

mar, and give names to everything. Later she uses bits from Adam's Diary and takes a great leap of forty years. Demarcsek's point is to see Eve as a modern woman, who starts writing to "become self-aware, with the obvious purpose of discovering herself and the world around her." After Eve has matured, and knows herself, she does not write in it for forty years, except for an entry written shortly before she dies. But it ends with Adam adding the words he said at Eve's grave to *her* diary. He intrudes on her work, becomes the first reader without her permission, and then makes himself her co-author! Demarcsek does not spell it out, but the meaning is obvious: 'how male!' It would have been natural to use extracts from Twain's "Adam's Soliloquy" from the same year, where perennial gender issues are so delightfully in focus. It is, of course, a mock diary, and the first, so Twain did not have to write in accordance with any convention. "Eve's Diary" (and "Eve Speaks" also from 1905) gave Twain an opportunity to challenge traditional Christian behavior and beliefs, and offered Demarcsek the chance to subtly challenge traditional male behavior.

The collection offers much insight, and several surprising readings, and it is a fine contribution to international Mark Twain studies

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Noble Effort, Prof. Haidt, but We're Not Convinced

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2012. 375 pages. ISBN: 978-0-307-37790-6. \$28.95.

Moral Jonathan Haidt argues for a new appreciation of conservative thinking and traditional religion in *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Pantheon Books, New York, 375 pages). His research focuses on the moral foundations of politics and on ways liberals and conservatives can move beyond the culture wars and engage in more civil forms of political discourse. He is not convincing that reconciliation is possible, however, and if he is right that politics *is* religion, we can easily understand why the Conservative Right did as well as they did in November.

The 2012 Presidential election campaign was a fierce and costly contest for power between Democrats and Republicans, two groups with different

values. One is socially liberal. The other is traditionally conservative and sporadically reactionary. Each has its own concept of citizenship and our obligations to one another. Each has its own understanding of freedom, one wanting freedom *from* ... exploitation and poverty; the other wanting freedom *to* ... make as much money as it is legally possible and permission to live without guilt concerning the nation's have-nots.

Social scientists have now started to use moral psychology to explain the mutual demonization and why the heterogeneous Democrats have had so much difficulty connecting with voters since Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. The best summary of this scholarship is the well-researched article in *The Atlantic*<sup>1</sup> by Thomas Byrne Edsall. The title, "Conservatives are from Mars, Liberals are from Venus" hints at just one of the many studies Edsall includes in his survey.

Taking data from American National Election Studies (ANES) Nicholas Winter<sup>2</sup> analyzed the words respondents used to describe the two political parties. In "Masculine Republicans and Feminine Democrats" he categorized words respondents volunteered as stereotypically "male" or "female": Masculine men are thought to be active, independent, and decisive; feminine women are thought to be compassionate, devoted to others, emotional, and kind.

Winter found that in describing what they like about each of the two parties, voters by an overwhelming ratio of 7 to 1 used more words and phrases that Winter coded as "masculine" in describing the GOP than in describing the Democrats. Conversely, voters used more "feminine" words and phrases to describe the Democrats than they used for Republicans, again by a strong ratio of 7 to 1. Winter demonstrates empirically that these connections between party images and gender stereotypes have been forged at the level of *unconscious cognitive connections* between gender and party stereotypes.

The operative words are *unconscious cognitive "connections"* and this is where Jonathan Haidt enters the picture. Our personal morality is unconsciously motivated, he says. It is intuitive and not the result of reason because we are governed by feelings. Our mind is divided into two parts like a rider on an elephant. The guy on top, trying to steer the enormous gray animal, represents our controlled thought processes tempered by "*rationalizations*" while the large animal itself represents our automatic processes fueled by our feelings, usually too big and willful to control. Haidt agrees

1 February 6, 2012.

2 published on line, 1 August 2010: DOI 10.1007/s11109-010-9131-z

with Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) who believed that reason is the servant of our passions.

What about philosophy? Is it not conducted through logic and deductive reasoning? Not so, Haidt says. Philosophers are also human beings and cannot escape the intuitive process. “Do people believe in human rights,” he asks in *The Righteous Mind*, “because such rights actually exist, like mathematical truths, sitting on a cosmic shelf next to the Pythagorean theorem just waiting to be discovered by Platonic reasoners? Or do people feel revulsion and sympathy when they read accounts of torture, and then invent a story about human rights to help justify their feelings?”

