

Cognitive liberalism and actively open-minded thinking

Jonathan Baron¹
and various collaborators²

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¹<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~baron>. Email. baron@upenn.edu. Talk for summer MindCORE program.

²Sydney Scott, Emlen Metz, Katrina Fincher, Onurcan Yılmaz, Ozan Isler, Derrick High II

Why study citizenship?

Many world problems arise from poor government: non-functioning government (including world government), populism, corruption, poor policies, isolationism.

This occurs in democracies and quasi-democracies.

Thus the bad decisions of citizens hurt other people; hence this is a moral issue, like donating to charity. Not just voting, but that is an example.

But voting, unlike donating to charity, is (usually) cheap.

If everyone voted for whatever is best on the whole for the world, it might be more likely to happen.

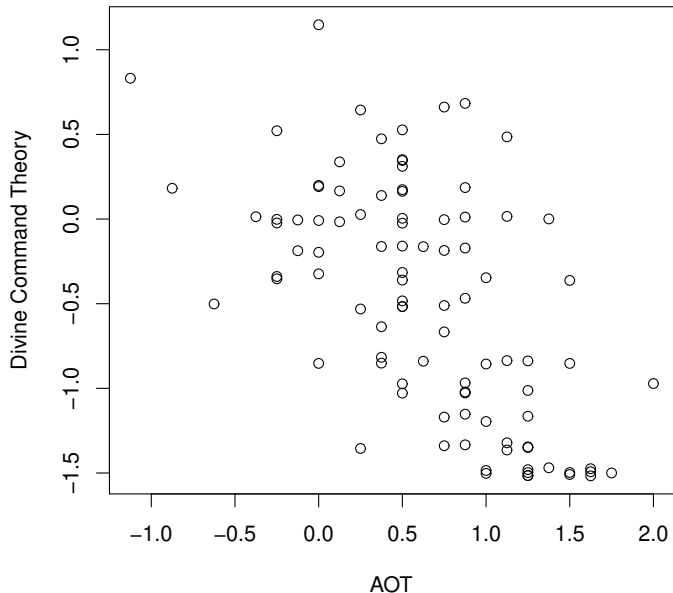
Three related utilitarian virtues/vices of good/bad citizens

Cosmopolitanism is a continuum, from pure self-interest voting to concern for present and future humanity. In the middle is parochialism, which is voting for an in-group, even when out-group harm exceeds in-group benefit.

Opposition to **moralism**, the willingness to impose on others beliefs that cannot be defended in terms of their goals, which often come from attachment to pre-Enlightenment traditions.

Actively open-minded thinking (AOT) includes active search for reasons why a pet idea might be wrong, fair inference from what is found, and confidence that is based on the strength or weakness of the evidence. AOT is required for individual thinking, for group discussion, and for evaluation of authorities.

Example of a correlation ($r = -.61$)



Positive manifold? - Hence “cognitive liberalism”

Everything correlates with everything (like IQ tests):

- ▶ Parochialism in the form of nationalism, e.g., opposition to immigration.
- ▶ Social conservatism (pre- vs. post-Enlightenment).
- ▶ Religion, especially Divine Command Theory, the belief that we must accept the commands of God, because we are incapable of reasoning ourselves.
- ▶ Deontology (morality based on rules, rights and duties) as opposed to utilitarianism (based on consequences for all affected).
- ▶ Acceptance of actively open-minded thinking as a standard.
- ▶ Trust in (good) science.

Two possible sources of these correlatons

Cultural diversity. Pre-Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment cultures in the same population. Older, traditional beliefs and values associated with (but not limited to) religion vs. modern liberalism (tolerance, respect for science, etc.).

Different standards for thinking. People differ (for many reasons, including their cultural background) in the way they reach conclusions, in part because of their norms and beliefs about how they *should* reach conclusions, and these differences affect their beliefs.

Thus, culture can affect each measure directly, or indirectly through norms for thinking, which have other determinants.

And these variables can affect each other, e.g., utilitarian standards can increase cosmopolitanism.

Properties of AOT: A theory of good thinking

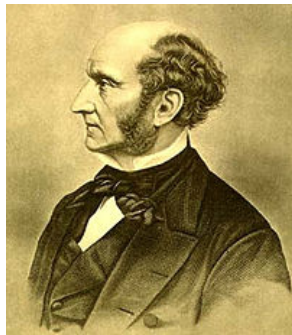
- ▶ Applies to search and inference.
- ▶ Objects can be **possibilities** (options, candidate conclusions), **evidence** (arguments), or **goals** (values, criteria).
- ▶ About fairness, not just amount. Not the same as reflection/impulsivity. Does not always demand lots of thinking.
- ▶ Applied to others (authorities), as well as self. We trust others to tell us what to believe.
- ▶ Applies to confidence, not just conclusions. Confidence can be justifiably low.
- ▶ Leads to better decisions.
- ▶ Main departures for individual differences: *Myside bias* (Perkins, 2019) and *Overconfidence*.

