

**When morality opposes justice:  
Conservatives have moral intuitions that liberals may not recognize**

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**Abstract**

Researchers in moral psychology and social justice have agreed that morality is about matters of harm, rights, and justice. With this definition of morality, conservative opposition to social justice programs has appeared to be immoral, and has been explained as a product of various non-moral processes, such as system justification or social dominance orientation. In this article we argue that, from an anthropological perspective, the moral domain is usually much broader, encompassing many more aspects of social life and valuing institutions as much or more than individuals. We present theoretical and empirical reasons for believing that there are in fact five psychological systems that provide the foundations for the world's many moralities. The five foundations are psychological preparations for caring about and reacting emotionally to harm, reciprocity (including justice, fairness, and rights), ingroup, hierarchy, and purity. Political liberals have moral intuitions primarily based upon the first two foundations, and therefore misunderstand the moral motivations of political conservatives, who generally rely upon all five foundations.

Suppose your next-door neighbor puts up a large sign in her front yard that says “Cable television will destroy society.” You ask her to explain the sign, and she replies, “Cables are an affront to the god Thoth. They radiate theta waves, which make people sterile.” You ask her to explain how a low voltage, electrically-shielded coaxial cable can make anyone sterile, but she changes the subject. The *DSM-IV* defines a delusion as “a false belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly sustained despite what almost everyone else believes and despite what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious proof or evidence to the contrary” (APA, *DSM-IV*, 1994, p.765). Your neighbor is clearly delusional, and possibly schizophrenic. She is responding to forces, threats, and agents that simply do not exist.

But now suppose your other neighbor puts up a large sign in his front yard that says “Gay marriage will destroy society.” You ask him to explain the sign, and he replies, “Homosexuality is an abomination to God. Gay marriage will undermine marriage, the institution upon which our society rests.” You ask him to explain how allowing two people to marry who are in love and of the same sex will harm other marriages, but he changes the subject. Because your neighbor is not alone in his beliefs, he does not meet the *DSM-IV* criteria for delusion. However, you might well consider your homophobic neighbor almost as delusional, and probably more offensive, than your cable-fearing neighbor. He, too, seems to be responding to forces, threats, and agents that do not exist, only in this case his widely shared beliefs have real victims: the millions of men and women who are prohibited from marrying the people they love, and who are treated unjustly in matters of family law and social prestige. If only there were some way to break through your neighbor’s delusions – some moral equivalent of Thorazine – which would help him see the facts as you see them.

But what makes you so certain that you see the moral world as it really is? If you are reading *Social Justice Research*, it is likely that you care a great deal about issues related to justice, fairness, equality, and victimization. It is also likely that you don’t care as much about patriotic displays, respect for authority, or chastity. In fact, these last three topics might even make you feel uneasy, calling up associations with political conservatism, the religious right, and other movements that limit the autonomy and free expression of the individual.

Our thesis in this article is that there are five psychological foundations of morality, which we label as harm, reciprocity, ingroup, hierarchy, and purity. Cultures vary on the degree to which they build virtues on these five foundations. As a first approximation, political liberals value virtues based on the first two foundations, while political conservatives value virtues based on all five. A consequence of this thesis is that justice and related virtues (based on the reciprocity foundation) make up half of the moral world for liberals, while justice-related concerns make up only one fifth of the moral world for conservatives. Conservatives have many moral concerns that liberals simply do not recognize as moral concerns. When conservatives talk about virtues and policies based on the ingroup, hierarchy, and purity foundations, liberals hear talk about theta waves. For this reason, liberals often find it hard to understand why so many of

their fellow citizens do not rally around the cause of social justice, and why many Western nations have elected conservative governments in recent years. In this paper we try to explain how moral emotions and intuitions that are not related to justice can often oppose moral emotions and intuitions that are. In the process we suggest ways that social justice researchers can broaden their appeal and engage in a more authentic, productive, and ultimately persuasive dialogue with the political moderates and conservatives who compose the majority of the electorate in many democratic nations.

### **Kohlberg and Social Justice**

Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) founded the modern field of moral psychology. He did so by proposing a grand theory that unified moral psychology as the study of the progressive development of the individual's understanding of justice. Building on the work of Piaget, Kohlberg proposed that moral development in all cultures is driven forward by the process of role-taking: as children get more practice at taking each others' perspectives, they learn to transcend their own position and appreciate when and why an action, practice, or custom is fair or unfair. Children may be blinded by their need for approval (Kohlberg's stage 3) or by the overbearing pronouncements of authority figures (stage 4), but if given enough practice and exposure to democratic institutions they will, in adolescence, reach the post-conventional level of moral reasoning (stage 5), at which actions and cultural practices can be critiqued based on the degree to which they instantiate justice.

