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Progressives are Religious Zealots

By Freddy Davis

It seems that there is a lot of confusion these days about the term "Progressive." It was originally used to represent people who wanted to transition American society from a free market economy to a Communist one using a "slow but sure" methodology. Marx's belief was that change like that had to come through a violent revolution. Some people who agreed with Marx's vision of transitioning to Communism, but who didn't want the violent revolution, came up with the idea of promoting it gradually by systematically taking over the various institutions of society (education, government, business, media, etc.) and indoctrinating the citizenry, along with implementing Socialist/Communist policies throughout those various institutions.

In modern times, it seems to have become associated with a more generic sense of what has, in the past, been labeled "Liberalism." Make no mistake, though, regardless of the terminology used, its ultimate goals are the same.

Progressivism is an expression of Naturalism – the belief that the natural universe, based on natural laws, is all that exists. It is atheistic, and its moral underpinning is relativism. While this kind of belief steadfastly claims that it is non-religious, the truth is, it is a thoroughly religious belief. Let's look at a case study of how this works.

Kathryn Paige Harden is a professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Over the years, she has been considered one of the top people in her field and has been the recipient of many grants and awards for her work.

Dr. Harden's specialty is in the field of behavior genetics. This is a branch of social science that investigates the influence of genes on character traits and life outcomes. The thrust of this field of study is to attempt to differentiate genetic effects from environmental ones in determining what causes people to be the way they are. Traditionally, this kind of research has relied on the study of twins by comparing identical twins with fraternal twins to help ferret out what behaviors are a result of a person's genes and what ones are the result of environmental influences. Dr. Harden's research has led her to conclude that much of a person's personal life trajectories is due to genetic influences.

Based on her field of study, you would think that Dr. Harden's work would be all about scientific analysis. And, indeed, she sees it that way. She studies people's genetic makeup and works to see how the various genes affect people's lives. However, a big part of her studies also requires that she make judgments that are outside of the realm of observation and experimentation (science). When she is dealing with matters of environmental influences, she, by necessity, must make judgments based on her underlying beliefs about the nature of man rather than on objective scientific data. Even though they don't like to admit it, all social scientists, who work in any social science field, operates using this same approach.

A few years ago while on sabbatical, Dr. Harden found herself on the outs with certain other left leaning professors who taught in various other fields of social science – to the point that she was virtually ostracized and told that she should completely give up her study of behavior genetics. It should be noted, at this point, that in spite of her work being in the area of genetics,

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Dr. Harden is a hard core social liberal. It seems that the root of the antagonism toward her by these other social scientists was based on the fact that they were afraid that her research might lead down a path to eugenics (the science of using controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics in a population). Dr. Harden, for her part, has pushed back very strongly insisting that genetic differences between people actually matter in our lives and reflect an element of human reality. That does not matter to these others, however. Their relativistic moral beliefs allow them to actually disregard matters that they believe go against their philosophical beliefs – even if these matters relate to hard science.

What is interesting about this story for the purpose of this article is that both Dr. Harden and the professors who oppose her are all left-leaning social justice liberals. The implications of that is that the passion that has been generated on both sides of the argument are matters of philosophical beliefs, not of science.

The social sciences have, over the years, managed to find a prominent place in academia, and have been able to exert considerable influence on the way society is thought of by the general public. By way of definition, social sciences are an attempt to use the scientific method to study humanity – the scientific method being the use of observation and experimentation to discover things about the natural world. The social sciences include such fields of study as sociology, anthropology, psychology, communications, economics, political science, and a number of others.

The only problem is, human beings are not purely natural animals. We are spiritual beings housed in a

physical body. Thus, there are certain aspects of human life that can be studied scientifically, but other aspects that cannot. Thus, it is impossible to do any kind of completely objective scientific study in the fields that are covered by the social sciences.

But the social sciences, as generally considered, do not recognize that distinction. They treat the human person as purely an animal creature that can be scientifically studied with objectively definitive results. In other words, they begin with a naturalistic worldview foundation, and do their study based on the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists.

That philosophy, though, brings up an interesting tension. While their naturalistic beliefs force them to think of human beings as only natural animals subject to pure scientific study, it also creates a particular way to view morality that does not correspond to the naturalistic beliefs they espouse. They can study the human body with science, but they cannot use empirical science to study human behavior – and it is in the arena of human behavior that morality becomes a matter to be dealt with. Since they don't believe there is anything outside of the natural universe (no God), they only have human preference as a basis for defining morality. Thus, their social justice point of view is purely a moral framework that cannot be studied by science.

So the tension that exists between Dr. Harden and her social science colleagues is not a scientific dispute at all, it is a philosophical one based on their naturalistic worldview beliefs. In other words, it is a religious battle.

And that is what happens when you have a belief about the nature of man that does not reflect reality. Their naturalistic beliefs only allow for the operation of the natural universe, but that leaves morality in a place that does not

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have an objective foundation. Based on the progressive beliefs about the doctrine of man, human beings are natural creatures with no spiritual element to them. Morality, however, is a spiritual concept. So when Naturalism has to deal with moral matters, it has no objective way to do it. You end up having to define morality based on the law of the jungle – the one with the power gets to decide what is moral and immoral.

And use the law of the jungle these progressives do. They will seek to destroy anyone who disagrees with their moral beliefs. We see it in the news virtually every day as people who identify as Progressives set out to destroy Christians, or anyone who promotes a biblical worldview. But their vitriol is not limited to opponents who hold a different worldview. They

will even seek to destroy people who agree with their own worldview beliefs if those people don't agree with their preferred moral pronouncements – as in the case of Dr. Harden above.

Progressivism is, ultimately, a religious belief, and most progressives are religious zealots. As Christians deal with them, we cannot try to oppose them in the arena of science. When it comes to actual science, Christians don't even disagree with them. The conflict is in the arena of religious faith. And if we, as Christians, want to deal with this conflict, it is necessary that we learn their beliefs and why their beliefs are not true. Then, we have to compare their faith beliefs with ours as we share how they can know Christ.

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