

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion Study Guide

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion by Jonathan Haidt

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Plot Summary

The Righteous Mind - Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion by Jonathan Haidt is an extensive exploration of man's morality and how it originated and has evolved. Haidt begins with a fundamental question: is man's morality a result of nature or nurture? He asks if man's morality is innate and learned; is the way we treat others just shooting from the hip and a natural reaction that is hard-wired into our genes or is it our upbringing that sets the framework of our morality?

With such a heady premise, Haidt goes on to explore the various theories and concepts that have emerged over many centuries that touch upon this profound question. Haidt presents the theories of developmental psychologist Jean Piaget who found that children have an innate sense of fairness. Psychologist Elliot Turiel learned that young children found that a child's action was wrong if it hurt another child. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg piggy-backed on Piaget's theories by adding that adolescents learn to work around what is considered right and fair and become adept at rationalizing their actions as fully justifiable. The work of moral psychologists in the latter part of the twentieth century found that young people had become cynical and egalitarian with regards to moral questions and justifications.

Haidt studied the work of these pioneers in moral psychology and by the time he arrived in graduate school, they had substantively defined it. However, Haidt felt that the studies were too cerebral and lacking in an undeniable element of human nature: emotion. Taking a course in cultural psychology from anthropologist Alan Fiske opened Haidt's eyes. Fiske required his students to read about how kinship, music and sexuality impacted ancient and remote cultures. Haidt began to see a connection between some backward cultures and modern Western societies relative to morality and religion. Studying the work of anthropologist Richard Shweder, Haidt learned that the morality of the individual is largely based on personality and individuality and that cultural mores originate from the need for a society to strike a balance between the needs of the individual and those of the group.

In his vast and thorough work, Haidt considers the theories on morality from such diverse sources as Thomas Jefferson, Plato and his brother, Glaucon, the Orissans of India, Immanuel Kant, Charles Darwin, Edmund Burke and literally scores of psychologists, scientists and scholars. Haidt describes the theory of the "rider" and the "elephant" that is in all of us. The "rider" is the reasoning part of the brain that justifies behavior while the "elephant" is the emotional, instinctual part of the mind. The stronger force is the "elephant" but the "rider's" job is to temper emotional behavior with learned reasoning.

Haidt explains the purposes and benefits of organized religions and man's natural instinct to be part of a group. He explains how the morality of a group overrides the needs and morality of its individuals. Through a process of natural selection, groups evolve and advance with members chosen for their cohesive and altruistic characteristics. Based on personalities and moralistic leanings, Haidt explains why



some people are liberal and others are conservative. Based on his studies and research, Haidt concludes that for a society to be successful in the political arena, there must be the presence of both liberal and conservative policies.

Haidt makes the general conclusion that for one group - be it religious or political - to understand the "righteous mind" of a group with opposing views, it is essential that it have a clear knowledge of the other's moral foundation.



Chapter One: Where Does Morality Come From?

Chapter One: Where Does Morality Come From? Summary and Analysis

The first step toward a righteous mind is to understand that morality differs according to culture. After Jonathan Haidt was admitted to the graduate program in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, he had a discussion about how moral thinking was different from other thinking with professor Jonathan Baron. At that time in 1987, moral psychology was part of developmental psychology which addresses issues such as how children know right from wrong and where does morality come from. Is morality from nature (inborn) or from nurture (parental teaching)? Those who believe that morality is inherent are nativists and those who believe that it stems from nurture are empiricists.

But rationalism is another option. Rationalism holds the belief that kids figure things out for themselves. Jean Piaget, considered the greatest developmental psychologist, applied a cognitive-developmental approach to study the moral thinking of children. Through Piaget's testing and research he found that children had an innate sense of fairness. They didn't like "cheating" when playing games. Just as a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly, children evolve into moral creatures through their experiences in sharing and playground justice. In essence, "rationalism" is the belief that reasoning is the most direct route to moral awareness.

Lawrence Kohlberg revolutionized the study of morality by quantifying Piaget's observation that children's moral reasoning changes over time - older children gave more complex reasons for their answers to test questions. The younger the child, the more superficial the reasoning. As kids mature, they find ways around rules and regulations by using their reasoning to remain "moral" or "fair" in their own minds. In adolescence, children begin to address the nature of authority and sometimes find self-justification for breaking laws.

Kohlberg's work led to many psychologists beginning to study morality from a reasoning perspective. Kohlberg's second major innovation was using research to create a scientific justification for a secular liberal moral order. He found that children who had more relationships with other children were more advanced morally. The work of moral psychologists from the 1970s through the 1990s involved interviewing young people about moral questions the justifications of which often resulted in secular worldviews that were cynical and egalitarian.

Elliot Turiel, a student of Kohlberg, developed a testing methodology that involved getting responses from children after telling them stories about other children breaking rules. Children as young as five could discern between the rules in different schools and



under different teachers. When it came to one child physically hurting another, the response from the vast majority of children was that the action was wrong. Turiel's work found that children do not treat all rules the same. He also found that morality was based largely on whether the action of one child brought harm to another.

By the time Haidt arrived at graduate school, Kohlberg and Turiel had defined the field of moral psychology. But Haidt found the study too cerebral and lacking in emotion. In his second year, Haidt took a course in cultural psychology taught by anthropologist Alan Fiske. He required his students to read several ethnographies on cultural subjects such as kinship, music and sexuality. He read a book on witchcraft in Africa and revenge killings among the violent Ilongot tribe in the Philippines. The books were enlightening and fascinating. The Hua of New Guinea has a complex network of food taboos for their young men. This practice was referred to by anthropologist Anna Meigs as an example of "a religion of the body" (pg. 13). Haidt was shocked to read about rules for food, sex and other cultural issues in the Hebrew Bible, a main source of Western morality. The idea that cleanliness is next to godliness originated from the Bible.

Anthropologist Richard Shweder of the University of Chicago found that Americans and the Orissans of India had different views on morality based on their views of personality and individuality. Cultural mores originate from a basic need for a society to strike a balance between the needs of the individual versus those of the group. The needs of the community dominated the ancient world while those of the individual came to the forefront in the modern world. When the individual's needs are predominate in a society, then any rule that limits the personal freedom of each member can come into question.

To test the theories of Shweder and Turiel, Haidt developed short stories about people who were guilty of harmless but offensive behavior. His goal was to create situations in which test subjects would be confronted with a conflict between cultural conventions and moral judgments about harmless behavior. Turiel's rationalism held that reasoning about harmful behavior formed the basis of morality. Shweder theorized that Turiel's concept only held among individualistic secular societies. Haidt compared the reactions of groups of upper-class and working-class Brazilians with Americans. The results from the Americans and the upper-class Brazilians were similar in that they both made distinctions between moral and conventional behaviors. But the working-class Brazilians were more influenced by social conventions. Haidt found that the moral domain of a culture extended beyond harm and fairness - social conventions were part of the mix. One surprising result of the research was that respondents often tried to invent victims for any given scenario. He concluded that morality varies by culture; intuition plays a part in morality; and, cultural conventions impact one's morality.



Chapter Two: The Intuitive Dog and Its Rational Tail

Chapter Two: The Intuitive Dog and Its Rational Tail Summary and Analysis

The mind is divided into parts that often conflict. One's intellect can form a conclusion about a matter that is not matched by one's emotional reaction. Western philosophy has given more credence to reason than to passion. When something is made sacred by "rational" delusion it can eradicate the ability for a culture to assess it clearly. Plato said that reason should be master. Hume said that reason should be subservient to passion. Thomas Jefferson found a way to agree with both and saw reason and passion as separate but equal entities. While in Paris, Jefferson had fallen in love with a married woman. Addressing the conflict between propriety and emotions, he wrote a letter to his beloved in which he portrayed his heart and his head having a debate.

