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## FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

These two models of the conservative and progressive worldviews show a drastically divergent set of principles. And yet over and over, we find that both conservative and progressive politicians talk about the same set of values—fairness, equality, responsibility, freedom, integrity, and security. Often, there is agreement about what they are saying. For all our political differences, we share far more ideals in common as Americans than one would think from all the harsh rhetoric of Sunday morning talk shows.

In some cases, though, conservatives and progressives have very different ideas about what a value means.

For example, Congressman John Murtha of Pennsylvania was seen by progressives as courageous for coming out in late 2005 against continuing the American occupation of Iraq. They saw him as supporting American troops in an impossible situation. They believed the occupation should end. But conservatives saw Murtha as a coward for taking what they labeled a “cut and run” position, which they saw as failing to support our troops. One person’s paragon of courage became another person’s coward.

Another example is what we might call the “freedom to marry” movement, which sees same-sex marriage as an issue of personal freedom. The government should not be involved in perhaps the most important moral and personal decision in your life: whom you marry. Progressives liken the situation to the expansion of freedom when the old laws banning interracial marriage were overturned.

George W. Bush also considers this a “freedom” issue, but he argued it to the opposite conclusion on June 5, 2006, when Congress took up a constitutional amendment to ban “gay marriage”:

In our free society, decisions about a fundamental social institution as marriage should be made by the people. The American people have spoken clearly on this issue through their elected representatives and at the ballot box. In 1996, Congress approved the Defense of Marriage Act by large bipartisan majorities in both the House and the Senate, and President Clinton signed it into law. And since then, 19 states have held referendums to amend their state constitutions to protect the traditional definition of marriage. In every case, the amendments were approved by decisive majorities with an average of 71 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In the progressive worldview, this is a matter of personal freedom beyond government rule. In the conservative worldview, the government has the moral authority to decide, and freedom is the exercise of the vote by elected officials.

What produces such cases is the fact that the concepts expressed by words such as “freedom” are contested. A contested concept is an idea that means different things to different people. The British political scientist W. B. Gallie, using examples like “art” and “democracy,” first described their properties in the late 1950’s.<sup>2</sup> Gallie and others, especially linguists, have noticed certain regularities about contested concepts:

- Each such concept has an uncontested core that is generally agreed on—an example or class of examples that there is no argument about.
- Each such concept is evaluative, that is, expresses certain values, and the contestation arises from value differences.
- Each such uncontested version of the concept has a complex structure, and contested versions are variations on that structure.

It used to be believed among philosophers and political scientists that if a concept was contested, it could have no clear logic. The situation was just a mess with different people having arbitrarily different views. But since people repeatedly use contested concepts in arguments in an understandable way, that itself suggests there is a logic where conclusions can be drawn. And indeed there is. The system was discovered by cognitive scientists Alan Schwartz and George Lakoff.<sup>3</sup>

Let’s take a look at six crucial American values—and how the progressive and conservative understandings of them differ, as well as how these differences are structured by the family models and political principles discussed in Chapter 4.

## FAIRNESS

The following voting principle links fairness and equality: It is fair for everyone’s vote to count equally. Nobody’s vote counts twice as much as another’s, and no person’s vote is not counted.

This is a core principle that everyone agrees with—as long as we disregard the hard cases: Should absentee military votes in Florida have been counted in 2004 if they were sent in after the election ended, when it was known that the election was close? Should confusing butterfly ballots have been recast? Does a hanging chad count? The contested concept was that of a vote.

The logical statement of voting fairness is possible if we rule out the contested meaning of vote. Applying this more generally, we can state the uncontested core of the fairness concept: Fairness is unbiased distribution.

Most conservatives and progressives would agree on that principle. The idea of fairness contains other concepts, though, that are contested: bias, a process of distributing things, things distributed, who they are distributed to, and so on. What

counts as “bias”? What is to count as an appropriate process for distributing things? What counts as an appropriate thing to be distributed?

Applying either the strict father (conservative) or nurturant parent (progressive) model to these questions typically yields different answers. It is these models that structure the contested category of fairness.

To see how this works, consider the issue of affirmative action in admissions to public colleges and universities.