Haidt defends the evolutionary biologist Edward O. Wilson’s predictions in his highly controversial *Sociobiology*, i.e., that the old approaches to morality would be swept away or merged into a new approach that focused on the emotive centers of the brain as biological adaptations. Not even Immanuel Kant escapes this premise. Haidt cites colleague Josh Greene whom he says has neuroscientific evidence to reinterpret Kant’s categorical imperative (“deontological philosophy”) as a sophisticated post-hoc justification of our gut feelings about rights and respect for other individuals.

### **Haidt’s Humanitarian Agenda**

Why is any of this important? Because, says Haidt, it explains why people shouldn’t trust their own opinions or the demonizing of their adversaries. If we are not reasonable but only intuitive, we can’t assume we are right. We should give our adversaries the benefit of the doubt. And this is Haidt’s humanitarian agenda. He wants Liberals and Conservatives to understand one another so they’ll get along better. Fair enough, but the flaw in his thinking is that he assumes understanding generates respect; clearly a non sequitur. A Danish expression says it well: *Det er en god forklaring men ikke en undskyldning*. “It is a good explanation but not an excuse.”

Excuse, indeed. If Liberals value social justice above all else, how can they possibly respect a Conservative mind-set that believes in the same values that constitute what psychologists call a “social dominance orientation,” or, in academic shorthand, SDO?<sup>3</sup> “Some groups of people are just more worthy than others,” say Conservatives. “It’s OK if some groups have

3 Felicia Pratto, James Sidanius, and Shana Levin, *European Review of Social Psychology* 17, 2006.

more of a chance in life than others.” “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.” “If certain groups of people stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.”

At the other end of the spectrum are ideas that characterize Liberal thinking. “We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.” “We should strive to make incomes more equal.” “No one group should dominate in society.”

Groups! Haidt acknowledges the significance of groups and evokes Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) who believed (contrary to Freud) that we are *both* selfish and groupish. We are *homo duplex*. Individually, we are engaged in the so-called 4 F’s: fighting, fleeing, feeding and f-cking. Collectively, we have a compulsion to follow and obey rules, morals and ethics in order to maintain self-control.

Fear and sensitivity to danger is the operative emotion. We all have “it” but Conservatives have it more than Liberals. Think of a volume dial from 0 to 100. Liberals are at the left end between 10 and 40. Conservatives are up on the right end, between 70 and 90 with some pinning in the red zone at 100. For more individualistic and less fearful Liberals, the “group” is often “out there”; other people suffering from various forms of systemic disadvantage. For Conservatives—fearful, conformist and sensitive to the threat of being taken advantage of by free riders—the group is their group; the home team; folks that deserve loyalty and defense.

It is hard to overestimate the significance of groups. It starts with the nuclear family, spreads to the extended family and is then applied to religious denominations, athletic teams, fraternities, corporations, political parties, and ultimately nations. American Conservatives place a high value on group identity and loyalty. Status and self-esteem often come from a stratified society in which one group can claim superiority over another. Subsequently, Conservatives love exclusivity. Liberals—far more individualistic, less materialistic and non-conformist by temperament—put far less value on group loyalty and identity. They value inclusivity and hate exclusivity.

Chris Hedges, one of America’s most outspoken social liberal “activists” blames “Big Ten” type college football and the Greek system of fraternities/sororities for the perpetuation of Republican group culture. Writing in *Truthdig*<sup>4</sup> Hedges says:

4 [http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the\\_perversion\\_of\\_scholarship\\_20120730/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_perversion_of_scholarship_20120730/)

There is probably no more inhospitable place to be an intellectual, or a person of color or a member of the LGBT community, than on the campuses of the Big Ten Conference colleges, although the poison of this bizarre American obsession has infected innumerable schools. These environments are distinctly corporate. To get ahead one must get along. These cultures are about subsuming the self into the *herd* (my emphasis). They have been conditioned to join the team, to surrender moral autonomy ... to define their life by an infantile narcissism centered on greed and self-promotion and to remain silent about crimes they witness or take part in. It is the very ethic of corporations.

### **Religion is a Team Sport**

Not all Liberals are atheists; indeed there *are* Christian, Jewish and Muslim believers who have progressive politics. Many Liberals, however, detest organized religion and feel superior because they embrace atheism.

Nevertheless, the predisposition to religious belief is a stubborn part of human behavior and since mankind has produced thousands of different religions, it is probably an illusion to think that a humanities education will dislodge belief. Liberals need to recognize the fact that many humans would rather have belief than knowledge.

A religion's power does not come from its particular theology, Haidt says, but from its ability to create group cohesiveness. The so-called "new atheists" are missing the point, he says, by looking at dogma and canon because the function of religion is not to foster belief per se but to create community.

