

THOUGHTS ABOUT MORALITY FROM THE BOOK THE RIGHTEOUS MIND

THE RIGHTEOUS MIND WHY GOOD PEOPLE ARE DIVIDED BY POLITICS AND RELIGION - JONATHAN HAIDT

This book examines the deep social questions about the authenticity of our social and religious and political moral sense. There is nobody better to write such a book than Haidt who is a moral psychologist. He is regarded as one of the world's most original thinkers with regard to society and its moralistic ways. Not all agree as he thinks evolution has made us religious for our own good! This is a virtual admission that religion can only benefit some (and by implication invite the destruction of the rest) for evolution implies the Darwinist view of dog system eating dog system.

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Quote: Moral judgment is a kind of perception, and moral science should begin with a careful study of the moral taste receptors. You can't possibly deduce the list of five taste receptors by pure reasoning, nor should you search for it in scripture. There's nothing transcendental about them. You've got to examine tongues. Hume got it right. When he died in 1776, he and other sentimentalists had laid a superb foundation for "moral science," one that has, in my view, been largely vindicated by modern research...

Analysis: It is true that right and wrong have to involve you perceiving. You perceive a tree and you perceive that hitting a baby for laughs is wrong. This quote tells us that you don't need God or the supernatural to detect what is morally wrong. He says you should not search for moral rules in scripture. If so then religion with its claim that God revealed its morals and rules to it is actually an enemy of morality and antagonistic to moral perception and awareness.

Quote: The first principle of moral psychology is Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second. In support of this principle, I reviewed six areas of experimental research demonstrating that: Brains evaluate instantly and constantly (as Wundt and Zajonc said). Social and political judgments depend heavily on quick intuitive flashes (as Todorov and work with the IAT have shown). Our bodily states sometimes influence our moral judgments. Bad smells and tastes can make people more judgmental (as can anything that makes people think about purity and cleanliness). Psychopaths reason but don't feel (and are severely deficient morally). Babies feel but don't reason (and have the beginnings of morality). Affective reactions are in the right place at the right time in the brain (as shown by Damasio, Greene, and a wave of more recent studies). Putting all six together gives us a pretty clear portrait of the rider and the elephant, and the roles they play in our righteous minds. The elephant (automatic processes) is where most of the action is in moral psychology. Reasoning matters of course, particularly between people, and particularly when reasons trigger new intuitions. Elephants rule, but they are neither dumb nor despotic. Intuitions can be shaped by reasoning, especially when reasons are embedded in a friendly conversation or an emotionally compelling novel, movie, or news story.

Analysis: He is not saying intuitions should come first but only that they do. This confirms how passive aggressive human moralising is. He says he is persuaded that rationalists want power and to decide for people considered less rational than themselves. He states that moral philosophers are no better or worse than any other kind of person. It is not true that rationalists necessarily wanted personal power. A mathematician does not want personal power. He wants to empower people by giving them information that passes some times - ie avoids contradicting itself. Intuition is a good thing to go by if it has been trained by reason for that means it tells you what reason would say. That is why it is vital for superstition and religion to go. The religious world has always thrived on untrained intuition and even dressed it up as divine inspiration or divine grace.

Quote: The second principle of moral psychology is: There's more to morality than harm and fairness. In this chapter I began to say exactly what more there is: Morality is like taste in many ways—an analogy made long ago by Hume and Mencius. Deontology and utilitarianism are "one-receptor" moralities that are likely to appeal most strongly to people who are high on systemizing and low on empathizing. Hume's pluralist, sentimentalist, and naturalist approach to ethics is more promising than utilitarianism or deontology for modern moral psychology. As a first step in resuming Hume's project, we should try to identify the taste receptors of the righteous mind. Modularity can help us think about innate receptors, and how they produce a variety of initial perceptions that get developed in culturally variable ways. Five good candidates for being taste receptors of the righteous mind are care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity.