To progressives, affirmative action is motivated by empathy and is fair and right.

First is empathy for African Americans and Native Americans, who often live in communities that are still suffering from past discrimination.

Second is empathy for poor minorities, who are often discriminated against culturally—given inferior educations or the lack of cultural knowledge necessary to succeed in the business world.

Third is empathy for minority communities that commonly lack adequate professionals (doctors, nurses, dentists, and lawyers), social services, and a business infrastructure (banks, stock brokers, real estate agents, and corporation offices).

Affirmative action is designed to meet the moral mission of colleges and universities by making sure that all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, can realize the benefit of higher education. Universities are part of the common wealth—even private universities, which get much of their money from government grants and tax breaks from their nonprofit status—and should serve the common good. That means they should serve all sectors of society.

With affirmative action, colleges and universities can train students from a wide range of backgrounds, so they can return to their communities as doctors, lawyers, teachers, social service providers, and business owners and executives. This would raise the economic and educational levels, thereby helping to improve those communities over time. Affirmative action is about fairness, for redressing widespread unfairness.

Conservatives view fairness through the lens of the bootstraps principle. If you haven’t made it, it’s your own fault. If people work hard, they can make it. Everyone is subject to the same process, so everything is fair. To conservatives, affirmative action is simply unfair and immoral—a matter of giving people something (college admission) that they haven’t earned.

Conservatives see college admissions in a different frame than progressives: a competition among individuals for a reward, namely, admission to a university that will allow one to make more money in the future. As a competition, it is a process that should be fair and unbiased. It should be about individual initiative and individual discipline. To be unbiased, colleges should use only “objective” criteria—grades on tests and in classes.

From such a perspective, progressive empathy is irrelevant. The needs of communities are irrelevant. Cultural discrimination is irrelevant. Past discrimination is irrelevant. The only things relevant are individual discipline, initiative, and achievement as shown by test scores.

This difference was highlighted in 1996 with Proposition 209—the “California Civil Rights Initiative.”<sup>4</sup> Here is the main provision:

The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.

It sounds like it ends discrimination, and many progressives voted for it because they accepted the conservative frame for college admissions: a competition among individuals for a reward. Seen that way, affirmative action looks like discrimination.

But Prop 209 ended programs that were designed to remedy past discrimination. It sanctioned ongoing systemic discrimination. In short, Prop 209 was possible because fairness is a contested concept, and conservatives exploited its contested nature, while progressives fell into the conservative framing trap.

## FREEDOM

We Americans have insisted throughout our history that certain freedoms be expanded: voting rights, civil rights, and the freedoms afforded by expanded systems of public education, public health, highways, parks, libraries, and scientific research. These are progressive freedoms.

But they are being turned back in the name of a very different concept of freedom—a radical conservative “freedom” that fits modern conservative ideology. Conservatives have taken over the words “freedom,” “free,” and “liberty.” Bush, in his second inaugural address in January 2005, used those words forty-nine times in twenty minutes.<sup>5</sup> Turn to the Web sites of Jerry Falwell<sup>6</sup> and James Dobson,<sup>7</sup> and it’s liberty this and liberty that—Liberty University, Liberty Counsel, Liberty Alerts.

This is because freedom is also a classic case of an essentially contested concept.

Uncontested freedom is (very roughly) defined as being able to do what you want to do, providing you don’t interfere with the freedom of others. This includes physical freedom, freedom to pursue goals, freedom of the will, and political freedom, where citizens freely choose who runs the state and where the state, by law, cannot interfere with the basic freedoms of its citizens. This much is generally accepted.

In addition, there is a logic of what counts as interfering with one’s freedom, a logic that includes such notions as coercion, harm, property, opportunity, fairness, justice, rights, responsibility, nature, and competition. Here is a sketch of that logic:

- Coercion and harm, and the fear of them, interfere with one’s freedom.
  - Property and money add to one’s freedom. Conversely, the taking of your property or money is an imposition on your freedom.
  - Opportunity is necessary for freedom.
  - Unfairness interferes with freedom by taking from you what is rightfully yours.
  - Justice contributes to freedom, since it deters unfairness, coercion, and harm.
  - Rights give you access; to take away access is to interfere with freedom.
  - Responsibility must be exercised, usually by others, to make your rights possible.
- Freedom of access thus requires that others exercise responsibility.

