the ‘people,’ does he mean his ‘people’ or my ‘people’?”

Evolving the Left Through a Generative Polar Alliance Between Liberals and Progressives

By way of review, in this paper we are considering how America's hyper-partisan political dysfunction may eventually be overcome through cultural evolution. In this analysis, we have used the fresh insights of polarity theory to better understand the cultural values that form the bedrock of loyalty-identity which underlies our national political landscape. The basic idea is that the overarching 'stuck polarity' of right and left can be outgrown when and as both the right and the left each become more mature and developed on their own terms.

And according to polarity theory, the evolution of each side can be best facilitated by the evolution of the other. So ideally, a more evolved right and left will emerge together, mutually stimulating their respective growth. Toward this end, polarity theory indicates that an effective strategy for evolving both the right and left is to better identify, illuminate, and refine the basic polarity of values that forms the foundation of each side. When the essential value poles that exist within each side are accordingly clarified and harmonized by mutual agreement, this will foster an interdependent relationship allowing for both challenge and support. Through the formation of such a deliberative polar alliance each side can evolve by strengthening its values and enhancing the commitment of its constituents. And as both the right and the left mature in this way, the universal appeal and enduring necessity of each side's values will become more apparent and thus more agreeable to their opponents.

Further, in the discussion above we saw how the larger overall polar pattern of 'progressive-conservative' appears within the right in the opposing yet interdependent 'liberty' and 'heritage' value complexes. And a similar kind of foundational value polarity can also be found within the American left. As discussed below, this left-wing value polarity can be identified as the 'liberation value complex' and the 'fairness and prosperity value complex.'

Values of the Modernist Liberal Establishment

America's cultural center of gravity is arguably located in the liberal establishment, whose powerbase includes the Democratic party, the mainstream media, union labor, the entertainment industry, and most of the education establishment. The political values of the liberal establishment are accordingly reflected in the Democratic party's platform. These values include: advancing the economic interests of working class and middle class Americans against the interests of big business; protecting the rights and advancing the social interests of minorities and women; encouraging America's ongoing economic growth and global influence; and promoting liberal values internationally while limiting and resisting the use of military force abroad. Unlike the right, the mainstream American left believes that a proper role of government is to ameliorate social ills and ensure that no one is in need.

Figure 3 below lists these liberal values, together with their potential downsides. But boiling down this list to its essential value foundations, we can summarize the left's

establishment pole as valuing ‘fairness and prosperity for all.’

In this subsection’s title I refer to this establishment pole of the left as ‘modernist’ because this camp continues to have faith in the American dream of upward mobility and economic success. Although establishment liberals are often suspicious of corporations and Wall Street banks, they are usually not opposed to America’s free market capitalist system in general, as long as a social safety net is provided. Similarly, most liberals continue to believe in American exceptionalism and think of themselves as patriotic citizens. Both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are fair representatives of this cultural pole.

Establishment liberals can be identified as modernists because they share many of the same values as fiscal conservatives. The values of modernism include personal achievement, scientific rationality, economic growth, and the upward mobility provided by higher education. Despite their political differences, both establishment liberals and fiscal conservatives generally hold these mainstream values in common, which helps explain why an existential polarity exists *within* both the right and left. As first shown in figure 1 above, a polarity exists within the right as a result of the dialectical difference between a traditional worldview, held by many religious and social conservatives, and the modernist worldview held by center-right moderates, neoconservatives, and others within the right-wing establishment. And in the case of the left, this same modernist worldview, which most

	Liberation Value Complex	Fairness & Prosperity Value Complex
Political Goals and Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect the environment above all else Champion social justice and worldcentric morality Promote multiculturalism and strong affirmative action Promote feminism and total equality Promote localism and natural lifestyle Expose America’s past abuses and question globalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Champion the working and middle class against big business Protect the rights and interests of minorities and women Foster America’s economic and scientific growth and its global influence Promote liberal values internationally while limiting military force Use government to ameliorate social ills and ensure none in need
Potential Deficiencies and Pathologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-modernism and reverse patriotism Radical rejection of social institutions Can promote anti-government anarchy Magical thinking and narcissism Self-righteous scolding Cultural cognition and tribalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bloated government bureaucracy Captured by special interests Relativistic and indecisive Can be scientistic and hostile to religion Results in crony capitalism Cultural cognition and tribalism

Figure 3. The natural value polarity on the left

establishment liberals continue to ascribe to, is in a similar kind of polar relationship with a dialectically opposed worldview. Only in this case the polar opposition is found between the modernist worldview and what is perhaps best characterized as the ‘postmodern worldview.’

