

JONATHAN HAIDT

[SOCIAL AND MORAL PSYCHOLOGIST]

“I THINK WHATEVER IS TRUE OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENT IS TRUE OF MORAL JUDGMENT, EXCEPT THAT IN OUR MORAL LIVES WE DO NEED TO JUSTIFY, WHEREAS WE DON’T GENERALLY ASK OTHERS FOR JUSTIFICATIONS OF AESTHETIC JUDGMENTS.”

The four foundations of moral sense:

Aversion to Suffering

Reciprocity, Fairness, and Equality

Hierarchy, Respect, and Duty

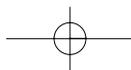
Purity and Pollution

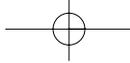
These are indignant times. Reading newspapers, talking to friends or coworkers, we seem often to live in a state of perpetual moral outrage. The targets of our indignation depend on the particular group, religion, and political party we are associated with. If the Terry Schiavo case does not convince of you of this, take the issue of same-sex marriage. Conservatives are furious over the prospect of gays and lesbians marrying, and liberals are furious that conservatives are furious. But has anyone on either side subjected their views to serious scrutiny? What’s the response, for example, when conservatives are asked exactly why gays and lesbians shouldn’t be allowed to marry? “It threatens the institution of marriage.” OK. How? “Marriage is between a man and a woman.” (Democrats give this answer as well.) Right, but why? “It’s unnatural.” Isn’t that true of marriage in general? “Well... look... I

mean... it’s just wrong!”

If you are familiar with the work of Jonathan Haidt, it will come as no surprise that our resentment, disgust, and outrage are rarely supported by fully developed arguments and deliberation. A psychologist at the University of Virginia, Haidt has devoted his career to the study of moral judgment and decision-making; his results are revealing and perhaps a bit unflattering. We tend to think of ourselves as arriving at our moral judgments after painstaking rational deliberation, or at least some kind of deliberation anyhow. According to Haidt’s model—which he calls “the social intuitionist model”—the process is just the reverse. We judge and then we reason. What, then, is the point of reasoning if the judgment has already been made? To convince other people (and also ourselves) that we’re right.

To support his model, Haidt has devised a number of ingenious experiments. He presents scenarios designed to





evoked strong moral responses (“it’s wrong!”) but ones that are hard to justify rationally. (Examples include: having sex with a chicken carcass you’re about to eat, wiping your toilet with a national flag, and, as we’ll see, brother/sister incest.) Although the goals of these experiments vary, the results all point to the causal importance of emotions and intuitions in our moral life, and to different roles for reason from the ones we might expect or hope for. Haidt’s model has gone against some dominant trends in moral and social psychology, in particular the theories of well-known psychologists Piaget and Kohlberg, whose work appeared to support rationalist models of moral judgment (where reason plays the primary causal role in moral decision-making). But as Haidt himself notes, his own work can be placed within a grand tradition of psychology and philosophy—a return to an emphasis on the emotions which began in full force with the theories of the Scottish philosopher David Hume.

One last thing to say about Jon Haidt: he gives the best conference talk in the business. There are slides, great visuals, videos of fraternity guys trying to explain why sleeping with your sister is wrong, images of a toddler perturbed about not getting the same number of stickers as the child beside her (or, in one hilarious case, a three-year-old who is not perturbed at all), and plenty of sharp insights and jokes. The research he presents has implications for philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and even the culture wars in America; not surprisingly, it provokes controversy and lively debate. I interviewed Haidt after one such conference at Dartmouth College.

—Tamler Sommers

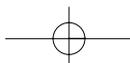
I. REASON IS THE PRESS SECRETARY OF THE EMOTIONS

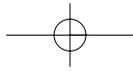
THE BELIEVER: I want to start out talking about the phenomenon you call “moral dumbfounding.” You do an experiment where you present five scenarios to a subject and get their reaction. One of these scenarios describes a brother and sister Julie and Mark vacationing in the south of France. They have some wine, one thing leads to another, and they decide they want to have sex. They use two different kinds of contraception and enjoy it, but they decide not to do it again. How do people react to this, and what conclusions do you draw from their reaction?