- Nature cannot interfere with freedom; only people can. If your legs are broken in an earthquake, the earthquake has not interfered with your freedom. But if they are broken by a Mafia enforcer, then he has interfered with your freedom.
- Competition does not involve freedom: The winner in a competition is not interfering with the freedom of the loser.

That is the basic logic of uncontested freedom—as long as you stick to the uncontested meanings of coercion, harm, property, nature, competition, and so on. Freedom becomes contested when these concepts become contested.

To get a sense of the contestation, consider what constitutes “interference” with freedom. Do I have a right to say what I want, even if it’s obscene, or do you have a right not to be offended (interfered with)? Do we have a responsibility to extend freedoms to others to give them opportunities? If I have no clothes, no food, and no shelter, am I free? How much property is necessary for adequate freedom? Should we collect taxes from those with the most to enhance the freedoms of those with much less? As you can see, the uncontested notion of freedom can get quite complicated very quickly.

These questions indicate that freedom is highly contested. But, as with fairness, there is a logic to the answers. They are filled in by the parent models discussed in Chapter 4. Typically, application of one model or the other to these questions will yield different answers, so you get two very different forms of freedom.

Apply “strict father” morality to the components of uncontested freedom, and you get conservative freedom; apply the “nurturant” morality, and you get progressive freedom.

For instance, progressives and conservatives both recognize that property can enhance one’s freedom. Progressives, based on the “human dignity principle,” recognize freedom from want as a fundamental freedom: Acting on empathy for people who are down and out requires that we have a social safety net to secure their freedom. So progressives see Social Security, welfare, and universal health care as increasing freedom.

Conservatives take the opposite approach. They start from the idea that self-discipline is fundamental. A lack of property to conservatives indicates a lack of discipline, and hence a lack of morality. Therefore, giving people things they haven’t earned creates dependency, which traps people in welfare programs and poverty and thus robs them of their freedom. Not only that, but the taxes that pay for programs like Social Security and universal health care infringe on the freedom of the taxpayer, since taking his money is imposing on his freedom.

What progressives see as essential freedoms, conservatives see as essential interferences.

Consider different approaches to the market.

### The Progressive Argument

Progressives empathize with people suffering economic hardship in the world’s richest nation and believe that economic pressures can deny people their freedoms. For instance, if you have to work eighty hours a week at the minimum wage of \$5.15 to earn poverty wages, the market is interfering with your freedom—freedom from want, freedom of opportunity. So progressives see regulation of the market as an issue of

freedom. In accordance with the “common good principle,” progressives also believe that Social Security, universal health care, and access to a college education—all part of the common wealth—can help the impoverished improve their finances, thereby contributing to freedom from want.

#### The Conservative Argument

Conservatives, on the other hand, believe that the market is a “natural” system. As a “natural” phenomenon, the market—like an earthquake or a rainstorm—can’t interfere with people’s freedom. The government should not set “artificial” prices for the market. A statute that says an employer and an employee can’t engage in a contract for less than \$5.15 an hour is interfering with the natural functioning of the market and thus inhibiting freedom. So regulations of the natural free market are interfering with freedom.

Conservatives’ “strict” morality also dictates that discipline is what the market requires. It is the mechanism by which property is acquired. Property adds to one’s freedom. A lack of discipline means a lack of property. A lack of property means a lack of freedom.

Lakoff’s *Whose Freedom?* goes explicitly through the details of these and many more cases of how strict and nurturant morality yield opposite versions of freedom.

## EQUALITY

In simple cases, equality is fairly straightforward. Two plus two equals three plus one. “Two plus two” and “three plus one” characterize the same amount. When you’re dividing a pie equally among six kids, each kid gets a wedge of the same size. If a relatively small group of people is voting, equality means one person, one vote.

Therefore, in simple cases, equality has an uncontested core: Equality is sameness of distribution.

The contested issues are what is distributed, who things are distributed to, what the process of distribution is, what counts as the same, who does the distributing, and on what basis.

