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WHAT IS RIGHT IS RIGHT

A three-part account of how ideology shapes factual belief

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In the days after Congressman Steve Scalise and three others were shot and wounded while practicing for an annual charity baseball game between Republican and Democratic lawmakers, the calls to inject a more civil tone into America's increasingly toxic political discourse resounded from both sides of the aisle. The sentiment behind those calls for civility was no doubt sincere, but we suspect that many attempts at civil discussion that were initiated by those calls met a similar unfortunate fate. As liberals and conservatives sat down to discuss the issues of the day – taxes, guns, health care, and the rest – their civil intentions were almost certainly tested upon discovering that many of the basic facts underlying their political opinions were not shared by their discussion partners. Republicans citing data showing that low taxes spur economic growth, that more gun owners make communities safer, and that Obamacare is imploding in an irreversible death spiral quickly found their Democratic friends citing data supporting diametrically opposite conclusions on each of these points. As such conversations continued, frustration on both sides was likely to build as each attempt to move toward some productive mutual understanding was stymied by the inability to agree on the ground-level facts that necessarily form the foundation of any attempt at compromise or negotiation. It is tough to have a civil political discussion, let alone a productive one, when the two sides begin that discussion with different sets of facts.

The questions we explore in this chapter concern the causes and consequences of the factual divide between Red (conservative) and Blue (liberal) America. Specifically, we propose a three-part account of how such differential beliefs arise or, more precisely, an account of how prescriptive beliefs (ideologically and morally based beliefs regarding how the world *should be*) shape descriptive ones ("factual" beliefs regarding how the world really *is*). Our account identifies three important

contributing processes: *moralization* (the infusion of issues and events with moral significance); *factualization* (the construction of pseudo-descriptive justifications for moral evaluations); and *socialization* (the reinforcement of morally palatable beliefs by selective exposure to ideologically sympathetic people, groups, and media sources). Our core contention is that the factual gulf between liberals and conservatives is an important contributor to the corrosive polarization that currently afflicts American national politics, not just because the inability to agree on basic ground-level "facts" makes political transactions like negotiation and compromise more difficult, but also because differences in factual belief can fuel negative perceptions and feelings across party lines. If one person believes a fact to be true that another believes just as certainly to be false, it is hard for either one not to see the other as stupid, disingenuous, or both.

Politics, morality, and facts

Politics is and in fact should be about moral vision: individuals and political parties offering their unique vision of what is right and wrong for the country and its citizens, and how to realize that vision through public policy. It is not surprising or odd that people differ in their vision of what constitutes a morally enlightened society, nor that these different moral visions form the basis of major political divisions and coalitions such as that between the left (liberals, progressives, the Democratic party in the United States) and the right (conservatives, traditionalists, the Republican party in the United States). Differences in moral sensitivity and value have the dual function of binding subgroups together in defense and celebration of the shared moral vision of their (liberal or conservative) tribe and driving a wedge between the subgroups as the differences in what each side values and fears translate into real-world conflicts over policies that are alternatively viewed as championing or defiling each side's vision of a just and moral society (Graham et al., 2013).

Politics seems particularly infused with morality of late. Many key political issues are moral ones – abortion, same-sex marriage – and even issues that are not inherently moral are often seen through a moral lens. Former House Speaker John Boehner spoke of national debt as a "moral threat" (Epstein, 2011), Senator Bernie Sanders called income inequality "the great moral issue of our time" (Schulson, 2016), and former Vice President Al Gore said of climate change that "it is indeed a single, reckless and immoral act if one fails to take his part in addressing this problem" ("Climate Change," 2010). Imbuing political issues with morality can fuel commitment and spur action in supporters (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005), but its cost is the implication that the opposition is acting immorally. Polling data reflect this growing animosity as Democrats' and Republicans' views of each other have become increasingly negative since the 1960s (Pew Research Center, 2016).

These moral differences are accompanied by different factual beliefs. Perhaps the two most memorable phrases of 2017 were "fake news" and "alternative

facts," and public opinion data confirm that the political parties show sharp dif-ferences in what they believe to be true. For example, 92% of Democrats agree that there is "solid evidence" of global warming, compared to 52% of Republicans (Pew Research Center, 2017), and 80% of Democrats, compared to 33% of Republicans, agree that the "Russian government tried to influence the outcome of last fall's U.S. presidential election" (Washington Post, 2017). In short, a factual gulf has emerged along ideological lines for many issues. The emergence and consequences of differing moral convictions, each with their associated sets of facts, are what we seek to explain in the sections that follow.

