



Why We're All Idiots: Credulity, Framing, and the Entrenchment Effect



Franklin Veaux

 **tacit**

<https://tacit.livejournal.com/>

2012-02-06 16:44:00

The United States is unusual among First World nations in the sense that we only have two political parties.

Well, technically, I suppose we have more, but only two that matter: Democrats and Republicans. They are popularly portrayed in American mass media as "liberals" and "conservatives," though that's not really true; in world terms, they're actually "moderate conservatives" and "reactionaries." A serious liberal political party doesn't exist; when you compare the Democratic and Republican parties, you see a lot of across-the-board agreement on things like drug prohibition (both parties largely agree that recreational drug use should be outlawed), the use of American military might abroad, and so on.

A lot of folks mistakenly believe that this means there's no real differences between the two parties. This is nonsense, of course; there are significant differences, primarily in areas like religion (where the Democrats would, on a European scale, be called "conservatives" and the Republicans would be called "radicalists"); social issues like sex and relationships (where the Democrats tend to be moderates and the Republicans tend to be far right); and economic policy (where Democrats tend to be center-right and Republicans tend to be so far right they can't tie their left shoe).

Wherever you find people talking about politics, you find people calling the members of the opposing side "idiots." Each side believes the other to be made up of morons and fools...and, to be fair, each side is right. We're all idiots, and there are powerful psychological factors that make us idiots.

The fact that we think of Democrats as "liberal" and Republicans as "conservative" illustrates one area where Republicans are quite different from Democrats: their ability to frame issues.



The American political landscape for the last three years by a great deal of shouting and screaming over

health care reform.

And the sentence you just read shows how important framing is. Because, you see, we haven't actually been discussing health care reform at all.

Despite all the screaming, and all the blogging, and all the hysterical foaming on talk radio, and all the arguments online, almost nobody has actually read the legislation signed after much wailing and gnashing into law by President Obama.

And if you do read it, there's one thing about it that may jump to your attention: *It isn't about health care at all*. It barely even talks about health care *per se*. It's actually about health *insurance*. It provides a new framework for health insurance legislation, it restricts health insurance companies' ability to deny coverage on the basis of pre-existing conditions, it seeks to make insurance more portable..in short, it is health *insurance* reform, not health *care* reform. The fact that everyone is talking about health care reform is a tribute to the power of framing.

In any discussion, the person who controls how the issue at question is shaped controls the debate. Control the framing and you can control how people think about it.

Talking about health *care* reform rather than health *insurance* reform leads to an image in people's minds of the government going into a hospital operatory or a doctor's exam room and telling the doctor what to do. Talking about health insurance reform gives rise to mental images of government beancounters arguing with health insurance beancounters about the proper way to notate an exemption to the requirements for filing a release of benefits form--a much less emotionally compelling image.

Simply by re-casting "health insurance reform" as "health care reform," the Republicans created the emotional landscape on which the war would be fought. Middle-class working Americans would not swarm to the defense of the insurance industry and its über-rich executives. Recast it as government involvement between a doctor and a patient, however, and the tone changed.

Framing matters. Because people, by and large, vote their identity rather than their interests, if you can frame an issue in a way that appeals to a person's sense of self, you can often get him to agree with you even if by agreeing with you he does harm to himself.

I know a woman who is an atheist, non-monogamous, bisexual single mom who supports gay marriage. In short, she hits just about every ticky-box in the list of things that "family values" Republicans hate. The current crop of Republican political candidates, all of them, have at one point or another voiced their opposition to each one of these things.

Yet she only votes Republican. Why? Because she says she believes, as the Republicans believe, that poor people should just get jobs instead of lazing about watching TV and sucking off hardworking taxpayers' labor.

That's the way we frame poverty in this country: poor people are poor because they are just too lazy to get a fucking job already.

That framing is extraordinarily powerful. It doesn't matter that it has nothing to do with reality. According to



the US Census Bureau, as of December 2011 46,200,000 Americans (or 15.1% of the total population) live in poverty. According to the US Department of Labor, 11.7% of the total US population had employment but were still poor. In other words, the vast majority of poor people have jobs--especially when you consider that some of the people included in the Census Bureau's statistics are children, and therefore not part of the labor force.