JONATHAN HAIDT: People almost always start out by saying it’s wrong. Then they start to give reasons. The most common reasons involve genetic abnormalities or that it will somehow damage their relationship. But we say in the story that they use two forms of birth control, and we say in the story that they keep that night as a special secret and that it makes them even closer. So people seem to want to disregard certain facts about the story. When the experimenter points out these facts and says “Oh, well, sure, if they were going to have kids, that would cause problems, but they are using birth control, so would you say that it’s OK?” And people never say “Ooooh, right, I forgot about the birth control. So then it is OK.” Instead, they say, “Oh, yeah. Huh. Well, OK, let me think.” So what’s really clear, you can see it in the videotapes of the experiment, is: people give a reason. When that reason is stripped from them, they give another reason. When the new reason is stripped from them, they reach for another reason. And it’s only when they reach deep into their pocket for another reason, and come up empty-handed, that they enter the state we call “moral dumbfounding.” Because they fully expect to find reasons. They’re surprised when they don’t find reasons. And so in some of the videotapes you can see, they start laughing. But it’s not an “it’s so funny” laugh. It’s more of a nervous-embarrassment puzzled laugh. So it’s a cognitive state where you “know” that something is morally wrong, but you can’t find reasons to justify your belief. Instead of changing your mind about what’s wrong, you just say: “I don’t know, I can’t explain it. I just know it’s wrong.” So the fact that this state exists indicates that people hold beliefs separate from, or with no need of support from, the justifications that they give. Or another way of saying it is that the *knowing* that something is wrong and the *explaining* why are completely separate processes.

BLVR: Are the subjects satisfied when they reach this state of moral dumbfounding? Or do they find something deeply problematic about it?

JH: For some people it’s problematic. They’re clearly puzzled, they’re clearly reaching, and they seem a little





bit flustered. But other people are in a state that Scott Murphy, the honors student who conducted the experiment, calls “comfortably dumbfounded.” They say with full poise: “I don’t know; I can’t explain it; it’s just wrong.” Period. So we do know that there are big differences in people on a variable called “need for cognition.” Some people need to think about things, need to understand things, need to reason about things. Many of these people go to graduate school in philosophy. But most people, if they don’t have a reason for their moral judgments, they’re not particularly bothered.

BLVR: So your conclusion is that while we might *think* that Reason or reasons are playing a big causal role in how we arrive at moral judgments, it’s actually our intuitions—fueled by our emotions—that are doing most of the work. You say in your paper that reason is the press secretary of the emotions, the ex post facto spin doctor.

JH: Yes, that’s right.

BLVR: What do you mean by that, exactly?

JH: Reason is still a part of the process. It just doesn’t play the role that we think it does. We use reason, for example, to persuade someone to share our beliefs. There are different questions: there’s the psychological question of how you came by your beliefs. And then there’s the practical question of how you’re going to convince others to agree with you. Functionally, these two may have nothing to do with one another. If I believe that abortion is wrong, and I want to convince you that it’s wrong, there’s no reason I should recount to you my personal narrative of how I came to believe this. Rather, I should think up the best arguments I can come up with and give them to you. So I think the process is very much the same as what a press secretary does at a press conference. The press secretary might say that we need tax cuts because of the recession. Then, if a reporter points out to him that six months ago he said we needed tax cuts because of the surplus, can you imagine the press secretary saying: “Ohhhh, yeah, you’re *right*. Gosh, I guess that is contradictory.”

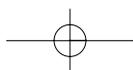
And then can you imagine that contradiction changing the policy?

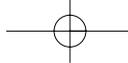
BLVR: I’m having a hard time doing that.

JH: Right. The president dispatches the press secretary, and the secretary’s job is basically to lie... to just make up a story. Should I take that back? No, I won’t take that back. The press secretary’s job is to be a *lawyer*. To argue for a position. And he doesn’t need to consult with the president about what the real reasons were for the instituting the policy. Those are irrelevant. He just needs to build the best case he can.

