

November 2023

Eudaimonic Happiness, Temperament, and Political Ideology

Anthony Walsh

Boise State University, twalsh@boisestate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ji>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Walsh, Anthony (2023) "Eudaimonic Happiness, Temperament, and Political Ideology," *Journal of Ideology*. Vol. 42: No. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ji/vol42/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you by the USC Lancaster at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Ideology by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Eudaimonic Happiness, Temperament, and Political Ideology

Abstract

This article looks at eudaimonic happiness and political ideology seen in terms of liberalism and conservatism. It appears that these two ideologies are driven by different temperaments that have been broadly viewed as Platonic and Aristotelian. It is often said that Aristotle is the master of those who know as Plato is the master of those who dream. Temperament is composed of a number of sub-traits that are highly heritable which, separately and together, move us to perceive the world in certain ways and thus help to forge worldviews that are emotionally attractive to us. Liberalism/conservatism is also consistently found to be heritable in the mid-50s range. It is well established that liberals and conservatives differ on the personality traits measured by the Big Five traits, and that these traits are each predictive of different levels of happiness. It is also well established in studies from around the world that conservatives report greater happiness and greater meaning in life than liberals. I thus explore reasons why this is so in terms of external reasons such as system justification theory, and in terms of personality traits, religious beliefs, beliefs in meritocratic principles, beliefs about victimhood, and marriage and divorce rates.

Keywords

Happiness, Temperament, Political Ideology, Locus of Control System Justification

Eudaimonic Happiness, Temperament, and Political Ideology

What is Happiness?

Happiness is the holy grail of life. According to Steptoe (2019, p. 339): “Happiness encompasses several constructs, including affective well-being (feelings of joy and pleasure), eudaimonic well-being (sense of meaning and purpose in life), and evaluative well-being (life satisfaction).” Affective well-being is a state induced by a specific circumstance, such as acquiring something new or different; a temporary feeling of hedonistic pleasure that quickly passes and then it’s back to the search. Eudaimonic happiness does not come from transient pleasures; rather, it is an “inside job.” It is related to subjective well-being, optimism, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, the intuition that one is the master of one’s own fate, and a system of transcendent moral beliefs (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 2014). In other words, eudaimonic happiness is a stable dispositional trait that requires no search. Liberal–conservative ideologies are foundational aspects of politics and social life and have been widely researched in terms of personality, thus this paper thus looks at the relationship between political ideology and eudaimonic happiness.

There are strong genetic effects on stable dispositional happiness, but no genetic effects on temporary affective well-being (Nes & Røysamb, 2017). Environmental circumstances thus account exclusively for variance in affective well-being. Studies consistently show a genetic baseline for eudaimonic and subjective well-being which moves up or down depending on circumstances but which returns to the genetic set-point as memories of the circumstance fade. There are a number of situational factors (a good marriage, good income, many friends) that contribute to people’s happiness, but if happiness has a genetic set-point, one that is set high will make a person attractive to potential spouses, bosses, and friends, and the opposite will be true for those with a low set-point. Our genomes set the stage for our habitual ways of interacting with the world (generally) positively or negatively, and these ways lead to different situational outcomes that reinforce our positive or negative interaction style. This is what geneticists call evocative and active gene-environment correlation. Each person’s personality leads them to view their social world mostly in positive or negative terms, and the way they view it impacts the way the social world responds to them.

Temperament and Emotion

The bedrock of personality is temperament, which arises: “from our genetic endowment. It influences and is influenced by the experience of the individual, one of the outcomes is the adult personality” (Rothbart, Ahadi, & Evans, 2000, p. 122). Temperament has a number of component parts such as *mood* (happy/sad), *sociability* (introverted/extraverted), *reactivity* (calm/excitable), *activity level* (high/low), and *affect* (warm/cold). These components have heritability coefficients ranging from 0.40 to 0.60s (Bouchard et al., 2003). All these sub-traits, separately and together, move us to perceive the world in certain ways and thus help to forge our worldviews. Temperamental differences thus make different worldviews more attractive to different people.

That temperament influences our worldviews does not sit well with many intellectuals because temperament reflects emotional rather than rational motivations. However, William James maintains that temperament inevitably intrudes into intellectual discourse and its grip is stronger than the grip of reason. James says that many deny this: “Yet his temperament really gives him a

stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises. It loads the evidence for him one way or the other, making for a more sentimental or a more hard-hearted view of the universe, just as this fact or that principle would” (1988, p. 488-489). James is essentially saying that: “we perceive a situation, experience emotions, pass judgment on the situation based on the emotion it evokes, and only then do we attempt to provide *post hoc* rational reasons for that judgment” (Walsh, 2014, p. 216). This notion is supported by neuroscience, which has long held our rationality plays handmaiden to our emotions: “Neuroscientific studies have proven that most decision-making is based primarily on emotional and not rational processing of information” (Alsharif, Salleh, & Baharun, 2021, p. 72).

Emotions are controlled by the limbic system, which predates the evolution of the “rational” prefrontal lobes by at least a million years (Suwa et al, 2009). Sociologist Douglas Massey (2002, p. 15) notes: “Emotionality clearly preceded rationality in evolutionary sequence, and as rationality developed it did not replace emotionality as the basis for human interaction. Rather, rational abilities were gradually added to preexisting and simultaneously developing emotional capacities.” Brain imaging research has shown that emotion and cognition are integrated in the lateral prefrontal cortex which weighs cognitive/affective motivational input from their respective brain areas to guide our responses (Pessoa et al., 2019). Emotion and reason always operate simultaneously, with reason sometimes stronger and emotion sometimes stronger, but when they clash, the more ancient system of responding will typically triumph (Etkin, Egner, & Kalisch, 2011). This is why equally intellectually gifted thinkers with different temperaments disagree on so many fundamental social and political issues.