Analysis: Five good candidates for being taste receptors of the righteous mind are care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity. These things help you to perceive what is right and wrong. He is wrong about sanctity. The other four are found in

society and thus you do not need religion or God. Let us rank them in order of importance. 1 care. 2 fairness. 3 authority. 4 loyalty. The care is what you have to work on most of all and it is better to make a mistake with one of the others than with this one. You don't need God or faith in God or Bibles or religionists to have to care. They insult its supreme importance. Faith claims to come first so faith is evil. Interestingly it is missing from the list. It should not even be considered for inclusion.

Quote: The Care/harm foundation evolved in response to the adaptive challenge of caring for vulnerable children. It makes us sensitive to signs of suffering and need; it makes us despise cruelty and want to care for those who are suffering. The Fairness/cheating foundation evolved in response to the adaptive challenge of reaping the rewards of cooperation without getting exploited. It makes us sensitive to indications that another person is likely to be a good (or bad) partner for collaboration and reciprocal altruism. It makes us want to shun or punish cheaters. The Loyalty/betrayal foundation evolved in response to the adaptive challenge of forming and maintaining coalitions. It makes us sensitive to signs that another person is (or is not) a team player. It makes us trust and reward such people, and it makes us want to hurt, ostracize, or even kill those who betray us or our group. The Authority/subversion foundation evolved in response to the adaptive challenge of forging relationships that will benefit us within social hierarchies. It makes us sensitive to signs of rank or status, and to signs that other people are (or are not) behaving properly, given their position. The Sanctity/degradation foundation evolved initially in response to the adaptive challenge of the omnivore's dilemma, and then to the broader challenge of living in a world of pathogens and parasites. It includes the behavioral immune system, which can make us wary of a diverse array of symbolic objects and threats. It makes it possible for people to invest objects with irrational and extreme values—both positive and negative—which are important for binding groups together. I showed how the two ends of the political spectrum rely upon each foundation in different ways, or to different degrees. It appears that the left relies primarily on the Care and Fairness foundations, whereas the right uses all five. ...Does left-wing morality activate just one or two taste receptors?

Analysis: He says the reason the right leaning politicians predictably do best in the long-term is that they use more moral foundations than the left which only uses one or two. Notice how he lists the dangers of some of those foundations. Fairness and loyalty have a dangerous side for those who do not conform. He adds in sanctity which shows that right wing politicians who seem secular are in fact not. Perhaps they turn themselves into messiahs or sons of God without being clearly seen that way? He gives us an interesting take on the danger of sanctity - it opens the door to extremes. Sanctity will be more effective for a political party that is expressly religious! This is a worry in today's world where the value of separating religion from politics is clear.

Quote: Morality is so rich and complex, so multifaceted and internally contradictory.

Analysis: Since when could a pile of contradictions be called morality? Who decides which of two contradictory rules will be followed? People who follow moral leaders are only going to feel manipulated. If morality is doubtful then are we trying to use a moral God to get over that questionable side? Are people who say that God and morality are in a sense the same thing and that without God you cannot have morality but just opinion trying to make morality solid? Using a prop to solidify and ground morality only makes the hypocrisy and the lying worse. It is about the smokescreen and the sin of maltreating God.

Quote: Psychologists used to assume that infant minds were blank slates. The world babies enter is “one great blooming, buzzing confusion,” as William James put it, and they spend the next few years trying to make sense of it all. But when developmental psychologists invented ways to look into infant minds, they found a great deal of writing already on that slate.

Analysis: No wonder religion desperately seeks power over children. It knows that if the person had a real choice they would probably not be in their religion. Conditioning a child then may not be about putting writing on the clean slate but wiping and altering the writing that is already there! If that is not child abuse then what is? I should send this analysis to Richard Dawkins who is clear that evangelising children or indoctrinating them is child abuse.

Quote: When we see or hear about the things other people do, the elephant begins to lean immediately. The rider, who is always trying to anticipate the elephant's next move, begins looking around for a way to support such a move. When my wife reprimanded me for leaving dirty dishes on the counter, I honestly believed that I was innocent. I sent my reasoning forth to defend me and it came back with an effective legal brief in just three seconds.

