

The Culture of Openness: How Creativity Fosters Moral Progress

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The major political upheavals of recent years have invariably followed the same pattern: rapid progressive change generates an authoritarian backlash. This could be observed after the Arab Spring movement, in the case of Brexit, Donald Trump's election as U.S. president, and the successes of right-wing populist parties in Europe. Each of these instances found younger, forward-looking urban voters – who demand progress and emancipation – clashing with older, rural, occasionally even reactionary conservatives intent on preserving the status quo.

This polarization between progressives and conservatives appears in many variations and is the subject of many fields of study. While the terminology and cases differ to some extent, the basic features are more or less the same. Two basic ideal-typical perspectives are opposed to one another: that of cosmopolitans and that of traditionalists. Or, more generally, an open mindset versus a closed one.

Drawing on worldwide research, Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham propose a *moral foundations theory* that introduces six emotion-based principles of everyday morality, so-called 'moral foundations' that shape our moral actions and judgments.¹ Widespread principles in Western industrialized countries,

1 To qualify for principle status, mental mechanisms of moral evaluation must meet five criteria: First, they appear globally in normative judgments about others. Second, they trigger emotions (such as outrage, disgust, or compassion) upon which moral value judgments are based. Third, they are culturally pervasive. Fourth, there is evidence of an

particularly among liberals, include *care* (i.e. compassion for the weak), *fairness* (which manifests itself in our sense of justice), and *liberty* (that is, the desire to live without oppression and pursue autonomy, understood as self-realization). In the rest of the world and among conservatives in the West, these three principles are joined by three other, more or less equal-ranking ones: *authority* (i.e. a clear, vertical social hierarchy); *loyalty* (group membership and distrust of strangers and outsiders); and *sanctity* (the idea that when it comes to such issues as sex, life, and death, some things – such as heterosexual marriage, for example – are considered ‘sacred,’ ‘pure’ and ‘natural,’ while others – such as homosexuality and abortion – are deemed ‘unholy,’ ‘impure’ and ‘unnatural.’)

Michele J. Gelfand and her colleagues draw a similar distinction between progressive *rule breakers* and conservative *rule makers*. They have shown that people are more likely to behave according to rules when they live together in poorer regions and in confined spaces, have limited food availability, and are at risk of violence or suffering the effects of natural disasters such as drought and floods.² So-called *tight* countries or cultures are those in which people tend to be collectivist, dutiful, cautious, and more controlled, and where more self-control is expected of individuals in social situations such as a school or workplace setting. By contrast, the more affluent *loose* countries are those in which people are more individualistic, permit a more diverse range of behaviors and expect less self-control. They see little problem in people singing at the top of their lungs in the street, for example, or children laughing during school lessons.

Randy Thornhill and Corey Fincher come to similar conclusions in a meta-analysis of global attitudes, where they distinguish between *collectivists* and *individualists*.³ Collectivists harbor more distrust of strangers, form a strong group identity, and think little of individualism and self-realization. Individuals in these cultures see themselves more as part of a group. Collectivist countries have significantly more gender inequality than individualist countries, and sexual morality is rather strict. People are very religious, tradition-conscious, and tend to see little value in intellectual autonomy.

innate, basic disposition for the emotional response in question. Fifth, they fit into evolutionary models of human cooperation (cf. Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2012).

2 Gelfand collected data from 6,800 people from 33 nations (cf. Gelfand et al., 2011; for a discussion, see Gelfand, 2018).

3 Cf. Thornhill & Fincher, 2014, pp. 88–89.

A recent comparative study of polarization in Europe (Germany, Poland, France and Sweden) points in the same direction. So-called *defenders* have a more ethnic idea of national belonging, feel threatened by foreigners (especially Muslims and refugees), are dissatisfied with democracy and feel unrepresented by the state.⁴ The reverse is true for *explorers* on the progressive fringe. The study's findings are compatible with David Goodhart's analysis of the situation in England, where more conservative *somewheres* (who are more locally and regionally oriented and critical of immigration) contrast with more progressive *anywheres* (who are more mobile, educated and open to immigration and diversity).⁵

