8

LIKELY REACTIONS TO THE FORUM

If a People’s Forum was to be run at an operational scale, it may well be treated with disdain by many conservatives as it could seem to them to be biased towards liberals. This is because the Forum would be questioning the status quo to see if change might improve things. Although many conservatives may be uneasy about this, few liberals will react in that way, because the two groups have been found to be consistently distinguished by the personality trait of ‘openness to change’ (Haidt 2012, 279; Jost 2009; Jost et al. 2003a; Mooney 2012, 96). Science journalist Jim Giles (2008, 29) summarizes the research as showing that people with high scores in openness to change are almost twice as likely to be liberals as conservatives. Openness to change includes willingness to accept new ideas and new experiences, tolerance for ambiguity and lack of closure, regarding change as an opportunity rather than a problem, and thinking about the world as it might be. Liberals are therefore likely to welcome the Forum as a tool for developing and implementing progressive policies, while conservatives may be offended by its questions and results and therefore repudiate the institution itself. Another difference between liberals and conservatives is that the latter are more sensitive to perceptions of threat (e.g. Haidt 2012, 279; Jost et al. 2003a) and thus tend to have greater needs for power and security. This is related to resistance to change (Jost 2009, 134), and both dispositions may be aggravated by the Forum’s ballot paper because, in order to indicate why an issue could be
important and worth public examination, the paper’s description of it is likely to include evidence of need for change, such as surveying the risks involved in ignoring the issue. It might be thought that discussing risks will arouse the interest of threat-sensitive conservatives, but some of them could overreact by denying any risk at all and rejecting any forum that discusses it. This may feel entirely sensible to them as it also expresses their aversion to change. Even if some risks or opportunities are crucial for the future wellbeing of society, their coverage by the Forum’s selection and descriptions of issues and by its questions may look like bias to someone who is particularly averse to change and threat.

Public dispute is therefore expected to arise over perceptions of liberal bias in People’s Forums. Although this may inhibit the political influence of Forums by tending to discredit them, it may also promote this influence, as any such dispute will focus attention on the Forum and the specific questions it poses that provoke the dispute. This should encourage citizens to think more about the Forum and its questions and to participate by debating and voting. The people who run People’s Forums must therefore manage controversies over bias by trying to minimize and resolve them while also channelling them to contribute energy towards the execution of the Forum’s two strategies.

As some of the perception of bias in the Forum will arise from genetically determined predispositions, it is likely to persist. Political scientists John Alford, Caroline Funk and John Hibbing (2005) have shown from studies of the political attitudes of monozygotic (identical) and dizygotic (fraternal) twins that for the conservative–liberal spectrum of attitudes, genotype (or ‘nature’) accounts for about 40% of the variance between individuals. Political genetics is now a developing field, and at the time of writing had identified twelve genes with variants that might incline people towards liberalism or conservatism. Perhaps the most definite of these prospects is from the gene DRD4, which is involved in regulating levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine and has a variant (7R) that is associated with novelty-seeking behaviour (Hatemi and McDermott 2012). DRD4–7R is there-
fore considered to facilitate openness to change. In 2010, James Fowler and associates (Settle 2010) found that people with this variant who also had a large network of friends in adolescence tended to be liberal rather than conservative. Although there are no genes specifically for liberalism or conservatism, this study was the first to show that a specific gene-environment interaction helps people develop an affinity with one or the other side of politics.

8.1 A closer look at the differing reactions of liberals and conservatives

Paul Slovic was quoted in §4.1(8) as observing that people ‘do their best to hold onto their worldviews’ and that they do so because it helps them maintain their personal identities and social networks. However, as observed above, some world views such as the conservative resistance to change and the liberal outlook of openness to change are facilitated by genotype, and this further explains why people ‘do their best to hold onto’ them. We should therefore not expect rapid political change from attempts to facilitate public deliberation. Any such change will be slow, requiring discourse over many years, and most of it may take place in young people as they build and modify their political preferences—partly by observing the discourse and by participating in it.

