Rhetoric Reframed: “Obamacare,” “Obamacore,” and the Failure/Future of Political Discourse in the United States

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ABSTRACT

This thesis utilizes metaphor theory and, in particular, the work of cognitive linguist George Lakoff to explore contemporary political discourse surrounding the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") and the Common Core State Standards ("Obamacore") in the United States. I investigate the different moral frameworks, grounded in metaphorical notions of the ideal family, that underlie both liberal and conservative ideology in the US. After demonstrating that liberals and conservatives have coherent positions toward both the Affordable Care Act and Common Core, I argue that conservatives have been more successful at framing political issues in terms favorable to their own views. I conclude by offering suggestions for how we might promote public debate over values instead of over-relying upon preexisting cognitive frames that polarize political discourse.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The polarization of American political rhetoric along partisan lines is not a new phenomenon, but its effects have become increasingly alarming over the past several years. Having recently departed from Washington, the 113th Congress (2013-14) narrowly avoided being dubbed the "least productive Congress in modern history" with its passage of 296 laws; its predecessor, the 112th Congress (2011-12), retains the title with its enactment of only 283 laws ("Late Spurt"). By comparison, the 80th "Do Nothing Congress" (1947-48) under President Harry S. Truman managed to pass 906 bills into law ("Do-Nothing"). The current 114th Congress, with Republican majorities in both houses opposite a Democratic president who has repeatedly indicated his willingness to use the veto power, seems unlikely to pass more legislation than its most recent predecessors.

Coinciding with this lack of legislative productivity have been the historically low approval ratings of the most recent Congress. Gallup polls indicate that the average annual approval rating of Congress in 2014 was 15%, just one point above the all-time annual low of 14% in 2013. Prior to 2008, Congress's average annual approval rating had dipped below 20% only twice throughout the 40-year history of the Gallup poll, once in 1979 and once in 1992. Significantly, no partisan differences in approval have been demonstrated by the polls; both Democrats and Republicans disapprove of Congress equally ("2014 Approval").

Disapproving of Congress, however, seems to be one of the few things about which Democrats and Republicans agree. The Pew Research Center, after conducting a survey of 10,000 adult US citizens, reports that "Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades" ("Political Polarization"). As voters become more consistent in their liberal or

conservative attitudes, the middle ground of ideological overlap has grown sparse, with 92% of Republicans occupying a space on the political spectrum that is to the right of the median Democrat and 94% of Democrats occupying a space to the left of the median Republican. Portraying this polarization even more starkly, a full 27% of Democrats and 38% of Republicans regard the other party's ideas as "so misguided that they threaten the nation's well-being" ("Political Polarization").

Why are Democrats and Republicans so ideologically divided? The work of cognitive linguist George Lakoff offers a compelling explanation for the roots of this division. Lakoff argues that the polarization of US politics can be attributed to a fundamental disagreement concerning metaphor, which he defines as the understanding or experience of "one thing in terms of another" (*Metaphors* 5).[1] Metaphors, according to Lakoff, structure both our brains and our lives. The metaphor "argument is war" serves as one example (specific to the American context) of how metaphors provide this structure. A number of expressions related to the central metaphor of argument as war pervade our speech, as illustrated by the following examples: "Your claims are *indefensible.* He *attacked every weak point* in my argument. His criticisms were *right on target*. I *demolished* his argument. I've never *won* an argument with him. . . . He *shot down* all of my arguments" (*Metaphors* 4, italics in original). Importantly, we do not merely *talk* about argument using the aforementioned metaphors; we actually *experience* argument in these terms. As Lakoff notes, "We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. . . . Many of the things we *do* in arguing are

[1] This conception of metaphor is widely accepted in the cognitive sciences (among other fields) and, notably, differs from the common notion of metaphor as a figure of poetic speech.

partially structured by the concept of war" (*Metaphors* 4). Metaphors, therefore, guide our speech, thoughts, actions, and, most significant to this study, *politics*.

Lakoff claims that, in the US context, political ideology finds its metaphorical basis in conceptions of the ideal family. In *Moral Politics*, he demonstrates that political reasoning follows closely from moral reasoning, which is inherently metaphorical, heavily based upon the lived experience of well-being, and usually learned and perpetuated through families (41). American families, according to Lakoff, tend to be organized around one of two fundamentally opposed forms of parenting and morality, which he terms "strict father" morality and "nurturant parent" morality. An individual's notion of the ideal family--whether a strict father family or a nurturant parent family--has significant implications for that individual's political ideology, as we will see below.

Strict father morality, which underlies conservative political ideology, most often operates in traditional nuclear families, with a father acting as both the protector and authority figure for the entire family. The strict father regulates his children's behavior through rewards and punishments, careful not to spoil them and thus undermine their ability to grow into mature adults who value "self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority" (*Moral Politics* 66). Adherents of strict father morality regard the world as divided into good and evil, with the central metaphor of "moral strength" separating the good from the evil (*Moral Politics* 73). The morally strong are those who hold the correct values of self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority and thus grow up to become their own strict fathers who protect their families from the fundamentally dangerous world (*Moral Politics* 65).

Liberal politics, on the other hand, derive from what Lakoff terms "nurturant parent"

morality, characterized by its emphasis on the experiences of being cared for (and caring for others) and pursuing one's own happiness in cooperation with others (*Moral Politics* 108). Nurturant parent moralists believe that "what children need to learn most is empathy for others, the capacity for nurturance, cooperation, and the maintenance of social ties" (*Moral Politics* 108). To instill these values, nurturant parent moralists emphasize open, two-way communication between parents and children. Although the nurturant parent ultimately holds responsibility for deciding what is in the child's best interest and acting as an authority figure when appropriate, parental authority in this moral schema is negotiated and earned through mutual respect rather than forcefully asserted.

Both liberals and conservatives, Lakoff shows, share "a common metaphorical conception of the nation as family," with citizens metaphorically conceived of as children of the parental government (*Moral Politics* 153-4). While liberals find it easy to regard this government-father as a nurturant parent (in accordance with their moral system), conservatives naturally conceive of the federal government as a strict father who has overstepped his authority by meddling in the lives of his adult children. Thus, the fundamental distinctions between liberal and conservative notions of the ideal family, when applied metaphorically to the federal government, account for the different attitudes held by liberals and conservatives toward a range of policy issues, as this thesis will show.

This thesis employs the work of George Lakoff to explore the widening ideological divide in American politics. Building upon the analysis offered above, I will show that liberal and conservative political ideologies in the United States stem from very different conceptions of the ideal family, conceptions that are highly metaphorical in nature. From there, I will analyze two case studies of contemporary political controversies in the United States--the controversy

surrounding the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") and the controversy surrounding the Common Core State Standards for public education--to demonstrate the consistency between liberal and conservative attitudes toward these controversies and the underlying family models informing their ideologies.

Finally, I will follow Lakoff in arguing that conservatives have been far more successful than liberals in framing these debates in terms favorable to their own positions. Frames, simple neurological structures by which concept are related in the brain, can activate either liberal or conservative modes of thinking (*Political Mind* 22), and the two case studies I have selected provide examples of how conservative framing has come to dictate the terms of political discourse. These two case studies also illustrate that this conservative framing of policy issues has operated both from the "top down" and the "bottom up." In the case of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), "official" rhetoric from conservative politicians (as well as the organizations that fund and support them) has come to dominate the political discourse surrounding the health care legislation; the very term "Obamacare," widely employed by both liberals and conservatives, speaks to the success of these politicians and organizations in framing the public discourse surrounding the ACA. The controversy surrounding the Common Core Standards, on the other hand, represents the "bottom-up" success of a grassroots organization in framing the issue in a manner that has brought about demonstrable political and educational consequences. These two case studies, therefore, show the bidirectional influence of framing: frames employed by politicians can dictate the terms of popular discourse, just as frames invoked by groups of ordinary citizens can ultimately influence politicians and public policy.

I will conclude by considering the recommendations of Lakoff and Sharon Crowley in formulating my own suggestions for how we might recast these debates in terms that allow for genuine democratic deliberation over political issues instead of partisan politics-as-usual. Bridging the ideological divide between both voters and the representatives they elect seems a prerequisite for restoring a semblance of functionality to the US government. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to uncover what a bridge between the two sides might entail. Especially in the face of the far-right extremism[2] that has become a significant force in American political culture, we might be tempted to further entrench ourselves in our own ideological views and advocate only for our own positions. I think we would do better to focus upon an alternate path that engages Americans who do not already have their minds made up one way or the other[3] and allows for non-partisan (or not necessarily partisan) deliberation over values. The same Pew Research Center report that uncovered the widening ideological gap between Democrats and Republicans also found that this ideological polarization is

> not shared by all – or even most – Americans. The majority do not have uniformly conservative or liberal views. Most do not see either party as a threat to the nation. And more believe their representatives in government should meet halfway to resolve contentious disputes rather than hold out for more of what they want. Yet many of those in the center remain on the edges of the political playing field, relatively distant and

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[2] In *Toward a Civil Discourse* (2006), Sharon Crowley traces the rise of far-right Christian extremism, which she terms "apocalyptism," as a hegemonic strain in US political discourse. Apocalyptics, according to Crowley, have no concern with achieving political consensus through rational persuasion, focusing instead upon mobilizing support for politicians who will further their desire to "restore" America's "Christian heritage," regardless of the fact that this so-called heritage is not grounded in historical reality and not something that the majority of Americans find appealing.

[3] Lakoff certainly calls for engaging what he calls "biconceptual thinkers" (people who hold liberal beliefs in some instances and conservative beliefs in others) but he wants to engage them with the goal of activating the liberal-leaning neural circuitries in their brains (which I will later discuss in detail). I argue, instead, for helping these individuals to understand what is at stake on both sides of a given issue and letting them determine their own values.

> disengaged, while the most ideologically oriented and politically rancorous Americans make their voices heard through greater participation in every stage of the political process. ("Political Polarization")

This thesis will examine the possibilities for restructuring US political debate so that those interested in an alternate path can have a more robust voice in American politics, a voice less constrained by the frames of the current ideological divide.

In *The Political Mind*, Lakoff argues compellingly for the danger of the metaphorical political spectrum in which liberals occupy the left and conservatives occupy the right. As conservatism becomes more radical (as it has in recent years) and thus shifts farther to the right, the political spectrum metaphor implies that liberal attitudes are similarly extreme and distant from the center. But an extreme leftist ideology has not taken hold in the US to counterbalance the right-wing extremism upheld by, e.g., the Tea Party. In fact, liberals today espouse many of the same policies that were held by moderate Republicans in the past; for example, many studies have shown the ideological similarities between Presidents Eisenhower and Obama. Moreover, no one, according to Lakoff, actually takes a "moderate" position on political issues; rather, those whom he categorizes as "biconceptual thinkers" agree with liberals on certain issues and conservatives on other issues (*Political Mind* 44-5). Following Lakoff's warning, I intentionally avoid the terms "moderate," "middle ground," and "political center," as these terms have very little meaning in the contemporary political climate. My search for an "alternate path" is a search not for moderation but for a meaningful space in which genuine democratic deliberation can take place.

CHAPTER 2: METAPHOR, MORALITY, AND THE AMERICAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Schoolchildren are often first introduced to metaphor as a figure of (poetic) speech, a comparison that, unlike a simile, does not use the terms "like" or "as." In scholarly circles, however, metaphor has come to be recognized as a fundamental feature of human cognition. Zoltan Kovecses characterizes this latter conception of metaphor, which I refer to as the cognitive linguistics notion of metaphor, as follows: (1) metaphor is not a figure of speech but a property of mental (often abstract) concepts; (2) metaphor promotes conceptual understanding rather than poetic imagery; (3) metaphor need not convey similarity (and usually does not); (4) metaphor pervades daily life and the ordinary language of ordinary people; and (5) metaphor is inherent to human cognition rather than serving as aesthetic ornamentation (x). The significance of the cognitive linguistics approach to metaphor is that "it attempts to connect what we know about conceptual metaphor with what we know about the working of language, the working of the human conceptual system, and the working of culture" (Kovecses xii). In other words, the study of metaphor can help us to better understand our words, our brains, and our culture.

The cognitive linguistics approach to metaphor broke scholarly ground in 1980, with the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson argue for the fundamentally metaphorical nature of human thought and behavior. They contend that "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (*Metaphors* 3), defining metaphor as the understanding and experience of "one thing in terms of another" (*Metaphors* 5). Importantly, this concept of metaphor is not merely linguistic, although Lakoff and Johnson rely upon work in linguistics to establish most of their claims. Rather, metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson's sense is grounded in

and inseparable from human experience--the ways in which we understand and interact with the world.