While doing fieldwork in India Haidt experienced an intellectual awakening that he considers a turning-point in his life. When human beings experience "uplift" emotionally, he says, they are responding to the perception of *sacredness*, i.e., something greater than oneself. Haidt calls this emotion *elevation* and says it is universal. We are wired to be inspired. *Elevation* explains why people experience well-being when they witness unexpected acts of human goodness, exceptional competence and high-level performances. (Why do I get tears in my eyes when I watch the Olympics?)

Elevation is particularly interesting because of its power to spread, explaining why we get "high" performing in a play, singing in a choir or working on a film crew. Even mundane activities can create a "feel good" response such as cooking a large group meal side-by-side with others and then washing the dishes together. "Even atheists have intimations of sacredness," Haidt says, "we just don't infer that God caused those feelings."

Relevant for our discussion is Haidt's assertion that politics is really religion. Politics is about sacredness and feelings of elevation. Politics is about

the group “high” that results from hearing politicians offer policies that correspond to one’s values. And Republican politicians, Haidt says, are much better doing it than Democratic.

### **Are Liberals Nicer and More Intelligent?**

In “The Secret Lives of Liberals and Conservatives”<sup>5</sup> both groups are described by certain personality traits. Since Conservatives have attributes related to the psychological management of uncertainty and fear, they tend to be masculine, obedient and conformist. Since Liberals are open to new experiences, they tend to be individualistic, tolerant, and sensation seeking.

Are Liberals more intelligent than Conservatives? Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker says they are,<sup>6</sup> and on hearing Congressman Todd Atkin’s theory about rape, it is easy to see his point. Pinker regrets, however, that many social scientists use their research to take cheap shots at Conservatives, studying them as if they were suffering from a mental defect. Some social scientists<sup>7</sup> have tried to look objectively at flattering and unflattering characteristics of the two groups and the following summary is illuminating for its honesty and balance:

The conservative response to social problems avoids the simplistic first response of treating the symptom by creating a new and expensive government program. Conservatives understand how free markets work, [they] recognize that the invisible hand of free market competition leads in the long term to incentives to produce good at levels of quality and quantity that satisfy effective demand for those goods.

On the minus side:

Conservatives do not understand how prevalent situational constraints on achievement are and thus commit the fundamental attribution error when they hold the poor responsible for poverty ... Conservatives are too prone to engage in zero-sum thinking, i.e., “either I keep my money or the government takes it.” They fail to appreciate the possibility of positive-sum resolutions of societal conflicts ... Conservatives cling to the comforting moral illusion that there is a sharp distinction between allowing people to suffer and making people suffer. Finally, conservatives fail to recognize that even if each transaction in

5 Dana Carney, John Jost, and Samuel Gosling, *Political Psychology* 29 (2008).

6 *The Better Angels of our Nature*, pp. 662-663.

7 P.E. Tetlock and P.G. Mitchell, *Psychological Perspectives on Justice*, edited by B. Mellers and J. Baron. Cambridge University Press, 1993.

a free market meets their standards of fairness, the cumulative result could be colossally unfair. Some people will acquire enormous power over others.

Liberals do not equate downtrodden or impoverished status with inherent unworthiness or inability ... in a nutshell, liberals are less selfish and more empathic and tolerant than conservatives. Their fear of aiding the undeserving is outweighed by their fear not helping the truly needy ... Liberals do not need to bolster their self-esteem by living in a stratified society in which they can claim superiority over this or that group ... Finally, liberals do not blame the victim or make defensive attributions ... Liberals acknowledge that fate can be capricious and that bad things happen to good people.

Liberals not only exaggerate the efficacy of government; they underestimate the creativity of the free market. Many liberals mindlessly condemn capitalism as a culture of greed and ignore the power of the market to stimulate hard work, investment and entrepreneurship.

These honest distinctions are important because they demonstrate how values bind but also blind. This makes Haidt a reconciliation counselor: "When it gets so that your opponents are not just people you disagree with, but ... the mental state in which I am fighting for good, and you are fighting for evil, it's very difficult to compromise," Haidt told Bill Moyers. "Compromise becomes a dirty word."

Fair enough, Prof. Haidt, but it is your own social science colleagues that demonstrate how compromise is far more likely to come from Democrats than Republicans. Indeed, GOP hyper-masculine mentality honors stubbornness and refusal to compromise. Forty-one percent of Republicans surveyed in a poll shortly after the November 2010 election said that political leaders should stand firm in their beliefs even if little gets done, compared to just 18 percent of Democrats.<sup>8</sup>

### **Biological Adaptations**

Haidt asks us to focus on the emotive centers of the brain as biological adaptations, necessary for human society to exist. Originally, he and his colleagues<sup>9</sup> identified five moral foundations that evolved as adaptive be-

8 Susan Page, *USA Today*, November 8, 2010.

9 Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian A. Nosek, "Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2009, Vol. 96, No. 5, 1029--1046, American Psychological Association, available at <http://people.virginia.edu/~jdh6n/>; Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham, "When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals may not Recognize," *Social Justice Research* (2007), available at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=872251](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=872251)

havior, but by the time he published *The Righteous Mind* they had added a sixth.