BLVR: You brought this up in your talk at Dartmouth, and I like the analogy. You said that when it comes to moral judgments, we think we’re scientists discovering the truth. But actually we’re lawyers arguing for positions we arrived at by other means. So, setting aside a few philosophy graduate students, do you think this is how our moral life works?

JH: For most people, most of the time, yes. There’s a question of the what you could call the ecological distribution of moral judgments. Now, by moral judgment I mean any time you have a sense that someone has done something good or bad. Think of how often you have that sense. If you live in a city and you drive, you probably have that sense many times a day. When I read the newspaper, I think unprintable thoughts, thoughts of anger. So I think moral judgment is ubiquitous. Not as ubiquitous as aesthetic judgments. As we walk around the world we see many beautiful and ugly things. But we don’t deliberate about them. We just see things as beautiful or ugly. My claim is that moral judgment is very much like aesthetic judgment. In fact, whenever I’m talking with philosophers who are trying to get me to clarify what I’m saying, if I ever feel confused, I just return to aesthetic judgment, and that saves me. I think whatever is true of aesthetic judgment is true of moral judgment, except that in our moral lives we do need to justify, whereas we don’t generally ask others for justifications of aesthetic judgments.





BLVR: So now where do these moral intuitions come from? I guess I'm looking to see if you think they're a product of evolution.

JH: Yes, I do. We're born into this world with a lot of guidance as to how to make our way. Our tongues come with various receptors that make us respond well to fruit and meat. Our bodies are designed to give us pleasure when we encounter fruit and meat. And to get displeasure from bitter sensations. So our bodies are designed to mesh with properties of the real world, the real *physical* world—to track nutrients and poisons. Similarly, our minds come equipped to feel pleasure and displeasure at patterns in the social world. When we see someone cheat someone else, we feel displeasure, dislike. And this dislike is a signal to us to avoid that person, to avoid trusting that person, cooperating with him. When we see a heroic act, or an act of self-sacrifice, or charity, we feel an emotion that I call moral elevation. We feel a warm, very pleasurable feeling that includes elements of love. We're much more likely to help such people, to trust them, and to want relationships with them. So just as our tongues guide us to good foods and away from bad foods, our minds guide us to good people, away from bad people.

BLVR: And to have these feelings was adaptive—they contributed to greater individual fitness—in the time we did most of our evolving?

JH: Yes. There are a couple of watersheds in human evolution. Most people are comfortable thinking about tool use and language use as watersheds. But the ability to play non-zero-sum games was another watershed. What set us apart from most or all of the other hominid species was our ultrasociality, our ability to be highly cooperative, even with strangers, people who are not at all related to us. Something about our minds enabled us to play this game. Individuals who could play it well succeeded and left more offspring. Individuals who could not form cooperative alliances, on average, died sooner and left fewer children. And so we are the descendants of the successful cooperators.

II. MAN IS AN ANIMAL SUSPENDED IN WEBS OF SIGNIFICANCE THAT HE HIMSELF HAS SPUN

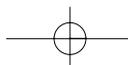
BLVR: I want to talk about the philosophical implications of your model for a moment. When I came across your work, I thought it provided a good deal of support for a position we can describe as moral skepticism. In particular, I thought the social intuitionist model makes plausible the claim that there is no such thing as objective moral truth, even though human beings *believe* that some of their moral judgments are objectively true.¹ But you don't draw skeptical conclusions from your findings, do you?

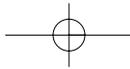
JH: For me it all hinges on the distinction made by David Wiggins between anthropocentric truths and nonanthropocentric truths. If anybody thinks that moral truths are going to be facts about the universe, that any rational creature on any planet would be bound by, then no such facts exist. I think that moral truths are like truths about beauty, truths about comedy. Some comedians really are funnier than others. Some people really are more beautiful than others. But these are true only because of the kinds of creatures we happen to be; the perceptual apparatus—apparati—that we happen to have. So moral facts emerge out of who we are in interaction with the people in our culture.