Things get even more complicated in social, legal, and political equality, where the things distributed are votes, rights, property, pollution credits, use of bandwidths, college admissions, jobs, access to legal counsel, marriage licenses, medical treatments, and so on. In religion, equality has to do with equal access to God versus access only through a priest or minister, the right to become a priest or minister, and so on. In politics, it is the question of which votes count, how they should be counted, who has the opportunity to run for office, who has access to office holders, and so on. Equality before the law means that everyone should be treated the same in the legal process, regardless of wealth or position.

To get a sense of how equality is contested in politics, consider the constant struggle between liberals and conservatives over what equality means: equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome.

Conservatives accept equality of opportunity—but it assumes the conservative deep frames, i.e., the market is open to everyone, so nothing further needs to be done except to get the government out of the way. It is all a matter of individual initiative and individual responsibility and individual accomplishment. Conservatives speak of “equity”—a hierarchy of merit, where merit is defined by success in the market. Equity replaces equality of outcome with a hierarchy of merit.

For progressives, empathy leads us to identify with the needs of others. A perfect example is President Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1965 speech at the Howard University commencement:

It is not enough to open the gates of opportunity; all our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. . . . We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result. . . . To this end equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough.<sup>8</sup>

Because progressives empathize with the other, we see the other as like us. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. Not the same abilities but the same range. Equality of outcome is therefore not identical outcomes but the same range of outcomes regardless of race. So we would expect that given equality of opportunity (as there should be in a democracy, and in a fair capitalist system), there would be equality of distribution of outcome. That is, if there were an equality of opportunity, there should be the same number of doctors, lawyers, scientists per capita in the African-American community as in the population at large. Or the median income in African-American households would be the same as in the population at large. But this is not the case. Given the assumption of the same range of abilities, this indicates that there must not be real equality of opportunity.

The “same range of abilities” frame is commonplace among liberals. It has a crucial use in classic liberal arguments. First, it defines the boundaries of racism: To deny it, to say some races have a greater range of abilities than others, is *de facto* taken as racist. Second, given this frame, it follows that different outcomes are *de facto* evidence of the effects of racism, past or present or both. The outcomes are documented in statistics—the rational presentation of a laundry list of statistical facts regarding infant mortality rates, income disparities, unemployment rates, and so on.

To counter the conservative argument that we should conclude from such facts that there is a racial difference of inborn abilities that have nothing to do with racism, LBJ, in his Howard University talk, spoke of the effects of racism on ability. Note that he took causes as not individual but as systemic and complex, both present and past:

But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.

We know the causes are complex and subtle. . . .

First, Negroes are trapped—as many whites are trapped—in inherited, gateless poverty. They lack training and skills. They are shut in, in slums, without decent medical care. Private and public poverty combine to cripple their capacities. . . .

We are trying to attack these evils through our poverty program, through our education program, through our medical care and our other health programs, and a dozen more of the Great Society programs that are aimed at the root causes of this poverty.

But there is a second cause—much more difficult to explain, more deeply grounded, more desperate in its force. It is the devastating heritage of long years of slavery; and a century of oppression, hatred, and injustice.

For Negro poverty is not white poverty. . . . These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice.

The reason we picked the LBJ speech was to show how much the progressive issues, the frames, and the equality arguments have remained the same over four decades, despite all the changes.

One big move on the conservative side is toward having equality replaced by equity—distribution on the basis of merit, or deservedness. Conservatives and progressives differ in their understanding of deservedness, as one would predict, by the application of their respective moral systems.

For conservatives, deservedness is understood as the result of discipline. Since their moral system advocates that reward should be proportional to discipline and ability, deservedness reflects discipline and ability: hours worked, widgets manufactured, or bold entrepreneurship, all of which hinge on being a disciplined person and so qualify as fair means for distributing resources equitably—by the market, not the government.

For progressives, deservedness is understood through the lens of nurturance, which says that someone in need deserves assistance. This satisfies the “human dignity principle,” making sure no one falls too far behind. It also fulfills the “common good principle,” since the needs of the commons are counted as valid needs that merit attention, besides just the needs of an individual.

