

“one of the most influential political thinkers  
of the progressive movement”

**Howard Dean**

# **don't think of an elephant!**

KNOW YOUR VALUES AND FRAME THE DEBATE

 **GEORGE LAKOFF**

FOREWORD BY **HOWARD DEAN** INTRODUCTION BY **DON HAZEN**

**THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR PROGRESSIVES**

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## Framing 101: How to Take Back Public Discourse

— JANUARY 21, 2004 —

On this date I spoke extemporaneously to a group of about two hundred progressive citizen-activists in Sausalito, California.

When I teach the study of framing at Berkeley, in Cognitive Science 101, the first thing I do is I give my students an exercise. The exercise is: Don't think of an elephant! Whatever you do, do *not* think of an elephant. I've never found a student who is able to do this. Every word, like *elephant*, evokes a frame, which can be an image or other kinds of knowledge: Elephants are large, have floppy ears and a trunk, are associated with circuses, and so on. The word is defined relative to that frame. When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame.

Richard Nixon found that out the hard way. While under pressure to resign during the Watergate scandal, Nixon addressed the nation on TV. He stood before the nation and said, "I am not a crook." And everybody thought about him as a crook.

This gives us a basic principle of framing, for when you are arguing against the other side: Do not use their language. Their language picks out a frame—and it won't be the frame you want.

Let me give you an example. On the day that George W. Bush arrived in the White House, the phrase *tax relief* started coming out of the White House. It still is: It was used a number of times in this year's State of the Union address, and is showing up more and more in preelection speeches four years later.

Think of the framing for *relief*. For there to be relief there must be an affliction, an afflicted party, and a reliever who removes the affliction and is therefore a hero. And if people try to stop the hero, those people are villains for trying to prevent relief.

When the word *tax* is added to *relief*, the result is a metaphor: Taxation is an affliction. And the person who takes it away is a hero, and anyone who tries to stop him is a bad guy. This is a frame. It is made up of ideas, like *affliction* and *hero*. The language that evokes the frame comes out of the White House, and it goes into press releases, goes to every radio station, every TV station, every newspaper. And soon the *New York Times* is using *tax relief*. And it is not only on Fox; it is on CNN, it is on NBC, it is on every station because it is “the president’s tax-relief plan.” And soon the Democrats are using *tax relief*—and shooting themselves in the foot.

It is remarkable. I was asked by the Democratic senators to visit their caucus just before the president’s tax plan was to come up in the Senate. They had their version of the tax plan, and it was their version of tax relief. They were accepting the conservative frame. The conservatives had set a trap: The words draw you into *their* worldview.

That is what framing is about. Framing is about getting language that fits your worldview. It is not just language. The ideas are primary—and the language carries those ideas, evokes those ideas.

There was another good example in the State of the Union address in January. This one was a remarkable metaphor to find in a State of the Union address. Bush said, “We do not need a permission slip to defend America.” What is going on with a *permission slip*? He could have just said, “We won’t ask permission.” But talking about a permission slip is different. Think about when you last needed a permission slip. Think about who has to ask for a permission slip. Think about who is being asked. Think about the relationship between them.

Those are the kinds of questions you need to ask if you are to understand contemporary political discourse. While you are contemplating them, I want to raise other questions for you.

My work on politics began when I asked myself just such a question. It was back in the fall of 1994. I was watching election

speeches and reading the Republicans' "Contract with America." The question I asked myself was this: What do the conservatives' positions on issues have to do with each other? If you are a conservative, what does your position on abortion have to do with your position on taxation? What does that have to do with your position on the environment? Or foreign policy? How do these positions fit together? What does being against gun control have to do with being for tort reform? What makes sense of the linkage? I could not figure it out. I said to myself, *These are strange people. Their collection of positions makes no sense.* But then an embarrassing thought occurred to me. *I have exactly the opposite position on every issue. What do my positions have to do with one another?* And I could not figure that out either.

That was extremely embarrassing for someone who does cognitive science and linguistics.

Eventually the answer came. And it came from a very unexpected place. It came from the study of family values. I had asked myself why conservatives were talking so much about family values. And why did certain values count as "family values" while others did not? Why would anyone in a presidential campaign, in congressional campaigns, and so on, when the future of the world was being threatened by nuclear proliferation and global warming, constantly talk about family values?

At this point I remembered a paper that one of my students had written some years back that showed that we all have a metaphor for the nation as a family. We have Founding Fathers. The Daughters of the American Revolution. We "send our sons" to war. This is a natural metaphor because we usually understand large social groups, like nations, in terms of small ones, like families or communities.

Given the existence of the metaphor linking the nation to the family, I asked the next question: If there are two different understandings of the nation, do they come from two different understandings of family?

I worked backward. I took the various positions on the conservative side and on the progressive side and I said, "Let's put them through the metaphor from the opposite direction and see what comes out." I put in the two different views of the nation, and out popped two different models of the family: a strict father family and a nurturant parent family. You know which is which.

Now, when I first did this—and I'll tell you about the details in a minute—I was asked to give a talk at a linguistics convention. I decided I would talk about this discovery. In the audience were two members of the Christian Coalition who were linguists and good friends of mine. Excellent linguists. And very, very good people. Very nice people. People I liked a lot. They took me aside at the party afterward and said, "Well, this strict father model of the family, it's close, but not quite right. We'll help you get the details right. However, you should know all this. Have you read Dobson?"

I said, "Who?"

They said, "James Dobson."

I said, "Who?"

They said, "You're kidding. He's on three thousand radio stations."

I said, "Well, I don't think he's on NPR. I haven't heard of him."

They said, "Well, you live in Berkeley."

"Where would I . . . does he write stuff?"

"Oh," they said, "oh yes. He has sold millions of books. His classic is *Dare to Discipline*."