Lakoff and Johnson offer a wide array of examples illustrating how daily experiences are shaped so significantly by metaphor that we cannot understand our cognitive processes and experiences apart from these metaphors. For example, the metaphor "happy is up" demonstrates how we think about and experience happiness in terms of our lived experience of spatial orientation. Fleshing out the metaphor that "happy is up; sad is down," Lakoff and Johnson provide the following examples from everyday speech: "I'm feeling *up*. That *boosted* my spirits. My spirits *rose*. You're in *high* spirits. Thinking about her always gives me a *lift*. I'm feeling *down*. I'm *depressed*. He's really *low* these days. I *fell* into a depression. My spirits *sank*" (*Metaphors* 15, italics in original). These entailments of the "happy is up" metaphor relate directly to the broader metaphor that "good is up" and thus "bad is down"[4] (*Metaphors* 16), which in turn stem from the lived experience of standing and sitting erect (*Metaphors* 57). That "good is up" would be associated with being erect makes intuitive sense; when we are healthy/alive, we stand and sit erect, whereas when we are ill/dead, we are much more likely to be unable to maintain an erect position. The idea that, for example, health is preferable to illness squares directly with our lived experience of both health and illness. This example illustrates the inseparability of metaphor from our experience and understanding of the world.

In addition to serving as the foundation of human thought and behavior, metaphor also shapes our beliefs about morality. In *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (2002), Lakoff demonstrates that moral reasoning is deeply metaphorical, heavily based upon the lived experience of well-being:

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[4] For example: "Things are looking *up*. We hit a *peak* last year, but it's been *downhill* ever since. Things are at an all-time *low*. He does *high*-quality work" (*Metaphors* 16, italics in original).

> Moral thinking . . . depends fundamentally on metaphorical understanding, [but] we should point out the obvious--that morality is not all metaphorical and that nonmetaphorical aspects of morality are what the system of metaphors for morality is based on. Nonmetaphorical morality is about the experience of well-being. The most fundamental form of morality concerns promoting the experiential well-being of others and the avoidance and prevention of experiential harm to others or the disruption of the well-being of others. (41)

As we have already seen, the metaphors "happy is up" and "good is up" (and their entailments) arise directly from our lived experience of well-being. The experience of well-being thus naturally gives rise to metaphorical thought and experience, which forms the basis of morality.

Of course, beliefs about morality are not as universal as the metaphors we have previously discussed. While most people may share many common experiences as relates to the overall experience of well-being, they have significant disagreements about *what brings about* such well-being. In *Moral Politics*, Lakoff outlines the two major moral systems prevalent in American society and shows that they are based upon fundamentally opposed beliefs about what promotes well-being. These moral systems--"strict father" morality and "nurturant parent" morality--are learned and perpetuated through families, which tend to be organized around one of the two systems.[5] The systems derive their names from their adherence to different models of parenting, the process through which a household's moral standards are set and children's moral reasoning is developed. Significantly, as I will later show in detail, moral metaphors for family

[5] Lakoff notes that strict father morality and nurturant parent morality are fundamental moral systems from which several pathologies (systems that distort the two central systems) arise. Abusive parenting, for example, deviates from strict father morality, which condones corporal punishment but not child abuse (*Moral Politics* 355). One pathological devolution from nurturant parent morality is the "indulgent-permissive model" in which very few demands are placed upon children and they are rarely (if ever) disciplined for inappropriate behavior. Another pathology, the "indifferent-uninvolved model," also involves minimal regulation of children's behavior, but this time with the goal of minimizing inconvenience to the parent (rather than indulging the child) (*Moral Politics* 358-60).

life directly translate to moral metaphors for political life, with strict father morality mapping on to conservative political ideology (in the American context) and nurturant parent morality mapping onto liberal political ideology (*Moral Politics* 33).

The fundamental assumption that the world is a dangerous place and life is rife with difficulties underlies the strict father model of morality. Strict father families, according to Lakoff, are traditional nuclear families in which the father acts as both the protector and authority figure of the family, charged with helping his children learn to cope with the "dangers and evils lurking everywhere, especially in the human soul" (*Moral Politics* 64). To help children avoid these dangers and evils, particularly those originating from their own human instincts, the strict father regulates his children's behavior through rewards and (often corporal) punishments. Such rewards and punishments are meant to teach children the values of "self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority" (*Moral Politics* 66); warmth and affection, while an important part of strict father families, must never take priority over parental authority and the inculcation of "correct" values. When they have sufficiently internalized these values, the strict father's adult children begin to serve as their own authorities, becoming the strict fathers (or mothers[6]) who protect themselves and their families from the fundamentally dangerous world (*Moral Politics* 66).

Adherents of strict father morality regard this fundamentally dangerous world as divided into good and evil, with the central metaphor of "moral strength" separating the good from the evil (*Moral Politics* 73). The morally strong are those who hold the correct values of self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority; anything that undermines these

[6] Most commonly, strict father families involve a traditional, gendered division of labor, with the father exerting authority over the other members of the household and the mother responsible for "car[ing] for the house, raising the children, and upholding the father's authority" (*Moral Politics* 66). However, there are some strict "father" families--usually led by a single mother--in which the mother is the ultimate authority figure.

values is thus immoral (*Moral Politics* 74). It follows that the "strict father moral system itself is right and good; it could not possibly be wrong and still function as a moral system with a strict right-wrong dichotomy. Opponents of the moral system are therefore wrong; and if they try to overthrow the moral system, they will be engaging in an immoral act. The moral system itself must be defended above all" (98). Strict father morality thus extends beyond the family and into the realm of politics through its imperative to universalize morality: the strict father system must be the *only correct* moral system if its internal logic is to remain consistent. Laws and policies inconsistent with strict father morality must therefore be opposed on moral grounds.

Strict father morality maps onto conservative politics in the United States through its emphasis on self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority as the pillars of moral strength. Such emphasis on the individual precludes explanations of social issues grounded in systemic or social forces; rather, moral weakness--the lack of self-discipline and self-reliance--serves as the explanation for these problems. For example, if

> moral people always have the discipline to just say no to drugs or sex and to support themselves in this land of opportunity, then failure to do so is moral weakness, and hence immorality. If the metaphor of Moral Strength has priority over other forms of explanation, then your poverty or your drug habit or your illegitimate children can be explained only as moral weakness, and any discussion of social causes cannot be relevant. (*Moral Politics* 75)

The stress on individual autonomy and rejection of collective responsibility relates closely to another important aspect of strict father morality and conservative political ideology: the idea that the pursuit of self-interest is moral. This belief provides the close link between strict father morality and free-market capitalism; as Lakoff explains, "Controlled-market economies, whether

socialist or communist, impede the pursuit of financial self-interest. For this reason, advocates of strict father morality have seen socialism and communism as immoral" (*Moral Politics* 95). The federal government, which intervenes in the economy and provides various forms of assistance to those who have not "earned" it, thus becomes an oft-cited manifestation of "illegitimate authority" by those who uphold strict father morality (*Moral Politics* 79).

In contrast to strict father morality, nurturant parent morality is characterized by its emphasis on care and happiness. Whereas strict father morality requires parents to rely heavily upon rewards and punishments to regulate their children's behavior and shape them into self-disciplined, self-reliant individuals, nurturant parent morality derives from the belief that children gain these traits through "being cared for and respected" and through demonstrating similar care and respect for others (*Moral Politics* 108). While parents still maintain ultimate authority over their children, the parents deserve and gain this authority through mutual respect and open communication. Nurturant parents wish for their children to grow into happy, nurturant, cooperative adults who have a sense of social justice and a concern for others (*Moral Politics* 109-10).

Just as the metaphor of moral strength dominates strict father morality, the metaphors of morality as empathy and morality as nurturance form the foundation of nurturant parent morality. Seeking to understand and care for others--and significantly, oneself--thus become the most important moral pursuits under this system (*Moral Politics* 114). Indeed, moral authority derives from the ability to empathize with and nurture others: leaders, whether parental or political, who "fulfill their nurturant obligations--who are empathetic, who successfully help people, who are fair, who communicate effectively, and who nurture social ties successfully" warrant moral authority through a relationship built upon trust (*Moral Politics* 134). These conditions for

moral authority contrast sharply with the strict father emphasis on setting and enforcing rules and consequences for breaking them.

Nurturant parent morality serves as the moral basis for liberal political ideology in the US context through its emphasis on care for others and the successful implementation of nurturant policy. Adherents of nurturant parent morality generally seek to understand the systemic causes of social problems and to adopt an attitude of empathy toward those who find themselves in undesirable circumstances, aiming to implement policy that improves the living conditions of those in need. The idea that individuals are accountable for their own circumstances due to their own moral strength or weakness--a central tenet of strict father morality--does not provide a compelling explanation for social problems to nurturant parent moralists, who regard the federal government as maintaining legitimate authority to the extent that it successfully addresses social problems and cares for the citizens it is supposed to represent.

Both nurturant parent liberals and strict father conservatives, Lakoff shows, share an important metaphorical notion of the "nation as family." Following this metaphor, the government is regarded as "an older male authority figure, typically a father" and citizens are regarded as the adult children of the federal government (*Moral Politics* 153-4). While liberals find it natural to regard this government-father as a nurturant parent (in accordance with their moral system), conservatives naturally conceive of the federal government as a strict father who has overstepped his authority by meddling in the lives of his adult children. This attitude would hold for meddlesome parents as well: the adult children of strict father families "know what is good for them better than their parents, who are distant from them. Good parents do not meddle or interfere in their lives. Any parental meddling or interference is strongly resented" (*Moral Politics* 66-7). Conservatives consequently think of the federal government as an abusive parent,

claiming that "it is distant, it doesn't know what's best at the local level, [and] it shouldn't meddle or interfere and is resented if it does" (*Moral Politics* 273). Local (and often state) governments, which are more attuned to local needs, maintain far more authority than the distant, abusive federal government under strict father morality.[7]

It should be noted, however, that the extent to which liberals and conservatives regard the federal government as nurturant and abusive (respectively) depends heavily upon the political leanings of the individuals running the government. For example, a president[8] who expands welfare accessibility would gain the trust (which, as discussed previously, forms the basis of legitimate moral authority under the nurturant parent model) of liberals by successfully caring for the nation's "children" and alienate conservatives by rewarding those who are undeserving (due to the moral weakness that has made them reliant upon the federal government as adults). On the other hand, a president who lifts regulations to "free up" the market economy would incite applause from conservatives for promoting the moral pursuit of financial self-interest and ire from liberals for failing to protect those most likely to be exploited by such an arrangement.

While strict father morality provides a coherent moral framework for those who hold exclusively conservative political beliefs and nurturant parent morality provides a similar framework for those who hold entirely liberal political beliefs, we also need to account for those who are less consistent in their worldviews--those who hold conservative beliefs about some political issues and progressive beliefs about others. In *The Political Mind* (2009), Lakoff argues that most people are biconceptual in their political thinking, holding liberal views on some issues and conservative views on others. These biconceptual thinkers have both liberal and

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[7] It is also worth noting that conservatives have been far more successful at getting policies consistent with strict father morality enacted at the local level, as I will discuss further in the chapter concerning Common Core and educational policy.

[8] The same could easily apply to Congress or the judiciary.

conservative neural circuits that can be activated by "language, ideas, images, and symbols" (*Political Mind* 113). Put even more simply, biconceptual thinkers are open to persuasion, predominantly at the subconscious level at which 98% of thought occurs (*Political Mind* 44). Framing--the defining of terms in relation to powerful concepts that already exist in the brain--has the power to activate or deactivate liberal and conservative modes of thinking (*Political Mind* 22). For example, invoking the metaphorical term "tax relief" activates neural pathways favorable to conservative attitudes; if taxes are something from which we can be relieved and if such relief would make us *feel* relief, then taxes must be a burden rather than, for example, membership dues (*Political Mind* 234-5). The term "God" on the other hand, activates different pathways based upon whether one regards God as a nurturant parent or a strict father, and a speech that emphasizes more progressive Biblical passages will frame the idea of God differently than one that preaches fire and brimstone (*Political Mind* 108).

Lakoff's 2010 study of state polling data from California illustrates the tremendous significance of framing in persuading biconceptual thinkers. In that study, a full 18% of participants revealed themselves to be biconceptual in their political thought, agreeing with liberals on some issues and conservatives on others. Whether participants thought like liberals or conservatives, however, depended directly upon their understanding of the issue. When an issue was framed with liberal values, these participants expressed liberal attitudes toward the issue; when the issue was framed in terms of conservative values, the participants likewise expressed conservative attitudes ("Poll" 2). In other words, almost one-fifth of participants shared the values--whether liberal or conservative--with which the issue was framed. The consequences of this finding for political discourse are significant: for better or worse, we can get about a fifth of people to agree with us on any given political issue simply by framing the issue to activate

certain neural pathways.

According to Lakoff, liberals and conservatives have not been equally successful at framing issues in their own terms for broader public consumption. Erroneously relying on an Enlightenment conception of rationality, liberals often fail to appreciate the subconscious nature of most thought, and Lakoff accuses them of "ignoring the cognitive unconscious, not stating [their] deepest values, suppressing legitimate emotions, accepting the other side's frames as if they were neutral, . . . and refusing to frame the facts so that they can be appreciated" (*Political Mind* 11-2). Conservatives, on the other hand, understand very well the importance of framing, and Lakoff provides a number of examples illustrating how conservatives have succeeded at framing issues in the media: "illegal immigrants, not illegal employers or illegal consumers; war in Iraq, not occupation of Iraq; surge, not escalation; supporting the troops, not squandering tax money" (*Political Mind* 46). These conservative frames have come to define the terms by which millions of Americans conceive of issues and events, as we will see in the chapters that follow.

