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Response to Andrew Gelman by Charles Murray

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Andrew Gelman's discussion is a model of collegiality and fairness, and I hope this responds in kind.

Does the new upper class tilt left? The answer depends on whether we are talking about the broad elite (the most successful five percent of people in managerial positions and the professions) or the narrow elite (the people with national influence on the culture, economy, and politics).

Executives and professionals working in ordinary for-profit businesses constitute a large majority of the broad elite. Fifty years ago, a large majority of those people, and by extension a majority of the total broad elite, were right of center. That majority has diminished in recent decades, as executives and professionals in journalism, the entertainment industry, and recently the IT industry have moved conspicuously left. David Callahan's *Fortunes of Change* documents that the number of liberals in traditional businesses has also been growing. But it seems likely that conservatives are probably still a majority of the broad elite, though perhaps a small majority.

The same uncertainty does not apply to the narrow elite. Consider my definition of the narrow elite:

The narrow elite includes the lawyers and judges who shape constitutional jurisprudence, the people who decide how the news will be covered on national news programs, and the journalists and columnists whose bylines are found in the leading print media and on the Internet. It includes the top executives in the nation's largest corporations, financial institutions, foundations, and nonprofit organizations. It includes the producers, directors, and writers who create the nation's films and television dramas, the most influential scholars in the nation's elite universities and research institutes, and senior government administrators and politicians. The narrow elite numbers fewer than a hundred thousand people, and perhaps only ten thousand or so (p. 17).

If you go through those categories one by one, only two of them—top executives in the nation's largest corporations and financial institutions—can be expected to have a conservative majority, and even that much is iffy for the financial sector.

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Furthermore, the number of executives of corporations and financial institutions is small, because only a few dozen individual corporations have national impact on the economy, culture, or politics. In the other categories, whose members constitute a far larger proportion of the narrow elite, liberals not only have majorities, but in many cases large ones. *Coming Apart* includes citations documenting that point.

But my wording was sloppy, and Gelman is right to call me on it. I wrote on page 95 that “It is widely accepted, with good reason, that the new upper class is more liberal than the rest of the country.” I should have said “the narrow elite” instead of “the new upper class.” I have made that change in the softcover edition of *Coming Apart*.

Is the subtext of Coming Apart more an indictment of the liberal elites than the conservative elites? When it comes to the full text of *Coming Apart*, I plead innocent. Regarding the quiz, the parade question does indeed twit the left. Again Gelman has prompted a change. In the softcover edition, the question now reads, “Have you ever participated in a parade not involving a war, political campaign, abortion rights (pro or con), or gay rights (pro or con)?”

Going over the other items, I suppose we could debate whether “Have you ever had a close friend who was an evangelical Christian?” has an ideological slant. I do not think so, but it is arguable. However, I submit that the remaining 23 items, accounting for 94 of the potential 100 points in the quiz, have no ideological skew whatsoever. I also submit that the rest of the discussion of the new upper class is free of imputations against the left.

Insofar as I give my prejudices expression, they are directed against the graduates of elite schools (whom I use as a proxy measure for “overeducated elitest snobs”), not liberals per se. Many of my fellow graduates of elite schools, left and right alike, are dismissive of mainstream American culture, and I let my irritation show in the text.

What about that graph from the blog post? I created that graph at the very beginning of my analyses that went into *Coming Apart*. I subsequently decided that the analysis was too fragile to put in print. But Gelman’s comments prompted me to recreate the analysis, using the revised GSS data file that I employed for the analyses in *Coming Apart* (which had better occupational coding than the one I used for the blog post in 2009).

Gelman is right that people in certain intellectual occupations moved leftward from 1972 to 2008 regardless of income. In fact, income seldom played a major role in explaining shifts within any given occupation. I was right that leftward shifts across white socioeconomic classes were anomalous exceptions to a broad rightward shift.

The new analyses that included dummy variables for levels of educational attainment showed a large liberalizing effect of graduate school. Without excep-

tion among occupations that commonly involve both graduate degrees and bachelor's degrees, a graduate degree was associated with a substantially higher level of liberalism. But level of education affected the sign of the trendline for only three occupations. For managers, K-12 teachers, and social workers, a graduate degree was associated with a small leftward shift from 1972 to 2008 while lower levels of education were associated with rightward shifts.

Overall, occupation dominated the determination of both the initial level of liberalism and the slope of the trendline. Table 1 shows the fitted values for