More general considerations from evolutionary psychology and biology suggest that traditionalism and cosmopolitanism express two basic working mechanisms of organisms. Paul Rozin describes the phenomenon, which is now known as the "omnivore's dilemma." Since the earliest humans were omnivores, it was advantageous to be neophobic, as new foods might be toxic or contain dangerous germs. At the same time, it was also advantageous to be neophilic, as the earliest humans were forced to try and adapt to new foods as soon as sustenance became scarce. Both attitudes were potentially deadly. This dilemma continues to resonate in the distribution of our dispositions: the segment of the population that can be characterized as *neophile* likes to try new things, while the *neophobe* segment prefers to stick with what they know.⁶ Even more generally, it could be about two basic biological principles, namely *stability* and *flexibility*. Stability ensures that an organism maintains its functions. Flexibility is expressed in an organism's need to gather new information about its environment.⁷

A summary of these approaches reveals the following, rough picture: closed-minded individuals are traditional, conservative and neophobic. They prefer clarity and simplicity, order and collectivism, duty and rule-following, and tend to opt for more authority. They direct their basic orientation toward the past, the status quo. Open-minded individuals, by contrast, tend to be cosmopolitan, progressive and neophilic; they prefer diversity and complexity, self-determination and individualism, creativity and rule-breaking. They tend to reject authority and are oriented toward the future, which brings the new.

4 Cf. Back, Echterhoff, Müller, Pollack & Schlipphak, 2021.

5 Cf. Goodhart, 2017.

6 Cf. Rozin, 1976.

7 Cf. Hirsh, Deyoung & Peterson, 2009.

The Roots of the Creative Class

Those who see value in the new are likely to view creativity in a positive light. This is hardly surprising, as creativity is the ability to create the new – one could also say the unknown, the different. The ‘new’ in this sense is not to be understood as *token novelty*, that is, as new individual objects or events, for the reason that every newly created thing is – quite trivially – ontically new, because it did not exist before. Events are likewise unique and new in themselves, as they happen only once at a specific place in space and time. The ‘newness’ of creativity refers rather to *type-novelty*: creative or, more generally, innovative people create new types. This is creativity in the broad sense. It encompasses straightforward problem-solving that provides an innovative answer to a question, including such diverse technical innovations as scotch tape, the smartphone, urban delivery services, or the sponge city, an urban construction model for flood management. Another aspect of this broad concept of creativity is artistic creativity in the narrower sense, a type of creativity more characterized by ‘original’ thinking.⁸ Artworks in the visual arts, music or literature do not provide innovative answers to existing questions, but brings different, previously disparate elements together in a completely novel way. If creativity is taken to contain both aspects, then it is easy to see why fields as diverse as economics, sociology and cultural studies view creativity as the hallmark of modernity. In his book “The Rise of the Creative Class,” Richard Florida observes that modernity is not primarily a technical transformation, but first and foremost a cultural one.⁹ To put it roughly, technology does not lead to social change; instead, progressive people meet in more socially-diverse places and then come up with new ideas. By that logic, hipster cafés, an underground music scene and an openly lived gay culture in cities are strong predictors for future cultural and technical innovation. Andreas Reckwitz concurs in his book “The Invention of Creativity,”¹⁰ in which he notes that the creative economy – i.e. industries including media, arts, film, design, music, architecture, advertising and cultural industries as well as digital companies – spearheads social change. Related to this is Gernot Böhme’s analysis that we live in an age of *aesthetic capitalism*. The flood of new products we consume are not primarily developed to satisfy people’s ‘needs’ – as most people

8 Cf. Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009.

9 Cf. Florida, 2002.

10 Cf. Reckwitz, 2012.

in industrialized countries have more than they need to live – but to awaken ever-new aesthetic ‘desires’ in us, whereby the focus is not on commodity value but exchange value.¹¹

Nevertheless, the tacit assumption behind these observations is that we want the new because it fulfils our desires. Since the new is appealing in itself, creativity and innovation hold a draw for us and we practice aesthetic capitalism. Yet the assumptions of Florida, Reckwitz and Böhme have three theoretical gaps. The first is about specification: who does the new individually appeal to, and why? After all, as the mentioned polarization between progressives and traditionalists shows, not everyone embraces the new with equal enthusiasm. Secondly, what is the communicative role of an interest in creativity? After all, we consume for more than just ourselves; much of it has to do with our social representation. And thirdly, does a culture of aesthetics cause moral progress? So far, we have only been able to observe a correlation.