Personality and Political Ideology

Chung, Mathew, and Subramaniam (2019, p.10) note that happiness is related to personality traits “like hand in glove,” and McCrae (1996, p. 325) opines that any analyses of ideology must take personality into account, because “there are recognizable patterns that endure beneath shifting political fashions, and the most conspicuous of these is the distinction between liberalism and conservatism.” This idea is not new. The 18th-19th centuries English poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed that all humans are temperamentally destined to follow the path of either Plato (liberal) or Aristotle (conservative): “Every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist. I do not think it possible that anyone born an Aristotelian can become a Platonist; and I am sure that no born Platonist can ever change into an Aristotelian. They are two classes of man, beside which it is next to impossible to conceive a third” (in Porteous, 1934, p. 97). Porteous describes Plato’s thought as “challenging and revolutionary” bringing to the table an “emotional quality” lacking in “Aristotle’s dispassionate analysis...Aristotle is the master of those who know, as Plato is of those who dream” (1934, p. 105). Herman (2014, p. 412) notes that the battle between Plato’s leftism and Aristotle’s rightism has been: “The creative drive of Western civilization had arisen not from a reconciliation of the two halves but from a constant alert tension between them.”

This is not to say that a particular constellation of personality traits is *always* linked to a particular political orientation. It only means that there is a strong tendency for it to be thus. Liberalism/conservatism lies on continua, with some people switching sides depending on the issue. Nevertheless, we see that most politically concerned people consistently line up on opposite

sides of the barricades on multiple social and political issues. Peterson, Smith, and Hibbing (2020, p. 600) find that political attitudes are highly stable across time, but “on those occasions when political attitudes do shift across the life span, liberals are more likely to become conservatives than conservatives are to become liberals.” Many people are Platonist idealists in their youth when idealism is at its height but become more Aristotelian as reality hits home.

We like to think that we get our politics with our porridge at the kitchen table, but we have genetic proclivities that help determine what political messages we will accept or reject. A cascade of studies finds the heritability of liberalism-conservatism to be between 0.40 and the mid-0.50s (Dawes & Weinschenk, 2020; Wajzer & Dragan, 2023). Neuroscientists are also finding that political orientation is correlated with variant brain structures (Claessens et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020). This is not to say that geneticists have found liberalism or conservatism genes by rummaging around among our chromosomes, or that neuroscientists find red and blue wiring patterns in our brains. Our worldviews are synthesized via meandering routes with our temperaments serving as physiological substrates guiding and shaping our environmental experiences in ways that increase the likelihood of developing traits and attitudes that color our worldviews in ways congenial to our temperaments (Olson, Vernon, & Harris, 2001; Smith et al., 2011). Geneticists call this shaping of experience by our gene-driven temperaments gene-environment interaction (GxE) and evocative and active gene-environment correlation (rGE). That is, genes—via GxE and active rGE—guide us to seek environments and ideological positions we find agreeable, and the environments and positions we find reinforce our innate propensities to interpret data on matters of importance to us in different ways (Kalmoe & Johnson, 2022).

Personality is derived from our temperaments interacting with our developmental experiences and is stable throughout life (Delgado, Pedapati, & Strawn, 2022), so if we are to understand the basis of political ideology, we have to examine how temperament situates individuals along the liberal/conservative spectrum. With so many fundamental differences between liberals and conservatives, the prospect of peace between them faces formidable barriers because they are more temperament-driven than rational because our temperaments dictate what information we deem worthy of our attention before we ponder it intellectually (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Psychologists and political scientists examine the relationship between political ideology and personality using the Big Five personality traits. These are core dispositional traits because they “are based on genetic differences and/or early childhood experiences, with limited contextual influences later in life” (Ekehammer & Akrami, 2007, p. 900). These core traits are composed of sub-traits and are briefly described below with heritability estimates in parentheses from Weiss, Bates, and Luciano (2008).

Agreeableness: prosocial, friendly, warm, considerate, trusting, altruistic (.48).

Conscientiousness: disciplined, reliable, self-control, scrupulous, delayed gratification (.58).

Openness: intellectual curiosity, creativity, preference for novelty (.38).

Extraversion: energetic, assertive, sociable, dominant, positive emotionality (.64).

Emotional stability: even-tempered, secure, confident, impulse control (.58).

Gerber et al. (2010) surveyed the literature on political orientation and Big Five personality traits involving thousands of people around the globe and added their own study of 12,472 Americans.

Most studies find no difference between liberals and conservatives on agreeableness, but two studies found that conservatism was weakly associated with agreeableness. Gerber et al. divided political orientation into social and economic conservatism and liberalism because although they are positively related, they are not always synonymous. They found that conservatives were more agreeable than liberals overall, but economic conservatives were more agreeable than economic liberals while social conservatives were less agreeable than social liberals. Both social and economic conservatives were found to be more extraverted than social and economic liberals. Previous studies have all found that emotional stability (typically referred to as its opposite—neuroticism) was stronger among conservatives than liberals. The Gerber study replicated this finding with both economic and social conservatives being more emotionally stable (less neurotic) than social and economic liberals. Fatke (2017) essentially replicated the Gerber et al. study with data from the World Value Survey from 21 countries from all continents, although the results varied somewhat among countries.