Framing the issue of poverty as "lazy people who won't get a job" helps deflect attention away from the real causes of poverty, and

also serves as a technique to manipulate people into supporting positions and policies that act against their own interests.

But framing only works if you do it at the start. Revealing how someone has misleadingly framed a discussion after it has begun is not effective at changing people's attention because of a cognitive bias called the entrenchment effect.

A recurring image in US politics is the notion of the "welfare queen"--a hypothetical person, invariably black, who becomes wealthy by living on government subsidies. The popular notion has this black woman driving around the low-rent neighborhood in a Cadillac, which she bought by having dozens and dozens of babies so that she could receive welfare checks for each one.



The notion largely traces back to Ronald Reagan, who during his campaign in 1976 talked over and over (and over and over and over and over) about a woman in Chicago who used various aliases to get rich by scamming huge amounts of welfare payments from the government.

The problem is, this person didn't exist. She was entirely, 100% fictional. The notion of a "welfare queen" doesn't even make sense; having a lot of children but subsisting only on welfare doesn't increase your standard of living, it lowers it. The extra benefits given to families with children do not entirely offset the costs of raising children.

Leaving aside the overt racism in the notion of the "welfare queen" (most welfare recipients are white, not black), a person who thinks of welfare recipients this way probably won't change his mind no matter what the facts are. We all like to believe ourselves to be rational; we believe we have adopted our ideas because we've considered the available information rationally, and that if evidence that contradicts our ideas is presented, we will evaluate it rationally. But nothing could be further from the truth.

In 2006, two researchers at the University of Michigan, Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, did a study in which they showed people phony studies or articles supporting something that the subjects believed. They then told the subjects that the articles were phony, and provided the subjects with evidence that showed that their beliefs were actually false.

The result: The subjects became even more convinced that their beliefs were true. In fact, the stronger the evidence, the more insistently the subjects clung to their false beliefs.

This effect, which is now referred to as the "entrenchment effect" or the "backfire effect," is very common among people in general. A person who holds a belief who is shown hard physical evidence that the belief is false comes away with an even stronger belief that it is true. The stronger the evidence, the more firmly the person holds on.

The entrenchment effect is a form of "motivated reasoning." Generally speaking, what happens is that a person who is confronted with a piece of evidence showing that his beliefs are wrong will respond by mentally going through all the reasons he started holding that belief in the first place. The stronger the evidence, the more the person repeats his original line of reasoning. The more the person rehearses the original reasoning that led him to the incorrect belief, the more he believes it to be true.



This is especially true if the belief has some emotional vibrancy. There is a part of the brain called the amygdala which is, among other things, a kind of "emotional memory center." That's a bit oversimplified, but essentially true; when you recall a memory that has an emotional charge, the amygdala mediates your recall of the emotion that goes along with the memory; you feel that emotion again. When you rehearse the reasons you first subscribed to your belief, you re-experience the emotions again--reinforcing it and making it feel more compelling.

This isn't just a right/left thing, either.

Say, for example, you're afraid of nuclear power. A lot of people, particularly self-identified liberals, are. If you are presented with evidence that shows that nuclear power, in terms of human deaths per terawatt-hour of power produced, is by far the safest of all forms of power generation (<http://nextbigfuture.com/2011/03/deaths-per-twh-by-energy-source.html>), it is unlikely to change your mind about the dangers of nuclear power one bit.

The most dangerous form of power generation is coal. In addition to killing tens of thousands of people a year, mostly because of air pollution, coal also releases quite a lot of radiation into the environment. This radiation comes from two sources. First, some of the carbon that coal is made of is in the naturally occurring radioactive isotope carbon-14; when the coal is burned, this combines with oxygen to produce radioactive gas that goes out the smokestack. Second, coal beds contain trace amounts of radioactive uranium and thorium, which remain in the ash when it's burned; coal plants consume so much coal--huge freight trains of it--that the resulting fly ash left over from burning those millions of tons of coal is more

[radioactive than nuclear waste \(http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=coal-ash-is-more-radioactive-than-nuclear-waste\)](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=coal-ash-is-more-radioactive-than-nuclear-waste). So many people die directly or indirectly as a result of coal-fired power generation that if we had a Chernobyl-sized meltdown every four years, it would STILL kill fewer people than coal.



