

contradictory neural circuits in the same brain? Easy. The answer is mutual inhibition, a very common kind of brain circuitry: When one circuit is active, it turns off the other. Which is turned on at a given time is a matter of context. Someone with both worldviews applies them to different issues in different contexts, resulting in the brain circuits for the different values unconsciously and automatically switching back and forth depending on the issue. That's what it means to be a biconceptual.

It is often these biconceptuals who, as voters, are the target of intense campaign attention. But Republicans understand how to appeal to them better than Democrats do. Recall that all politics is moral, and that a voter's implicit sense of morality is absolutely central to a voter's identity. Since biconceptual voters have both moral systems—mostly one but partly the other—conservatives need to keep their voters and attract the partly conservative moderate Democrats. Conversely, progressives need to keep their voters and attract partly progressive moderate Republicans. There is an honest strategy for achieving this goal, and also an Orwellian one. The honest strategy is to use only your language and avoid using the other side's language. That will maximally activate your moral system in the moderates on the other side. The Orwellian strategy involves using the other side's language in an attempt to “reach” those with moderate or opposing views. But if you use Orwellian language, you will be activating the other side's moral system, making it stronger, and shooting yourself in the foot.

However, some political organizations use Orwellian language. For instance, an hour before writing this, I received a robocall from the “Center for Worker Freedom” asking me to support a measure that they said would support worker freedom. They are an anti-union organization and the measure is anti-union, though the telephone message didn't mention that. They were trying to fool Democrats into supporting an anti-union measure out of ignorance.

It is vital that progressives understand why just citing the facts doesn't work, and why attention to public discourse must be constant, not just focused on elections. Here are the basics that progressives need to understand.