

SIN AND SYNAPSE: THE NEUROSCIENCE OF MORAL JUDGMENT

By Christopher Shea
Week in Ideas Columnist
The Wall Street Journal

Patricia S. Churchland, the philosopher and neuroscientist, is sitting at a cafe on Manhattan's Upper West Side, explaining the vacuousness, as she sees it, of a vast swath of contemporary moral philosophy. "I have long been interested in the origins of values," she says, the day after lecturing on that topic at the nearby American Museum of Natural History. "But I would read contemporary ethicists and just feel very unsatisfied. It was like I couldn't see how to tether any of it to the hard and fast. I couldn't see how it had anything to do with evolutionary biology, which it *has* to do, and I couldn't see how to attach it to the brain."

For people familiar with Churchland's work over the past four decades, her desire to bring the brain into the discussion will come as no surprise: She has long made the case that philosophers must take account of neuroscience in their investigations.

While Churchland's intellectual opponents over the years have suggested that you can understand the "software" of thinking, independently of the "hardware" — the brain structure and neuronal firings — that produced it, she has responded that this metaphor doesn't work with the brain: Hardware and software are intertwined to such an extent that all philosophy must be "neurophilosophy." There's no other way.

Churchland, professor emerita of philosophy at UCSD, has been best



Patricia S. Churchland
Photo by Sandy Huffaker

known for her work on the nature of consciousness. But now, with a new book, *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Morality* (Princeton University Press), she is taking her perspective into fresh terrain: ethics. And the story she tells about morality is, as you'd expect, heavily biological, emphasizing the role of the peptide oxytocin, as well as related neurochemicals.

Oxytocin's primary purpose appears to be in solidifying the bond between mother and infant, but Churchland ar-

gues — drawing on the work of biologists — that there are significant spillover effects: Bonds of empathy lubricated by oxytocin expand to include, first, more distant kin and then other members of one's in-group. (Another neurochemical, arginine vasopressin, plays a related role, as do endogenous opiates, which reinforce the appeal of cooperation by making it feel good.)

The biological picture contains other elements, of course, notably our large prefrontal cortexes, which help us to take stock of situations in ways that lower animals, driven by "fight or flight" impulses, cannot. But oxytocin and its cousin-compounds ground the human capacity for empathy. (When she learned of oxytocin's power, Churchland writes in *Braintrust*, she thought: "This, perhaps, [David] Hume might accept as the germ of 'moral sentiment.'")

From there, culture and society begin to make their presence felt, shaping larger moral systems: tit-for-tat retaliation helps keep freeloaders and abusers of empathic understanding in line. Adults pass along the rules for acceptable behavior — which is not to say "just" behavior, in any transcendent sense — to their children. Institutional structures arise to enforce norms among strangers within a culture, who can't be expected to automatically trust each other.

These rules and institutions, crucially, will vary from place to place, and over time. "Some cultures accept infanticide for the disabled or unwanted," she

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writes, without judgment. “Others consider it morally abhorrent; some consider a mouthful of the killed enemy’s flesh a requirement for a courageous warrior, others consider it barbaric.”

Hers is a bottom-up, biological story, but, in her telling, it also has implications for ethical theory. Morality turns out to be not a quest for overarching principles but rather a process and practice not very different from negotiating our way through day-to-day social life. Brain scans, she points out, show little to no difference between how the brain works when solving social problems and how it works when solving ethical dilemmas.

Churchland’s position within academic philosophy is ambiguous. In conversation, she is far more likely to cite writers like the science journalist **Matt Ridley**, author of *The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves*, or the economist **Paul Seabright**, author of *The Company of Strangers: A Natural History of Economic Life*, than contemporary philosophers. But her biocultural view is compatible, she thinks, with **Aristotle’s** argument that morality is not about rule-making but instead about the cultivation of moral sentiment through experience, training, and the following of role models. The biological story also confirms, she thinks, David Hume’s assertion that reason and the emotions cannot be disentangled. This view stands in sharp contrast to those philosophers who argue that instinctual reactions must be scrutinized by reason. The villains of her books are philosophical system-builders — whether that means **Jeremy Bentham**, with his ideas about maximizing aggregate utility (“the greatest good for the greatest number”), or **Immanuel Kant**, with his categorical imperatives (never lie!), or **John Rawls**, erector of *A Theory of Justice*.