My friends were right. I followed their directions to my local Christian bookstore, and there I found it all laid out: the strict father model in all its details. Dobson not only has a 100-to-200-million-dollar-a-year operation, but he also has his own ZIP code, so many people are writing to order his books and pamphlets. He is teaching people how to use the strict father model to raise their kids, and he understands its connection to right-wing politics.

The strict father model begins with a set of assumptions:

*The world is a dangerous place, and it always will be, because there is evil out there in the world. The world is also difficult because it is competitive. There will always be winners and losers. There is an absolute right and an absolute wrong. Children are born bad, in the sense that they just want to do what feels good, not what is right. Therefore, they have to be made good.*

*What is needed in this kind of a world is a strong, strict father who can:*

- *Protect the family in the dangerous world,*
- *Support the family in the difficult world, and*
- *Teach his children right from wrong.*

*What is required of the child is obedience, because the strict father is a moral authority who knows right from wrong. It is further assumed that the only way to teach kids obedience—that is, right from wrong—is through punishment, painful punishment, when they do wrong. This includes hitting them, and some authors on conservative child rearing recommend sticks, belts, and wooden paddles on the bare bottom. Some authors suggest this start at birth, but Dobson is more liberal. “There is no excuse for spanking babies younger than fifteen or eighteen months of age” (Dobson, *The New Dare to Discipline*, 65).*

*The rationale behind physical punishment is this: When children do something wrong, if they are physically disciplined they learn not to do it again. That means that they will develop internal discipline to keep themselves from doing wrong, so that in the future they will be obedient and act morally. Without such punishment, the world will go to hell. There will be no morality.*

*Such internal discipline has a secondary effect. It is what is required for success in the difficult, competitive world. That is, if people are disciplined and pursue their self-interest in this land of opportunity, they will become prosperous and self-reliant. Thus, the strict father model links morality with prosperity. The same discipline you need to be moral is what allows you to prosper. The link is the pursuit of self-interest.*

*Given opportunity and discipline, pursuing your self-interest should enable you to prosper.*

Now, Dobson is very clear about the connection between the strict father worldview and free market capitalism. The link is the morality of self-interest, which is a version of Adam Smith's view of capitalism. Adam Smith said that if everyone pursues their own profit, then the profit of all will be maximized by the invisible hand—that is, by nature—just naturally. Go about pursuing your own profit, and you are helping everyone.

This is linked to a general metaphor that views well-being as wealth. For example, if I do you a favor, you say, "I owe you one" or "I'm in your debt." Doing something good for someone is metaphorically like giving him money. He "owes" you something. And he says, "How can I ever repay you?"

Applying this metaphor to Adam Smith's "law of nature," if everyone pursues her own self-interest, then by the invisible hand, by nature, the self-interest of all will be maximized. That is, it is moral to pursue your self-interest, and there is a name for those people who do not do it. The name is do-gooder. A do-gooder is someone who is trying to help someone else rather than herself and is getting in the way of those who are pursuing their self-interest. Do-gooders screw up the system.

In this model there is also a definition of what it means to become a good person. A good person—a moral person—is someone who is disciplined enough to be obedient, to learn what is right, do what is right and not do what is wrong, and to pursue her self-interest to prosper and become self-reliant. A good child grows up to be like that. A bad child is one who does not learn discipline, does not function morally, does not do what is right, and therefore is not disciplined enough to become prosperous. She cannot take care of herself and thus becomes dependent.

When the good children are mature, they either have learned discipline and can prosper, or have failed to learn it. From this point on the strict father is not to meddle in their lives. This translates politically into no government meddling.

Consider what all this means for social programs. It is immoral



to give people things they have not earned, because then they will not develop discipline and will become both dependent and immoral. This theory says that social programs are immoral because they make people dependent. Promoting social programs is immoral. And what does this say about budgets? Well, if there are a lot of progressives in Congress who think that there should be social programs, and if you believe that social programs are immoral, how do you stop these immoral people?

It is quite simple. What you have to do is reward the good people—the ones whose prosperity reveals their discipline and hence their capacity for morality—with a tax cut, and make it big enough so that there is not enough money left for social programs. By this logic, the deficit is a *good* thing. As Grover Norquist says, it “starves the beast.”

Where liberals and fiscal conservatives take Bush’s huge deficit as bad, right-wing radicals following strict father morality see it as good. In the State of the Union address in January 2004, the president said that he thinks they can cut the deficit in half by cutting out “wasteful spending”—that is, spending for “bad” social programs. Are conservatives against all government? No. They are not against the military, they are not against homeland defense, they are not against the current Department of Justice, nor against the courts, nor the Departments of Treasury and Commerce. There are many aspects of government that they like very much. They are not against government subsidies for industry. Subsidies for corporations, which reward the good people—the investors in those corporations—are great. No problem there.

But they are against nurturance and care. They are against social programs that take care of people. That is what they see as wrong. That is what they are trying to eliminate on moral grounds. That is why they are not merely a bunch of crazies or mean and greedy—or stupid—people, as many liberals believe. What is even scarier is that conservatives believe it. They believe it is moral. And they have supporters around the country. People who have

strict father morality and who apply it to politics are going to believe that this is the right way to govern.

Think for a minute about what this says about foreign policy. Suppose you are a moral authority. As a moral authority, how do you deal with your children? Do you ask them what they should do or what you should do? No. You tell them. What the father says, the child does. No back talk. Communication is one-way. It is the same with the White House. That is, the president does not ask; the president tells. If you are a moral authority you know what is right, you have power, and you use it. You would be immoral yourself if you abandoned your moral authority.

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

This belief comes together with a set of metaphors that have run foreign policy for a long time. There is a common metaphor learned in graduate school classes on international relations. It is called the rational actor metaphor. It is the basis of most international relations theory, and in turn it assumes another metaphor: that every nation is a person. Therefore there are “rogue states,” there are “friendly nations,” and so on. And there is a national interest.