The most recent conservative take on equality is via culture and family values. John McWhorter argues that the reason for a lack of African-American achievement is black culture, which does not respect learning, and so African-American kids grow up not doing well in school or in life.

David Brooks sees two cultural problems standing in the way of equality of outcome. The first is the breakdown in the nuclear family, which, he claims, has led to a lack of attachment between children and their parents. The second is that the culture does not support the delay of gratification. Both of these are conservative arguments that the government has no role to play in equality for African Americans. The cultural message is that the African-American community has to get its act together itself, learn to just say no, and start glorifying entrepreneurs, political leaders, and intellectuals over basketball players, hip-hop musicians, pimps, and criminals. The sneaky part of the McWhorter and Brooks argument is that they use nurturant values—responsibility and a respect for knowledge—as an argument against a progressive role for government.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, Brooks's recent discovery of attachment does not lead him to attack conservative child-rearing practices, e.g., James Dobson's *Focus on the Family*, which teaches strict father child rearing and its link to conservative politics.

## RESPONSIBILITY

The difference in the conservative and progressive understanding of responsibility is conveniently reflected in a difference between two surface frames English speakers have for understanding the word. This is instructive since the surface frame difference is one we can all understand and doesn't necessarily have to do with one's moral system. Consider the following two ways of talking about responsibility:

- Carrying the weight of a responsibility
- Fulfilling a responsibility

In the first, responsibility is a load carried by a single person as she goes through life. This load makes moving through life more difficult, and if the person is too weak to shoulder the responsibility, it is her fault and she alone is the failure. In the second, there is a void that needs to be filled. If the person can't do it, then she isn't the right person to fill the void, and someone else more appropriate should be taking on the responsibility.

Progressive responsibility is connected with the surface frame of fulfilling a need through empathy and using the common wealth for the common good. An illustrative example of this is Hurricane Katrina.

When disaster strikes, progressives generally react with empathy for those affected. In Katrina, it meant empathy for the victims of the hurricane and the ensuing breach of the levees. The progressive vision has everyone helping in whatever capacity they can. Our government has the powerful capability to harness our collective resources. One way that we fulfill our responsibilities to be nurturant of others is by paying taxes. Part of these taxes is to be used by government to be the immediate responder in the aftermath of any disaster. When government does so, we can also carry on with our personal responsibilities—working, taking care of families, etc. The taxes we pay should have also been spent responsibly ensuring the safety of the levees in the first place.

The conservatives' response to Katrina was strikingly different. Instead of holding Bush and Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff responsible, they pushed blame downward to the point where they blamed the victims themselves for choosing to live in and near New Orleans. Under the conservative principle of "individual responsibility," you are responsible for only yourself, so blaming the victims makes sense in their view. Bush can't be blamed if the government isn't supposed to be responsible for keeping the levees secure. For example, Joe Allbaugh, former FEMA director and Bush/Cheney campaign manager in 2000, argued before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that FEMA was an entitlement program to be phased out, not an agency essential to the safety of Americans. No responsibility was assumed.

Conservative responsibility also has two sides—the people making the rules and the people following the rules. It is the responsibility of our leaders to enforce discipline (moral authority), which means making rules and doling out rewards and punishment. For the rest of us, our responsibility is simply to follow the rules and otherwise maximize personal well-being—for ourselves and others.

The Katrina example has become such a major political touchstone because it highlights the two different attitudes about the role of government in our lives and about the contested concept of responsibility.

## INTEGRITY

The basic logic of integrity is twofold. First, it means saying what you believe and then acting on it consistently. Second, it means the consistent application of a principle:

- Progressive integrity is the consistent application of nurturance.
- Conservative integrity is the consistent application of strictness.

It may seem simple, but these statements lead to an interesting difference in the understanding of integrity.

With discipline, constancy is critical. Discipline must be applied the same way every time, regardless of circumstance. The person being disciplined needs to understand that there is a direct and immediate consequence for all actions and that the consequence is the same. The focus is on the constancy of the process, the identicalness of action.

To consistently apply empathy, however, the needs of the person receiving nurturance must be addressed, not the process itself. So to remain empathetic, the same degree of care must be applied. Sometimes this care requires different actions or different approaches, depending on circumstance.