If you're afraid of nuclear power, that argument didn't make a dent in your beliefs. You mentally went back over the reasons you're afraid of nuclear power, and your amygdala reactivated your fear...which in turn prevented you from seriously considering the idea that nuclear might not be as dangerous as you feel it is.

If you're afraid of socialism, then arguments about health reform won't affect you. It won't matter to you that health care reform is actually health insurance reform, or that the supposed "liberal" health care reform law was actually mostly written by Republicans (many of the health insurance reforms in the Federal package are modeled on similar laws written by none other than Mitt Romney; the provisions expanding health coverage for children were written by Republican senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah); and the expansion of the Medicare drug program were written by Republican Representative Dennis Hastert (R-Illinois)), or that it's about as Socialist as Goldman-Sachs (the law does not nationalize hospitals, make doctors into government employees, or in any other way socialize the health care infrastructure). You will see this information, you will think about the things that originally led you to see the Republican health-insurance reform law as "socialized Obamacare," and you'll remember your emotional reaction while you do it.

Same goes for just about any argument with an emotional component--gun control, abortion, you name it.

This is why folks on both sides of the political divide think of one another as "idiots." That person who opposes nuclear power? Obviously an idiot; only an idiot could so blindly ignore hard, solid evidence about the safety of nuclear power compared to any other form of power generation. Those people who hate Obamacare? Clearly they're morons; how else could they so easily hang onto such nonsense as to think it was written by Democrats with the purpose of socializing medicine?

Clever framing allows us to be led to beliefs that we would otherwise not hold; once there, the entrenchment effect keeps us there. In that way, we are all idiots. Yes, even me. And you.

TAGS: [credulity](#), [neurology](#), [politics](#), [skepticism](#)



39 comments



[terryo](#)

February 7 2012, 01:12:19 UTC

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

most excellent... ought to be taught in schools.



[sweh](#)

February 7 2012, 02:11:12 UTC

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

So what's the solution?



[meandering](#)

February 7 2012, 03:24:34 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

The only viable solution I know of is to be aware of how badly the human brain thinks and then acknowledge that you think with a human brain. The only way to work against the meat you think with is to know how badly your meat thinks.



[rekre8](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK



[tacit](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK



[sushispook](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK



[whitefox77](#)

February 7 2012, 03:18:39 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

It is possible for a person to get past the entrenchment effect to some extent, but it takes something pretty extraordinary to do it. You first have to have a person that is naturally inclined towards logical reasoning. Then you have to have them specifically trained from the time they are about 5 or 6 years old to make decisions dispassionately. I read a book related to it about 10 years ago (I'll see if I can dig up the title and author for you).

The problem is that this theoretical person ends up having a hard time fitting into a society where all the rest of us make decisions based on emotion...



[bikil](#)

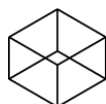
February 7 2012, 14:39:45 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

And this is me. I even turned around my thinking about nuclear power thanks to people like tacit explaining it. I also feel I have a hard time fitting into society because emotion-based decisions don't make as much sense to me (tho I fully admit I make them, I think I just don't make them as often).

I am interested in how that works in your brain. When you are able to revise an opinion, how does that happen and what reactions are occurring? Maybe you should do a follow up post.



[elusis](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK



[Nitpick](#)

[edm](#)

February 7 2012, 06:32:07 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

"According to the US Census Bureau, as of December 2011 462,000,000 Americans (or 15.1% of the total population) live in poverty."

Either the USA population has gotten *much* larger since I last looked, or one of those numbers (462M, 15.1%) has a typo: 462M seems more like 150% than 15%. Given the distribution of wealth reported in the USA I'd certainly be willing to believe 15% at present.



Interesting cross-disciplinary way of describing the overall problem, BTW. FWIW, I suspect that the entrenchment effect also has something to do with people not wanting to "lose face" (even to themselves: "how could I have been such an idiot?!") and thus being predisposed to finding a way to rationalise their



present view as being correct. Then having rationalised their present view as being correct, they're more convinced due to having "examined it and found it to be true".

Ewen

 **Re: Nitpick**
 **tacit**
 February 7 2012, 07:56:44 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

Right you are, good catch! i copied the numbers incorrectly from the Census Bureau PDF. They should be 462,000, not 462,000,000. It's been fixed. :)



 **Re: Nitpick**  **edm** 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK

  **miss_lisa_ma**
 February 7 2012, 11:55:07 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

One way you work around someone's frame is by activating another.