What does it mean to act in your self-interest? In the most basic sense it means that you act in ways that will help you be healthy and strong. In the same way, by the metaphor that a nation is a person, it is good for a nation to be healthy (that is, economically healthy—defined as having a large GDP) and strong (that is, militarily strong). It is not necessary that all the individuals in the country be healthy, but the companies should be, and the country as a whole should have a lot of money. That is the idea.

The question is, How do you maximize your self-interest? That is what foreign policy is about: maximizing self-interest. The rational actor metaphor says that every actor, every person, is rational, and that it is irrational to act against your self-interest.

Therefore it is rational for every person to act to maximize self-interest. Then by the further metaphor that nations are persons (“friendly nations,” “rogue states,” “enemy nations,” and so on), there are adult nations and child nations, where adulthood is industrialization. The child nations are called “developing” nations or “underdeveloped” states. Those are the backward ones. And what should we do? If you are a strict father, you tell the children how to develop, tell them what rules they should follow, and punish them when they do wrong. That is, you operate using, say, the policies of the International Monetary Fund.

And who is in the United Nations? Most of the United Nations consists of developing and underdeveloped countries. That means they are metaphorical children. Now let’s go back to the State of the Union address. Should the United States have consulted the United Nations and gotten its permission to invade Iraq? An adult does not “ask for a permission slip”! The phrase itself, *permission slip*, puts you back in grammar school or high school, where you need a permission slip from an adult to go to the bathroom. You do not need to ask for a permission slip if you are the teacher, if you are the principal, if you are the person in power, the moral authority. The others should be asking *you* for permission. That is what the *permission slip* phrase in the 2004 State of the Union address was about. Every conservative in the audience got it. They got it right away.

Two powerful words: *permission slip*. What Bush did was evoke the adult-child metaphor for other nations. He said, “We’re the adult.” He was operating in the strict father worldview, and it did not have to be explained. It is evoked automatically. This is what is done regularly by the conservatives.

Now let me talk a bit about how progressives understand *their* morality and what their moral system is. It too comes out of a family model, what I call the nurturant parent model. The strict father worldview is so named because according to its own beliefs, the father is the head of the family. The nurturant parent worldview is gender neutral.

*Both parents are equally responsible for raising the children. The assumption is that children are born good and can be made better. The world can be made a better place, and our job is to work on that. The parents' job is to nurture their children and to raise their children to be nurturers of others.*

*What does nurturance mean? It means two things: empathy and responsibility. If you have a child, you have to know what every cry means. You have to know when the child is hungry, when he needs a diaper change, when he is having nightmares. And you have a responsibility—you have to take care of this child. Since you cannot take care of someone else if you are not taking care of yourself, you have to take care of yourself enough to be able to take care of the child.*

*All this is not easy. Anyone who has ever raised a child knows that this is hard. You have to be strong. You have to work hard at it. You have to be very competent. You have to know a lot.*

*In addition, all sorts of other values immediately follow from empathy and responsibility. Think about it.*

*First, if you empathize with your child, you will provide protection. This comes into politics in many ways. What do you protect your child from? Crime and drugs, certainly. You also protect your child from cars without seat belts, from smoking, from poisonous additives in food. So progressive politics focuses on environmental protection, worker protection, consumer protection, and protection from disease. These are the things that progressives want the government to protect their citizens from. But there are also terrorist attacks, which liberals and progressives have not been very good at talking about in terms of protection. Protection is part of the progressive moral system, but it has not been elaborated on enough. And on September 11, progressives did not have a whole lot to say. That was unfortunate, because nurturant parents and progressives do care about protection. Protection is important. It is part of our moral system.*

*Second, if you empathize with your child, you want your child to be fulfilled in life, to be a happy person. And if you are an unhappy, unfulfilled person yourself, you are not going to want other people to be hap-*

pier than you are. The Dalai Lama teaches us that. Therefore it is your moral responsibility to be a happy, fulfilled person. Your moral responsibility. Further, it is your moral responsibility to teach your child to be a happy, fulfilled person who wants others to be happy and fulfilled. That is part of what nurturing family life is about. It is a common precondition for caring about others.

There are still other nurturant values.

- If you want your child to be fulfilled in life, the child has to be free enough to do that. Therefore **freedom** is a value.
- You do not have very much freedom if there is no opportunity or prosperity. Therefore **opportunity** and **prosperity** are progressive values.
- If you really care about your child, you want your child to be treated fairly by you and by others. Therefore **fairness** is a value.
- If you are connecting with your child and you empathize with that child, you have to have **open, two-way communication**. Honest communication. That becomes a value.
- You live in a community, and that the community will affect how your child grows up. Therefore **community-building, service to the community, and cooperation in a community** become values.
- To have cooperation, you must have **trust**, and to have trust you must have **honesty** and **open two-way communication**. Trust, honesty, and open communication are fundamental progressive values—in a community as in a family.

These are the nurturant values—and they are the progressive values. As progressives, you all have them. You know you have them. You recognize them.

Every progressive political program is based on one or more of these values. That is what it means to be a progressive.

There are several types of progressives. How many types? I am

asking as a cognitive scientist, not as a sociologist or a political scientist. From the point of view of a cognitive scientist, who looks at modes of thought, there are six basic types of progressives, each with a distinct mode of thought. They share all the progressive values, but are distinguished by some differences.

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

All six types are examples of nurturant parent morality. The problem is that many of the people who have one of these modes of thought do not recognize that theirs is just one special case of something more general, and do not see the unity in all the types

of progressives. They often think that theirs is the only way to be a true progressive. That is sad. It keeps people who share progressive values from coming together. We have to get past that harmful idea. The other side did.