Actively open-minded thinking (AOT) as a norm

- ▶ People tend to follow their own standards for what good thinking is.
- ▶ And use these standards to evaluate others.
- ▶ AOT based on theory of optimal thinking.
- ▶ Takes into account the cost of thinking. Allows reliance on others. (Hence is different from reflection/impulsivity.)
- ▶ Main departures from AOT: myside bias and overconfidence.

Mill on myside bias and AOT as a norm

“In the case of any person whose judgment is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism of his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and expound to himself . . . the fallacy of what was fallacious.” J. S. Mill, *On liberty*



Anti-moralism: A virtue of good citizens

In June, 2006, then Senator Barak Obama said something like the following (from USA Today, July 10)): “To say that men and women should not inject their ‘personal morality’ into public policy debates is a practical absurdity; our law is by definition a codification of morality. ... [But d]emocracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason. If I am opposed to abortion for religious reasons but seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.”

AOT scale: Acceptance of norms for thinking

- ▶ Willingness to be convinced by opposing arguments is a sign of good character.
- ▶ People should take into consideration evidence that goes against conclusions they favor.
- ▶ Being undecided or unsure is the result of muddled thinking. (-)
- ▶ People should revise their conclusions in response to relevant new information.
- ▶ Changing your mind is a sign of weakness. (-)
- ▶ People should search actively for reasons why they might be wrong.
- ▶ It is OK to ignore evidence against your established beliefs. (-)
- ▶ It is important to be loyal to your beliefs even when evidence is brought to bear against them. (-)
- ▶ There is nothing wrong with being undecided about many issues.
- ▶ When faced with a puzzling question, we should try to consider more than one possible answer before reaching a conclusion.

Cosmopolitanism: British Election Survey (wave 8, 2016)

Selected items for parochialism measure:

The UK should help other EU members in times of crisis

Should EU citizens be able to claim child-benefit for children not in the UK

Good or bad for Britain: Allowing the free movement of workers within Europe

Allow more asylum seekers to come to UK

Britain should allow more workers from other EU countries

Britain should allow more workers from outside the EU

Allow more student to come to UK

Allow more families of people who already live here to come to UK

Self: Allow more or fewer immigrants

EU Referendum vote intention (unqueued)

Correlations from British Election Survey



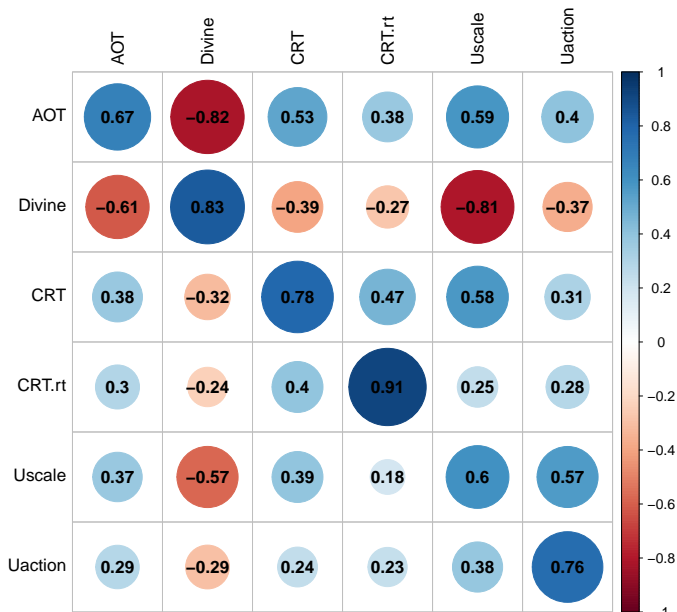
Other correlations of AOT scale (including similar scales)

- ▶ predicts judgments of others' thinking (Baron, 1995).
- ▶ $-.61$ ($-.82$ corrected for attenuation) with belief in divine-command theory (Piazza & Landy, 2013).
- ▶ $\sim .3$ (corrected) with utilitarian responding in moral dilemmas (Baron et al., 2015).
- ▶ negative correlation with political conservatism.
- ▶ $-.49$ with supernatural religious beliefs (Pennycook et al., 2014).
- ▶ $-.44$ with superstitious beliefs (Svedholm-Häkkinen & Lindeman (2017)).
- ▶ lower negative correlations with belief in conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs.