Say, for example, that Joe thinks government workers are all lazy, greedy, overpaid leeches. OTOH, he thinks highly of his neighbor, Bill, who plows roads in the neighborhood for the city. If you try to contradict Joe's opinion about government workers directly, Joe will cling more firmly to his belief. If, however, you remind him how much he likes Bill, what a good job Bill does taking care of Joe and his neighbors, how much it matters that their streets are plowed...and hey, doesn't Bill work for the government?--then Joe begins to soften on his original stance.



Cognitive dissonance being what it is, it doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen. Use one frame they already believe in to dismantle the other frame.

  **mckitterick**
 February 7 2012, 16:14:02 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

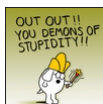
Unfortunately, those who identify as "liberal" or "progressive" in the USA tend to consider opposing points of view more than do those who identify as "conservative." This is simply by definition: To progress, one must be open to changing one's mind and appreciating other points of view; to conserve, one must *not* allow new ideas to change the way things have always been. In a strictly literal sense, environmentalism is a form of conservatism, because the most radical environmentalists would urge a "return to nature," where we would renounce the modern world. Ironically, self-identified "conservatives" in this country would fight this.

Anyhow, I think this is the problem in our country, why it's sliding toward the right: When conservatives frame an argument, progressives are willing to listen to their arguments... except for those things they hold dear, like Nuclear Power Is Evil. It's just that they're willing to consider different ways of looking at everything else, while conservatives are *unwilling* to consider new ideas - *by definition*.

This is a fantastic piece - thanks! I'd like to share this around a bit if you don't mind.

  **tacit**
 February 7 2012, 22:01:59 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

By all means, feel free!



 [joreth](#)

[February 19 2012, 05:39:46 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

There was something on that, not too long ago... lessee if I can remember the gist.

Basically, the idea was that most people hold some viewpoints on the right and some viewpoints on the left, averaging us out to middle-ground or moderates.

Apparently, adamantly asserting a view to one side activates that side of the listener's brain (the conservative/liberal side, not the literal right or left side) and makes the opposing side of the brain shut up, so that the listener starts to lean towards the speaker's viewpoint.

In other words, when a fanatical conservative starts ranting and railing in absolutes, listeners who might hold some liberal but also some conservative values can't, apparently, hold both at the same time. So the liberal parts of the brain shut down and the parts that hold the conservative values lights up & says "hmm, this guy knows his stuff! I agree with him!", swaying the listener further to the right.

So when the liberal politicians try to sound all reasonable by talking about "balance" and letting everyone be heard, and compromising their stances, they are at a disadvantage because their listeners are not being swayed and can be pulled over to the conservative side of the argument.

So we get a Right that is getting more extremely Right and a Left that keeps leaning Right.

Wish I could find that URL, it was a frighteningly fascinating read.



 [6 bleen 7](#)

[February 7 2012, 17:56:07 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

I'm quite sure that coal does not contain a significant amount of ^{14}C . The half-life of ^{14}C is about 5760 years, vs. hundreds of millions of years since the Carboniferous period. In fact, burning fossil fuels should decrease the percentage of atmospheric carbon that is ^{14}C .




 [tacit](#)


[February 7 2012, 22:13:59 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

My understanding--and apologies if I have the details wrong, I've been out of college for quite some time, so my recollection of the class where we discussed this might be hazy--is that large coal seams tend to contain anomalously high levels of ^{14}C and ^{13}C into ^{14}C through the process of neutron capture. So while you'd normally not expect to find significant (or indeed, any) radioactive isotopes of carbon in coal seams, in fact there's a surprisingly high preponderance of ^{14}C .

Like I said, that's something I remember from a fairly distant classroom lecture, so you're welcome to fact-check me on that. :)

 [6 bleen 7](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK

 [tacit](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK

 [6 bleen 7](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK

[Response from a fiscally-conservative, socially-liberal Ron Paul voter](#)

Anonymous



February 7 2012, 19:28:23 UTC

 CHECK COLLAPSE

Nice article, but not factually correct. A few points to consider.