Darwin had several theories on how morality could evolve. He felt that the human emotion of sympathy was a foundation of social behavior. Darwin was an advocate of nativism; he believed that natural selection fostered minds that were equipped with moral emotions such as shame and pride. But social scientists in the twentieth century were appalled at "social Darwinism" that held the belief that giving charity to the poor only encouraged their breeding and therefore perpetuation. It was more ideal to allow the poor to literally die out. Hitler was a nativist who believed in the superiority of races. In the 1960s, radical reformers preferred to think of humans as blank slates on which hopes and dreams could be sketched. They did not want to think that men and women were equipped with different skills and abilities that would prohibit equality. In his book, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Steven Pinker wrote of scientists betraying science by denying reality for the sake of progressive ideals such as racial and gender equality. Biologist Edward O. Wilson was demonized for suggesting that human behavior was shaped by natural selection. He alleged that moral philosophers were creating justifications for behavior based on emotion.

Frans de Waal's *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* discussed the emotional foundation of morality. But the theories were shot down and by the time Haidt arrived at graduate school in 1987, science had rejected the concept of reducing psychology to an evolutionary by-product. Yet, Haidt did see a connection between emotion and moral systems. In *Descartes' Error* by Antonio Damasio, the author made a connection between brain damage and lack of a sense of morality. His theory was that feelings and bodily reactions were essential for thinking rationally. In other words, the head couldn't fully function without the heart which rejected Jefferson's theory that head and heart could operate successfully on an independent basis.



In 1995, Haidt took on his first position as a professor at the University of Virginia. By then some philosophers and neuro-scientists were beginning to view emotionalism shaped by evolution as the foundation of morality, the concept of which was referred to as evolutionary psychology. Haidt maintained a belief in Jefferson's dual process model. He worked with an undergraduate, Scott Murphy, to aggressively attempt to strip away the moral principles of test subjects. He referred to this research as "moral dumbfounding." Most subjects did not abandon their moral principles even though they could not counter Scott's arguments with credible reasoning. Often the response was that they just didn't want to abandon their own sense of morality. In one exercise, some individuals wouldn't sign a deal with the devil even though they were atheists. It was obvious in many of these test cases that the subjects generally responded to questions of morality from an emotional standpoint but had trouble providing intellectual reasoning.

In *Patterns, Thinking, and Cognition*, author Howard Margolis, a professor at the University of Chicago, tried to understand why political beliefs were often disconnected from objective fact. His experimentation found that people were able to confidently defend a stance they were told to be true even if it could easily be refuted by facts. In his work, he concluded that there were two types of cognitive thinking: "seeing that" (assessing a situation empirically) and "reasoning why" (why one reaches a judgment), the latter being a more complex thought process. "Seeing that" responses are rapid intuitive reactions while "reasoning why" responses are slowly arrived at.

After years of trying to hold on to the concept that cognition and emotion could operate independently, Haidt began to abandon it. In the 1980s, scientists began to ideate that emotions were actually made up of cognitive thought since emotions are part of information processing. Separating emotion from reason is like trying to separate rain from weather. Moral emotions are one type of moral intuition although most moral judgments don't require an emotional response. In his book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Haidt defined two types of cognition: the "rider" (controlled processes) and the "elephant" (automatic or emotional responses). The "rider" can help the "elephant" make better choices. Haidt developed what he termed, the "social intuitionist model of moral judgment" which encompassed both emotional response and cognitive justification. To win an argument, to be convincing, one must communicate with the "elephant." The secret of success often lies in one's ability to see an issue from another person's perspective. In political debate, this transformation is not possible because our "righteous minds" kick into gear to defend long-held beliefs and biases.

The "rider" evolved to serve the "elephant;" that is, man's fundamental response is intuitive and emotional but is tempered and guided by cognitive reasoning. The "elephant" holds more convictions than the "rider." Appealing to the emotional level of a person is more likely to change beliefs than appealing to his cognitive nature.



Chapter Three: Elephants Rule

Chapter Three: Elephants Rule Summary and Analysis

There are three basic principles of moral psychology. The first is intuition and second is strategic reasoning. An emotional response is often evoked when one is criticized. And, we have the tendency to exaggerate or lie about ourselves when confronted with criticism. It is easy to see the fault in others but sometimes impossible to see our own flaws. Haidt quotes Jesus, who referred to seeing "the speck in your neighbor's eye" (pg. 54) and Buddha who wrote in part, "one conceals one's own faults as a cunning gambler conceals his dice" (pg. 54).

Brains aren't particularly concerned with the truth. They evaluate everything all the time and make adjustments to put the host in an optimum position at all costs. In the 1890s, Wilhelm Wundt who was the founder of experimental psychology, established the concept of "affective primacy" which refers to the flashes of positive and negative feelings that the brain processes constantly. Sometimes we like or dislike something before we know what it is just from these reactive flashes. A century later, psychologist Robert Zajonc revived Wundt's doctrine and advocated the use of a dual-process model in which "feeling" is first and "thinking" is second. He theorized that they could take place separately but the process is so fast that it is almost impossible to distinguish one function from the other.

Social and political judgments are most intuitive. The rapid reaction of the brain is called "affective priming" which means that the flashes of positive and negative reactions of the brain primes the brain in one direction or another. It's such a fast process that it can create a bias for subsequent images that may appear immediately afterward. The most widely used test for this process is the Implicit Associate Test (IAT) which can be self-administered. Human minds like animal minds are constantly reacting to everything they encounter. Bodily reactions also influence judgments through the five senses. People may have a negative reaction to something just because there's a bad smell in the air.

There are exceptions in human response. Psychopaths have reason but do not feel. Although most are non-violent, those who commit crimes like serial murders and rapes have no feelings for the victims. They lack moral emotions. They may react emotionally to their own situation but have no empathy for others. Criminal psychopaths know that their actions will get them arrested but have enough reasoning power and ability to do whatever it takes to avoid capture.

At the other end of the spectrum, infants feel but have no reasoning power until later development. Research has found that babies do have an innate sense of physics in that they are surprised by unexpected movement and will stare at it longer than at movement to which they are accustomed. A sense of social elements like "harm" and "help" develop early in babies. Damasio also studied brain-damaged patients which proved that the emotional areas of the brain are the correct places to be pursuing the

foundations of morality. It is conclusive that losing that functionality impacts moral competence.

There has long been disagreement among philosophers whether the sacrifice of the few is justifiable for the benefit of the many. Some adhere to that concept; however, others feel that society has a duty to bring no harm to anyone despite the potential for the suffering of all. That latter belief is known as deontology from the Greek root word that means "duty." In 1999, philosophy student Joshua Greene conducted research that found that there is more activity in the regions of the brain involved in emotional processing when subjects are reacting to fictional stories about harm coming to other people.

Research has indicated that the "elephant" can listen to reason. The best chance for a change to occur in the fundamental intuitive part of the reactive process is through a person's interaction with people. The change comes from empirical evidence as opposed to rational appeals to the "rider." For example, pre-conceived opinions about abortion can be changed when a person interacts with a real person who is going through the ordeal.