The biggest gaps found between conservatives and liberals are in conscientiousness, with conservatives higher, and openness, with liberals higher. Both traits are considered admirable, but they can exceed their normal boundaries. Conscientious types endear themselves to spouses, employers, and friends because they take seriously their obligations to others, but they can be too conscientious, making them boring and inflexible. People also like others who are open to experiencing a variety of different things, but being overly open can make a person unpredictable, unfocused, unhinged, and “cognitively trapped by compulsive abstraction” (Charlton, 2009, p. 869). For instance, a Pew Research Center (2009) study found that close to twice as many liberal Democrats reported belief in such new-age phenomena as astrology, fortune tellers, mystical yoga, and the evil eye (the ability to cast spells and curses) than less open-minded conservative Republicans. Furthermore, two meta-analyses found that openness was the only Big Five trait significantly positively related to narcissism (O’Boyle et al., 2014; Muris et al., 2017), although the correlations were small (0.20 and 0.17, respectively).

Happiness and Political Orientation

Weiss, Bates, and Luciano’s (2008) sample of 973 twin pairs, found that heritable differences in subjective well-being may be accounted for by a common genetic structure associated with the Big Five personality traits. They found that “the genetic correlations (r_g) between subjective well-being and Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were equal to .58, .66, .21, .20, and .32, respectively” (2008, p. 208). All correlations are positive because they are correlations between genetics and the Big Five traits. A genetic correlation indicates the extent to which the same gene or genes affect two or more different traits (pleiotropic effects). The authors conclude: “These findings indicate that subjective well-being is linked to personality by common genes and that personality may form an ‘affective reserve’ relevant to set-point maintenance and changes in set point over time” (2008, p. 205).

In a nationwide sample assessing happiness, political affiliation, and religiosity among 3,966 college students, Ozmen, Brelsford, and Danieu (2018, p. 622) concluded that their analyses demonstrated that:

politically conservative participants were significantly more optimistic and satisfied with life than their liberal counterparts and Republican emerging adults reported significantly higher life satisfaction than Democrats. Republican emerging adults also reported significantly higher rates of religiosity and spirituality than Democratic and Independent politically affiliated emerging adults. Our findings corroborate and expand upon existing literature regarding belief systems and political identity as determinants of subjective well-being in emerging adults.

Schlenker, Chambers, and Le (2012, p. 127) note: “In surveys of people from across the globe, conservatives report being more satisfied with their lives than liberals.” However, this is not true always and everywhere. Stavrova and Luhmann (2016) found that liberals were significantly happier than conservatives in 5 out of 92 countries they surveyed. A Pew Center survey (Taylor, Funk, & Craighill, 2006) reported that 47% of conservative Republicans described themselves as “very happy,” compared with 28% of liberal Democrats. This result held regardless of income level. That is, conservative Republicans are happier than liberal Democrats regardless of whether they are poor, middle-income, or upper-income. Furthermore: “This finding has also been around a long time; Republicans have been happier than Democrats every year since the General Social Survey began taking its measurements in 1972” (Taylor, Funk, & Craighill, 2006, p. 5).

What Explains the Happiness Gap?

Such consistent findings require explanation. Using data from the World Values Survey and the General Social Survey (n = 32,000), Schlenker, Chambers, and Le (2012, p. 140) provide some reasons in terms of personality differences:

Conservatives score higher than liberals on personality and attitude measures that are traditionally associated with positive adjustment and mental health, including personal agency, positive outlook, transcendent moral beliefs, and generalized beliefs in fairness. These constructs, in turn, can account for why conservatives are happier than liberals. ... Conservatives are more satisfied with their lives, in general and in specific domains (e.g., marriage, job, residence), report better mental health and fewer mental and emotional problems (all after controlling for age, sex, income, and education), and view social justice in ways that are consistent with binding moral foundations.

Studies have endeavored to explain the happiness gap from both an internal (personality) and an external (situational) point of view. One such theory is the “system justification theory.” As Jost (2019, p. 1) explains it: “According to system justification theory, people are motivated (to varying degrees, depending upon situational and dispositional factors) to defend, bolster, and justify aspects of existing social, economic, and political systems.” In other words, system justification is satisfaction with the status quo. Napier and Jost (2008) examined data from 10 different countries and from three of their own studies, all of which found conservatives to be happier than liberals. However, they found that the happiness gap statistically disappeared when they entered a variable measuring “rationalization of inequality” into their statistical model. This “rationalization of inequality” was composed of items measuring such things as satisfaction with the status quo and meritocracy, which are strongly related to conservatism. Thus it is not surprising that the gap closed

because they used one measure of conservatism to control for another, which raises the problem of collinearity.

Napier and Jost conclude that the happiness gap closes: "because liberals lack ideological rationalizations that would help them frame inequality in a positive (or at least neutral) light." (2008, p. 571). Countering Napier and Jost's (2008) statement that liberals are less happy than conservatives because they ruminate about social inequalities, Briki and Dagot (2020, p. 3) note that: "The tendency to ruminate refers to the concept of dispositional neurotic self-attentiveness (a component of a broader phenomenon called 'dispositional self-attentiveness'), which can be defined as a chronic self-attentiveness motivated by threats, losses, or in-justices to the self." Briki and Dagot found that conservatives are happier than liberals because they have better self-regulatory mental adjustment under contextual threat. They conclude:

The present study supports the general view that, at the individual level, conservative people are happier than are liberal ones, and that this fact can be due to conservatives' greater capability to adjust themselves to their social environments and to activate adaptive thinking. In addition, this study suggests that the rationalization of inequality, which reflects a central cognitive characteristic of conservatives' thinking and reasoning, can bolster adaptive self-regulatory functions when exposed to threatening contexts (p.10).

