

Thom Hartmann

A photograph of Thom Hartmann, a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt. He is sitting on a wooden park bench outdoors, with green trees and foliage in the background. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

Bestselling Author & Air America Radio Host

How to
Win Hearts,
Change Minds, and
Restore America's Original Vision

CRACKING THE CODE

an excerpt from

***Cracking the Code:
How to Win Hearts, Change Minds, and Restore America's Original Vision***

by Thom Hartmann

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

TALKING THE TALK

Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy, and mutual valuing.

— ROLLO MAY

My wife, Louise, and I live atop 30 feet of water, 100 feet from shore, in a houseboat on a river in Portland, Oregon. One day I stepped out our back door onto the floating deck that serves as our backyard and found myself confronting a very upset Canada goose. He bobbed his head up and down, lifted his wings to make his body look larger and more intimidating, and ran straight at me, hissing and trying to nip at me.

Observing this behavior my comedian friend Swami Beyondananda (Steve Bhaerman), who was visiting us that week, named the bird Goosalini.

I had no idea why this psycho goose was attacking, but there was no mistaking what Goosalini was trying to communicate: *Stay inside that house and don't come out!* I got the message, but I didn't stay inside. Instead, every time I went out to water the plants on my deck, I brought a broom with me to fight off Goosalini.

I found out what was going on a week later, when I learned from my neighbor that a female goose had settled on her back deck, just a few feet from our own, and was sitting on a nest. I realized that Goosalini must have been the proud papa, protecting his territory, and I stopped swatting at him with my broom.

Goosalini has a lot to tell us about communicative strategies. Even though he was just doing what a gander does when he wants a predator to leave—draw attention to himself and away from his

mate, attack first and ask questions later—he was able to communicate the “go away” part of his message to me pretty well. We all communicate all the time, even when we don’t give much thought to what we are saying or how we are saying it.

Because Goosalini was unable to use what we would call rational powers of persuasion, he communicated by going straight for the more primitive parts of my brain—the parts we shared as human and goose, the center of our gut feelings. The first time Goosalini attacked, I backed off because he was successful in communicating an intent to harm me, which caused me to feel fear, that most primal and visceral of human emotions.

The first key to unlocking the communication code is to understand that when we communicate, *feeling comes first*. Emotions will always trump intellect, at least in the short term.

This emotive form of communication, however, ultimately didn’t get Goosalini the response he wanted. On its own the attack wasn’t very persuasive. Instead of shooing me away, Goosalini got me angry.

Effective communicators know how to get the response they want because they understand how to tailor a message to the person who’s listening. They know the second key to unlocking the communication code: *the meaning of a communication is the response you get*.

Because Goosalini couldn’t tell me his story, I had to imagine his story for myself. The first story I came up with was that he was simply a psycho goose, trying to hurt me for no reason I could understand. The second story that I came up with—after talking to my neighbor—was a story of a dad protecting his soon-to-be-hatched goslings. Both stories accurately described what was happening, but the stories led to very different endings. The psycho goose made me angry; the dad goose made me feel protective of Goosalini himself.

In this book I call such stories “maps,” and the world the stories describe as “the territory.” The third key to unlocking the commu-

nication code is: *the map is not the territory*. Each story captures a different piece of reality; no one story captures all of it. *The key to effective communication is to find the best story to use to convey your understanding of the world to the greatest number of people.*

In politics we tell each other stories all the time. If you think about it, politics is really nothing more than a set of stories.

The United States of America began as a story that the Founders and the Framers told about a society that could live in harmony around the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This country was held together after the Great Depression and through a war by a story told by Franklin D. Roosevelt, which he called the New Deal.

Ronald Reagan told a very different story—one we are still in—that he called the “free market” story. In Reagan’s story our corporate CEOs should run our society instead of our elected representatives because, as Reagan pointed out (and believed), “The best minds are not in government. If any were, business would hire them away.”

Most of the stories we hear in the media today are scary. We are told to be afraid because the world is a bad place and people are untrustworthy. Every goose is a Goosalini—without understanding why.

These scary stories are profitable to our infotainment industry and to the politicians who are typically allied with the barons of the infotainment industry.

There is a different story, however, in which every Goosalini is a proud papa. It is a story of a world that is interconnected and of people who are fundamentally good. This is the traditional American liberal story, which has been told and understood since the first telling of it during the Enlightenment by thinkers like Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, and Thomas Jefferson. It’s the story that reaches directly back to the founding of this country.

My aim with this book is to give you the tools to tell the liberal story—and tell it well. I will show you how the process of

communication is coded—actually hardwired into our brains—and help you crack that code to become a brilliant communicator.

First, though, there are a few concepts it's important to master.

Everybody wants the best outcomes, and their behavior reflects the best tools they have to achieve those outcomes.

Another way of saying this is that people always make what they think are the best choices given the circumstances and the tools they have. *All behavior has, at its root, the goal of a positive outcome.*

As a practical statement, this means that conservatives and liberals are both working toward the best world possible.

