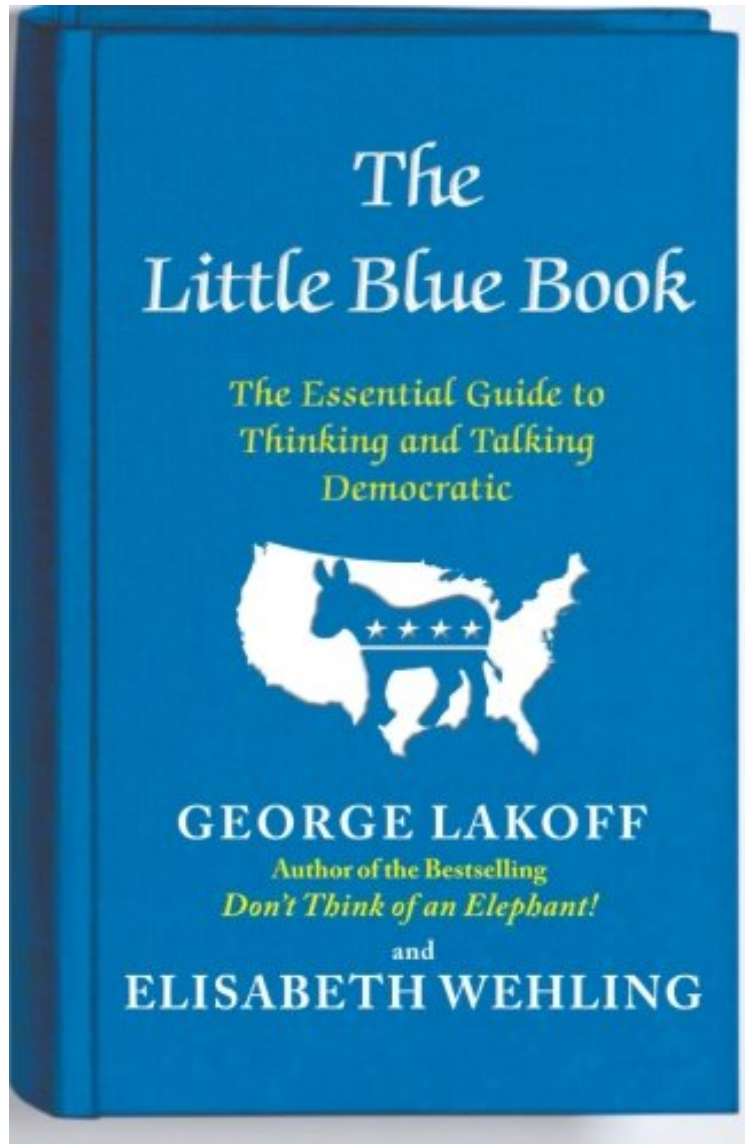


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George Lakoff, Elisabeth Wehling
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The essential handbook for thinking and talking Democratic must reading not only for every Democrat but for every responsible citizen (Robert B. Reich, former Secretary of Labor and author of Beyond Outrage). The essential handbook for thinking and talking Democratic must reading not only for every Democrat but for every responsible citizen (Robert B. Reich, former Secretary of Labor and author of Beyond Outrage). Voters cast their ballots for what they believe is right, for the things that make moral sense. Yet Democrats have too often failed to use language linking their moral values with their policies. The Little Blue Book demonstrates how to make that connection clearly and forcefully, with hands-on advice for discussing the most pressing issues of our time: the economy, health care, womens issues, energy and environmental policy, education, food policy, and more. Dissecting the ways that extreme conservative positions have permeated political discourse, Lakoff and Wehling show how to fight back on moral grounds and in concrete terms. Revelatory, passionate, and deeply practical, The Little Blue Book will forever alter the way Democrats and progressives think and talk about politics.