Building upon this overview of Lakoff's work on metaphor, morality, and political thinking, I will now turn to two case studies of metaphorical morality in contemporary American politics: the response to the Affordable Care Act and the response to the Common Core State Standards. In both cases, I will show that supporting these initiatives is consistent with liberal political ideology (nurturant parent morality) and that opposing the initiatives is consistent with conservative political ideology (strict father morality). However, I will also demonstrate that conservatives have been far more successful at framing these debates in terms, such as "Obamacare" and "Obamacore," that promote their own positions, creating an uphill battle for liberals working to garner support for these policies.

An explicit goal of much of Lakoff's work is to help liberals wage this uphill battle. My

purpose here is somewhat different: I want to promote political dialogue that examines and makes explicit the underlying values that are at stake in the various ways we might frame political issues. Whereas Lakoff wants to expose these values so that liberals can employ them to gain wider support for their positions and to reframe political issues so that extreme conservatives no longer dominate US political discourse, my goal is to promote public debate over values themselves.

CHAPTER 3: FROM THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT TO "OBAMACARE"

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), perhaps better known as "Obamacare," has remained in the news since it was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama on March 23, 2010. Despite the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision to uphold the law on June 28, 2012 in the case of *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius*, Republicans in the House of Representatives have notoriously voted to repeal, defund, or otherwise debilitate the law over fifty times. In October 2013, the federal government experienced its first shutdown in over a decade largely due to Republican opposition to the law.[9]

With Republicans gaining control of both houses of Congress following the 2014 midterm elections, many Republican leaders renewed their vows to bring about Obamacare's demise.[10] Meanwhile, over 15 million previously uninsured Americans gained coverage through the ACA, with over 9 million signing up for insurance through the online health insurance marketplace (healthcare.gov) established by the law during the most recent open enrollment period.

This chapter will explore several prominent elements of the political debate surrounding the Affordable Care Act/Obamacare[11] by employing a Lakoffian analysis of the moral frameworks involved in liberal and conservative perceptions of the ACA. I will show that progressive support of the law squares with a nurturant parent model of morality, whereas conservative opposition to the law aligns with a strict father model of morality. Moreover, I will

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[9] Many Republicans in Congress would not vote for a spending bill for the government that did not include provisions designed to undercut the ACA, and Speaker of the House John Boehner initially refused to bring to the floor for vote a "clean" spending bill that did not include such provisions. When Boehner finally did bring such a bill to the floor, the spending bill passed and the government reopened, but not before costing the economy (in the form of lost revenue) and taxpayers many billion dollars (Hicks).

[10] Of course, the president's veto power will prevent this from happening as Republicans do not have the ⅔ majorities in both chambers of Congress necessary to override a presidential veto.

[11] I will generally refer to the law by its official name (the Affordable Care Act/ACA) unless specifically referring to conservative perceptions and opinions of the law.

demonstrate that conservatives have successfully dominated the public and political discourse surrounding the ACA by framing the issue in terms that reinforce strict father morality and sway the opinions of biconceptual thinkers.

The actual content of the law has often been obscured by the political debate surrounding it, but many elements of the ACA are relatively uncontroversial, with most Americans supporting many elements of the law ("New Enrollment Period"). The ACA aims to regulate various aspects of the health insurance industry (notably, a for-profit industry in the United States) by consolidating a number of reforms into a single, albeit very lengthy, piece of legislation. Among the most significant of the fairly uncontroversial stipulations of the law are the following:

1. Insurance companies can no longer deny individuals coverage based on pre-existing conditions. In other words, medical expenses related to a diagnosis that occurs while a patient has one insurance provider must continue to be covered if the patient switches insurance providers. Insurance companies also cannot charge higher premiums to those with pre-existing conditions, who are likely to require more care and thus higher expenditures for insurance companies.
2. Young adults up to the age of 26 can remain covered under their parents'/guardians' health insurance plans.
3. Lifetime limits on coverage are no longer legal (in most cases). Insurance companies cannot set a limit on the amount they will pay toward the treatment of a specific medical condition during a patient's lifetime.

4. Insurance companies must provide a rationale for all increases in insurance premiums. In other words, insurance companies cannot raise their rates without justification for doing so, which they must make publicly available.
5. In many cases, preventive care is paid for entirely by insurance companies at no additional charge to patients. This type of care is believed to lower total health costs in the long run by providing for earlier diagnosis of treatable or preventable conditions. ("Affordable Care Act")

These regulations, while undeniably government restrictions of free-market enterprise, are not among the most controversial aspects of the ACA. Even the staunchest free-market conservatives have not publicly denounced, for example, the ban on denying coverage to those with preexisting conditions; doing so would likely come across as uncompassionate (as denying coverage to those with preexisting conditions amounts to penalizing individuals and families for circumstances beyond their control) and thus would be politically unwise.

The politically controversial elements of the ACA relate to its expansion of access to affordable health care and its mandates requiring that individuals obtain and employers provide such health care. These stipulations of the law grate against strict father morality in fairly obvious ways. For example, the ACA establishes a health insurance marketplace through which individuals who cannot obtain adequate or affordable health care through their employers can purchase insurance privately, with the government offering subsidies to those under a certain income threshold[12] to ensure that their health insurance premiums do not exceed 9.5% of their income ("Affordable Care Act"). Moreover, the law calls for the expansion of Medicaid[13] to

[12] Individuals and families making under 400% of the federal poverty level are guaranteed some amount of subsidy, with more being offered to those closer to the poverty line ("Affordable Care Act").

[13] A number of state governments (Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee,

provide free or very low-cost coverage for individuals and families with incomes under 138% of the federal poverty line. Both of these policies, which provide free or subsidized insurance for lower-income individuals and families, amount to rewarding people for their moral shortcomings in the eyes of strict father moralists. From the strict father viewpoint, those who have not obtained well-paying jobs either through their failure to acquire the necessary education or their unwillingness to work hard are receiving governmental "handouts," which are unfairly funded by hardworking taxpayers. These unwarranted rewards undermine the entire system of strict father morality, which rests upon the fundamental belief that human behavior must be regulated to prevent evil; if people are rewarded for their moral failings, what will encourage them to become morally upright?

The individual and employer mandates, regarded by strict father moralists as instances of governmental overreach into the private lives of citizens, further provoke the moral indignation of conservatives. Effective January 1, 2014, the individual mandate requires that all U.S. citizens obtain "minimal essential coverage"[14] or pay a penalty,[15] the rate of which increases annually. The employer mandate requires all companies with more than 100 full-time employees

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Texas, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, although Indiana, Tennessee, Utah, and Wyoming are currently reconsidering expansion) have chosen not to expand Medicaid, despite the fact that the expansion would have been funded largely by the federal government and come at an inconsequential cost to the state. The decision of these states not to expand Medicaid has created a coverage gap for many of their poorest residents; in these states, low-income individuals and families "may not have many options for health coverage" because they do not qualify for tax credits to help them purchase insurance through the marketplace, as the law was designed with the assumption that these low-income individuals and families would have been covered through the expansion of Medicaid (healthcare.gov). As healthcare.gov makes clear, "If you make less than about $11,670 a year as a single person or about $23,850 for a family of 4, you won't qualify for lower costs for private insurance based on your income. You may be eligible for Medicaid, even without the expansion, based on your state's existing rules. But if you aren't, you won't qualify for either of the affordability options under the health care law."

[14] "Minimal essential coverage" is defined differently for different age groups, but the general requirement is that an individual's health insurance must provide for long-term coverage of a wide-range of medical issues. For example, insurance that covers only dental expenses or family planning would not constitute minimal essential coverage.

[15] In 2014, the penalty for failure to obtain minimal essential coverage was the greater of $95 per adult, $47.50 per child, and $285 per household or one percent of a household's annual income. For 2015, those numbers have increased to $325 per adult, $162.50 per child, and $975 per household or 2% of a household's annual income; in 2016, the numbers will further increase to $695 per adult, $347.50 per child, and $975 per household or 2.5% of a household's annual income.

(defined as those who work 30 hours per week or more) to provide adequate, affordable[16] health insurance to 95% of employees by 2016[17] or face a penalty of $2,000 dollars per full-time employee (with the first thirty employees exempt from this fine). Different rules are in place for smaller businesses, with employer tax credits available for businesses with fewer than 25 full-time employees, but the ACA by and large requires employers to provide ACA-approved health insurance for full-time employees ("Affordable Care Act"). The very term *mandate* sheds light upon conservatives' distaste for these aspects of the ACA; in the eyes of conservatives, the law requires individuals and businesses to do something--purchase or provide health insurance--that, as adults, they should be allowed to choose whether or not to do. The federal government acts as a meddlesome parent, interfering in the lives of adult children who can decide for themselves what is best for them.

Nurturant parent moralists, on the other hand, regard the mandates as part of the price that individuals should willingly pay to be part of a healthy, well-organized society; to liberals, the mandates function like taxes[18] that promote the common good of the United States citizenry. As Lakoff states,

> From the progressive perspective, everyone's health and well-being depend on public provisions: clean air, clean water, a safe food supply, sewers, public support of children's athletic programs and parks, disease control, FDA food and drug monitoring, and even seat belts and traffic lights to prevent injury. The reason all these public provisions exist is that citizens in a democracy care about each other and think that a failure to prevent

[16] Again, "affordable" means that the insurance premiums do not exceed 9.5% of an employee's income.
[17] This stipulation of the law was originally intended to be enforced starting in 2014 but was delayed by President Obama. Republicans in Congress voted in November 2014 to sue Obama for executive overreach in his decision to delay the employer mandate, despite their staunch opposition to the mandate itself.
[18] The interpretation of the mandates as taxes figured prominently into the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the law, with Chief Justice John Roberts voting with the court's four liberal justices (Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan) against his fellow conservative justices (Justices Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito) in a 5-4 decision.

> unnecessary suffering is immoral. It follows that people's health and well-being depend in large measure on what the public provides. (*Little Blue Book* 20).

The privatization of health care strikes nurturant parent progressives as immoral because it allows profit-driven enterprises to restrict or otherwise meddle with individuals' universal right to life, the most fundamental of all human rights in the eyes of liberals (*Little Blue Book* 21). It seems natural and obvious to nurturant parent moralists that the federal government should ensure that all citizens have the unrestricted ability to enjoy this fundamental right, and progressives tend to support the ACA as an important step toward securing this right.

It is worth noting that, in the eyes of many progressives, the ACA is not an ideal solution to the problems facing the United States health care system. Many liberals have expressed dissatisfaction that the law does not go far enough toward securing the right to life (and thus health care) and argue that health care should be fully controlled by the federal government through a single payer system, as is the case in most other developed nations. While the ACA does take a significant step toward ensuring that all Americans have quality, affordable health coverage, it still represents a fundamentally market-based solution to the issue, as evinced by the development of the insurance "marketplace" through healthcare.gov, with private insurance companies primarily seeking to maximize their profits rather than to provide optimal care. In fact, the ACA closely resembles legislation passed by then-Governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney, a Republican who went on to challenge Barack Obama in the 2012 presidential election; moreover, the Massachusetts version of the law was initially proposed by the conservative Heritage Foundation as a means of increasing profits for insurance companies (*Little Blue Book* 7). The modeling of "Obamacare" upon the successful implementation of "Romneycare" in Massachusetts suggests that the ACA is not nearly as left-leaning as

conservatives have portrayed it to be. Nonetheless, as the foregoing analysis has demonstrated, liberals have important moral affinities with the goals of the ACA, just as a consistent moral framework underlies conservative antipathy toward Obamacare.

It may seem that conservatives have done an "about face," suddenly denouncing legislation that they once supported. However, it is important to remember that conservatives tend to regard state governments and the federal government very differently. State governments, in the eyes of strict father moralists, wield legitimate authority because they understand local needs. The federal government, on the other hand, is seen as distant and meddlesome, so its initiatives are met with suspicion by strict father moralists. This suspicion is particularly intense when the initiatives in question are championed by members of the opposing political party, whose "incorrect" moral system is considered to be fundamentally evil for the threat it poses to the "correct" moral system.

Of course, the actual political rhetoric surrounding the ACA employs subtler appeals to metaphorical moral reasoning than the preceding analysis might suggest. A 2012 publication by *The New England Journal of Medicine* offers a strong example of the important, and often subtly conveyed, differences between liberal and conservative thinking concerning health care. Published less than a month before the 2012 presidential election, the article features the health care platforms of Democratic candidate Barack Obama and Republican candidate Mitt Romney laid out side-by-side. Both platforms reveal the types of metaphorical moral reasoning that pervade each political party, providing strong examples of a Lakoffian political-moral framework.

