

MORTAL MORALITY:  
HOW THREAT AND PARTISANSHIP INFLUENCE MORAL JUDGMENT

A Thesis  
by  
CHARLES SCOTT BELL

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CHARLES SCOTT BELL  
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APPROVED BY:

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Todd Hartman  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

---

Phillip Ardoin  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Craig Burnett  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Brian Ellison  
Chairperson, Department of Government and Justice Studies

---

Edelma Huntley  
Dean, Research and Graduate Studies

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## ABSTRACT

### MORTAL MORALITY: HOW THREAT AND PARTISANSHIP INFLUENCE MORAL JUDGMENT

(December 2012)

Charles Scott Bell, B.A., Syracuse University

M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Todd Hartman

According to Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), ideologues' moral judgments fundamentally diverge. Liberals resonate more with individual appeals (to issues of harm or fairness), while conservatives are more responsive to plights of the in-group. Extant literature, however, has produced mixed evidence for the role emotion plays in skewing partisan morality. Terror management theorists, for example, find that threatened ideologues entrench themselves in their own worldviews, while motivated social cognition theorists argue that, when threatened, ideologues' policy preferences shift right. In the present research, I attempt to unite each approach with a laboratory-controlled experiment ( $N=142$ ). Using answers to moral relevance items as a key dependent variable, I find no statistical differences between how threatened liberals and conservatives evaluate group appeals. Their threatened preferences, however, diverge along individual dimensions, suggesting that liberal and conservative differences may relate more to emotion (and threat) than moral differences.

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## CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Morality is personal, but moral judgment is deeply rooted in politics. In the course of a storied life, one is likely to witness the driving, decisive power that individual beliefs wield and likely to *feel* moral intuition. In the context of American politics, both sides of the left-right divide beckon a conflicted, American public to consider the moral weights of each new policy proposal. And, like most issues that toe political lines, matters of morality and the foundations that frame moral judgments are deeply polarized, cleaved in half by a familiar paradigm—liberal and conservative, Republican and Democrat. Ideology has become a question of moral principle. The rights and wrongs of policy, how citizens interact with one another, issues of law, and what should and should not be socially permitted or encouraged, are all commonplace, modern political anthems. How moral judgment relates to partisanship, though, is not yet fully understood.

According to one line of research, Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), liberals and conservatives fundamentally differ in how they come to judge right and wrong. They rely on different moral foundations. Spanning cultural divides, MFT theorists argue that moral considerations can be neatly divided into five distinct structures: (1) Harm and Care; (2) Fairness and Reciprocity; (3) Authority and Respect; (4) In-group Loyalty; and (5) Divinity and Purity (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Haidt & Graham, 2007). This same research suggests that, when making moral judgments, liberals weight two of these foundations (Harm/care and Fairness/justice) more so than their conservative counterparts. For example, Graham, Haidt,



and Nosek (2009) argued that conservatives rely on all five foundations equally and that such moral considerations are implicit—active in guiding rationality well before ideologues are consciously aware of them.

A separate vein of psychological research also suggests a fundamental difference between liberal and conservative attitudes. According to Terror Management Theory (TMT; see Pyszczynski, Abdollahi, Solomon, Greenberg, Cohen, & Weise, 2006), when ideologues are exposed to outside threat (specifically, the subconscious threat of death), they cling to worldview-reinforcing belief systems—a behavior that, in the lab, has produced a number of policy-preference and behavioral changes related to worldview defense (the most common, for example, being in-group favoritism). Theoretically, TMT posits that all worldviews serve a defensive, threat-mitigating function. As such, threatened liberals and conservatives should respond differently to death-related manipulations and express divergent, ideologically charged attitudes. Liberal and conservative ideologies themselves represent unique systems of symbolically charged worldviews. Departing from this view, the motivated social cognition model proposed by Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) also claims that conservative values facilitate a worldview-defensive function that serves to combat the anxiety and threat associated with the uncertainty of everyday life. What follows threat, according to the theory, is an ideological shift in the conservative direction. Under conditions of threat, liberals and conservatives both appear to be more conservative.

Empirically, studies have found support for both camps. The aim of the present research is two-fold. First, borrowing from Moral Foundations Theory, I attempt to bridge this gap between TMT and social cognition models by testing the effect that a standard threat induction has on moral judgments. When threatened with mortality salience—the most robust

threat induction used in TMT research—do liberals and conservatives share the same self-reported moral foundations, or do they shift in one direction or another? Second, I explore whether liberal and conservative morality, as is suggested by MFT, really is ideologically fixed. According to TMT accounts, when threatened with subtle thoughts of death, liberals should look more liberal; conservatives should look more conservative. Yet, Jost's social cognition model predicts that threatened liberals and conservatives shift right on the political spectrum and report more conservative attitudes. I initially expected, following TMT, that worldviews would be individually salient and activated after exposure to mortality primes (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Following, I expected liberals to evaluate individualizing moral foundations favorably and conservatives to remain true to binding intuitions. What I found, however, questions both theoretical frameworks.