Back in the 1950s conservatives hated each other. The financial conservatives hated the social conservatives. The libertarians did not get along with the social conservatives or the religious conservatives. And many social conservatives were not religious. A group of conservative leaders got together around William F. Buckley Jr. and others and started asking what the different groups of conservatives had in common and whether they could agree to disagree in order to promote a general conservative cause. They started magazines and think tanks, and invested billions of dollars. The first thing they did, their first victory, was getting Barry Goldwater nominated in 1964. He lost, but when he lost they went back to the drawing board and put more money into organization.

During the Vietnam War, they noticed that most of the bright young people in the country were not becoming conservatives. *Conservative* was a dirty word. Therefore in 1970, Lewis Powell, just two months before he became a Supreme Court justice appointed by Nixon (at the time he was the chief counsel to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce), wrote a memo—the Powell memo ([http://reclaimdemocracy.org/corporate\\_accountability/powell\\_memo\\_lewis.html](http://reclaimdemocracy.org/corporate_accountability/powell_memo_lewis.html)). It was a fateful document. He said that the conservatives had to keep the country's best and brightest young people from becoming antibusiness. What we need to do, Powell said, is set up institutes within the universities and outside the universities. We have to do research, we have to write books, we have to endow professorships to teach these people the right way to think.

After Powell went to the Supreme Court, these ideas were taken up by William Simon, the father of the present William Simon. At the time the elder Simon was secretary of the treasury under Nixon. He convinced some very wealthy people—Coors, Scaife,

Olin—to set up the Heritage Foundation, the Olin professorships, the Olin Institute at Harvard, and other institutions. These institutes have done their job very well. People associated with them have written more books than the people on the left have, on all issues. The conservatives support their intellectuals. They create media opportunities. They have media studios down the hall in institutes so that getting on television is easy. Eighty percent of the talking heads on television are from the conservative think tanks. Eighty percent.

When the amount of research money spent by the right over a period of time is compared with the amount of media time during that period, we see a direct correlation. In 2002 four times as much money was spent on research by the right as by the left, and they got four times as much media time. They get what they pay for.

This is not an accident. Conservatives, through their think tanks, figured out the importance of framing, and they figured out how to frame every issue. They figured out how to get those frames out there, how to get their people in the media all the time. They figured out how to bring their people together. Every Wednesday, Grover Norquist has a group meeting—around eighty people—of leaders from the full range of the right. They are invited, and they debate. They work out their differences, agree to disagree, and when they disagree, they trade off. The idea is, *This week he'll win on his issue. Next week, I'll win on mine.* Each one may not get everything he wants, but over the long haul, he gets a lot of what he wants.

Nothing like this happens in the progressive world, because there are so many people thinking that what each does is *the* right thing. It is not smart. It is self-defeating.

And what is worse is a set of myths believed by liberals and progressives. These myths come from a good source, but they end up hurting us badly.

The myths began with the Enlightenment, and the first one goes like this:



*The truth will set us free. If we just tell people the facts, since people are basically rational beings, they'll all reach the right conclusions.*

But we know from cognitive science that people do not think like that. People think in frames. The strict father and nurturing parent frames each force a certain logic. To be accepted, the truth must fit people's frames. If the facts do not fit a frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off. Why?

Neuroscience tells us that each of the concepts we have—the long-term concepts that structure how we think—is instantiated in the synapses of our brains. Concepts are not things that can be changed just by someone telling us a fact. We may be presented with facts, but for us to make sense of them, they have to fit what is already in the synapses of the brain. Otherwise facts go in and then they go right back out. They are not heard, or they are not accepted as facts, or they mystify us: Why would anyone have said that? Then we label the fact as irrational, crazy, or stupid. That's what happens when progressives just “confront conservatives with the facts.” It has little or no effect, unless the conservatives have a frame that makes sense of the facts.

Similarly, a lot of progressives hear conservatives talk and do not understand them because they do not have the conservatives' frames. They assume that conservatives are stupid.

They are not stupid. They are winning because they are smart. They understand how people think and how people talk. They think! That is what those think tanks are about. They support their intellectuals. They write all those books. They put their ideas out in public.

There are certainly cases where conservatives have lied. That is true. Of course, it is not true that *only* conservatives lie. But it is true that there are significant lies—even daily lies—by the Bush administration.

However, it is equally important to recognize that many of the ideas that outrage progressives are what conservatives see as truths—presented from their point of view. We must distinguish

cases of out-and-out distortion, lying, and so on, from cases where conservatives are presenting what they consider truth.

Is it useful to go and tell everyone what the lies are? It is not useless or harmful for us to know when they are lying. But also remember that the truth alone will not set you free. Saying “the president lied when he started this war” puts the truth out there—but for many people it just bounces off. A huge number of people in the country still believe that Saddam Hussein was behind September 11. There are people who will believe this because it fits their understanding of the world. It fits their worldview. Given that, it is appropriate for them to believe. They still believe that Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda are the same thing, and that by fighting the war in Iraq we are protecting the country from terrorism. They believe this—in spite of the report by the 9/11 Commission. It is not that they are stupid. They have a frame and they only accept facts that fit that frame.

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

The myth has been challenged by cognitive scientists such as Daniel Kahneman (who won the Nobel Prize in economics for his theory) and Amos Tversky, who have shown that people do not really think that way. Nevertheless, most of economics is still based on the assumption that people will naturally always think in terms of their self-interest.