"This book is a game-changer, one that will enable Democrats to regain their language and to stop mimicking Republican ideas and rhetoric." Diane Ravitch, author of The Death and Life of the Great American School System
Republicans offer values. Democrats offer policies. Guess what? Values often win, even when the policies are more popular. Its about time Democrats learned how talk (and think) in terms of the underlying values that make them Democrats -- values that are more widely shared by Americans than the values Republicans espouse. Heres the essential handbook for thinking and talking Democratic must reading not only for every Democrat but for every responsible citizen. Robert B. Reich, Chancellors Professor of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley, and author of Beyond Outrage
George Lakoff is the progressive movement's Jedi master of language. The Little Blue Book tells us how to say what we need to say to bring about the policy changes Americans need. Van Jones, author of Rebuild the Dream
Ive always learned a lot from Lakoff and you will too. George Soros
If you only preach to the choir, youve no need for The Little Blue Book. But if you want to reach people you dont agree with, read this book! Joan Blades, founder of Moveon.org
George Lakoffs willingness to share his unmatched understanding of the way language impacts politics is a precious gift to his fellow progressives. In this election year, The Little Blue Book is a must-read. Bob Edgar, President of Common Cause
"Blending insight and rigor, Lakoff and Wehling have produced a Rosetta Stone that translates progressive ideas into fundamental human values that will resonate with Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs." Michael Brune, executive director, Sierra Club
With their "Little Blue Book", Lakoff and Wehling are giving Democrats and Progressives a gift -- the tools to inspire Americans by using the moral language of our democratic values of caring for each other and building and protecting our community. Our leaders, Obama included, must stop falling in to right wing traps and repeating their language and frames. Our vision is far better than the right wing. Use this book, and learn from Lakoff and Wehling how we can best communicate for a future we all deserve and need. Don Hazen, Executive Editor, AlterNet.org
The Little Blue Book gives progressives not just invaluable tools but, more importantly, an infusion of the hope desperately needed to fix our broken politics. By mapping the political brain, Lakoff and Wehling have shown Democrats the surest way to find their spines. Ken Cook, President, Environmental Working Group
About the Author
George Lakoff is Goldman Distinguished Professor of Cognitive Science and Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of the New York Times bestseller Don't Think of an Elephant!, among other works, and is Americas leading expert on the framing of political ideas. Elisabeth Wehling is a political strategist and author working in the U.S. and Europe. She is doing research in Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, on how politics is understood both in America and Europe.
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INTRODUCTION
The Importance of Moral Frames
The central issue of our time is what kind of country America is and ought to be, that is, what system of values should govern us. First, we must understand that all politics is moral: every political leader says to us that we should do what he or she recommends because its right, not because its wrong or doesnt matter. And today our politics is governed by two very different views of what is right and wrong. The progressive view, mostly in the Democratic Party, is that democracy depends on citizens caring about each other and taking responsibility both for themselves and for others. This yields a view of government with a moral mission: to protect and empower all citizens equally. The mechanism for accomplishing this mission is through what we call the Public, a system of public resources necessary for a decent private life and a robust private enterprise: roads and bridges, education, health care, communication systems, court systems, basic research, police and the military, a fair judicial system, clean water and air, safe food, parks, and much

more. Conservatives hold the opposite view: that democracy exists to provide citizens with the maximum liberty to pursue their self-interest with little or no commitment to the interests of others. Under this view, there should be as little of the Public as possible. Instead, as much as possible should be relegated to what we call the Private. The Private is comprised of individuals (private life), businesses owned by them (private enterprise), and institutions set up by groups of individuals (private clubs and associations). The Private is, for conservatives, a moral ideal, sacrosanct, where no government can tread, whether to help or hinder, regulate, or even monitor. No one should have to pay for anyone else. Private interests should rule, even if that means that corporate interests, the most powerful of private interests, govern our lives through a laissez-faire free market. Citizens are free to sink or swim on their own. Each moral worldview comes with a set of issue frames. By frames, we mean structures of ideas that we use to understand the world. Because all politics is morally framed, all policy is also morally framed, and thus the choice of any particular policy frame is a moral choice. Americans are now faced with two sets of moral choices, each leading the nation in opposite directions. Nowhere is this clearer than in the issue of health care, so let us look at this example in some detail. Rudolph Giuliani, in his 2008 run for the presidency, likened health care to a product, using the example of a flat-screen TV. Not everyone, he