Kohlberg's theory was famously criticized by Carol Gilligan (1982), who proposed an alternative foundation for ethics: care. Gilligan thought that women, more than men, based their moral judgments and actions on concerns about their obligations to care for, protect, and nurture those to whom they are connected, particularly those who are vulnerable (Gilligan & Wiggins, 1987). Kohlberg and most other moral psychologists ultimately conceded that justice and care were two separate foundations of morality. Despite disagreements about which foundation was more important, or whether one could be derived from the other, nearly everyone in moral psychology was united behind a central axiom: *morality is about protecting individuals*. Justice and care both mattered only insofar as they protected individuals. Practices that do not protect or help individuals were seen as mere social conventions at best, and as moral affronts at worst. Elliot Turiel, a student of Kohlberg, codified this individual-centered view of morality when he defined the moral domain as:

prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other. Moral prescriptions are not relative to the social context, nor are they defined by it. Correspondingly, children's moral judgments are not derived directly from social institutional systems but from features inherent to social relationships -- including experiences involving harm to persons, violations of rights, and conflicts of competing claims. (Turiel, 1983, p.3)

When the moral domain is limited by definition to two foundations (harm/welfare/care, and justice/rights/fairness), then social justice is clearly the extension of morality out to the societal level. The programs and laws that social justice activists endorse aim to maximize the welfare and rights of individuals, particularly those whom the activists believe do not receive equal treatment or full justice in their society. If social justice is just morality writ large, it follows that opposition to these programs must be based on concerns other than moral concerns. Social justice research is therefore in part the search for the non-moral motivations – such as selfishness, existential fear, or blind prejudice – of those who oppose social justice, primarily political conservatives. For example, one of the leading approaches to the study of political attitudes states that political conservatism is a form of motivated social cognition: people embrace conservatism in part “because it serves to reduce fear, anxiety, and uncertainty; to avoid change, disruption, and ambiguity, and to explain, order, and justify inequality among groups and individuals” (Jost et al., 2003, p.340; see also Social Dominance Orientation, Pratto et al., 1994). This view of conservatives is so widespread among justice researchers that it sometimes leads to open expressions of self-righteousness and contempt. At a recent conference on justice research, for example, a well-known researcher began her talk by stating categorically that affirmative action was the morally and practically correct policy. She then asked why many people oppose it. She dismissed the reasons conservatives sometimes give (mere theta waves) and then enumerated the self-serving mechanisms that gave rise to their delusions. For this speaker, affirmative action embodies justice and care, end of story. In her moral worldview, that’s all there is.

The moral basis of conservatism has been defended by the “principled conservatism” account (Sniderman & Piazza, 1993), but it is important to note that this debate has been conducted entirely by examining competing notions of fairness that can be derived from the reciprocity foundation. Hing, Bobocel, and Zanna (2002), for example, showed that some portion of conservative opposition to affirmative action is truly based on concerns that affirmative action programs sometimes violate the principle of merit. Our claim here goes further: we argue that the “principles” of principled conservatism go beyond fairness to include principles that liberals do not acknowledge to be moral principles, such as unconditional loyalty to one’s group, respect for one’s superiors, and the protection of female chastity.

### **There Is More to Morality Than Justice and Care**

It is interesting to note that the leading theories in moral psychology were shaped by the social and moral tumult of the 1960s and 1970s, and that most of the leading figures were embedded in two of the most politically liberal communities in the United States: Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Berkeley, California. Those who have studied morality from a more anthropological or historical perspective, however, have generally found a much broader

morality which cannot be supported by only two foundations.<sup>1</sup> Take, for example, the Old Testament, the Koran, Confucius, or almost any ethnography of a non-Western society. Issues of loyalty to the group, respect for one's elders, self-restraint, and the regulation of bodily processes (e.g., rules about food, sex, and menstruation) are highly elaborated in most human societies. Are these concerns just manifestations of an immature "conventional" morality (Kohlberg's stages 3 and 4)? Are they mere social conventions (à la Turiel), to be distinguished from the "real" individual-centered morality of harm/welfare/care and justice/rights/fairness?

Richard Shweder (1990) has long argued that the individual-centered moralities of Kohlberg and Turiel reflect just one of three widespread moral "ethics," each based on a different ontological presupposition. In the "ethics of autonomy" the moral world is assumed to be made up exclusively of individual human beings, and the purpose of moral regulation is to "protect the zone of discretionary choice of 'individuals' and to promote the exercise of individual will in the pursuit of personal preferences" (Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997, p.138). Rights, justice, fairness, and freedom are moral goods because they help to maximize the autonomy of individuals, and to protect individuals from harms perpetrated by authorities and by other individuals. The "ethics of community," in contrast, has a different ontological foundation. It sees the world not as a collection of individuals but as a collection of institutions, families, tribes, guilds or other groups. The purpose of moral regulation is to "protect the moral integrity of the various stations or roles that constitute a 'society' or a 'community,' where a 'society' or 'community' is conceived of as a corporate entity with an identity, standing, history, and reputation of its own" (Shweder et al., 1997, p.138) Key virtues in this ethic are duty, respect, loyalty, and interdependence<sup>2</sup>. Individuals are office-holders in larger social structures, which give individual lives meaning and purpose. Finally, the "ethics of divinity" is based on the ontological presupposition that God or gods exist, and that the moral world is composed of souls housed in bodies. (See Bloom, 2004, for evidence that this presupposition is the natural, default assumption of our species.) Each soul is a bit of God, or at least a gift from God, and so the purpose of moral regulation is to "protect the soul, the spirit, the spiritual aspects of the human agent and 'nature' from degradation" (Shweder et al., 1997, p. 138). If the body is a temple housing divinity within, then people should not be free to use their bodies in any way they please; rather, moral regulations should help people to control themselves and avoid sin and spiritual pollution in matters related to sexuality, food, and religious law more generally.