Values of the Postmodern Progressive Counterculture

While the word *postmodern* has been used in a narrower sense to describe art movements or critical forms of academia, I use this term more broadly (both in this paper and in integral philosophy in general) to describe the distinct countercultural worldview that has emerged beyond modernism in many parts of the developed world. Those who identify with this postmodern worldview, sometimes called progressives or ‘cultural creatives,’ ascribe to a well-defined set of values that includes strong environmentalism, social justice, and multiculturalism. Postmodernists also value locally-sourced and organic food, alternative medicine, alternative spirituality, and they often oppose the core values of both traditionalism and modernism.

Postmodernists, who comprise approximately twenty-percent of the U.S. population, represent America’s dissident counterculture. They see themselves as distinct from the mainstream and question the legitimacy of the modernist American establishment. While this demographic group does not have significant political power, it does have abundant cultural power, which influences politics in indirect but profound ways. The most popular political leaders within this cultural pole are undoubtedly Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. But being U.S. Senators, Sanders and Warren are more or less tied to the left’s establishment pole, even while many of their supporters are postmodernists. Beyond the confines of electoral politics, however, the more authentic political leaders of the postmodern worldview can be identified as activists such as Naomi Klein and Bill McKibben.

As also shown in Figure 3, the values of the left’s postmodern pole are more focused on overturning the system than on improving it incrementally. The postmodern value complex is concerned with liberation from oppression—the oppression of capitalism, racism, sexism, and a host of other -isms seen as currently afflicting society. Since its emergence in the Sixties and Seventies, the postmodern worldview has defined itself as stridently ‘anti-modernist.’ So the perceived crimes and pathologies of modernism accordingly serve as the motivational foundation for its political identity. The essential value propositions of this distinct pole on the left can therefore be found within what I will term the ‘liberation value complex.’

Another perspective on America’s major political factions is illustrated by figure 4, which shows the approximate size of the three major worldviews that make up the American body politic.¹³ Within this framing, most traditionalists are on the right, most postmodernists are on the left, and modernists, while skewing slightly to the left, remain largely divided along the left-right axis. How these historically enduring worldviews influence American politics is described further in the ICE whitepaper: *Premises and Principles of the Evolutionary Worldview*. But this brief discussion of America’s major worldviews sets the stage for our

examination of the disruptive role that the postmodern worldview has come to play within our national culture and politics.

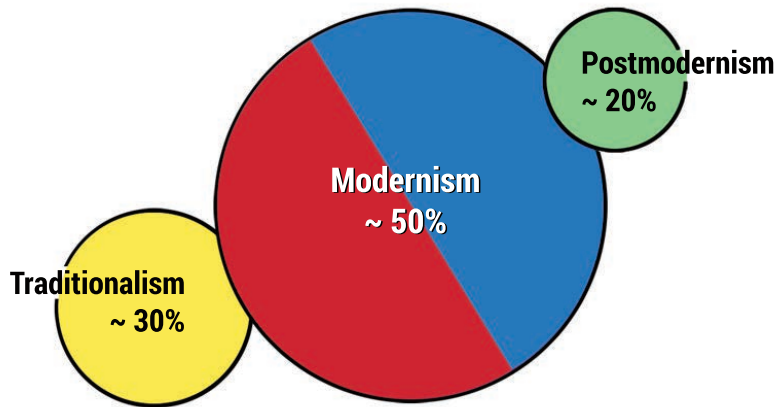


Figure 4. Estimated demographic size of America's major worldviews

Postmodernism's Rejection of Modernity

Returning to our theoretical consideration of America's currently polarized political situation, we can clearly see the recurring fractal pattern of 'progressive-conservative' within the left. The establishment left represents the conservative side of this polarity in the way it generally seeks to preserve the modernist status quo, even while working for greater fairness and inclusion. And of course, the countercultural left seems to naturally fit on the progressive side of this persistent polar pattern.