Obama's piece, entitled "Securing the Future of American Health Care," discusses the issue of health care in predominantly human terms, consistent with a liberal moral system. The

president employs statistics to stress the positive human impacts of the ACA: 105 million Americans were freed from the lifetime limits previously placed on their health care coverage by insurance companies (1378); 13 million people collectively received over $1 billion in tax rebates (1378); 3 million young adults qualified for coverage on their parents' health care plans through the age of 26 (1379); 17 million children diagnosed with "pre-existing conditions" no longer faced the threat of being denied insurance (1379); 30 million uninsured Americans were finally able to obtain affordable health plans (1379). Implied by these statistics is the idea that the federal government has a responsibility to *nurture* its citizens--to provide for basic care-- by assuring the provision of affordable health insurance. Obama concludes by explicitly stating this underlying progressive assumption: "Although the debate over Obamacare has been divisive, I signed the legislation not because it was good politics, but because it was good for the country. It enshrines a core principle that makes us who we are as Americans: that everybody should have some basic security when it comes to their health care" (1380). This "principle," however, does not apply to *Americans*, as Obama suggests; it applies to *liberals*, in accordance with nurturant parent morality. Conservatives, following strict father morality, believe that individuals should be responsible for ensuring their own basic security.[19]

In addition to emphasizing the progressive belief that the federal government should care for its citizens, Obama also focuses on cooperation as a requirement for meaningful reform, another important tenet of nurturant parent morality. He credits a "broad coalition of doctors, nurses, hospitals, businesses, AARP, and patients" with helping him to sign the ACA into law (1378). Furthermore, he describes the task of implementing and improving the law as a

[19] Debates surrounding the Second Amendment tend to break down along similar ideological lines: liberals believe the federal government should take measures (such as gun control) to ensure the basic security of citizens, while conservatives believe that citizens should ensure their own security (by protecting themselves through their Constitutional right to bear arms).

cooperative effort that will require collaboration among various stakeholders, frequently employing plural pronouns such as "we" and "our" to emphasize the cooperative nature of policy implementation. The notion that *all* stakeholders have a right to question and suggest improvements upon government policy squares with the nurturant parent model of raising children, in which parental authority is earned rather than assumed and negotiated rather than asserted.

Romney's column, entitled "Replacing Obamacare with Real Health Care Reform," discusses the ACA--which Romney refers to exclusively as "Obamacare"--primarily in economic terms consistent with strict father morality. Romney's formula for health care reform includes promoting "competition among providers and choice among consumers," ending "tax discrimination," "facilitating purchasing pools," and "opening up an interstate market" (1379). These proposed solutions typify the conservative belief that the federal government creates, rather than solves, problems by hindering free-market capitalism and thus the moral pursuit of financial self-interest. According to Romney, the free market "has always been the formula for better quality at lower cost, and it can succeed in health care as well"[20] (1379). Romney accordingly refers to "incentives" that would be used to encourage insurance providers to offer quality, affordable plans as well as incentives that would encourage "consumers" to purchase health insurance. Significantly, these incentives do not constitute mandates; under Romney's plan, instead of being forced to buy insurance, people would choose to do so because of the associated rewards. The provision of such rewards corresponds to the notion, central to strict

[20] Significantly, the ACA in large part represents a free-market solution to health care by creating an insurance marketplace through which individuals "shop for" and choose their health plans. Romney's emphasis on free-market enterprise thus may misrepresent what I take to be his actual complaint: the *mandate* that individuals purchase health insurance and that employers provide it under certain circumstances.

father morality, that punishments and rewards are the most effective means of regulating human behavior.

Romney's characterization of the ACA as a "2700-page federal takeover" of the health care industry further squares with strict father notions concerning the proper role of the federal government (1379). According to Romney, the law exposes a federal government that has overstepped its bounds by interfering in the lives of its adult citizens and mandating that they obtain health insurance. Through enacting the ACA, the government--metonymically represented through the president--proves itself to be out of touch with local needs and concerns, like an overweening father meddling in the lives of his grown children. Romney repeatedly refers to the "bureaucrats" responsible for creating and enacting the law to highlight this sense of disconnect between the goals of the federal government and the needs of the American citizenry. He accordingly vows to "repeal Obamacare and replace it--not with another massive federal bill that purports to solve all our problems from Washington, but with common-sense, patient-centered reforms suited to the challenges we face" (1378). Federalized solutions from Washington, Romney implies, lack the simple common sense that drives local decision-making; to put the matter in explicitly Lakoffian terms, a distant father (the federal government) cannot know what is best for his adult children (citizens).

Romney's consistent referral to the ACA as "Obamacare" frames the debate in terms favorable to his conservative position. By associating the law with the president, Romney and fellow conservatives align the ACA with many of the charges brought against Obama by conservatives: socialism, communism, and overall anti-Americanism.[21] Obama makes an effort

[21] A 2010 Harris poll indicated that 67% of Republicans and 40% of the general population believed Obama to be a socialist, 57% of Republicans and 32% of the general population believed him to be a Muslim, and 45% of Republicans and 25% of the general population believed him not to be a natural born US citizen (Schlesinger).

to reclaim this terminology for his own position: "Supporters and detractors alike refer to the law as Obamacare. I don't mind, because I do care. And because of Obamacare we're moving forward toward a health care system that broadly provides health security" ("Health Care Reform" 1378). By embracing a conservative frame, however, instead of reframing the issue in new terms that make his values explicit, Obama fails to reverse the damage done to his signature piece of legislation and in fact reinforces the conservative neural pathways associated with this frame. As I will later show in more detail, Obama plays the game on conservative terms, and he loses.

In addition to branding the ACA as "Obamacare" in order to explicitly associate it with the president, conservatives have succeeded in framing the fundamental metaphor underlying the national conception of health care in a manner sympathetic to strict father morality. Lakoff argues that the metaphorical conception of health care as a product, as opposed to a fundamental human right, immediately casts the debate surrounding health care reform in terms favorable to a conservative position. If health care is a product instead of a right, Lakoff writes, then "providing health care is . . . not a moral concern; it is an economic matter. The word *affordable* fits the economic frame, as do words like *market*, *purchase*, and *choice*" (*Little Blue Book* 5). The metaphor of health care as a product also makes it difficult for proponents of the ACA to justify the individual mandate; why should the government force citizens to purchase a product? We are not forced to purchase other products, such as vegetables, that promote individual health. What makes health care different?[22] The framing of the ACA in market-based terms forces

[22] A lot, in fact, makes health care different from other "products" that individuals choose whether or not to purchase. For example, when individuals without health insurance visit an emergency room and incur massive medical bills, everyone else ends up paying for the cost of the uninsured individual's health care through higher medical bills. In other words, hospitals charge more than they would otherwise have to if everyone had health insurance to make sure that they do not experience a shortfall in revenue if a patient is unable to pay his/her medical bills.

proponents to grapple with these sorts of questions, which, Lakoff suggests, could have been sidestepped altogether if the law's proponents had chosen a different metaphorical frame.

With the ACA's establishment of the health care-as-product metaphor, conservatives faced minimal difficulty in framing "Obamacare" as a "federal takeover" of individual rights (the right to choose whether or not to buy health insurance) and thus a threat to American freedoms and liberties (*Little Blue Book* 7). The success of this framing has been well-established through polls, with a Bloomberg poll conducted following the first open enrollment period through healthcare.gov in 2014 revealing that most Americans oppose "Obamacare" despite largely supporting the specific provisions of the law (Steinhauser). In other words, most Americans claim that they dislike "Obamacare," but when specifically asked whether they support or oppose the various components of the law--divorced from the larger frame of "Obamacare"--an overwhelming majority say that they *do* like the content of the law. This incongruity may stem partly from ignorance--many (or perhaps most) people may have heard of "Obamacare" but may not know what the law actually contains--but it certainly attests to the successful framing efforts undertaken by conservatives.

A segment entitled "Six of One" that aired on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* in October 2013 further highlights both the ignorance of many Americans concerning the ACA and the success of conservative framing in influencing people to adopt a stance of opposition toward Obamacare. In "Six of One," a camera crew interviews individuals on Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, asking people whether they support the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare. As Jimmy Kimmel notes in his introduction to the segment, "Obamacare is just a nickname for the Affordable Care Act. They're the same thing. But, lo and behold, we found people who did not know that, and that didn't stop them from weighing in on it" (Kimmel). While obviously edited to promote a

comedic effect, the segment shows a handful of people explaining why they support the Affordable Care Act and oppose Obamacare. One man claims that the Affordable Care Act is more affordable than Obamacare; another describes Obamacare as un-American and states that the Affordable Care Act is "more American because it allows people to make their own choices" (Kimmel). A woman who claims to support the Affordable Care Act states, "I just don't agree with the whole Obamacare . . . policy thing that's going on. I just don't agree with it" (Kimmel). Although "Six of One" certainly does not provide a scientific sampling of American public opinion, the clip does suggest that people who are otherwise uninformed about the ACA have internalized the conservative rhetoric surrounding the law.

The *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* segment offers anecdotal evidence for the success of "top-down" conservative efforts to frame the debate surrounding the ACA. By dubbing the law "Obamacare" and casting it as a federal "takeover" of the health care system, conservative politicians and the organizations that support them have activated conservative modes of thought concerning health care reform in the American public. Following strict father morality, these conservative frames portray "Obamacare" as a meddlesome government mandate that unjustly forces employers to provide and people to obtain a product while unfairly rewarding those who are immoral by subsidizing their health insurance and giving them what they have not earned. The "Obamacare" frame negates and excludes potential liberal frames that cast health care as a fundamental human right that a nurturant federal government has a moral obligation to provide for its citizens. While such framing may have a minimal effect on individuals who are fully liberal or fully conservative in their political thought, the consequences for biconceptual thinkers can be significant: conservative modes of thought are activated *at the expense* of liberal modes of

thought. Biconceptual thinkers thus come to regard the issue of health care in predominantly conservative terms.

I will now turn to a second case study--the debate surrounding the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in public education--that builds upon my analysis of the ACA/Obamacare to demonstrate how strict father and nurturant parent morality account for the divergent attitudes that conservatives and liberals adopt toward public education in general and educational standards in particular. As with the debate over the ACA/Obamacare, the debate over Common Core exhibits a fundamental division along ideological lines, with conservatives successfully dominating the framing--and thus the public discourse--surrounding the issue. However, the grassroots movement against Common Core also differs from the backlash against Obamacare in that the issue has been framed from the "bottom up" as opposed to the "top down": while conservative politicians framed "Obamacare" and saw their rhetoric internalized by general public, groups of private citizens (as well as some conservative organizations) have banded together to frame Common Core--sometimes called "Obamacore"--in a manner that has been adopted by politicians. The policy consequences of this "bottom-up" framing, as the next chapter will show, have been significant.

CHAPTER 4: FROM COMMON CORE TO "OBAMACORE"

As the title of this chapter might suggest, an understanding of the political controversy surrounding the Common Core State Standards depends upon an understanding of the debate over the Affordable Care Act/Obamacare. The two issues are related morally: similar values concerning health care and education tend to fit under strict father and nurturant parent metaphorical frameworks, with liberals and conservatives holding coherent worldviews that account for their beliefs toward both issues. The issues of health care and education reform are also related politically; as I will show, the debate over the ACA/Obamacare has created the exigence for the debate surrounding Common Core. However, whereas the political backlash against "Obamacare" came "top-down" from the successful efforts of politicians and organizations to frame the ACA as a federal takeover of the health care system, the backlash against "Obamacore" grew from the ground up, as grassroots movements worked to reframe Common Core as a federal takeover of the public education system. Just as a huge portion of the general public has internalized the rhetoric of "Obamacare," conservative politicians have taken up the rhetoric of "Obamacore," showing that framing can work bidirectionally to influence both public perception from the top down and public policy from the bottom up.

This chapter examines the reframing of Common Core from an educational initiative that enjoyed bipartisan support to one met with intense suspicion from strict father moralists. I will trace the history of the accountability movement in public education, with Common Core serving as the latest face of that movement. Subsequently, I will employ Lakoffian theory to explore the backlash against Common Core in the state of Tennessee. Tennessee provides an important case study as a conservative state that began implementation of the standards before any significant backlash had set in. The significant gains in student scores on national examinations following

state adoption of the standards in 2010 speak to the unequivocal success of Common Core in improving student outcomes in Tennessee (Layton). Nonetheless, starting in late 2012 and early 2013, Tennessee conservatives began organizing in a grassroots capacity to voice their opposition to the Common Core, notably through the Facebook page "Stop Common Core in Tennessee."[23] Much of the debate surrounding Common Core has obscured where the standards come from and what they actually say. This chapter aims to clarify the history and content of Common Core before showing how conservatives have successfully framed the debate surrounding Common Core in terms favorable to strict father morality.

State standards for education are neither new nor generally associated with the political left. Sandy Kress, Stephanie Zechmann and J. Matthew Schmitten trace the development of what they term the "consequentialist accountability" movement in education to the 1990s, when forty states adopted some notion of outcomes-based accountability into their educational policies (186). Such policies shared three defining characteristics: "(1) explicit, publicized standards; (2) regular testing against those standards; and (3) consequences linked to performance" (Kress 185-6). With accountability measures in place in most states by the year 2000, the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) under the George W. Bush administration represented the outgrowth of an already well-established trend toward standards-based accountability measured by high-stakes tests. NCLB was unique, however, in its *requirement* that states adopt consequentialist accountability measures through high-stakes testing in order to receive federal funding for education, thereby marking the first major intervention of the federal government

[23] The demonstrable improvement in student outcomes under Common Core may seem to undermine conservative attacks against the standards, but this chapter will argue that conservatives do not value the types of gains that have been observed. For example, strict father moralists do not value critical thinking because it often undermines authority. They likewise do not value attention to subtlety and nuance because they see the world as fundamentally divided between good and evil. Such black-and-white thinking is incompatible with many of the aims of both education in general and Common Core in particular, as this chapter will show.

into state education policy (Kress 186). Emphasizing the groundbreaking nature of this legislation, Kress et al. write, "The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 marked a historic shift in federal education policy. Gone were the days of limited or no federal involvement in education" (214). Thus, under NCLB, the federal government exercised an unprecedented degree of control over state education policy, although it was left up to the states to set standards and oversee their assessment.