Here is my response to the first question: The connection between aesthetics and morality (broadly understood here as our values and norms, including political attitudes and ideas of lifestyle) is no coincidence, as those who exhibit pronounced ‘openness’ as a personality trait encounter moral, aesthetic and cognitive values in the new. The answer to the second question is that we typically communicate our moral identity. Creativity is the expression of openness par excellence, and openness is in turn a signal of progressive morality. Therefore, creativity is a strong *progressiveness marker*. As to the third question, I claim that progressive morality depends not only on genetic factors and a safe environment, but also on a ‘culture of openness’ that teaches us through education, peer- and cultural influences how to deal with diversity, ambiguity, and complexity. I will substantiate these three theses in the following.

The Anti-Authoritarian Personality

Creativity goes hand in hand with a progressive morality in which authoritarian, rigid and collectivist thinking – as found especially in religions – is frowned upon. This is no coincidence. After all, openness to moral and aesthetic diversity is more than just a feature of the present; it is also an expression of a progressive temperament, as research in personality psychology and other fields has demonstrated. Studies suggest that personality traits shape not only our aesthetic preferences, but also our moral identity. They show, for

11 Cf. Böhme, 2016.

example, that the five traits of *openness*, *conscientiousness*, *extroversion*, *agreeableness*, and *emotional instability* (also called *neuroticism*) are independent of one another, vary among individuals, and correlate with lifestyle and political preferences.¹² Openness and conscientiousness have been found to be particularly important factors for moral and political dispositions.¹³ People with a high degree of ‘openness’ are *neophiles*, which is to say they like that which is sensorially and cognitively new and special, for example intellectual challenges, surprises, interesting books and new foods. An individual with a high degree of openness values diversity, ambiguity, vagueness, abstraction, uncertainty, diversity and complexity, along with breaking with tradition, old authorities, and the status quo.¹⁴ Also typical of very open-minded people is a style of thinking that, at first glance, combines fundamentally different topics.¹⁵ Perhaps unsurprisingly, very open-minded people hold significantly more progressive values than the population average, as global research shows.¹⁶

Traditionalists, by contrast, score lower on the openness scale. They are inclined to favor conformity and tradition, are opposed to change, tend to shy away from complexity and prefer clarity and ‘closure,’ that is the dissolution of tension. Conversely, a high conscientiousness score is an indicator of conservatism. Conscientious people are guided by a sense of duty, plan ahead and prefer stability, order, structure and categorizability.¹⁷

The Progressive Revolution

For all the apparent differences between open and closed mindsets, industrialization and globalization have, on average, shifted the values of nearly all people toward the progressive side, particularly in Western industrialized countries. In short, the world has become more open. Evidence for this can

12 Cf. Matthews, Deary & Whiteman, 2003; Polderman et al., 2005; Hibbing, Smith & Alford, 2014; Talhelm et al., 2015.

13 The so-called Big Five personality test is one of the most reliable in psychology, even though it is still disputed today whether one should assume more and different characteristics (cf. Paunonen & Ashton, 2001). Whether personality traits form political sentiment or both aspects, personality and political sentiment, have a common cause such as these meta-traits is still disputed today, but irrelevant for the present analysis (cf. Verhulst, Eaves & Hatemi, 2012).

14 Cf. Matthews, Deary & Whiteman, 2003.

15 Cf. Nettle, 2006.

16 Cf. Sibley & Duckitt, 2008.

17 Cf. Mendez, 2017.

be found in the World Value Surveys. For some 40 years, these global studies conducted by Ronald Inglehart and colleagues have tracked the values and attitudes of people in every inhabited region in the world.¹⁸ More than 30,000 publications are based on these data.¹⁹ One important finding is that virtually all countries have seen two progressive shifts in recent decades, which continue to this day: The first is the move from a traditional to a secular-rational society in which religion has little or no influence on politics and everyday life. The second is the shift from a collectivist to an individualist society. People in collectivist societies hold ‘survival values’ because they are primarily concerned with ensuring material security and sheer survival. However, as economic prosperity increases, emphasis switches to ‘self-expression values.’ When this happens, people feel a desire to self-actualize as much as possible; they are longing for a sense of purpose, view their jobs, leisure time and consumption as an expression of their personality, and make more universal moral demands of their own lives and society at large. In other words, people become more open not only morally, but also aesthetically and cognitively as they become more affluent.