The difference between conservative and liberal world views has been summarized by psychologist John Jost (2009) as comprising two core preferences: stability versus change and hierarchy versus equality, both of which are partially motivated by differing needs to manage uncertainty and threat. The first of these is conservatives’ preference for the status quo and liberals’ openness to change, as discussed above. The second is that conservatives tolerate and support inequality (possibly as it is seen to be the natural order of things, the status quo) whereas liberals want change that reduces inequality. As noted in §4.2.3, the passive and sometimes active support that conservatives give to inequality is a major obstacle to controlling economic growth,
as it prevents radical sharing of employment. One of the results of this is a crucial block to collective action for halting global warming and other damage to our natural capital.

From Jost and others (e.g. Jost et al. 2003a,b; Jost 2009; Giles 2008; Graham and Estes 2012) we can list the main conservative-liberal polarities of preferences or tolerances as follows (conservative first, liberal last) in which the core tensions noted by Jost and his colleagues are printed bold:

1. stability and convention versus openness to change and novelty seeking;
2. order, organization and certainty versus tolerance of ambiguity;
3. hierarchy versus equality;
4. cognitive closure versus inclination for integrative complexity (viewing issues from multiple perspectives and merging those views into nuanced positions) (Mooney 2012, 69–70);
5. conscientiousness versus rebellion and creativity;
6. lower control of impulses versus higher control of impulses (Graham and Estes 2012, 42);
7. fear of threat (including salience of personal mortality and threats to the stability of the social system) versus a relative tolerance of threat.

In addition to these conservative–liberal polarities, there are others in moral values and they will be inspected later, with a suggestion as to how they might be explained by these seven polarities.

Much of the potential for this list of seven polarities shows up in the comprehensive system of human motivational values proposed by psychologist Shalom Schwartz (2007). His system demonstrates tensions between values within the individual (rather than between different individuals) and is depicted in Figure 8.1 by opposing segments in a circular arrangement of the values experienced by each person. Schwartz developed this scheme by hypothesizing from evolutionary psychology that
values represent, in the form of conscious goals, three universal re-
requirements of human existence to which all individuals and socie-
ties must be responsive: needs of individuals as biological organ-
isms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and
welfare needs of groups. (Schwartz 1992, 4)

To test this conjecture, Schwartz took 210 samples from 67 coun-
tries on 54 to 57 items of abstract value that should help to satisfy
those ‘three universal requirements of human existence’, such as
creativity, wealth and honesty (Schwartz 2007). The people in
each sample rated each value item for its importance as guiding
principles in their lives and the relations between items were
represented by proximity in two dimensions. Those proximities
placed the value items within segments of a circle as shown in
Figure 8.1, where each segment is a motivationally distinct type
of value, as listed and defined in Table 8.1. The circular configu-
ration indicates that each individual, irrespective of nationality
and culture, experiences the same congruities and tensions be-
tween types of value. Congruities are shown by proximities of
value types around the circumference and tensions by opposing
locations of value types across the circle. Schwartz further sum-
marizes these ten types of value into four broad types, which
are shown outside the circle adjacent to the two or three types
of value that they encompass. As indicated by their opposing
locations, these broad types produce two tensions within the
individual:

1. openness to change (stimulation, self-direction) versus con-
servation (tradition, conformity and security) and
2. self-enhancement (power, achievement and hedonism) ver-
sus self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence).

Different individuals have different resolutions of the tensions
between types of value, at both the detailed level (10 types)
and the broad level (4 types). At the broad level, this means
that each individual has, in the openness to change–conserva-
tion dimension, some motivation for openness to change and
some for conservation. Those with more openness to change than conservation are likely to be politically liberal and those with stronger conservation values, conservative. Likewise, in the self-enhancement–self-transcendence dimension, each per-

