

Framing: More than a message

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The importance of framing

**“If they can get you asking the wrong questions,
they don't have to worry about answers.”**

**Thomas Pynchon
Gravity's Rainbow**

It Depends on How You Ask

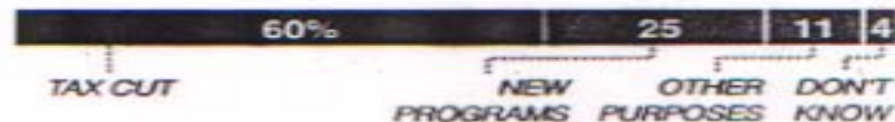
The public's desire for tax cuts can be hard to measure. Pollsters asking what should be done with the nation's budget surplus got different results depending on the specifics of the question.

THE QUESTION

President Clinton has proposed setting aside approximately two-thirds of an expected budget surplus to fix the Social Security system. What do you think the leaders in Washington should do with the remainder of the surplus? ...

Variation 1

... Should the money be used for a tax cut, or should it be used to fund new government programs?



Variation 2

... Should the money be used for a tax cut, or should it be spent on programs for education, the environment, health care, crime-fighting and military defense?



Source: Pew Research Center

HEALTH CARE






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Framing

Framing is more than just a message. It represents a conceptual system in which major issues are connected by a common understanding of values.

Lakoff's three levels of analysis

-  **Level 1: Big ideas and universal values like fairness, equality, and justice**
-  **Level 2: Issue types such as civil rights, the environment, public health**
-  **Level 3: Specific issues such as beer taxes, toxic waste sites, health care coverage**

Adapted from The Frameworks Institute
<http://www.frameworksinstitute.org>

Lakoff's rule of levels

 You can only fight level 3 challenges if you know the level 1 and level 2 frames.

 If you accept the opposition's level 1 and level 2 frames it doesn't matter what you say at level 3.

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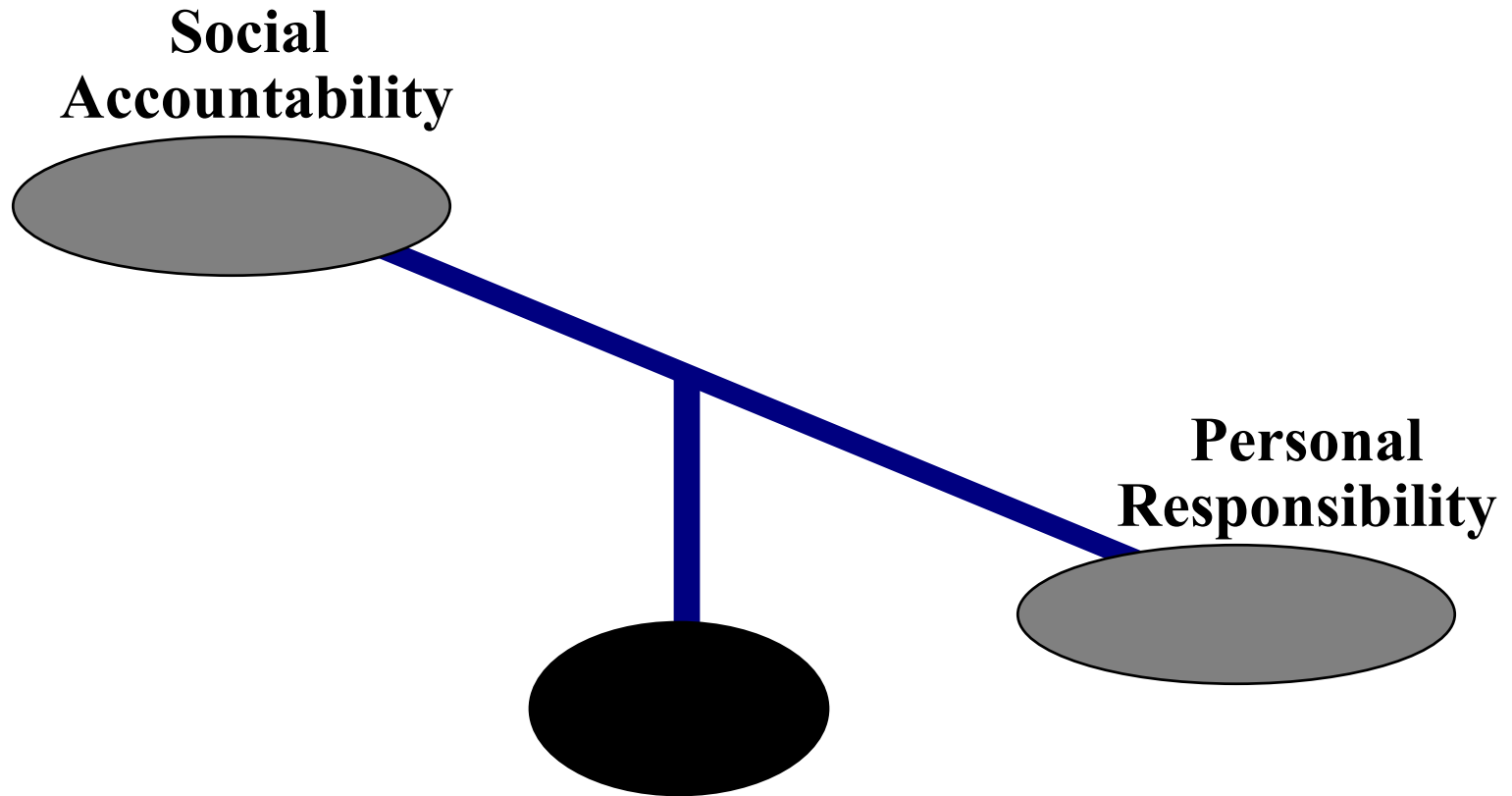
Social Justice Values