Analysis: The point is we can use reason to justify ourselves for morality is usually a grey area. We take advantage of that greyness to reason ourselves into thinking we are innocent when we are not. And he wants to believe he is innocent for he thinks that is the way to get his wife to believe it. Its about manipulating her not just himself. If we carry on like that with people who know we have done wrong imagine how ineffectual God will be! Why people see God as putting you off immorality is beyond comprehension.

Quote: He cites the harm principle of John Stuart Mill had put forth in 1859: "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."

Analysis: Realistically this rarely happens. And it makes no sense to allow a person to harm themselves at the hands of another if the principle is right. For example, some people see gender confirmation surgery and abortion as harmful but you cannot do them on your own. Others have to be involved.

Quote: The ethic of autonomy is based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, autonomous individuals with wants, needs, and preferences. People should be free to satisfy these wants, needs, and preferences as they see fit, and so societies develop moral concepts such as rights, liberty, and justice, which allow people to coexist peacefully without interfering too much in each other's projects. This is the dominant ethic in individualistic societies. You find it in the writings of utilitarians such as John Stuart Mill and Peter Singer (who value justice and rights only to the extent that they increase human welfare), and you find it in the writings of deontologists such as Kant and Kohlberg (who prize justice and rights even in cases where doing so may reduce overall welfare). But as soon as you step outside of Western secular society, you hear people talking in two additional moral languages. The ethic of community is based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations. These larger entities are more than the sum of the people who compose them; they are real, they matter...

The ethic of divinity is based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, temporary vessels within which a divine soul has been implanted. People are not just animals with an extra serving of consciousness; they are children of God and should behave accordingly. The body is a temple, not a playground. Even if it does no harm and violates nobody's rights when a man has sex with a chicken carcass, he still shouldn't do it because it degrades him, dishonors his creator, and violates the sacred order of the universe. Many societies therefore develop moral concepts such as sanctity and sin, purity and pollution, elevation and degradation. In such societies, the personal liberty of secular Western nations looks like libertinism, hedonism, and a celebration of humanity's baser instincts.

Analysis: We have three moralities here.

Individualism where the person alone matters as long as they harm nobody else.

Then there is the idea that people should be looked at as communities not mere islands.

Then there is the notion that we are like little gods and are not animals and should afford ourselves some measure of worship and reverence.

Number 2 looks like the wisest.

Individualism has problems and leads to loneliness.

Seeing yourself as a child of God is really just you thinking of yourself as a god and is egoistic.

The chicken carcass analogy is disgusting but yet the Christians praise Jesus for knowingly walking to the cross - one of the most barbaric forms of execution ever. Another argument he makes is that if a brother or sister could have sex without the slightest risk of a baby or anybody knowing they clearly should not. And what if a man in extreme circumstances and extreme secrecy could consent to let another man eat him for sexual gratification?

All this is about making right right and wrong wrong regardless of anything else. Some certain actions are wrong no matter how good the results and if nobody knows. But reason says we may be programmed to see it that way though it makes no sense.

Quote: Why doesn't sacrifice strengthen secular communes? Sosis argues that rituals, laws, and other constraints work best when they are sacralized. He quotes the anthropologist Roy Rappaport: "To invest social conventions with sanctity is to hide their arbitrariness in a cloak of seeming necessity." But when secular organizations demand sacrifice, every member has a right to ask for a cost-benefit analysis, and many refuse to do things that don't make logical sense. In other words, the very ritual practices that the New Atheists dismiss as costly, inefficient, and irrational turn out to be a solution to one of the hardest problems humans face: cooperation without kinship. Irrational beliefs can sometimes help the group function more rationally, particularly when those beliefs rest upon the Sanctity foundation. Sacredness binds people together, and then blinds them to the arbitrariness of the practice.

Analysis: It may seem that illogical contradictory belief systems bring benefits at times but that is through luck. Without thinking correctly you have no reality check so it can backfire easily and indeed can happen at any time!