Yet modernization and globalization have done more than boost openness in the world. Progressives, by definition open and curious, are in return rewarded by globalization, as it introduces the new: not only new capital, but new people, cultural goods, food, customs, and ideas – in other words, precisely what open-minded individuals value anyway. Moreover, globalization dissolves boundaries that progressives find too rigid, such as national borders, for example, but also conventions like distinctions between cultural identities and stereotypical differences between men and women. Until quite recently, conservatism had been a successful strategy for millennia. In an environment that changed little, and with the paramount importance of survival in smaller groups, most were better off if they stuck with the traditional ways of thinking and doing things.

In light of these studies, Thomas Bauer’s cultural analysis – namely that our current age lacks ‘tolerance of ambiguity’ because we tend to ‘unify’ the world more than previous generations – seems rather bizarre.²⁰ For one thing, he does not support his claim with quantitative studies, but with anecdotal

18 Cf. Inglehart, 2018.

19 Cf. <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp> [10 Dec. 2021].

20 Cf. Bauer, 2018.

examples at best. Moreover, it is not without a certain irony that Bauer himself uses the term ‘ambiguity’ in an ambiguous way, i.e. not only in the usual sense of the word, but also denoting anything that is not clear-cut. By ‘ambiguity,’ Bauer refers (often without realizing it himself) to generality, variety, undecidability, uncertainty, arbitrariness, and what in philosophy is called ‘vagueness,’ namely fuzzy conceptual boundaries – precisely those aspects that open-minded people prefer. He also stops short of distinguishing between moral and aesthetic ‘ambiguity.’

Either way, the current situation is precisely the opposite of what Bauer claims it to be. The data so far shows that both aesthetic diversity and moral openness are more important values around the world than they were just a few decades ago, particularly in Western industrialized countries. Inglehart and colleagues’ research bears this out for moral change. This observation is also evident in the case of aesthetic diversity. Three examples: An average supermarket in Germany had 3,200 products on offer in 1965. By 2015, it had as many as 11,600 items, while the largest stores today display more than 40,000 products.²¹ Just a few tens of thousands of new music tracks were recorded each year in 1950; 2015, by contrast, saw more than six million new recordings come to the market, spread across countless subgenres and crossover categories. The film industry reflects the same tendency: In 1895, the Lumière brothers projected one of the first movies in history at a Paris café; by 1906, the first feature films could be viewed in movie theaters. Today, more than 11,000 films are shown in movie theaters every year²² – not including content from streaming services.

In the area of morality, Bauer fails to recognize the progressive shift because he does not distinguish between progressive values – which are universalizable and correspond to human rights – and conservative values, which tend to be more parochial, rarely universalizable, and often contradict human rights. For example, he considers it an ‘ambiguity trick’ that Catholic clergy have tolerated child marriage in Armenia in the past, even though it contradicted the Church’s guidelines. Yet this has nothing to do with ambiguity tolerance. At best, it reflects opportunism, because child marriage clearly violates human rights – in contrast to such ‘victimless’ acts as homosexuality, which

21 Cf. <https://magazin.spiegel.de/SP/2016/51/148564978/> [10 Dec. 2021].

22 New music and new movies: Rosling, 2018, p. 62.

the Catholic Church and other religions and traditionalists quite unambiguously continue to stigmatize to this day.²³

In fact, pace Bauer, we are now better equipped to tolerate moral ‘ambiguity,’ i.e. diversity and different levels of normativity, than ever before. This is shown not only by the World Value Survey, but also by legislation. Homosexuality, for example, was still a punishable offense in almost every country in the world after the Second World War; today, 31 nations allow homosexual couples to legally marry. Or think of intersexuality and transsexuality, which were socially sanctioned or simply disregarded by many world religions for millennia: and yet as of 1 January 2019, German passports can be printed with *divers* (i.e. “diverse” or “various”) as a third category next to the gender categories “male” and “female,” though it will take some time for society to accept this as a matter of course. The fact that mental illness is now less morally stigmatized than it was just a few decades ago, and that universities, companies and institutions have been explicitly embracing ‘diversity and inclusion’ for some years now, points in the same direction.