This view of rationality comes into Democratic politics in a very important way. It is assumed that voters will vote their self-interest. Democrats are shocked or puzzled when voters do not vote their self-interest. “How,” Democrats keep asking me, “can any poor person vote for Bush when he hurts them so badly?” Their response is to try to explain once more to the poor why voting Democratic would serve their self-interest. Despite all evi-

dence to the contrary, Democrats keep banging their heads against the wall. In the 2000 election Gore kept saying that Bush's tax cuts would go only to the top 1 percent, and he thought that everyone else would follow their self-interest and support him. But poor conservatives still opposed him, because as conservatives they believed that those who had the most money—the “good” people—deserved to keep it as their reward for being disciplined. The bottom 99 percent of conservatives voted their conservative values, against their self-interest.

It is claimed that 35 percent of the populace thinks that they are, or someday will be, in the top 1 percent, and that this explains the finding on the basis of a hoped-for future self-interest. But what about the other 65 percent, who have no dream that they will ever get that tax cut but still support it? They are clearly not voting in their self-interest, or even their hoped-for future self-interest.

A similar phenomenon happened in the 2003 California recall election. Labor unions invested a lot of money presenting facts that Gray Davis's positions were better for people, especially for working people, than Arnold Schwarzenegger's. In focus groups, they asked union members, “Which is better for you, this Davis position or that Schwarzenegger position?” Most would say, “The Davis one.” Davis, Davis, Davis. Then they would ask, “Who you voting for?” “Schwarzenegger.”

People do not necessarily vote in their self-interest. They vote their identity. They vote their values. They vote for who they identify with. They may identify with their self-interest. That can happen. It is not that people never care about their self-interest. But they vote their identity. And if their identity fits their self-interest, they will vote for that. It is important to understand this point. It is a serious mistake to assume that people are simply always voting in their self-interest.

A third mistake is this: There is a metaphor that political campaigns are marketing campaigns where the candidate is the product

and the candidate's positions on issues are the features and qualities of the product. This leads to the conclusion that polling should determine which issues a candidate should run on. Here's a list of issues. Which show the highest degree of support for a candidate's position? If it's prescription drugs, 78 percent, you run on a platform featuring prescription drugs. Is it keeping social security? You run on a platform featuring social security. You make a list of the top issues, and those are the issues you run on. You also do market segmentation: District by district, you find out the most important issues, and those are the ones you talk about when you go to that district.

It does not work. Sometimes it can be useful, and, in fact, the Republicans use it in addition to their real practice. But their real practice, and the real reason for their success, is this: They say what they idealistically believe. They say it; they talk to their base using the frames of their base. Liberal and progressive candidates tend to follow their polls and decide that they have to become more "centrist" by moving to the right. The conservatives do not move at all to the left, and yet they win!

Why? What is the electorate like from a cognitive point of view? Probably 35 to 40 percent of people—maybe more these days—have a strict father model governing their politics. Similarly, there are people who have a nurturant view governing their politics, probably another 35 to 40 percent. And then there are all the people in the "middle."

Notice that I said *governing* their politics. We all have both models, either actively or passively. Progressives see a John Wayne movie or an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, and they can understand it. They do not say, "I don't know what's going on in this movie." They have a strict father model, at least passively. And if you are a conservative and you understand *The Cosby Show*, you have a nurturing parent model, at least passively. Everyone has both worldviews because both worldviews are widely present in our culture, but people do not necessarily live by one worldview all of the time.

So the question is, Are you living by one of the family-based models? But that question is not specific enough. There are many aspects of life, and many people live by one family-based model in one part of their lives and another in another part of their lives. I have colleagues who are nurturant parents at home and liberals in their politics, but strict fathers in their classrooms. Reagan knew that blue-collar workers who were nurturant in their union politics were often strict fathers at home. He used political metaphors that were based on the home and family, and got them to extend their strict father way of thinking from the home to politics.

This is very important to do. The goal is to activate *your* model in the people in the “middle.” The people who are in the middle have *both* models, used regularly in different parts of their lives. What you want to do is to get them to use your model for politics—to activate your worldview and moral system in their political decisions. You do that by talking to people using frames based on your worldview.

However, in doing that, you do not want to offend the people in the middle who have up to this point made the opposite choice. Since they also have and use both models in some part of their lives, they might still be persuaded to activate the opposite model for politics.

Clinton figured out how to handle this problem. He stole the other side’s language. He talked about “welfare reform,” for example. He said, “The age of big government is over.” He did what he wanted to do, only he took their language and used their words to describe it. It made them very mad. Very smart technique.

It turns out that what is good for the goose is good for the gander, and guess what? We get “compassionate conservatism.” The Clear Skies Initiative. Healthy Forests. No Child Left Behind. This is the use of language to mollify people who have nurturant values, while the real policies are strict father policies. This mollifies, even attracts, the people in the middle who might

have qualms about you. This is the use of Orwellian language—language that means the opposite of what it says—to appease people in the middle at the same time as you pump up the base. That is part of the conservative strategy.

Liberals and progressives typically react to this strategy in a self-defeating way. The usual reaction is, “Those conservatives are bad people; they are using Orwellian language. They are saying the opposite of what they mean. They are deceivers. Bad. Bad.”

All true. But we should recognize that they use Orwellian language precisely when they have to: when they are weak, when they cannot just come out and say what they mean. Imagine if they came out supporting a “Dirty Skies Bill” or a “Forest Destruction Bill” or a “Kill Public Education” bill. They would lose. They are aware people do not support what they are really trying to do.

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

A very good example relates to the environment. The right’s language man is Frank Luntz, who puts out big books of language guidelines for conservatives only, which are used as training manuals for all conservative candidates, as well as lawyers, judges, and other public speakers—even high school students who want to be conservative public figures. In these books, Luntz tells you what language to use.

For example, in last year’s edition, the section on global warming says that science seems increasingly to be going against the conservative position. However, conservatives can counter the science using right language. People who support environmentalist positions like certain words. They like the words *healthy*, *clean*, and *safe* because these words fit frames that describe what the environment means to them. Therefore, Luntz says, use the

words *healthy*, *clean*, and *safe* whenever possible, even when talking about coal plants or nuclear power plants. It is this kind of Orwellian weakness that causes a piece of legislation that actually increases pollution to be called the Clear Skies Act.