BLVR: So you would call those *truths*? Take someone like Drew Barrymore—some people find her fairly hot while other people don't see what the big deal is. You would say that there is some *truth* concerning what her aesthetic appeal really is?

JH: Well, apparently, if there's that much disagreement

¹ For those who are philosophically inclined, my thinking is as follows: We have moral intuitions. These intuitions were not selected for their ability to "track moral truth," nor were they even selected for their contributions to human happiness. They were selected, as you say, because they enabled individuals and their relatives to leave more offspring. At the same time, though, these intuitions lead us to *believe* that the truth of our moral judgments is "self-evident." (Think of the Declaration of Independence.) So to me it seems that JH's model lends decisive support to what philosophers call an error theory of morality—a theory that attributes widespread error to human beings about the status of moral claims.





about her, she must be somewhere in the middle. There's much less disagreement about Catherine Zeta-Jones and George Clooney. So they are more attractive than Drew Barrymore.

BLVR: So in other words, the way you determine the truth is by how much agreement there is?

JH: It's not that simple. But these are truths in which how people respond is the most important piece of evidence. You could never say that person X is really hot even though nobody thinks so. I think about it this way. One of my favorite quotes is from Max Weber: "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun." So I think that with morality, we build a castle in the air and then we live in it, but it is a real castle. It has no objective foundation, a foundation outside of our fantasy, but that's true about money; that's true about music; that's true about most of the things that we care about.

BLVR: So give me an example of some ethical truths in the limited sense that you're talking about.

JH: Let's see... you should value and repay those who are good to you. You should protect and care for those who you are superior to, in a dominant position to. You should not hurt people unless there's a very good reason to do so—where good reason means a moral reason, not just a reason advantageous to yourself.

BLVR: So let's take one of those: you should take care of those people who are in an inferior position to you—

JH: You have a position of authority over them... so you should take care of them.

BLVR: What makes that true?

JH: What makes that true... what makes that true... now I feel like I'm the subject of one of my own dumb-founding experiments.

BLVR: Well, that's what I'm wondering. Why isn't this

one of those cases?

JH: Nothing *makes* it true—it's a truth that grows out of who we are... what makes that true... See, I guess that's the wrong question. This is—I know that philosophers are very into justifications but... nothing makes it true.

BLVR: OK, but then how—

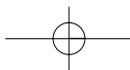
JH: Well, OK, let's see. Catherine Zeta-Jones is beautiful—what makes *that* true? Um, her... shape, I suppose.

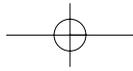
BLVR: But don't people think that there's a difference between moral truths and aesthetic truths? If someone doesn't find Catherine Zeta-Jones beautiful, for whatever reason, you don't necessarily think that he's *wrong*, do you?

JH: I might, actually.

BLVR: Most would think that maybe he just has different tastes. Maybe he likes blondes, he likes men, he hates Australians, or whatever. But now take a moral judgment like "it's wrong to torture people." If someone says, "no, it's not wrong at all... it's fun, actually, you should try it," you don't just think: to each his own. You think he's *wrong*, that he's made a mistake. And that's where you want justifications—you want to be able to convince people that they're wrong in a way that has nothing to do with their individual preferences on the matter.

JH: That's right, so we need justifications for our moral beliefs; we don't need them for our aesthetic beliefs. We can tolerate great diversity in our aesthetic beliefs, but we can't tolerate much diversity in our moral beliefs. We tend to split and dislike each other. I recently wrote a paper on moral diversity, addressing the fact that many people, especially in academic settings, think that diversity is a virtue in itself. Diversity is not a virtue. Diversity is a good only to the extent that it advances other virtues, justice or inclusiveness of others who have previously been excluded. But people are wrong when they say that everything should be more diverse, even, say, rock bands. It's an error, an overgeneralization. I'm





sorry—back to your question. And this relates to the distinction between moral pluralism and moral relativism. I subscribe to the former, not the latter.

BLVR: Talk about that for a moment. What's the difference?