Occupation	Percentage, liberal minus conservative (fitted values*)		Net change
	1972	2008	
College faculty (n=236)	12.9%	52.7%	39.8%
Attorneys and judges (n=153)	-2.3%	35.9%	38.1%
MDs, DDs, and DVMs (n=137)	-14.6%	1.0%	15.6%
Journalists, writers, producers (n=167)	22.4%	36.1%	13.7%
K-12 teachers (n=1074)	-2.0%	0.7%	2.7%
Technicians (n=2110)	-2.1%	-0.8%	1.3%
Managers (n=3551)	-6.8%	-5.7%	1.1%
Social workers (n=196)	19.6%	19.7%	0.1%
Skilled service workers (n=2376)	-1.9%	-6.4%	-4.5%
Engineers (n=339)	-6.3%	-11.1%	-4.8%
Social scientists (n=103)	27.0%	21.8%	-5.3%
Sales workers (n=1136)	-4.8%	-10.9%	-6.1%
Low-skill white collar workers (n=4634)	-5.6%	-13.1%	-7.5%
Other skilled blue collar (n=5391)	-2.6%	-11.7%	-9.1%
Farmers (n=421)	-11.5%	-21.3%	-9.9%
Unskilled workers (n=4202)	-2.3%	-12.8%	-10.5%
Hard scientists (n=229)	0.2%	-11.2%	-11.5%
Mid-level white collar workers (1074)	-1.8%	-14.1%	-12.3%
Police (n=218)	-12.4%	-26.5%	-14.1%
Construction trades (n=691)	2.1%	-12.5%	-14.6%
Accountants (n=345)	-0.2%	-21.6%	-21.4%
Registered nurses (n=564)	21.4%	-13.7%	-35.1%
Clergy (n=103)	4.0%	-49.8%	-53.8%

Table 1 Logit analysis of changes in self-reported political position by occupation, 1972–2008.

*All values are fitted for age 40 and income centile 75.

In surveys such as the GSS, subjects sometimes self-report occupations that are inconsistent with their self-reported educational attainment. Attorneys and MDs, DDs, and DVM are limited to those reporting a graduate degree. Engineers, hard scientists, social scientists, college faculty, and K-12 teachers are limited to those reporting at least a college degree. Registered nurses are limited to those reporting at least an associate's degree.

Source: General Social Survey (GSS).

the liberal-minus-conservative percentages in 1972 and 2008 without dummy variables for education, controlling only for age and family income centile. All values are fitted to age 40 and family income centile of 75. I have ordered the table according to the magnitude of the net change, with positive numbers indicating a leftward shift and negative numbers indicating a rightward shift.

There is a lot of intriguing material in the table, but I will confine myself to the issue that Gelman raised. Were the rightward shifts really as broad, and the leftward shifts as narrow, as my blog graph suggested?

College faculty and attorneys showed extremely large shifts to the left over that period. There were also smaller but substantial leftward shifts among journalists/writers/producers and physicians/dentists/veterinarians. That's it. The trendlines for all the other occupations are nearly flat or shift rightward. If we consider net changes greater than $\pm 5\%$ as being nontrivial, 2.4% of GSS subjects were in occupations that shifted leftward compared to 64.9% who were in occupations that shifted rightward.

Overall, elaborating on my original analysis strongly supports a modified conclusion that America has seen a broad rightward trend among Whites in a wide variety of occupations and education levels, with the exceptions being confined to a handful of occupations with high intellectual demands—but some occupations with high intellectual demands also shifted rightward.

What's "preach what you practice" all about? I could not see the connection between Gleman's Paterno example and my own presentation. But since *Coming Apart* appeared, I wish I had elaborated on what "preach what you practice" means. Many reviewers seemed to interpret it as getting a bullhorn and a soapbox and haranguing from a street corner in the nearest working-class neighborhood. Here is what I had in mind:

When a society's elite is confident that its own values are the ones that all of society ought to adopt, those values get communicated. They're in the air—in the way journalists cover stories, editors write editorials, television networks choose the new season's series, and screenwriters create plots. They are reflected in the way that members of the elite talk with their children, with their professional colleagues, and whenever those topics relating to their values come up in a public setting. In all of those settings, today's new upper class tends to be obsessively nonjudgmental.

If you doubt it, try bringing up the issue of single women having babies at your next dinner party, and see how many of your companions are willing to say, even in a private gathering of friends, that it is morally wrong for a woman to bring a baby into the world knowing that it will not have a father, and morally wrong for a man to impregnate a woman knowing he will not be a father to the child. Fifty years ago, no one at the same kind of dinner party would have said that it was *not* morally wrong.

It is statistically highly likely that all of the biological children of the people at a dinner table of today's upper-class adults have been born within wedlock. If there are childless never-married women at the table, it is likely that they have deliberately foregone having a baby, even though they might want one, because they have decided it is unfair to the child not to have a father. Put another way, it is likely that all of the people at the table have made moral evaluations and behaved accordingly. "Preach what you practice" simply means to stop being nonjudgmental in public about moral principles that you hold in private.

Upper-class liberal and upper-class conservatives. In his last section, I think Gelman conflates separate issues: The need for the new upper class to engage with the rest of America and the need for the new upper class to lead by example. These are not contradictory behaviors; they are mutually reinforcing. Yes, smoking is a poor life choice. How are you as a member of the new upper class going to help stigmatize smoking among people in the working class if you never engage with them?

Gelman also continues in this section to treat my indictment of the new upper class as if it were an indictment of liberalism. I believe that conservative members of the new upper class are just as isolated from mainstream America as liberal ones, and that their cultural folkways are in most respects identical with those of liberal members of the new upper class. I clearly state as much in *Coming Apart*. But Gelman's presentation is understandable. Even if the broad elite still has a conservative majority, the narrow elite, predominantly liberal, is much more influential in setting cultural trends. Gelman recognizes that much of the new-upper-class culture originated on the left, realizes that I recognize the same thing, and concludes, correctly, that in my heart of hearts I see the left as the culprits. But the consistent position within *Coming Apart* is that the origin of the new-upper-class folkways is irrelevant if they have been generally adopted across the political spectrum.

References

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