Similarly, a few years ago Luntz wrote a memo for talking to women. How do you talk to women? According to Luntz, women like certain words, so when you are talking to an audience of women, here are the words you use as many times as possible: *love*, *from the heart*, and *for the children*. And if you read Bush's speeches, *love*, *from the heart*, and *for the children* show up over and over again.

This kind of language use is a science. Like any science it can be used honestly or harmfully. This kind of language use is taught. This kind of language use is also a discipline. Conservatives enforce message discipline. In many offices there is a pizza fund: Every time you use the "wrong" language, you have to put a quarter in the pizza fund. People quickly learn to say *tax relief* or *partial-birth abortion*, not something else.

But Luntz is about much more than language. He recognizes that the right use of language starts with ideas—with the right framing of the issues, a framing that reflects a consistent conservative moral perspective, what we have called strict father morality. Luntz's book is not just about language. For each issue, he explains what the conservative reasoning is, what the progressive reasoning is, and how the progressive arguments can be best attacked from a conservative perspective. He is clear: Ideas come first.

One of the major mistakes liberals make is that they think they have all the ideas they need. They think that all they lack is media access. Or maybe some magic bullet phrases, like *partial-birth abortion*.

When you think you just lack words, what you really lack are ideas. Ideas come in the form of frames. When the frames are there, the words come readily. There's a way you can tell when you lack the right frames. There's a phenomenon you have probably

noticed. A conservative on TV uses two words, like *tax relief*. And the progressive has to go into a paragraph-long discussion of his own view. The conservative can appeal to an established frame, that taxation is an affliction or burden, which allows for the two-word phrase *tax relief*. But there is no established frame on the other side. You can talk about it, but it takes some doing because there is no established frame, no fixed idea already out there.

In cognitive science there is a name for this phenomenon. It's called *hypocognition*—the lack of the ideas you need, the lack of a relatively simple fixed frame that can be evoked by a word or two.

The idea of hypocognition comes from a study in Tahiti in the 1950s by the late anthropologist Bob Levy, who was also a therapist. Levy addressed the question of why there were so many suicides in Tahiti, and discovered that Tahitians did not have a concept of grief. They felt grief. They experienced it. But they did not have a concept for it or a name for it. They did not see it as a normal emotion. There were no rituals around grief. No grief counseling, nothing like it. They lacked a concept they needed—and wound up committing suicide all too often.

Progressives are suffering from massive hypocognition. The conservatives used to suffer from it. When Goldwater lost in 1964, they had very few of the concepts that they have today. In the intermediate forty years, conservative thinkers have filled in their conceptual gaps. But our conceptual gaps are still there.

Let's go back to *tax relief*.

What is taxation? Taxation is what you pay to live in a civilized country—what you pay to have democracy and opportunity, and what you pay to use the infrastructure paid for by previous taxpayers: the highway system, the Internet, the entire scientific establishment, the medical establishment, the communications system, the airline system. All are paid for by taxpayers.

You can think of it metaphorically in at least two ways. First, as an investment. Imagine the following ad:



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

Imagine versions of this ad running over and over, for years. Eventually, the frame would be established: Taxes are wise investments in the future.

Or take another metaphor:

Taxation is paying your dues, paying your membership fee in America. If you join a country club or a community center, you pay fees. Why? You did not build the swimming pool. You have to maintain it. You did not build the basketball court. Someone has to clean it. You may not use the squash court, but you still have to pay your dues. Otherwise it won't be maintained and will fall apart. People who avoid taxes, like corporations that move to Bermuda, are not paying their dues to their country. It is patriotic to be a taxpayer. It is traitorous to desert our country and not pay your dues.

Perhaps Bill Gates Sr. said it best. In arguing to keep the inheritance tax, he pointed out that he and Bill Jr. did not invent the Internet. They just used it—to make billions. There is no such thing as a self-made man. Every businessman has used the vast American infrastructure, which the taxpayers

paid for, to make his money. He did not make his money alone. He used taxpayer infrastructure. He got rich on what other taxpayers had paid for: the banking system, the Federal Reserve, the Treasury and Commerce Departments, and the judicial system, where nine-tenths of cases involve corporate law. These taxpayer investments support companies and wealthy investors. There are no self-made men! The wealthy have gotten rich using what previous taxpayers have paid for. They owe the taxpayers of this country a great deal and should be paying it back.

These are accurate views of taxes, but they are not yet enshrined in our brains. They need to be repeated over and over again, and refined until they take their rightful place in our synapses. But that takes time. It does not happen overnight. Start now.

It is not an accident that conservatives are winning where they have successfully framed the issues. They've got a thirty- to forty-year head start. And more than two billion dollars in think tank investments.

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

And it is not just public officials. I have been talking to advocacy groups around the country, working with them and trying to help them with framing issues. I have worked with more than two hundred advocacy groups in this way. They have the same problems: They are under attack all the time, and they are trying to defend themselves against the next attack. Realistically, they do

not have time to plan. They do not have time to think long-term. They do not have time to think beyond their particular issues.

They are all good people, intelligent, committed people. But they are constantly on the defensive. Why? It is not hard to explain it when we think about funding.

The right-wing think tanks get large block grants and endowments. Millions at a time. They are very well funded. The smallest effective think tanks on the right have budgets of four to seven million dollars a year. Those are the *small* operations. The large ones have up to thirty million dollars a year.