From Shweder's perspective it is clear that social justice is the ethics of autonomy writ large, but the two other ethics – community and divinity – are at work in most cultures and in

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<sup>1</sup> Kohlberg (1969) and Turiel (Hollis, Leis, & Turiel, 1986) both conducted cross-cultural research, but they went to other cultures only to measure age trends on the constructs of their theories, not to examine local moral concerns.

<sup>2</sup> People sometimes think that Gilligan's ethic of care falls into Shweder's ethic of community, because both involve interdependence; it does not. The ethic of community is about protecting non-voluntary groups and institutions. The ethic of care is about relationships between pairs of individuals to enhance their welfare, and as such it is a part of the ethics of autonomy. See Jensen, 1997, for further discussion.

many Western subcultures. Political conservatism is often defined by its strong valuation of institutions and its concern that ideologies of “liberation” often destroy the very structures that make society and well-being possible (Muller, 1997). Most conservatives (with the exception of some economic conservatives) therefore embrace the ethics of community, and are morally opposed to the extreme individual freedom promoted by a pure ethics of autonomy – and by most social justice activists. Conservative groups that are religious (such as the American “religious right”) share this embrace of institutions and traditions embodied by the ethics of community, and then add in a passionate concern for the ethics of divinity; they see “secular humanism” as an organized effort to encourage people to live in an ungodly way, each person choosing her own goals and values based on what feels good or right to her alone. So when the electorate fails to embrace liberal policies and candidates, when a nation fails to rally around social justice concerns, it is at least plausible that there are moral motivations at work – motivations that liberals may not recognize as moral at all. If conservative morality goes far beyond justice, then it may often happen that moral emotions and intuitions that are *not* related to justice can oppose moral emotions and intuitions that are.

### **The Five Foundations of Morality**

Shweder’s three ethics were derived from a cluster analysis of moral discourse in India and the United States (data first reported in Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller, 1987), and its utility was later demonstrated in studies in Brazil (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993) and the United States (Haidt & Hersh, 2001; Jensen, 1997). In each case, educated secular Westerners revealed a narrower moral domain, more heavily focused on the ethics of autonomy, while other groups made greater use of two or all three of the ethics. Haidt and Joseph (2004) wanted to go beyond discourse patterns and search for the psychological systems that give rise to moral intuitions around the world. They examined several comprehensive theories of morality and values (including Shweder’s, but also Fiske, 1992, and Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990) as well as lists of human universals (Brown, 1991) and a description of the social lives of chimpanzees (de Waal, 1996) to try to identify the kinds of intuitions and automatic emotional reactions that appear widely across cultures, along with the social functions for which these intuitions and emotions may have evolved. Haidt and Joseph concluded that there are five psychological systems, each with its own evolutionary history, that give rise to moral intuitions across cultures<sup>3</sup>. Each system is akin to a kind of taste bud, producing affective reactions of liking or disliking when certain kinds of patterns are perceived in the social world. Cultures then vary in the degree to which they construct, value, and teach virtues based on the five intuitive foundations. The five foundations are:

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<sup>3</sup> Haidt and Joseph (2004) focused on four foundations, but suggested in a footnote that ingroup concerns are likely to be a separate foundation, rather than a part of the hierarchy foundation. Haidt and Bjorklund (in press) discussed all five foundations.

**1) Harm.** The long history of mammalian evolution has shaped maternal brains to be sensitive to signs of suffering in one's own offspring. In many primate species, particularly humans, this sensitivity has extended beyond the mother-child relationship, so that all normally developed individuals dislike seeing suffering in others, and have the potential to feel the emotion of compassion in response. (Compassion is not inevitable; it can be turned off by many forces, including the other four systems described below.) Because people have a sensitivity to cruelty and harm (analogous to the negative sensations caused by taste buds for bitterness), they feel approval toward those who prevent or relieve harm, and this approval is culturally codified in virtues such as kindness and compassion, and also in corresponding vices such as cruelty and aggression. Cultures vary in how much they value and emphasize these virtues and vices, relative to others described below.

**2) Reciprocity.** The long history of alliance formation and cooperation among unrelated individuals in many primate species has led to the evolution of a suite of emotions that motivate reciprocal altruism, including anger, guilt, and gratitude (Trivers, 1971). Because people feel these emotions when they observe or engage in reciprocal interactions, all cultures have developed virtues related to fairness and justice. These virtues can, of course, be overridden by moral concerns from the other four systems, and by the many self-serving biases that lead to errors of social perception. In some but not all cultures, participation in reciprocal interactions and role-taking (plus many other historical and economic factors) have led to the elaboration and valuation of individual rights and equality (in much the way that Kohlberg said). Most traditional cultures, however, do not have highly developed notions of individual rights, nor do most cultures appear to value or seek to create equality among all adult members, or even among all adult male members. (See Boehm, 1999, on how rare egalitarian societies are, and on how hard people in such societies must work to suppress their natural proclivities toward hierarchy.) Fairness is an excellent candidate for a universal (though variably applied) value, but equality of outcome or status is not.