Churchland thinks the search for what she invariably calls “exceptionless rules” has deformed modern moral philosophy. “There have been a lot of interesting attempts, and interesting insights, but the target is like perpetual youth or a perpetual-motion machine. You’re not going to find an exceptionless rule,” she says. “What seems more likely is that

there is a basic platform that people share and that things shape themselves based on that platform, and based on ecology, and on certain needs and certain traditions.”

The upshot of that approach? “Sometimes there isn’t an answer in the moral domain, and sometimes we have to agree to disagree, and come together and arrive at a good solution about what we will live with.”

Owen Flanagan Jr., a professor of philosophy and neurobiology at Duke and a friend of Churchland’s, adds, “There’s a long tradition in philosophy that morality is based on rule-following, or on intuitions that only specially positioned people can have. One of her main points is that that is just a completely wrong picture of the genealogical or descriptive story. The first thing to do is to emphasize our continuity with the animals.” In fact, Churchland believes that primates and even some birds have a moral sense, as she defines it, because they, too, are social problem-solvers.

Recognizing our continuity with a specific species of animal was a turning point in her thinking about morality, in recognizing that it could be tied to the hard and fast. “It all changed when I learned about the prairie voles,” she says — surely not a phrase John Rawls ever uttered.

She told the story at the natural-history museum, in late March. Montane voles and prairie voles are so similar “that naifs like me can’t tell them apart,” she told a standing-room-only audience (younger and hipper than the museum’s usual patrons — the word “neuroscience” these days is like catnip). But prairie voles mate for life, and montane voles do not. Among prairie voles, the males not only share parenting duties, they will even lick and nurture pups that aren’t their own. By contrast, male montane voles do not actively parent even their own offspring. What accounts for the difference? Researchers have found that the prairie voles, the sociable ones, have greater numbers of oxytocin receptors in certain regions of the brain. (And prairie voles that have had their oxytocin receptors blocked will not pair-bond.)

“As a philosopher, I was stunned,”

Churchland said, archly. “I thought that monogamous pair-bonding was something one determined for oneself, with a high level of consideration and maybe some Kantian reasoning thrown in. It turns out it is mediated by biology in a very real way.”

The biologist **Sue Carter**, now at the University of Illinois at Chicago, did some of the seminal work on voles, but oxytocin research on humans is now extensive as well. In a study of subjects playing a lab-based cooperative game in which the greatest benefits to two players would come if the first (the “investor”) gave a significant amount of money to the second (the “trustee”), subjects who had oxytocin sprayed into their noses donated more than twice as often as a control group, giving nearly one-fifth percent more each time.

Paul Zak, an economist at Claremont Graduate University, was an author of that study, as well as others that Churchland cites. He is working on a book called *The Moral Molecule* and describes himself as “in exactly the same camp” as Churchland. “Oxytocin works on the level of emotion,” he says. “You just get the feeling of right and wrong. It is less precise than a Kantian system, but it’s consistent with our evolved physiology as social creatures.”

The CUNY Graduate Center philosopher **Jesse Prinz**, who appeared with Churchland at a Columbia University event the night after her museum lecture, has mostly praise for Churchland’s latest offering. “If you look at a lot of the work that’s been done on scientific approaches to morality — books written for a lay audience — it’s been about evolutionary psychology. And what we get again and again is a story about the importance of evolved tendencies to be altruistic. That’s a report on a particular pattern of behavior, and an evolutionary story to explain the behavior. But it’s not an account of the underlying mechanism. The idea that science has moved to a point where we can see two animals working together toward a collective end and know the brain mechanism that allows that is an extraordinary achievement.”

Nevertheless, he says, how to move from the possibility of collective action to “the specific human institution of moral rules is a bit of connective tissue that she isn’t giving us.”

