

Why are good people divided by politics and religion?

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Why are good people divided by politics and religion? This question is addressed in the best-selling book by moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt (pronounced "height"):

The Righteous Mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion (2012)

In this meeting, we'll find out what late-breaking research in moral psychology reveals about how we acquire moral values, how we make moral judgments, and how we can improve our personal lives and our society.

Haidt's book has three parts, covering the following topics:

- ◆ **A model of cognitive processing**
- ◆ **A model of moral values**
- ◆ **A model of evolution and society**

Philip Bitar will present the topics in an interactive format, introducing each topic with questions to which we will propose answers. After presenting Haidt's theory, Bitar will lead a discussion of how we can apply the theory to our personal lives and to our society.

Model of cognitive processing

In Haidt's model, there are two main kinds of cognitive processing:

- ◆ **Automatic, unconscious intuition**
- ◆ **Deliberate, conscious reasoning**

Haidt identifies himself as an intuitionist, holding that our moral judgments are largely determined by our intuitions, which render moral judgments immediately and automatically.

At www.ProjectImplicit.org, you can participate in the research paradigm that is used to detect the effect of automatic moral judgments. Although laboratory experiments use more sophisticated presentation of stimuli and more sophisticated measurement of response times, the examples on this website will give you a feel for the methods used to detect the effect of automatic moral judgments.

Model of moral values

Haidt presents a model of moral values in terms of six categories:

Care, fairness, loyalty, authority, sanctity, and liberty

Haidt argues that each of these categories is grounded in evolutionary endowment but is brought to specific expression in variable ways depending a person's culture. The first four categories entail a logical progression: care is unilateral, fairness entails relational compensation proportional to an act, loyalty pertains to group coherence, and authority pertains to group structure. Sanctity and liberty pertain to value that is considered inherent in a person, object, or activity.

At www.YourMorals.org, you can participate in the research paradigm that is used to determine the strength of commitment that a person has to each of the moral categories. At www.MoralFoundations.org, you can find out more about the foregoing theory of moral values.

Model of evolution and society

Haidt presents an evolutionary model of natural selection at the group level as the source of moral values. He goes on to argue that religion emerged because religion enhanced the development of moral values and, hence, enhanced the survival of the respective groups.

Haidt explains that atheists who campaign against religion, as a source of falsehood and evil, fail to recognize the value of religion in group survival. As a result, such atheists unwittingly campaign to undermine the longstanding moral foundation of society. As an atheist, Haidt argues that his fellow atheists should recognize the crucial value of religion for society even if its teachings about God are thought to be false.

Haidt applies his theory to political activity in democratic governance, using the categories of liberal, libertarian, and social conservative as understood in American politics. Haidt presents the results of extensive research into the moral values of these three groups. These results are summarized in the following table, where level of strength ranges from 1 (low) to 4 (high).

Moral value	Liberal	Libertarian	Social conservative
Care	4	1	2
Liberty	3	4	2
Fairness	2	2	2
Loyalty	1	1	2
Authority	1	1	2
Sanctity	1	1	2

In view of these results, Haidt concludes that social conservatives have a sounder moral basis for society because of their strength in the values of loyalty, authority, and sanctity.

Concluding quote

“This book explained why people are divided by politics and religion. The answer is not...because some people are good and others are evil. Instead, the explanation is that our minds were designed for groupish righteousness. We are deeply intuitive creatures whose gut feelings drive our strategic reasoning. This makes it difficult — but not impossible — to connect with those who live in other matrices [i.e., who live by other realizations of the six moral categories]....” [p. 317-318]

The site www.CivilPolitics.org provides a venue for scholars to contribute evidence-based ideas for improving American political dialog. Other websites of Haidt include www.RighteousMind.com and www.JonathanHaidt.com.

Philip Bitar bio

Philip Bitar earned bachelor degrees in Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Washington, and then followed this, at U.C. Berkeley, with graduate study in Cognitive Psychology, a master degree in Statistics, and a doctorate in Computer Science. Bitar subsequently spent 10 years developing a comprehensive theory of human life covering the following topics: knowledge, reality, religion, ethics, commerce, government, and meaning — the meaning of human life. Thus far, Bitar has published three books presenting portions of his theory:

Why Human Life Makes Sense (2011) — knowledge, reality, religion, ethics, and meaning

The Second American Revolution (2012) — commerce and government

Why? In Pursuit of the Ultimate Answer (2008) — comprehensive theory of human life

For more info on Bitar’s work, please visit the meetup site ***Why Human Life Makes Sense***:

www.meetup.com/Why-human-life-makes-sense