Distinction through Consumption and Morality

Speaking of morals: our behavior is always a form of self-presentation.²⁴ In his influential study “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,” Pierre Bourdieu argues that people expect to benefit from the ‘distinction’ of their conspicuous consumption simply by visibly setting themselves apart from members of poorer classes.²⁵ His study found that in France, university lecturers and professors prefer Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavier,” while ‘small tradesmen’ and even-level lower white-collar workers favored more popular-taste music such as Strauss’s “Blue Danube.” Whereas upper-class members of the Parisian elite are more interested in abstract photography and avant-garde theater pieces, workers from Provence have no interest in them.

Consumption – to speak generally of Bourdieu’s observation – serves as a marker of group membership. Yet in addition to the income-related vertical demarcation as studied by Bourdieu, there is also a morality-based horizontal axis that holds particular importance to people.²⁶ Indeed, even in Bourdieu’s study, it is striking that upper class cultural consumption indirectly express-

23 Cf. Bauer, 2018, p. 22.

24 Cf. Tosi & Warmke, 2020.

25 Cf. Bourdieu, 1984.

26 Cf. Hübl, 2019.

es the personality trait ‘openness’ via the sub-characteristics ‘complexity,’ ‘abstraction’ and ‘avant-garde.’

In our current age, cultural consumption is less a hierarchical indicator of socioeconomic status than one of openness and thus of progressive moral status. This is how Richard A. Peterson and his colleagues have described the ‘aesthetic omnivore’ – as a category that can be regarded as the prototype of the modern neophile, as these individuals are always looking to be surprised anew. This is not to say that aesthetic omnivores are indiscriminately open to everything, it rather means they are open to *being excited* by anything, but only insofar as it is new.²⁷ Aesthetic omnivores do not distinguish between high culture and entertainment culture. They are as likely to be entertained at a concert by the Berlin Philharmonic as they are at a Kanye West gig; they are as intrigued by an art house cinema Luis Buñuel retrospective as they are by *Far Cry*, the PlayStation game franchise. But the openness aesthetic omnivores express with regard to their consumption also signals their moral attitude.

I consider communicative (verbal or non-verbal) signals to be *moral markers* if they are used to communicate one’s attitude, i.e. one’s values and norms, to others, whether consciously or unconsciously. A *marker of progressiveness* is a moral marker that communicates one’s progressive attitude to others. While this can be done explicitly through a sticker with the words “Nuclear Power? No Thanks!” or “Fuck Nazis,” many markers are used implicitly and often tacitly, as in the carrying of a cotton tote bag. Positive progressivity markers can be used to indicate that a person follows the progressive principles of *care*, *fairness*, and *freedom*, but also express *openness*; by contrast, negative progressivity markers such as those expressing *anti-authority*, *anti-loyalty*, and *anti-sarcasm* can be used to communicate rejection of conservative and traditionalist principles, including extreme forms of the *conscientiousness* personality trait.²⁸

For example, the language of progressive Germans can be recognized by their use of the so-called gender asterisk, which removes the typical masculine grammatical gender of generic nouns into an all-gender encompassing noun (showing *care* and *fairness*); they often pursue self-actualization in the creative industry (*freedom*); they prefer to eat tofu curry for lunch (*openness*), a vegan dish that protects animals from harm (*care*) and at the same time saves natural resources (*fairness*). This could be followed by a cold brew coffee (*open-*

27 Cf. Peterson & Kern, 1996.

28 Cf. Hübl, 2019.

ness) made from fair-trade beans (*fairness*). *Markers of conservativeness* are expressed in a similar fashion, albeit with signals going in the opposite direction.