However, as I am arguing, evolution across the left-right political spectrum overall can be fostered most effectively by bringing the value polarities found within each side into better alignment by forming more deliberative alliances between each side's natural poles of value. Yet while postmodernists reliably vote for the left (if they vote), their commitment to the 'liberation value complex' frequently results in their unwillingness to constructively cooperate in an alliance with the establishment left.

Although postmodernists have no problem with the 'challenge' function of such an alliance, supporting the modernist establishment cuts against the grain of their anti-modernist identities. So again, most postmodernists would rather overturn the system than work to improve it incrementally. This unwillingness to validate or cooperate with the pragmatic establishment is seen, for example, in the postmodern left's rejection of Barack Obama's leadership. Within postmodern political discourse Obama is often condemned as a betrayer, or as a tool of corporate interests.

Now, perhaps this radical stance of postmodern rejectionism is not really a threat to America's political future. Calls to overthrow the system have been part of the political scene for over a century, but the far left has had little success in American electoral politics. After

all, almost every democracy includes fringe elements on both the left and right, which the mainstream usually ignores at best or placates at worst. Indeed, the rise and fall of the Occupy Movement did little to hurt the Democratic party, and merely underscored the relative political impotency of the countercultural left. So as long as the establishment left continues to win the presidency, there may be little incentive to directly confront the postmodern voices who argue that both capitalism and the American nation are something akin to criminal enterprises.

But even though the establishment left has tended to ignore the countercultural left, postmodernism has had a profound influence on the right. Many on the right can't (or won't) tell the difference between the radical postmodern left and the establishment modernist left. Because the establishment left has failed to adequately challenge the rhetoric of the countercultural left, in the minds of many on the right the left as a whole is seen as surreptitiously anti-American.

Reverse Patriotism

Ever since the 1960s when the postmodern worldview first arose as a cultural and political force, America has found itself in a culture war wherein traditionalists and postmodernists have fought for the allegiance of the modernist mainstream. Although this conflict over values has changed and evolved since the 1970s, America's ongoing culture war continues to be a major cause of its political dysfunction. At the deep level of values and loyalties, the aspect of this cultural conflict that roils conservatives and fuels distrust and affective polarization overall is found in what can be identified as a kind of *reverse patriotism*.

Throughout America's history national patriotism has been a strong source of political will. Indeed, the power of patriotism has led thousands to lay down their lives for their country. And in the same way that old-fashioned patriotism produces strong loyalty, patriotism's opposite—a feeling of shame and contempt for America's crimes and pathologies—now provides a strong sense of identity for many on the countercultural left. Reverse patriotism, which consistently takes a dim view of America's economic system and its role in international affairs, has now come to replace patriotism in the minds of a significant number of postmodernists by offering a similar, yet opposite, kind of righteous cause to believe in and sacrifice for. Reverse patriotism can be clearly seen in the work of Noam Chomsky, Oliver Stone, Amy Goodman, Howard Zinn, Chris Hedges, Slavoj Žižek (internationally), and a host of similar leftists who are the political heroes of many progressive postmodernists.

Figure 5 shows how, in an attempt to transcend nationalism, many within the postmodern left are effectively opting out of America's political system by rejecting its very legitimacy. However, the countercultural left's contribution to the polarization of American politics is rarely accounted for by establishment liberal commentators, who blame Republicans for

moving to the right.¹⁴ Yet while Republicans have indeed moved rightward in recent years (as also shown in figure 5), this can be partially explained as a reaction to the postmodern left's growing influence.

From an integral perspective, however, the critiques leveled by postmodernists against modernism in general, and America in particular, are not all wrong. The American government has definitely committed historical crimes at home and abroad, and free market capitalism has created gross inequality and economic oppression. In response to these perceived pathologies, postmodernism has staked out a cultural position of antithesis, which defines itself in opposition to many mainstream American institutions. And it must be acknowledged that the dissident American counterculture has made progress by helping to overcome sexism, racism, militarism, homophobia, and a host of other national deficiencies.