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**Table 8.1. Definitions of motivational types of values in terms of their core goal (from Schwartz 2007, 174).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Core Goal</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stimulation</td>
<td>Excitement, novelty and challenge in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-direction</td>
<td>Independent thought and action: choosing, creating, exploring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universalism</td>
<td>Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition</td>
<td>Respect for, commitment to and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide for the self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td>Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
son strikes their own balance between these two broad values, and some will be more self-enhancing and others more self-transcending. In line with his initial approach, Schwartz sums up his analysis with an evolutionary explanation of the two broad dimensions of motivational tension. He conjectures that the conflict within the individual of self-enhancement versus self-transcendence was selected because *Homo sapiens* evolved as a social animal and this demanded that individuals attend to the interests of both self and group. The intra-personal tension of openness to change against conservation is seen as being selected by the struggle for survival in a sometimes hostile environment, as this would require abilities to adapt and to maintain stability. Furthermore, natural selection is likely to have produced the ability of each person to strike different balances between self-enhancement and self-transcendence and between openness to change and conservation depending on their circumstances (see also Jost 2009, 139). Tim Jackson has described some of the implications of this with slightly different terminology: altruism for self-transcendence, selfishness for self-enhancement, novelty seeking for openness to change and tradition for conservation.

The important point here is that each society strikes the balance between altruism and selfishness (and also between novelty and tradition) in different places. And where this balance is struck depends crucially on social structure. When technologies, infrastructures, institutions and social norms reward self-enhancement and novelty, then selfish sensation-seeking behaviours prevail over more considered, altruistic ones. Where social structures favour altruism and tradition, self-transcending behaviours are rewarded and selfish behaviour may even be penalized. (Jackson 2009, 163)

Another analysis of motivational values has been developed by social psychologists Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph (Haidt 2012). As with Schwartz’s approach, they base their theory of ‘moral foundations’ on evolutionary psychology. From the major adaptive challenges that confronted our evolving social
ancestors, Haidt and Joseph conjectured that natural selection should have shaped our minds to value at least six ‘virtues’. These ‘moral intuitions’ or ‘moral foundations’ are postulated to be generated by cognitive modules that were shaped by our evolution, and the six identified by Haidt and Joseph are concerns for: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation and liberty/oppression. The sanctity/degradation foundation covers such concerns as cleanliness, temperance, chastity and piety, with violations of those concerns typically arousing disgust. Together with several colleagues, Haidt has surveyed more than 130,000 people, with the clear result that self-identified liberals are motivated mainly by just three of these intuitive concerns — care/harm, fairness/cheating and liberty/oppression — whereas self-identified conservatives are well motivated by all of them (Haidt 2012, 181–84). Haidt’s (2012, 279, 312) explanation of this striking difference is that, as noted above, people have different genotypes that give them different resolutions of the seven polarities listed in the opening part of this section, and these predispose (but do not predestine) some people to be less concerned with loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation. As life experiences cause people to react to events with these differing responses, they settle into those different attitudes, while identifying with those of similar disposition to form groups such as conservatives, authoritarians, libertarians and liberals. The social identities of the members of these groups then direct their confirmation bias, strengthening their divergent world views.

But as Jost (2012, 526) observes:

From a scientific perspective, his theory raises more questions than it answers. Why do some individuals feel that it is morally good (or necessary) to obey authority, favour the ingroup, and maintain purity, whereas others are sceptical? Why do some think it is morally acceptable to judge or mistreat others (such as gay or lesbian couples or, only a generation ago, interracial couples) because they dislike or feel disgusted by them, whereas others do not? Why do we ‘care about violence towards many more classes of victims to-
day than our grandparents did in their time? Haidt dismisses the possibility that this aspect of liberalism, which prizes universal over parochial considerations (the justice principle of impartiality), is in fact a tremendous cultural achievement — a shared victory over the limitations of our more primitive ancestral legacy.

Perhaps Jost’s questions are answered by a more thorough application of the first mechanism in Haidt’s explanation of conservative and liberal moral foundations, which is the effect of their genetic differences in ‘motivational values’ (Schwartz 2007) or ‘motivated social cognition’ (Jost et al. 2003a,b). We now devote some space to investigating this possibility because it could mean that those motivational values or motivated cognitions can construct more thoughtful morals than the intuitions that Haidt calls moral foundations. As Jost observes, thoughtful morals provide a better basis for public policy than indiscriminate acceptance of our intuitions.