**3) Ingroup.** The long history of living in kin-based groups of a few dozen individuals (for humans as well as other primate species) has led to special social-cognitive abilities, backed up by strong social emotions related to recognizing, trusting, and cooperating with members of one's co-residing ingroup, while being wary and distrustful of members of other groups. Because people value their ingroups, they also value those who sacrifice for the ingroup, and they despise those who betray or fail to come to the aid of the ingroup, particularly in times of conflict. Most cultures therefore have constructed virtues such as loyalty, patriotism, and heroism (usually a masculine virtue expressed in defense of the group). From this point of view, it is hard to see why diversity should be celebrated and increased, while rituals that strengthen group solidarity (such as a pledge of allegiance to the national flag) should be challenged in court. According to ingroup-based moralities, dissent is not patriotic (as some American bumper-stickers suggest);

rather, criticizing one's ingroup while it is engaged in an armed conflict with another group is betrayal or even treason.

**4) Hierarchy.** The long history of living in hierarchically-structured ingroups, where dominant males and females get certain perquisites but are also expected to provide certain protections or services, has shaped human (and chimpanzee, and to a lesser extent bonobo) brains to help them flexibly navigate in hierarchical communities. Dominance in other primate species relies heavily on physical force and fear, but in human communities the picture is more nuanced, relying largely on prestige and voluntary deference (Henrich and Gil-White, 2001). People often feel respect, awe, and admiration toward superiors, and many cultures have constructed virtues related to good leadership, which is often thought to involve magnanimity, fatherliness, and wisdom. Bad leaders are despotic, exploitative, or inept. Conversely, many societies value virtues related to subordination: respect, duty, and obedience. From this point of view, bumper stickers that urge people to “question authority” and protests that involve civil disobedience are not heroic, they are antisocial.

**5) Purity.** Against the long background of primate evolution, the human transition to a heavily meat-based diet occurred quite recently (1-3 million years ago; see Leakey, 1994). The move to meat, which may have included scavenging carcasses, coincided with the rapid growth of the human frontal cortex, and these two changes (meat eating and a big cortex) appear to have given humans – and only humans – the emotion of disgust (see Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2000). Disgust appears to function as a guardian of the body in all cultures, responding to elicitors that are biologically or culturally linked to disease transmission (feces, vomit, rotting corpses, and animals whose habits associate them with such vectors). However, in most human societies disgust has become a social emotion as well, attached at a minimum to those whose appearance (deformity, obesity, or diseased state), or occupation (the lowest castes in caste-based societies are usually involved in disposing of excrement or corpses) makes people feel queasy. In many cultures, disgust goes beyond such contaminant-related issues and supports a set of virtues and vices linked to bodily activities in general, and religious activities in particular. Those who seem ruled by carnal passions (lust, gluttony, greed, and anger) are seen as debased, impure, and less than human, while those who live so that the soul is in charge of the body (chaste, spiritually minded, pious) are seen as elevated and virtuous (Haidt, 2006; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 1999; see also a book by the current Pope: Ratzinger, 2004). From this point of view, a philosophy that says “if it feels good, do it” is the philosophy of the devil.

Three clarifications must be made immediately. First, while the “five foundations” theory is a nativist theory, it does not need any version of modularity to be true. We suspect that the human mind does contain a number of social-cognitive and social-emotional abilities that are modular “to some interesting degree” (Sperber, 1994), such as an automatic responsiveness to

signs of physical or emotional suffering by children, or by animals that resemble children (i.e., those that are “cute”). For our version of nativism to be true, all we need is the sort of “preparedness” that is widely accepted throughout psychology (Garcia & Koelling, 1966; Seligman, 1971). Does anyone seriously believe that it would be as easy to teach children to love their enemies as to hate them? Or that betrayal of friends and family is as intuitively pleasing as is loyalty to them? (Such “unnatural” beliefs may have been taught in Mao’s China, but only imperfectly and with great effort. Loyalty to kin is far more easily learned than its opposite.)

Second, the five foundations theory is a cultural-psychological theory as well as a nativist theory. A dictum of cultural psychology is that “culture and psyche make each other up” (Shweder, 1990). The five foundations theory is about both directions of this causal process. Virtues are cultural constructions, and children develop different virtues in different cultures and historical eras, yet the available range of human virtues is constrained by the five sets of intuitions that human minds are prepared to have. Cultures select areas of human potential that fit with their social structure, economic system, and cultural traditions, and work to cultivate these virtues in their children.

Third, it should be noted that Haidt and Joseph (2004) did not set out to validate Shweder’s three ethics, yet their analysis ended up confirming and refining his tripartite scheme. The first two foundations (harm and reciprocity) underlie and motivate the moral concerns of the ethics of autonomy. The second two (ingroup and hierarchy) are the psychological foundations of the ethics of community. The fifth foundation, purity, is the psychological foundation of the ethics of divinity (see Haidt, 2006, ch. 9 for a more complete explication of the role of disgust and moral elevation in the ethics of divinity). The five foundations theory therefore extends Shweder’s theory by being specific about the psychological mechanisms underlying moral judgment and moral discourse.