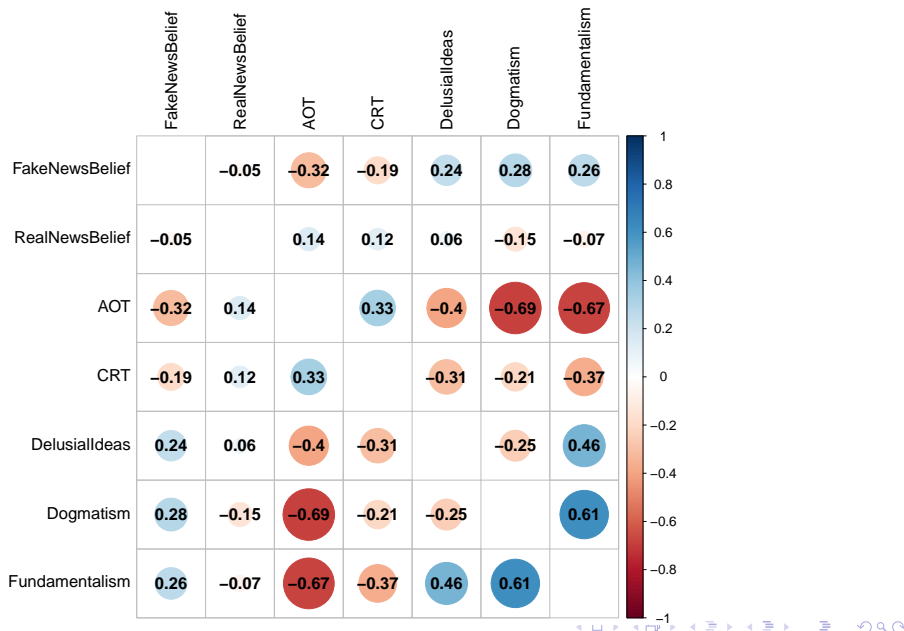
Correlations with Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) are lower

A bat and ball cost \$1.20 together. The bat costs \$1.00 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?
(This measures one aspect of AOT, looking for counter-evidence.)

Correlations from Baron et al. 2015, Study 4



Correlations from Bronstein et al., JDM 2018



Correlation of AOT scale with myside bias in political statements, Study 1 (with Derrick High II)

8 pairs of items differing in recognition of otherside arguments, 100 Ss:

- ▶ **Type1** It would be flat out irresponsible to oppose tuition-free access to community or technical college programs — it will create a wave of new workers prepared for the 21st century economy.
- ▶ **Type2** Tuition-free access to community or technical college programs will create a wave of new workers prepared for the 21st century economy. Yes, it is expensive, but it is worth the price.

How much can you trust the judgment of the person who said this?
(4-point scale)

$r = .35$ between AOT and the Type2-Type1 difference

How fairly has the speaker thought about the topic? (4-point scale)

$r = .37$ between AOT and the Type2-Type1 difference

Correlation of AOT scale with overconfidence of statements, Study 2

14 pairs of items differing in unjustified high confidence, 100 Ss:

- ▶ "Those tremors don't mean anything. An earthquake won't happen. (scientist)"
- ▶ "Those tremors probably don't mean anything. An earthquake is unlikely. (scientist)"

Trust: "Consider someone who made this statement. How would this affect your willingness to rely on what this person says? (The type of person is in parentheses.)"

Difference between ratings of two types correlated .36 with AOT.

Credibility: "How credible is each statement by itself, when made by the source in parentheses?"

Difference correlated .47 with AOT.

Time travel experiment on cognitive liberalism (R=reversed)

[Completely disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Completely agree]

- ▶ **Utilitarianism** When a moral rule leads to outcomes that are worse than those from breaking the rule, we should **follow** the rule. (R)
- ▶ When a moral rule leads to outcomes that are worse than those from breaking the rule, we should **break** the rule.
- ▶ When two options harm other people in the same ways, we should choose the option that harms fewer people.
- ▶ When some action causes harm to some people but prevents the same harm to many more people, we should act.
- ▶ It is morally wrong to harm some people in order to prevent the same harm to more people. (R)
- ▶ Sometimes we should follow moral rules that prevent us from doing what is best on the whole. (R)

Items (continued)

- ▶ **Divine.** The truth about morality is revealed only by God.
- ▶ Acts that are immoral are immoral because God forbids them.
- ▶ We don't need to try to figure out what is right and wrong, the answers have already been given to us by God.
- ▶ **Religion** There is a god that truly exists.
- ▶ God, and gods, do not exist, despite what people believe.
- ▶ I consider myself a religious person.