Chapter Four: Vote for Me (Here's Why)

Chapter Four: Vote for Me (Here's Why) Summary and Analysis

Glaucon, Plato's brother, proffered the concept that people only behave virtuously because of fear of being caught and exposed. The brain wants to protect the reputation. Socrates believed that only philosophers should rule a society because they are the only individuals who will pursue what is truly good for all and not just for themselves. Socrates added that such a person is just and happy and is blessed with the ability to reason. And since reason rules, it seeks that which is good not just what appears to be good. Plato himself felt that reason was a gift from God and that passion needed to be controlled because it could negatively impact one's reason. Haidt tends to agree with Glaucon.

What is the function of moral reasoning? Humans have developed and learned to cooperate in a society with one another where everyone is held responsible for his actions and may be required to explain it. The appearance of one's behavior and reputation often becomes more important than reality - many politicians might come to mind. Research has found that a person who knows he will be called upon to explain his reasoning is much more prepared than a person who is asked to explain his position without warning.

Psychologists understand the need for people to think well of themselves. In order to have good mental health, one has to have good self-esteem. Experimentation has shown the existence of an internal socio-meter that gauges one's value in his environment. Just like the president's press secretary who makes excuses to the news media after the fact, the internal meter attempts to explain and defend our behavior. The press secretary's job is not to talk policy; rather, it is to defend the commander-in-chief's actions. Each person has a confirmation bias which is one's tendency to find new evidence to confirm what one already believes. People seek the proof that makes their beliefs "right." Few people are unbiased in their hunt for the truth.

If they are not caught, people often lie and cheat. In a research study, only 20 percent of those subjects who were given too much money in their pay, returned the extra money. Other studies have proved that many people known to be honest will cheat when given the opportunity and the ability to remain invisible. Often we delude ourselves with our beliefs. When we want to believe something, we can find evidence to believe in it. On the contrary, when told that we "must" believe something, we often try to disprove it.

Political scientists used to believe that people vote for their own interests. However, after decades of research, it has been found that self-interest is not a predictor of voting patterns. In the case of public policies, people tend to vote more for their interest group than for their individual interests and concerns. The term, "rationalist delusion" refers to the idolatry that the general public has for its philosophers and scientists which entitles



them to have more influence and power in a society because of their superior reasoning skills. The philosopher Eric Schwitzgebel questioned that premise about himself and his colleagues and conducted some research which found that their behavior falls within the norms of the society as a whole. If the goal of a society is to foster good behavior, reliance upon intuition rather than reasoning is a better choice.



Chapter Five: Beyond WEIRD Morality

Chapter Five: Beyond WEIRD Morality Summary and Analysis

Haidt interviewed dozens of people at McDonald's restaurants when he was working toward his dissertation. He would tell them fictional stories about people doing things like eating their dogs, cutting up the American flag and having sex with chickens. Some would laugh and others would confront him for not knowing that those things were immoral.

An article entitled, "The Weirdest People in the World?" asserted that most psychological research was conducted on a subset of the general population who were: Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic - the first letters of which word form the acronym "Weird." It has long been established that Western people have a more independent view of themselves than do East Asians. WEIRD people think more analytically than do people from other cultures. In a non-WEIRD society, members are more likely to be concerned with the needs of the group than of the individual.

The second of the three basic principles of moral psychology is the belief that there is more to morality than the concerns of harm and fairness. After finishing his Ph.D at Penn, Haidt was granted a fellowship at the University of Chicago to work with Shweder, a leading voice in cultural psychology - the discipline that joined the anthropologist's love of context with the psychologist's focus on the mental processes. Shweder had developed a theory that there are three moral themes - the ethics of autonomy, community and divinity. Autonomous individuals are those with independent wants and needs. The discipline of community is based on the concept that individuals are part of a group, i.e. families, teams, armies, and therefore subjugated to the needs of the community. The ethic of divinity describes humans as temporary bodies that have been implanted with souls. This ethic drives the morality of societies with focus on sin and purity. Haidt tested out Shweder's theory and found that individuals who were educated and well-off usually fell in the autonomous category while working-class subjects leaned toward the community and divinity ethics.

Haidt went on a fellowship to Orissa, India, for three months. He was a twenty-nine year-old liberal atheist who found himself in a sexist, caste based and devout society. He was told that it wasn't proper to thank his servants. To understand them he had to view his environment from their eyes. Haidt's "elephant" liked the people even though it was a society where women and children were mistreated causing his "rider" to try to defend them. The moral ethic of this community was undoubtedly one of community. He also got a taste of the divinity ethic during his visit as well. There were hours of prayer each day and the people believed in the soul's reincarnation to higher or lower creatures depending on one's behavior in his current life. Haidt saw beauty in a code of living that stressed self-control, resistance to temptation and the development of one's higher self. However, in a community based on a divinity ethic, there was a tendency for some to

become judgmental and pious. He was witness to obese and homosexual individuals being ridiculed and ostracized.

Haidt grew up in New York City as a liberal Jew. To him, liberalism had always seemed the only choice. Conservatism represented big business, war and Evangelical Christianity. Liberalism defended civil rights, workers and advocated secularism. After Haidt's visit to India, he was more tolerant of the far right and was better able to understand them.

Shweder came to the overall conclusion that we must all be open to the possibilities within us and that we are all multi-dimensional from the beginning. It is possible for our minds to become righteous about much in life and only a few of those concerns have been with us since childhood.



Chapter Six: Taste Buds of the Righteous Mind

Chapter Six: Taste Buds of the Righteous Mind Summary and Analysis

Pluralists like Haidt and Shweder do not believe that morality can be reduced to one single principle and that such an approach leads to an unsatisfactory culture. We all have five senses but we like different foods and listen to different music. It's the same for moral reasoning. We process our experiences in different ways and reach different conclusions. In modern times, secularists see Enlightenment as the battle between science (reason) and religion (superstition). Hume believed that philosophers who attempted to reason their way to morality while ignoring the importance of human nature were on a fool's errand. Hume believed that intuition or sentiment was the driving force of morality versus reasoning which was biased and subservient to passion. He felt human sentiment was not one-dimensional but was prepared to react with pleasure to virtue and with displeasure to vice. Hume died in 1776 but the foundation for his "moral science" remained intact for centuries.

Autism is not one single disease; rather, it is a disease that runs a spectrum. People with autism are generally low empathizers but surprisingly enough there is speculation that some famous philosophers like Kant and Bentham had some level of the condition. Bentham was a utilitarian who believed in the principle of utility which he defined as "the principle which approves or disapproves of every action. . . according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question" (pg. 118). Some suspect that Bentham, though brilliant, had Asperger's Syndrome, a mild form of autism. Immanuel Kant was an equally brilliant and renowned philosopher and also showed symptoms of Asperger's.

The most successful way to discover how the mind works is through observation, not theory. During the 19th century, philosophers retreated from testing subjects and observation to systematic thought — a movement that included Bentham's utilitarianism and Kantian deontology. To the philosophers of that era, systematic thought seemed more scientific and neater than Hume's gauzy sentimentalist approach.

Haidt felt there was a link between virtue and evolutionary theories and if it were to exist it would be found in two fields that Haidt highly respected: anthropology and evolutionary psychology. Haidt worked with Craig Joseph at the University of Chicago in isolating innate receptors and how initial moral perceptions are produced. Candidates for the receptors of the righteous mind include a series of dichotomous pairings: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation.