Burton, Plaks, and Peterson (2015) noted that studies consistently show that liberals are more neurotic than conservatives. In their own study of over 2,000 subjects and found that the differences between liberals and conservatives in neuroticism (liberals higher), conscientiousness (conservatives higher), and religiosity (conservatives higher) can each separately account for the differences in happiness. They offered both external and internal explanations of why conservatives are higher than liberals in emotional stability: "First, emotionally stable people may feel less need to adopt an ideology that advocates changing the status quo. In particular, lower neuroticism may lead people to feel less aggrieved by apparent inequities in the distribution of resources. Second, there are likely common genetic factors underlying one's personality traits such as neuroticism and one's eventual political orientation" (2015, p. 97). Burton et al. counsel that conservatives should be more understanding of liberal neuroticism and "rather than decrying the perceived 'whining' of liberals, [they] might reframe their construal of liberals in terms of generalized proneness to dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, or even 'perfectionism'" (p. 97).

Kirkegaard (2020) also looked at neuroticism (among other indicators of mental health) as a barrier to happiness using items measuring mental health from the General Social Survey cumulative cross-sectional dataset encompassing the years 1972 through 2018. Among the 11,338 respondents, the difference in mental health between "extremely liberal" and "extremely conservative" subjects was measured at 0.39 (Cohen's d). The relationship is rather weak, but it points to a significant substantive difference in mental health. Kirkegaard concluded: "The finding of increased mental illness among left-wingers is congruent with numerous findings based on related constructs, such as positive relationships between conservatism, religiousness, and health in general" (2020, p. 487).

Peterson and Palmer (2017) posit that conservatives are happier because they are supposedly more physically attractive. Using data from three waves of American National Studies surveys that asked subjects to evaluate the appearance of others, and found that the more individuals were judged attractive the more likely they were to identify as conservative Republican. Peterson and Palmer attributed their findings to the “halo effect,” which they define as a form of cognitive bias influencing a person’s view of others. They opine that attractive people faced fewer hurdles in life, which makes them more likely to embrace conservative values of individualism, self-reliance, and hard work. Peterson and Palmer (2017, p. 6) see this as a conservative “blind spot” “that leads them not to see the need for more government support or aid in society...thus we would expect that more attractive individuals would develop a worldview that is less supportive of government intervention and aid to others.”

Locus of Control and Happiness

Locus of control is also related to happiness and political ideology. The locus of control concept posits that people differ in the extent to which they believe in an internal or external locus of control. As Farnier et al. (2021, p. 3514) explain: “An internal locus of control reflects the perception that reinforcements are principally caused by an individual’s behavior or characteristics. In contrast, an external locus of control reflects the perception that reinforcements are triggered by factors external to the individual, such as chance, fate or other people.” Conservatives tend to attribute the locus of control to internal dispositional factors, and liberals tend to attribute the locus of control to factors external to individuals. These two loci of control are revealed in a Cato Institute nationwide poll that found: “When asked the top three reasons people become wealthy, strong liberals selected family connections (48%), inheritance (40%), and luck (31%). In contrast, strong conservatives selected hard work and grit (62%), ambition (47%), self-discipline (45%), and risk-taking (36%)” (Ekins, 2019, np). Strong liberals also said that the top causes of poverty are discrimination (51%), an unfair economic system (48%), and lack of educational opportunities (48%), while strong conservatives say that the problems are poor life choices (60%), lack of work ethic (52%), breakdown of families (47%), and drugs and alcohol (47%). Furthermore: strong conservatives are almost twice as likely (61%) to reject the idea “powerful others” direct their lives than strong liberals (34%).

The literature on the locus of control consistently finds this liberal-conservative difference. One such study noted: “The results indicate supporters for the two major parties are wired differently, in line with previous findings about ideology. Democrats were driven by an external locus of control and Republicans by an internal locus” (Sweetser, 2014, p. 1183). Another study linked locus of control to motivation and belief in free will: “Evidence from three studies reveals a critical difference in self-control as a function of political ideology. Specifically, greater endorsement of political conservatism was associated with greater attention regulation and task persistence...this relationship is shown to stem from varying beliefs in freewill” (Clarkson, et al, 2015, p. 8250). Farnier et al (2021, p. 3515) found that the locus of control was associated with mental health differences: “the internal locus of control was positively related to positive mental health indicators while the external dimensions showed the opposite pattern.”

We also see this liberal-conservative divide in loci of control among academics. In Cooper, Walsh, and Ellis' (2010) survey of 770 criminologists, criminologists were asked to rank what they believed were the most important causes of serious and persistent criminality. Conservatives and moderates favored individual explanations, and liberals and radicals favored external explanations. The top three factors for conservatives were "lack of empathy and concern for others," "impulsiveness and risk-taking tendencies," and "unstable family life." The top three listed by moderates were "lack of empathy and concern for others," "poor discipline practices," and "unstable family life." The liberal top three factors were "unfair economic system," "lack of educational opportunities," and "peer influences," and for radicals, they were "unfair economic system," "bias in law enforcement," and "lack of educational opportunities."