Yet notwithstanding these deficiencies, since its founding America has been a beacon of democratic freedom in the world, and has done much to alleviate the suffering of millions. Despite its shortcomings, free market capitalism has lifted more people out of poverty than any other form of economic relation. And capitalism's power to create new technologies and innovative solutions remains humanity's best hope for ameliorating climate change. So even though there is a legitimate role for dissent, postmodernism's cynical form of reverse patriotism is as vulnerable to jingoistic blindness and a one-sided 'us and them' mentality as historical forms of nationalistic patriotism.

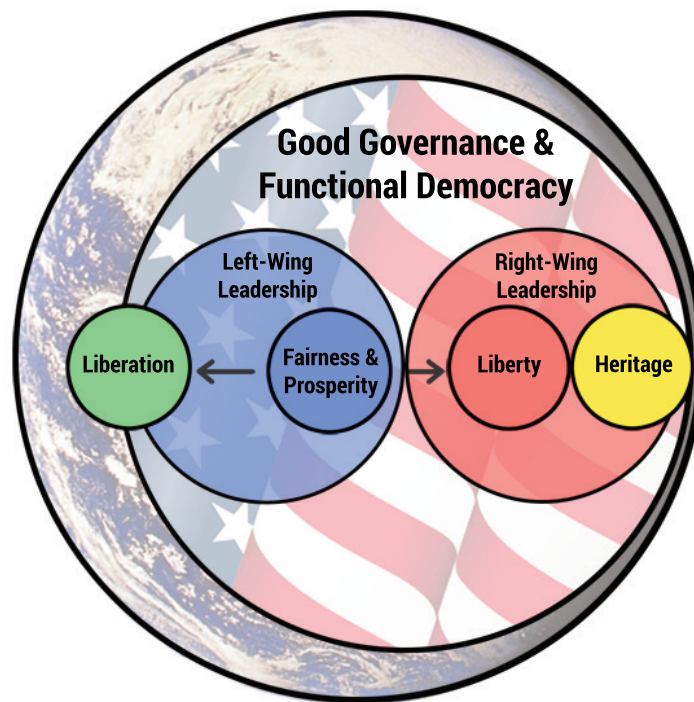


Figure 5. The effects of postmodern rejectionism and reverse patriotism

According to the theoretical thesis advanced here, the crimes and pathologies of modernity cannot be positively atoned for or corrected if there is no underlying sympathy for its achievements and core goods. As I am arguing, the ability to effectively improve a political position is almost always tied to the ability to recognize its accomplishments and provide provisional support for its positive goals. It thus bears repeating that the promise of overcoming our democracy's paralysis through the formation of a more functional polarity on the left (as a prerequisite to a more functional left-right polarity overall) can only be fully realized within a relational container that provides for both support and challenge.

The Future of the Left

Just as the future of the right will ideally entail a more conscious and deliberative alliance between conservatives and libertarians, a more functional future left will likewise require a more congenial alliance between establishment liberals and progressive counterculturalists. While 'fairness,' as well as many other values of the establishment left, are certainly shared by the countercultural left, the polar relationship between these two major factions is an existential fact of American politics. And this dialectical difference between the left's two major worldviews can be clearly seen in the contest between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. Even though their respective policy proposals are similar, Sanders appeals to postmodernists in a way that Clinton cannot. So as I am arguing, if the left is to evolve, both politically and culturally, it will need to better integrate and harmonize the important values that stand at the heart of each of its existential cultural poles.

Despite its rejectionism, the postmodern pole of the left has an important job to do. Largely unburdened by the pragmatic 'real politic' of the establishment left, the countercultural left is free to imagine, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*, as postmodern author Charles Eisenstein puts it. However, as long as postmodernists occupy a position of staunch antithesis to mainstream modernism, their emancipatory goals will remain unmet. For example, the postmodern left is clearly the strongest voice in the fight against global warming. Yet their calls for 'climate justice' admit of no compromise. They consistently condemn nuclear power and fracking for natural gas, even though energy experts are increasingly convinced that these technologies must serve as a bridge to a lower carbon future under almost every scenario. The countercultural left's attitude of 'just say no to modernity' accordingly tends to hijack their influence within America's democratic system.

Therefore, in order to perform its vital function of standing for a more just and sustainable future, the postmodern pole of the left will need to make the dialectical move from antithesis to synthesis. Stated otherwise, the future of the left must involve the evolution of its progressive pole from its current position of antithesis to a more synthetic stance that can better acknowledge the ongoing value of modernity. And according to an evolutionary understanding of dialectical development, this move from antithesis to synthesis will necessarily involve a *negation of the negation*.