To test my hypotheses, I randomly assigned experimental subjects to either a mortality salience condition or control condition and, using the same moral questionnaire found in MFT research, gauged the differences between liberals' and conservatives' answers to moral relevance items concerned with implicit judgment and morally relevant decision-making. I found statistically significant differences for the contextual nature of moral judgment. Liberals and conservatives did not, as Haidt and colleagues have suggested, rely statically on divergent sets of moral foundations. Instead, contra to both TMT and social cognition accounts, the difference between liberals and conservatives was more nuanced than extant literature has theorized. On individualizing items, liberal and conservative ideologues, when threatened, further separated in self-reported attitudes. On binding foundations, however, liberals and conservatives looked remarkably more similar under conditions of threat. These findings suggest that individual morality is not an ever-fixed mark—judgment

changes within emotional context and across ideological divides. Liberals and conservatives, when threatened, react to individualizing appeals (Harm / Fairness items) differently than they react to binding appeals (In-group, Respect, and Purity items). Of the binding foundations measured, threatened liberal and conservative ideologues appear statistically identical. These findings help explain why evidence has been mixed for the above camps. My results suggest that, under certain conditions, liberals and conservatives will look more similar—threatening conditions are closely tied with conservative positions (e.g., right-shift after September 11th). They diverge, however, along others (e.g., issues of individual rights).

## CHAPTER 2—A SYNTHESIS

### Moral Foundations Theory

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) was originally developed to provide a systematic, functionalist theory of morality. In 2004, Haidt and Joseph surveyed rich literatures in anthropology and evolutionary psychology and matched common, academic themes to moral foundations shared across cultures. At the time, and up through 2012, their results revealed five likely dimensions as the innate “foundations” upon which cultures erect moral scaffolds.<sup>1</sup> Haidt’s definition of morality focused not on the content of moral judgment but the functions of moral systems: “Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible” (Haidt, 2008, p. 70)

Moral beliefs are categorized into five distinct, interrelated domains: Harm/care; Fairness/reciprocity; Authority/respect; Ingroup/loyalty; and Purity/divinity (Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011). Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity form what Haidt and colleagues refer to as “individualizing” dimensions—Harm/care involves intuitions of compassion, empathy, and nurturance and reflects sensitivity to the suffering of others. Fairness/reciprocity includes notions of justice and rights and is related to the evolutionary idea of reciprocal altruism. Haidt and Joseph

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<sup>1</sup> Since the conception of this project, a new, sixth dimension (Liberty/Oppression) has been added to MFT. As our experiments use MFT’s original questionnaire, we limit our discussion to the dimensions originally introduced by Jonathon Haidt and colleagues. For additional details, see: <http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/mft/index.php?t=home>

(2004) call the remaining three dimensions “binding” because of their associated function as community building blocks. Authority/respect emphasizes the need for hierarchy and societal structure and is associated with concerns about social order and the importance of tradition and duty. The Ingroup/loyalty dimension includes conceptions of patriotism and groupthink and necessitates the need for cooperation with in-group members versus out-group members. Finally, Purity/sanctity, with ties to disgust, is closely wed with religion and deals with the need for social boundaries and concerns about cleanliness and perversion. Along with theoretical innovation and empirical example, multiple factor analyses have also confirmed the parsing of morals into five domains. MFT theorists have argued, for example, that five foundations fit their available data—data spanning 11 different world regions—better than other models (Haidt & Joseph, 2004)

Based on MFT, Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) also suggested that liberals and conservatives rely on different moral foundations. Borrowing Marcus’ (2004) concept of *innateness*—that innate does not necessarily mean ingrained—they argued: “foundations are not values or virtues; they are the psychological systems that give children feelings and intuitions that make local stories, practices, and moral arguments more or less appealing during the editing process” (p. 3). Haidt and colleagues also address moral foundations in terms of America’s “culture war” (Huntington, 1991). While liberals and conservatives both rely, in some degree, on all of Haidt and Joseph’s five dimensions, liberal morality, Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) argue, prioritize individualizing dimensions—Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity—at the expense of binding dimensions. Conservatives, on the other hand, utilize the binding foundations—Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, Purity/divinity—

more so than liberals. In theory, individualizing foundations champion the self and individual over community, while binding foundations favor the community over the individual.

### **Terror Management Theory**

Started in 1986 by social psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon, Terror Management Theory (TMT) takes root in the work of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker. In his Pulitzer-winning *The Denial of Death*, Becker (1973) argued that humans are unique in the animal kingdom, not in their physical ability or propensity for good and evil, but in their cognitive ability—their knack for insight. As intellectual animals, humans are unique in their ability to be consciously aware of the inevitability of death and their own subconscious battle against it. Therefore, according to Becker, they trod through life as earnest individuals—they invest in cultural worldviews that allow them to uniquely stand out and add meaning and significance to everyday life.

In this view, such death anxiety does rest subconsciously and, when activated, helps explain the need most of us feel for individual meaning, cultural connection, and self-esteem. Following Becker's work, scholars of TMT propose that, to defend against death anxiety, people invest in worldviews and beliefs that necessitate continuation. People believe that some aspect of the self will continue after death. Historically, these beliefs have assumed literal and symbolic forms. Literally, immortality has taken the form of a heavenly afterlife. Symbolically, immortality can be imbued and passed on through one's children, personal accomplishment, or other aspects of the self that continue to "exist" after death. Functionally, this anxiety buffer consists of two components: (1) a belief in the validity of one's cultural worldview cuffed with that worldview's associated values and standards; (2) a belief that one

is meeting or exceeding those values and standards—self-esteem (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989).

The most common approach to examining TMT effects has been with the Mortality Salience hypothesis (MS). To prime subconscious, death-related anxiety, a typical MS study asks participants to briefly write about their own deaths. Typically, an MS prime is followed by a distraction task designed to allow death-related thoughts to drift from consciousness. Empirical findings for MS effects have proven prolific. Over 350 studies conducted in 13 countries have supported TMT's central claims that self-esteem and faith in one's worldviews can mitigate death anxiety by—theoretically—providing outlets for literal or symbolic immortality. Since its conception, TMT has also offered valuable insight into human behavior and can offer additional insight into what makes morality tick.