JH: What I want to say is that there are at least four foundations of our moral sense, but there are many coherent moral systems that can be built on these four foundations. But not just *anything* can be built on these four foundations. So I believe that an evolutionary approach specifying the foundation of our moral sense can allow us to appreciate Hindu and Muslim cultures where women are veiled and seem to us to lead restricted lives. These are not necessarily oppressive and immoral cultures. Given that most of the world believes that gender role differences are good and right and proper, they are unlikely to be wrong, by which I mean, they are unlikely to be incoherent or ungrammatical moralities. We in America, especially liberals, use only two of these four bases. Liberals use intuitions about suffering (aversion to) and intuitions about reciprocity, fairness, and equality. But there are two other foundations—there are intuitions about hierarchy, respect, duty... that's one cluster. And intuitions about purity and pollution, which generate further intuitions about chastity and modesty. Most human cultures use all four of these bases to ground their moral worldviews. We in the West, in modern times especially, have to some extent discarded the last two. We have built our morality entirely on issues about harm (the first pillar), and rights, and justice (the second). Our morality is coherent. We can critique people who do things that violate it within our group. We can't critique cultures that use all four moralities. But we *can* critique cultures whose practices are simple exploitation and brutality, such as apartheid South Africa or the American slave South.

BLVR: OK, but *why* is it that we can critique apartheid South Africa whereas we can't critique a culture that uses genital mutilation where chastity and fidelity of females is considered a high virtue? What makes us able

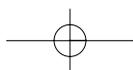
to do one and not the other?

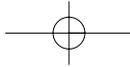
JH: You have to look at any cultural practice in terms of what goods it is aiming for. Veiling, or keeping women in the home, is usually aimed at goods of chastity and modesty. Not all human practices are aimed at moral goods. Sweatshops, child pornography, child slavery, the slavery of Africans in the American South—none of these is aimed at goods provided by any of the four foundations. These are just people hurting and exploiting others for their personal monetary benefit.

BLVR: Do you ever worry that you're doing what the subjects in your experiments do—attempting to justify a strong intuition against exploiting people, and then trying to come up with a reason why *that's* wrong, whereas maybe your intuition doesn't flash as powerfully against the veiling of women... I would think in your work that that's something you might be extremely sensitive to. How would you answer the charge that you're merely trying to come up with a reason why exploitation of different races is wrong, and veiling of women is not, without providing a sufficient basis for this judgment?

JH: That's an excellent question. Consistent with my theory, I must say that I never looked at the other side and considered whether I might be wrong in that way. We tend to think that we're right, and we're not good at coming up with reasons why we might be wrong. So, that's a great question to think about. Whether I am motivated to apologize for or justify some practices and not others. That said, I certainly don't think I'm motivated in that way... my first experiences in Muslim or Hindu cultures were emotionally negative, in seeing the treatment of women and the hierarchy. It took me a while to get over that. And to see that these practices offended my American sensibilities, but that I was being ethnocentric in that respect.

The women that I spoke to in India—while there was a diversity of opinion, most of them do not see it as American feminists see it; they did not see veiling as something imposed upon them, to oppress them, to deny them freedom. In contrast, most black slaves in the





American South were not happy about their position. And many slave owners knew that what they were doing was wrong, or at least they were ambivalent about it. Now you might say: well, maybe the women have been brainwashed? So there are two tests you can do. The first is to ask: do the people who appear from the outside to be victims endorse the moral goals of the practice? The second test is: how robust is this endorsement? Even when they learn about alternative ways in other cultures, do they still endorse it? So while you might have found black slaves in the South who were so brainwashed that they accepted their status, I believe that if they heard about other countries where blacks were not enslaved, they would not insist that blacks ought to be enslaved.

BLVR: OK, so then tracing it back to these four modules or bases on which moral systems are based. Because that's where you're going to provide your justification for whether we condemn other cultures or whether we can't...

JH: That's right, those are the four pillars in the air upon which we'll build our culture-specific moralities.

