Phil. 2200
Notes: Introduction, irrationality

Agenda
· Distribute syllabus, readings.
· Discuss course requirements.
· Irrationality.

I. The problem of political disagreement
· Features of political disagreements:
  - Widespread
  - Strong
  - Persistent
· Harms:
  - Waste of resources
  - Bad policies
  - Conflict, violence
· Theories of political disagreements:
  a. Miscalculation + inherent difficulty of issues
  b. Ignorance
  c. Divergent values
  d. Irrationality

II. Ignorance & miscalculation theories do not explain:
· Persistence of political disagreements.
· Strength of political beliefs.
· Clustering of logically unrelated beliefs.
· Correlations of political beliefs with race, sex, personality traits, etc.

III. Divergent values theory does not explain:
· Why people disagree about values in the first place.
· Clustering of logically unrelated beliefs.
· Factual disputes in politics. Examples:

| *Issue*	*Disputes*
Gun Control	P Do guns cause crime?
	P Are they effective means of self-defense?
	P Is there a risk of developing a tyrannical government?
	P Does private gun ownership reduce this risk?
Capital Punishment	P Does capital punishment deter crime?
	P How often are innocent people executed?
Capitalism vs. Socialism	P What determines prices in a market economy?
	P What are the effects of socialism?
	P Where do capitalists get their money?

IV. Rational ignorance & rational irrationality

· Two kinds of "rationality":
  - *Instrumental rationality:* consists in choosing the correct means for pursuing your existing goals, whatever they are. The explanation of action:

Non-moral
Beliefs ＼
＼→ Choice of → Action
／ means
Values ／
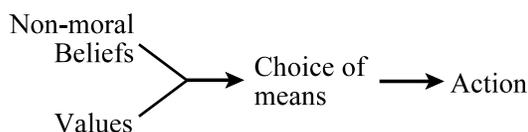
  - *Epistemic rationality:* consists in using correct (logical) reasoning, basing beliefs on evidence, avoiding fallacies, not contradicting oneself, and so on.

· The Theory of *Rational Ignorance:*
  - It is rational to remain ignorant when costs of collecting information exceed expected benefits.
  - *Example:* information about political candidates & issues. Political information is a *public good:* a good for which the producer bears most of the cost, while others receive most of the benefits.
  - People in fact choose to remain ignorant in these cases.
    ☞ 60% think foreign aid is one of the 2 largest items in the federal budget. In fact, it is <1% of the budget.[1]
    ☞ "During the 1992 presidential campaign 89 percent of the public knew that Vice President Quayle was feuding with the television character Murphy Brown, but only 19 percent could characterize Bill Clinton's record on the environment... 86 percent of the public knew that the Bushes' dog was named Millie, yet only 15 percent knew that both presidential candidates supported the death penalty. Judge Wapner (host of the television series 'People's Court') was identified by more people than were Chief Justices Burger or Rehnquist."[2]

A Public Good

Cost   Benefits

▨ To Others
■ To You
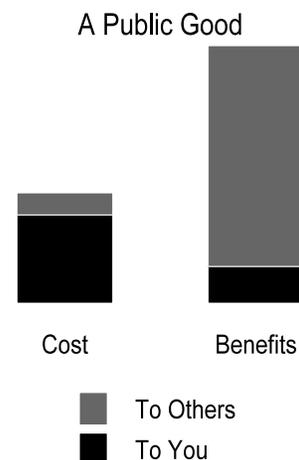
· The Theory of *Rational Irrationality:*
  - Assumes:
    a. People have non-epistemic belief preferences: prefer to believe certain things, for reasons independent of the truth or epistemic rationality of those beliefs.
    b. People have some control over what they believe.
    c. People are generally instrumentally rational.
  - Therefore:
    ☞ People choose to adopt epistemically irrational beliefs, when the "costs" of being rational are greater than the expected benefits.
    ☞ This includes most political beliefs.

V. Sources of belief preferences
  · People are biased by self-interest + interests of the group they prefer to identify with
  · People adopt beliefs to accord with the self-image they want to project
  · Political beliefs can serve as tools of social bonding.
  · People are biased towards other beliefs that cohere with their existing beliefs.

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[1] <www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/BFW/finding1.html>. Respondents were asked to pick the two largest items from the following list: foreign aid, defense, Social Security, food stamps, and Medicare. On average, foreign aid was estimated as 23% of the budget.

[2] Delli Carpini & Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*, 101.