The major problem with such a model is obvious: significant variation between standards in different states can make it nearly impossible to compare educational progress in different geographical areas. For example, as Paul Peterson points out in his analysis of the shortcomings of NCLB, 43 percent of Massachusetts schools in 2007 failed to make "adequate yearly progress" under NCLB, while only 7 percent of Tennessee schools failed at this measure, even though Tennessee students regularly receive among the lowest scores in the nation on nationally-administered exams. "Why? Because Tennessee has one of the lowest operational definitions of proficiency in the country" (Peterson 49). Tennessee accordingly received a grade of "F" for the category of "Truth in Advertising" on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Education Report Card because so many students who scored at or above the proficient level on state math and reading assessments did not score nearly as well on national assessments (Tennessee Department of Education 2). Compounding this problem, under NCLB states actually faced a disincentive against developing high standards because such standards, as evinced by the case of Massachusetts above, lead to more schools being deemed "failing" and thus receiving less federal funding (Kress 218).

The Common Core State Standards address the aforementioned shortcomings of state-specific standards under NCLB by providing a unified set of educational standards that transcend

state boundaries. Launched in 2008 (during the end of the Bush administration) by the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, the Common Core represent a state-led push to raise student achievement and college and career readiness (Tennessee Department of Education 2). According to the Tennessee Department of Education, "Compared to current standards, [the Common Core] focus on deeper mastery of less content each year. Rather than a 'mile-wide, inch-deep' curriculum, leading to superficial coverage of topics, the Common Core State Standards focus on the core skills required for success in college and career" (Tennessee Department of Education 4). Emphasizing basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics as well as critical thinking and problem-solving, the Common Core demand significantly more of students than had previous standards in many states.

The basic premise behind Common Core is that geography should not limit a student's opportunity to acquire important life skills. Mastery of these skills and their associated habits of mind matters far more than the specific content covered in classrooms. For example, the Common Core maintain that fourth grade students in Massachusetts and Tennessee should be able to read, write, think, and solve problems at the same level, but they need not read the same texts, write about the same topics, etc. The following English and Language Arts Standards illustrate the emphasis on what students can *do* rather than what content they know:

- 4th Grade Reading: Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.
- 9th and 10th Grade Writing: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under

investigation. (National Governors Association)

The verbs utilized throughout the text of the Common Core call attention to this focus on *doing* rather than *knowing*. Students should be able to "determine," "conduct," and "synthesize"; they need not know specific content in order to be able to perform these tasks.

Importantly, there is no mention within the English and Language Arts portion of the Common Core Standards of *which* texts the students should be reading or *which* questions they should be researching. Decisions concerning those matters are left up to local districts, principals, and teachers. As a fact sheet published by the Tennessee Department of Education states: "Standards define learning expectations. Standards do not dictate curriculum (e.g., textbooks and reading lists) or prescribe a method of instruction. . . . Typically, standards decisions are made at the state level, curriculum decisions are made by local districts, and instructional decisions are made by local teachers and principals" (1). Most significant to this study is the notion that "standards do not dictate curriculum or prescribe a method of instruction" (1). These decisions continue to be made at the local level, while decisions concerning which standards to implement are made by state governments as opposed to the federal government. Moreover, in addition to being crafted by state governors and school officers and implemented by state governments, the final version of the Common Core incorporates feedback from "content experts" from state Departments of Education as well as teachers and parents across the country, further emphasizing the role of local decision-making in the development and implementation of Common Core (Tennessee Department of Education 4).

Unlike state governments, the federal government has no role in determining *which* educational standards are to be adopted by the states, although, as seen with NCLB, it can declare *that* the states must adopt standards. Under the Obama administration, the Race to the

Top initiative, passed as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, incentivized the adoption of common standards across the states. The federal government allocated Race to the Top funding to the states based on a point system, and states earned points toward their applications by demonstrating "commitment to and progress toward adopting a common set of K-12 standards" in advance of an August 2010 deadline (U.S. Department of Education 17). Race to the Top did "not endorse any particular . . . set of standards," although Common Core became the default set of standards, given that no other set of common standards existed at the time Race to the Top was implemented (U.S. Department of Education 20). Nonetheless, the Obama administration never mandated that states adopt Common Core; state governments voted concerning whether or not to enact the standards.

To summarize and reiterate, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, *not* Common Core, dictated that all states had to adopt educational standards as well as methods for evaluating student achievement under those standards; Common Core simply provides states with a unified set of education standards that they may choose to adopt. Common Core does not dictate curriculum, although it does offer lists of suggested texts for interested teachers and districts. Curricular decisions are made by local school districts, and teachers are still responsible for planning their own lessons. While President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have voiced their support for Common Core, the federal government has not required states to adopt Common Core, although it did incentivize the implementation of *some* set of common standards by awarding points for doing so to states competing for Race to the Top funding. Yet states could still receive Race to the Top funding without adopting common standards, and four states (Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia) initially chose not to participate (or not to

participate fully) in Common Core.[24]

Tennessee adopted the Common Core in July of 2010 (Tennessee Department of Education). Before the implementation of Common Core, Tennessee had among the lowest standards for public education in the US. In fact, as of 2011, the ACT determined that only 15% of Tennessee high school graduates were prepared for college and not in need of remedial work (ACT Profile Report). Tennessee has gradually phased in the Common Core over the past several years, with the standards fully implemented during the 2013-2014 school year (Tennessee Department of Education). While it is too soon to determine the statewide impact of Common Core, the *Washington Post* reports that Tennessee exhibited massive gains on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams in math and reading, suggesting that recent reforms have already begun to have a positive effect on student learning, at least as measured by national standardized exams (Layton). In other words, the implementation of Common Core in Tennessee correlates with significant improvement in national test scores in both math and reading.

In principle, it would appear that rigorous educational standards with promising preliminary results should garner bipartisan support. Indeed, the Common Core did initially enjoy such support, with 46 states adopting the standards in 2009 and 2010 (Tennessee Department of Education 5). However, this bipartisan support began eroding in 2012, when various Tea Party activists and conservative groups began speaking out against what they now termed "Obamacore." The Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina state legislatures responded to this conservative backlash by repealing Common Core, with the Missouri, North Carolina, and Louisiana legislatures currently debating a similar course of action.

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[24] Following initial adoption (and, in some cases, extensive preparation for implementation) of the standards, Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina have repealed Common Core, with Missouri, North Carolina, and Louisiana considering similar action.

This sudden shift in public sentiment toward Common Core may seem odd given the initial widespread--and bipartisan--support enjoyed by the standards, but the onset of conservative backlash against Common Core coincides closely with two related events in national politics: the 2012 reelection of Barack Obama to a second term as president and the heightened media coverage--brought on by the election--of the increasingly bitter debate surrounding the ACA/Obamacare. A nasty campaign season had cast the president and his signature piece of legislation in a very unfavorable light with conservative audiences. As awareness of and rhetoric about the moral evils (from a strict father perspective) of Obamacare spread, so did the idea that the president's immoral overreach into the lives of citizens, like an abusive father meddling in the lives of his adult children, extended into various realms of American life, including public education.

This concern about government overreach into public education, however, has remained relatively confined to members of the Tea Party movement. Many mainstream Republicans, and notably Jeb Bush, former Republican governor of Florida and likely 2016 presidential candidate, have been outspoken in their support of the standards. Businesses also generally support Common Core, which was designed with the goal of increasing the productivity and skillfulness of the workforce. Common Core, like the ACA, does not represent a radical, left-wing utopian dream; both policies were designed to promote capitalism. Nonetheless, Tea Party suspicion toward the Democratic Party in general and Obama in particular has come to define the political discourse surrounding Common Core.[25]

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[25] We might question how Obama's racial identity factors into Tea Party distrust of the president. If conservatives tend to see any Democratic president as a strict father who has abused his authority by meddling in the lives of his adult children (citizens), it is not hard to imagine that their feelings of resentment would increase if that president were also to be regarded as "foreign/other." To put it another way, Tea Party conservatives may see Obama as doubly illegitimate, due both to his immoral overreach into the private lives of citizens as a Democrat and to his lack of authority to hold the office of President of the United States as a "foreigner."

The following internet meme provides one example of how Common Core became linked with both Obamacare and President Obama himself in the aftermath of the 2012 election.

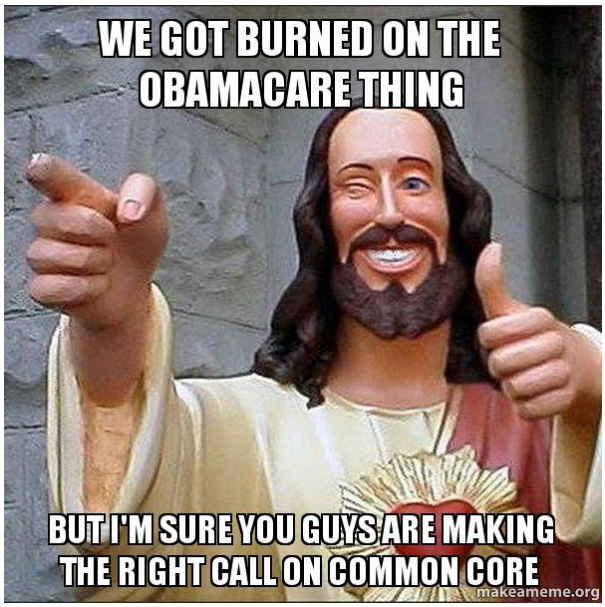

Figure 1. Jesus Opposes Obamacare

This meme aims to undermine the credibility of Common Core proponents, and liberals more broadly, by linking Common Core to Obamacare, the adoption and implementation of which the creator of the meme assumes to be an obvious and unmitigated disaster. The meme's message is simple: anyone foolish enough to support Obamacare cannot be trusted to make educational policy (or, likely, policy in general). Even Jesus agrees with this position; the facial expression and hand gestures of the Jesus figure depicted by the meme evince patent mockery of Obamacare/Common Core supporters. Significantly, the meme assumes that Obamacare and Common Core supporters come from the same group; in this case, that group is the Democratic Party or progressives more broadly. The meme also assumes that Obamacare's opponents--those

who, according to the meme, correctly appreciate the extent to which we all "got burned on the Obamacare thing"--naturally oppose Common Core. These assumptions, when examined from a Lakoffian perspective, generally hold up to scrutiny: nurturant parent moralists tend to support both the ACA and Common Core, while strict father moralists oppose both "Obamacare" and "Obamacore."

When considering conservative politics and moral values, it is important to keep in mind that a fundamental tenet of strict father morality regards the defense of the moral system itself. As Lakoff states, "The very first category of conservative moral action includes acts of promoting and defending conservative morality" (*Moral Politics* 228). I have already shown how Obamacare, despite being a fundamentally market-based (and, thus, conservative-friendly) approach to health care reform, represents an attack upon strict father morality through its mandates that individuals obtain and employers provide health insurance, as well as its government subsidies and efforts at expanding Medicaid, which allow for low-income Americans to have access to goods and services (health care) that they cannot pay for on their own and thus have not earned. Forcing individuals and companies to obtain and provide a good--because the ACA conceives of health care under the conservative "health care is a product" metaphor--interferes with their ability to pursue their own moral self-interest and hence, under the strict father system of morality, is immoral. Likewise, giving money and goods to those who have not earned them is immoral, because it interferes with the system of just rewards and punishments that is necessary to regulate human behavior. Conceiving of the "nation as a family," conservatives regard the federal government as a father who has inappropriately--and immorally--meddled in the lives of his adult children (citizens). They must therefore defend their moral system against this attack through fierce opposition to Obamacare.

The grouping together of attitudes toward health care and education under coherent moral frameworks, with liberals tending to support both the ACA and Common Core under nurturant parent morality and conservatives tending to oppose both Obamacare and "Obamacore" under strict father morality, helps to explain the exigence for the conservative movement against Common Core. Given that the conservative moral system is under attack by Obamacare and the president from whom its name derives, other federal policies have become increasingly suspect in the eyes of strict father moralists. With conservatives in defense-mode, policies that once appeared fairly innocuous now reveal themselves as potential threats to the strict father moral system. Common Core stands out as one of these policies; as it became increasingly clear to conservatives, through the implementation of Obamacare and the reelection of the president who championed it, that their moral system was under attack, Common Core became "Obamacore." The conservative backlash against Obamacare thus set the ideological stage for the backlash against Common Core.