1: I don't know about you, but I, and I think most normally intelligent people, know that health care reform is insurance reform, but Republicans complain about the government regulating the Health insurance industry and, by relation, the health industry, because your health services are as good as you can pay for them.

If government obliges private insurance companies to insure a guy who had three heart attacks at a low premium cost, the insurer will raise the premium for everybody (unfair to a guy who has never smoked, never over-ate, never got drunk, etc.) In addition, government does not allow insurance companies to compete across state lines.

"Obamacare" is a failure, because it is government messing with private companies and that never works. In Italy and France, for example, the government picks up the whole tab (it does not oblige insurance companies to pick up the tab) and the system works very well, but taxes in those countries are double than in the U.S. I pay around 24% income taxes in the USA, but during my years in Italy and France I paid close to 50%.

Obama knew that he could not pass a health care reform like in France, because both Republicans and Democrats would have opposed such a "socialistic" "un-American" system with such huge tax increase and, therefore he, Pelosi and Read studied this stupid hybrid government-private system, which cannot and will not ever work.

The Republican accusation against the government of mingling in your personal health care is correct, because by meddling in your insurance they meddle in your health.

2: No intelligent person *in his right mind* would think that a welfare queen would get rich by having 25 children and additional 25 welfare checks. We all know that raising children is expensive and those checks will only help reduce the cost, but never the whole cost.

Intelligent people are against two things – Fraud: when people get welfare checks for dead relatives, faking social security numbers, etc. and - The fact that welfare checks keep people with less drive to find a good job and better themselves, or to work harder, because with the little money of their part-time work and the little money from welfare, they get by and feel satisfied.

Who said that a welfare queen has to be a black woman? That's what this blogger says in order to accuse Republicans of racism. When someone thinks of a welfare fraud, we could think of an inner-city black or Latino person, a "redneck white trash" man or woman, a native American, etc. Nothing to do with race nor are these stereotypes pushed by Republican leadership.

3: The whole "nuclear" discussion is illogical. It's trying to prove that everybody clings to their beliefs, even when evidence shows otherwise. He has no proof of that. He is just making it up, in order to claim that conservatives, who stay on their economic beliefs, even when proven otherwise, are the same as people that fear nuclear power.

This article is trying to confuse reasonable people with illogical arguments. If someone can prove to me

with statistics that, once I increase the capital gain tax to 30%, the economy will boom (I need a proof from a country where that has happened), I will change my mind. That is why we have a brain. We listen and, if they convince us logically, we change our minds.

The problem is that this is a very leftist blogger, who takes the conservative side only on nuclear power, in order to deceive you that he is a moderate and then tries to prove that conservatives are just stupid. He is accusing Republican leaders of framing things better than Democrats and stupid Republican voters to be sucked in.

As if the Democrats were not masters at framing slogans "We can't go back the same tax cuts mistakes of the Bush years that brought us this mess in the first place", "The Rich are not paying their fair share!", etc... Who is framing now? The blogger only mentions great "framings" by Republicans, never by Democrats.

Based on my perspective, this blogger is a Democratic liberal hiding in moderate clothing. Like, maybe from the Gap or something.

Vote Ron Paul. Down with Obama. Down with Romney.



Re: Response from a fiscally-conservative, socially-liberal Ron Paul voter

 [6_bleen_7](#)

[February 8 2012, 15:06:30 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

"Obamacare" is a failure, because it is government messing with private companies and that never works.

We're in a Great Recession precisely because the government wasn't messing around with the banking industry *enough*.


I pay around 24% income taxes in the USA, but during my years in Italy and France I paid close to 50%.

And what was your annual health-care bill in Italy and France?

he, Pelosi and Read studied this stupid hybrid government-private system, which cannot and will not ever work.

[citation needed]


Who said that a welfare queen has to be a black woman? That's what this blogger says in order to accuse Republicans of racism. When someone thinks of a welfare fraud, we could think of an inner-city black or Latino person, a "redneck white trash" man or woman, a native American, etc.


So because you replace one racist stereotype with five, you have refuted  [tacit](#)'s assertion? His accusation has much merit: just because *all* Republicans don't subscribe to racist stereotypes doesn't mean that a overly large proportion of them don't. Have you ever been to Utah? Or southern Ohio?