Indeed, that’s one of the most striking aspects of *Braintrust*. After Churchland establishes the existence of a platform for moral decision-making, she describes the process through which moral decisions come to be made, but she says little about their content — why one path might be better than another. She offers the following description of a typical “moral” scenario. A farmer sees a deer breaching his neighbor’s fence and eating his apples while the neighbor is away. The farmer will not consult a Kantian rule book before deciding whether to help, she writes, but instead will weigh an array of factors: Would I want my neighbor to help me? Does my culture find such assistance praiseworthy or condescending? Am I faced with any pressing emergencies on my own farm? Churchland describes this process of moral decision-making as being driven by “constraint satisfaction.”

“What exactly constraint satisfaction is in neurobiological terms we do not yet understand,” she writes, “but roughly speaking it involves various factors with various weights and probabilities interacting so as to produce a suitable solution to a question.”

“Various” factors with “various” weights? Is that not a little vague? But Duke’s **Owen Flanagan Jr.** defends this highly pragmatic view of morality. “Where we get a lot of pushback from philosophers is that they’ll say, ‘If you go this naturalistic route that Flanagan and Churchland go, then you make ethics merely a theory of prudence.’ And the answer is, yeah, you kind of do that. Morality doesn’t become any different than deciding what kind of bridge to build across a river. The reason we both think it makes sense is that the other stories” — that morality comes from God, or from philosophical intuition — “are just so implausible.”

Flanagan also thinks Churchland’s approach leads to a “more democratic” morality. “It’s ordinary people discussing

the best thing to do in a given situation, given all the best information available at the moment.” Churchland herself often underscores that democratic impulse, drawing on her own biography. She grew up on a farm, in the Okanagan Valley, in British Columbia. Speaking of her onetime neighbors, she says: “I got as much wisdom from some of those old farmers as I ever got from a seminar on moral philosophy.”

If building a bridge is the topic up for discussion, however, one can assume that most people think getting across the water is a sound idea. Yet mainstream philosophers object that such a sense of shared purpose cannot always be assumed in moral questions — and that therefore the analogy fails. “If we knew that abortion was wrong, we could find ways of reducing abortion — we could try to determine what the best policy might be to discourage people from trying to engage in it,” says **Guy Kahane** of Oxford. Engineering analogies might be relevant. “But whether abortion is wrong is not such a problem,” he says. Kahane says the complexity of human life demands a more intense and systematic analysis of moral questions than the average citizen might be capable of, at least if she’s limited to the basic tool kit of social skills.

Peter Railton, a philosophy professor at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, agrees. Our intuitions about how to get along with other people may have been shaped by our interactions within small groups (and between small groups). But we don’t live in small groups anymore, so we need some procedures through which we leverage our social skills into uncharted areas — and that is what the traditional academic philosophers, whom Churchland mostly rejects, work on. What are our obligations to future generations (concerning climate change, say)? What do we owe poor people on the other side of the globe (whom we might never have heard of, in our evolutionary past)?

For a more rudimentary example, consider that evolution quite likely trained us to treat “out groups” as our enemy. Philosophical argument, Railton says, can give reasons why members of

the out-group are not, in fact, the malign and unusual creatures that we might instinctively think they are; we can thereby expand our circle of empathy.

Churchland’s response is that someone is indeed likely to have the insight that constant war against the out-group hurts both sides’ interests, but she thinks a politician, an economist, or a farmer-citizen is as likely to have that insight as a professional philosopher.

Churchland is a warm presence and a warm public speaker, but she can also be remarkably acidic in her attacks on other thinkers. The Princeton philosopher **Peter Singer**, for example, gets a quick drubbing in *Braintrust*. Singer has argued that Westerners should reduce their standard of living substantially to support the developing world. His philosophy is “much more demanding, and much more meddlesome, than the morally moderate, such as I, find reasonable,” Churchland writes. “The urgings of the ardent utilitarian sometimes alarm me the way intrusive do-gooders can be alarming, not least because of infringements on liberty and the conflict with paradigmatically good sense.”

But isn’t she, right there, sneaking in some moral principles that have nothing to do with oxytocin, namely the primacy of liberty over equality? In our interviews, she described Singer’s worldview as, in an important sense, unnatural. Applying the same standard to distant foreigners as we do to our own kith and kin runs counter to our most fundamental biological impulses.