In 2007 I broadcast my radio program live from the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, D.C. Three hours a day for four days, I had one conservative after another on my show, debating the issues of the day with me. As I was the only liberal in a hotel filled with more than 4,000 conservatives, most felt pretty comfortable, and we were often able to meet on a human-to-human level.

One particularly poignant moment came after I'd debated health care with a prominent conservative ideologue, who honestly and strongly believed that if there were absolutely no government interference in the "private marketplace of health care" whatsoever—no Food and Drug Administration (FDA); no pure-drug laws; no regulation of hospitals, doctors, or HMOs; no Medicare or Medicaid—all the "imbalances" in the system would be removed and everybody would end up with access to health care. Our debate was spirited, fast paced, and at times loud. Listeners may have even thought he was occasionally angry with me.

When we were finished and the radio network had gone to the news at the top of the hour and the microphones were turned off, he leaned across the table and said to me, in a soft and friendly voice, as if he didn't want his fellows around to hear: "You know, Thom, you and I want the same things. We both want our children

to live in a world at peace. We both want everybody to be healthy and to be cared for when they're sick. We both want to eliminate hunger and poverty in the world. We both want a clean environment, security in old age, and protections from the unexpected dangers of life."

He took a breath, straightened up a bit, and added: "We just differ on how best to achieve those goals. I think the free market will make it all happen if we restrict government to its core function of armies and police. You think these social goals can be achieved with the help of government. But we're both good people who love our families and just want the best. We differ on the means, not the ends."

He was so right.

Of course, there is the occasional sociopath among us (Dick Cheney comes to mind), but I'd argue that they're the exception that proves the rule. At our core we're all essentially interested in the same outcomes.

And we can begin to persuade others of our point of view only when we respect and understand theirs. This establishes the rapport that makes communication possible.

WELL-FORMED OUTCOMES ARE DESIRABLE.

If we're going to set out to change another person's behavior by changing their mind about something, we want the outcome of that new behavior to be useful to both them, us, and everything and everybody else involved. In its largest sense, this is a form of *ecology check*. In the most direct sense, what this means is that we're trying to achieve what's referred to in psychology as a "well-formed outcome." It works. It's sustainable. It accomplishes a new goal.

WE ADD TOOLS BUT NEVER TAKE AWAY TOOLS.

One of the essentials to ensuring a well-formed outcome is to be continually expanding—rather than contracting—the sphere and

the collection of behaviors of each person with whom we come into contact.

Understanding that *all* behavior—no matter how dysfunctional or destructive it may seem—has at its core the desire for a positive outcome, you'll quickly understand why, when we try to take behaviors *away* from people, we meet resistance.

Instead of trying to stop or delete or prohibit behaviors, it always works better to offer people new and additional, more useful behaviors.

At the smallest level, this means instead of telling children to “stop” doing something in the living room, it's more effective to help them “start” doing something else in the backyard. People will always be receptive to new options, new tools, and new behaviors. It's always more effective to say, “Start this,” than to say, “Stop that.”

On a larger scale, this illustrates why our government's “War on Drugs” is so dysfunctional. Most illegal (and much legal) drug use is a response to despair, apathy, or boredom. And most illegal drug selling is a response to a lack of other economic activities. Most drug dealers are simply entrepreneurs who lack other, more appropriate means to make money. When we understand this, we realize that providing small-scale entrepreneurial opportunities within a legal context would be far more effective than prison at stopping the illegal drug trade. We saw this writ large during Prohibition (1920–1933) and its immediate aftermath, although most people alive don't remember that time.

On the largest scale, this is often the story of immigrants. When Irish Catholic immigrants came to America in droves in the early 1800s, escaping the potato famine and British oppression, they were viewed by the WASPs already living here as a new “criminal class.” Entire books were written about the inherent criminality of the Irish genetics and culture. But the simple fact was that their large numbers drove up the supply of labor, which drove down the price of labor, producing more people than jobs

and more poorly paying jobs than well-paying ones. The result was widespread poverty, which led to widespread crime.

By the 1880s the Irish Catholics, particularly in areas like Boston and Philadelphia, were into their second and third generations. They were Americans. Their numbers were stabilizing, their wages were rising, and suddenly they weren't the criminal class anymore. That role went to the new immigrants of the 1880s from Italy—which produced another generation of speculative writings about the Sicilian gene and the native criminality of Italians and their “mafia culture.”

In each case, when people are given more opportunities—more tools—they take them and grow to the next level. When they find tools taken away from them (economic and cultural oppression), they sink into despair and crime.

THERE'S NO FAILURE, ONLY FEEDBACK; NO MISTAKES, ONLY OUTCOMES.

Our biological and psychological/emotional similarities (we're all just human here) mean we're all working toward the same general goals, just using different tool sets and techniques. When things don't work out—personally, politically, or in any other fashion—people who believe they have no other tools, techniques, or options available to them will interpret that outcome as “failure.” In fact, there are no failures; there's only feedback. There are no mistakes; there are only outcomes.

Every “failure” can be the germ of a great success. Henry Ford went bankrupt seven times before becoming successful. Thomas Edison tried thousands of filaments before he made a light bulb work. Charles Colson went to prison, and the experience transformed his life in a way that he today believes was both necessary and positive. When we re-understand the results of our actions as “feedback” and “outcomes,” new spectrums of options for learning open up to us.