Chapter Seven: The Moral Foundations of Politics

Chapter Seven: The Moral Foundations of Politics Summary and Analysis

Many social scientists have maintained a long-held belief that man acts based almost exclusively on self-interest which can be interpreted as a moral foundation. For many decades scientists were reluctant to use the term "innate" when referring to human behavior unless there was proof positive that the trait was hardwired. However, in more modern times, scientists have softened their view and agree that some traits are pre-wired to be flexible and open to change. A newborn is like the first draft of a book - subject to enhancement and revision.

Relative to the care/harm receptor of the righteous mind, there is proof that this trait is inborn. There is an innate mothering instinct in animals and in humans. New mothers who have had no prior experience with young ones have an innate sensitivity to the needs of their baby. There is an innate reaction to a sweet sleeping child and there is quite another innate reaction if someone is about to swing a bat at him.

Evolutionary theorists often refer to the "selfish gene" that will compel an animal to do things that will lead to the perpetuation of that gene. Although man has a natural intuition for his own welfare, he also has a tendency to play "tit for tat." In other words, there is something in the moral make-up of man to do favors in return for favors given - it's a mutually beneficial arrangement for the welfare of the group and is part of the "fairness/cheating" receptor of the righteous mind. But everything is relative and up to interpretation. Politically speaking, the left - like the 99 percent - feel they are being exploited by the one percent. On the right, the Tea Party sees the 99 percent as lazy and as takers.

In the summer of 1954, Muzafar Sherif conducted one of the most famous studies in social psychology using twenty-two twelve year-old boys. He separated the boys into two teams where leaders emerged and a territorial attitude developed. What was intended to be a healthy competition between two teams of boys turned angry and violent. The boys wound up destroying each other's flags and vandalizing each other's camps. It may have come to blows had the counselors not stopped them. The exercise confirmed the tribal and territorial instincts of man and was an example of the loyalty/betrayal receptor of the righteous mind.

There is also a hierarchical and authoritarian sense that is part of our intuition which aligns with the authority/subversive receptor. There is a pecking order among chickens. Dominant leaders, usually the alpha males, emerge among animal families and packs. Lower ranking animals appear submissive to their leaders. While animals use the threat of violence for control, human authorities take on responsibility for their groups.

Authority is one of the receptors of the righteous mind. When authority is challenged, whether deserved or not, everyone in the group is impacted and feels threatened. On the left, insubordination may be encouraged. Those on the right are more likely to feel more comfortable feeling subversive to an authority.

Groups can be bound together by both positive and negative symbols and values. Part of the sanctity/degradation receptor of the righteous mind is the behavioral immune system that causes us to be wary of symbols or values that we, as specific groups, find to telegraph danger.



Chapter Eight: The Conservative Advantage

Chapter Eight: The Conservative Advantage Summary and Analysis

Republicans have long understood the psychology of morality. They know that the emotional "elephant" is in charge of political behavior and they know how to reach the emotions of a people. The famous Willie Horton commercial that George H. W. Bush ran against Michael Dukakis during their race for the White House is a perfect example. A black man who was a murderer was shown leaving prison with a voice over warning the public that Dukakis was soft on crime. Democrats usually target their ads and appeals to the "rider" - to the reasoning part of human response. Bill Clinton was the exception to the rule. As a Democrat, he understood how to appeal to the emotional side of the people.

Haidt conducted research with several other colleagues and confirmed that liberals more than conservatives tend to reject the intuitions of loyalty, authority and sanctity. They are strongest in the areas of the care and fairness receptors of moral response. On the right or conservative side, their research indicated that this group leaned toward a morality that was comprised of all five receptors. Yet, many conservatives did not embrace equality, diversity and change and Haidt and his colleagues wanted to find out why. But after continued research, the results were always the same: conservatives were not advocates of equality and diversity but both care and fairness were in the wheelhouse of their morality.

When Barack Obama clinched the Democratic nomination for president, Haidt thought the liberal party finally had a candidate who was connected to all five foundations of morality. He gave speeches about marriage, family, patriotism and even criticized liberals who had burned the American flag. But as time went on, his speeches began to focus on civil rights, social justice and corporate greed - the typical care and fairness traits of a liberal. Refusing to wear an American lapel pin and declaring himself a citizen of the world in a huge speech in Berlin confirmed his liberal credentials to the world.

Fearing that Obama would go the way of Gore and Kerry, Haidt wrote an essay entitled, "What Makes People Vote Republican?" Haidt recommended that Democrats assume that conservatives are just as sincere as liberals and gain understanding about the five moral foundations in order to have insight into the other side. He advised liberals to infuse their policies with elements of the loyalty, authority and sanctity foundations of morality. In essence, he advised liberals to expand their morality palate to include more elements than just fair and care. The response from liberals and conservatives were mixed. Some liberals vowed to hold to their principles. Some conservatives appreciated his outreach; others told him he missed the point.



Anthropologist Christopher Boehm studied tribal cultures as well as chimpanzee families with Jane Goodall. He saw many similarities between humans and the chimps. Humans are inherently hierarchical but sometime during human development there was a transition that allowed them to live as egalitarians and they banded together to fend off alpha-males who might emerge as dominant bullies. By doing so, Boehm contends that the first true moral communities were created. In these "reverse dominance hierarchies," people banded together to restrain dominant alpha-males. Those males who showed such tendencies were ostracized and virtually kept out of the gene pool so that kinder, gentler creatures would prevail. One trait that appears to be exclusively human is the tendency toward reciprocal altruism. But reciprocity only really works in pairs. Man gets along in group settings when it can be shown that all can share in the rewards.

A similarity between the modern political parties is that both have maintained the trait of banding together to protect their own. To a liberal, a truly moral society is socialist, not capitalist. Conservatives are concerned about their own interest groups rather than the whole of society. Liberalism salutes "equality" while conservatism salutes "liberty." Liberals are largely unmoved by the moral foundations of loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation and these receptors represent the main partisan differences between the liberals and the conservatives.



Chapter Nine: Why Are We So Groupish?

Chapter Nine: Why Are We So Groupish? Summary and Analysis

It is natural for us to lie and cheat when we can get away with it and then apply moralistic reasoning after the fact to justify our actions and transform what seemed to be a flaw into a virtue. Moral psychology is fundamentally a form of enlightened self-interest. It's Darwin's law of natural selection at the individual level. Our righteous minds were shaped by kin selection, reciprocal altruism and external pressures.

Although man is basically consumed with self-interest, he likes to join teams and clubs. He likes to be part of something more than himself. This tendency for man to group made the way for political parties and religious sects. But a group is an extension of self and while man is filled with self-interest, there is a transference of that self-interest to a group level and a concern for those with whom he has chosen to be associated. It is through groups that the individual makes the greatest advancement and therefore, self-interest is at the root of our desire to be formally linked with others.

There is value in considering groups as genuine entities that compete with one another. Positive results from group activity include the cooperation it inspires and the team work it fosters. These factors have pushed mankind in a good direction although the success of a group is an admixture of selfishness and selflessness. What is good for all is good for one. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin concluded that a tribe could only be successful with "courageous, sympathetic and faithful members" (pg. 192). However, the tribe with the most courageous members also has cowards among it. The brave members therefore bring the cowards along with them via their superior traits. Darwin theorized how successful groups came to pass. Successful members of groups had the same characteristics: good social instincts, reciprocity, concern with reputation and the capacity to be dedicated to group rules. Members of competent armies have these same characteristics.