The five foundations theory offers a surprisingly simple explanation of the “culture war” going on in the United States, and in other democracies such as Israel (see Hunter, 1991, on the battle in many countries between the “orthodox” and the “progressivists”). The five foundations theory can also explain two puzzling features of the 2004 American presidential election. The first puzzle is that a plurality of Americans who voted for George Bush said in a well-publicized exit poll that their main concern was “moral values.” The second puzzle is that political liberals in the United States were shocked, outraged, and unable to understand how “moral values” drove people to vote for a man who, as they saw it, tricked America into an unwinnable war, cut taxes for the rich and benefits for the poor, and seemed to have a personal animosity toward mother nature. Our explanation of these two puzzles, and of the culture war in general, flows from this simple proposition: the morality of political liberals is built on the harm and reciprocity foundations, while the morality of political conservatives is built upon all five foundations. In the remainder of this paper we provide preliminary evidence for this claim, and discuss some of its ramifications.

### **Is Justice Half of Morality, or One Fifth?**

Previous studies of moral judgment have shown that political and religious conservatives are more likely than political and religious liberals to moralize behaviors that do not involve direct harm (e.g., Haidt and Hersh, 2001; Jensen, 1997, 1998). But is it just that conservatives are more “moralistic,” or do the differences correspond to the more specific claims made by the five foundations theory? To test the theory, we conducted an online survey (Graham, Nosek, & Haidt, in prep). An international sample of 1,613 respondents (mostly from the U.S. and U.K.) rated the relevance of 15 concerns to their moral judgments. The question stem asked: “When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?” Three statements were then presented for each foundation, in randomized order. Here is one example for each:

- Whether or not someone was harmed [for the harm foundation]
- Whether or not someone acted unfairly [reciprocity]
- Whether or not someone betrayed his or her group [ingroup]
- Whether or not the people involved were of the same rank [hierarchy]
- Whether or not someone did something disgusting [purity].

Participants also rated their political orientation on a 7-point scale. When we compared liberals to conservatives we found, as hypothesized, that liberals rated concerns related to harm and reciprocity as being significantly more relevant to moral judgment than had conservatives, while conservatives rated ingroup, hierarchy, and purity concerns as significantly more relevant than did liberals. When we limited the analysis to people who had rated themselves using the endpoints of the scale (1=extremely conservative, 7=extremely liberal) – people who are, presumably, the most vocal players in the culture war – we found that the differences became quite stark, as illustrated in Figure 1. Extreme liberals (the solid line) said that only the first two foundations were highly relevant, while the other three foundations were not nearly as important. Extreme conservatives, in contrast, said that all five domains were equally relevant to making moral judgments. We are continuing to explore this difference between liberal and conservative moralities with studies on persuasion and implicit cognition. Do the two groups differ in their implicit attitudes as greatly as they do in their explicit values? Will moral appeals for liberal causes that press emotional buttons related to ingroup, hierarchy and purity persuade political moderates, who make up most of the electorate, where more traditional liberal appeals have failed? We expect that the five foundations theory will be useful in the study of political action and rhetoric.

If our initial findings hold up, they would indicate that justice (and related concerns derived from the reciprocity foundation) is literally half of morality for liberals, while it is only

one-fifth of morality for conservatives.<sup>4</sup> If this is true, then we would expect texts created and valued by liberals and conservatives to show the predicted difference in the number of moral foundations they rely upon. With this in mind we have begun to analyze liberal and conservative texts to measure the degree to which they discuss or value virtues related to each of the five domains. To find out how current social justice research maps onto the foundations, we examined the last four years of articles in this very journal; two independent coders rated all SJR abstracts from 2002-2005 according to two criteria: 1) whether or not virtues or vices related to each of the five foundations were mentioned at all, and 2) whether the authors' viewpoint seemed to accept or reject the moral validity of that domain. Analyses of simple inclusion, shown in Figure 2 (solid line) showed that 78% of all articles bore a close link to the reciprocity foundation (including fairness, justice, rights, and equality), followed by 65% for harm. In contrast, less than half of the articles addressed ingroup, one third addressed hierarchy, and only one article made reference to purity. The constraining of morality to harm and reciprocity is not unique to social justice research; the general field of social psychology constrains its discussion of morality this way as well. Analyses of all 1995-2005 JPSP abstracts that mentioned morality revealed a similar pattern (the dotted line in Figure 2): high rates of inclusion for harm and reciprocity, and relatively few mentions of ingroup (27%), hierarchy (18%) and purity (15%). Figure 2 reveals that for both journals, the difference between the first two foundations and the last three mirrors the sharp dropoff in relevance ratings shown by the extreme liberals in Figure 1.

Beyond simple inclusion, the way social psychologists and social justice researchers discuss these domains further highlights a difference between the first two foundations (harm and reciprocity) and the three conservative-only foundations (ingroup, hierarchy, and purity). Specifically, the virtues built on the harm and reciprocity foundations were moderately to strongly endorsed by the SJR and JPSP articles that addressed them. In other words, care, protection, justice, fairness, and equality were presented, implicitly or explicitly, as good. The other three moral domains, however, tended to be moderately rejected, associated with vice more than virtue (see valence ratings next to data points in Figure 2). For instance, ingroup was consistently discussed in terms of prejudice, and organizational or familial hierarchies were more likely to be seen negatively (unjust, oppressive) than positively (helpful, protective). When values related to ingroup, hierarchy, and purity were rejected, they were often rejected because they conflicted with virtues related to the harm and reciprocity foundations.