A teacher of mine once told the story of two men who were walking down a rural dirt road. There was a small crack in the road, where a recent rain had cut a 2-inch-wide gully from one side of the road to the other, and both men, being deep in conversation, tripped on it and fell on their faces.

The man on the right reached over to the side of the road to grab a stick and began beating his own head and shoulders with it. "What an idiot I've been!" he shouted at himself as he repeatedly struck his own head. Meanwhile, the man on the left stood up, saw the crack in the road, made a mental note to look for others in the future, dusted himself off, and recommenced his journey.

The man on the right experienced a mistake in not noticing the crack in the road and a subsequent failure to maintain his balance. The man on the left experienced the outcome of tripping and falling and took the feedback of that experience as an opportunity to learn how to better walk down unpredictable rural dirt roads.

This ties into the concept of more tools and options rather than fewer, and it clarifies the need for well-formed outcomes. The man on the left gained a tool and had the desirable outcome of continuing to walk but with a new and more useful level of knowledge about walking. The man on the right had the poorly formed outcome of self-flagellation and a slowing in his reaching his goal where the road eventually led.

USING THESE TOOLS

Communication is value-neutral. It is neither good nor evil. It can be used for either, but, like a screwdriver or a scalpel, is only a tool.

Nonetheless, some people are fearful of open discussions of communication and its code.

Some want to believe that humans are not in any way Pavlovian stimulus/response machines, and thus the idea of enhancing the effectiveness of communication for the purpose of persuasion is all nonsense. They'll often say this, ironically enough, in book

reviews published in newspapers or on Web sites funded—including the reviewer’s paycheck—by a multi-hundred-billion-dollar industry devoted to (and effective at) producing a specific response (“buy!”) to a specific stimulus. The simple reality is that if we didn’t react to these tools, the advertising and marketing industry—and, for that matter, the psychotherapy industry—would cease to exist within a year for lack of satisfied customers.

Others fear that teaching people how to be better communicators—particularly in the context of political persuasion—is teaching people how to “manipulate” others. They are right in the technical sense and wrong in the value sense.

For lack of a better word (and we do lack the vocabulary, outside of the very specific vernacular of psychotherapy), we all “manipulate” all the time. It’s how we accomplish everything. If you’re hungry, you can manipulate an entire multi-billion-dollar industry by offering a few dollars to a clerk in a fast-food restaurant. The result of that manipulation is that you get fed. You manipulated your partner into being your partner, your friends into being your friends, and your pet onto your lap. The only people who don’t manipulate are those who are dead.

Manipulate has a negative connotation because one of our most pervasive cultural myths—a victim myth combined with a not-my-responsibility myth—is the belief that we are all totally free agents who act with totally free will yet at the same time our words and actions are only rarely responsible for specific reactions in others. It’s such a nice, convenient, comfortable myth set. But the reality is that every stimulus of the world around us—no matter how small or seemingly insignificant—produces a response.

Those who understand this are competent at producing predictable responses. Those who don’t are often lost in life and don’t know why.

Moving manipulation out of the “practical frame” and into the “value frame,” it is true that the tools of competent communication can be used to persuade people in ways that are not in their

interest or in the interest of society or the world. Some will suggest that, because of this danger, this book should not exist.

But I can tell you from personal experience that there is little in this book that the senior marketing officials and the most powerful lobbyists for the world's largest corporations don't already know. Frank Luntz and Newt Gingrich (among others) set out, in the 1980s and 1990s, to share much of this information with conservative politicians, and they have used it masterfully since that time (as you'll see in this book).

Psychologically and politically, these are core concepts, whether we're talking about children, adults, politicians, entire groups of people, or even geese.

So it is with respect and hope for a better world that I now hand *you* these tools, trusting that in your hands they will be used for good. The Earth and all life on it need you to be a more competent communicator now at this critical time in our nation's history.

PART I

TELLING YOUR
STORY

CHAPTER 1

CRACKING THE WORLDVIEW CODE

As Mankind becomes more liberal, they will be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are equally entitled to the protections of civil government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations of justice and liberality.

— GEORGE WASHINGTON

Someone coming to America during one of our national elections might think politics was a kind of sporting event. They'd see a red team facing off against a blue team and hear that a team would win or lose based on how many votes it got.

That kind of thinking got a friend of mine into trouble. Once an outspoken and proud “dittohead,” a few years ago he decided he was going to instead become a liberal (his wife actually decided it for him, but that's another story). But this guy tripped up because he thought that politics was a sporting event with teams that are just as interchangeable as if a baseball team were to move from Kansas City to Oakland. He thought it was a matchup with a playlist of issues like Social Security, national health care, and the “War on Terror.” On one side of each issue were conservatives and their talking points, and on the other side were liberals and their talking points. He figured all he had to do to switch sides was memorize a new set of talking points, the way a sports team would simply change its venue.