Conservative–liberal differences in motivational values are approximately sketched by the seven polarities listed in the opening part of this section. What Haidt missed or perhaps ignored to avoid offending conservatives was that those polarities indicate that liberals tend to be better equipped than conservatives to teach themselves new emotional reactions when these are more appropriate in the modern world than Haidt’s (2012, xiv, xv etc.) six instinctive moral foundations. This conjecture may provoke three questions: (1) how are liberals better equipped to recognize when new emotional reactions should replace instinctive ones; (2) how can people replace instinctive reactions with others; and (3) how are liberals better equipped to do this than conservatives? The answer to the first question is that liberals are more likely than conservatives to recognize needs for new emotional responses because liberals are more open to change, more inclined to exercise integrative complexity, to rebel against convention, to be creative, and to tolerate ambiguity, uncertainty and threat. The answer to the second question is that psychologists and psychiatrists have been aware for many years that people can largely determine their emo-
tional responses to stimuli by what they choose to think about them (e.g. Haidt 2012, 71; Seligman 1992; Seligman 1994). So, within limits, anyone can teach themselves new likes and dislikes, approvals and disapprovals, by regarding the stimuli that evoke emotional responses in more positive or negative ways. Perhaps this is a matter of deliberate association, a self-administered form of Pavlovian conditioning. The answer to the third question is the same as that to the first: liberals are more likely to be willing and able to teach themselves new emotional reactions because they tend to be more open to change and more thoughtful and tolerant.

From these observations then, we form our first element of hypothesis: Liberals are more likely than conservatives to review and overrule their intuitions when experience, self-examination or criticism from others indicates that they are unhelpful. To be blunt, this is a capacity for maturation. But on the other hand, conservatives have not only the youthful virtues of drive and commitment to their group and its goals, but also rather mature regards for stability, order, persistence and conscientiousness (Mooney 2012, 268). As Haidt (2012, 294–95) emphasizes, we need both the conservative and liberal approaches, often in alternating balance. He quotes John Stuart Mill: ‘A party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life.’ Haidt also notes Bertrand Russell claimed that ‘social cohesion is a necessity and mankind has never yet succeeded in enforcing cohesion by merely rational arguments.’ The need for cohesion is strongly appreciated at an instinctual level by conservatives, but may be neglected in the individualistic and reasoning approach of liberals that may put instinct on hold in order to consider other perspectives. Achieving a productive balance between conservative and liberal inputs may not be as difficult as it appears because, as the work of Schwartz and others indicates, most individuals have some of both dispositions and the balance that each person strikes between the two is in some cases influenced by their circumstances. And obviously, those circumstances include the ways in which people are treated by those with different points
of view. The People’s Forum may be effective in this situation because its verdicts are nonbinding and thus, while of concern to those who differ, initially do not pose an urgent threat to them. Those verdicts would remain open to alteration for some years, until it becomes clear to all those who are interested in them: (a) that a firm majority decision has been reached, (b) why that choice was made, and (c) that the time has come to implement it.

This hypothesizing of why liberals have much narrower ‘moral foundations’ than conservatives suggests that liberals are more inclined and more able to mentally step outside their instinctive moral responses to objectively inspect them for appropriateness in the situation that aroused them. They will also be better equipped to conduct the same type of dispassionate inspection of other people, including those who are members of other groups, such as religions or nations. In all these situations, such inspections will often indicate that loyalty to a group, obedience to an authority figure and scrupulous sanctity (avoidance of contaminants, dirt, alcohol, other races and so on) can, in real life, be unnecessary and sometimes dangerous, whereas care, fairness and liberty will appear to be more directly and reliably useful. In making those value judgements of what is unnecessary, dangerous and useful, the criterion of value that is likely to be used is the utilitarian one, of what creates pleasure and avoids pain. Just why liberals would select that criterion despite their instinctive concern for at least care/harm, fairness/cheating and liberty/oppression (and to some extent for the other three of Haidt’s moral foundations as well) is that, in observing the fallibility of moral instincts in others and in themselves, they will try to make sense of them by looking for something in them that might explain their feeling that all of them seem to have some value, even if only vaguely and perhaps not often. Fairly obviously, those foundations all have some capacity to produce pleasure and minimize pain. For example, obedience to authority generally pays off in terms of the pleasure of a stable life that is free of official persecution. If people assess the worth of their moral foundations by looking at how likely they are to produce
pleasure and minimize pain, for both themselves and others, then they are likely to rate care, fairness and liberty as the most direct and reliable sources of positive value. Some liberals will go further and look at these three values as also being rather superficial, in that they are merely instrumental in producing pleasure and avoiding pain.