In his book, *Adaptation and Natural Selection*, biologist George Williams wrote of the cooperative behavior of animal groups. Behavioral functions that benefit the group were focused upon. For example, a deer with a keen sense of hearing could serve as the sentinel for the herd while its fast runners could lure predators away from it. While such group selection is possible among animals, for the most part an animal acts out of self-interest and its own survival. Darwin and Williams both agreed that man is born selfish and morality is learned or forced upon him. Man's charity and altruism were simply misfirings of his selfish nature or the result of outside pressure. Haidt disagrees believing that man has the unique and innate ability to be selfless and to become team players at least on occasion. One recent example of a group reaction, or the triggering of the groupish mechanism, was the response to the attacks of 9/11. People came



cross-country to offer whatever help they could to the victims, their families and to the community.

Haidt believes that morality is the key to understanding mankind and provides four basic reasons for his theory: 1) major transitions in evolution; 2) shared intentionality; 3) the co-evolution of genes and cultures; and, 4) the speed of evolutionary change.

Major transitions are rare. The biologists John Maynard Smith and Eors Szathmary assert that there have been just eight such transitions in the past four billion years. The last transition was the forming of human societies. To form these communities, multi-level selection had to be a factor. On a group level, cooperation and team work were the characteristics that had to prevail for a successful group and on a larger scale, a successful society. There are only a few examples of animals becoming ultrasocial. In addition to humans, ants and bees have built successful groups comprised of large numbers.

Michael Tomasello, an expert in chimpanzee cognition, discovered that chimps do not coordinate tasks. Two chimps would never be seen carrying a log together. Tomasello believed that man departed from other animals when he developed "shared intentionality." Man's ancestors long ago discovered the efficiency of sharing a task. Perhaps while foraging, one pulled down a branch so another could pick the fruit.

It was about 600,000 to 700,000 years ago that hominids began to develop large brains and benefited from the advancements made by their ancestors in tool-making, team work in hunting and food sharing. It was the point in time at which the physical development of man's genes paralleled advancements that had already been achieved. When man's genes began to co-evolve with their cultural innovations was when major transitions occurred.

Evolution is generally thought of as a process that takes eons. However, there is evidence to the contrary on some levels of development. Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould believed that man had not changed biologically in 40,000 plus years. However, data from the Human Genome Project provided evidence that genetic evolution had been greatly accelerated during the last 50,000 years. This finding coincides with the recent research that found that genes are quite active and dynamic.

In essence, a group responds to events as though it was one organism. The most successful and cohesive groups dominate over less effective groups. Human nature was shaped largely by natural selection on the individual level but there have been some adaptations and transitions that have been achieved on a group level.



Chapter Ten: The Hive Switch

Chapter Ten: The Hive Switch Summary and Analysis

William McNeill was drafted into the Army in 1941. He later became a renowned historian and felt that his experience in the army with basic training - the constant drilling and marching formations - was the key innovation of the great armies of Greece, Rome and Europe. While he marched with his fellow soldiers, he felt a comfort and a strange sense of being larger than he was. McNeill's studies led him to believe that soldiers who "die for their country" are actually dying for their fellow comrades. Like bees, man is able to lose himself in the "hive" and have a one for all and all for one mind set. Haidt refers to this ability as the "hive switch" which is an adaptation on the individual level that makes the group more effective. In the late fifteenth century when Europeans began to explore other regions of the world, they were collectively appalled by the tribal dancing they would observe. They didn't understand that what they were seeing in the group dancing was a muscular bonding that fosters the feelings of trust and love.

In writing *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, Barbara Ehrenreich tried to understand the psychology behind collective joy but found that psychology was very little help in discovering the root of what binds people together. The scholar Emile Durkheim believed that man was a creature who existed on two levels: as an individual and as part of a larger group or society. Certain binding emotions such as honor, respect, affection and fear are part of multi-leveled selection. Congregating is a powerful experience which explains the popularity of religious services. There are several theories about the biology of the "hive switch" including oxytocin, a hormone and neurotransmitter which is produced by the hypothalamus and the mirror neuron system that in humans has a strong correlation to emotion-related regions of the brain.

In modern society, the corporation is an example of a large community. The word "corporation" comes from the Latin word "corpus" which means body. Even in the eyes of the law a corporation is sometimes treated as an individual. A corporation can selectively build its organization with those individuals who have the skills and characteristics that make a group successful. It can take care of man's "hivish" nature by fostering pride, loyalty and enthusiasm among its members. The most successful corporations focus on similarity not diversity - everyone wants to feel they are part of the "family." Also the "all for one and one for all" mindset is stressed. Wise corporations will not pit individuals against each other; rather, they will encourage competition among teams of employees.

An example of political "call to action" to the "hivish" nature in man is the famous line from John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." The appeal of serving something larger than oneself has been the foundation of many modern political movements. However, when a single hive or country is led by a dictator with soldiers at his disposal, the hive is not effective and is ultimately unsuccessful and can result in disastrous outcomes. There

are ways to turn on the "hive switch" that are positive: awe of nature. There are also ways to turn on the switch that could have undesirable consequences: drugs and raves.



Chapter Eleven: Religion Is a Team Sport

Chapter Eleven: Religion Is a Team Sport Summary and Analysis

When college students have tailgate parties, get drunk and attend football games to cheer their teams on to victory, they are not really rooting for the team. Their aim is to gain a feeling of community. Durkheim defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things which unite into a single moral community. The attacks of 9/11 fostered a lot of distrust about the Islamic religion and ultimately about religion in general. Some felt that religion created delusions that kept people from the realities of science and modernity. In his book, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, Sam Harris criticizes faith because belief moves everything else in a person's life. It can make a faithful person bomb a building in the name of his God. In Richard Dawkins' book, *The God Delusion*, the author asserts that the delusion of faith can result in pernicious behavior.

Belief, action and community are elements of all religions. To an evolutionist, the need for religious community is unique in that it has prevailed throughout the ages despite the many other advancements of man. The mind-set for a person to accept belief without tangible proof is a child-like behavior - listen to your adults and do as you're told. Developmental psychologist Paul Bloom believes that man's mind is designed for dualism - we can accept that our bodies are mortal but that our souls within that body are not. To Dawkins, religions have undergone Darwinian selection in that they are heritable and mutate.

Anthropologists Scott Atran and Joe Henrich believe that religion evolved as adaptations were made to resolve specific problems but then morphed into new beliefs often involving the supernatural. They believe that religions serve a good purpose in society in that they make groups more cohesive and cooperative. Early groups that were able to use their "god" in effective ways were successful. Others that were not as successful learned to adapt and change. Religion leads to the establishment of moral communities. Gods can be used to promote cooperation and trust and to reject selfishness and divisive behaviors. The threat of god's punishment in the cultures of yore made most people behave in accordance with the morals of the church. Organized religion provides a way to create cooperation without kinship. Atran and Henrich do not believe that there is any genetic relationship to religion.

The biologist David Sloan Wilson married the theories of Darwin and Durkheim. He combined Darwin's theory of the evolution of morality by group selection with Durkheim's hypothesis that religion unified a culture's beliefs and practices into one single moral society. In his book, *Darwin's Cathedral*, Wilson describes the ways that religion has helped to create groups, divide labor, work as teams and prosper. He writes about John Calvin's demanding form of Christianity, medieval Judaism and the water temples of Balinese rice farmers before colonization by the Dutch. According to Wilson,



there is no need for a moralistic and threatening god to bring people together; rather, gods can be used to encourage a cohesive and cooperative society.