VI. Mechanisms of belief fixation

How do we ensure that we can believe what we want to believe?

a. *Biased weighting of evidence:* we attribute slightly more weight to each piece of evidence that supports our belief, and slightly less weight to each piece of evidence that undermines our belief, than it merits.

b. *Selective attention:* we spend more time/energy thinking about arguments supporting our beliefs than arguments criticizing them. But we spend more time looking for flaws in arguments opposing our beliefs than in arguments supporting them. This leads to:

☞ Prospects for attaining the truth, with different intellectual traits:

	Intelligence	Bias	
1.	+	-	(best)
2.	-	-	
3.	-	+	
4.	+	+	(worst)

c. *Selection of evidence sources:* we get political information from sources we already know we agree with.
   ☞ Contrast this with scientific approach.

d. We base beliefs on *subjective, speculative, and anecdotal claims.* These are more subject to bias.

VII. What should we do?

· Avoid using mechanisms in (VI).
· Collect information from variety of sources.
· Look for flaws in your own arguments.
· Be aware of cases where we are likely to be biased.
   - Moral-political issues
   - Emotional issues
   - Clustering of logically independent beliefs
   - Factual beliefs that occur prior to gathering evidence / are unaffected by evidence
· Remember:
   - Irrationality is not fully conscious.
   - Don't assume you are immune.
   - Conscious efforts may reduce it.
· Regard others' political claims with skepticism.
· Identify what sort of evidence is required to scientifically resolve a factual question, or test a factual claim. Ask whether one has such evidence.

Phil. 2200
Notes: Common Biases about Economics

A. Public Ignorance
- Recall rational ignorance theory
- Solutions
    1. The Miracle of Aggregation: Assume ignorant voters vote randomly. Informed voters vote for the best candidate. ➡ Best candidate will win.
    2. Voters could punish wayward politicians very severely.
    3. Special interest laws: Someone could introduce an omnibus anti-special-interest-law bill repealing all of them.
    4. Voters aware of their own ignorance could adopt the rule, "When in doubt, say no." Similar to buyers who are ignorant of the quality of a used car.
- Q: Why don't these things happen?

B. The Public Has 4 Main Biases
- *Anti-foreign bias:* They see interactions with foreigners as a threat.
    - Outsourcing
    - Trade & protectionism
    - Immigration
    - Foreign aid
- *Make-work bias:* "Jobs" are an end in themselves. Labor-saving is bad.
    - Downsizing
    - Technological progress
    - Trade & outsourcing again
    - Gov't policies that cost labor. Being costly in labor is good, because it "creates jobs".
- *Anti-market bias:* The market is bad.
    - Prices result from conspiracies, rather than supply & demand.
    - Executive pay needs to be controlled.
- *Pessimistic bias:* Things are constantly getting worse.
    - Living standards over the past 20 years.
    - Will the next generation live better than this one?
    - Deficits, welfare dependency, high taxes are disasters waiting to happen.

C. Could It Be the Economists Who Are Biased?
- Because of their high incomes?
    No. High-income non-economists think like the rest of the public, not like economists.
- Because of their conservative ideology?
    No. Most economists are Democrats.
- The simplest explanation for the disagreement is that the experts have knowledge, and the lay public do not.

D. Policy Implications
- Explains why public policy is often bad. Voters are confused. They vote for policy-makers who share their confusions.
- Public policy is less bad than public opinion, because the average voter & the average politician is more educated than the average member of the public.
- It would be better if fewer things were subject to public control.

Phil. 4340
Notes: Political Expertise

I. Background: Why Care about Political Expertise?
· People must make political decisions, based on political opinions.
· The "experts" seem like the most likely source for such opinions.
· They are relied upon by activists and policy makers.
· Q: Are they any good?

II. Expert Reliability
· Is political expertise genuine? How to approach:
  - Get experts to make falsifiable predictions about (semi-)observable matters of fact.
  - We could ask them moral or ideological questions, but no clear way to test accuracy.
· Tetlock collected predictions and tested them over 20 years.
· Results:
  - No one is very accurate. The best experts are slightly better than chance.
  - Mathematical formulas do better.
  - Experts were highly overconfident. Events predicted with 65-70% probability happened only 12-15% of the time.
  - Assigning equal probability to every outcome gives better calibrated probabilities.
  - Well-informed amateurs do about as well as experts.

III. What Went Wrong?
· Confirmation bias:
  - We look for evidence supporting existing beliefs.
  - We scrutinize counter-evidence more carefully.
  - We place greater emphasis on confirmatory evidence.
· Human pattern-seeking. People look for patterns. When we look for them we "see" them, even in random data.
· Political/social science is in a primitive state. Almost all current theories are wrong.