Moralization

In the last two decades, researchers have explored the role of moral attitudes (or moral convictions) in social and political behavior (Skitka et al., 2005). A moral attitude involves the evaluation of an attitude object as fundamentally right or wrong, moral or immoral, rather than a mere preference (Rozin, 1999). Moral attitudes have distinct features, including universality, objectivity, and emotion (Skitka, 2010). Moral attitudes are experienced as universal truths that should apply to everyone, regardless of circumstance or cultural differences. They are experienced as self-evident, objectively true beliefs and are strongly associated with intense emotions, such as disgust or anger, more so than strong nonmoral attitudes. Moral attitudes have unique consequences and predict behavior for which other attitude strength components cannot account (Skitka et al., 2005).

Rozin and colleagues conducted influential work on how commonplace be-haviors, such as vegetarianism (Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997) and cigarette smoking (Rozin & Singh, 1999), become moralized. People may moralize eating meat because something prompts them to see the connection between a moral principle (e.g. not harming animals) and the act of eating meat. Strong affective experiences can also lead to moralization. A person may not be moved to become a vegetarian just by knowing that eating meat harms animals but may be more motivated if they were to watch an emotionally arousing video of a factory farm. Feeling strong emotions, such as disgust, is thought to be part of how cigarette smoking evolved into a moral issue (rather than a matter of taste or preference) in the United States (Rozin & Singh, 1999). The link between strong feelings of disgust and moralized attitudes has been replicated with other issues as well, such as attitudes toward homosexuality (Olatunji, 2008) and obesity (Ringel, 2016).

Political moralization

But how do political issues become moralized? We propose two types of political moralization that often have negative consequences. The first type to consider is what we call *issue moralization*. Issue moralization occurs when people connect broad moral values to specific political issues. Consider the contentious issue of abortion in the United States. Antiabortion proponents may link abortion to one

or more moral principles, such as prohibitions against harming innocent life or violations related to notions of sexual purity. Those in favor of abortion rights may moralize the issue by linking it to concerns about harm to the mother's life or a woman's right to control her own body.

A person's emotions toward an issue and how much they care about it (i.e. attitude importance) are also thought to be crucial to the moralization process (Brandt, Wetherell, & Crawford, 2015; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). Longitudinal research suggests a bidirectional influence between moralization and affect. Strong emotions lead to greater moralization over time, but moralization also predicts stronger emotions over time (Brandt, Wisneski, & Skitka, 2015). Thus, people can enter a cycle in which an emotional reaction leads to moralization, and moralization leads to a greater sense of outrage, disgust, or other strong emotions. Attitude importance also predicts greater moralization of an issue over time – the more a person cares about an issue, the more likely they are to imbue it with moral significance (Brandt, Wetherell, & Crawford, 2015). In sum, the moralization process involves both cognitive and affective components, and should occur for issues people deem personally important.

Outside influences such as politicians and media sources can encourage citizens to moralize a political issue. Marietta (2008) contends that politicians often use "sacred rhetoric," which leads people to frame issues in terms of nonnegotiable moral values rather than pragmatic assessments of costs and benefits. Morally framed messages tend to contain strong emotional language, which appeals to audiences that are likely to share the same emotional response to a given issue (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel, 2017; Kreps & Monin, 2011). Rhetoric invoking disgust – considered one of the most influential emotions in moral judgments (e.g. Schnall, Haidt, Clore, & Jordan, 2008) – has been found to lessen support for gay rights (Gadarian & van der Vort, 2017). People perceive the communicator of a moral message as more certain and confident in their position, thereby increasing the communicator's persuasive appeal (Kreps & Monin, 2011). Given these benefits of moral framing, it is no wonder that politicians and other skilled communicators use it to their advantage.