Think of them as pillars holding up a building. Since they serve as foundations, Haidt and his colleagues call their concept Moral Foundation Theory. The five pillars are (a) *harm/care* (strong empathy for those that are suffering and care for the most vulnerable); (b) *fairness/reciprocity* (life liberty and justice for all); (c) *in-group/loyalty* (tribalism, patriotism, nationalism); (d) *authority/respect* (mechanisms for managing social rank, tempered by the obligation of superiors to protect and provide for subordinates); and (e) *purity/sanctity* (related to the evolution of disgust, that makes carnality degrading and renunciation as noble). The newest foundation pillar is (f) *liberty/oppression* (related to the desire for equality; also the distinction between freedom from (oppression); and freedom to (pursue order of things “wealth”).”

Haidt has charts in *The Righteous Mind* that show how Liberals give priority to only three: *care/harm*; *liberty/oppression*; and *fairness/cheating*, while Conservatives value all six in equal amounts. These charts confuse the reader, however, because we’ve been meticulously informed that *care/harm* (compassion) is not a Conservative value and to give it equal weight to the other five is puzzling.

In addition, Haidt seems unaware of two late 20<sup>th</sup> century movements that arguably make *purity/sanctity* a value for Liberals. The first is the ecology movement that sees Mother Earth in danger and unsustainable industrial-growth-capitalism as repulsive. The second is the food revolution in which “whole foods” are pure and valued over industrialized products and genetically engineered foodstuff. “Our bodies have become the world’s toxic dump sites,” writes one food activist.<sup>10</sup> She goes on to say that the billions of dollars worth of pesticides, plastics, petroleum products, and heavy-metal containing technology have made the industrial world rich while threatening human survival. While unrestrained sexuality is disgusting for many Conservatives who feel it is carnal and undignified, unnatural food and genetically manipulated grains are vile and disgusting for many Liberals. The campaign against the Monsanto Company is just one target of this movement.

10 Nancy Appleton, *Stopping Inflammation: Relieving the Cause of Degenerative Diseases*.2005, Square One.



### How Do We Form Our Personalities?

Where does Haidt get his data? And if biology is destiny, do we have a choice about being Liberal or Conservative? Together with his colleagues,<sup>11</sup> Haidt is a member of a team of academic researchers collaborating at a website—“www.YourMorals.org”—designed to test a variety of theories about the connection between personal morality and politics. The team has collected and systematized very large numbers of responses to questions designed to elicit new information about political values and their influence on how we vote.

Are we destined to be a Liberal or a Conservative? Yes and no, says Haidt. Our moral profiles are not innate. Quoting neuroscientist, Gary Marcus, Haidt says: “Nature bestows upon the newborn a considerably complex brain, but one that is prewired—flexible and subject to change—rather than hardwired, fixed and immutable.” Another analogy is to see the brain like a book, the first draft of which is written by the genes during fetal development. No chapters are complete at birth, and some are just rough outlines to be completed during childhood.

What changes the first draft? Childhood experiences. Genes make brains and our brains dictate our behavior. Haidt describes, for example, how the neurotransmitters *glutamate* and *serotonin* are related to threat sensitivity and how *dopamine* is related to openness and new experiences. These genetic traits guide children along different paths. And then, years later as we become adults, we create a personal narrative that reinforces our profiles. Since fear and sensitivity to danger are a root of conservative “behavior” and openness and appetite for new experiences are a root of liberal behavior, we can supposedly hold our DNA responsible for our politics. “Forgive me for being a bigot! It’s not my fault. My DNA has excessive amounts of glutamate and serotonin!”

### The Progressive Era

Between 1890 and the late 1920s, American politics was characterized by social activism and political reform. Looking back, we see a pantheon of Americans who responded to the first Gilded Age by bravely opposing the status quo. They wanted to move American society forward and create an

11 Nicholas Winter at University of Virginia and Ravi Iyer of the University of Southern California.

environment in which a level playing field was possible. After reading *The Righteous Mind*, we can assume that these reformers must have had DNA with high doses of dopamine.