Moving back to politics, we can see this difference in the understanding of integrity in the conservative and progressive reaction to John Murtha's call to bring the troops back home. To progressives, Murtha was courageous and speaking out of empathy for the Iraqi people and, even more so, out of empathy for our troops. He knew he would receive withering criticism for doing so, but even still, he said what he believed. This unwavering dedication to nurturance and to his beliefs exemplifies the progressive view of integrity.

To conservatives, Murtha's initial commitment to the war and then his reversal were the exact opposite of courage and completely lacking in integrity. They see the Bush administration's unchanging vigilance in Iraq as a sign of integrity. What they fail to see in Murtha's case is that his initial support for the war was based on being misled to believe that it would protect Americans and protect Iraqis. In this respect, Murtha's commitment didn't change—his call for withdrawal reflected a continued interest in the safety of Americans, as did the initial decision to go to war based on flawed information.

So just as with fairness, equality, and freedom, integrity can be understood differently by conservatives and progressives because of a difference in worldview. The conservative worldview applies discipline to integrity to get an understanding of

integrity that is unchanging action, regardless of changing circumstances. Progressive integrity comes from applying the idea of nurturance to integrity, the result being an unchanging commitment to nurturance, which may call for charting a different path when circumstance requires.

## SECURITY

Progressives have been accused of being weak on security. However, this comes not from an objective assessment of progressive policies but rather from the fact that the conservative understanding of security has dominated public discourse. This is possible because security is a contested concept.

The uncontested core of security is providing protection through strength.

But strength itself is a contested concept, as can be seen in contrasting two different scenes. For the first scene, imagine a wall surrounding a city under attack. If the wall is strong, it will hold up against the attack, protecting the people inside. This is strength in the sense of protection against the use of force.

For the second scene, imagine a fist trying to punch through a board. If the person is strong, he or she will break through the board. This is strength through the use of force.

The first scene is representative of progressive security: security through protection. The second scene is representative of conservative security: security through the use of force.

The response of both ideologies to the threat of terrorism highlights this difference. The progressive response is to make sure our ports, our landmarks, our infrastructure, and our troops are protected. Progressives advocated for federal funds to be used to increase port security, for example, and wanted the Department of Homeland Security to protect possible targets of terrorist attack, not to turn itself into another pork-barrel slush fund.

The conservatives' strategy differed markedly. Their idea of security was to attack.

Some progressives voted for the use of force in both Afghanistan and Iraq because it was presumed that both wars would provide protection for Americans. When the Iraq attack turned out not to be about protection but about a show of force, progressives who supported the war felt duped. And as the Iraq war ended and was replaced with an occupation, it became even less about protection, and progressives have been calling for a pullout—to protect the troops.

The conservative idea of strong security at home is based on a justice system that inflicts harsh punishment on criminals—another example of a show of force. Punishment is required to enforce discipline, and that's why conservatives advocate for policies like three-strikes laws.

Progressive security is based on nurturance, so domestic protection takes on a very different form. The best way to prevent crime is not harsh deterrence—at least in the case of the death penalty, this clearly does not work. Instead, security comes from the broad application of progressive principles.

Crime is lower when poverty is lower, so ensuring secure communities requires providing opportunity and a decent living for all its members—extensions of the “human dignity principle.” Therefore, broad prosperity is crucial to security.

The “common good principle” requires that secure communities come from having a well-funded infrastructure. This means funding not only police and fire departments but also departments like FEMA, the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Weather Service, and a public health infrastructure—as well as good schools and universal health care. Thus, a strong infrastructure is crucial to security.

So security looks like all the other contested concepts we have discussed. Progressives and conservatives have different points of view as to what security—and the related values of strength and protection—means, and the difference in meaning comes from their different views of the world.

In this chapter, we’ve articulated the basic progressive values. The discussion of each value should have shown that it’s not enough just to say “equality” or “responsibility” in a speech, because conservatives and progressives each have their own understanding of what these values mean. You have to talk about your understanding of each of these words. Doing so allows progressives to reclaim the values that have been co-opted by conservatives and advance our vision for America.