But then over lunch, one of us would bring up an issue that wasn't one of the issues for which he'd memorized a new set of talking points. Sometimes it was an issue that didn't even seem obviously political, like why so many coal miners are getting killed in mining accidents¹ or why we're paying to teach kids how to take tests but not paying for music classes.² The guy who thought he had gone from being a conservative to a liberal didn't know what to say. Those issues just weren't in his playbook.

A true liberal or conservative, with a grounding in the philosophy and the history of the liberal or conservative worldview, would instantly know how to respond to such issues.

A liberal would put the miners' story inside a bigger story about how corporations are now required by law to care more about profits than people and how the evisceration of the labor movement by Reagan's "War on Labor" and later conservative pro-business efforts have stripped workers of the democratic and balancing power in the workplace (known as *unions!*) to emphasize things like safety.

A liberal might answer the music issue by talking about a child who learned how to read and write after he started playing a musical instrument—how that shows there are different intelligences we all have and can express—and conclude by stressing how important it is that we create an opportunity for every child to realize his or her potential.

There is a story behind every political issue, a story that is either liberal or conservative. Politics is no more and no less than the sum of those stories.

THE COMMUNICATION CODE

To be an effective communicator, we learn *how* to tell a story, *to whom* to tell that story, and *why*.

Everyone is a communicator, and we all communicate constantly. Some of us, like Bill Clinton, Ralph Nader, and Ronald Reagan, are born storytellers and natural communicators. The skill of communication and persuasion seems innate and effortless. Folks like that are *unconsciously competent* at communicating.

Most of us, however, are not very competent at communicating; what's more, we don't *know* we're not competent. We are *unconsciously incompetent*. The challenge we face when we want to communicate effectively is to go from being unconsciously incompetent to being *unconsciously competent*. This involves four stages.

Learning to communicate well is like learning to ride a bike. At first you don't know what it's like to ride a bike (*unconsciously incompetent*); then, when you start learning, you fall off a lot (*consciously incompetent*).

After a while you get the hang of bike riding, but you have to concentrate on pedaling, turning, shifting, and so forth (*consciously competent*).

Then, one day, you are riding around with a friend and you suddenly realize you haven't even thought about being on a bike for the past ten minutes. You know how to ride the bike so well that you can now focus on other things you want to do while you are riding it (*unconsciously competent*). This is true of everything we learn, from walking to talking to typing to reading. And you'll learn the communication code in just the same way:

- Unconsciously incompetent—never thought about the impact of words; wonder why communication often is misunderstood
- Consciously incompetent—become aware of these tools and how often you're not using them or are doing things wrong

- **Consciously competent**—start using the tools but have to pay attention; thinking things through before doing or saying them
- **Unconsciously competent**—powerful, influential communication becomes second nature

Anyone, with any message, can become an effective communicator. Stephen Hawking, mute and in a wheelchair, continues to influence the entire world with his communications. The communication code itself is politically neutral. It's just a tool.

Combining a competent use of that tool with a good ethical base and a positive vision produces a powerful and useful force. When people combine competent communication with a desire to dominate others or to rule through fear, it often becomes a corrosive force that strikes at the very heart of our democratic republic.

The tools of communication are widely known. I learned many of them from working with Richard Bandler and reading the works of John Grinder, two men who together developed a theory of communication they called Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).³ Professional message makers like Frank Luntz and Newt Gingrich have studied these tools as well. These message makers have used their knowledge of the communication code to convince average working Americans that middle-class interests correspond with those of global corporations and the mega-wealthy. Luntz, Gingrich, Karl Rove, and others like them—the manipulators of Madison Avenue, Wall Street, and the Bush White House—figured out how to crack the communication code to become masters of political persuasion.

Some politicians' efforts at persuasion are conscious, intentional, systematic, and, of necessity, deceptive because they don't share the worldview held by the majority of Americans. To respond, the rest of us must learn to communicate more effectively.

THE CONSERVATIVE STORY

Much thought and many words have been devoted to the differences between conservatives and liberals, ranging from their temperament to their parenting to their vision of government.

One popular line of thought is that conservatives want a government that's a stand-in for a "strict father" whereas liberals are more interested in a government that plays the role of a "nurturing family." While this may help explain the strain of authoritarian conservatives so well documented by John Dean in his book *Conservatives without Conscience*, it fails to note that the history of the left is littered with equally authoritarian figures, from Leon Trotsky to Joseph Stalin to Fidel Castro. It's an excellent exposition on the authoritarian-seeking personality, but it doesn't address the true historical and modern differences between conservative and liberal thought.

Another popular canard is that conservatives value personal liberty at the expense of the good of society, whereas liberals value social goals above personal freedom. While both sides use this to beat up the other, it fails to explain why such an overgeneralization would even come into being or why most liberals hold personal liberty (a value conservatives claim) as a high value, and most conservatives believe that their worldview will best solve the problems of society as a whole (a value liberals claim).

To truly understand the difference between modern conservative and liberal thought—and policy—it's necessary to step back in time to the beginning of the modern versions of both. They emerged within a generation of each other, in England during the 1600s.⁴ Up until that time, the story most Europeans told themselves—the core story of European culture and politics—was that the social order was ordained by God, who had created a great chain of being, stretching from divinely ordained rulers through lesser monarchs down through the landed aristocracy to peasants and serfs.