argued, deserves a flat-screen TV. If you want one, work for it and save up for it. Similarly not everyone deserves health care, but you should be free to buy it if you want it. Like a flat-screen TV, health care is in this view a product. If you want a product, you can make the money for it and buy it, and if you cant afford it, too bad. But if you dont want a product, no one, especially not the government, should be able to force you to buy it. That should be unconstitutional outside the powers of the government. The problem, of course, is that this is a metaphor. Health care is not literally a product built in a factory and transferred physically from a seller to a buyer. It cannot be crated and shipped. You cannot return defective health care and get a refund. Yet the metaphor of health care as a product survived the presidential campaign and was even adopted by the Democrats. Giuliani introduced his TV metaphor in the spring of 2008, but after the election that fall, Barack Obama, a former professor of constitutional law, used the same metaphor while reasoning to a different conclusion. In formulating his health care act, President Obama placed the product metaphor in the context of the commerce clause of the Constitution, Article I, Section 8, which gives Congress the right to regulate commerce. If health care is a product that is bought and sold across state lines, then Congress can regulate the selling and buying of it. The Affordable Care Act is based on that metaphor and Obamas interpretation of it. What that did was impose a frame on health care a frame from the market economy. Notice what is not in the frame: if health care is a product, it is not a right. Providing health care is thus not a moral concern; it is an economic matter. The word affordable fits the economic frame, as do words like market, purchase, and choice. Obama seemingly did not even consider a Medicare-for-all model of national health care. Medicare involves a tax, and conservatives had vowed not to raise any taxes, seeing them as the process by which the government takes peoples hard-earned money and wastes it. Obama also did not think he could replace the powerful private health care industry, so he chose to work with it. Doing so, however, would require regulating it, and the most straightforward constitutional basis for congressional regulation is the commerce clause. This meant that health care had to be framed in terms of the market. Economists have long observed that there is an economic equivalence between a tax and a required purchase. The equivalence lies in the concept of fungibility. In any business balance sheet, the loss of a credit (e.g., a tax paid) is equivalent to the gain of a debit (a purchase required). That all occurs within an economic frame, where economics is all that is considered. Conceptually, however, a tax is normally understood in terms of a frame very different from a necessary purchase. Purchasing is in what we can call the commercial-event frame of buying and selling products, while what the government does is a credit-debit exchange and is necessarily in the taxation frame. From a conservative perspective, nearly all taxation is governmental oppression, and therefore immoral, but purchasing is perfectly fine because it is based in the market, and conservatives have a moral preference for the market. Obama, hoping to avoid conservative opposition to taxation and needing a basis for regulation, chose to use the power of the commerce clause, which required the health care is a product metaphor. The metaphor was, as usual, taken literally. At first, Obama favored the public option, in which the government would be seen as a business competing with other businesses and selling health care at a lower price with better offerings. Medicare, run by the government, has only a 3 percent administration cost, while most health care corporations have administrative costs between 15 and 20 percent, mostly to verify and seek grounds to deny claims. Adding in profit demands, private health care spends about 30 percent of its total budget not on care but on administration and profit. This is a large part of what makes the U.S. health care system the most expensive in the world, though far from the best. The public option did not require a large, expensive staff to administer, and possibly deny, claims, nor did it have to make a profit. The government could have used the savings from administration, profit, and advertising to cover everyone. Crucially, however, in the public option, the metaphor of health care as a product was preserved, and conservatives objected that the public option would result in unfair competition. Given the market frame, this was a position easy to argue for, and conservatives eventually prevailed, forcing the president to abandon the public option. With the public option defeated, the president reframed. He went with a plan he took to be more favored by conservatives: the individual mandate, backed by Hilary Clinton and Mitt Romney and proposed originally by the conservative Heritage Foundation. What the Heritage Foundation and Romney liked about the individual mandate was that it forced

