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# **The Conservative and Liberal Values**

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“When it comes to moral judgments, we think we are scientists discovering the truth, but actually we are lawyers arguing for positions we arrived at by other means.” The surprising psychology behind morality is at the heart of social psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s research. He explains “liberal” and “conservative” not narrowly or necessarily as political affiliations, but as personality types — ways of moving through the world, reports Krista Tippett, host of “On Being,” an award winning podcast.

In his acclaimed book, *The Righteous Mind*, he examined the conundrum behind good people divided by religion and politics. Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University’s Stern School of Business, Haidt writes about his life: “As a kid who always loved science, and when I first read the bible in college, the Old Testament, I was horrified when I read the whole thing. And so I went through the phase that many young scientific types go through. I’m the sort of person who would have been a New Atheist if I hadn’t taken a very different turn in my own research.”

He refers to the negative psychology which focusses almost exclusively on problems. It dealt with pathologies, violence, drug addiction, racism, all those sorts of things. He recalls what Martin Seligman, a psychologist at Penn,

said, when he was president of the American Psychological Association, “Well, what about the positive side of life? Most people are doing pretty well. And when they go to the bookstore, all they have on offer are books by Deepak Chopra. So we should be having psychologists doing research on the positive side of life.”

When Heidt started doing research on morality and how it’s based on the emotions like disgust and anger and shame, he asked himself: “Well, what’s the opposite of disgust?” And I started – what do you feel when you see somebody do something beautiful or uplifting? And it felt to me as though there’s such an emotion, but there wasn’t a word for it, at least not in the psychological language – I mean you can say “uplifted” or “touched” or “moved.”

“So if you go with me that morality is part of human nature, that it is something that evolved in us as our primate ancestors became cultural creatures that lived in larger groups, then these groups competed with each other, and the groups that were able to hang together and cooperate are the ones that succeeded and became our ancestors.” Further, heads: “So if you are with me that morality, just like the love of our children or the sense of humor or language... You begin to see morality as this amazing ability that binds groups together in groups that are larger than kinship.”

We cooperate “so brilliantly, and that’s because we have this moral psychology that binds us together.” It’s most effective when we have a sacred value, something that we all worship or circle around. “So it’s clearest in religions, where the sacred value is literally God or the Torah or whatever, but you’ll see it in any political group too. So on the left, nowadays, just in the last year or two, it’s become over-

whelmingly marriage equality and rising income inequality.”

Heidt suggests that human beings are born with moral “receptors.” Just as our taste buds organically incline us to like and dislike certain tastes and textures, our minds come equipped to feel pleasure or displeasure at patterns in the social world.

He describes five primary moral foundations, accepted by all cultures. People who are liberal and conservative, he says, value two of these in common, compassion and fairness. But conservatives juggle three other moral values – of loyalty, authority, and sanctity.

May we liberals and conservatives, maintaining our distinct viewpoints, protect and promote life, which has become so fragile today! May we, in this New Year, find life as pure and unalloyed source of joy. For me and for all of us!

[Adapted from an article for *The Financial Chronicle*]