But Oxford’s Kahane offers a counterargument: “Are humans capable of utilitarianism?” is not a question that is answered by neuroscience,” he says. “We just need to test if people are able to live like that. Science may explain whether it is common for us to do, but that’s very different from saying what our limits are.”

Indeed, Singer lives (more or less) the way he preaches, and chapters of an organization called Giving What We Can, whose members pledge to give a large portion of their earnings to charity, have popped up on several campuses. “If

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I can prevent hundreds of people from dying while still having the things that make life meaningful to me, that strikes me as a good idea that doesn't go against 'paradigmatically good sense' or anything," says **Nick Beckstead**, a fourth-year graduate student in philosophy and a founder of the group's Rutgers chapter.

Another target in Churchland's book is **Jonathan Haidt**, the University of Virginia psychologist who thinks he has identified several universal "foundations" of moral thought: protection of society's vulnerable; fairness; loyalty to the in-group; respect for authority; and the importance of purity (a sanitary concern that evolves into the cultural ideal of sanctity). That strikes her as a nice list, but no more — a random collection of moral qualities that isn't at all rooted in biology. During her museum talk, she described Haidt's theory as a classic just-so story. "Maybe in the 70s, when evolutionary psychology was just becoming a thing, you could get away with saying" — here she adopted a flighty, sing-song voice — "It could have been, out there on the veldt, in Africa, 250,000 years ago that these were traits that were selected," she said. "But today you need evidence, actually." The audience tittered. (Universality is not a sign that something is genetically based, she writes in *Brain-trust*, adding that a "background hunch about evolution of the human brain" doesn't strengthen Haidt's intellectual case: "If you cannot paddle a canoe with one banana," she concludes, aggressively but mystifyingly, "would using two improve matters materially?")

Her audience laughed harder when she rebutted Haidt's idea that there is anything universal about the reaction of disgust by mentioning that her childhood farm had a "two holer" — a two-seat outhouse. What New Yorkers might have found gross was, in western Canada, 50 years ago, "a social occasion." (Replies a frustrated-sounding Haidt: "That is exactly what my theory is designed to address — that norms and practices vary around the world, yet there is enough similarity in practices that there must be

something in human nature at work.")

The element of cultural relativism also remains somewhat mysterious in Churchland's writings on morality. In some ways, her project dovetails with that of **Sam Harris**, the "New Atheist" (and neuroscience Ph.D.) who believes reason and neuroscience can replace woolly armchair philosophy and religion as guides to morality. But her defense of some practices of primitive tribes, including infanticide (in the context of scarcity) — as well the seizing of enemy women, in raids, to keep up the stock of mates — as "moral" within their own context, seems the opposite of his approach.

I reminded Churchland, who has served on panels with Harris, that he likes to put academics on the spot by asking if they think such practices as the early 19th-century Hindu tradition of burning widows on their husbands' funeral pyres was objectively wrong.

So did she think so? First, she got irritated: "I don't know why you're asking that." But, yes, she finally said, she does think that practice objectively wrong. "But frankly I don't know enough about their values, and why they have that tradition, and I'm betting that Sam doesn't either."

"The example I like to use," she said, "rather than using an example from some other culture and just laughing at it, is the example from our own country, where it seems to me that the right to buy assault weapons really does not work for the well-being of most people. And I think that's an objective matter."

At times, Churchland seems just to want to retreat from moral philosophical debate back to the pure science. "Really," she said, "what I'm interested in is the biological platform. Then it's an open question how we attack more complex problems of social life." But given the broadsides that she has fired in her new book, it seems unlikely that she'll be able to avoid tangling with other moral philosophers. Given her combative sensibility, it also seems likely that she'll enjoy those fights. ♦

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Scientists and Public Opinion

Joseph Bookstein

Professor Emeritus of Medicine

I enjoyed two important and related articles in the April **Chronicles** — **Somerville** on climate change, and **Yankelovich** on science and public judgment. Upon completion of Somerville's article however, I was strangely dissatisfied — indeed, felt an acute case of *consensus interruptus* — for although his views and mine were convergent, they never quite merged.