Science writer Nicholas Wade agrees with Wilson that even ancient religious practices helped groups become stronger and able to compete with other groups. He wrote that individuals who were members of religious communities were more likely to survive than those who were not. In essence, the creation of gods and religions are adaptations at the group level and their by-products are cohesiveness and trust-building. Since human minds and religions have co-evolved simultaneously, people cannot be expected to easily abandon their faith.

Some atheists feel that religion is the root of evil since historically it has been the cause of wars, genocide, terrorism and the oppression of women. Of course, the devout feel that atheists are the evil ones. Does religion turn people into altruists? Statistics show that more volunteer time and money in America is donated to secular organizations than to religious ones. However, those who attend regular church service are generally more charitable than those who do not. Research indicates that they make better neighbors and better citizens because selflessness is one of the attributes that is encouraged by religion. But man's self-interest plays a role in a person's decision to become part of an organized religion. As Wilson asserted, religions help people to achieve what they can't achieve on their own.

Suicide bombers are not motivated by religion; rather, they are inspired by nationalism, a response to being occupied. While religion is not behind these acts of terror, it can be an accessory to the action although not the main motivating force. However, a culture that has a strong religious foundation is one that has a shared moral order. When a society is free and open without a solid moral foundation and the individual is allowed to do whatever he wants, the result is unhappiness and an increase in suicides.

After many years of research and study, Haidt arrived at his own definition of morality: "Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make co-operative societies possible" (pg. 270). Haidt defined morality by what it does rather than what it is comprised of and how it evolved.



Chapter Twelve: Can't We All Disagree More Constructively?

Chapter Twelve: Can't We All Disagree More Constructively? Summary and Analysis

Political campaigns are rough and tumble. Running for office is a highly competitive undertaking with very high stakes. But does it have to be as nasty as it is? With the influx of millions and even billions of dollars into campaigns, things are deteriorating and the country is becoming more politically polarized. There has been a shift toward the tribal mentality which began in the 1990s when politicians were encouraged not to cross the aisle in compromise. This culminated in 2011 when the parties would not agree on a routine bill to raise the debt ceiling. This failure led to a downgrading of America's credit rating, something that could have been easily avoided through cooperation.

Political analysts since the days of Marx assumed that people chose political ideologies to further self-interest. Although a person's political preference was once predicated on his wealth or lack thereof, this is no longer the case. While the rich had traditionally been conservative, in modern times many of the high-tech billionaires are liberal. The poor used to be liberal because they wanted change. Nowadays, many are die-hard conservatives largely based on social issues. The study of twins has revealed that there is a genetic connection between one's choices in life, including political party allegiance. Twins raised apart will often have the same political leanings. While a political tendency may be innate, it can still be mutated by experience and environment.

After studying the DNA of 13,000 Australians, scientists have recently discovered several genes that differed between liberals and conservatives. Most of the genes are related to the function of the neurotransmitter, in particular the glutamate and serotonin genes which are involved in the brain's reaction to threat and fear. Conservatives are known to react more strongly to signs of danger. Traits that children possess lead them down different paths to different choices. As children, liberals were seen as being novelty-seeking and having an insensitivity to threats. They were also seen as curious, verbal and even assertive and aggressive. People develop their own life narratives about themselves. When asked how they came to their political beliefs, conservatives will often attribute it to their respect for authority and their loyalty to one's group. Liberals will emphasize their deep feelings about human suffering and social fairness.

The liberal narrative involves concern about human struggles. It stands against institutions that are unjust, unhealthy and oppressive because they lead to inequality and exploitation. The conservative narrative is contained in many of President Ronald Reagan's speeches with his frequent references to liberty, loyalty, authority and God. Can partisans understand the narratives of one another? Although conservatives opposed some of the great liberations of the twentieth century like those for women, gays and minorities, they recognize and applaud the liberation of Eastern Europe.



Liberals have a more difficult time taking to the conservative narrative. To liberals, loyalty to a group represents racial bias; authority represents oppression; and, sanctity is meaningless political mumbo-jumbo. In an experiment, Haidt confirmed that conservatives had a greater understanding of liberals than vice versa.

Haidt began to research conservatism by reading the book, *Conservatism* by Jerry Muller. Orthodoxy is not the same as conservatism. Orthodoxy is the belief that there is a transcendent moral order that is handed down from the Bible. Modern conservatism is guided by the main tenets of Enlightenment thinking - from David Hume and Edmund Burke for example. The critique of progressive arguments takes place on the "enlightened grounds of the search for human happiness based on the use of reason" (pg. 289).

As a liberal and an atheist, Haidt had always thought that conservatism = religion = rejection of science. But according to Muller, modern conservatism's aim is to create the best possible society, one that will bring happiness and success to all. Continuing his research, he read more from Edmund Burke and modern conservatives such as Friedrich Hayek and Thomas Sowell and began to see that they had great insight in the sociology of morality. These conservatives were great advocates of social capital - the social ties between individuals and the cohesion that results from those ties. These connections run the full gamut from corporations to churches to schools. Conservatives believe that in order to be "good" one must have external constraints. Haidt concluded that although liberals have been behind major social changes they have a tendency to overreach and have a blind eye to the importance of maintaining social capital.

To be effective, government needs the energy of both political persuasions - just like the yin and yang which are opposing though complimentary elements. There are two categories of conservatives: social conservatives and libertarians. They both have distinct traits and personalities. Liberals base their morality on the care foundation and are suspicious of references to loyalty, authority and sanctity. Haidt conducted extensive research on liberal goals and found that most held that governments should have some controls on corporations and that regulation can solve problems.

Libertarians are the direct descendents of eighteenth and nineteenth century Enlightenment reformers. They once were known as "liberals" until that term was taken by the progressive movement. Liberals split with libertarians because they believed that government was the big protector while libertarians feared big government. One huge difference between liberals and libertarians is that the latter believes in the power and reliability of the free market - that is, a market without the constraints and regulations that the liberals feel are necessary.

While some refer to conservatives as obstructionists who try to hold back progress, a better definition is that their broader moral foundation allows them to spot threats to moral capital that liberals aren't capable of seeing. They do not oppose all change but fight against it when it threatens established institutions. Just like the yin and yang, conservatives stop liberals from going too far while liberals move mankind along. While

liberals try to help the bees struggling in life, the conservatives keep them from damaging the hive.

If an individual has a desire to understand another group, it is essential that he attain an accurate knowledge of its moral foundation. To achieve a deeper understanding, individuals from opposing sides must open their hearts and minds to one another.



Characters

Jonathan Haidt

Jonathan Haidt is a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia and the author of the subject book, *The Righteous Mind*. He conducted vast research and study in gathering the information for this book and in making reasonable conclusions from the wealth of material that he amassed.

By the time the twenty-four year-old Haidt arrived at the University of Pennsylvania as a graduate student, the field of moral psychology had been largely defined by developmental psychologist Jean Piaget and psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. But Haidt felt uneasy about some of their conclusions in that they seemed to ignore an important element of human nature: emotion. He was very liberal at the time and was full of indignation over Ronald Reagan and the conservative groups such as the piously named Moral Majority.

Haidt became interested in a class offered by anthropologist Alan Fiske which required the students to read about remote and ancient cultures for an understanding of the foundations of social relationships. This experience opened Haidt's eyes up about the moral roots of societies and he was surprised to discover a link between underdeveloped cultures and those of the West. That link was the foundation of morality that led to successful tribes and group religions that fostered advancement for the group and for the individual.