Items (continued)

- ▶ **Liberalism** I am reluctant to make any large-scale changes to the social order. (R)
- ▶ I favor stability in society, even if there seem to be problems with the current system. (R)
- ▶ Society should be quicker to throw out old ideas and traditions and to adopt new thinking and customs.
- ▶ Traditional values, customs, and morality have a lot wrong with them.
- ▶ On SOCIAL matters, my political orientation is on the right (conservative) as opposed to left. (Here, 'agree' means that you are right wing, and 'disagree' means that you are left wing.) (R)
- ▶ On ECONOMIC matters, my political orientation is on the right (conservative) as opposed to left. (R)

Final items: AOT scale (again)

- ▶ Willingness to be convinced by opposing arguments is a sign of good character.
- ▶ People should take into consideration evidence that goes against conclusions they favor.
- ▶ Being undecided or unsure is the result of muddled thinking. (-)
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- ▶ There is nothing wrong with being undecided about many issues.
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Questions after each item

How would you have answered this question earlier in your life, when you first might have been able to understand the question as you do now? [Past]

How would those who brought you up have wanted you to answer this question? [Background]

Please indicate which of the following influences on your views are relevant, even if they did not lead to any changes.

I thought about things like this myself. [Not at all . . . Quite a bit]

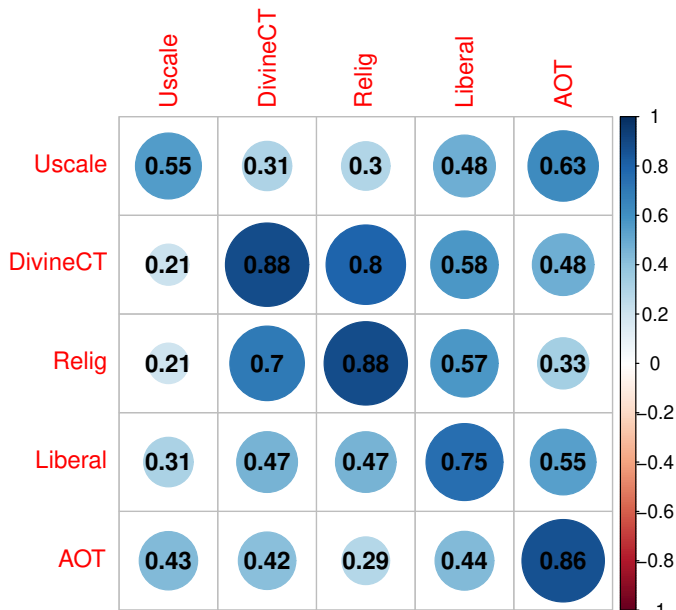
People involved in my upbringing influenced me, or tried to influence me.

Other people I met later influenced me, or tried to influence me.

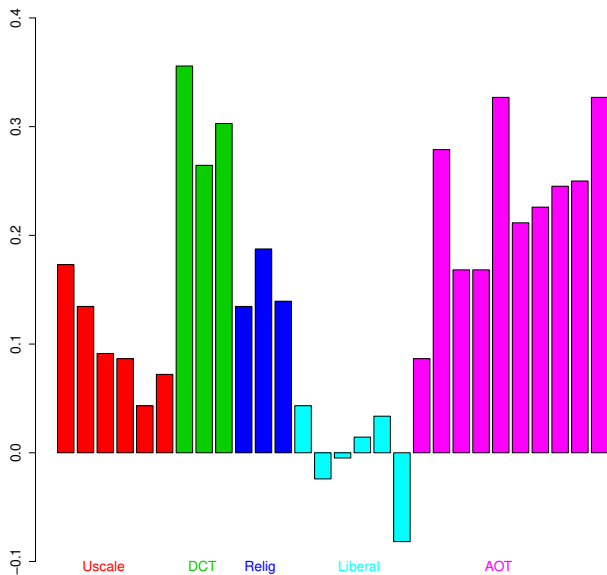
My formal education (e.g., school, college) was relevant to this question.

I had certain specific life experiences that changed, or could have changed, my views on this.