The problem traces to differing philosophies of the role of science. In reference to global warming, Somerville states that "governments ... will decide ... what level of climate change they regard as tolerable," and that "Science and scientists will not and should not make that change." True statements perhaps, but of limited truthfulness, for no mention is made of a correlate — that scientists should enter the debate beyond merely supplying data — that scientists can play a major, perhaps dominant, role in shaping public opinion and governmental policy.

An example is to be found in the actions of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPNW), anti-nuclear groups particularly active during the 1980s. PSR held symposia in many cities entitled "The Medical Consequences of Nuclear War," which portrayed to the public the potential disasters of nuclear war, as opposed to the comforting efforts of the Reagan Administration that suggested that one only had to dig a shallow trench, covered with a door and some dirt, to be reasonably safe after a nuclear attack. In my opinion, the efforts of these physician groups played a significant role at that time in promoting public abhorrence to the idea of nuclear war. The doctors were not willing to leave

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President's Letter

By Ann Craig

*Provost Emerita of Roosevelt College
and President, UCSD Emeriti Association*

The summer of 2011 will be remembered as a summer of exceptional heat. As much of the country sweltered, Washington sweated over the debt ceiling and budget restructuring. From the sidelines, I have been grateful to be living outside the heat belt, and concerned about the tenor of the national political conversation and its impact on our futures. At least cooler temperatures will prevail as the fall begins.

Gratitude and concern also inform how I approach the work of the Emeriti Association. On the gratitude side, I hope to ensure that we can continue to give back to the campus and contribute toward educational opportunities of students. On the concern side of the ledger, the economy and state budget will make agonizing budget choices inevitable. We will all witness dismantling or restructuring of programs in which we are personally invested — both on campus in our national entitlement programs.

Under the circumstances, I invite your help this year as the Association works in three priority areas: community-building, active reinvestment in UC San Diego, and membership growth and service.

Community-building: As active faculty, our collegial communities coincided with departments and research groups both on and off-campus. In retirement, we can unleash our catholic interest in the work of colleagues across the campus. The Association aspires to create conversations that build an academic and social community across departmental and disciplinary boundaries. Our monthly programs allow us to dabble or delve into the latest research instruments, ambitious collaborations, and, quite simply, fascinating discoveries being pursued at UCSD.

Vice President **Rick Nelesen** and the Program Committee are building our calendar for 2011-12. The year opens Oc-

tober 12 with **James Nieh** from Ecology, Behavior, and Evolution. A winner of the Senate Distinguished Teaching Award, he will be speaking about the social life of bees. I hope you will come and bring friends.

Under the rubric of “promoting the general welfare of members,” our community efforts also involve keeping a watchful eye on retirement benefits and pensions. A well-placed response to proposed changes has had some influence in the past. Through Past President **Dick Attiyeh’s** continued service on CUCEA, we intend to stay connected.

Active reinvestment in UCSD: As individual emeriti, we give back to the university in many different ways. With services being cut, offices reorganized, and staff workload increasing, emeriti can be highly valued volunteer or part-time labor. I am applying my experience exploring how UCSD can become more international in undergraduate research and teaching. To stay directly connected with students, I am also teaching a freshman and senior seminar. Others among you are also creating your own singular niches.

As a group, the EA is reinvesting in the campus through our Emeriti Mentoring Program with the Chancellor’s Scholars. Emeriti Mentors apply the wisdom of seniority toward helping the very best first generation students in the freshman class to make a successful transition to UCSD. Across the campus, first year students are plunged from high schools with small classes and supportive teachers who know their names, into large lecture halls and anonymity. For any student it is powerfully

encouraging to have a well-placed word of personalized encouragement, facilitated networking with other faculty and the opportunity to become visible. Research shows that mentoring helps with retention and academic success. Please consider volunteering as a mentor and contact **Mel Green**.

There are many other ways in which undergraduates could profit from individualized teaching which departments may not find manageable with budget cuts and faculty workload. These are niches where emeriti can make valued contributions. For example, students in many disciplines are served by having team project experiences, or research or internship opportunities. Many departments are exploring how to provide these experiences.