The idea that social forces can achieve transcendent yet inclusive synthetic progress by partially negating the original negation of a prior antithesis was first conceived by Hegel over two hundred years ago. And this idea remains highly relevant for our current political challenges. For the last fifty years at least, the postmodern worldview has been chiefly concerned with negating the pathologies of modernism. But again, while this creditable project is obviously ongoing, we have now come to a point in history where a more synthetic stance toward modernism is needed for our next steps of progress. The postmodern left's opportunity to become more synthetic, and thereby more politically effective, can thus be realized by partially negating its reverse patriotism. In the same way that the right must carry forward the best while pruning away the worst of the heritage value complex, the left will at some point also need to tease apart the "dignities from the disasters" that currently exist within its liberation value complex.

Following this strategy, the countercultural left, which up till now has engendered loyalty in many of its constituents by radically rejecting our current system, can now use the emerging insights of polarity theory to better harmonize the third-level polarity that exists within its own camp. That is, the fractal pattern of 'progressive-conservative' can be found at every level: across the left-right spectrum and within each side (as we have seen), and also there again within the respective factions that make up each side. Within the current countercultural left, perhaps ironically, the 'conservative pole' is now occupied by the antithetical stance of reverse patriotism. Conversely, the 'progressive pole' within political postmodernism, which is presently poorly represented, can find its voice through a renewed kind of inclusive patriotism that better acknowledges the astonishing accomplishments and enduring moral strengths of Western civilization. This new kind of global or 'integral' patriotism can continue to admit the valid critiques of its rejectionist polar counterpart while at the same time working to improve and build on what modernity has achieved by making capitalism more conscious and America more moral.

This emerging form of 'post-postmodern patriotism,' which can better harmonize old-fashioned national patriotism with a global, worldcentric form of patriotism, is thus the way forward for the future of the left. By adopting a more inclusive stance toward modernity, while continuing to stand for the 'liberation value complex,' such a move by the countercultural left could significantly empower the left overall while also assuaging some of the fears of the right. This future form of the left would thereby become authentically *more progressive* than what currently passes for progressivism within contemporary American politics.

The postmodern left's opportunity to become more synthetic, and thereby more politically effective, can be realized by partially negating its reverse patriotism.

Conclusion

At its root, hyper-partisan polarization is a cultural problem with a cultural solution. This solution can be realized by sharpening our focus on the foundational values that form the bedrock of loyalty-identity underlying our national political landscape. As I have argued, these bedrock values naturally cohere in polar sets identified as the “heritage-liberty” and “fairness-liberation” value complexes. Although these value complexes often come into conflict, each provides a solution to a given set of problems. And because all of these problem sets continue to challenge us, we need all of these values to be on-line and working for our society and government to function effectively.

As I have also argued, Americans can overcome hyper-partisanship by working to bring about a more mature version of both the right and the left. This crucial work of evolving both sides can be facilitated through the conscious formation of a new kind of deliberative polar alliance. By working to bring about this new kind of political agreement we can harmonize competing factions and turn conflict into strength. And by employing this method, all Americans can increase the scope of what they are able to value and thereby bring about a ‘generative polarity’ between a more evolved ‘future right’ and ‘future left.’ Ultimately, the evolution of culture requires the evolution of values. So by reaffirming and revivifying the core values that almost all Americans share deep down, we can evolve our way out of our democracy’s dysfunctionally polarized condition.

A new kind of global or ‘integral’ patriotism can build on what modernity has achieved by making capitalism more conscious and America more moral.