Our hypothesis that many liberals are likely to actively select their ‘moral foundations’ by critically reviewing and overruling or retraining their ethical intuitions while many conservatives continue to view all of them as self-evident truths appears to be supported by the observation and theory of moral development that was initiated by psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg in the 1960s. His work indicates that as children grow up, some of them develop the ability to review and control their moral intuitions. Kohlberg identified the earliest part of the development of moral reasoning as the very superficial ‘pre-conventional’ phase of early childhood, such that if an adult punished a young child for an act, then the child would feel or ‘know’ that the act was wrong. Psychologist Elliot Turiel subsequently modified this description with the observation that, in all the cultures that he examined, children as young as five recognize, at some level, moral rules such as *harm is wrong*. In elementary school, children enter the ‘conventional’ phase of recognizing and respecting authority and social rules, even as they learn to manoeuvre within and around these constraints. After puberty, just as children develop the capacity for abstract thought,

Kohlberg found that *some* children begin to think for themselves about the nature of authority, the meaning of justice, and the reasons behind rules and laws. In the two ‘post-conventional’ stages, adolescents still value honesty and respect rules and laws, but now they sometimes justify dishonesty or law-breaking in pursuit of still higher goods, particularly justice. (Haidt 2012, 8, emphasis added)

Kohlberg’s finding that only some children achieve the later stages of development is crucial (which is also emphasized by Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 198). It echoes the hypothesis
advanced here that some people (presumably mostly those who become liberals) are better equipped than others (presumably mostly those who become conservatives) to move into the post-conventional phase. This developmental progression of the individual appears to be mirrored in a similar progression of societies. As Haidt (2012, 110) points out, societies that have become educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (generally western societies, hence earning the acronym WEIRD) have developed — partly in the Enlightenment — a set of moral foundations that is more liberal than those of most other societies, emphasizing concerns about harming, cheating and oppressing individuals. Both developmental progressions — in individuals and in societies — are suggested here to be processes of learning to replace inappropriate intuitions with more appropriate responses. The relevance of this hypothesis for the People’s Forum is that it indicates that this institution might assist such learning and development. But to do it, the Forum must be managed not only to assist learning but also to assist those who are repelled by such change to adjust to it and to find a place within it where their motivations are appreciated, which is likely to be in leadership and in encouraging group solidarity. Conservatives may therefore make their greatest contribution in conventional electoral politics and the ‘leadership’ or executive function it provides (see §2.2 and §2.2.1 discussions of leadership), while liberals mainly use the Forum to develop the citizen directorship (see §2.2.2) that guides the so called ‘leaders’.

Before concluding this consideration of differences in the dispositions of conservatives and liberals, we should note that those differences may produce very different attitudes to government, such as the Republican–Democrat split in the United States (see §3.2). As discussed in §2.2.3.1 and §2.2.3.2, and also indirectly in §4.1, it is often much easier to recognize and appreciate private goods than public goods. This suggests that liberals’ inclination towards integrative complexity, tolerance of ambiguity, interest in novelty and so on leads them, as a general rule, to perceive the value of a wider range of public goods than conservatives will. And so, as it is primarily government that
provides and maintains these goods, liberals (generally Democrats in the US) may therefore tend to be more appreciative of government than conservatives (mostly Republicans in the US).