Political ideology is one example of a common, cultural worldview. While American conservatism may look appealing to some for security reasons, according to TMT, all ideologies serve worldview defensive functions and are woven with diverse sets of often crosscutting values (Weise, Pyszczynski, Cox, Arndt, Greenberg, Solomon, & Kosloff, 2008). In the context of American politics and ideology, however, researchers have found mixed support for the worldview-defensive functions of TMT. Known as motivated social cognition, a leading alternative hypothesis suggests that a possible reason for an embrace of conservative ideology is simply because it serves to reduce the uncertainty, fear, and general threat of everyday life (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003).

Since 2003, several studies have supported Jost's claim. Landau, Solomon, Greenberg, Cohen, Pyszczynski, Arndt, Miller, Ogilvie, and Cook (2004) found that

mortality salience and reminders of the 9/11 attacks increased support for president Bush in both liberal and conservative camps. Nail and McGregor (2009) also found support for motivated social cognition when testing Jost's model head-to-head with that of TMT. The pair examined samples before and after September 11<sup>th</sup> and found that liberal and conservative participants reported more conservative attitudes following 9/11 than before the attacks, while their strongest findings found increased support for President Bush and military spending. Cohen, Ogilvie, Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2005) also found that MS increased support for President Bush among both liberals and conservatives.

Evidence for the worldview-defensive functions of TMT, however, is also rich and readily available. Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Chatel (1992a) found that mortality salience caused conservatives to become significantly more biased against liberals while, trending in the opposite direction, liberals expressed less bias under conservative threat. Pyszczynski, Abdollahi, Solomon, Greenberg, Cohen, and Weise (2006) found that MS increased support for extreme military interventions among conservatives but not liberals. In a particularly unique experiment, McGregor, Lieberman, Solomon, Greenberg, Arndt, Simon, and Pyszczynski (1998) also found that MS motivated aggression against worldview-threatening others—measured in hot sauce. In their initial study, participants were assigned to two conditions (MS and control) and instructed to administer hot sauce to worldview threatening targets. As expected, MS participants allocated a much larger sample of hot sauce to respondents who most threatened their own worldview.



### CHAPTER 3—BRIDGING THE GAP: THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Overall, three central questions guided the present research: (1) does mortality salience affect self-reported moral judgments; (2) will those judgments differ by partisan ideology; and, (3) if mortality salience does influence judgment, why? As implicit reactions bias rational decision-making, I first expected implicit judgment and emotion—rather than rational decision-making—to wield a heavy hand when liberals and conservatives decided on what was moral and what was not. I also expected to find significant differences between liberals' and conservatives' self-reported moral judgments when they were experimentally threatened, relative to an unthreatened control group.

I also suspected, given recent literature on TMT, that ideological judgments would adjust based upon worldview. Liberals, I guessed, would report more pronounced liberal, individualizing positions (higher ratings on the Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity dimensions) while conservatives would respond more strongly to binding dimensions (In-group/loyalty, Authority/respect, Purity/divinity) or more evenly endorse all five. And, I expected the effect to be more pronounced at the ideological extremes and less so for those that consider themselves moderate or independent. Contrary to Jost's social cognition model and the previous hypotheses, scholars of TMT have suggested a careful warning when generalizing about the underlying causes of MS effects:

Research to date strongly refutes claims that existential threat inevitably leads to a conservative or system-justifying shift. Worldviews are too complex and people acquire security in too many ways for a simple unidirectional response to threat to be

useful. The emerging picture is that of a highly flexible system in which both chronic and momentary salience of worldview elements, along with the security value of each, determines how people protect themselves from existential threat. (Pyszczynski & Kesebir, 2011, p. 9)

Specific to moral foundations, recent research has also shown that terror management processes can affect reactions to violations of all five MFT foundations (for a review, see Kesebir & Pyszczynski, in press). Especially related to the present research, studies have shown that mortality salience leads people to rate moral transgressions based on the Harm/care foundation as more severe, compared to a control, and to recommend harsher punishment for transgressors (Florian & Mikulincer, 1997). Other studies have shown that MS intensifies reactions to violations of the Fairness/reciprocity foundation. In 2004, Landau, Johns, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Martens found that, when exposed to MS, people increased derogation of victims of random tragedy.

Additionally, when justice concerns are salient, MS increases support for violence—even when the expected utility of violence is low—and increases appeals for justice-based arguments promoting military action and the desire for retribution. That desire for justice, Hirschberger, Pyszczynski, Ein-Dor, and Kesebir (2011) argue, mediates the tie between thoughts of death and increased support for military intervention. From ethnography to terrorism, a multitude of other TMT studies have shown that MS significantly increases reliance on the In-group/loyalty dimension in the form of both in-group favoritism and out-group hostility. As one would expect, MS also increases preference for leaders with the most tribal mentality and those that champion the value of the in-group (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004). Vail, Rothschild, Weise, Solomon,

Pyszczynski, and Greenberg (2010) also found that MS boosts belief in an afterlife and increases death thought accessibility when one's religious beliefs are challenged.