Art and Creativity as a Progressiveness Marker

In the case of personality traits, self-attribution converges with attributions from others.²⁹ Open or conscientious people, for instance, are commonly seen as such by other people, which shows that we are able to decode indirect signals of moral identity. Openness does not only manifest itself in lifestyle and consumption, but also in progressive morals. One of the strongest indicators of a high score for the openness personality trait is a strong interest in creativity and the arts. If one were allowed to ask only a few questions to determine the level of openness of subjects in a study, one would have to ask whether they like to visit art exhibitions, read books, write poetry, or make gifts for others.³⁰ The connection between openness and creativity also manifests itself in people's lifestyle choices. In a pioneering study, Dana Carney was able to show that open-minded people also express their neophilia through interior decoration, for example through photographs and souvenirs of travels to faraway places, but above all through works of art.³¹ Social media has proved this connection on a global scale. For example, Michal Kosinski and colleagues studied 58,000 Facebook users with a personality test app that simultaneously requested information about the preferences ('likes') of the users.³² The data show, among other things, that people with high degrees of 'openness' not only enjoy TED Talks (i.e. popular lectures about scientifically surprising findings), they are also more likely than the average person to favor artists such as Salvador Dalí.³³

Moreover, research indicates that "creative personality types" interested in art and culture score higher than average on creativity tests and are more likely to vote for left-liberal parties.³⁴ Progressive students also performed significantly better than their conservative peers in practical creativity exercises.

29 Cf. McCrae & Costa, 1987.

30 For an overview, see Hübl 2022.

31 Cf. Carney, Jost, Gosling & Potter, 2008; see also Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003.

32 Cf. Kosinski, Stillwell & Graepel, 2013; see also Matz, Kosinski, Nave & Stillwell, 2017.

33 Cf. Youyou, Kosinski & Stillwell, 2015.

34 Cf. Tyagi, Hanoch, Choma & Denham, 2018.

es in which subjects produced drawings and photo essays that were evaluated for creative potential by an independent panel of judges.³⁵

Even people who say that sometimes listening to music or enjoying other art forms gives them goosebumps (also known as ‘aesthetic chills’) are expressing their openness, as this aesthetic reaction to art is found in individuals with high degrees of that personality trait.³⁶

The creative class also expresses its moral progressiveness through language. The vocabulary of contemporary art criticism, for instance, is a vernacular of openness and thus a marker of progressiveness. In this context, positive words are ‘new,’ ‘innovative,’ and ‘curiosity,’ as well as ‘disturbance,’ ‘ambiguity,’ ‘diversity,’ ‘fault lines,’ ‘complexity,’ ‘provocation,’ ‘questioning,’ ‘surprising,’ ‘challenging,’ ‘unconventional,’ ‘creativity,’ ‘diversity,’ ‘interdisciplinary,’ ‘boundary-crossing,’ ‘subversive,’ ‘dynamic’ and so on. These new, high-value words as well as the ‘vocabulary of fluidity’ of the humanities and social sciences, as Mark Lilla has termed it (i.e. incorporating buzzwords from the academic left including ‘hybridity,’ ‘intersectionality,’ ‘performativity,’ ‘transgressivity’) also express a rejection of the values of the opposite side (i.e. boundaries, clarity, categorizability and rigidity), and thus position the writer or speaker as opposing conservative morality.³⁷ The same is true of the jargon of companies and business coaches who wish to present themselves as particularly progressive with the use of words including ‘agility,’ ‘dynamic,’ ‘imagination,’ ‘innovation,’ ‘change,’ ‘future,’ and so on. The increasing use of English words in non-anglophone countries is also an expression of openness through cosmopolitanism: English is the *lingua franca* of the creative class. Yet whatever their intentions, progressives often fail to realize or fully appreciate the ambivalence of creativity: Those who emphasize group symbols might (willingly or unwillingly) exclude others who do not understand the terminology and to whom radical forms of openness are not at all appealing.