This brief and partly conjectural excursion into psychology and moral philosophy suggests that although genotype and tradition present considerable obstacles to productive public deliberation via the People’s Forum, nevertheless this design has potential to make a crucial contribution to public policy. Although conservatives will suspect liberal bias in the Forum, they should not be viscerally alarmed that it threatens the social order because its establishment would not require the alteration or removal of existing institutions of government. They may therefore adapt to its presence by contributing to the debates it facilitates and by becoming accustomed to new ideas on public policy. But they will need more time than liberals; especially if the Forum facilitates deliberation on significant changes to the social order such as replacing electoral representation with sortition. Much of the deliberative response to the Forum should occur with generational change. As young people become politically aware, they may form their views with more openness than their elders. Another part of the potential of the Forum is that, if it is well managed, it may become widely used as a political heuristic that is recognized and widely accepted as presenting well-considered trends in its polling results. All these effects may be slow to develop, so the political potential of the People’s Forum could take many years to be fully demonstrated.

8.2 The applicability of the People’s Forum to the polarized politics of the USA

Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler (2009) have shown that in the USA a political sorting has occurred in the last few decades by which the Republican Party now much more clearly represents conservatives and the Democratic Party unambiguously represents liberals. US citizens are not differing markedly more with each other on issues, but politicians are more clearly representing one side or the other (Hetherington 2009). In the
American system, with its many checks and balances, this sharp
dichotomy among politicians is producing political gridlock
and, as a consequence, a zeitgeist of antagonism. Americans
now feel strongly polarized as their politics undergoes ‘conflict
extension, in which multiple and seemingly cross-cutting di-
mensions all divide Republicans from Democrats, rather than
one issue cleavage completely displacing another’ (Hethering-
ton and Weiler 2009, 203). Is this partisanship a problem that
the People’s Forum could help to transform into constructive
discourse?

Hetherington and Weiler (2009, 40) note that scholars have
generally considered conservatives to be distinguished from lib-
erals by one or more of three traits: (1) a desire to protect the
status quo against change; (2) a preference for free markets and
small government; and (3) a desire for order, that is, an intoler-
ance of confusion, ambiguity and difference. Hetherington and
Weiler find that polarization in the US has proceeded mostly ac-
cording to the last trait. Those with a high need for social or-
der have been increasingly voting, campaigning and standing
for the Republican Party, and those who try to understand or
tolerate confusion, ambiguity and difference have been turning
increasingly to the Democrats. Noting that the need for order
characterizes authoritarianism (2009, 3–4), they describe the
polarization of American politics as ‘the increasingly central
role that authoritarianism has come to play in structuring party
competition, mass preferences and the relevant issue agenda of
the past forty years’ (2009, 203).

Authoritarianism should not be confused with conservatism
as it is only one possible part of it (the third part listed above)
and can, in certain situations and in those who feel it strongly,
overrule the other components of conservatism to produce a
zeal for changing the status quo that is the antithesis of con-
servatism. When authoritarians perceive that existing norms,
institutions and authorities are maintaining the social fabric,
they will be conservative and
tend to favour orthodox, venerable understandings of right and wrong. But under the right circumstances, they will support radical changes in the existing social fabric if they can be persuaded that those changes are necessary to maintain order and quell threats to the social fabric. (Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 39)

Hetherington and Weiler (2009, 203) also observe, beginning

in the late 1960s, our political system began a transformation that, in fits and starts but inexorably, produced a picture in increasingly sharp resolution — one in which the division between people’s fundamental outlooks became refracted onto a landscape of increasingly irreconcilable political differences.

Resolving or accommodating these differences appears to call for new processes or institutions. A new system of government with many fewer checks and balances (that is, with fewer super-majoritarian devices, as discussed in §2.2.6) such as a parliamentary system, could help by allowing majorities to rule with less opportunity for minorities to undemocratically frustrate them. This would produce more order in the political system, which should appeal to authoritarians. If this reform is taken further with proportional representation, then the ruling group will be more likely to consider the interests of other groups, in order to avoid provoking them into forming coalitions that can overrule the rulers. Another approach, and one that is probably needed to enable such reformation of government, is to establish an institution — such as the People’s Forum — that is designed to facilitate public deliberation on strategic issues, as those include constitutional reform. A Forum would also improve the order of the system by removing much of its ambiguity of delegation, as it explicitly and publicly allocates directorship to the people. In addition to helping the people consider how they should reform their government, the Forum could also help them inquire into ‘the division between people’s fundamental outlooks’, which should help them understand why they differ and see more clearly where they might come together in order to move
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ahead. In doing this, the Forum should assist by transferring the emphasis of political debate from political personality and party rivalries to the substance of issues. Such a shift may be transformative, for people's beliefs are currently heavily influenced by their identification with cultural and political groups (as noted in §7.2.2 E13 for the issue of climate change).