everyone to buy insurance, thus giving the insurance companies tens of millions more customers and more profits. This version of health care was passed into law. Conservatives never argued against any of the laws specific provisions. For example, they never said that there should be preconditions or caps. Instead they reframed. They made a moral case against Obamacare. (In choosing this name, they made Obama the issue, not the people and their health.) The conservative moral principles applied were freedom and life, and they had language to go with them. Freedom was imperiled by government takeover, life by death panels. Republicans at all levels repeated this language over and over, changed public discourse, and thus changed the minds of the electorate, especially the independents. By 2010 Obamacare had become a dirty word, and the most radical Republicans won their elections and took over the House with a promise to repeal it. What the Obama administration missed was the opportunity to argue on the basis of the same moral ideals of freedom and life. Serious illness without health care takes away your liberty and threatens your life. Forcing people to live without health care is an infringement on their liberty. But the White House did not choose to frame the issue with that moral counterargument; instead they discussed technical policy details. Conservatives, meanwhile, were arguing their values. People should not be forced to pay for other peoples goods. The Public should be kept to a minimum. And the individual mandate constitutes a government takeover: if the government can force people to buy particular products, it can force them to do anything at all. Liberty is imperiled. In all of this, the Obama administrations rationale inadvertently helped its opponents by adopting the product metaphor and placing health care in a market context. In 2012 the Roberts Supreme Court took up the conservative frame. The conservative justices, taking the product metaphor literally, again argued that the individual mandate forces people to buy a particular product: health care. If the government can do that, it can force you to buy burial plots or cell phones or even broccoli! The government would no longer be regulating commerce but bringing it into existence. Citizens would be forced to pay for other people, thus denying individual liberty. The result would be a government takeover. At this writing the Court has not yet decided, but one can see where this is going. Medicare and Social Security are likely next in line, as is environmental legislation, which serves the public interest over the private and thus threatens the use of private property. At stake is the very idea of the Public. At stake is the view of democracy as a system in which citizens are bound to fellow citizens, with each individual bearing social as well as personal responsibility. This state of affairs should never have come to pass. Health care should never have been a market issue. The Constitution gives Congress the right to provide for the general welfare of the United States. That right should have been, and should be, the moral and conceptual basis of health care law. But because it was not, because the issue was placed within a market frame, the general welfare of the United States is in danger. Do we care about each other? Are we proud that we have contributed to the liver transplants of those who need them? Are we proud to save the lives of our fellow Americans on a daily basis? Will we recognize that, without the Public, we have no reasonable private lives or private enterprise? And will we recognize that the dismantling of the Public exposes us to corporate control over our lives not for our well-being but for corporate profit, and not under the control of a government we elect and can change but under the control of corporate managers we did not elect and cannot change? We are writing this book because the centrality of this issue is not now in public discourse, and we hope the Democratic Party and its candidates bring it to the fore. To do so, they need to use language appropriate to the moral views they believe in. Language is not a matter of mere words or wordsmithing. Words mean things. They are defined by conceptual frames. In politics those frames are morally based. They are the same morally based frames that underlie and precede our policies. To discuss political language is to discuss morality and policy. This fundamental truth contradicts a long-standing myth about political communication, a myth that comes from the advertising world. The word messaging is defined in terms of that myth, namely, that morality and policy are independent of messaging. In this myth messaging is just wordsmithing, finding the words that work to sell the policy, conceptualized as a product being marketed. There are two problems with this idea. First, communication and policy are based on the same moral frames. Policy doesn't come first, followed by communication, as the health care example shows. Second, the messaging myth is fundamentally undemocratic, placing politics in a business marketing frame, where any marketing that sells is sanctioned and preferred. In this view, citizens are consumers of politics, and politicians are looking for ways to sell them ideas. This is in direct contradiction with the Democratic understanding of how democracy should work, a view that is shared by most Americans. Our alternative is communication based on moral and conceptual transparency. Know your values and say what you believe. Will this work? It depends on how well it is done. Moreover we believe that most Americans care about their fellow citizens. That is the moral basis of Democratic thought, and we think the public will respond to it. Finally, a caveat. This book is not intended to be exhaustive. Its too short, and a book much bigger would probably be too long. We will cover a great deal but far from the full range of topics. We jump in with the most pressing challenges facing Democrats and with hands-on communication advice. Next, we explore the effects, especially the hidden effects, of extreme conservatism. Third, we turn to ideas that Democrats need but that are not yet in public discourse, along with the new language needed to express those ideas. Finally, our Phrasebook for Democrats covers the most controversial areas in current politics, providing relevant background and introducing new ways to talk. Our job here is to go beyond policy and punditry and the same old ideas. We hope it will change the way you see, understand, and discuss American

politics.