Haidt went on to study the concepts of morality of a variety of historic and scholarly individuals including Thomas Jefferson, Plato, Darwin and Burke. Haidt later worked extensively with anthropologist Richard Shweder at the University of Chicago. Haidt developed fictional short stories about people who were guilty of harmless but offensive behavior to learn the moral responses of test subjects. In 1995, Haidt took on his first position as a professor at the University of Virginia. By then some philosophers and neuro-scientists were beginning to agree with him that emotionalism played a role in one's moral response.

After years of study and research, Haidt came to define moral systems as intertwined "sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make co-operative societies possible" (pg. 270). Haidt came to believe that morality should be defined by what it does rather than by what it is comprised of and how it evolved.

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg was an American psychologist who revolutionized the study of morality by picking up on the early work of Jean Piaget who was considered the



greatest of all developmental psychologists. Piaget had worked with the morality of children which Kohlberg expanded on in his work and research.

Kohlberg took Piaget's theory that children's moral reasoning changes over time and enhanced it with the evidence that the younger the child, the more superficial his reasoning was. As the child matured, there was a realization that more complex reasoning was appropriate in response to moralistic questions. Kohlberg also found that once reaching adolescence, children begin to rebel against authority and use their reasoning powers to find self-justification for breaking rules.

Kohlberg's work changed the direction of the psychology of morality in that many psychologists began to study morality from a reasoning standpoint rather than from an emotional perspective. Kohlberg also innovated research by creating a scientific justification for a secular versus religious moral order. Kohlberg also noted that children who were more social were more likely to have advanced and multi-faceted morals. Playing with their peers on the playground taught the kids the lessons of fairness, taking turns, team play and many other elements that are important for succeeding in a group-based society.

Richard Shweder

Haidt conducted research with anthropologist Richard Shweder of the University of Chicago. Shweder found that Americans and the Orissans of India had different views on morality based on their views of personality and individuality.

Michael Tomasello

Michael Tomasello, an expert in chimpanzee cognition, discovered that chimps do not coordinate tasks. For example, one would never observe two chimps carrying a log together. It was Tomasello's conclusion that man departed from other animals when he developed "shared intentionality."

Christopher Boehm

Christopher Boehm was an anthropologist who studied tribal cultures and did research work on chimpanzee families with Jane Goodall. He observed many similarities between humans and the chimps.

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget is considered the greatest developmental psychologist of all time. He applied a cognitive-developmental approach to study the moral thinking of children. Through his research he concluded that children had an inborn sense of fairness.



Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant was a brilliant and renowned philosopher. Although there was no diagnosis, there has been much speculation that Kant showed symptoms of Asperger's, which is a mild form of autism.

Craig Joseph

Haidt worked on isolating innate morality receptors and how initial moral perceptions develop with Craig Joseph at the University of Chicago.

Thomas Jefferson

When in Paris on one occasion, Thomas Jefferson fell in love with a married woman. Later, when he wrote her a letter, he presented his feelings about her as a debate between his heart and head. This type of morality came to be known as dualism.

Glaucon

Glaucon, Plato's brother, was of the belief that people only behave virtuously due to a fear of being caught and exposed for bad behavior. It was the brain's job to protect the reputation.



Objects/Places

University of Pennsylvania

Jonathan Haidt was admitted into the graduate program in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

The Hua of New Guinea

During his study of anthropology, Haidt was required to read about ancient and backward cultures including the Hua tribe of New Guinea. The Hua had a complex network of food taboos for their young men. This practice was referred to as an example of "a religion of the body."

University of Chicago

Jonathan Haidt worked with anthropologist Richard Shweder at the University of Chicago. They conducted research on fictional stories about moralistic situations.

Brazil

In his research work at the University of Chicago, Haidt traveled to Brazil to get responses to test questions from upper-class Brazilians and working-class Brazilians which he later compared to responses from Americans.

Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and O

Haidt studied Frans de Waal's Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals which discussed the emotional foundation of morality.

Patterns, Thinking, and Cognition

Haidt made references to Patterns, Thinking, and Cognition, in which author Howard Margolis, a professor at the University of Chicago, attempted to understand why political beliefs were often disconnected from objective fact.



The Willie Horton Political Ad

The famous Willie Horton commercial that George H. W. Bush ran against Michael Dukakis during their race for the White House showed a black man who was a murderer leaving prison with a voice over warning the public that Dukakis was soft on crime. It was devastating and helped elect Bush.

The Descent of Man

In *The Descent of Man*, the famous book about evolution by Charles Darwin, the naturalist theorized how successful groups were formed. Successful members of groups had the same characteristics: good social instincts, reciprocity, concern with reputation and the capacity to be dedicated to group rules.

Darwin's Cathedral

In his book *Darwin's Cathedral*, David Wilson describes the ways that religion has helped to create groups, divide labor, work as teams and prosper.

Conservatism

Haidt began to research conservatism by reading the book *Conservatism* by Jerry Muller, who describes orthodoxy as the belief that there is a transcendent moral order that is handed down from the Bible.



Themes

Origin of Morality

How did man develop morality? What was the source of that morality - was it nature or nurture? There are theories on both sides of the coin. Some believe that humans are born with innate responses to moralistic situations, that there's a sense of fairness and caring that is hard-wired into our DNA. Others believe that our responses are taught by parents, groups, religion and society in general.

But there is a case that both are true. The example in *The Righteous Mind* that proves this point is the "elephant" and the "rider." In this scenario, the "elephant" represents the emotional region of the brain that reacts with an inborn response to questions of morality. For example, when a boy takes a ball away from another boy on the playground, the emotional response from the "elephant" would be that the boy was wrong to take the boy's ball away. The "rider" who rides herd on the emotions of the "elephant," is the part of the brain that has learned to reason. He has been taught that things aren't always as they seem. The response from the "rider" could be that perhaps the ball actually belonged to the second boy.

There's a reason that the image of an elephant is used for the emotional response. It is the most powerful because it is the brain's natural response - the part that is perhaps already baked in when we are born. The "rider" is the small fellow on top of the elephant who tries to bring reason to the emotional responses of the "elephant." The "rider" can be reasoned with but it is difficult to change the responses of the "elephant" because it is more deeply rooted. This scenario is similar to Thomas Jefferson's dualism which came about when he wrote a love letter to a married woman and presented the pros and cons of an affair with her as a debate between his head and heart.

Conservatism vs. Liberalism

On the political front most people who have access to a television, radio or computer are more familiar with the terms "conservative" and "liberal" and the political party labels, "Republican" and "Democrat" than they would like to be, especially around election time which seems to be a never-ending circumstance. Those who are not political junkies, may throw the terms "liberal" and "conservative" around and even interchange them and cynically think that politicians are all alike. However, according to psychologist Jonathan Haidt who wrote the book, *The Righteous Mind*, there are personality traits, moral foundations and perhaps even innate responses that are cooked into the DNA that cause a person to be attracted to the very different political tenets found in the Republican Party versus the Democratic Party.

There are several reasons that individuals tend toward the policies and platforms of one political party over another. Part of the allure of the politics of a party have for individuals



comes from the individuals themselves. Whether our moral barometers are the result of nature or nurture, the responses to moralistic situations are based on them. There are certain innate responses that one has and there are certain learned responses. No one is certain which force is the stronger - the answer may be that they may have an equal impact on the individual's response. But these traits are part of what drives us to the political parties of our choice.