My explanation of the exigence driving conservative backlash against Common Core is not meant to negate or gloss over the more substantive complaints conservatives have leveled against the standards. In *Moral Politics*, Lakoff demonstrates that conservative and liberal attitudes toward education in general and educational standards in particular are vastly different. Having seen their moral system under attack by "feminism, the gay rights movement, the ecological movement, the sexual revolution, multiculturalism, and many more manifestations of Nurturant Parent morality," conservatives worry that the values of these movements have infiltrated public schools (*Moral Politics* 229). They believe that the values of these and other progressive movements promote social ills by undermining strict father morality, the moral system upon which they believe the United States and the entirety of Western civilization is

based (*Moral Politics* 229). Exacerbating the problem, these progressive values are being taught by progressive *teachers*; strict father moralists do not tend to choose education--with its limitations on the pursuit of financial self-interest--as a profession, whereas nurturant parent moralists much more often choose professions, such as teaching, that place them in a position to nurture others (*Moral Politics* 232). Many conservatives respond to this problem by sending their children to private schools or homeschooling[26] their children, and they promote school choice and educational voucher systems as means of enabling themselves to defend their children against the infiltration of nurturant parent morality (*Moral Politics* 232). They want their children to be "educated" in a manner that upholds and promotes strict father morality: self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority.

Liberals, on the other hand, believe that education should be a fundamentally nurturant undertaking, with the social movements despised by conservatives regarded as great advances in American society by nurturant parent moralists. They regard American history as focused less on heritage than on progress:

> Much of the history of progress in America is the history of what has been made possible through the progressive extension of nurturant morality: progress in equal treatment, progress in opportunities for education and other forms of self-development, progress in health care, progress in humane working conditions, progress in the development of knowledge, and so on. There is a dark side of American history from this perspective as well, and it too must be told: the mass murder of Native Americans and the near extinction of their culture, slavery, the brutalization of factory workers, and the discrimination against women, nonwhites, Jews, immigrants, and gays. (*Moral Politics*

[26] Indeed, many Common Core opponents are calling on parents to pull their children out of public schools immediately ("Stop Common Core").

231-2)

For nurturant parent moralists, the history of progress and public education go hand-in-hand; the very *goal* of public education is the development of individual knowledge in the service of continued social progress. Conservatives, however, see this so-called "progress" as just the opposite: "immoral, backward steps" away from moral truth and our moral heritage (*Moral Politics* 232).

These starkly different beliefs about the purpose and goals of education unsurprisingly lead to disagreements about educational standards. Both conservatives and liberals believe in standards, but they disagree vehemently about what those standards should entail. Conservatives, as I will demonstrate in detail below, argue for educational standards that promote strict father morality. They believe that the standards of strict father morality, applied to public schools, will overcome the social problems that run rampant in public schools due to "permissive parenting and liberal social policies" (*Moral Politics* 233). The conservative view of standards requires holding individual students accountable for their own success or failure--defined in terms of adherence (or lack thereof) to strict father morality--through a system of rewards and punishments. Liberals, on the other hand, argue for nurturant educational standards that promote "honest inquiry" and an appreciation for context; instead of requiring students to memorize "facts," nurturant parent moralists are more interested in educational standards that encourage students to grapple with how those facts fit into a broader social, historical, and educational context (*Moral Politics* 235-6). Common Core, as my previous discussion of the standards has shown, promotes the honest inquiry and attention to context that liberals prize in educational standards through its focus on critical thinking and problem-solving.

However, most conservative complaints against Common Core do not directly attack the

content of the standards. Lakoff's discussion of conservative attitudes toward national education standards sheds some light on what might perhaps be the main reason conservatives oppose Common Core: "Because conservatives have been most effective in changing education at the local level, the elimination of national standards and the leaving of content to local school boards would make it much easier for conservatives to change the curricula in the direction of conservative morality and politics" (*Moral Politics* 230). From this perspective, it makes sense for conservatives to oppose educational standards that are "common" across the states, even if the standards are not actually national or federally-mandated standards. Common Core does in fact leave all curricular decision-making under local control, but the requirement that such local decisions must accord with and promote a broader set of "common" standards makes it more difficult for strict father morality to be upheld in public schools; strict father morality depends upon the authority of select individuals instead of broader consensus.

The Facebook group "Stop Common Core in Tennessee" provides many examples of how conservatives have rallied together in a predominantly grassroots capacity to oppose Common Core. The group first appeared on Facebook on January 21, 2013, well after the state's July 2010 adoption of the standards. Boasting nearly 6,7000 "likes" as of April 2015, the page's most practical function is to bring together Common Core opponents for the purposes of organizing rallies and signing petitions; however, the page also provides a forum for opponents to publicly defend strict father morality, with individuals posting images, articles, and video clips from a variety of online sources that uphold conservative attitudes toward education ("Stop Common Core"). Often, these posts are only tangentially related to Common Core itself (e.g., a public letter from a teacher bemoans the way her particular school's administration has enacted a policy and mentions the phrase "Common Core"), but in general, three types of complaints

appear repeatedly on the Facebook page. Conservatives claim that Common Core: (1) is liberal indoctrination propagated by the federal government, (2) will lead to the "dumbing down" of America, and (3) requires assessments which amount to data-mining our nation's children. An analysis of each of these claims from a Lakoffian perspective shows that conservative opposition to Common Core, despite frequently betraying a misrepresentation of what the standards actually say and aim to do, stems from a strict father moral framework.

The first complaint, that Common Core amounts to liberal indoctrination propagated by the federal government, surfaces repeatedly on the "Stop Common Core in Tennessee" Facebook site. For example, the following figure depicts the longtime cover image for the page:

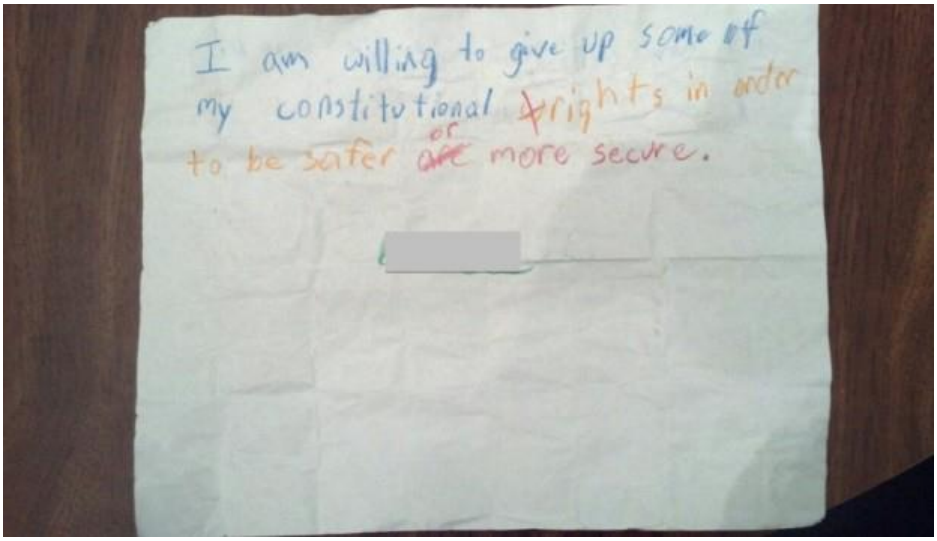

Figure 2. "Liberal Indoctrination" of Children

The text reads "I am willing to give up some of my constitutional (w)rights in order to be safer (are) or more secure" [sic], etched with crayon in the shaky scrawl of a child on a piece of crumpled computer paper ("Stop Common Core"). Given the conservative focus on heritage, frequently expressed through appeals to the Constitution, as opposed to social progress, this

image would likely startle conservative parents for its implied attack on the Second Amendment and other constitutionally guaranteed rights.[27] The image also suggests that teachers of young children have free rein to indoctrinate rather than educate under Common Core; because any viewpoint that contradicts strict father morality is deemed inherently immoral, "indoctrination" becomes the appropriate word to describe the act of turning children away from the correct moral system. The placement of the image as the Facebook page's longtime cover photo implies that it represents the most significant problem with Common Core: the standards undermine the lessons conservative parents are teaching their children at home by filling their heads with liberal propaganda.[28]

The following internet meme visually depicts conservative fears about Common Core's efforts at "liberal indoctrination":

Figure 3. Children of the Common Core

Punning on the title of the Stephen King novel-turned-film *Children of the Corn*, this image depicts the nightmarish "results" of Common Core. The hyper-focused eyes and zombie-like

[27] It is important to keep in mind that, according to Lakoff, conservatives value "facts" and place far less value on the broader context of those facts. Thus, the letter of the "right to bear arms" matters far more to strict father moralists than the historical context of that amendment and its association with the need for militias.

[28] The image may also strike a strange note with those familiar with the psychology of young children. It seems implausible that a small child would have written this statement of his/her own volition, an observation that lends itself to two disturbing possibilities: either a teacher coerced (or at least strongly nudged) a child into writing the statement at school, or an opponent of Common Core coerced a child into creating the document as propaganda. Alternately, but no less disturbing, the document could be a forgery created by an adult for the purposes of propaganda.

appearance of the children in the photograph suggest a trancelike state; the children's indoctrination is so complete that they can no longer function as human beings. Despite its obvious exaggeration of the effects of Common Core, this meme nonetheless plays into a powerful fear of conservative parents: the fear that their children could be irrevocably turned away from the only correct moral system, strict father morality. Indoctrination, the image implies, must be forcefully banished from public education.

This distinction between indoctrination and education[29] also appears in far starker terms on the "Stop Common Core in Tennessee" Facebook page. A *Fox News* article posted on the page explicitly sounds the alarm about the "liberal indoctrination" resulting from schools' implementation of the standards. An excerpt from the article reads:

> Parents should insist on reviewing their children's school assignments," said Glyn Wright, executive director of the Eagle Forum, a think tank that opposes implementation of Common Core. "Many parents will be shocked to find that some 'Common Core-approved' curriculum is *full of inappropriate left-wing notions, disinformation, and fails to teach the truth of American exceptionalism and opportunity*. We are doing a terrible disservice to this generation and the next if we only present them with one side of the argument and bombard them with *ideas contrary to the American ideal*. In doing so, we allow our children to be *indoctrinated instead of educated*. (Chiaramonte, italics mine)

Wright erroneously attributes local curricular decisions to Common Core, a misunderstanding that pervades much of the conservative rhetoric surrounding the standards, but her attack on Common Core epitomizes strict father attitudes toward public education. She warns parents that

[29] Liberals may be puzzled by the conservative characterization of "indoctrination," because nurturant parent morality's focus upon honest inquiry is meant to preclude such indoctrination. However, it is again important to keep in mind that for strict father morality to be upheld, it must be regarded as the *only correct* moral system. Any teachings that undermine strict father morality thus amount to lies and "indoctrination."

their children will be inundated with left-wing ideas that are biased, factually false, and un-American, taking it as a given that educating our youth and promoting patriotism go hand in hand and that anything else amounts to indoctrination. As with the child's profession of willingness to forego constitutional rights, the concern for conservatives is that "traditional American values" are under attack by a liberal curriculum that devalues the Constitution and the central myths of American culture (e.g., American exceptionalism, the land of opportunity, etc.). In other words, heritage is being lost to morally bankrupt "progress."

Another article posted to the "Stop Common Core in Tennessee" Facebook site from *The Blaze*, a libertarian news source, provides specific content to complement statements like Wright's. Titled "NY's Common Core-Aligned Lessons Use Scientology Videos to Teach Students They Have Right to Food, Housing, Clothing, Medicine, Even a Job," the article describes a "concerned" father who was "disturbed" to learn that his daughter was studying the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights in fifth grade. The father claims that his daughter spent eight weeks studying the UN Declaration--a document that could be said to represent "progress"--in school and only three weeks studying the U.S. Constitution--a document that, to conservatives, represents heritage. Moreover, his daughter reportedly watched a series of videos in class that had been compiled by the Church of Scientology, notable (or perhaps notorious) champions of the UN Declaration (Opelka). Source author Mike Opelka offers very little commentary, seeming to let the story speak for itself. Implied is the notion that Common Core has turned public schools into a breeding ground for anti-American, anti-Christian propaganda.

Significantly, both the *Fox News* and *Blaze* articles refer to the lessons they decry as "Common Core-approved" or "Common Core-aligned." Given that, as I have shown above, the

Common Core dictates standards and not curricula, these particular grievances have very little to do with the standards themselves and much more to do with local decisions being made by teachers, school administrators, and districts. Most likely, these same lessons would have been "approved" by or "aligned" with the previous state standards that had been in place before the implementation of Common Core. This reality underscores Lakoff's claim that, for liberals, the issue of educational standards often amounts to a "red herring": "Everyone sets standards. The question is what standards to have, what should be done in the classroom to meet them, and what education is about" (*Moral Politics* 235). The issue, in other words, is less about Common Core than about what occurs in classrooms and what the overall aims of education should be. Liberals and conservatives, as I have shown, have irreconcilable disagreements concerning these matters.