Are we saying that SJR, JPSP and other academic sources need to start writing articles in praise of ingroup favoritism and power inequalities? No. Our point is merely that the morality studied and discussed in academic journals such as this one represents only a subset of human

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<sup>4</sup> At least, conceptually speaking. Of course, there is no reason to think that each of the five foundations underlies exactly 20% of the judgments conservatives make. Justice/fairness may even be the most important concept for understanding everyday judgments of conservatives. Our claim is simply that justice-related concerns occupy a smaller part of the conceptual and experiential domain of morality for conservatives than they do for liberals.

morality. We in psychology, and in academe more generally, have a tendency to reject conservative concerns related to ingroup, hierarchy, and purity as “bad” on the grounds that they often conflict with the “good” moralities of harm and reciprocity. We dismiss the conservative outgroup’s morality as “motivated social cognition” driven by non-moral concerns such as fear of change. Doing so makes us feel good, but it should not, for it is a violation of our values (we become “politicocentric”), and it is a route to irrelevance (we cannot persuade the electorate, because we do not have an accurate picture of their moral motivations). Recognizing ingroup, hierarchy and purity as moral concerns – even if they are not *your* moral concerns -- is crucial both for scientific accuracy and for the application of social justice research beyond the walls of the academy.

### **The Wall, and the Door**

On the July 25, 2005 episode of *The Daily Show*, liberal host Jon Stewart tried in vain to convince conservative U. S. Senator Rick Santorum that banning gay marriage was an injustice. Quickly realizing the futility of this effort, Stewart remarked, “It is so funny; you know what’s so interesting about this is ultimately you end up getting to this point, this crazy stopping point where literally we can’t get any further. I don’t think you’re a bad dude, I don’t think I’m a bad dude, but I literally can’t convince you.” The stopping point Stewart felt was the invisible wall separating liberal and conservative moralities. Santorum’s anti-gay-marriage views were based on concerns for traditional family structures, Biblical authority, and moral disgust for homosexual acts (which he had previously likened to incest and bestiality). To Stewart these concerns made about as much sense as the fear of theta waves; it was impossible to see why a decent, moral person (or at least not a bad dude) would want to violate the rights of a group of people who weren’t hurting anyone.

The exchange between Stewart and Santorum was not unique; you can witness liberals and conservatives talking to the wall in almost any forum that brings liberals and conservatives together. More unique was Stewart’s realization that his interlocutor was not “a bad dude,” that he too seemed genuinely concerned for what is right, even though he came to the opposite policy conclusion. Stewart was heavily criticized by his show’s liberal fan-base for this comment (taking it easy on the “evil bigot” Santorum), just as Fox News conservative Sean Hannity would be if he were to find any virtue in liberal politicians such as John Kerry or Hillary Clinton. Talk shows featuring the battle of good versus evil sell better than talk shows that explore shades of gray; it’s more entertaining to watch two people throw rocks at each other over the wall than it is to watch the slow, difficult process of dismantling the wall and understanding each other’s point of view.

We would like to suggest that the five foundations theory can be used as a doorway through the wall. Liberals can use this doorway to step (briefly) beyond their moral comfort zone and see issues from the moral perspective of others. For example, on the issue of gay marriage it is crucial that liberals understand the conservative view of social institutions. Conservatives

generally believe, as did Durkheim (1951/1897), that human beings need structure and constraint to flourish, and that social institutions provide these benefits. In a recent edited volume on conservatism, Muller (1997, p. 7) explains:

For the conservative, the historical survival of an institution or practice – be it marriage, monarchy, or the market – creates a *prima facie* case that it has served some human need. That need may be the institution's explicit purpose, but just as often it will be a need other than that to which the institution is explicitly devoted.

Muller then quotes the modern conservative Irving Kristol:

Institutions which have existed over a long period of time have a reason and purpose inherent in them, a collective wisdom incarnate in them, and the fact that we don't perfectly understand or cannot perfectly explain why they 'work' is no defect in them but merely a limitation in us. (Muller, 1997, p.7; taken from Kristol, 1978, p.161)

These are not crazy ideas. They are practical and ultimately utilitarian justifications for some of the intuitions related to the hierarchy foundation. Traditions and institutions which have been vested with authority over the ages should be given the benefit of the doubt; they should not be torn down and rebuilt each time one group has a complaint against them. (Liberals might perhaps examine their instinctive distrust of institutions and authorities, and the ways that this distrust “motivates” their own social cognition.) Viewed from this perspective, the conservative fear that gay marriage will “destroy marriage as we know it” is no longer incomprehensible – it is correct. Legalizing gay marriage would be a change to an ancient institution. We social scientists know that the institution of marriage has changed substantially over the centuries. We also know that homosexuality is not a “choice” or a disease, and we know that gay people are just as good as straight people at parenting and citizenship. We can therefore predict that in countries where gay people do get the right to marry, the new institution of marriage will be better and stronger than the old one. But it *will* be a change, and if social justice researchers really want to bring that change about, then they will have to understand the moral motivations that are at present working against them. Conservatives and many moderates are opposed to gay marriage in part due to moral intuitions related to ingroup, hierarchy and purity, and these concerns will have to be addressed, rather than dismissed contemptuously.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, we have argued for three main points: 1) Human morality consists of more than what is covered by the traditional Kohlberg/Gilligan domains of justice and care. 2) Liberal morality rests primarily on these two foundations (we call them reciprocity and harm), but conservative morality rests on five foundations, including ingroup, hierarchy, and purity concerns as well. 3) Recognizing these latter foundations as moral (instead of amoral, or immoral, or just plain stupid) can open up a door in the wall that separates liberals and conservatives when they try to discuss moral issues. We would love to have persuaded you on