For this study, I build on a rich and diverse morality literature and utilize a powerful stimulus—mortality salience—to get at the moral roots of liberal and conservative ideology. In essence, I provide a synthesis of the relationship between TMT, social cognition, and MFT. My design is unique in that it pits conservative, liberal, and others' thought accessibility against self-reported—hypothetically more rational—considerations. As the direct relationship between implicit and rational judgment is unknown, I also aim to provide additional insight and directly test the relationship between morality salience primes, worldview defense, and moral judgment.

## **CHAPTER 4—AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY: MORTALITY SALIENCE and MORAL JUDGMENT**

### **Overview**

Study 1 serves as a link to two theories—Terror Management and Moral Foundations. According to TMT, when exposed to thoughts of one's own death (MS), respondents should react to the existential threat by emphasizing and reverting back to their own cultural worldview. Recall that I hypothesized that death-related thoughts would cause self-reported liberals to implicitly, and explicitly rate the individualizing dimensions—Harm / Care and Fairness / Reciprocity—higher than the non-threatened control. I also expected that conservatives would become more polarized in their self-reported moral considerations—a phenomenon that could rear itself as a flat line across all five dimensions (i.e., a more even attribution of all five moral foundations) or a disproportional reliance on binding foundations (Ingroup / Loyalty, Authority / Respect, and Purity / Divinity).

### **Data**

While there are known limitations in relying solely on college student convenience samples (e.g., Sears, 1986), my primary research objective for this study was to establish causal inference and internal validity (Druckman & Kam, 2010; Mook, 1983). In a controlled laboratory setting, a total of 161 undergraduates at Appalachian State University participated in this study for extra credit during the spring semester of 2012. Sixty percent of subjects were female, and 88% of the sample identified their race as White. Forty-three percent of

subjects identified themselves as Democrats, 42% as Republicans, and 15% as Independents. Similarly, 38% listed their ideological orientation as liberal, 34% as conservative, and 28% as moderate. To ensure that my threat induction was successful, I first removed any subject that spent less than 60 seconds on the lexical filler task ( $n = 14$ ). Next, I removed anyone that spent less than 60 seconds on the mortality salience writing task ( $n = 2$ ) or 30 seconds on the control condition writing task ( $n = 3$ ). Thus, the final  $N = 142$ .

### **Mortality Salience Prime**

To test the effects of mortality salience on moral judgment, I employed a between-subjects design, in which participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. First, the most common mortality salience induction technique asks participants two open-ended questions about their own mortality (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Specifically, participants were asked to “please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you,” and “please jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead.” In the control condition, participants responded to similarly worded question that asked them to briefly consider and write down what they did each morning to prepare for a typical day. As mortality salience effects are associated with other constructs as well (e.g., self-esteem, right-wing authoritarianism [RWA], and social dominance orientation), I also included other, well-known measurement instruments to check for alternative explanations of effects. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (see Rosenberg 1989; Appendix A), Altemeyer’s RWA scale (Appendix A), a Social Dominance Orientation item, as well as questions on religious preference and views of the afterlife were also gauged.

## Accessibility Delay

Past TMT research has shown that mortality salience effects surface after a short delay or distraction (Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, Rosenblatt, Burling, Lyon, Pinel, & Simon, 1992; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). Several studies have used a short, three paragraph passage from *The Growing Stone* (Camus, 1957) framed as an “attitude task.” Instead, my delay consisted of a separate WORD/NONWORD association task. Following the Morality Salience prime (Appendix B), all of the study participants completed a reaction time task, which measured the cognitive accessibility of concepts related to each of the five proposed moral foundations (harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, etc.). Both tasks were presented via an interactive computerized questionnaire. The reaction time task closely followed the WORD/NONWORD judgment paradigm suggested by Fazio in 1990 (see also, Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997).

Participants viewed a series of letter strings flashed in the center of their computer monitors and indicated, as quickly as possible, whether the letters constituted a true English word, like “purity,” or a nonsense word, like “treskl.” They did so by pressing one of two keys, “e” for “WORD” and “i” for “NOT A WORD.” After two practice trials, eight categories of ten word probes appeared in random order: words related to each of the five moral foundations (taken directly from the MFT dictionary); neutral filler words with similar linguistic frequencies as selected moral words (e.g., “planet”); and nonsense words. The computer recorded the duration of time between the initial display of each word and the time

of key press. Response times were taken as indicators of the relative accessibility of the concepts in memory, with more accessible concepts producing faster times (Fazio, 1990).<sup>2</sup>

## Measures

After the experimental treatment, respondents were given the same two-part, 30-item battery used by Graham, Haidt and Nosek in 2009 (for specific details see Appendix C; Appendix D). Respondents were asked a number of randomly-ordered and evaluative questions (three per dimension) along with other, more nuanced, moral-specific questions. For comparison purposes, I left the original 30-item questionnaire intact. In Part 1, respondents were asked to rate the relevance of each item on a six-point Likert scale ranging from “0=Not at all relevant” to “5=Extremely relevant.” Using a six-point scale, Part 2 asked respondents to agree or disagree with a series of morally charged statements. Subjects then answered a set of demographic questions regarding their age, gender, race, and citizenship status, as well as 8 items designed to assess political knowledge. Response choices were then recoded from 0-1 for ease of interpretation.

**Dependent Variables.** From the Moral Relevance Questionnaire (Appendix C), I created 5 scales (recoded from 0 to 1) which mapped onto each of the distinct moral foundations: 1) Harm / Care ( $\alpha = 0.58$ ,  $M = 0.67$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ), 2) Fairness / Reciprocity ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ,  $M = 0.69$ ,  $SD = 0.22$ ), 3) Ingroup / Loyalty ( $\alpha = 0.57$ ,  $M = 0.57$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ), 4) Authority / Respect ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ,  $M = 0.55$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ), and 5) Purity / Divinity ( $\alpha = 0.49$ ,  $M = 0.49$ ,  $SD = 0.23$ ).