Notes

1. See: “Affect, Not Ideology, a Social Identity Perspective on Polarization” by Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood and Yphtach Lelkes, in *Oxford Public Opinion Quarterly*, September 2012. <http://poq.oxfordjournals.org/content/76/3/405>.
2. David Blankenhorn quote: <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/12/22/why-polarization-matters>.
3. The proposition that centrism is a failed strategy is borne out by the history of American politics over the last two decades. Despite the large number of voters who identify as ‘independents,’ research shows that most independents reliably lean one way or another, which indicates that there is really no stable centrist position on most issues. See e.g., Hawkins, C. B. & Nosek, B. A. (2012). “Motivated independence? Implicit party identity predicts political judgments among self-proclaimed Independents,” in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18, 1441-1455. It seems that in both politics and physics, trying to find a stable center in a polarity is like trying to find a balance between two sides of a magnet, which inevitably pulls you to one side or the other. While centrists may find hope in the viability of a candidate like Michael Bloomberg, centrism can just as easily lead to a candidate like Donald Trump.
4. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biology_and_political_orientation. Thanks to Jonathan Haidt for adding nuance to this point.

5. See e.g.: Charles M. Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars, *Building Cross-Cultural Competence: How to Create Wealth from Conflicting Values* (Yale University Press 2000), Charles Handy, *The Age of Paradox* (Harvard Business Review Press 1995), and Charles Johnston, *Necessary Wisdom* (ICD Press 2010).
6. Barry Johnson quote: *Polarity Management* by Barry Johnson (HRD Press 1996), p. xviii.
7. Niels Bohr quote: <http://quoteaddicts.com/724948>. For a further discussion of the metaphysics of polarities, see Steve McIntosh, *The Presence of the Infinite* (Quest Books 2015).
8. Quoted from: The American Political Science Association's 2014 whitepaper: "American Deliberative Negotiation," by Mark E. Warren and Jane Mansbridge. <http://www.apsanet.org/portals/54/Files/Task%20Force%20Reports/Chapter5Mansbridge.pdf>, p. 92. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deliberative_democracy.
9. Ross Douthat, "How to Break a Party," *The New York Times*, February 18, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/18/opinion/campaign-stops/how-to-break-a-party.html>
10. See: Elkins and Haidt, "Donald Trump supporters think about morality differently than other voters. Here's how," Vox, February 5, 2016 <http://www.vox.com/2016/2/5/10918164/donald-trump-morality>. See also: <http://www.moralfoundations.org>
11. See: Michael Lind, "The Coming Realignment: Cities, Class, and Ideology After Social Conservatism," *The Breakthrough Journal*, April 28, 2014 <http://thebreakthrough.org/index.php/journal/past-issues/issue-4/the-coming-realignment>
12. The potential power of a conservative-libertarian alliance is argued for by Charles C.W. Cooke in *The Conservatarian Manifesto: Libertarians, Conservatives, and the Fight for the Right's Future* (Crown Forum 2015). Yet significant polar tension remains between these two factions on the right. This tension can be seen in conservative suspicions of libertarians—for example, the conservative article: "What's Wrong With the Latest Trendy Libertarianism" <http://dailysignal.com/2015/03/15/whats-wrong-with-the-latest-trendy-libertarianism>. And libertarians can likewise be suspicious of conservatives, as seen in the *Huffington Post's* blog: "There Is Nothing Libertarian About Conservatives" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-peron/there-is-nothing-libertar_b_6883224.html. Some commentators have even suggested that libertarians may have more in common with liberals than with conservatives, as described in the *Think Progress* blog: "Why Libertarians And Progressives Will Never Get Along" <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2013/10/30/2853181/libertarians-progressives-libertarian>, but the potential for such a libertarian-liberal alliance has, of course, not borne out at the ballot box.
13. For the evidence supporting the existence of these major values-based worldviews see: Ronald Inglehart, ed., *Human Values and Social Change* (Brill, 2003); Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (Harmony Books, 2000). See also: Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World* (Routledge, 1928); Lawrence Kohlberg, *From Is to Ought* (Academic Press, 1971); Clare W. Graves, "Levels of Existence: An Open System Theory of Values," in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (November 1970); Jenny Wade, *Changes of Mind: A Holonomic Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness* (SUNY Press, 1996); and Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization* (Tarcher Putnam, 2009).
14. See: Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein: "Let's just say it: The Republicans are the problem," in *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/lets-just-say-it-the-republicans-are-the-problem/2012/04/27/gIQAxCVUIT_story.html. See also: Norman J. Ornstein: "Yes, Polarization Is Asymmetric—and Conservatives Are Worse," in *The Atlantic Magazine*, June 19, 2014 <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/06/yes-polarization-is-asymmetric-and-conservatives-are-worse/373044>

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