BLVR: These four pillars are a product of evolution. How do you respond to the age-old philosophical question that you can't derive an "ought" from an "is"? Darwinism gives us a *descriptive* story of why we might endorse things that come out of them. How do you get the claim "one *ought* to treat people below you kindly" out of this "don't harm people" module that's in place because of its contributions to biological fitness? That's the puzzle. Because when you do put your foot down and say that a culture ought not to act in a certain way, how are you getting that "ought" from a purely descriptive story about pillars of morality that evolved for nonmoral reasons?

JH: You keep asking me to provide some kind of external justification, to go outside the system. But when I'm within the game—

BLVR: Not external justification... even internal, I'm

just looking for any kind of justification.

JH: Well, from within the game, within our web of significance, it's wrong to hurt people.

III. DO LIBERALS HAVE AN IMPOVERISHED MORAL WORLDVIEW?

BLVR: Let's take a more concrete question. Gay marriage. You brought this up in your talk at Dartmouth and the one I saw at Duke. You say that conservatives in America employ all four of the modules, whereas liberals only employ two. You said that liberals have an *impoverished* moral worldview, and that conservatives somehow have a richer moral life. Now, I don't know if that's just a way to shock the liberal intelligentsia...

JH: No, I meant it, although I don't mind doing a bit of shocking.

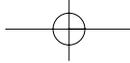
BLVR: You said that we as liberals have pared down our moral foundations to two modules, fairness and do-no-harm—whereas perfectly intelligent conservatives have all four modules.

JH: Exactly.

BLVR: So if you take gay marriage, and let's say we're not in Massachusetts, we're in Mississippi, and you have people who have the *intuition* that gay marriage is really wrong, it's *impure*. Because they have that purity module that liberals lack. Do you want to say that in that culture that gay marriage is really *wrong*?

JH: I think it depends on the kind of society you have. I'm glad that we have a diversity of societies in this world. And some societies become experts in lives of piety and sanctity and divinity. The four modules are not virtues themselves. Virtues come out of them. America is very much about individual happiness, the right to expression, self-determination. In America you do need to point to harm that befalls victims before you can limit someone else's rights. So I think





that gay marriage, while there's not necessarily an objective truth about whether gay marriage is right or wrong, when you look at the values and virtues that we hold dear in America, and you look at who is helped and harmed by legalizing gay marriage, if you start with a utilitarian analysis, so many people benefit from gay marriage and no one is directly harmed by gay marriage. So that in itself argues in favor of gay marriage. On the other hand, conservative morality looks not just at effects on individuals, but at the state of the social order. The fact that acts that violate certain parts of the Bible are tolerated is disturbing to conservatives even though they can't point to any direct harm. So I do understand the source of their opposition to it. And this is a difficult case, where it can't work out well for everyone. Somebody has to give. If we were in a Muslim country, or a Catholic country where much of social and moral life was regulated in accordance with the purity and hierarchy codes, then it would be very reasonable to ban gay marriage. But we are not in such a country. We are in a country where the consensus is that we grant rights to self-determination unless a limiting reason can be found. So in this case, I think conservatives have to give. It is *right* to legalize gay marriage.

BLVR: I want to make sure I understood that. If we were in the 1930s—I don't want to stereotype—but 1930s Alabama, there's a pretty safe one, maybe the modules of purity and tradition played more of a role then than they do now. Let's say you're the father of a man who wants to marry another man. You would feel comfortable saying to your son that it's wrong to marry—it's *wrong* for you do that...

JH: I do think that facts about the prevalence of homosexuality and the degree of repugnance to it are relevant. In the present case, 5 percent of people are gay. That's a lot of people. And in the present case, repugnance against homosexuality is not nearly as strong as it used to be. I think we are now at the point where we *ought* to legalize gay marriage, and some people just won't be happy about it. But now look at Justice Scalia's argument in opposing *Lawrence v. Texas*. Scalia's ar-

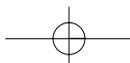
gument is very interesting. I think it's ultimately wrong, but wrong for an empirical reason. I'm paraphrasing: he said, "If we have to legalize sodomy, the next step will be incest and sex with animals." But I don't think that would be the next step. Five percent of people cannot live full happy lives if homosexuality is outlawed. If 5 percent of people could not live full happy lives without having sex with their siblings, or with sheep, then we'd have a difficult moral problem on our hands. But we don't. Very few people fall into either category. So legalizing homosexuality is not the first step on a slippery slope to legalizing everything.