A second type of moralization that can shed light on political behavior is what we call *personal moralization*. Personal moralization represents the darker side of political conflict, wherein people are not focused on arguments about an issue itself but rather focused on mistrust, blame, and demonization of the other side. One reason politics becomes invested with moral significance is that people tend to *intentionalize* differences of opinion about issues. Rather than seeing a political dispute as simply a pragmatic disagreement between actors who all want the same outcome, people often ascribe nefarious intentions to those on the other side. When people feel highly involved in a political issue, they are more likely to attribute selfish and biased motives to those who disagree with their position (Reeder, Pryor, Wohl, & Griswell, 2005). When this occurs, it becomes easy to demonize the other side. With the issue of illegal immigration, for example, rather than each side framing the issue in terms of which policies

work best to regulate safe immigration into the United States, it has devolved into a fight about intentions. The right accuses the left of not just being soft on illegal immigration but of intentionally encouraging immigration as a way to grow the democratic voter base. The left, in turn, sees the right's tough stance on immigration as stemming from racist motivations rather than a more noble desire to enforce existing immigration law and protect American workers from unfair competition for jobs.

Personal moralization is particularly problematic in that it involves a broader view of oneself and one's own group as morally good, while individuals on the other side are seen as morally bad. This fits with what other researchers have described as the *intergroup relations function* of morality (Ellemers & van den Bos, 2012). The in-group's morality, a crucial part of in-group identity, can be affirmed by disparaging the out-group's moral standing and establishing the moral distinctiveness of one's in-group. This may explain why former Vice President Joe Biden often spoke out eloquently against this kind of intentionalization, urging fellow politicians to question their opponents' judgment but never their motives (Singer, 2015).

Consequences of political moralization

Political moralization has troubling implications for interpersonal and political behavior. According to Tetlock and colleagues' (2000) sacred value protection model, the belief that certain values are sacred leads people to take rigid stances on issues and reject pragmatic compromises. Merely construing an attitude as moral increases its strength, leading to greater attitude-behavior correspondence, greater resistance to persuasion, and more extreme and universal evaluations of behavior than non-moralized attitudes (Luttrell, Petty, Briñol, & Wagner, 2016; Van Bavel, Packer, Haas, & Cunningham, 2012). Individuals who hold moral attitudes show greater intolerance of people with opposing viewpoints and less desire to interact with dissimilar others (Skitka et al., 2005). People who moralize a greater number of political issues hold more positive feelings about their in-group and greater animosity toward, and even dehumanization of, political out-group members (Pacilli, Roccato, Pagliaro, & Russo, 2016; Ryan, 2014). In sum, moralization may increase political gridlock both by increasing attraction and loyalty to one's own side, and by lowering willingness to interact and compromise with the other side.

Finally, experiencing a threat to one's moral values can also change how a person responds to messages related to the threatened value. When the in-group's moral image is threatened, in-group members tend to respond with defensiveness and outrage toward the out-group (Täuber & Van Zomeren, 2013). After exposure to a value-threatening news story, people who held nonviolence as an important moral value were more likely to believe disparaging claims from scientific and political sources about the effects of violent video games (Rothmund, Bender, Nauroth, & Gollwitzer, 2015). Similarly, people evaluate an attitude-congruent

scientific study more favorably when they hold a relevant value as personally important and feel the value is under attack (Bender, Rothmund, Nauroth, & Gollwitzer, 2016). If an individual feels like a cherished moral value has been threatened, their motivation to protect this moral value can lead them to interpret information in a biased fashion. In fact, as we will discuss further in the next section, moralization plays a crucial role in shaping the beliefs people hold about political issues.

Factualization

If you asked the average person why they hold a certain political view, such as their opinion on same-sex marriage, most individuals would cite a number of supporting principles, factual evidence, and logical arguments that ostensibly led them to their opinion. Their story would give you the impression that they arrived at their current position only after careful consideration of all the best pieces of information. Decades of psychological research, however, suggest that the process is often less bottom up (i.e. effortful consideration of information prior to drawing a conclusion) than top down, with principles, facts, and logic flowing from intuitions, expectancies, and motivations to reach a desired conclusion (Ditto, Pizarro, & Tannenbaum, 2009). A wealth of research shows that people desire consistency or coherence between their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Cooper, 2007). Models of *explanatory coherence* (e.g. Simon, Krawezyk, & Holyoak, 2004) suggest that achieving such consistency requires a dynamic process in which attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors all influence one another in an iterative process. The same processes are evident in the interplay between moral-political views and factual beliefs. Through a process of *moral coherence*, moral attitudes can be influenced by, as well as exert influence on, factual beliefs (Clark, Chen, & Ditto, 2015; Liu & Ditto, 2013).