the first two points, but the third point is more important than our specific theory. Social justice researchers and activists have much to gain by opening their ears to the moral nature of arguments related to ingroup, hierarchy, and purity, and much to lose if they do not. Even if social justice researchers never come to care about group cohesion, institutional integrity, or divinity as much as conservatives do, it will still be crucial for them to understand these cares, especially when they conflict with the virtues of compassion, justice, and equality that the social justice community values so dearly.

Jost et al. (2003) describe the core elements of conservatism as opposition to change and acceptance of inequality. They conclude that conservatism is associated empirically with a set of traits that make conservatives look rigid, authoritarian, and dumb: dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, high need for order, low cognitive complexity. They suggest that they have found an explanation for one of the central puzzles of social justice research: why do conservatives believe the things they believe? Their answer is: because conservatives have a particular pattern of epistemic and existential motives. This approach to conservatism reminds us of the old and probably apocryphal British newspaper headline: “Fog in channel, continent cut off.” (Common sense would suggest that Britain, not Europe, was cut off.) Looking at the entire range of human societies, the statistically “normal” human society is built upon all five foundations. It is modern liberalism (not the “continent” of all other cultures) which requires a special explanation. Why is it that in a minority of human cultures the moral domain has shrunk? How did it come to pass that in much of Europe, and in some parts of the United States, moral concerns have been restricted to issues related to harm/welfare/care and justice/rights/fairness? We believe that a team of historians and sociologists could easily tell such a story, probably involving references to the growth of free markets, social mobility, science, material wealth, and ethnic and religious diversity. Mobility and diversity make a morality based on shared valuation of traditions and institutions quite difficult (Whose traditions? Which institutions?). These factors help explain the electoral map of the United States in the 2004 presidential election. When viewed at the county level, the great majority of counties that voted for John Kerry are near waterways, where ports and cities are usually built and where mobility and diversity are greatest. Areas with less mobility and less diversity generally have the more traditional five-foundation morality, and therefore were more likely to vote for George W. Bush – and to tell pollsters that their reason was “moral values.”

We agree with Jost et al. (2003) that much of conservatism can be understood as motivated social cognition, but we add this caveat: many of these motives are moral motives. The same, of course, goes for liberals. Social justice researchers might therefore benefit from stepping out of the “good versus evil” mindset that is often present in our conferences, our academic publications, and our private conversations. One psychological universal (part of the ingroup foundation) is that when you call someone evil you erect a protective moral wall between yourself and the other, and this wall prevents you from seeing or respecting the other’s point of view (Baumeister, 1997, calls this process “the myth of pure evil.”)

We end our paper with an appeal to a great liberal moral value: tolerance. If social justice researchers and activists want to make progress and be consistent with their own values, they will have to understand, respect, and work with the moral concerns of people with whom they disagree.

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Figure 1. Moral relevance by foundation for extreme liberals and conservatives. 1=not relevant at all, 6=always relevant.