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<sup>2</sup> The results of this further check, however, are not relevant to the main findings of the present study and are not discussed.

**Independent Variables.** Subjects' self-reported ideology, which serves as the primary explanatory variable, was measured using the standard 7-point scale (1 = very conservative). I also control for gender (1=female), race (1= non-White), and partisanship (1= strong Republicans). For ease of interpretation, all independent variables were also rescaled from 0 to 1.

## **Results**

To test the effects of my threat induction—that is, mortality salience—on ideologues' moral intuition, I regressed each of the five moral relevance dimensions on a threat dummy variable, ideology, and their interaction, as well as a set of control variables. Recall that a significant interaction would indicate that threat moderates the degree to which liberals and conservatives rely on different moral foundations. Looking at the results in Table 1, I find a significant threat-by-ideology interaction for four of the five dimensions. Threatened liberals reported that each of the five dimensions were more relevant to their own moral decision-making than did conservatives. In fact, threatened conservatives rated each dimension as *less* relevant than did their non-threatened, control counterparts. Although no significant difference was found for the Harm / Care dimension, this pattern held across all dimensions, and the results were most significant for the Ingroup / Loyalty dimension.

To explicate these results, I calculated predicted moral relevance values for strong liberals and conservatives in both threat and control conditions (holding all other variables at their means or reference categories). Figure 1 compares predicted values at ideological extremes across each moral foundation. Between threat and control conditions, liberals and conservatives showcased divergent patterns throughout the individualizing and binding



dimensions. First, threatened conservatives rated moral relevance items from the Harm/care scale 0.6 points less relevant (on a 10-point scale) when compared to the control condition (6 to 5.4). Threatened liberals, on the other hand, rated the items as 0.6 points more relevant (6.4 to 7.1). Along the second, individualizing dimension—Fairness/reciprocity—threatened conservatives rated reciprocity items 4.7 out of 10; unthreatened conservatives, 6 out of 10. Threatened liberals, however, reported an average of 8, while liberals in the control condition clocked in at 6.7 out of 10.

Along the Ingroup/loyalty dimension—the first binding dimension—control conservatives rated loyalty items 7.6 out of 10 on the relevance scale, while threatened conservatives rated them at 5.6. However, liberals in the control group averaged 4.6, while threatened liberals averaged 6.1. This convergence of threatened liberals and conservatives along the binding dimension is evident in each of the binding dimensions. In fact, liberals and conservatives appear statistically equivalent along the first two binding dimensions (Ingroup and Authority). As was the case with the Ingroup/loyalty dimension, threatened conservatives rated Authority/respect items more than one point lower than conservatives in the control (5.1 to 6.3). Threatened liberals averaged 5.4 out of 10—only 0.3 points from conservative ratings. Although positions in the control group were further segregated along the Purity/divinity dimension, liberals and conservatives differed between the two conditions. Control group conservatives reported a mean of 6.7; liberals, 0.19. In the threat condition, conservatives reported a mean of 5.8; liberals, 3.1. In other words, liberals and conservatives

self-reported significantly different levels of personal relevance for each of the five moral foundations, with the exception of Harm / Care.<sup>3</sup>

Next, it is especially useful, in this case, to provide a more complete view of the underlying pattern that these results suggest. Figures 2 and 3 provide a bird's eye view of liberals and conservatives as they react across each dimension. Although data points are connected in each figure, there is no theoretical link between the dimensions—the line is provided as a reference tool only. Looking at Figure 2, compare liberals and conservatives in the control condition to those in the threat condition. The pattern is stark. Across the board, liberals in the threat condition rate each dimension as more relevant, while threatened conservatives rely less on each dimension, or at least report lower relevance ratings for each moral foundation.

The more interesting finding, however, can be inferred more clearly from Figure 3. In the control condition, liberals and conservatives look most similar along the individualizing dimensions—Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity. They appear further apart, however, along the first two binding dimensions—Ingroup/loyalty and Authority/respect. When compared to the MS condition, under conditions of threat, a pattern emerges. Liberals and conservatives appear to approximate similar attitudes along the first two binding foundations (Authority/respect and Ingroup/loyalty), while they appear to diverge along the individualizing axis (Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity). This could mean that, as observed by social cognition and terror management accounts, threatened liberals and conservatives look statistically identical along binding dimensions. This could also help explain, for

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<sup>3</sup> The same pattern, however, was present. I suspect, given a larger sample size, that this dimension would also yield significant results.

example, the preference that both liberals and conservatives had for President Bush and stringent homeland security following September 11<sup>th</sup>. Individualizing considerations, however, follow a different pattern. This could mean that, depending on the policy and outside context, liberals and conservatives, when threatened, are psychologically primed to either rally around a central, binding theme or further polarize when questions of individual rights are called into question.

My strongest findings yielded from moral relevance items—items that were abstractions and may not be true tests of moral judgment. The pattern, however, is an interesting one. I suspect that, when applied to the empirical gap that arises from social cognition and terror management accounts, moral foundations theory could suggest that, under certain conditions and given certain policy climates, social cognition theory holds. However, when applied to different policy contexts, the assumptions of terror management hold. The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, for example, could have caused both liberals and conservatives to support and lobby for more group-specific, protectionist policy but diverge on policies that dealt more with individual expression (e.g., gay rights). Confirmation is still on the horizon. I cannot, with the present research, answer every theoretical question these findings raise. I can, however, beckon a call-to-arms for further research.