In essence, those who are drawn to conservatism have moral foundations that are strongly pinned to loyalty, authority and sanctity. On the other hand, people who choose liberalism, have a moral foundation that is strong on fairness and caring. These characteristics are translated into policy. The Republican party is more closely associated with a strong military and a sense of personal responsibility while the Democratic party is associated with civil rights, fairness and helping the needy.

Haidt's overall conclusion about political parties is that we need both liberalism and conservatism to have a successful government. The liberals move the country forward and sometimes overreach but the conservatives are there to rein them in.

Individual and Group Morality

There are layers of morality that exist within a culture. Just by the very nature of a community and by its definition, there has to be a level of cooperation and cohesion within the group in order to achieve success, grow, prosper and ultimately survive. There is a fundamental question of the source of one's morality: does it originate from nature or nurture? The most reasoned answer is that there is probably a mixture of one's instinctual, innate responses to moralistic situations and the responses he has been taught by parental and societal influences.

But man is not an island. He lives in a world where the moral foundations of others must be a consideration. Not only does man have to live in a level of peace and cooperation with others, there is a natural grouping or "hivish" instinct that drives him to something that is larger than he is. This inborn need to be part of a group is not unselfish. Man realized long ago that he can accomplish more in a group than he can by himself. This grouping instinct is the force that is behind organized religions and political parties. Although at first blush, one would not make a natural connection between faith and politics, the fundamental grouping instinct is the tie that connects the two cultural phenomena.

While it is easy to define the morals of an individual, what defines the morals of a group? Since a group is made up of many different people with diverse needs and goals, how can such a complex group be cohesive and attain success? Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection plays a key role in the success of a group. Over time, a group selects those individuals with the traits that will make the group successful. Those characteristics include a dedicated and altruistic nature and a personality that will allow the needs of the group to override their own.



The individual's morality enters into the choice of group that he decides to become part of. Conservative politics requires its members to have a strong connection to the moral foundations of loyalty and authority while liberal politics appeal to those whose moral foundations are rooted in caring and fairness. In the end, those who will be successful in a group will have strong ties to the group's basic morality and are able to put the group's needs before their own.

Style

Perspective

The Righteous Mind - Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion by Jonathan Haidt is written in the first person with Jonathan Haidt as narrator. He presents a vast amount of data about the research, studies and theories of psychologists, anthropologists, naturalists, scholars, philosophers and others about the origin of morality and how each of us comes to our own "righteous mind" - that is our own moral foundation which we believe to be right.

Interwoven into his scholarly work is his own story, how he came to his own conclusions about morality through his studies, research and work with experts in the field. He also tells a personal story of his own evolution from a young liberal who was angered by the mere existence of Ronald Reagan and the Moral Majority to a more seasoned scientist who was able to understand the moral foundation of the conservative mind.

Johnathan Haidt did his undergraduate work at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia and a visiting professor of business ethics at New York University's Stern School of Business. Haidt has already authored several other books including The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom.

Tone

The Righteous Mind by Jonathan Haidt is written in a scholarly manner with many references that are backed up by in-depth and detailed notes. Haidt describes his own journey in the field of moral psychology and how he was intrigued by the mystery of morality - where it came from, whether it originated from nature or nurture. Haidt's enthusiasm for the subject, which is a rather deep one for the average person, makes the read more compelling. It is quite apparent from Haidt's thorough descriptions and proclivity to show all sides of an issue that he has great respect for those who came before him in the field of moral psychology and for his contemporary colleagues.

Since there is no sign that Haidt has any prejudice toward any of the theories that he presents, he is not reluctant to present them in a clear and complete manner. Although he has reached his own conclusions and of course cannot agree with the many and diverse theories and concepts that have emerged about human morality over the centuries, he has respect for them all. As a psychologist, he is open to the possibility that any of them could be correct or at least partially correct.

Haidt was also not reluctant to say that he himself had been changed by the knowledge he had gained over the years in his quest for answers. He started as a liberal who could not understand how anyone could be drawn to conservatism. However, once he learned

how conservatives think and what they base their moral judgments upon his respect for them grew and he gained a better understanding of them.

Structure

The *Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt is separated into three main parts: "Part I: Intuitions Come First, Strategic Reason Second" contains four chapters; "Part II: There's More to Morality than Harm and Fairness" also has four chapters; and there are four chapters in "Part III: Morality Binds and Blinds."

The book explores the origin of morality and contains the theories of many evolutionary scientists, psychologists and anthropologists. The author himself provides his own theories and definition of morality and the righteous mind. The book is structured in an orderly manner and each chapter builds from the preceding ones and makes references to that which has already been presented.

Preceding the first chapter is an "Introduction" written by the author in which he explains his purposes for writing this book and what he wanted accomplish with it. After the final chapter of the book, there is a "Conclusion" in which Haidt summarizes the main points he covered in this work. There are also an "Acknowledgments" section, an extensive "Notes" section, a "References" section and finally an "Index."

Interspersed throughout the book are charts, graphs and images that are used to support the theories and concepts that the author puts forth.



Quotes

"Thinking about moral issues seemed different from thinking about other kinds of questions because of the much greater need to provide reasons justifying your moral judgments to other people." (Chapter 1, page 5)

"To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.' ~ Mark Twain" (Chapter One, page 8)

"To be human is to feel pulled in different directions, and to marvel - sometimes in horror - at your inability to control your own actions." (Chapter Two, page 27)

"The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others." (Chapter Five, page 96)

"Yet the conceptions held by others are available to us, in the sense that when we truly understand their conception of things we come to recognize possibilities latent within our own rationality. . . and those ways of conceiving of things become salient for us for the first time, or once again. In other words, there is no homogeneous 'backcloth' to our world. We are multiple from the start." (Chapter Five, page 109)

"Behind every act of altruism, heroism, and human decency you'll find either selfishness or stupidity." (Chapter Seven, page 128)

"Human beings are innately hierarchical but at some point during the last million years our ancestors underwent a 'political transition' that allowed them to live as egalitarians by banding together to rein in, punish, or kill any would-be alpha males who tried to dominate the group." (Chapter Eight, page 170)

"We like, cheat, and cut ethical corners quite often when we think we can get away with it, and then we use our moral thinking to manage our reputations and justify ourselves to others." (Chapter Nine, page 190)

"Selfish and contentious people will not cohere, and without coherence nothing can be effected." (Chapter Nine, page 192)

"A corporation is a collection of many individuals united into one body, under a special denomination, having perpetual succession under an artificial form, and vested, by policy of the law, with the capacity of acting, in several respects, as an individual." (Chapter Ten, page 237)

"[Ideology is] a set of beliefs about the proper order of society and now it can be achieved." (Chapter Twelve, page 277)

"Liberals and conservatives are like this: A party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life."
(Chapter Twelve, page 294)



Topics for Discussion

Make the case that "morality" is a result of nature and make the opposing case that it is the result of nurture.

Describe the works of Lawrence Kohlberg and Elliot Turiel in the study of human morality.

What was Thomas Jefferson's theory on dualism? How did he come to develop the concept and how did it impact his personal life?

What does the author mean by the "rider" and the "elephant" that reside within each person? What are the roles of each in the development of a person's righteous mind?

What morality theory was developed by Richard Shweder? What three main elements did he define and what impact did he claim they had on an individual's morality?

Describe individual versus group morality? What is the importance and purpose of each?

What is the yin and the yang? Why is it necessary for a successful nation to have a political system that includes both liberalism and conservatism? What is the role of each?

Provide the definitions for conservatism, liberalism and libertarianism.

What are the dichotomous pairings of receptors of the righteous mind? What are their significance?