Membership: To continue to grow and increase the vitality of our organization, the EA must be responsive to our membership. I invite you to communicate with me, or our Director **Suzan Cioffi**, or other members of our Executive Board to let us know how you think the EA can make the strongest contribution to the campus and its members. In the meantime, I urge you to keep your membership current, and to invite colleagues to join us.

As the fall begins, difficult budget choices will dominate campus conversations. I hope you will help us maintain a vibrant Emeriti Association. ♦



Audrey Spiro, Art Historian and UCSD Pioneer

Audrey Spiro, for over 60 years the wife and often co-field-researcher of **Mel Spiro**, University Professor of Anthropology Emeritus, died in July of this year. After raising two sons, Audrey decided in her mid-50s to enter graduate school to pursue a long-held passion for Asian art, earning a Ph.D. from UCLA. Her revised dissertation was published by the UC Press in 1990 as *Contemplating the Ancients: Aesthetic and Social Issues in Early Chinese Portraiture*. She was also co-author with her husband of *Children of the Kibbutz*.

Among her contributions to the welfare of UCSD, Mel notes, the most important was to the founding of the Anthropology Department. A gourmet cook, “it was her special dinners, together with her sparkling conversation, that motivated more than one potential recruit to sign on to a non-existent department.”

Understanding Liberalism

By **Sanford Lakoff**

Dickson Professor Emeritus of Political Science

The etymological root of liberalism is the word “liberty,” from the Latin *libertas*. The medieval church had made the freedom of the will the basis of moral responsibility, but the church authorities did not approve of “liberty of conscience” because it could lead believers into error and heresy. Indeed, it was indirectly as a result of the turmoil produced by the Reformation that freedom of the will became the basis of the belief in the right of conscience. In effect, the zero-sum distinction between orthodoxy and heresy was dropped in favor of the view that for the sake of civil peace, divergent forms of the faith had to be accepted as equally respected competitors for the allegiance of the believer. The wars of religion eventually led to toleration, and toleration was the first expression of liberalism.

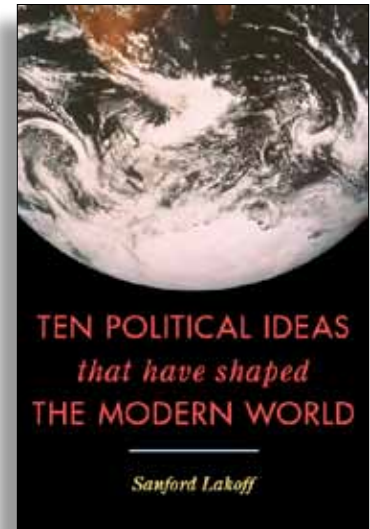
The word came into wide use politically in the 1820s after a political party in Spain called itself *los Liberales*. In England, the Whigs or “Country Party” had already arisen in opposition to the Tory (or King’s) Party. The Whigs had brought off the Glorious Revolution of 1688 that ended absolutism and produced limited monarchy, with power passing increasingly to a parliament dominated by an elected House of Commons. In the nineteenth century the Whigs were renamed Liberals. Their most famous leader was **William E. Gladstone**.

As the ideology of the British Liberal Party, liberalism had several key elements: the legacy of natural rights-social contract theory as expounded by **John Locke**; the belief in free market economics expounded by **Adam Smith** and the Manchester School; and a belief in freedom of conscience broadened to include freedom of speech and press. Critics on the left charged that what really con-

cerned liberals most was the protection of property rights. From the perspective of liberals themselves, economic freedom, or the right to hold private property and to acquire and dispose of it, is the expression of a more general belief in liberty, which includes civil and political rights.