Moral judgments, in fact, may be especially susceptible to this seemingly backward reasoning process (Ditto et al., 2009). Moral judgments often arise from intuitive or emotional reactions rather than analytical thinking (Haidt, 2001). Following this intuition, people are adept at finding concrete reasons for their moral views, which can make it seem as though they had these reasons all along. This backward process can lead to *factualization* or the construction of pseudo-descriptive justifications for moral evaluations.

Turning moral opinions into moral facts

There are two main logics that people rely on to factualize moral beliefs: deontological and consequentialist. Both are affected by motivated reasoning in ways that lead us to feel our moral intuitions are grounded in something deeper, more real, and objective. Deontological reasoning grounds moral judgments in inviolate principles that make certain actions morally right or wrong, regardless of the consequences. A person who believes that abortion is wrong, no matter the

circumstances, is employing deontological logic by adhering to a broad moral principle that prohibits harming a fetus. An individual relying on deontological logic is often characterized as believing that even morally good ends (e.g. relieving a rape victim of the unfair trauma of carrying her rapist's baby) cannot justify morally bad means (e.g. ending the fetus' life via abortion). In contrast, people can also rely on consequentialist logic to justify moral positions. Consequentialist (also often referred to as utilitarian) reasoning is based on an analysis of the costs and benefits of moral actions, and can thus conclude that in some cases, the morality of ends can justify even morally questionable means. In this sense, a consequentialist may recognize the moral implications of ending the life of a healthy human fetus but still feel it is morally justified because of the profound moral unfairness of asking a victimized woman to carry to term the offspring of her abuser.

Although deontological and consequentialist logics are often at odds, either can support moral intuitions in a way that makes prescriptive opinions resemble descriptive facts. Consider a typical justification for a descriptive belief, such as "sugary drinks are bad for a person's health *because* they increase the risk of developing diabetes and obesity." Deontological and consequentialist justifications produce the same type of justification for moral beliefs, one serving to ground moral intuitions in broad principles ("Capital punishment is wrong *because* it is wrong to kill another human being") and the other in advantageous cost-benefit analyses ("Capital punishment is wrong *because* the costs associated with keeping an inmate on death row outweigh the benefits"). Either kind of justification, deontological or consequentialist, can make moral positions feel like factual ones, and there is evidence that both kinds of justifications are shaped by ideologically based motivations.

Motivated deontology

Politicians, like many other public figures, work hard to portray themselves as people of principle as we admire people who steadfastly adhere to moral standards no matter the cost (e.g. Everett, Pizarro, & Crockett, 2016). But that is precisely the problem with principles; their power flows from their generality, the willingness to stick with them even when they are costly or lead to morally questionable outcomes. The generality of principles is what makes adhering to them so hard, which explains why principled judgment is both so admired and so often violated. Instead, people tend to apply their principles selectively, touting them when they lead to favorable judgment outcomes and abandoning them when they do not.

This tendency to invoke principles in a post hoc fashion to support desired outcomes is well illustrated in an experiment involving a modified version of the classic footbridge dilemma (Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Ditto, 2009). Participants were asked to choose whether they would sacrifice one man's life in order to save 100 others. The scenarios entailed either sacrificing a Black man

to save "100 members of the New York Philharmonic" or sacrificing a White man to save "100 members of the Harlem Jazz Orchestra." Liberals faced with a decision about sacrificing a Black man to save 100 (ostensibly White) people chose to save his life, citing deontological reasons (i.e. it is never justified to kill a person) to support their choice. Liberals, however, were significantly more willing to sacrifice the White man to save 100 (ostensibly Black) people, rejecting deontological reasoning when justifying their choice. In other words, liberals grounded their choice in deontological principles when it helped them achieve a desired outcome but rejected those same principles when they did not support their preferred outcome. Although conservative participants tended to be more evenhanded in their decisions in this race-relevant scenario, they showed the same selective use of deontological principles in another study reported by Uhlmann et al. (2009), examining judgments about the morality of civilian collateral damage caused by the actions of either the American or the Iraqi military. In this case, the judgments of political liberals were unaffected by the nationality of the perpetrators, whereas conservatives were significantly more forgiving when American actions led to unintended civilian deaths than when Iraqi actions did.