Furthermore, they know that they are going to get the money the next year, and the year after that. Remember, these are block grants—no strings attached. Do what you need. Hire intellectuals. Bring talent along. One of the think tanks is putting up a new building. It is going to be an eight-story building with a state-of-the-art media auditorium, and one hundred apartments for interns who cannot afford apartments in Washington.

These institutions also build human capital for the future. The interns and scholars are people who want to be there, who have talents and abilities that may well make them important in their fields. Through the think tanks, they get to know each other. And the interns are building lifetime networks: They are likely to know each other closely throughout their lives because they lived together while they were interns. These are social networks that will pay dividends for years and years. The conservatives who built the think tanks are not dumb people.

There are very few grants like this from progressive foundations. Progressive foundations spread the money around. They give twenty-five thousand dollars here, maybe fifty thousand, maybe even a hundred thousand. Sometimes it is a big grant. But recipients have to do something different from what everyone else is doing because the foundations see duplication as wasting money. Not only that, but they are not block grants; the recipients do not have full freedom to decide how to spend the money. And it is certainly not

appropriate to use it for career development or infrastructure building or hiring intellectuals to think about long-term as well as short-term or interrelated policies. The emphasis is on providing direct services to the people who need the services: grassroots funding, not infrastructure creation. This is, for the most part, how progressive foundations work. And because of that, the organizations they fund have to have a very narrow focus. They have to have projects, not just areas they work on. Activists and advocates are overworked and underpaid, and they do not have time or energy to think about how they should be linking up with other people. They mainly do not have the time or training to think about framing their issues. The system forces a narrow focus—and with it, isolation.

You ask, Why is it like this? There is a reason. There is a deep reason, and it is a reason you should all think about. In the right's hierarchy of moral values, the top value is preserving and defending the moral system itself. If that is your main goal, what do you do? You build infrastructure. You buy up media in advance. You plan ahead. You do things like give fellowships to right-wing law students to get them through law school if they join the Federalist Society. And you get them nice jobs after that. If you want to extend your worldview, it is very smart to make sure that over the long haul you have the people and the resources that you need.

On the left, the highest value is helping individuals who need help. So if you are a foundation or you are setting up a foundation, what makes you a good person? You help as many people as you can. And the more public budgets get cut, the more people there are who need help. So you spread the money around to the grassroots organizations, and therefore you do not have any money left for infrastructure or talent development, and certainly not for intellectuals. Do not waste a penny in duplicating efforts, because you have to help more and more people. How do you show that you are a good, moral person or foundation? By listing all the people you help; the more the better.

And so you perpetuate a system that helps the right. In the process, it also does help people. Certainly, it is not that people do not need help. They do. But what has happened as budgets and taxes get cut is that the right is privatizing the left. The right is forcing the left to spend ever more private money on what the government should be supporting.

There are many things that we can do about all this. Let's talk about where to start.

The right knows how to talk about values. We need to talk about values. If we think about it a little, we can list our values. But it is not easy to think about how the values fit the issues, to know how to talk about every issue from the perspective of our values, not theirs. That is something that our institute, the Rockridge Institute, is working on. We are looking at the values behind the issues.

Progressives also have to look at the integration of issues. This is something that the right is very, very savvy about. They know about what I call *strategic initiatives*. A strategic initiative is a plan in which a change in one carefully chosen issue area has automatic effects over many, many, many other issue areas.

For example, tax cuts. This seems straightforward, but as a result there is not enough money in the budget for *any* of the government's social programs. Not just not enough money for, say, homelessness or schools or environmental protection; instead, not enough money for everything at once, the whole range. This is a strategic initiative.

Or tort reform, which means putting limits on awards in lawsuits. Tort reform is a top priority for conservatives. Why do conservatives care so much about this? Well, as soon as you see the effects, you can see why they care. Because in one stroke you prohibit all of the potential lawsuits that will be the basis of future environmental legislation and regulation. That is, it is not just regulation of the chemical industry or the coal industry or the nuclear power industry or other things that are at stake. It is the

regulation of *everything*. If parties who are harmed cannot sue immoral or negligent corporations or professionals for significant sums, the companies are free to harm the public in unlimited ways in the course of making money. And lawyers, who take risks and make significant investments in such cases, will no longer make enough money to support the risk. And corporations will be free to ignore the public good. That is what “tort reform” is about.

In addition, if you look at where Democrats get much of their money in the individual states, it is significantly from the lawyers who win tort cases. Many tort lawyers are important Democratic donors. Tort “reform”—as conservatives call it—cuts off this source of money. All of a sudden three-quarters of the money going to the Texas Democratic Party is not there. In addition, companies who poison the environment want to be able to cap possible awards. That way they can calculate in advance the cost of paying victims and build it into the cost of doing business. Irresponsible corporations win big from tort reform. The Republican Party wins big from tort reform. And these real purposes are hidden. The issue appears to be eliminating “frivolous lawsuits”—people getting thirty million dollars for having hot coffee spilled on them.

However, what the conservatives are really trying to achieve is not in the proposal. What they are trying to achieve *follows* from enacting the proposal. They don't care primarily about the lawsuits themselves. They care about getting rid of environmental, consumer, and worker protections in general. And they care about defunding the Democratic Party. That is what a strategic initiative is.

There have been a couple of strategic initiatives on the left—environmental impact reports and the Endangered Species Act—but it has been thirty years since they were enacted.

Unlike the right, the left does not think strategically. We think issue by issue. We generally do not try to figure out what minimal change we can enact that will have effects across many issues.