Then Thomas Hobbes came along, during a time of social, economic, and political turmoil in England, to argue against that great-chain-of-being story and propose what became the modern conservative story. In his book *Leviathan*, Hobbes suggested that all men were equal, and he argued in favor of private property—two views later also embraced by liberals (and ultimately extended to women and to non-European peoples).

Unlike the liberals who would come later, however, Hobbes believed that because all people are equal, all people are equally dangerous. He believed that human nature was essentially evil and that, left to our own devices, we humans would constantly be engaged in war with one another.

The first truly articulate definer of what has become modern American conservative thought, Hobbes was the mathematics tutor to Charles II during the young prince's exile after the murder of his father; it was during that time that Hobbes wrote and published *Leviathan*, which both defined his view of how civilization came about and also subtly rationalized placing Charles II on the throne.

In the introduction Hobbes told how he was setting out to basically answer the questions *Who are we?* and *Why do we have society?* and *What is the true nature of man?* Civilization, he believed, was the recent, artificial, and clever invention of modern man, and prior to its existence there had been nothing but fear that held humans together.⁵

Hobbes then proceeded to lay out what has become the basis of today's modern conservative worldview and also to lay the foundations for today's modern liberal worldview, which would follow him by about a generation. First, he suggested that the divine right of kings was dead and that therefore no man had an inherent right to rule over another.⁶

This notion of equality was radical stuff for his time and was embraced by the people of England, paving the way for Hobbes's

protégé, Charles II, to assume the throne and share power with Parliament.

But Hobbes saw his vision of human equality as a curse, leading to the miserable “natural” state of mankind.⁷

Thus, in Hobbes’s mind, the natural state of humankind was to be at war, and peace was merely the absence of war. “From Equality Proceeds Diffidence,” Hobbes said, and from diffidence, war. As a result of this, there *must* be, in Hobbes’s mind, “allowed” a power of “dominion over men” or else continuous war would always be the result.⁸

This means, Hobbes said, that warfare between men, between families, between states, and between nations is as natural as the weather. It’s the normal state of things because humans are, at their core, evil and selfish beings willing to kill one another simply because it’s what men do.⁹

This logic, then, led to Hobbes’s most famous core assumption, which is absolutely at the heart of modern conservative thinking (and is often quoted in books on conservative philosophy):

In such condition [without people being ruled by the iron fist of Church or King], there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

Hobbes was also quite certain that he could see the truth of this in the natives living on the American continent, although he had never visited it or met any of them.¹⁰

Even today most modern American conservatives believe—wrongly, in the opinion of liberals and most anthropologists—that

all American Indian tribes lived in a state of constant hate and warfare against each other before the arrival of the “civilizing” Europeans. On the other hand, most modern American liberals will assert that the majority of American Indian tribes lived in relative peace and harmony both among and between each other and that tribal conflict was the exception brought about mostly by changes in climate from generation to generation.

Conservatives, believing Hobbes’s view of human nature to be inviolable, cannot conceive of the possibility that civilizations can exist without constant warfare or an iron-fisted Church or State to prevent that warfare. This is the original modern conservative story. Conservatives believe in what Riane Eisler and others have called the *dominator culture*.¹¹ They believe that human nature must be dominated for human societies to flourish because without constraint by domination the essentially evil nature of humans will emerge and society will dissolve into chaos.

Conservatives believe that government must be restrained and controlled precisely because it’s made up of flawed human beings, “the governed.” This is why they’re willing to allow corporations to take powers—like controlling our health-care system—that they would never allow to government. Corporations are essentially independent entities and totally without morality (and, thus, without immorality or evil). Being amoral they’re less dangerous in the conservative mind than a government controlled by humans, particularly the vast majority of people (whom John Adams called “the rabble”) because those people are, at their core, evil.

The conservatives’ core belief is that if our essential (evil) human nature is not restrained by *something*—God or priests or corporate bosses—harm will come to society. This is why conservative morality is nearly always focused on restraining individual behavior, particularly private behavior (*With whom are you having sex and in what positions or ways? What are you smoking, drinking, or snorting? Is there a fetus growing inside of you?*). And why they’re

enthusiastic to “privatize” functions of government, taking the commons out of the hands of We the (evil) People and putting it into the hands of morality-neutral corporations that, in their minds, answer only to a mechanistic and morally neutral “free market.”

THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN LIBERAL WORLDVIEW

Thomas Hobbes’s student Charles II lived to rule for only three years and was replaced by his brother, James II, who was such a maniacal power-freak (and a Catholic in an increasingly Protestant nation) that the people of England rose up and overthrew him in the nearly bloodless “Glorious Revolution” of 1688. But before they would let William and Mary rule, Parliament passed the first real British “bill of rights.”