Common Core opponents attack the substance of the standards more directly in their second major complaint: the claim that Common Core will lead to the "dumbing down of America." This concern closely echoes the fear of "liberal indoctrination" which, to conservatives, is almost indistinguishable from "dumbing down" because it encourages children to believe in lies rather than the truth of the only correct moral system. A Facebook post from the administrator of the "Stop Common Core in Tennessee" page captures this sentiment:

> Reading levels are lowered. Reading standards for 12th grade students will be at the 8th grade level. . . . Standards are designed to lead to a uniform, federally controlled, and intellectually undemanding curriculum. . . . Classical literature will be reduced and replaced with 'informational texts.' This drastic decrease in the instruction of classical literature at the high school level necessary for success at the university college level will ill prepare students. Informational texts are written at a low level of thinking skills at around a 6th or 8th grade reading level. . . . (Administrator)

These claims, which assign quantitative values to conservative concerns about Common Core without indicating how such figures were reached, may prove especially galling to liberals, who prefer a *logos*-centered rhetoric emphasizing facts and valid inferences. However, to conservatives, Common Core's turn away from tradition, perhaps most obviously embodied in the form of classical literature, and toward uncanonical nonfiction texts constitutes a shift away from the intellectual heritage that has made America great and thus amounts to the "dumbing down" of America.

Moreover, conservatives charge Common Core with the "dumbing down" of America because, as nationally adopted standards, they are out of touch with local needs. A move toward national standards cannot possibly serve the best interests of the states, because any encroachment by the federal government onto citizens' local authority is inherently immoral and abusive. Conservatives believe that public schools should promote strict father morality, and the mere existence of national standards undermines strict father morality. Anything other than the teaching of strict father morality amounts, as has been previously demonstrated, to "liberal indoctrination" and the "dumbing down of America" to the minds of conservatives. In the context of strict father morality, these fears make sense; if strict father morality is necessarily right/good and anything else is necessarily wrong/evil, then of course it should matter tremendously to conservatives that their children be taught in accordance with the "correct" moral system.

In addition to railing against Common Core itself, conservative opponents also take major issue with the assessments that have been designed to test student learning outcomes under the standards. The concern regarding these assessments stems not from fear of liberal indoctrination but from resentment toward governmental overreach, an issue which I discussed

extensively in the context of Obamacare. According to Glenn Beck (quoted in a *Mother Jones* article by Tim Murphy), the assessments designed to measure student progress under Common Core represent nothing less than a

> massive data tracking system on each child with over 400 points of information collected. This information can be shared among organizations and companies and parents don't have to be informed about what data is being collecting. They will collect information such as: your child's academic records, health care history, disciplinary record, family income range, family voting status, and religious affiliation, to name a few. Big brother will be watching your child from preschool until college. You, the parent, are unable to opt your child out of this tracking system. (Murphy)

Beck further asserts that Common Core assessments will depend upon "tools such as a wireless skin conductance sensors, functional magnetic resonance imaging, and a posture analysis seat to measure how students learn," with his fellow Common Core opponents stating that fingerprints and retinal scans will be taken of children during the tests (Murphy). These claims play into conservative fears of the federal government encroaching on their privacy rights, heightened following Edward Snowden's leak of classified National Security Agency documents, which revealed that agency's mass surveillance program. As I have argued, such governmental overreach metaphorically amounts to abuse from the viewpoint of strict father moralists. Many conservatives trust the claims of Beck and others like him, despite the fact that such surveillance would be financially and technologically implausible, more than they trust an "abusive" federal government.

The image associated with this article, pictured below, provides a visual representation of conservative fears surrounding the Common Core assessments.

Figure 4. Soon

The image shows President Obama sitting next to a young girl in what appears to be a kindergarten or first grade classroom. The president is holding a magnifying glass up to his eye, as though examining the child. The obviously playful nature of Obama's behavior is reframed into a disturbing commentary on the Common Core assessments by the word "SOON" placed at the bottom of the photograph, suggesting that the president and federal government will soon be carefully examining schoolchildren as a matter of course (Souza). Again, that such concerns are factually unfounded bears little on the perceived threat of government surveillance to the minds of Common Core's conservative opponents; the immoral overreach of the federal government into the private lives of American citizens and disregard for those citizens' constitutionally-protected right to privacy leaves strict father moralists feeling that any "left-wing atrocity" is possible.

It is worth noting that disgust with the culture of standardized assessments in public schools reaches across the political aisle. Liberal and conservative parents alike have

vociferously complained about the amount of time their children spend taking standardized tests, and teachers (who, as mentioned previously, are far more likely to be nurturant parent moralists than strict father moralists) have bemoaned the pressures of high-stakes accountability testing and the need to "teach to the test" rather than educate their students based on a higher ideal of what education should be. Conservatives like Beck thus capitalize upon this well-established distaste for standardized tests by inciting fears about the Common Core-associated assessments in particular, as the following figure illustrates:

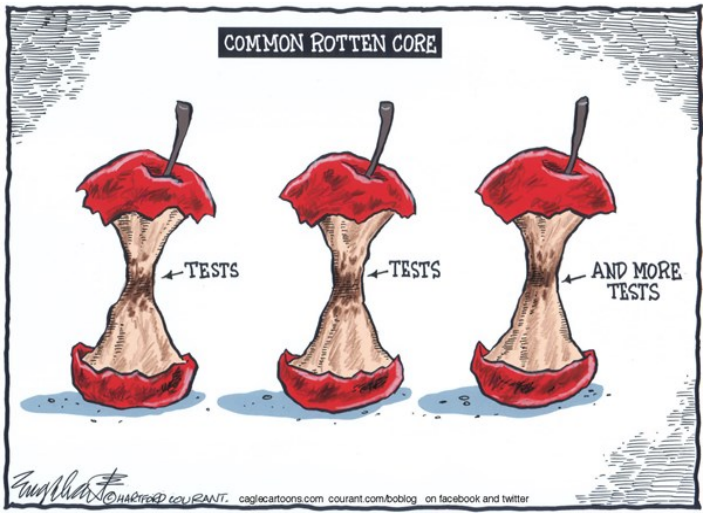

Figure 5. Common Rotten Core

The image above suggests that high-stakes standardized tests play a central role in the implementation of Common Core; they represent the "rotten core" of Common Core. But yoking together Common Core and high-stakes tests ignores the fact that the relationship between the two is contingent rather than necessary. In other words, neither Common Core specifically nor educational standards generally *require* that assessments take the form of high-stakes standardized tests; such tests, a legacy of NCLB, simply represent the manner in which

policymakers have chosen to assess the effectiveness of the standards at this time. Indeed, educational commentators such as Anya Kamenetz have argued for a variety of different forms of assessments that could replace high-stakes tests as measures of student learning (*Test*).

Conservatives' success in framing the debate surrounding Common Core, as with Obamacare, is indisputable. The initial grassroots efforts to overturn the standards have gained widespread national media attention and have resulted in the repeal of the standards in Indiana, Oklahoma, and South Carolina, with Missouri, North Carolina, and Louisiana seriously considering repeal and a handful of other states currently debating the issue. As this chapter has shown, the frames--simple cognitive structures that allow us to process information in light of what we already know and believe--that we adopt when discussing political issues can bring about measurable policy consequences.

CHAPTER 5: (RE)FRAMING THE DEBATE

I have shown that liberals and conservatives have deep, likely irreconcilable differences in their moral worldviews, stemming from very different notions of the ideal family. Conservatives see the ideal family as governed by a strict father who wields authority over his children by using a system of rewards and (often corporal) punishments to regulate their behavior. According to the strict father worldview, children need to be raised in this manner in order for them to internalize the self-discipline and self-reliance that will enable them to survive in an inherently competitive world in which good and evil remain constantly at odds. Liberals, on the other hand, believe that children should be nurtured and encouraged to question the world surrounding them--including their parents--with the goal of fostering mutual respect, understanding, and empathy. Nurturant parents want their children to internalize the experiences of being cared for and caring for others so that they will grow up to be compassionate adults who value cooperation and respect for others and themselves. Given that both liberals and conservatives conceive of the United States metaphorically under the "nation as family" model, with the federal government regarded as a parental figure, it is not surprising that liberals and conservatives have very different ideas about how the federal government should operate and what the roles of adult citizens should be. These differences arise in almost all arenas of political life, but the debates surrounding the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") and the Common Core State Standards for public education have been particularly contentious contemporary issues that have called attention to the deep moral divisions between liberals and conservatives.

Although most Americans are biconceptual in their political thinking--neither fully liberal nor fully conservative--conservatives have been far more successful than liberals in getting biconceptual thinkers to sympathize with their positions on divisive issues. This chapter

explores why conservatives have succeeded in dominating popular political discourse while liberals have not and how we might restore legitimate bipartisan debate to our citizenry and our government. I will continue to draw upon the work of Lakoff and Johnson along with that of Sharon Crowley to offer suggestions for how we might overcome the failure and secure the future of political discourse in the United States.

One of the central claims consistent throughout Lakoff's later writings (*Philosophy in the Flesh*, *The Political Mind*, *Don't Think of an Elephant*, and *The Little Blue Book*) is that the findings of cognitive science--empirical evidence concerning how the brain works--must be incorporated into political rhetoric if such rhetoric is to be persuasive. Whereas Aristotle famously defined rhetoric as "an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion" (*On Rhetoric* 1355b), Lakoff provides empirical evidence for what such "available means" entail based upon our knowledge of the human brain. Most importantly, Lakoff debunks the notion that the Enlightenment conception of rationality governs the workings of the human mind and that reason (and thus logic) drives persuasion. Enlightenment rationality depends upon the assumptions that human reason is:

> conscious--we know what we think; universal--the same for everyone; disembodied--free of the body, and independent of perception and action; logical--consistent with the properties of classical logic; unemotional--free of the passions; value-neutral--the same reason applies regardless of your values; interest-based--serving one's purposes and interests; and literal--able to fit an objective world precisely, with the logic of the mind able to fit the logic of the world. (*Political Mind* 7-8)

Cognitive science, Lakoff shows, has overturned each of these tenets of Enlightenment rationality.

According to Lakoff, findings from cognitive science reveal that the Enlightenment view of rationality fails on four major counts. First, reason and emotion cannot be separated; the latter actually requires the former. For example, individuals with brain damage who cannot experience emotion or recognize it in others prove entirely unable to reason. They do not understand self-interest and cannot make decisions that will benefit themselves or others (*Political Mind* 8). Second, an estimated 98 percent of human thought occurs subconsciously.[30] The reflexive nature of this thought allows us to make decisions over which we have no control and usually no awareness (*Political Mind* 9). Third, as I have shown throughout this thesis, reason is "not purely literal, but largely metaphorical and imaginative" (*Philosophy* 4). Finally, the brain is profoundly embodied; "the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment," and our ability to reason is thus constrained by our embodiment (*Philosophy* 4-5). Appealing to some disembodied notion of rationality, then, fails to account for what recent developments in neuroscience tell us about how persuasion actually works and therefore fails to effect persuasion.

Changing minds, Lakoff demonstrates, means changing brains, which depends in large part upon an understanding of cognitive frames. Cognitive frames exist physically in the brain as simple neural circuitries that can be activated or inhibited by language. They account for the "unconscious understanding that we bring to words" and often work in tandem with metaphors to structure our modes of making sense of the world (*Political Mind* 43). All words are defined in relation to cognitive frames, and the activation of a particular cognitive frame produces a cascade

[30] In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson explain: "Most of our thought is unconscious, not in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but in the sense that it operates beneath the level of cognitive awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and operating too quickly to be focused on" (10).

effect in which other frames are likewise activated (*Political Mind* 43).[31] To return to the Affordable Care Act as an example, the notion of a health care "marketplace" cognitively evokes frames relating to capitalism: producers, consumers, supply, demand, individual choice, etc. Speaking of health care as a "fundamental human right" evokes very different cognitive frames. In other words, how we frame the issue of health care determines how people think about it on a neurological level, and if we want to change their minds, we must first change their brain physiology.

Conservatives, as Lakoff argues and as I have shown in the cases of the Affordable Care Act and the Common Core State Standards, have been far more successful than liberals at activating cognitive frames favorable to their own positions and inhibiting other frames in the brains of most biconceptual thinkers. As Lakoff explains,

> What conservatives did was to use language, ideas, images, and symbols repeatedly that activate the conservative mode of thought and inhibit the progressive mode of thought in individuals who had both. This increased the synaptic strength of the neurons in the circuitry characterizing conservative thought, and did the opposite to progressive thought. The relatively greater activation strength of the conservative mode of thought increased the likelihood of its being neurally bound to conservative framings of particular issues. This gradually made people more and more conservative, though in most cases not wholly so. (*Political Mind* 113)

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[31] Lakoff's cognitive frames can be seen as a neurological counterpart to Kenneth Burke's "terministic screens." In *Language as Symbolic Action* (1966), Burke describes terministic screens as terms that direct our attention in a given direction and deflect it from proceeding elsewhere (45). He elaborates: "Not only does the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direction the *at*tention to one field rather than to another. Also, *many of the 'observations' are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made.* In brief, much that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms" (46, italics in original). Terministic screens--much like Lakoff's cognitive frames--are inherent to our use of language and thus unavoidable; our only choice lays in which screens to employ and when. We cannot strip away terministic screens to see what is "actually there," but we can try to understand what is at stake when we employ a given screen or frame.