## CHAPTER 5—CONCLUSION

As my strongest results are grounded in abstract, moral relevance items, replication is the key to unlocking any underlying patterns to politicized morality. It is also important to note that the most prominent effects observed in this study were calculated at opposing boundaries. Extreme ideologues on the left-right spectrum, while heavy-handed in their influence on American politics, are not representative of the mass, American electorate. Most Americans do fall somewhere between opposing, political extremes, call themselves moderates, and can be persuaded by cross-partisan appeals (e.g., Fiorina, 2011; Hillygus & Shields, 2008). Extreme liberals and conservatives, while somewhat different in how they respond to moral context, are similar to the electorate as a whole—all individual judgments are directed by emotion (e.g., Marcus, Neuman, & Mackuen, 2000).

When subconsciously threatened, ideologues and moderates are both psychologically predisposed to rationalize differently than they would in the absence of such threat. If the results reported here are correct, there is a fundamental difference between liberals and conservatives. At base, liberals do rely more individual appeals than conservatives. But, when threatened, both groups prefer safety in numbers. Their differences, however, may go even deeper. Threatened liberal ideologues consistently rated each of Haidt's moral dimensions as more relevant to his or her own moral judgment than conservatives, suggesting that there may be psychological differences in how liberals and conservatives adapt to and

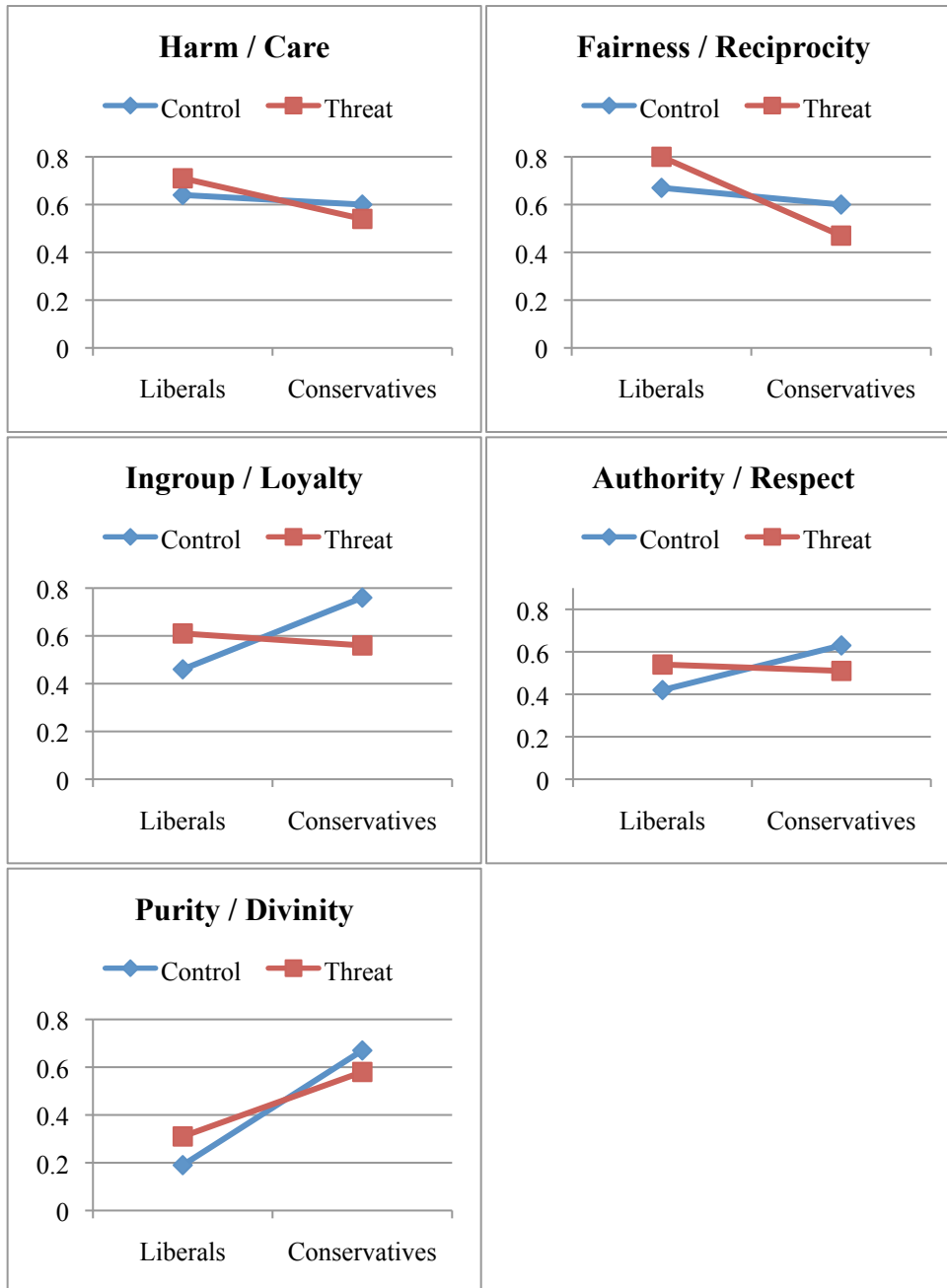
cope with outside threat. Overall, these findings help to unravel the cognitive processes that interact with political ideology and contribute to a more diverse understanding of human morality. My evidence suggests that morality *is* personal, yet ethics shape politics.

