

Conclusion - The Righteous Mind by Jonathan Haidt

In this book I took you on a tour of human nature and human history. I tried to show that my beloved topic of inquiry—moral psychology—is the key to understanding politics, religion, and our spectacular rise to planetary dominance. I fear that I crammed too many sights into the tour, so let me close by highlighting the most important ones. In Part I, I presented the first principle of moral psychology: Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second. I explained how I came to develop the social intuitionist model, and I used the model to challenge the “rationalist delusion.” The heroes of this part were David Hume (for helping us escape from rationalism and into intuitionism) and Glaucon (for showing us the overriding importance of reputation and other external constraints for creating moral order). If you bring one thing home from this part of the trip, may I suggest that it be the image of yourself—and everyone else around you—as being a small rider on a very large elephant. Thinking in this way can make you more patient with other people. When you catch yourself making up ridiculous post hoc arguments, you might be slower to dismiss other people just because you can so easily refute their arguments. The action in moral psychology is not really in the pronouncements of the rider. The second part of our tour explored the second principle of moral psychology: There’s more to morality than harm and fairness. I recounted my time in India, and how it helped me to step out of my moral matrix and perceive additional moral concerns. I offered the metaphor that the righteous mind is like a tongue with six taste receptors. I presented Moral Foundations Theory and the research that my colleagues and I have conducted at YourMorals.org on the psychology of liberals and conservatives. The heroes of this part were Richard Shweder (for broadening our understanding of the moral domain) and Emile Durkheim (for showing us why many people, particularly social conservatives, value the binding foundations of loyalty, authority, and sanctity). If you take home one souvenir from this part of the tour, may I suggest that it be a suspicion of moral monists. Beware of anyone who insists that there is one true morality for all people, times, and places—particularly if that morality is founded upon a single moral foundation. Human societies are complex; their needs and challenges are variable. Our minds contain a toolbox of psychological systems, including the six moral foundations, which can be used to meet those challenges and construct effective moral communities. You don’t need to use all six, and there may be certain organizations or subcultures that can thrive with just one. But anyone who tells you that all societies, in all eras, should be using one particular moral matrix, resting on one particular configuration of moral foundations, is a fundamentalist of one sort or another. The philosopher Isaiah Berlin wrestled throughout his career with the problem of the world’s moral diversity and what to make of it. He firmly rejected moral relativism: I am not a relativist; I do not say “I like my coffee with milk and you like it without; I am in favor of kindness and you prefer concentration camps”—each of us with his own values, which cannot be overcome or integrated. This I believe to be false. ¹ He endorsed pluralism instead, and justified it in this way: I came to the conclusion that there is a plurality of ideals, as there is a plurality of cultures and of temperaments.... There is not an infinity of [values]: the number of human values, of values which I can pursue while maintaining my human semblance, my human character, is finite—let us say 74, or perhaps 122, or 27, but finite, whatever it may be. And the difference this makes is that if a man pursues one of these values, I, who do not, am able to understand why he pursues it or what it would be like, in his circumstances, for me to be induced to pursue it. Hence the possibility of human

understanding. 2 In the third part of our tour I presented the principle that morality binds and blinds. We are products of multilevel selection, which turned us into Homo duplex. We are selfish and we are groupish. We are 90 percent chimp and 10 percent bee. I suggested that religion played a crucial role in our evolutionary history—our religious minds coevolved with our religious practices to create ever-larger moral communities, particularly after the advent of agriculture. I described how political teams form, and why some people gravitate to the left, others to the right. The heroes of this part were Charles Darwin (for his theory of evolution, including multilevel selection) and Emile Durkheim (for showing us that we are Homo duplex, with part of our nature forged, perhaps, by group-level selection). If you bring one thing home from this last part of the trip, may I suggest that it be the image of a small bump on the back of our heads—the hive switch, just under the skin, waiting to be turned on. We've been told for fifty years now that human beings are fundamentally selfish. We're assaulted by reality TV programs showing people at their worst. Some people actually believe that a woman should shout "fire" if she's being raped, on the grounds that everyone is so selfish that they won't even come out to investigate unless they fear for their own lives. 3 It's not true. We may spend most of our waking hours advancing our own interests, but we all have the capacity to transcend self-interest and become simply a part of a whole. It's not just a capacity; it's the portal to many of life's most cherished experiences. This book explained why people are divided by politics and religion. The answer is not, as Manichaeans would have it, 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, which are often built on different configurations of the available moral foundations.

So the next time you find yourself seated beside someone from another matrix, give it a try. Don't just jump right in. Don't bring up morality until you've found a few points of commonality or in some other way established a bit of trust. And when you do bring up issues of morality, try to start with some praise, or with a sincere expression of interest. We're all stuck here for a while, so let's try to work it out.