IV. Expert Rationalizations
· Experts rarely gave up their theories in response to failed predictions. Instead, they produced belief-system defenses, e.g.:
  - *Minimizing the error:* "The false prediction was due to a minor error that doesn't reflect on the underlying theory." E.g., "my policy failed only because it was poorly implemented."
  - *The close-call counterfactual:* "Well, it *almost* happened."
  - *The exogenous shock:* "It would have happened if not for some weird interfering factor that couldn't have been anticipated."
  - *I made the right mistake:* E.g., "It was prudent to err on the side of caution."
  - *Timing:* "I was just off on the timing; it's going to happen later."
  - *Bad luck:* "Well, unlikely things sometimes happen."
· But, what's wrong with these defenses? Maybe they are true.
· But experts virtually never use these arguments to explain away their *successful* predictions. E.g., they don't say, "Well, I was almost wrong" or "I was right for minor reasons that don't reflect on my underlying theory."

V. Cognitive Styles: The Fox and the Hedghog

- The Hedghog:
  - Knows one big thing. Simpler world view.
  - Tend to be more extreme politically, and to have more extreme predictions.
  - Higher confidence.
  - Less accurate predictions.
  - These people are found on both the left and the right of the political spectrum.
- The Fox:
  - Uses many miscellaneous pieces of knowledge.
  - Thought contains more qualifications, lower confidence.
  - Tend to be more moderate.
  - More accurate predictions.

VI. What Should We Do?

- Be like the fox.
- Menand's conclusion:

  "But the best lesson of Tetlock's book may be the one that he seems most reluctant to draw: Think for yourself."

  Q: Is this the best lesson of the book?

Phil. 2200
Notes: Lakoff on Liberal & Conservative Values

I. Introductory Remarks
- Non-metaphorical morality: "experiential morality"
  - Morality = promoting well-being, preventing harm.
  - Well-being: health, strength, happiness, wealth, cleanliness, standing upright, etc.
  - [Think about: Is this a correct moral theory?]
- People use metaphors to think about morality.

II. The Accounting Metaphor
- Well-being as wealth
- Must pay moral debts. Helps us understand:
  - Retribution, revenge
  - Restitution
  - Altruism
  - Turning the other cheek

II. The Strength Metaphor
- Good = upright
- Evil = falling
- Morality = strength. Two forms of strength:
  - Courage: Standing up to external threats
  - Self-control, strength of will: standing up to internal evils (temptation)
- The 7 deadly sins: greed, lust, gluttony, sloth, pride, envy, anger. These are internal evils, sources of temptation.
- Strength developed through discipline, self-denial.
  - But some people have bad essence, or 'character'
- Leads to political positions:
  - Against affirmative action
  - Against welfare programs
  - Against giving condoms to teenagers
  - The "3 strikes, you're out" law
  - Model citizens: Rich people & corporations
- Attitudes towards people who disagree:
  - They're evil.
  - Do not give them respect. Just fight them.
  - Be ruthless.
  - Do not grant any truth to their side.
  - [Think about: Is this what conservatives think? Does this follow from the Strength metaphor?]

III. The Strict Father Metaphor
- Conservatives share: The Strict Father Model of the family
  - Father responsible for overall family policy
    - protecting family
    - setting a moral model
    - punishment.

- Father = central authority.
- Emotionally restrained.
- Once children are grown, they are on their own. Parents do not meddle.
· For conservatives, government = father. Citizens = children.
  [Think about: Is this a good way to think about politics?]
· This leads to political positions:
  - Against feminism
  - Against homosexuality
  - Against abortion. Women who want abortions are immoral. Opposition to abortion isn't about protecting life, or the unborn.
  - Against gun control. Father has to protect family.

IV. Other Accounts of Conservatism
· Conservatives look to past traditions?
· Conservatives want less federal government?
· Conservatives just follow the Bible?
· Conservatives are selfish / tools of the rich?

V. The Nurturant Parent Metaphor
· Parent cares for and protects child. Interpersonal relationships are most important.
· Again, gov't = parents, citizens = children.
· Morality = empathy, nurturance.
· Fair distribution = (a) equal distribution, (b) impartial rule-based distribution, or (c) rights-based distribution.
· Leads to political positions:
  - Pro social programs
  - Regulation
  - Environmentalism
  - Feminism & gay rights
  - Abortion is nurturing for pregnant women
  - Multiculturalism. Parents celebrate their children's differences.
  - Affirmative action.
  - Art & the humanities should be supported.
  - Taxation: older children have to help younger children.