Systems of directive, intuitive moral “truths” have the power to ignite mass publics, uproot yesterday’s wrongs, and replace them with tomorrow’s rights. In an 1833 review, “A Few Observations on the French Revolution,” John Stuart Mill recognized the same account: “all political revolutions, not affected by foreign conquest, originate in moral revolutions. The subversion of established institutions is merely one consequence of the previous subversion of established opinions.” If moral conviction, as my findings suggest, is bent and shaped by emotional context and truly is slave to intuition, then perhaps a better understanding of this process will lead to more diffuse moral understanding across partisan aisles. We could be, as Mill might have predicted, on the horizon of a moral-political revolution. A better understanding of emotion’s role in biasing our own moral judgments may serve as the antidote for partisan cleavage. Further research can help identify the role emotion plays in this process, but only time can predict the political landscape of future generations. What opinions, I wonder, will those generations subvert?

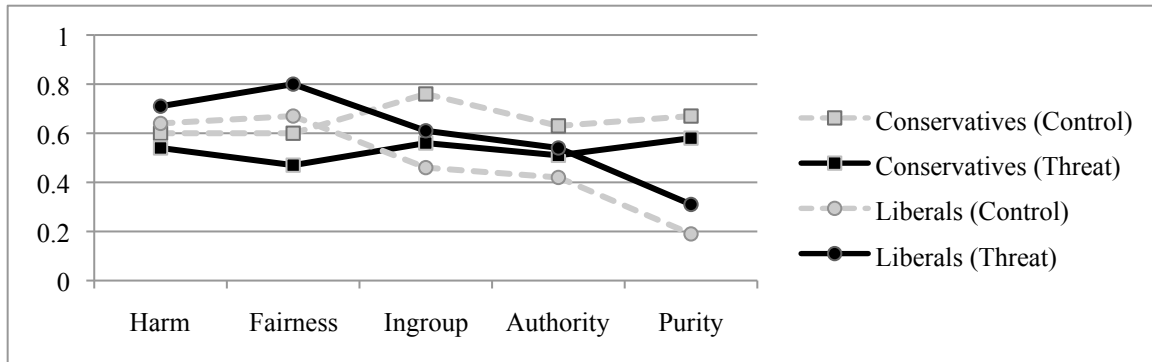
**Table 1.** Models Testing the Effects of Threat by Ideology on Each Moral Foundation

	Harm / Care	Fairness / Reciprocity	Ingroup / Loyalty	Authority / Respect	Purity / Sanctity
Threat	.07 (.05)	.12† (.07)	.15* (.06)	.12† (.07)	.12† (.07)
Ideology	-.04 (.10)	-.07 (.14)	.30* (.14)	.21 (.14)	.41** (.15)
<b>Threat X Ideology</b>	<b>-.12 (.12)</b>	<b>-.25† (.15)</b>	<b>-.35** (.12)</b>	<b>-.24† (.13)</b>	<b>-.21† (.12)</b>
Female	.12*** (.03)	.07† (.04)	-.03 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.10** (.04)
Non-White	.03 (.04)	.05 (.05)	-.04 (.06)	.02 (.05)	.03 (.06)
Party Identification	-.00 (.09)	-.07 (.11)	-.04 (.11)	.11 (.12)	-.04 (.13)
Intercept	.64*** (.04)	.70*** (.06)	.48*** (.05)	.37*** (.05)	.21*** (.06)
$R^2$	.14	.15	.11	.12	.23

*Notes:*  $N = 142$ . Cell entries are unstandardized Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. † $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

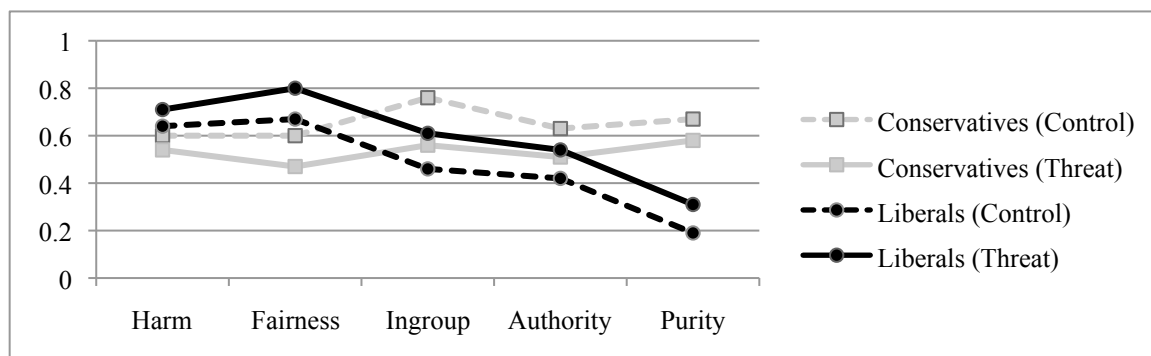


**Figure 1.** Threat X Ideology Interactions, by Moral Foundation. *Notes:* N = 142. Points represent predicted values at ideological extremes across each moral foundation.



**Figure 2.** Comparing Predicted Values, by Ideology and Moral Foundation. *Notes:* N = 142. Points represent predicted values at ideological extremes across each moral foundation.





**Figure 3.** Comparing Predicted Values, by Threat and Moral Foundation. *Notes:* N = 142. Points represent predicted values at ideological extremes across each moral foundation.