English liberalism gradually underwent a change. Some liberals remained unreconstructed champions of *laissez faire*. Others compromised with socialism to create a hybrid social liberalism, which became the foundation of the welfare state and also led to the replacement of the Liberal Party by Labor as one of England’s two major parties. This amalgam laid the groundwork for policies aimed at regulating the swings of the business cycle, curbing monopolistic practices, regulating food and drugs for public safety, and redistributing wealth through the progressive income tax and the inheritance tax. These measures were built in recognition that the liberty of the individual had to be balanced and integrated with the good of the society as a whole. It was not enough to leave the care of the indigent and injured to the benevolence of the wealthy; a safety net was needed that would be provided by the state through taxation. How extensive the safety net would become was a matter of intense debate. Many liberals wanted greater equality, but others feared that too steep a tax rate would discourage the initiative and entrepreneurial activity that foster economic growth. Liberals have never fully resolved the question of where the balance should be struck.

From the late nineteenth century onward, a split developed within the ranks of liberals. A hybrid conservative liberalism, now championed by the Conservative Party in Britain and the Republican Party in the U.S., couples liberal faith in markets with conservative social values. A hybrid social liberalism, cham-



pioned by the Labor Party in Britain and the Democrats in the U.S., blends socialist concern for widespread welfare with liberal concern for individual freedom in matters of personal morality and lifestyle. The role of the state in these matters is a central point of contention.

Liberalism has been especially influential in the United States. **G. K. Chesterton** remarked that America is “the only nation that is founded on a creed.” That creed is liberalism. With the eclipse of communism in Eastern Europe, the rise of market economies in Asia, including China, and the revival of democracy in Latin America (coupled with a less interventionist attitude on the part of the United States), that creed has won new respect. The American and Western European example of systems combining liberal democracy with a regulated market economy has been accepted as a fairer, freer, and more efficient system than collectivism on the Soviet model. It remains to be seen whether the transition to free markets and democracy will proceed successfully in the former communist countries, but for the time being liberal democracy is now the political idea with the most universal appeal. ♦

Condensed from chapter 3 of Sanford Lakoff, Ten Political Ideas that Have Shaped the Modern World (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

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nuclear decisions to the “wisdom” of governments, or the military. Interdisciplinary boundaries were ignored: internists argued radiation matters, a radiologist initiated warnings of a post-nuclear-war global cooling (subsequently termed nuclear winter), generalists considered the philosophy of mutual assured destruction (MAD) and other military matters.

Yankelovich is right in saying that “in recent years, the public’s willingness to accept the authority of experts and elites has sharply declined.” But it doesn’t follow that scientists should give up trying to sway public opinion, now to recognize the reality of climate change. With few exceptions (i.e., James Lovelock), scientists have insufficiently emphasized the possible social and personal consequences of say 3 degrees of temperature elevation, one foot of sea-level rise, or cubic kilometers of ice-loss. The crucial role of the emotions in decision making is well known (see the work of **Antonio Demasio**), but scientists have not exploited this avenue in their arguments against climate change. They generally do not speak of the risks of climate change to human health, life, and indeed to civilization. Many scientists seem to have accepted industrial claims that technical solutions (i.e., alternative energy sources, high-mileage autos) can be effective mitigants, while scrupulously avoiding mention of mitigating the true root of the problem, the needs and wants of the huge human population, rapidly approaching seven billion consumers.

In my opinion, if civilization is to be preserved from the ravages of climate change, more scientists must emerge from their ivory towers. Besides speaking to the choir they must also confront the uncommitted. They should become actively involved in the socio-political process, translate statistics into plausible human consequences, and even feel free to express personal opinions (provided the opinions are indicated as just that). Scientists must be willing to roll up their sleeves and enter the fray. As is said, actions speak louder than words alone. ❖

Anecdote

By **Sandy Lakoff**

Late Night Jokes for Democrats
(with thanks to *Jeff Calcara*)

Newt Gingrich said Republicans shouldn’t be afraid to go into black neighborhoods and tell them Obama failed them. To which every Republican replied, “You first.”

New Rule: Stop asking Miss USA contestants if they believe in evolution. It’s not their field. It’s like asking **Stephen Hawking** if he believes in hair scrunchies. Here’s what they know about: spray tans, fake boobs and baton twirling. Here’s what they don’t know about: everything else. If I cared about the uninformed opinions of some ditsy beauty queen, I’d join the Tea Party.