This was the beginning of true democracy in England, and its greatest philosopher was John Locke. His *Two Treatises on Government* was written in part as a rebuttal to Thomas Hobbes. In it Locke laid out the idea that natural law is real, that it doesn’t require a state of war, and that one of the goals of civil society should be to know natural law and reflect it in manmade laws.¹²

Locke first developed the idea of private property as being the result of human interaction with nature. A tree is part of the commons, but if part of that tree is worked by a human hand, some of the person is invested in it and the resulting ax handle (or whatever is made) is now the private property of the person who invested it with his human labor. Prior to the introduction of imperishable forms of representative wealth (money), Locke said that natural law forbade any man to accumulate more than he could use. With the introduction of money, however, it was possible for people to accumulate well in excess of what they could use, and Locke suggested it was then up to society (government) to determine what the limits on this accumulation might be.

Thomas Jefferson drew heavily on John Locke's theories. Locke wrote:

Man being born, as has been proved, with a title to perfect freedom, and an uncontrouled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the *law of nature*, equally with any other man, or number of men in the world, *hath by nature a power*, not only to preserve his property, that is, *his life, liberty and estate*, against the injuries and attempts of other men... (emphasis added)

As Thomas Jefferson noted in his *Autobiography*, the genesis of the Declaration of Independence was in the perversion of the tax laws by the transnational corporation the East India Company in getting a huge tax break from the British Parliament so it could destroy the smaller American entrepreneurs and corner the market in tea and other commodities. After the colonists, in the early winter of 1773, threw overboard more than 300 chests of tea in Boston harbor—what would be worth more than \$1 million in today's U.S. currency—the British passed the Boston Ports Act that demanded the colonists repay the East India Company for its losses from this illegal act of vandalism and rebellion or the Port of Boston would be closed to further traffic.¹³

This led to some general rabble-rousing on the part of the Founders, with Jefferson writing *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, which didn't completely call for separation from England but was philosophically moving in that direction. This was followed by Jefferson's writing a "draught of instructions" in how a colony may secede. Most quickly embraced it, although some were only marginally interested.

Ultimately, the process led directly to Jefferson's writing the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, wherein he changed Locke's "life, liberty and estate" to:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the

pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

This substitution of *happiness* for Locke's language for private property was no accident on Jefferson's part. The core division between Hobbes and Locke, between Sir Edmund Burke and Thomas Jefferson, between conservative and liberal in the 1770s was the theory of the true core of human nature. The majority of the Founders were Lockean liberals, while most of England still held to Hobbesian conservative principles.

Jefferson and other American liberals early on embraced Locke's notion of private property as being essential to liberty, but Jefferson also saw in the issue that Locke wouldn't follow to its conclusion—the unlimited amassment of private property through the accumulation of monetary wealth—a fundamental danger to the public good. By inserting *happiness* instead of *estate*, Jefferson was pointing again to his belief (and that of his peers among the Founders) in the essential goodness of human nature, of happiness as its “original state,” and that natural law traced itself back to ensuring happiness as much as it did life and liberty.

To the proto-conservative Hobbes, freedom was found in the restraint of human nature by the iron fist of Church or State, thus preventing the original state of perpetual warfare. To the proto-liberal Locke, freedom was found in the restraint of Church or State, leaving the individual and a self-governing society to reclaim the original state of balance and harmony (and, Jefferson would add, happiness).

To this day, this is still the fundamental cleavage between conservatives and liberals.

Liberals speak of using government for positive ends, but they don't mean to further restrain people. Instead liberals believe that the role of government is to provide a framework within which individuals can achieve their maximum potential.

The closer we can all come to our true human nature, the better, liberals believe. Instead of restraining human nature, liberals want to promote it.

What should be restrained, in the liberal worldview, are those amoral institutions—like corporations—that serve to lock humans into particular social and/or economic roles that prevent both individual and societal self-actualization and achievement of our essential human nature (Jefferson's *happiness*).

This is why liberal morality is nearly always focused on providing for the needs of individuals within society—and was so well articulated by Jesus in the Beatitudes and Matthew 25 when He said, essentially, that we couldn't claim morality if there were hungry, homeless, sick, thirsty, or imprisoned people among us whose needs were not being met.

The fundamental difference between liberals and conservatives is that conservatives think amoral institutions like corporations, or moral institutions like churches, are morally *superior* to immoral/evil humans, and so constraints on governments run by immoral/evil human voters should come from religion and the power of the supposedly amoral marketplace.

Liberals, on the other hand, believe that amoral institutions like corporations and corruptible institutions like churches are *inferior* to moral/good humans, and so want constraints on government to come from the voters/citizens themselves, anchored in the core concepts of human rights and human needs.

The liberal story of our Founders is told in the Preamble to our Constitution, which lays out six purposes for creating our government. Only one has to do with defense, whereas the other five are all about helping our citizens realize their maximum potential:

We the people of the United States, in order to *form a more perfect union*, establish *justice*, insure domestic *tranquility*, provide for the common *defense*, promote the general *welfare*, and secure the *blessings of liberty* to ourselves and our posterity, do

ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. (emphasis added)

Together, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States lay out a clear and solid story of the original worldview of the Founders of our nation, nearly all of them liberal “children of the Enlightenment.”