US politics is replete with examples of motivated deontology, resulting in hypocritical principle-switching. Consider the recent issue of filibuster rules in the US Senate. In 2013, when the Senate was under Democratic control, Democrats changed filibuster rules so that judicial nominees (with the exception of Supreme Court Justices) could be confirmed with a simple majority, ensuring that the minority party could not delay or obstruct future nominations (Savage, 2017). At the time, Republicans balked at the rule change, arguing that it is the fundamental right of the minority party to exercise their voice and to oppose undesirable judicial nominees. When Republicans gained control of the Senate in 2015, however, they kept the rules in place and, in 2017, even adjusted the rules to include Supreme Court nominees, to the ire of Democrats, who then comprised the minority party. Both parties have eloquently defended the Senate filibuster when it has suited their goals and maligned it just as eloquently when it hasn't. In each case, their position is framed in terms of their faithfulness to broad principles, with both positions and principles switching places depending on which party is in power.

Motivated consequentialism

The other way to turn moral opinions into moral facts is to ground them in a favorable cost-benefit analysis. Consequentialism can be thought of as a "rational" form of moral evaluation in which the quality of a moral act is determined by an analysis of whether its benefits outweigh its costs. In politics, policy positions are most typically justified with arguments, not about their inherent morality but about how they are likely to produce beneficial consequences for those involved. In the legal debate over same-sex marriage, for example, a great deal of time was spent presenting data on whether it was good or bad for the well-being

of children. Although, to many of us, whether a policy produces beneficial out-comes for children seems an appropriate yardstick by which to evaluate its mo-rality, problems arise when both sides produce evidence that the policy position they favor morally also produces the greater good. This tendency to regard ac-tions perceived as moral as also being beneficial is a process Liu and Ditto (2013) termed *motivated consequentialism*.

In one study, Liu and Ditto (2013) examined views on four political issues (forceful interrogations, condom promotion, capital punishment, and stem cell research) and found moderate-to-strong positive correlations between people's moral opinions and their factual beliefs about the effectiveness of their preferred policies. For instance, the more participants believed that stem cell research is immoral, the more undesirable costs (and fewer benefits) they believed were as-sociated with stem cell research. This pattern would occur, of course, if people were simply making judgments using consequentialist logic such that their evalu-ation of whether a given policy was morally desirable was based on their analysis of whether or not it was effective. Challenging this rational explanation, Liu and Ditto (2013) conducted an experiment manipulating moral evaluation of the pol-icy and examining whether moral evaluations shaped beliefs about its costs and benefits. Participants read moral arguments either in favor of or against capital punishment. Importantly, these arguments focused only on the inherent moral-ity or immorality of capital punishment, with no mention at all of its potential costs (e.g. its likelihood of resulting in wrongful executions) or benefits (e.g. its likelihood of deterring future crime). Although no "facts" about its costs or benefits were mentioned, people led to view the morality of capital punishment more positively endorsed more benefits and fewer costs of capital punishment compared to their pre-essay judgments, while those led to view its morality more negatively showed the opposite pattern. That is, both groups factualized their attitudes about capital punishment by aligning their descriptive beliefs about its costs and benefits to fit their prescriptive evaluations of its inherent morality.

Ideological reasoning

Google "conservative logic 101," and click on images. You will see pages of what look like dorm room posters mocking conservatives for their faulty reasoning. Now do the same with "liberal logic 101," and you will see pages of virtually identical images strategically rewritten to ridicule the quality of liberal rather than conservative logic. These dueling internet memes are a wonderfully tangible ex-ample of a mirror image perception held by Red and Blue America, the shared be-lief that the other side's arguments just don't make sense. These mutual perceptions suggest that logical reasoning itself can be affected by ideological commitments.

Psychologists studying people's capacity for logical reasoning have for years noted a phenomenon called "belief bias" (Evans, Barston, & Pollard, 1983; Feather, 1964; Oakhill & Johnson-Laird, 1985). When evaluating the validity of logical syllogisms (arguments containing two premises and a conclusion), people

are biased to see arguments as logical when the conclusion is plausible. For exam-ple, the following two syllogisms have the same logical structure:

All cold–blooded animals like water
Fish are cold–blooded animals
Fish like water

All things made of plants are healthy
Cigarettes are made of plants
Cigarettes are healthy

Both arguments are logically valid (examples of modus ponens reasoning for those of you who remember your own logic 101 class from college). But research partic-ipants asked to evaluate them (while told to ignore the truth value of all statements) are much more likely to see the first syllogism as logically sound than the second one. The fact that cigarettes are not actually healthy makes it difficult for people to accept that the logic leading up to that implausible conclusion can be solid.