Journalists Walter Lippmann, Jacob Riis, Upton Sinclair, and Herbert Croly set the agenda and with *The Promise of American life* —published by Croly in 1909—the crusade got a manifesto for a progressive movement that ultimately influenced the New Deal.

Jane Addams, Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt, Margaret Sanger, Anna Howard Shaw and Emma Goldman were first wave feminists. Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Stimson, William Howard Taft, Thorstein Veblen, Elihu Root and Robert M. La Follette were the statesmen. W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, and Frederick Jackson Turner gave African Americans their voice.

We must be grateful that these progressives did not concern themselves with the moral foundations of *loyalty/betrayal*, *authority/subversion* or *purity/sanctity*. Otherwise, American society might still be defending slavery, child labor and the disenfranchisement of women.

### **The Screwed Generation**

What would these patriotic Americans say about today's youth; citizens between 18 and 35 who call themselves "the screwed generation"? Without righteous indignation on the Left, triggered by their interpretation of *liberty/oppression*, these young ones would have no voice or protector as they become adults and are drafted into an economic war they don't understand.<sup>12</sup>

In the name of *liberty/oppression*, (*freedom to... earn as much money as possible*), the 1% Super Rich have instigated what Paul Krugman<sup>13</sup> calls "the great wealth transfer" in which the median net worth of young Americans 18 to 35 dropped 68% since 1984, making it now less than \$4,000. The richest 1% tripled their share of income between 1980 and 2006 and then took 93% of all the new income in the first year after the 2008 recession, making their medium net worth now over \$5,000,000. To quote Krugman: "Horatio Alger has moved to Canada."

We know from Haidt that the *fairness/cheating* foundation concerns

12 Paul Buchheit, *Nation of Change*, July 9, 2012, [www.nationofchange.org](http://www.nationofchange.org)

13 *Rolling Stone*, December 22, 2006.

justice and treating others in proportion to their actions (otherwise known as “just desserts.”) While Liberals interpret this as reaping the rewards of cooperation without getting exploited, Conservatives focus more on proportionality. They hate the ones who drink the water they didn’t carry. Intuitively, they want to see cheaters punished and good citizens rewarded in proportion to their deeds.

It is more than perplexing, therefore, why ordinary Conservatives, not among the Super Rich 1%, fail to see extreme wealth concentration as a violation of the *fairness/cheating* foundation. The rich pay taxes at a lower rate than middleclass folks. Yet they are not rich because of a 9-5 job but from money they move around; from income they got from capital gains and dividends. They drink water they didn’t carry!

### **Why did Haidt write *The Righteous Mind*?**

*The Righteous Mind* is a decoding manual for Liberals so they can appreciate Conservative values and understand why they might be necessary for any society to hang together. But, really. What could Haidt have possibly been thinking of? He is a professional social scientist; a Jewish atheist, worldly, and sophisticated. Did he really believe that by reading *The Righteous Mind*, Liberals would start appreciating Conservatives?

The *authority/subversion* foundation alone is enough for feminists and Liberal women to hold Conservatives in contempt. Women know that patriarchy justifies traditional authority over them. They know that patriarchy is the reason most Conservatives still oppose an Equal Rights Amendment. They know that the *authority/subversion* foundation is why contraception and rape became election issues (!) in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Presidential race.

So why wasn’t Haidt satisfied to keep his ideas within the pages of peer-reviewed articles in professional journals? Let us guess. Haidt is a kind man, a nice person who wants the greatest good for the greatest number. He read Edmund Burke, fell in love with *moral capital* and wanted to share his enthusiasm. Consequently, it is easy to see his book as a confession of a lapsed Liberal; a declaration of faith, and using his own theory, an intuitive rationalization.

It is easy to picture Haidt sitting on his elephant, telling himself that asking Liberals to understand Conservatives is a reasonable, utilitarian task—*tout comprendre, c’est tout pardonner*—when what he really wants to say is: “Watch out! Human beings are flawed! They need constraints! They



need institutions, customs, traditions and religions to behave, cooperate and thrive. They need all six foundations to keep society together. Please, please listen!”

Nevertheless, reading *The Righteous Mind* is a fascinating adventure and certainly worth one’s patience to wade through a highly cerebral presentation. You’ll never be bored and you’ll frequently be challenged. If you *are* a Liberal, however, beware! It might wound your heart and irritate your brain. Haidt’s respect for Edmund Burke is well placed, but it is asking too much of us to extend this respect to Ayn Rand.

After reading *The Righteous Mind*, you’ll definitely have a new understanding of Conservatives, but it’s doubtful it will change your opinions. You might admire Haidt for trying to build a bridge but in the end, it won’t be one you’d want to cross.

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