THE ISSUES PLAYLIST: THREE EXAMPLES

Every issue on the political playlist can be told using either the liberal story or the conservative story but is nevertheless grounded in the core good/evil humanity stories just outlined. Here are some examples:

Social Security

Liberals tell a story about each person paying into an insurance system so that we collectively, as a society, can make sure that each of us has enough if the vicissitudes of life strike us, whether those are disability, loss, or old age. Social Security becomes the prime example of the kind of story of a cooperative society that liberals envision and feel is essential for “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Conservative ideologues first ignore that one-third of Social Security recipients are not retired people but, literally, widows, orphans, and the severely disabled poor. They then tell a story about each person needing to be responsible for investing in their personal future. We deserve to have a good retirement, they suggest, only if we have been “good people” and adopted internal restraints on ourselves and saved for our own futures. If we are without those restraints, the government shouldn’t “bail us out.”

Unions

Liberals believe that people are most productive when they can realize their potential, so they favor situations like unionization in which workers are on equal footing with bosses so

they can negotiate issues and work out common solutions to problems. To liberals, unions are a form of democracy in the workplace, which would otherwise be organized like a kingdom.

Conservatives believe that to be productive, workers need restraints, so they favor giving power in the workplace to bosses, whose eyes are on productivity and profit, and eliminating the power that's given to workers by laws that protect the right to unionize.

Global Warming

Liberals believe that we humans are part of a larger whole and are capable of being a positive force in the world. We created global warming and that means, ultimately, that we have a responsibility to resolve it through our democratic institutions (passing laws to restrain CO₂-producing behaviors, sustainability, and the like). The "free market" may eventually remedy past harms, but with so much at stake we can't afford to wait to do something about global warming.

Many conservatives worry about global warming but believe that the best solution is in the so-called free market, which they believe to be independent of and thus superior to human nature. Conservatives believe that people are entirely self-interested and therefore will keep driving their SUVs and using their gas furnaces until constrained by market forces like high prices. Their solution to global warming is to wait until the situation is so bad that there is enough demand on corporations within the "free market" to develop products that pollute less and have reduced energy consumption. Industry will then develop these products on its own so long as liberals don't use government to interfere with the workings of the market.

They Can't Govern If They Don't Believe in Government

Liberals believe—as stated in the Preamble to the Constitution—that five-sixths of the reasons for the existence of government have to do with helping people achieve their fullest

potential and protecting the common wealth and the common future. This is why during the Great Liberal Era from 1935 until 1981 a huge middle class arose, millions moved from the working poor into the middle class, and infrastructure from schools to roads to dams to the ability to put a man on the moon was built.

Conservatives believe that the fundamental strength of a society comes from and is reflected by the power of its wealthiest individuals and its most powerful institutions. They believe that government power should be weak and limited to restraining people: police, prisons, and armies.

Because conservatives don't believe in government beyond these purposes, when conservative governments are called on to do things other than punish, they will inevitably fail.

Recent and obvious examples include George W. Bush turning the consequences of Hurricane Katrina over to private corporations like Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing, Blackwater USA, and Halliburton; turning the occupation of Iraq—after a quick and successful (albeit illegal) war—over to private corporations like Blackwater and Halliburton; Republicans turning our voting rolls over to private voter-purging companies and our voting systems over to private corporations like Diebold; and a nearly thirty-year record since the conservative Reagan revolution of failure to invest in the infrastructure of schools, hospitals, libraries, colleges, national parks, regulatory agencies, and other public institutions.

CRACKING THE CONSERVATIVE/ LIBERAL CODE

Being liberal or conservative isn't a matter of where you stand on any particular issue. Some conservatives are very concerned about global warming. Some liberals oppose abortion. What makes people conservative or liberal is which story they believe at their core about the true nature of humans.

Conservatives view the world as a dangerous and evil place and believe people to be fundamentally selfish. Humans create institutions to protect us from ourselves by constraining and channeling evil human nature in productive and positive ways. The main purpose of government is to protect, mainly through the instruments of police, prisons, and armies.

Liberals view the world as a natural and harmonious place and believe people to be fundamentally good. The purpose of government, therefore, in addition to protecting us from the occasional nutcase, is to help us all achieve our highest potential by providing things that will expand education, skills, and economic opportunities.

After September 11, 2001, George W. Bush was able to use the communication code to persuade many liberals to temporarily believe the conservative story. He used the communication code so effectively he was able to convince Americans that Saddam Hussein, a secular nationalist, was personally connected to the Islamic fundamentalist jihadists who carried out the 9/11 attacks. Many Americans still believe that.¹⁴

It's interesting to note that Hobbes was writing in a time of great poverty and upheaval in the England of the 1630s (which was then a third-rate power, its economy eclipsed by the Dutch and Spanish trading companies until the mid-1600s, when the British East India Company began successfully competing worldwide). He noted how poverty makes people desperate, and desperate people can be dangerous people. London was filled with them. And he assumed that such poverty and "criminal" behavior was the norm of all societies that preceded "civilization."

Locke, on the other hand, was writing as the East India Company and British colonialism were having considerable economic successes, the Enlightenment was taking hold, and a more substantial middle class was emerging in England. He looked at the behavior of London's emerging middle class as a more accurate reflection of the "natural" state of humanity.