Conservatives' employment of cognitive frames that are favorable to strict father moral values and liberals' failure to respond in kind has created a political climate in which debates are conducted on conservative terms, which means that conservatives automatically have the upper hand. For example, as previously discussed, President Obama attempted to embrace the conservative frame "Obamacare" in crafting his own discourse surrounding his signature piece of legislation. In doing so, he actually reinforced his opponents' values by activating the neural circuitries associated with that frame.

Liberals, instead of reframing these political debates in terms that make their values explicit and activate the neural circuitries associated with those values, have predominantly relied upon an Enlightenment conception of rationality in responding to conservatives. Lakoff accuses progressives of "ignoring the cognitive unconscious, not stating [their] deepest values, suppressing legitimate emotions, accepting the other side's frames as if they were neutral, . . . and refusing to frame the facts so that they can be appreciated" (Political Mind 11-2). Liberals proceed in political discourse as though exposing "the facts" and making valid inferences should be enough to persuade others of their positions. In reality, such facts and inferences are not neurologically persuasive unless they are linked to emotions, values, and cognitive frames.

A common strategy that liberals employ to refute the claims made by their conservative opponents involves attacking the credibility of conservative positions on factual grounds. Accordingly, the following internet meme aims to undermine the popular conservative news source Fox News:

Figure 6. Faux News

The humor employed by this meme is obvious and effective for a liberal audience. However, the meme relies upon an Enlightenment-oriented concept of correctness for its humor. Based upon Fox's actual logo, the meme calls into question the network's claim to report the "news" by replacing the name "Fox" with "Faux." The subtitle "WE MAKE IT UP" reiterates the attack upon Fox's legitimacy and credibility. Given that the actual Fox slogans that appear below the network's name include "WE REPORT. YOU DECIDE." and "FAIR AND BALANCED"--slogans meant to distinguish Fox News from what they characterize as the liberally-biased mainstream media--this meme suggests that what in fact distinguishes Fox from other news sources is that Fox does not report real news. But the idea that Fox "makes up" their news is only humorous if there is a contrast between "Faux News" and other networks that report "true" news. This contrast between "true" and "faux" news thus privileges a standard of correctness that relies heavily upon Enlightenment rationality and thus does not ultimately prove persuasive to most people.

Another meme directly related to Common Core employs a similar strategy of pointing out the ignorance of conservative opponents to the standards.

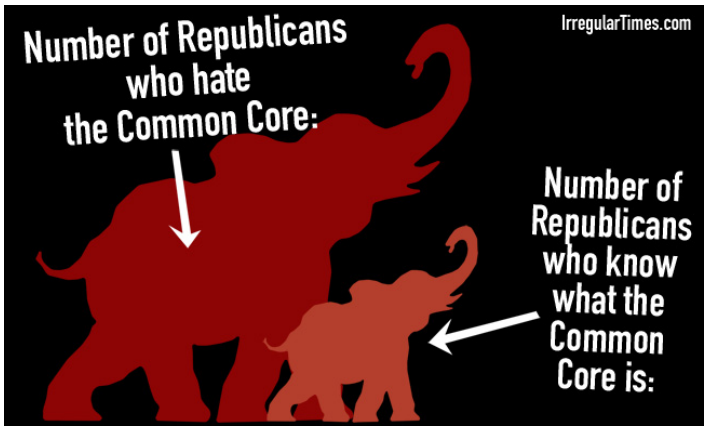

Figure 7. Common Core Elephants

The meme, included above, graphically depicts a difference between the huge number of conservatives who hate Common Core (the large elephant) and the small number of conservatives who know what Common Core is (the small elephant), suggesting that conservatives are willing to vociferously oppose policies they do not understand. If so many conservatives hate Common Core without knowing anything about the policy they profess to hate, the meme implies, then their opposition to Common Core should not be regarded as credible. As we have seen, however, conservative opposition to Common Core *has* been taken very seriously by a number of state legislatures, seriously debilitating the move toward a rigorous set of national education standards.

My analysis of conservative opposition to Common Core has shown that the elephant meme may represent an idea that is factually correct: conservatives who hate Common Core often demonstrate a misunderstanding of how the standards were created and implemented, as well as what the standards say and aim to do. But my analysis of the political debate surrounding Common Core has also shown that attacking the "irrationality" of conservative opposition to Common Core fails to prevent people from accepting the conservative frame. Conservatives may misunderstand and/or misrepresent the "facts" of the policy initiative, but

they understand very well that educational standards such as Common Core make it difficult for strict father morality to gain a stronghold in public schools. Meanwhile, liberals, in their appeals to "facts" and a flawed Enlightenment version of human rationality, misunderstand brains and thus persuasion.

So how can we restore legitimate political debate to our government and our electorate given that one side resists accepting facts and the other side resists acknowledging frames? Both Lakoff and Crowley believe the answer lies in getting liberals to adopt a progressive version of conservatives' successful tactics for persuasion. Lakoff calls upon liberals to "know their values and frame the debate" (*Elephant* 3). These liberals values, which Lakoff contends form our nation's true heritage, include "freedom, . . . opportunity, . . . prosperity, . . . fairness, . . . open, two-way communication, . . . community-building, service to the community, and cooperation in a community, . . . trust and honesty" (*Elephant* 13). According to Lakoff, conservatives have co-opted many of these values in the service of framing their own positions, but liberals can and must show how these values are consistent with progressive ideals and policies. For example, many of these values require basic health as a baseline condition from which the values can be enacted; how can we achieve prosperity if we are not healthy, and how can we be healthy without access to quality, affordable health care? Powerful arguments for liberalism, Lakoff believes, can be framed by the aforementioned values in an attempt to re-route the conservative neural circuitries that are currently activated by appeals to these shared values.[32]

In a similar vein, Sharon Crowley in *Toward a Civil Discourse* charges liberals with the task of adopting a civic/civil discourse that engages conservatives[33] on issues of emotion, values,

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[32] Indeed, the term "values" itself has come to be associated with conservatism, as though the term implies an adherence to tradition. In fact, the idea of "values" is politically neutral; everyone has values, so the question becomes one of *which* values should we esteem and why.

[33] As previously mentioned, Crowley is concerned mainly with conservatives of the apocalyptic Christian variety.

and belief instead of relying solely upon empirical evidence and reason (114). Although Crowley identifies "liberals" as those Americans who wish "to preserve the brand of liberal democracy developed . . . during the Enlightenment" by achieving consensus through "reason and tolerance" (15), she acknowledges that appeals to Enlightenment rationality are not equal to the task of effecting persuasion in the contemporary political climate. She calls for a return to Aristotle's tripartite means of persuasion with a special emphasis on *pathos*, noting that the liberal emphasis on rationality alone fails to convince many (if not most) individuals, who are always already situated within Pierre Bordieu's notion of a *habitus* that strongly and subconsciously influences their beliefs and actions. While she does not rely upon cognitive science to back her claims, Crowley's conclusions are very similar to Lakoff's: liberals need to account for how persuasion actually works and to modify their public discourse accordingly.

These suggestions for restoring legitimate bipartisan political debate, however, strike me as somewhat undemocratic. Lakoff and Crowley are convinced that the other side's values are misguided,[34] and though I happen to agree, I worry that their calls for liberals to reclaim public discourse are significantly shaped by the desire to have the "good guys" clean up the political quagmire that has engulfed our government. Their desired outcome, while certainly appealing in many ways, leaves little space for a genuine debate concerning values. To borrow Lakoff's terminology, if we must know our values in order to frame the debate to our persuasive advantage, how can we foster legitimate debate *about* those values? And if we are not allowing for the public debate of values, can we really call our form of government a democracy?

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[34] In *Moral Politics*, Lakoff writes: "The Strict Father moral system . . . gives priority to forms of metaphorical morality--Moral Strength and Moral Authority--over experiential morality, namely, poverty, illness, physical weakness, and lack of care. This is where this metaphorical moral system loses touch with the nonmetaphorical, literal, directly experienced foundation of all metaphorical moral systems. It is where this system of metaphorical morality loses touch with common humanity" (383).

In my efforts to answer these questions, I turn back to the examples of the Affordable Care Act/"Obamacare" and the Common Core State Standards. It should be clear by now that--in terms of fostering bipartisan debate about important issues--both of these policies were disastrously framed from the start. As I have followed Lakoff in arguing, the very name "Affordable Care Act" instantly frames the issue of health care in economic terms--terms that are favorable to the conservative position and catastrophic for the progressive position on health care. If health care is a good, then it becomes difficult for ACA proponents to justify why the government should force people to buy it. The Supreme Court interpretation of the health care law as imposing a tax, which follows the health care-as-economic-good frame, does little to evoke more positive frames. And the reframing of the ACA as "Obamacare" is even worse for the progressive cause, as it directly associates the ACA with a president who has not enjoyed widespread popularity among his constituents.

Similarly, the very name "Common Core" immediately suggests a set of standards that operate at the national rather than state/local level, serving as anathema to conservative sensibilities. The various misconceptions about the standards that I have analyzed likely stem from the frames evoked by the term "common," a term that swiftly takes on a political charge in a country that prides itself upon "exceptionalism." This notion of exceptionalism pervades conservative ideology from the cultural to the individual level; a quick Google image search of the term "Common Core" yields countless images of parents attending rallies against the standards, their signs of protests reading "MY CHILD IS NOT COMMON." One wonders whether the implementation of the same standards would have gone relatively unnoticed had the standards been given a more strategic name.

All of this being said, it is not as though we can simply choose names for our policies that do not evoke cognitive frames. We cannot cast policy in value-neutral terms, although we certainly could have done better than the "Affordable Care Act" and "Common Core." We can, however, explicitly debate the values themselves. Again, such debate can never be value-neutral, since the linguistic choices involved would be inherently value-laden. Nonetheless, an explicit discussion of values would give biconceptual thinkers a chance to grapple with their own values instead of offering political issues to them pre-framed with either blatantly conservative values, as is the case with much of contemporary political discourse, or intentionally liberal values, as Lakoff and Crowley advocate.

I believe that we need to find ways to foster political discourse about values--the values that underlie any given policy initiative--as a means of restoring bipartisan debate in the United States. Too many people are willing to voice their opposition to Obamacare and Common Core without adequately understanding what those policies do. Instead of trying to educate people about the "facts" behind these policies, and instead of reframing the terms of the debate to activate neural circuitries favoring liberal positions (as Lakoff suggests), we need to take a step back from discussing policy and spend some time discussing values. What do we want health care *to be*? Do we want it to be a consumer product or a basic right? Do we want it to be universally accessible or contingent upon employment or other factors? Do we want it to be controlled by the government or by private industries (or something in between)? What do we want public education *to be*? Do we want it to help children grow into productive workers or engaged citizens (or both)? Do we want it to teach children to be open to new ideas or to defend what they already believe? Do we want schools to instill tradition or foster critical thought (or

some combination of the two)? Too many Americans have not grappled with these questions, and until they do so, our political discourse--and our democracy--will suffer.

How can we encourage people to think about and debate values? Bringing about such a shift in our public discourse may seem implausible, but it is not impossible. Public school teachers can encourage their students to engage in open dialogue about values, their own as well as those they discern in literature, history, and their broader culture(s).[35] Politicians, when addressing their constituencies, can work to tell us not only what they care about, but also *why*. Journalists and news anchors and talk show hosts can make an effort to write and talk about values in explicit terms. Public figures in general, who often endorse or denounce political candidates and policy initiatives, can publicly tell us *why* they do so. Overall, we can work to focus more energy on the *why* question of our political positions and policies, instead of letting it get buried beneath the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *how*. Such discussions would likely need to begin at the local level, but the political consequences of the grassroots movement against Common Core illustrate that discussions that begin on a small scale have the potential to influence politics at a larger level.

An explicit, public discussion of values will not resolve the deep political divide between liberals and conservatives. For example, strict father conservatives will still oppose "Obamacare," and nurturant parent progressives will still support the Affordable Care Act (and likely feel that it does not go far enough in securing basic, quality health care for all Americans). As I have shown, these different policy stances stem from very different value-systems, systems grounded in metaphors for how the ideal family should operate, that cannot be reconciled. But

[35] This classroom discussion of values may seem like exactly the sort of critical endeavor that strict father moralists oppose. However, conservatives also very much want expressions of their own values (e.g. invocations of the Bible) to be permitted in public schools. I regard classroom discussions of values to have upsides and downsides for both liberals and conservatives: such discussions would inevitably promote critical thinking and just as inevitably allow for the expression of values that most liberals would find distasteful if not downright offensive.

explicit public debate of values would provide biconceptual thinkers with a better chance to consider what they care about and how it aligns (or fails to align) with the viewpoints of certain politicians and the aims of particular policies. A robust discussion of values might encourage these biconceptuals, who tend to be far less politically active than their more ideologically-driven fellow citizens, to care more about politics by helping them to clarify what they care about and why. Biconceptuals, after working to articulate their values, might also work to make their voices heard. These voices, I believe, are the key to overcoming the failure and securing the future of political debate in the United States.

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