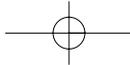
BLVR: OK, but getting back to my question, we're in 1930s Alabama. Five percent of the people are still gay, I imagine, but repugnance is *much* higher. Is it wrong then? Or maybe you think it's not a proper question.

JH: No, I think it's a very good question. The amount of shock and outrage would have been much greater then than it is now. Plus back then they didn't know the facts about homosexuality; they didn't know that it's caused by hormonal conditions in utero, it's not a choice. Now that we know these facts we're in a much better position than they were then. I don't know if that answers your question.

BLVR: Well, maybe it does. Correct me if I'm wrong. Maybe you want to say yes, in that case it probably would have been wrong. Maybe you want to say to your son: no, you ought not marry that man, or even carry on a relationship with him. *But* given that we're not in that situation now, that's changed. Is that not a fair analysis of what the implications of your theory are?

JH: Yes, I think so. Given that there's not an objective (nonanthropocentric) fact of the matter, and what makes our moral life so interesting is that any particular act can be justified or opposed by reference to a different constellation of these four modules, of these foundational intuitions, it really is a matter of argument, public discussion, triggering people's intuitions, and somehow or other the chips fall in a certain way. Sometimes, with time, they fall in a different way. Ten





years ago, or even three years ago, we never thought that we'd be this close to having gay marriage—we have it, actually.

IV. “EVERYONE IS MORALLY MOTIVATED”

BLVR: Let's continue with this culture war discussion. You tend to sound quite pessimistic about the state of affairs in America. What are the prospects of discussion between conservatives and liberals, given that conservatives make use of two modules—purity and hierarchy—that we liberals care little about? Are we speaking different languages? How can we get past this?

JH: First, it would help if liberals understood conservatives better. If I have a mission in life, it is to convince people that *everyone* is morally motivated—everyone except for psychopaths. Everyone else is morally motivated. Liberals need to understand that conservatives are motivated by more than greed and hatred. And Americans and George Bush in particular need to understand that even terrorists are pursuing moral goods. One of the most psychologically stupid things anyone ever said is that the 9/11 terrorists did this because they hate our freedom. That's just idiotic. Nobody says: “They're free over there. I hate that. I want to kill them.” They did this because they hate us, they're angry at us for *many* reasons, and terrorism and violence are “moral” actions, by which I don't mean morally *right*, I mean morally motivated.

BLVR: And at the same time you want liberals to understand that we didn't go into Iraq just for oil or Halliburton.

JH: Of course not. Bush is Manichean. He really believes that we are in a battle of good vs. evil. Now I think *strategically* that he led us into disaster. But I never believed for a moment that this was about oil.

BLVR: As an aside, I completely agree with you on this. Being in an academic environment, I'm very frustrated with how people view conservatives—as moral mon-

sters whose only goal is to pursue evil. It's a little like the prochoice, prolife debate, where the prochoice faction looks at the other side as though all they want to do is oppress women—

JH: Exactly, exactly. That's the press secretary at work; that's what he does. The press secretary doesn't just explain your actions in the best light. He strips away any *possible* moral motivation for the opponent. It's the same thing. Liberals want to understand conservatives as motivated only by greed and racism. They think that conservatives just want to hurt minorities and get money. And that completely misses the point.

BLVR: So what would the consequences be of everyone understanding that the other side is morally motivated? I guess we could just get down to the nuts and bolts of the issue at hand.

JH: We would become much more tolerant, and some compromise might be possible, for example, on gay marriage. Even though personally I would like to see it legalized everywhere, I think it would be a nice compromise if each state could decide whether to legalize it, and nobody was forced one way or the other by the Supreme Court. And then gay people who live in Alabama, if they wanted to get married, could go to Massachusetts.