VI. Objections to Conservatism
· "Foundational pathology":
  - Every moral system is based on "experiential morality".
  - But the Moral Strength system allows one to harm others in the name of the principle that Morality is Strength.
  - Thus, conservatism contradicts its own foundations.
· "Empirical pathology":
  - Children who are nurtured are more likely to grow up self-reliant.
  - So being a strict father does not achieve its own goals.
· Conservatives are to blame for the Oklahoma city bombing.
[Think about: Are these criticisms relevant and fair?]

Phil. 2200
Notes: Haidt on Moral Foundations of Liberalism and Conservatism

I. Earlier Observations about Liberal/Conservative Divide
· (Sowell)
  - Liberals hold the "unconstrained vision" of human nature. Human nature is perfectible.
  - Conservatives hold the "constrained vision". Human nature is fixed and flawed.
  - [How much does this explain of liberal/conservative views? Abortion? Gun control? Immigration? Gay marriage?]
· (On the five factor model of personality)
  - Liberals are higher on "Openness to experience"; conservatives value stability & predictability.
  - Conservatives higher on "Conscientiousness." This dimension is also called "orientation toward work versus play". Conservatives more oriented toward work; liberals more oriented toward play.
· Conservatives resist change & accept inequality.

II. Moral Foundations
· There are 5 "moral foundations":
  1. Harm/care
  2. Fairness/reciprocity
  3. Ingroup/loyalty
  4. Authority/respect
  5. Purity/sanctity
· About the foundations:
  · They are psychological mechanisms that produce ethical intuitions.
  · They are innate in the human brain.
  · They can be modified ("edited") by subsequent experience.
  · Everyone (or almost everyone) shares all five foundations, but with differing degrees of emphasis.
· Q: Do conservatives and liberals differ systematically in their moral foundation profiles?

III. Four Empirical Studies
Study 1: Studied correlation between (1) self-reported political identity, and (2)self-reports of the relevance of the foundations to subjects' moral judgments.
Study 2: Correlations between (1) self-reported political identity + political identification measured by Implicit Attitudes Test, and (2) agreement/disagreement with specific moral claims.
Study 3: Studied willingness to commit moral violations of different kinds, in exchange for money.
Study 4: Studied use of foundation-invoking language in sermons from liberal (Unitarian) and conservative (Southern Baptist) churches.

Results:
· All ideologies give some weight to each factor.
· Liberals give slightly more weight to Harm and Fairness than conservatives do.
· Conservatives give significantly more weight to Ingroup, Authority, and Purity than liberals do. The size of the gap increases with strength of ideology.
· Haidt says that conservatives have more complex morality, because they rely on all five foundations. (This doesn't exactly match the data.)
· Results consistent across all 4 studies.

IV. To Think about
- Do these personality differences logically explain conservative/liberal positions? Think about issues like abortion, gun control, gay marriage, capital punishment, war, welfare, immigration.
- If political beliefs are explained by personality differences of this sort, what are the prospects for resolving political debates?
- Is it reasonable to think that one side is more likely to be objectively right?

Phil. 2200
Review of Unit 1

At the end of this unit, students should be able to explain:

These concepts
Instrumental rationality
Epistemic rationality
Non-epistemic belief preferences
The accounting metaphor
The moral strength metaphor
Strict father morality
Nurturant parent morality
Experiential morality
Confirmation bias
Fox vs. hedgehog cognitive styles
The 5 moral foundations
  Harm/care
  Fairness/reciprocity
  Ingroup/loyalty
  Authority/respect
  Purity/sanctity

These theories
Rational Ignorance
Rational Irrationality
Divergent values theory of disagreement
Lakoff's explanation of conservative values

These empirical results
The 4 common biases of the public:
  anti-foreign, make-work, anti-market, pessimistic
The reliability of political experts, including:
  Reliability of fox vs. hedgehogs
  How experts react to errors
Diff. between conservative & liberals on the 5 moral foundations

These arguments
Why disagreements are not explained by divergent values.
Why disagreements are not explained by ignorance & miscalculation.
Why irrationality is the worst social problem.
The "foundational pathology" of conservatism.
The "empirical pathology" of conservatism.

The positions advanced by these people
Huemer
Caplan
Tetlock
Lakoff
Haidt et al.