This leads to interesting effects when two groups have different beliefs about what conclusions are plausible. Gampa, Wojcik, Motyl, Nosek, and Ditto (2017) presented thousands of liberals and conservatives with both valid and invalid logical syllogisms across a range of political topics but manipulated whether the conclusions were consistent with liberal or conservative beliefs. So, for example, both groups saw the following two arguments:

Things that harm the economy burden job creators
Tax increases burden job creators
Tax increases harm the economy

Programs that help the economy help unemployed find jobs
Welfare programs help unemployed find jobs
Welfare programs help the economy

Both arguments have an identical logical structure, which, in this case, is actually invalid (logicians refer to this fallacy as "affirming the consequent"; both syllo-gisms actually become valid if the conclusion and second premise are swapped). However, Gampa et al. found that liberals are more likely than conservatives to catch the logical flaw in the first syllogism, whereas conservatives are more likely than liberals to catch the flaw in the second. A similar pattern occurs with valid syllogisms, where each side shows inappropriate skepticism of sound logic when it syields a conclusion that challenges their side's political beliefs. The subjec-tive believability of the arguments mediated the relationship between partici-pant political ideology and accuracy in argument ratings, and these results were replicated across three studies, including a nationally representative sample. The upshot of this pattern of partisan belief bias is clear: my side's moral arguments seem logical, and your side's don't.

To summarize, motivated reasoning processes can convert moral opinions into moral facts by grounding them in principles and logic – both formal logic and the logic of cost-benefit analysis. In this way, factualization adds fuel to the fire that moralization starts. Moralization infuses issues with emotion and energy, which, in turn, shapes the way information is processed and reinforces moral intuitions by grounding them in principles, facts, and logic. Ironically, factualization processes can be seen as demoralizing moral judgments by making them seem more like descriptive judgments, but this process makes political disagreements that much more volatile. Indeed, the more a person perceives a moral belief to be objectively true, the more uncomfortable they feel about interacting with someone who disagrees with their view (Goodwin & Darley, 2008). Matters of opinion can tolerate disagreement, but disagreement about facts implies something more problematic. And once this battle is joined by others – when the disagreement is no longer between me and you but rather between us and them – the temperature goes up more still. As we will discuss in the next section, people's tendency to selectively expose themselves to ideologically sympathetic people, groups, and media sources also plays a significant role in the development of political conflict.

Socialization

The psychological processes of moralization and factualization described in the previous sections do not happen in a vacuum but embedded in social contexts. People not only moralize their beliefs and reinforce them with fact-like justifications but are also inclined to surround themselves with other people who share those beliefs and justifications. We use the term *socialization* very much how it is used classically in sociology to describe the internalization of the social norms, values, and ideologies of a society (Persell, 1990). Just as children come to learn the rules of their national, ethnic, or religious culture, a similar process occurs in which people are reinforced by their social environment to internalize the factual beliefs of their ideological culture. This requires some degree of separation between groups – such as having friends that are mostly part of your ideological group and exposure to media that reinforce your group's beliefs. This tendency to construct social environments as ideological "safe spaces" involves several group dynamics that make democratic dialogue and compromise less likely by consecrating ideologically supportive belief systems as a reflection of socially shared reality.

Similarity and group formation

Early social psychologists showed that people tend to select their social interactions and environments based on perceived similarity (Williams, 1959) and, conversely, that interpersonal closeness leads to over-perceiving similarity (Newcomb, 1963). More recent studies have shown a robust association between value similarities and interpersonal attraction (e.g. Lee et al., 2009). Social media

studies have found that this effect is also present in internet communities and interpersonal relationships: people tend to have similar friends on Facebook, according to political ideology (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015) and personal values (Lonnqvist & Itkonen, 2016).

Perceived similarity with other group members also contributes to stronger in-group identification. Perceiving higher levels of fit with one's group makes group identity more salient and tends to maximize intergroup differences and minimize intragroup differences (Blanz, 1999; Hornsey, 2008). This basic process underlying identification with the in-group and differentiation from the out-group accounts for several different phenomena in intergroup relations, such as stereotyping, prejudice, and out-group derogation (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999; Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). Moralization of political issues tends to magnify social identification effects as people who moralize a greater number of political issues hold more positive feelings about their in-group and greater animosity toward political out-group members (Ryan, 2014).