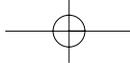
BLVR: So there are some nice social implications of your theory—if we can understand and apply it properly. I'm curious how your theory has affected you personally. There's a large element of self-deception that's involved in moral judgment, according to your model.

JH: That's right.

BLVR: So I'm curious how that's affected *you* in your day-to-day life. Are you more distrustful of moral judgments that you make? Do you find yourself questioning your own motives or beliefs, or do you not take your work home with you?

Continued on page 84, right column





death I suddenly felt that I had never thanked him enough for his tremendous and very altruistic favor. And then I see the name of Laurie Cunningham, the British winger who once played for Real Madrid whom I once interviewed on behalf of a girlfriend who knew nothing of soccer; he died in a car accident many years later. I see the names of Edouard de Andreis and Gilles Barbedette, my first editors in France, two charming and brilliant men who died within a day of each other, both at the end of long and harrowing illnesses. I also see names that don't make me particularly sad, though their place in my address book is something of a mystery to me. Philip and Jane Rylands from Venice, for example: I believe I visited them there sometime, though I cannot possibly say that I know them in any real sense. And then of course there are the telephone numbers of women I must have met some night in a bar, and whom I either never dared to call, or called but never succeeded in dating despite the promising telephone number that had been handed to me. Who were Suzanne Weldon and Caterina Visani, whose names I gaze at now? I couldn't possibly put a face to their names the way I can, for example, with Muriel Sieber and Mercedes Vivian, though I can't recall much more about them, either.

And then there I am, a name in my own address book, listed in the foreign countries I once lived in, attached to street names and telephone numbers I would have surely forgotten had I not written them down here. Via della Lupa 4, in Rome: that must have been 1975. Horton House, 666 Washington Street: Massachusetts, 1984, some twenty years ago. 22 Woodstock Road: Oxford, a much clearer memory.

Now, perhaps, you can understand why I have decided against updating my old address book: I think I'd rather stick with the one that I have, filled with demighosts and ancient history, more and more dog-eared and confusing with each passing day. Perhaps it is because there are so many things that recede from the mind without any effort at all that it seems somehow excessive to voluntarily eliminate the vestiges and echoes of people that were once present, and important in my life, distant as they may seem now. ★

Translated by Kristina Cordero

Jonathan Haidt, continued from page 79

JH: Well, for one thing, I am more tolerant of others. I was *much* more tolerant of Republicans and conservatives until the last two years. George Bush and his administration have got me so angry that I find my hard-won tolerance fast disappearing. I am now full of anger. And I find my press secretary drawing up the brief against Bush and his administration. So I can say that doing this work, coming up with this theory, has given me insight into what I'm doing. When I fulminate, my press secretary writes a brief against Bush. Once passions come into play, reason follows along. At least now I know that I'm doing it.

BLVR: But knowing that you're doing it, does that make you, in a calmer moment, concerning your disapproval of Bush or whoever, do you say to yourself: wait a minute, reason is the press secretary of my emotions—I now have reason to distrust this anger.

JH: I don't do that.

BLVR: Do you think you should?

JH: No. Because I don't think there's an objective truth of the matter.² Also, outrage is fun. Outrage is pleasurable. I'm enjoying my outrage.

BLVR: OK, then let's bring this back full circle. What do you think of Julie and Mark and their consensual sex in the south of France. Is it wrong?

JH: It's fine with me. Doesn't bother me in the least. Remember: I'm a liberal. So if it doesn't involve harm to someone, it's not a big deal to me. Liberals love to find victims, and incest cases are usually ones in which someone is being harmed. But that's the trick of the question. They're both adults, and it's consensual. So liberals have an especially hard time trying to justify why it's wrong. But I wrote the story, so I know the trick. ★

² Upon reflection a few months later, JH agreed that he should question his anger, and that his response here was a post hoc justification of his anger.