Conservatives may well be right about the “true nature” of people—when they’re desperate. Liberals may well be right about the “true nature” of people—when their basic needs are met and they feel safe and secure.

The history of social interaction—from tribal times to civilization to today—has been about providing safety and security, sometimes more successfully than at other times.

Whereas safe, secure people do creative and positive things, desperate people do desperate things.

Before the United States invaded Iraq, there had never, in the seven-thousand-year history of that nation, been a recorded incident of a suicide bomber killing random civilians. After a year of sporadic electricity, no clean water, constant strife, and the heavy foot of a foreign occupier, suicide bombers suddenly became relatively common in Iraq.

One lesson of this has to do with the importance of liberal civil society to maintain democracy, and of democracy to maintain a liberal civil society.

But war is not a form of civility; it’s the ultimate failure of civility. Because it is legalized mass murder, it is rightly relegated to the measure of last resort by civilized people the world over. Thus the majority of the civilized world was horrified when the United States launched a preemptive war on Iraq without the authorization of the United Nations.

Yet many Americans bought the initial sales pitch for the war, even as the rest of the world looked on with horror. Listen to George W. Bush in the last speech he gave before he invaded Iraq:¹⁵

Some citizens wonder, after 11 years of living with this problem [Saddam Hussein], why do we need to confront it now? And there’s a reason. We’ve experienced the horror of September the 11th. We have seen that those who hate America are willing to crash airplanes into buildings full of innocent people. Our enemies would be no less willing, in fact, they would be eager, to use biological or chemical, or a nuclear weapon.

Knowing these realities, America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

This speech uses many of the tools and techniques you will learn in this book. It's pretty clear that Bush is pushing the panic button, appealing (much like Goosalini) directly to our very primitive fight-or-flight reaction. Less obviously, he's using language designed to engage our three most basic senses: *seeing*, *hearing*, and *feeling*. He's also using even more-subtle hypnotic techniques here, such as *future pacing*, to create a kind of trance state that will make us more likely to agree with him.

The communication techniques Bush used to persuade us to go to war in Iraq are not evil in themselves; they are value-neutral. Franklin D. Roosevelt used the communication code to push through the New Deal. Lincoln used the code to motivate soldiers to win the Civil War and end slavery.

Yet when Lincoln and FDR used the communication code to push through an idea, their story stuck because it was fundamentally honest. Bush's story wasn't honest, and ultimately it didn't stick.

The difference between Bush and Lincoln, and between Bush and FDR, is simple and has nothing to do with conservative/liberal: Bush lied. There was no smoking gun. Bush persuaded the American people to invade Iraq by motivating them to avoid “the threat gathering against us” when there was no immediate threat—at least not from Saddam, as Hans Blix was telling the United Nations as recently as a week before our invasion of Iraq. Bush failed what I call the *ecology check*—and it ultimately came back to bite him.

ECOLOGY CHECKS

When Bush lied about the connection between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, and lied again about the presence of nuclear weapons

in Iraq, he probably thought the ends justified the means. When he used the communication code to tell those lies, he must have thought the war he was creating was really worth its cost in blood, money, and national prestige.

In politics, as in nature, the most ecological efforts at enhancing social good cause no harm. That's an example of an ecology check.

The word *ecology* means a system in balance. When you are communicating about a particular topic, ask yourself these questions:

- Does it serve you and others well?
- Will it help serve community, democracy, and all life on Earth?
- Is it sustainable over time in a healthy balance?

Because conservatives believe that the natural human role is to dominate all of nature and, ultimately, each other (to prevent nature's evil and our evil from emerging), they sometimes will justify using whatever means necessary to bring the undisciplined public into line. Similarly, sometimes liberals have used deceit or raw power to bring about what they think are the solutions to greater social ills. These are both examples of failed ecology checks.

Fear is created about a group—be it communists, gays, hippies, the Japanese during World War II, or members of another religion—and in the short term there is a strong and immediate response. We human beings, like other animals, are hardwired to move away from anything dangerous.

Over the past few decades in particular, some politicians have become very competent at using fear to paint a larger and more systemic picture of a reality that is always dangerous. This picture gives them power because it is based in a very powerful, primitive emotion and it emerges from their essential frame of reality.

Franklin D. Roosevelt became president during the Great Depression at a time when everyone was terrified of the future.

But he said, literally, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself,” and that positive message helped pull the American people together to bring our economy and society back on track.

To help you crack the communication code for yourself, I’ll show you, tell you, and hand you the tools you need to understand how people think, sort, and understand the world. Along the way we’ll examine how the communication code can be used to frame, explain, and promote or oppose issues that face the United States and the world—with examples to help you see and learn the stories of the traditional progressive values that made America great.

As you read deeply into this book, you’ll see things you hadn’t realized were right there in front of you all along in everything from advertising to political rants. You’ll discover resources and personal abilities within yourself and find out how they can be used.

You’ll become an agent of change, in the finest tradition of those brilliant and unconsciously competent geniuses Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and the cousins Roosevelt.

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by Thom Hartmann

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