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## APPENDIX A: ROSENBERG SELF-ESTEEM AND PREJUDICE SCALES

Instructions: We are interested in how the next set of statements describes you. Please rate how characteristic each statement is of you by entering the number from the corresponding scale that best represents your answer. (Each statement was followed by a table providing responses 1 – 6, with 1 = *Disagree Very Much*, and 6 = *Agree Very Much*.)

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel that I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. I certainly feel useless at times.
10. At times I think that I am no good at all.

And one last thing: Sometimes we test questions for other surveys. These questions may be different, but just answer them as best you can. I'm going to read you a few statements. Just tell me if you:

[Strongly Agree], [Agree], [Disagree], or [Strongly Disagree] with each statement.

- 1) It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.
- 2) If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.
- 3) To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.
- 4) We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.
- 5) It would be good if groups could be equal.
- 6) There is no "ONE right way" to live life; everybody has to create their own way.
- 7) The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get back to our traditional values, put some tough leaders in power, and silence the troublemakers spreading bad ideas.
- 8) God's laws about abortion, pornography and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late, and those who break them must be strongly punished.
- 9) Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.

APPENDIX B: MORTALITY SALIENCE TREATMENT

On the following page are two open-ended questions, please respond to them with your first, natural response.

We are looking for peoples' gut-level reactions to these questions.

The Projective Life Attitudes Assessment

This assessment is a recently developed, innovative personality assessment. Recent research suggests that feelings and attitudes about significant aspects of life tell us a considerable amount about the individual's personality. Your responses to this survey will be content-analyzed in order to assess certain dimensions of your personality. Your honest responses to the following questions will be appreciated.

- 1. PLEASE BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE EMOTIONS THAT THE THOUGHT OF YOUR OWN DEATH AROUSES IN YOU.

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- 2. JOT DOWN, AS SPECIFICALLY AS YOU CAN, WHAT YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO YOU AS YOU PHYSICALLY DIE AND ONCE YOU ARE PHYSICALLY DEAD.

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## APPENDIX C: MORAL RELEVANCE ITEMS

Part 1. When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? Please rate each statement using this scale:

[0] = Not at all relevant (This consideration has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong)

[1] = Not very relevant

[2] = Slightly relevant

[3] = Somewhat relevant

[4] = Very relevant

[5] = Extremely relevant (This is one of the most important factors when I judge right and wrong)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was good at math
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted unfairly
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone did something disgusting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was cruel
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder
- \_\_\_\_\_ Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

Part 2. Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:

[0]	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree

\_\_\_\_\_ Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

\_\_\_\_\_ When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I am proud of my country's history.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is better to do good than to do bad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Justice is the most important requirement for a society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Men and women each have different roles to play in society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It can never be right to kill a human being.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.

## APPENDIX D: MORAL FOUNDATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

--Below are the items that compose the MFQ20. Variable names are IN CAPS  
 --Besides the 30 test items there are 2 “catch” items, MATH and GOOD  
 --For more information about the theory, or to print out a version of this scale formatted for participants, or to learn about scoring this scale, please see: [www.moralfoundations.org](http://www.moralfoundations.org)

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 PART 1 ITEMS (responded to using the following response options: not at all relevant , not very relevant, slightly relevant, somewhat relevant, very relevant, extremely relevant)

MATH - Whether or not someone was good at math [This item is not scored; it is included both to force people to use the bottom end of the scale, and to catch and cut participants who respond with last 3 response options]

### Harm:

EMOTIONALLY - Whether or not someone suffered emotionally  
 WEAK - Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable  
 CRUEL - Whether or not someone was cruel

### Fairness:

TREATED - Whether or not some people were treated differently than others  
 UNFAIRLY - Whether or not someone acted unfairly  
 RIGHTS - Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights

### Ingroup:

LOVECOUNTRY - Whether or not someone’s action showed love for his or her country  
 BETRAY - Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group  
 LOYALTY - Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty

### Authority:

RESPECT - Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority  
 TRADITIONS - Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society  
 CHAOS - Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder

### Purity:

DECENCY - Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency  
 DISGUSTING - Whether or not someone did something disgusting  
 GOD - Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

PART 2 ITEMS (responded to using the following response options: strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree)

GOOD – It is better to do good than to do bad. [Not scored, included to force use of top of the scale, and to catch and cut people who respond with first 3 response options]

Harm:

COMPASSION - Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

ANIMAL - One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.

KILL - It can never be right to kill a human being.

Fairness:

FAIRLY - When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.

JUSTICE – Justice is the most important requirement for a society.

RICH - I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.

Ingroup:

HISTORY - I am proud of my country's history.

FAMILY - People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.

TEAM - It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.

Authority:

KIDRESPECT - Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.

SEXROLES - Men and women each have different roles to play in society.

SOLDIER - If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.

Purity:

HARMLESSDG - People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.

UNNATURAL - I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.

CHASTITY - Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.

The Moral Foundations Questionnaire (full version, July 2008) by Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian Nosek. For more information about Moral Foundations Theory and scoring this form, see: [www.MoralFoundations.org](http://www.MoralFoundations.org)

## VITA

Charles Scott Bell was born in North Wilkesboro, North Carolina in 1985. He graduated from North Wilkes High School in 2003 and, in 2007, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Syracuse University. He secured his M.A. from Appalachian State University in 2012 and is now pursuing a Political Science PhD at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. His parents, Chuck and Vickie Bell, still reside in his hometown of Wilkesboro, North Carolina.