Hannikainen et al (2017) took a system justification approach to loci of control in five studies and found that a belief in free will and personal autonomy increases opposition to paternalistic policies. They write: "Support for a paternalist state was associated with an external locus of control; that is, the view that individuals are not themselves in control of their outcomes. Relatedly, individuals with a deterministic [as opposed to a free will] worldview were more likely to favor paternalist policies" (p. 257). Regardless of its link to paternalism, belief in personal autonomy is positively related to happiness: "happy individuals also score high on measures of internality, i.e., a tendency to attribute outcomes to oneself rather than to external causes. Happy people perceive a high degree of control and tend to believe that they have choice in their activities" (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 2014, p. 197).

Singh and Choudhri (2014) also found an internal locus of control to be positively related to finding meaning in life. They concluded their study by noting that: "adults with an Internal Locus of Control have superior perception of their ability and achievement, better social interactions and relationship, superior recognition of beliefs about their limitations and self-acceptance and greater beliefs that life has treated them fairly much more than external Locus of Control adults" (p. 137). Newman et al. (2019, p. 500) looked at political orientation and meaning in life in five independent samples from 16 Western countries and found that:

political conservatives report greater meaning in life than liberals at all reporting periods (global, daily, and momentary). Even when fine-grained analyses found quadratic relationships, this pattern remained. The relationship was generally robust after adjusting statistically for religiosity, which suggests that there is some unique aspect of political conservatism that provides people with meaning and purpose in life.

These studies also found that meaning in life was more closely related to social conservatism than economic conservatism. Individuals who perceive their lives to be meaningful and purposeful show better outcomes across a variety of psychological and physical measures of health and well-being (Wu & Jeste, 2020).

Religion, Marriage, and Happiness

Frequent church attendance has perhaps the strongest relationship to the positively correlated concepts of meaning in life and happiness (Dar & Iqbal, 2019; King & Hicks, 2021). The Cato report (Ekins, 2019) referenced above found that conservatives (58%) are more likely than liberals

(39%) to strongly agree their lives have purpose and meaning, as do frequent churchgoers (68%) compared with nonchurchgoers (36%), or atheists and agnostics (29%). The 39% gap between churchgoers and atheists/agnostics adds more credence to this claim that religion is an important predictor of happiness and meaning in life, and provides another clue to the happiness gap between liberals and conservatives. Numerous studies have found strong relationships between religiosity/frequent church attendance and happiness (Iceland, & Ludwig-Dehm, 2019; Steiner, Leinert, & Frey, 2020). A Pew survey found that more than twice as conservatives (55%) regularly church than liberals (27%) (Newport, 2010).

It is obvious that few liberals value religion. As David Horowitz observes: “Since its birth in the fires of the French Revolution, the political left has been at war with religion and with the Christian religion in particular” (2019, p. 3). The left is aware that religious adherents have bona fide claims of allegiance to a power greater than the state, and that threatens its vision of an all-powerful state. It is this subversive aspect of religion that leads the left to be suspicious of it: “Religion poses a threat to the intellectual world of the liberal tradition because it is a form of social life that mobilizes the deepest passions of believers in the course of creating institutions that stand between individuals and the state” (Tushnet, 1988, p. 248). The idea of any institution refusing to bow to the supremacy of the state simply cannot be tolerated by the hard left. Thus: “There are a lot of people on the cultural left who think that political liberalism is, and ought to be, the enemy of traditional religion. And they're happy about that. I think many on the left want their particular vision of liberalism to render religious belief irrelevant and to keep people of faith confined to their little sanctuaries” (Loconte, 2019, p. 9).

Another factor consistently found to be related to happiness is marriage. A Pew Research Report found that 59% of Democrats were married versus 79% of Republicans, and 42% of Democrats were divorced versus 22% of Republicans (Newport, 2009). However, this does not tell us whether marriage makes one happy, if divorce makes one unhappy, if happier people are more likely to be married, or if unhappy people are more likely to get divorced. Stutzer and Frey (2006) addressed these issues with 17 waves of the longitudinal German Socio-Economic Panel of 15,268 people. This study assessed happiness levels before and after marriage, and found that happier people were more likely to self-select into marriage than less happy people: “Moreover, a retrospective evaluation shows that those who get divorced were already less happy when they were newly married and when they were still single. This indicates substantial selection effects of generally less happy individuals into the group of divorced people” (p. 327). I could find no similar longitudinal study to answer the question of whether religion makes one happy or if happier people are drawn to religion, although Stavrova, Fetchenhauer, and Schlösser (2013, p. 91) write: “a number of longitudinal studies suggest that causality is likely to run from religiosity to psychological well-being, but the reverse is not true.”

The Culture of Victimhood and Happiness

It is frequently claimed that the United States and other Western societies have embraced a “culture of victimhood” (Campbell & Manning, 2018) and that claiming victimhood has become fashionable and taken seriously in some quarters (Sullivan et al., 2012). Such people claim victimization by such things as “micro-aggressions,” which usually means speech of which they

do not approve, and demand censorship and “safe spaces” into which they can retreat from those who do not cater to their feelings. We used to call people with such fragile psyches spoiled, petulant, egoists, or hysterics, now they are often referred to as “snowflakes” who melt at the slightest hurt feeling. Victim claimants in this sense cannot be happy in the belief that others control their mental space. Freeman (2023, np) quotes progressive journalist Jill Filipovic:

I am increasingly convinced that there are tremendously negative long-term consequences, especially to young people, coming from this reliance on the language of harm and accusations that things one finds offensive are “deeply problematic” or even violent. Just about everything researchers understand about resilience and mental well-being suggests that people who feel like they are the chief architects of their own life — to mix metaphors, that they captain their own ship, not that they are simply being tossed around by an uncontrollable ocean — are vastly better off than people whose default position is victimization, hurt, and a sense that life simply happens to them and they have no control over their response.