– **Bill Maher**

Blagojevich said he was stunned by the verdict. Apparently, he wasn’t paying attention during the trial.

New Republican Presidential candidate **Jon Huntsman** is fluent in Chinese. In a short period of time the Republicans have come quite a long way. The last Republican president wasn’t even fluent in English.

– **David Letterman**

Bristol Palin released her much-anticipated memoir called “Not Afraid of Life: My Journey So Far.” Bristol said that **Levi Johnston** cheated on her but then made it up to her by buying designer rain boots. Things are different up there, I guess.

– **Jimmy Kimmel**

You know, maybe we should stop telling kids that anyone can grow up to be president of the United States.

– **Jimmy Kimmel** and
Michele Bachmann

A spokesman for Texas Gov. **Rick Perry** says there’s a 50/50 chance he’ll run for president. Meanwhile, Sarah Palin says there’s an 80/50 chance she’ll run for president.

Newt Gingrich says he does not support gay marriage. He says marriage is a sacred sacrament that should only be between a man and his first, second, and third wives.

Arnold Schwarzenegger is laying low in Europe. He was in his homeland of Austria, and he said he misses schnitzel. By the way, schnitzel is the name of his Austrian lovechild. – **Conan O’Brien**

John McCain made his claim that illegal immigrants started the Arizona wildfires without doing his research. The last time he did that we got **Sarah Palin**.

– **Jay Leno**



Conundrums and Queeries

(Thanks to *Roz Meyer*)

I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, “where’s the self-help section?” She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

What if there were no hypothetical questions?

If a deaf child signs swear words, does his mother wash his hands with soap?

Is there another word for synonym?

Where do forest rangers go to “get away from it all?”

What do you do when you see an endangered animal eating an endangered plant?

If a parsley farmer is sued, can they garnish his wages?

Would a fly without wings be called a walk?

Why do they lock gas station bathrooms? Are they afraid someone will clean them?

If the police arrest a mime, do they tell him he has the right to remain silent?

Why do they put braille on the drive-through bank automatic teller machines?

How do they get deer to cross the road only at those yellow road signs?

One nice thing about egotists: they don’t talk about other people.

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Anecdote from p.7

- Does the little mermaid wear an algebra?
- Do infants enjoy infancy as much as adults enjoy adultery?
- How is it possible to have a civil war?
- If one synchronized swimmer drowns, do the rest drown too?
- If you try to fail, and succeed, which have you done?
- Whose cruel idea was it for the word "lisp" to have "s" in it?
- Why is it called tourist season if we can't shoot at them?
- Why is there an expiration date on sour cream?
- If you spin an oriental person in a circle three times, do they become disoriented?
- Can an atheist get insurance against acts of God?



Tim Sullivan, the Union-Tribune sportswriter, reports that pitcher **Heath Bell**, the Padres' somewhat rotund All-Star closer, has what might be called a well-rounded view of how to present himself to the public. Bell likes to wear a t-shirt that reads:

I'm in Shape.
Round is a Shape!

And speaking of baseball, the prolific and amusing writer **Joseph Epstein**, reviewing a new book on the national pastime in *The Weekly Standard*, recalls how in 1984 his beloved Chicago Cubs lost the National League to the Friars. It happened because in the late innings of a playoff between the two division leaders, a Cub player named **Leon Durham** let an easy grounder go through his legs. The next day, at Epstein's neighborhood grocery, the manager asked if he had heard about Durham's attempted suicide after the game. "He deliberately stepped out in front of a speeding bus," the manager reported, "but it went through his legs."



Emeriti Website

The UCSD Emeriti Association maintains a website: <http://emeriti.ucsd.edu>
Clicking the NEWS, PROGRAMS, & MEETINGS button will allow you to view past issues of this newsletter. The website also provides the constitution and by-laws, lists of members, and minutes of meetings.



Mark Your Calendar!



James Nieh

Professor of Ecology, Behavior, and Evolution

"The Social Life of Bees"

Wednesday, October 12, 2011

4:00-5:30 pm

Green Faculty Club

Chronicles

Newsletter of the UCSD Emeriti Association



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