There are a very few exceptions. For example, at the present moment there is a strategic proposal called the New Apollo Initiative. Simply put, the idea is to put thirty billion dollars a year—which is the amount that now goes in subsidies to support the coal and gas industries—into alternative energy. What makes this strategic? It is strategic because it is not just an energy issue or a sustainability issue. It is also:

- A jobs issue: It would create two to four million jobs.
- A health issue: Less air pollution means less childhood asthma.
- A clean water, clean air issue.
- A species issue: It would clean up environments and habitats.
- A global warming issue: We would be making a contribution to lowering greenhouse gases without a program specifically for global warming.
- A foreign policy issue: We would no longer be dependent on Middle Eastern oil.
- A Third World development issue: Every country, no matter how “underdeveloped,” can make its own energy if it has the appropriate alternative technologies. Such countries would not have to borrow money to buy oil and pollute their environments. And they would not have to pay interest on the money borrowed. Furthermore, every dollar invested in energy in the third world has a multiplier effect of six.

In short, a massive investment in alternative energy has an enormous yield over many issue areas. This is not just about energy; it is about jobs, health, clean air and water, habitat, global warming, foreign policy, and third world development. It is also about putting together new coalitions and organizing new institutions and new constituencies.

Thirty billion dollars a year for ten years put into alternative energy would have massive effects. But progressive candidates are still thinking in much smaller terms, not long-term and strategically.

There also strategic initiatives of another kind—what I call slippery slope initiatives: Take the first step and you're on your way off the cliff. Conservatives are very good at slippery slope initiatives. Take “partial-birth abortion.” There are almost no such cases. Why do conservatives care so much? Because it is a first step down a slippery slope to ending all abortion. It puts out there a frame of abortion as a horrendous procedure, when most operations ending pregnancy are nothing like this.

Why an education bill about school testing? Once the testing frame applies not just to students but also to *schools*, then schools can, metaphorically, fail—and be punished for failing by having their allowance cut. Less funding in turn makes it harder for the schools to improve, which leads to a cycle of failure and ultimately elimination for many public schools. What replaces the public school system is a voucher system to support private schools. The wealthy would have good schools—paid for in part by what used to be tax payments for public schools. The poor would not have the money for good schools. We would wind up with a two-tier school system, a good one for the “deserving rich” and a bad one for the “undeserving poor.”

The Medicare bill was another slippery slope initiative. The HMOs can use their size to bargain for lower prices on drugs, while the government is forbidden from using its size to get discounts. Moreover, Medicare will be forced to compete with private drug companies after a few years on uneven grounds; the drug companies will get a twelve-billion-dollar subsidy to help attract senior citizens. The conservative strategy is to lure seniors out of Medicare and into private accounts with temporarily lower drug prices. Eventually, more and more people will leave Medicare, until it collapses. From the conservative moral worldview, that is how it should be.



And yet a prominent Democratic senator voted for it, on the grounds that it would give immediate help in billions of dollars to seniors in her home state. She called it a “good first step.” To the edge of the cliff.

The conservatives don’t have to win on issue after issue after issue. There is a lot you can do about it. Here are eleven things progressives can do.

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

**Second, remember “Don’t think of an elephant.”** If you keep their language and their framing and just argue against it, you lose because you are reinforcing their frame.

**Third, the truth alone will not set you free.** Just speaking truth to power doesn’t work. You need to frame the truths effectively from your perspective.

**Fourth, you need to speak from your moral perspective at all times.** Progressive policies follow from progressive values. Get clear on your values and use the language of values. Drop the language of policy wonks.

**Fifth, understand where conservatives are coming from.** Get their strict father morality and its consequences clear. Know what you are arguing against. Be able to explain why they believe what they believe. Try to predict what they will say.

**Sixth, think strategically, across issue areas.** Think in terms of large moral goals, not in terms of programs for their own sake.

**Seventh, think about the consequences of proposals.** Form progressive slippery slope initiatives.

**Eighth, remember that voters vote their identity and their values, which need not coincide with their self-interest.**

**Ninth, unite! And cooperate!** Here’s how: Remember the six modes of progressive thought: (1) socioeconomic, (2) identity

politics, (3) environmentalist, (4) civil libertarian, (5) spiritual, and (6) antiauthoritarian. Notice which of these modes of thought you use most often—where you fall on the spectrum and where the people you talk to fall on the spectrum. Then rise above your own mode of thought and start thinking and talking from shared progressive values.

**Tenth, be proactive, not reactive. Play offense, not defense.** *Practice reframing, every day, on every issue.* Don't just say what you believe. Use *your* frames, not their frames. Use them because they fit the values you believe in.

**Eleventh, speak to the progressive base in order to activate the nurturant model of “swing voters.” Don't move to the right.** Rightward movement hurts in two ways. It alienates the progressive base and it helps conservatives by activating their model in swing voters.



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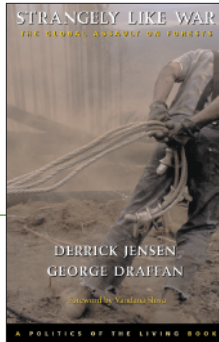
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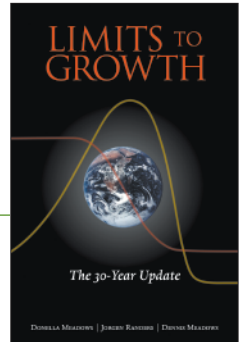
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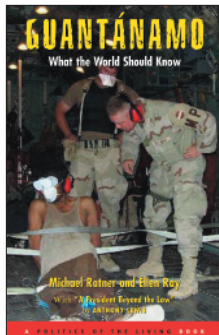
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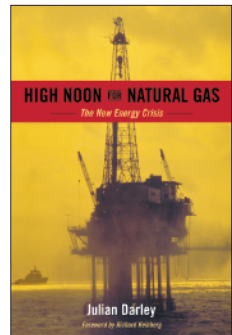
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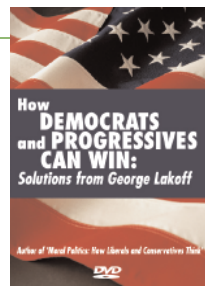
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