Victim claimants run to report speech that hurt delicate feelings to university offices of compliance, often embellishing their complaints, to seek revenge on their “tormentors” with no regard for consequences to the accused. Ok et al. (2021) note about people who claim such victimization: “their overlapping features of manipulation and callousness toward the welfare of others, which makes it easier to exploit or harm them constitutes the basis for our theorizing that the three dimensions of the Dark Triad personalities [Machiavellianism, narcissism, and sub-clinical psychopathy] will jointly predict the frequency of emitting the virtuous victimhood signals” (p. 4). Indeed, they showed in five separate studies, controlling for SES, sex, and race, that individuals with Dark Triad traits more frequently signal victimhood than others.

Bell et al. (2021) used the Dark Triad traits as predictors of political orientation and found that Machiavellianism and narcissism predicted a more liberal orientation (or as the phrase it, a less conservative orientation). Noting that in general that liberals disdain the status quo that conservatives embrace, they write:

Machiavellians may be repelled by social conservatism insofar as that social philosophy represents a staunch defense of conventional values and moral positions. Similarly, it may be the case that religious social conservatives are viewed by Machiavellians as the public face of the traditional values they disdain. The extreme self-centeredness of people with high levels of this dark trait may create resentment toward any group that tries to put constraints on the attitudes and behaviors that define Machiavellianism, which is generally what conventional, established religions endeavor to do. ...Machiavellianism uniquely predicted lower levels of socio-religious conservatism, and both Machiavellianism and narcissism uniquely predicted lower levels of overall conservatism (p.183).

Conclusion

We have seen that the literature consistently reports that conservatives are happier than liberals and the reasons given for this are many. Perhaps the fundamental reason lies in their respective Aristotelian or Platonic temperaments-personalities. Recall that Porteous claimed that “Aristotle

is the master of those who know, as Plato is of those who dream” (1934, p. 105), and Burton, Plaks, and Peterson (2015, p. 97) described liberals as having a “generalized proneness to dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, or even ‘perfectionism.’” Plato was certainly a dreamer of social perfection in his *Republic*. To attain this perfection, there had to be a radical destruction of the status quo to be replaced by the rule of the elite philosopher kings, who alone knew what was best for lesser beings. This was echoed in recent times by ex-President Barack Obama’s desire to “fundamentally transform” the United States. Utopia is unattainable, and that is an unassailable fact that haunts all dreamers of the *ought* who disdain the status quo. In Walter Kaufmann’s analysis of alienation, he sees Plato’s utopian dreams as springing from a deep sense of estrangement from his society: “Plato may be considered a paradigm of alienation. His *Republic* is the work of a man estranged from his society and from the politics and morals of his time” (1980, p. 34).

Aristotle had no illusions about Plato's utopianism because he was a realist about what is and is not possible. Rather than imagining perfection in society that is yet to be instantiated as Plato envisioned, Aristotle counseled tinkering with deficiencies in existing society. He saw the state and its institutions as springing naturally and spontaneously from the human needs for sustenance, cooperation, friendship, and stability, and not as something dreamt up while strolling in the garden. In Aristotle's state, everyone decides his or her own function based on the talents and ambitions they possess, and not assigned some function according to the demands of elitist philosopher kings. Unlike Plato, Aristotle was married with children and was at home with the status quo. Amadio and Kenny (2023, np) describe him as having a kind and affectionate character, and: “His will, which has been preserved, exhibits the same kindly traits; he makes references to his happy family life and takes solicitous care of his children, as well as his servants.”

Thus, a good case can be made for system justification theory in the sense that if one is like Aristotle, at home with the status quo, one will tend to be happy, and if one is not, like Plato, one will tend to be unhappy. Of course, there are degrees of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the status quo just as there are different degrees of happiness and different degrees of Platonic and Aristotelian temperaments/personalities. To the extent that genes drive our temperaments and personalities, we will always have Herman’s (2014) “constant alert tension” and irreconcilable differences between Platonic leftists and Aristotelian rightists. This is not a negative thing because social change is often good, such as the expansion of rights for minorities, women, and gays. This is the kind of progress almost all Western peoples, liberal or conservative, see as just reforms that did not dump the baby with the bathwater. The French and Russian Revolutions, both based on abstract theories did this, throwing out the good as well as the evil with tyrannical and chaotic results. Thus, two great elements of every stable society are permanence and progress; a disposition to preserve, and a desire to improve. Preservation without progress results in stagnation and progress without preservation lacks a grounded sense of direction, as the French and Russian Revolutions so well demonstrated. They sought the ideal, but nothing is ever good enough when measured against such a standard. We must measure what counts as progress against the wisdom, experience, and traditions of the past, only then can we truly understand what counts as progress.

References

Alsharif, A., Salleh, N., & Baharun, R. (2021). The neural correlates of emotion in decision-making. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11: 64-77.