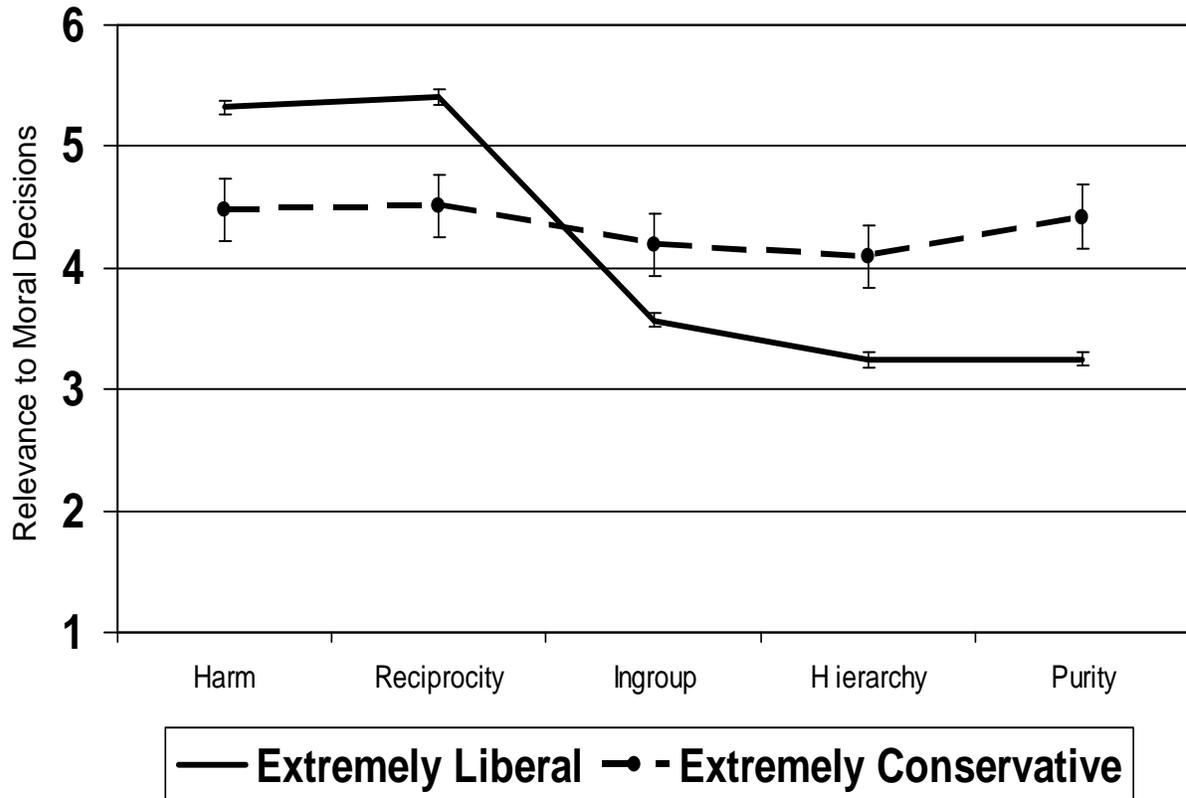
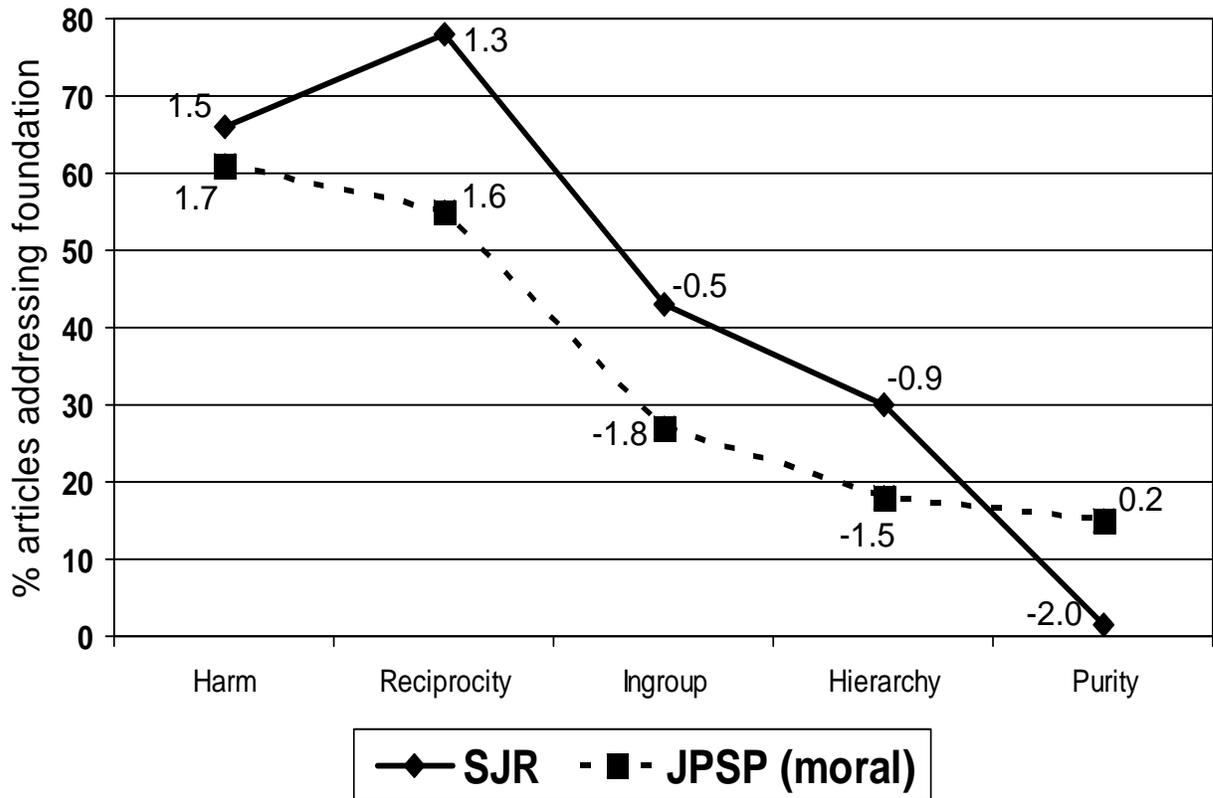


Figure 2. Percentage of articles dealing with moral foundations.



*Note.* For SJR, the pool is all articles published from 1/2002 until 10/2005. For JPSP the pool is all articles published 1995-2005 that had the word “moral” or “morality” in the abstract, title, or key phrase. Numbers next to data points indicate average valence of articles regarding the virtues and vices of each foundation:

- 2 = strong, unambiguous endorsement of the moral foundation
- 1 = moderate or ambiguous endorsement
- 0 = neutral toward moral legitimacy of the foundation
- 1 = moderate or ambiguous rejection
- 2 = strong, unambiguous rejection of the moral foundation