8.3 General prospects for the Forum

As the introduction of a People’s Forum into a community would slightly alter its social structure by adding to it an institution that facilitates debate, discussion and thought about public affairs, it may shift the balance, or resolution, of such conflicts towards openness to change and self-transcendence. Although this means that People’s Forums are likely to encounter opposition from conservatives (much of which may persist, due to its genetic component) these opponents will feel some obligation to engage with it, at least to appear willing to publicly explain and defend their points of view and to be seen as contributing to the democratic process. However, some conservatives may prefer to leave the ambiguous business of discussion and negotiation to others: to those who are more comfortable with uncertainty, who are motivated by seeing opportunities for change and who are stimulated by complex problems that demand integrative capability. As suggested by Chris Mooney (2012, 267–68), some conservatives may therefore prefer to ignore a process such as the Forum, viewing it as a frustrating gabfest. But if Forum participants actually achieve a strong and stable — perhaps even a strengthening — majority view on what should be done about a particular issue in the face of counter-argument and the dissemination of new information over many years, then conservatives may be drawn in by the prospect of closure. Closure will be even more imminent if politicians declare that they will enact the next poll result on that issue, unless it is overturned by a reversal of the voting trend (as proposed in §7.2.9). Over several years of sustained public discussion and polling, conservatives may also become accustomed to the prospect of the changes in the status
quo that majorities in the PF poll are consistently advocating as necessary. If closure is broadly recognized by the public and their political agents, conservatives may then be among those calling for united collective action to enact the change. They may be keen to see that everyone contributes according to their means and that they all stay the course, because although they resist change and accept inequality, they are intolerant of ambiguity and have strong desires for hierarchy, conformity, loyalty to their group, fairness (as proportionality) and closure.

The slow but potentially deep process of public argument and deliberation that the People’s Forum is intended to facilitate may help liberals and conservatives to better understand their differences. It may help liberals show conservatives new possibilities and help conservatives show liberals when the time for solidarity and decisive collective action has arrived. In support of this optimism it is anticipated that authoritarians would welcome the Forum. They are usually a small proportion of the public, being just one type of conservative, but in addition to them, non-authoritarians tend to react to increasing perceptions of threat by becoming authoritarian themselves. As political psychologist Karen Stenner (2005, 269) observes, authoritarianism is ‘fuelled by the impulse to enhance unity and conformity and manifested under conditions … that threaten that oneness and sameness’. She concludes that

authoritarians are never more tolerant than when reassured and pacified by an autocratic culture, and never more intolerant than when forced to endure a vibrant democracy.

We have long known that the ‘anti-democratic personality’ is bad for democracy. The harder lesson to learn is that democracy is bad for the anti-democrat. (Stenner 2005, 334)

Stenner observes this in democracies as we know them today. But if they are made more systematic while remaining no less vibrant, via new, transparent institutions such as the People’s Forum, then authoritarians may be reassured by such strengthening of the order of the democratic process. One way that the
Forum would do this is by minimizing ambiguity in delegation by making the people more clearly the directors of their government. As discussed in §2.3.4 and §2.3.5, this element of order would then create more order by reducing the distractions of excessive competition between politicians. Another strengthening of order by the Forum would come from its reduction of excessive compromise in democratic government. As noted in §2.4, this might be done by the Forum’s meritocratic effect of prioritizing engaged opinion over disengaged opinion, while assisting both categories of opinion to develop. Order would also be strengthened by the Forum always giving prior notice of any changes to the provision of public goods (see §7.2.9). It would do this by publicizing the trends it registers in the development of engaged opinion and also by those trends provoking politicians to challenge citizens to reverse them before they are expressed as social choices, through new laws and policies.