- **Shared responsibility**
- **Strong obligation to collective good**
- **Basic benefits should be assured**
- **Community well-being supercedes individual**
- **Government involvement necessary**

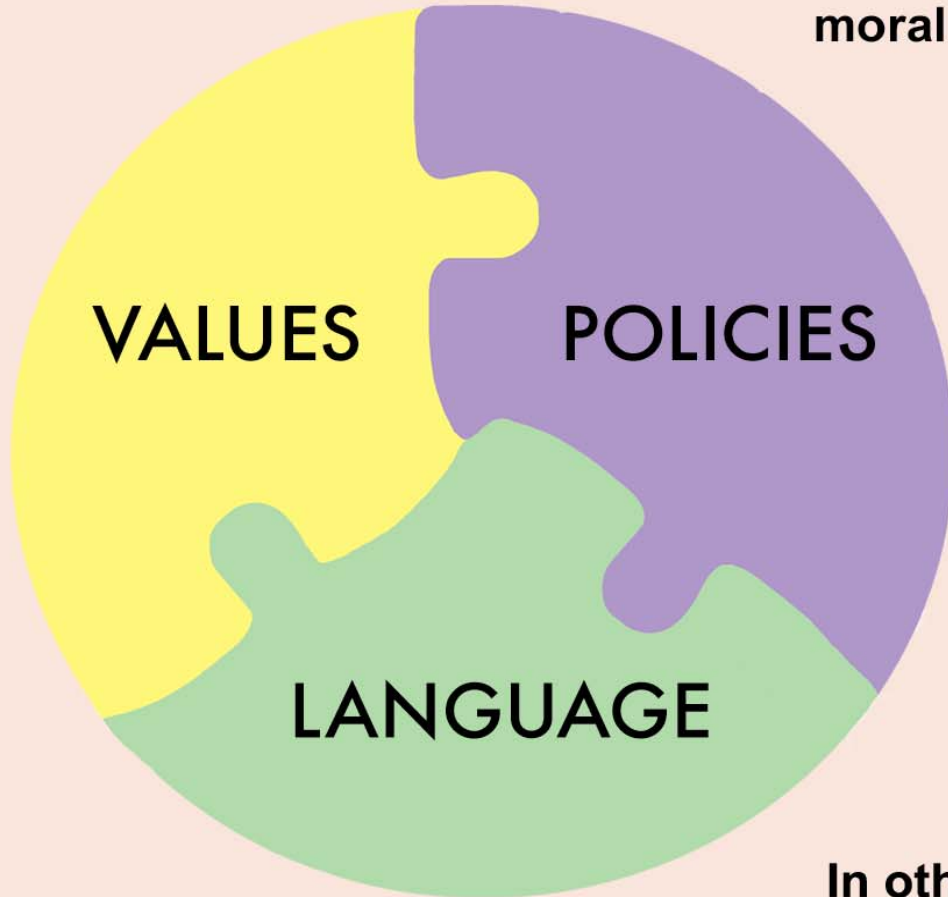
Dominant Values

- **Self-determination/Self discipline**
- **Rugged individualism**
- **Benefits based solely on effort**
- **Limited obligation to collective good**
- **Voluntary and moral nature of behavior**
- **Limited government intervention**

The Need to Rebalance Values



Policies need to evolve out of a firm foundation of values rooted in a moral understanding of the world.



In addition, we need a language to clearly talk about the intersection of values and policy.

In other words, values, policies, and language are part of a larger worldview and need to be thought of as such.

Developing a message

- **Statement of concern,**
what is wrong?
- **Statement of the value,**
why is it important?
- **Statement of solution,**
what is the policy?