Your blindness to Ron Paul's faults is especially ironic here, given his affinity for white supremacist

groups.

Based on my perspective, the commenter is immune to the vast evidence showing that dogmatic libertarianism is completely detached from reality.

Re: [Response from a fiscally-conservative, socially-liberal Ron Paul voter](#)  [idahoev](#) 7 years ago
[EXPAND](#) CHECK

Re: [Response from a fiscally-conservative, socially-liberal Ron Paul voter](#)  [idahoev](#) 7 years ago
[EXPAND](#) CHECK



 [james_the_evil1](#)
[February 7 2012, 19:37:17 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

The "But coal is bad!" bit doesn't do any good because it's a false equivalency. Yes, coal is bad, but saying so doesn't actually address any of the real problems with nuclear.

It's like trying to tell someone who's afraid of flying that planes don't crash as often as cars. They're not in a car, so it doesn't matter.

More to the point you have TWO industries that're notorious for greed, corruption, safety violations, and lying to the public (often with direct government collusion, as is STILL going on in Japan in the wake of Fukushima) pointing fingers at each other & saying "No, HE'S bad!" to distract the public from problems inherent with each & keep us from looking at safe alternatives to BOTH.



 [james_the_evil1](#)
[February 9 2012, 19:55:59 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

To this I would add that it's not a binary position of "you can have coal or you can have nuclear."
I know plenty of people who don't like either. :-)
In fact the argument that it's binary is part of the industry rhetoric.

 [tacit](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK

 [james_the_evil1](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK



 [know](#)
[February 7 2012, 20:39:50 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

I work in the UK benefits system and the, "Welfare Queen," is alive and well here, although race isn't part of the stereotype.


Discounting the claimant's personal allowance, the money that someone receives for two children is nearly double that of one child, triple for three children &c.


The US has far more restrictions, and I think it's far better for it.



 [kissmedeadly](#)
[February 8 2012, 15:41:49 UTC](#) CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

Er . . the only benefit here that you get for each child is child benefit. Which is £20.30 for the eldest child a week and £13.40 for any children after that per week. That's quite a big gap, and also, I'm pretty certain that the average child costs considerably more than this to feed and clothe.

 [knaw](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK

 [kissmedeadly](#) 7 years ago [EXPAND](#) CHECK



 [fin9901](#)
February 8 2012, 00:10:52 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

I read an [interesting article](#) about moral psychology a few years ago. Rather than try to explain it, I'll just jump to this interesting conclusion near the end:

Recently, Jonathan Haidt, along with Jesse Graham and Craig Joseph, has suggested an expansion of Shweder's three domains into five foundations for morality. Haidt, Graham and Joseph propose that the world's diverse moralities are built on top of five psychological foundations, each primed to detect and react emotionally to transgressions or violations of different moral concerns: harm to, and care, of individuals; justice and fairness; in-group loyalty; respect for authority/tradition; and issues of purity and sanctity.

Although we're all equipped with these psychological foundations, the ones that are actually built on varies across and within cultures. Using questionnaires, Haidt and Joseph have found that self-identified liberals in the US typically draw on the harm/care and justice/fairness in deciding moral issues. By contrast, religious and social conservatives generally take all five foundations to be relevant to their moral judgements. So when liberals and conservatives disagree, at stake is not just whose rights should be protected and how, but what counts as a legitimate moral concern in the first place. It is little wonder people so frequently talk past each other in the emotionally charged atmosphere of moral disputes.



 [elusis](#)
February 8 2012, 02:48:36 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

Ah, I was going to link to [this](#) above.



[To pick something only somewhat relevant to the main point](#)

 [omnifarious](#)
April 23 2012, 21:28:28 UTC Edited: April 23 2012, 21:28:41 UTC CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

I went from being cautiously pro-nuclear power to being very against it after the Fukushima disaster.

This isn't because I feel nuclear power is incredibly unsafe. It's because I think the people who want it are dishonest and unwilling to disseminate negative but true information about what happened. If we hadn't heard a litany of progressively worse news about what happened after getting previous reassurances that these bad things weren't happening at all I would be much less upset about it. If they had just come out with the bad news right away instead of practically being forced into it by independent (often non-governmentally sponsored) investigations, I would be much more forgiving. Accidents happen. We learn from them. Unless, of course, we deny reality and pretend things are better than they are.