Selective exposure

A long research tradition on *selective exposure* (Festinger, 1957; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) has shown, across multiple domains, that people systematically choose situations that support rather than challenge prior attitudes and beliefs (Frey, 1986; Hart et al., 2009). This tendency to consume ideologically friendly media and associate with homogenous, like-minded groups can reinforce moralization and factualization.

There is consistent evidence that media consumers tend to select outlets that align with their ideological views, transforming the act of watching television or clicking on a headline into an act of identity affirmation (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011). For example, in a repeated surveys study with nationally representative samples, Rodriguez, Moskowitz, Salem, and Ditto (2017) found not only that respondents systematically chose pro-attitudinal over counter-attitudinal news sources but that this tendency toward audience fragmentation increased significantly between 2000 and 2012. There is little reason to suspect that this trend is subsiding as several recent studies continue to show an association between viewers' ideology and cable and online news consumption (e.g. Barnidge et al., 2017; Feezell, 2016).

Importantly, selective exposure does not equal the total absence of counter-attitudinal information (Garrett, 2009). Evidence suggests that the draw of attitude-consistent information is stronger than the avoidance of counter-attitudinal information (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013), and highly ideological individuals do sometimes access crosscutting information sources, especially when it is viewed as a way to gain advantage over the other political group (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012). Moreover, selective exposure may be a symptom of political polarization as much as its cause (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, 2010; Lee & Cappella, 2001) since evidence suggests that partisan media

do not persuade or reinforce already ideologized individuals but rather only influence those with little exposure and interest in political news (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Cryderman, 2013). Still, watching or reading pro-attitudinal news is linked to both greater accessibility of political identity (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011) and increased affective polarization (Garrett et al., 2014; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012).

Social media, with the almost limitless variety of information and opinions it contains, have the potential to override effects of selective exposure. However, evidence points in the other direction. Internet users replicate similar patterns of media consumption to those they consume as offline media, relying heavily on like-minded news websites (Johnson, Zhang, & Bichard, 2011). People avoid crosscutting discussions online in blogs and forums (Heatherly, Lu, & Lee, 2016). Users on Facebook present patterns of ideological selectivity in friendships and selecting content (Bakshy et al., 2015). Twitter users tend to cluster by ideology, following and sharing content from pro-attitudinal partisan websites (e.g. grass-roots blogs) rather than traditional outlets (Himelboim, McCreery, & Smith, 2013). Twitter users also tend to share (i.e. retweet) content aligned with their own ideological stance during politically controversial issues but not for other issues, such as sports or entertainment events (Barberá, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015). This body of research is consistent with the tenet that in their everyday media consumption – whether on paper, television, or social media – people are disproportionately likely to read, see, and hear arguments aligned with their prior beliefs.

Even if people's media consumption habits serve to surround them with ideologically congenial information, perhaps this bubble is burst during their everyday interactions with friends and neighbors who do not share their political views. To the contrary, research suggests that Americans increasingly live in places populated mostly with their ideological brethren. The publication of "The Big Sort" (Bishop, 2009) introduced the hypothesis that political polarization in America is associated with geographical patterns of ideological clustering (see also Gimpel & Hui, 2015; Sussel, 2013). Increasingly, liberals choose to live in places (often cities) disproportionately populated with liberals, while conservatives reside in places (often suburban or rural) disproportionately populated by conservatives. According to this account, people are motivated (albeit often implicitly) to select neighborhoods where crosscutting ideological contact is minimized. Decreased ideological fit predicts lower neighborhood satisfaction (Hui, 2013), worse interpersonal relations (Chopik & Motyl, 2016), and higher motivation to migrate (Motyl, 2014; Motyl, Iyer, Oishi, Trawalter, & Nosek, 2014). Experimental studies confirm that most people are reluctant to personally discuss political issues with a cross-ideological partner, considering it less preferable than taking out the trash (Frimer, Skitka, & Motyl, 2017) and will even refuse to comply with an experimenter's instructions when asked to write counter-attitudinal essays extoling the positive qualities of a president of the opposite party (Collins, Crawford, & Brandt, 2017; Nam, Jost, & Van Bavel, 2013).