The Culture of Openness

On the whole, however, there are advantages to the fact that more people than ever before in the history of humanity are open-minded, as this makes them better at handling diversity, ambiguity and anomalies. As with other person-

35 Cf. Dollinger, 2007.

36 Cf. McCrae, 2007.

37 Cf. Lilla, 2018.

ality traits, only half of the variance in individual openness scores can be attributed to environmental factors, so its expression depends to a considerable extent on genetic disposition.³⁸ Yet it is precisely environmental factors that are both modifiable and causal in determining the development of openness, as global studies suggest. Inhabitants of countries with material security, a low risk of infection, little violence and good health care are on average significantly more open than those of less industrially developed countries.³⁹ Even if it cannot always be clearly proven, there is much to suggest that environmental factors are not a mere correlation, but play a causal role in both the emergence of openness as a personality trait and in the adoption of a progressive lifestyle. Another contributing factor is a lived ‘culture of openness.’⁴⁰ This starts with parenting: parents who show ‘warmth’ toward their children, for example – thereby communicating security and promoting openness – also serve to reinforce their creative tendencies.⁴¹ Peer influence is presumably even more substantial, as many studies on other traits suggest, for example when it comes to helpfulness or a propensity for violence.⁴²

Indirect influence via the cultural environment also promotes at least habitual openness. Cities are a promise of progressiveness. Young people are increasingly moving from the countryside to the city for vocational training, higher education or simply because they can no longer stand the narrowness of their towns and villages. Compared to the national average, young city dwellers vote disproportionately often for progressive parties and significantly less frequently for right-wing populists.⁴³ Academics and journalists (for whom curiosity is part of the job description) are also typically based in metropolitan areas. Cities are a hotbed for new aesthetic trends, and the attire worn there is more often experimental and unisex than in the countryside. Ethnic diversity is becoming the norm in urban environments, and international cuisine the standard. Those who are gay, lesbian or trans can find like-minded people and expect more acceptance in anonymity. Anyone hop-

38 Cf. Polderman et al., 2005.

39 Cf. material safety (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Gelfand, 2018), low risk of infection (Thornhill & Fincher, 2014), little violence (Henrich, 2020), healthcare (Schmitt, 2005).

40 Welzel, 2013; for an overview, see Hübl, 2019.

41 Cf. Guo, Zhang & Pang, 2020.

42 Cf. Tomé, de Matos, Simões, Camacho & Alves Diniz, 2012; Liu, Zhao, Chen, Falk & Albarracín, 2017; Malonda, Llorca, Mesurado, Samper & Vicenta Mestre, 2019; Yu, Siegel, Clithero & Crocket, 2021; for an overview, see Christakis & Fowler, 2009.

43 Cf. Hasselbach, 2021.

ing to try things out or reinvent themselves will find their best chance to do so in the city. The larger the metropolis, the less are social roles predetermined by the environment.

The opposite is also true. Cities not only attract open-minded people, they also make their inhabitants more open-minded. People who are confronted with a diverse array of dialects, accents, languages, ethnicities, fashion styles and non-binary gender identities on a daily basis are inevitably forced to learn to deal with it. Thus, it might not be a coincidence that immigration is closely correlated with cultural as well as intellectual diversity (also called ‘view-point diversity’). In the U.S., for example, immigrants are more than three times more likely than U.S.-born citizens to be Nobel Prize winners, members of the National Academy of Science, or Academy Award-winning directors.⁴⁴ Many studies also show that diverse groups perform significantly better than average in creative work groups and in group problem solving.⁴⁵ While it is true, as Robert Putnam has shown, that there is initially little trust between ethnically diverse groups in cities, more recent studies indicate that these mixed environments also tend to boost both the willingness to help one another and the expansion of the ‘moral circle,’ i.e. compassion towards foreigners and strangers.⁴⁶

Yet cities are not the only significant influence in this regard. The arts likewise serve to train us to think progressively and to ‘tolerate ambiguity,’ among other things because paintings and sculptures, theater and performances, books and films teach us to deal with vagueness and diversity, and to tolerate complexity and incompleteness. Even the most successful U.S. television programs – blockbuster series such as “The Sopranos,” “Homeland,” “Game of Thrones,” “Breaking Bad,” “House of Cards,” and “Westworld” – feature characters with subtle nuances and stories condensed to the limits of comprehensibility. The – often torn – main characters commit morally ambiguous or even reprehensible acts, and yet the audience continues to sympathize with them. In other words, art education, lessons in creativity, and other aspects of a culture of openness not only serve to make people citizens of the world, they also train and encourage them to think in more progressive ways. Creativity fosters moral progress.

44 Cf. Putnam, 2006.

45 Cf. Webber & Donahue, 2001; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998; Page, 2007.

46 Cf. Nai, Narayanan, Hernandez & Savani, 2018.

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