It's caused me to be extremely distrustful of any pro-nuclear source of information because there were several different such sources of information that were trying to be falsely reassuring as the disaster was ongoing.

Yes, that's association bias. But I don't have the time or the knowledge to investigate thoroughly and figure out who's trustworthy and who's not. I need some vetting mechanism, and clearly the current mechanism for deciding who's authoritative and trustworthy is completely broken. Until it's fixed and I feel confident that there are trustworthy sources of information out there, I'm going to be against.



On Nuclear Power

Anonymous

June 10 2012, 02:27:13 UTC CHECK COLLAPSE

Okay,the article describes coal as being more dangerous than nuclear power.Since weve been using it far longer,and use more of it,it stands to reason.But,I believe even one nuclear accident is too many,and there has been quite a few accidents,and some are still ongoing.And there is where the problem is.

When even one nuclear power plant,or any other nuclear source for that matter,has the has the ability to meltdown or otherwise contaminate large areas of the countryside,state,continent,planet,for thousands and millions of years,to leave it uninhabitable,cause severe,grotesque birth defects,cancers,etc.,all waiting for one little accident to release it,then yes,it is one of the most dangerous things to human life on the planet.

All these hundreds/thousands of nuke plants around the world are amassing a stupidly large pile of spent and unspent fuel,that's just waiting for the chance to escape.It is a growing problem and threat to the human race.With all kinds of more severe natural disasters on the rise,I believe we will see more and more Fukushima/Chernobyl/Three Mile Island/1959 Boeing-Rocketdyne nuclear testing facility accidents to come.Also,what would happen in the event of social/economic collapse,war,pandemics,or other situations where no one was there,or able to maintain the hot reactors,or cooling pools full of fuel,to keep them from meltdown,or fission?Answer:We all die.

So yes,in my opinion(or fact),nuclear energy is NOT SAFE!



Re: On Nuclear Power

 tacit

June 10 2012, 04:49:00 UTC CHECK COLLAPSE

That's exactly the kind of cognitive error I am talking about.

You're scared of all the things you describe. You've been sold on lurid, vivid fears. and your brain responds to all those fears. You are frightened of nuclear power.

What you don't think about, because your fear is so vivid, is that every single one of the things you mention--contaminating the countryside, causing cancer and birth defects--**coal does all those things**. Language like "contaminating for thousands or millions of years" sounds scary. It frightens us in a visceral way. Coal doesn't contaminate the land for thousands or millions of years; it contaminates the land *forever*. Radioactive iodine is dangerous for days. Other radioactive elements are dangerous for months, or years, or centuries. Arsenic, cyanide, gallium--these are deadly *forever*.

The spent fuel you are talking about? It is LESS radioactive than coal waste. And there is a lot less of it.

You point to the things you are afraid of, without realizing that there are more dangerous things that don't frighten you as much. This is an error in the way the human brain was wired; you see a choice between "nuclear plants" and "no nuclear plants" and don't realize how dangerous the alternatives are.



 [Dusty Hu](#)

[May 24 2013, 04:02:11 UTC](#)

CHECK [COLLAPSE](#)

The only cognitive error is believing the assertions posted here. Carbon14 is a natural element that is part of almost all carbon based life, it also radioactively decay extremely steady and reliable, hence it is often used to date the remains of something dead, and it gives an estimate of when it was alive.

It has absolutely nothing to do with which form of power generation is the least toxic when all is considered in regards to power plants operation.

Flyash is nowhere near as toxic as nuclear waste. Nuclear energy is great, it doesn't emit noxious gases of have any of the byproducts that burning any fuel has, EXCEPT, for all the waste which remain toxic for what amounts to an eternity and is all but impossible to safely contain.

It seems like a good idea until not everything goes right, and then we are screwed. It doesn't take much to contaminate the earth, especially water. You really didn't have to mess with people's mind and get them to believe your "partial truth" which is nothing but misleading lies, in order t prove your point.

If you want to show people the power of the mind and how it can be cognitively reframed to be a benefit, you need to reframe it with truth, not fallacy and lies, in fact that is a really messed up thing to do if you never come clean with a punch line of your joke, mind screwing people is not the a great joke to the people who believe. To be honest, it is never funny, it's sociopathic.