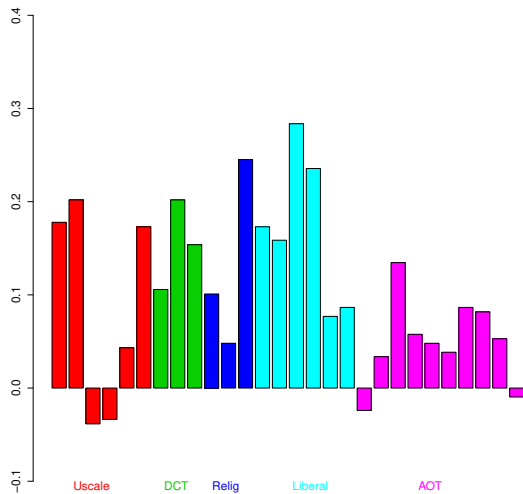
Positive manifold for the responses



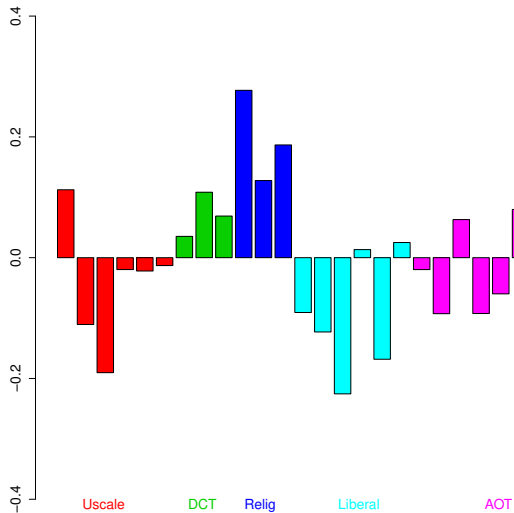
Change from past to present



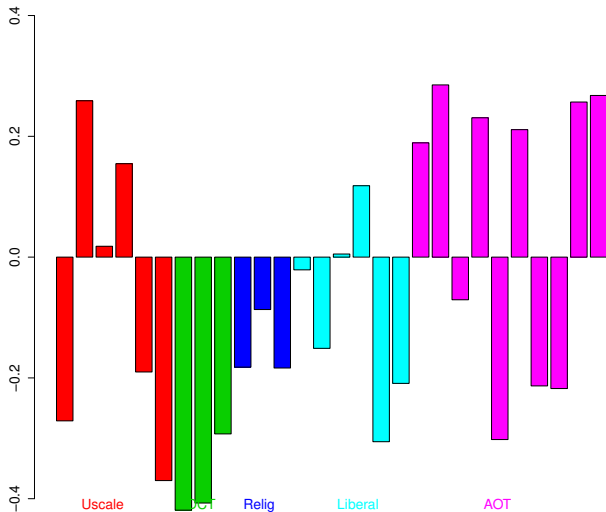
And past is more liberal than upbringing



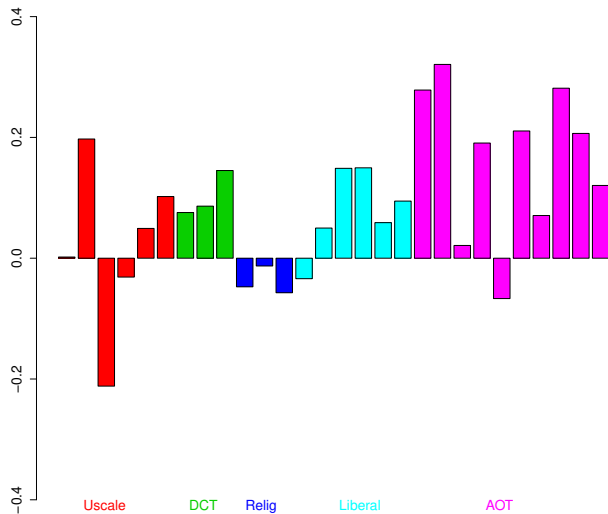
Average AOT (past and present) may affect change in religion but not other manifestations of cognitive liberalism



“Thought about it myself” may reduce cognitive liberalism



But attempts from “people involved in my upbringing” may increase it



Conclusions

There is a positive manifold among measures of deontology, social conservatism, parochialism, religious “fundamentalism”, and non-acceptance of AOT.

Some traits may affect others. AOT could lead to cosmopolitanism, rejection of moralistic values, and utilitarianism. Utilitarianism can lead to cosmopolitanism. Belief in divine command theory can make people resist AOT.

Some beliefs/norms/standards seem likely to arise from direct cultural transmission (Divine Command Theory). Why are these traditions maintained?

Some people have become more cognitively liberal. Some of this may be the effect of AOT itself. But “thought about it myself” does not explain it. The change seems more likely when people say that people involved in their upbringing have at least tried to influence them. Is this rebellion? Or what?