- Amadio, H. & Kenny, A. (2023). Aristotle. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Updated January, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aristotle>.
- Bell, E., Kowalski, C., Vernon, P., & Schermer, J. (2021). Political Hearts of Darkness: The Dark Triad as predictors of political orientations and interest in politics. *Behavioral Sciences*, 11:169-187.
- Bouchard, T., Segal, N., Tellegen, A., McGue, M., Keyes, M., & Krueger, R. (2003). Evidence for the construct validity and heritability of the Wilson-Patterson conservatism scale: A reared-apart twins study of social attitudes. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 34: 959-969.
- Briki, W., & Dagot, L. (2020). Conservatives are happier than liberals: The mediating role of perceived goal progress and flow experience—a pilot study. *Current Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-00652-0>.
- Burton, C., Plaks, J., & Peterson, J. (2015). Why do conservatives report being happier than liberals? The contribution of neuroticism. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 3: 89-102.
- Campbell, B., & Manning, J. (2018). *The rise of victimhood culture: Microaggressions, safe spaces, and the new culture wars*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Charlton, B. (2009). Clever sillies: Why high IQ people tend to be deficient in common sense. *Medical Hypotheses*, 73:867-870.
- Chung, E., Mathew, V., & Subramaniam, G. (2019). In The Pursuit of Happiness: The Role of Personality. *International Journal of Academic in Research Business and Social Sciences*, 9: 10–19.
- Claessens, S., Fischer, K., Chaudhuri, A., Sibley, C., & Atkinson, Q. (2020). The dual evolutionary foundations of political ideology. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4: 336-345.
- Clarkson, J., Chambers, J., Hirt, E., Otto, A., Kardes, F., & Leone, C. (2015). The self-control consequences of political ideology. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 112: 8250-8253.
- Cooper, J., Walsh, A., & Ellis, L. (2010). Is criminology ripe for a paradigm shift? Evidence from a survey of American criminologists. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 21:332-347.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Wong, M. (2014). The situational and personal correlates of happiness: A cross-national comparison. In *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology* (pp. 193-212). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Dar K., Iqbal N. (2019). Religious commitment and well-being in college students: examining Conditional indirect effects of meaning in life. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 58:2288–97.
- Dawes, C. & Weinschenk, A. (2020). On the genetic basis of political orientation. *Current opinion in behavioral sciences*, 34, 173-178.
- Delgado, S., Pedapati, E., & Strawn, J. (2022). Temperament: The building block of personality. In *Promoting the Emotional and Behavioral Success of Youths* (pp. 43-54). Springer, Cham.
- Ekehammar, B., & Akrami, N. (2007). Personality and prejudice: From Big Five personality factors to facets. *Journal of Personality*, 75: 899-926.
- Etkin, A., Egner, T., & Kalisch, R. (2011). Emotional processing in anterior cingulate and medial prefrontal cortex. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 15: 85-93.
- Etkins, E. (2019). What Americans think about poverty, wealth, and work. The Cato Institute.

- <https://www.cato.org/publications/survey-reports/what-americans-think-about-poverty-wealth-work>.
- Farnier, J., Shankland, R., Kotsou, I., Inigo, M., Rosset, E., & Leys, C. (2021). Empowering well-being: Validation of a locus of control scale specific to well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22(8), 3513-3542.
- Fatke, M. (2017). Personality traits and political ideology: A first global assessment. *Political Psychology*, 38: 881-899.
- Freeman, J. (2023). Is politics making kids depressed? Young leftists may be suffering more than others. *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/is-politics-making-kids-depressed-5ec774>.
- Gerber, A., Huber, G., Doherty, D., Dowling, C., & Ha, S. (2010). Personality and political attitudes: Relationships across issue domains and political contexts. *American Political Science Review*, 104: 111-133.
- Hannikainen, I., Cabral, G., Machery, E., & Struchiner, N. (2017). A deterministic worldview promotes approval of state paternalism. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 70: 251-259.
- Herman, A. (2014). *The cave and the light: Plato versus Aristotle, and the struggle for the soul of western civilization*. New York: Random House.
- Horowitz, D. (2019). *Dark agenda: The war to destroy Christian America*. New York: Humanix Books.
- Iceland, J., & Ludwig-Dehm, S. (2019). Black-white differences in happiness, 1972–2014. *Social science research*, 77, 16-29.
- James, W. (1988). *Writings 1902–1910*. New York: The Library of America.
- Jost, J. (2019). A quarter century of system justification theory: Questions, answers, criticisms, and societal applications. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 58(2), 263-314.
- Jost, J., Federico, C., & Napier, J. (2009). Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60: 307-337.
- Kalmoe, N. P., & Johnson, M. (2022). Genes, ideology, and sophistication. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 9: 255-266.
- Kaufmann, W. (1980). The inevitability of alienation. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 18: 29-42
- Kim, T., Hur, J., Kwak, S., Jang, D., Lee, S., & Kwon, J. (2020). Intrinsic functional connectivity of blue and red brains: neurobiological evidence of different stress resilience between political attitudes. *Scientific Reports*, 10: 1-10.
- King, L. & Hicks, J. (2021). The science of meaning in life. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72: 561-584.
- Kirkegaard, E. (2020). Mental illness and the left. *Mankind Quarterly*, 60: 487-510.
- Loconte, J. (2019). Is liberalism good for religions? *Cato Policy report*. July/August. <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/serials/files/policy-report/2019/8/cpr-v41n4-5.pdf>
- Massey, D. (2002). A brief history of human society: The origin and role of emotion in social life. *American Sociological Review*, 67:1-29.
- McCrae, R. (1996). Social consequences of experiential openness. *Psychological bulletin*, 120: 323-337.
- Ok, E., Qian, Y., Strejcek, B., & Aquino, K. (2021). Signaling virtuous victimhood as indicators of Dark Triad personalities. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 120: 1634.

- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000329>.
- Napier, J. & Jost, J. (2008). Why are conservatives happier than liberals? *Psychological Science*, 19: 565-572.
- Nes, R., & Røysamb, E. (2017). Happiness in behaviour genetics: An update on heritability and changeability. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 18: 1533-1552.
- Newman, D., Schwarz, N., Graham, J., & Stone, A. (2019). Conservatives report greater meaning in life than liberals. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10: 494-503.
- Newport, F. (2010). Americans' church attendance inches up in 2010. Pew Report, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/141044/americans-church-attendance-inches-2010.aspx>
- Muris, P., Merckelbach, H., Otgaar, H., & Meijer, E. (2017) The malevolent side of human nature: A meta-analysis and critical review of the literature on the Dark Triad (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy). *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12: 183–204.
- O'Boyle, E., Forsyth, D., Banks, G. Story, P., & White, C. (2014). A meta-analytic test of redundancy and relative importance of the Dark Triad and Five-Factor Model of personality. *Journal of Personality*, 83: 644–664.
- Olson, J., Vernon, P. & Harris, J. (2001). The heritability of attitudes: A study of twins. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80: 845-860.
- Ozmen, C., Brelsford, G., & Danieau, C. (2018). Political affiliation, spirituality, and religiosity: Links to emerging adults' life satisfaction and optimism. *Journal of religion and health*, 57: 622-635.
- Pessoa, L., Medina, L., Hof, P., & Desfilis, E. (2019). Neural architecture of the vertebrate brain: implications for the interaction between emotion and cognition. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 107: 296-312.
- Peterson, R. & Palmer, C. (2017). Effects of physical attractiveness on political beliefs. *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 36: 3-16.
- Peterson, J., Smith, K., & Hibbing, J. (2020). Do people really become more conservative as they age? *The Journal of Politics*, 82: 600-611.
- Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. (2009). Many Americans mix multiple faiths: Eastern, New Age beliefs widespread. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Plato (1960). *The Republic and Other Works*. Jowett, B. (Trans.). Garden City, NY: Dolphin.
- Porteous, A. (1934). Platonist or Aristotelian? *The Classical Review*, 48:97-105.
- Rothbart, M., Ahadi, S., & Evans, D. (2000). Temperament and personality: origins and outcomes. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 78: 122-135.
- Schlenker, B., Chambers, J., & Le, B. (2012). Conservatives are happier than liberals, but why? Political ideology, personality, and life satisfaction. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 46: 127-146.
- Singh, T., & Choudhri, N. (2014). Early adulthood: The role of locus of control, meaning of life and subjective well being. *Journal of Psychosocial Research*, 9: 131-139.
- Smith, K., Oxley, D., Hibbing, M., Alford, J. & Hibbing, J. (2011). Linking genetics and Political attitudes: Reconceptualizing political ideology. *Political Psychology*, 32:369-397.
- Stavrova, O., Fetchenhauer, D., & Schlösser, T. (2013). Why are religious people happy? The effect of the social norm of religiosity across countries. *Social science research*, 42: 90-105.
- Stavrova, O., & Luhmann, M. (2016). Are conservatives happier than liberals? Not always and

- not everywhere. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 63, 29-35.
- Steptoe, A. (2019). Happiness and health. *Annual review of public health*, 40: 339-359.
- Steiner, L., Leinert, L., & Frey, B. (2020). Economics, religion and happiness. *Wirtschafts-und Unternehmensethik*, 11: 27-43.
- Stutzer, A., & Frey, B. S. (2006). Does marriage make people happy, or do happy people get married? *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 35(2), 326-347.
- Sullivan, D., Landau, M., Branscombe, N., & Rothschild, Z. (2012). Competitive victimhood as a response to accusations of ingroup harm doing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102: 778 –795.
- Suwa, G., Asfaw, B., Kono, R., Kubo, D., Lovejoy, C., White, T. (2009). The *Ardipithecus ramidus* skull and its implications for hominid origins. *Science*, 326:68e1-68e8.
- Sweetser, K. (2014). Partisan personality: The psychological differences between Democrats and Republicans, and independents somewhere in between. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58: 1183-1194.
- Taylor, P., Funk, C., & Craighill, P. (2006). Are we happy yet? *Pew Research Center*. 1-41.
- Tushnet, M. (1988). *Red, white, and blue: a critical analysis of constitutional law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walsh, A. (2014). *Biosociology: Bridging the biology-sociology divide*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Wajzer, M., & Dragan, W. (2023). It is not only the environment that matters: A short introduction to research on the heritability of political attitudes. *Political Studies Review*, 21(1), 144-161.
- Weiss, A., Bates, T., & Luciano, M. (2008). Happiness is a personal (ity) thing: The genetics of personality and well-being in a representative sample. *Psychological Science*, 19: 205-210.
- Wu, T., & Jeste, D. (2020). Meaning in life and its relationship with physical, mental, and cognitive functioning. *Journal of Clinic Psychiatry*, 81: e13064.