In other words, living near like-minded others is psychologically satisfying and may have such a significant effect on perceived well-being that people are motivated to move to ideologically congenial areas.

In summary, socialization processes are a crucial last step in the construction of Red and Blue America's alternative factual worlds. A wealth of evidence suggests that people actively seek exposure to ideologically supportive information and like-minded people, and to a lesser extent avoid exposure to ideologically challenging information and political opponents. In this way, people place themselves in information and social environments that reinforce and amplify the effects of moralization and factualization. Holding a belief by oneself, even one grounded in moral commitment and intellectual justification, is a challenge if those around you feel and believe otherwise. But when surrounded by people, both real and virtual, who share your beliefs, that perceived consensus makes those views subjectively more plausible.

The expanding political divide

Our argument in a nutshell is this. Moralization *turns teams into tribes*. It contributes to an "us versus them" mentality, inciting intense emotions, unwillingness to compromise, and the desire to see the views of one's own side as righteous and the other's side as sacrilege. Factualization *turns opinions into facts*. Selective appeals to principles, logic, and favorable cost-benefit analyses justify preferred conclusions and create the impression that one's position is grounded in reason and objectively true. Socialization *turns beliefs into socially shared truth*. It further reifies moral opinions into moral facts as people become more confident in the validity of their beliefs when they believe more people share those beliefs.

These three processes converge to create the divergent factual worlds of liberals and conservatives, and have far-reaching implications for beliefs, policy preferences, and political conflict. First, these processes make it more likely that people will acquire and vigorously defend inaccurate beliefs. Erroneous beliefs may, in turn, lead to bad public policy as partisans can successfully push policies that appear sufficiently evidence based to their supporters, even if such policies are built on inaccurate reasoning or information. Importantly, nearly everyone is vulnerable to these processes. A recent meta-analysis of political bias revealed that partisans of all stripes show similar degrees of bias when exposed to belief-confirming or -disconfirming information (Ditto et al., in press). Experts and highly educated people are likewise susceptible (at times even more so than the less educated) to political biases (e.g. Kahan et al., 2012).

Perhaps the most troubling result of these processes, though, is the corrosive political conflict that ensues. When people begin to see themselves as occupying the moral high ground and believe their views to be objectively true, constructive dialogue or compromise can become nearly impossible. Once an issue is moralized, people are more likely to turn a blind eye to the flaws of their own reasoning but will keenly seize on any flaw in their opponents' arguments. When

a moral opinion becomes factualized, it is easy for people to feel like their view is the obviously correct one; as a result, anyone who disagrees seems stupid (or outright immoral). Simply put, we feel anger toward people when they firmly believe something that we just as firmly disbelieve. Choosing sides is also an important social process. Identifying strongly with one side leads to reinforcement of one's group-based beliefs and greater perceived moral distance between the in-group and out-group. Ultimately, these processes can feed into one another and breed the kind of political environment in which people no longer disagree over specific policies but rather distrust and despise the political out-group and anything with which it is associated.

Conclusion

"In these circumstances they did what most of us do, and, being ignorant of the truth, persuaded themselves into believing what they wished to believe" (Arrian, First Century AD).

One of the casualties of factualization of beliefs across political groups is scientific data. Scientific reasoning is often considered the last resort to resolve differences in terms of public debate, public policy, and social progress. In the bare-knuckle competition that is modern politics, scientific data is seen by many as the sole referee available to fairly and objectively adjudicate the truth. Yet, as literature shows, scientific data and its claims of objectivity are entangled in a web of moral outrage, motivated confabulation, and ideological isolation. We direct disproportionate skepticism toward scientific findings that threaten our own worldviews and complacent acceptance of data that confirm what we already believe (Ditto & Lopez, 1992). These dynamics undermine the bright line distinguishing facts and values that was championed by Enlightenment scholars and that forms the foundation of positivistic views of science and progress. In politics, as in other realms of human experience, what is taken for reality is not based on a clean slate of indisputable evidence but on a complex fabric of motivations and intuitions about the world, the good, and the truth. As a society, we will have to decide whether a functional political system can be sustained in a world of fake news and alternative facts, where politics defines reality rather than the other way around.

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Belief Systems and the Perception of Reality

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