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The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics And Religion

"A landmark contribution to humanity's understanding of itself."
—The New York Times Book Review

THE RIGHTEOUS
MIND

WHY GOOD
PEOPLE ARE DIVIDED
BY POLITICS AND
RELIGION



JONATHAN HAIDT



Synopsis

Why can't our political leaders work together as threats loom and problems mount? Why do people so readily assume the worst about the motives of their fellow citizens? In *The Righteous Mind*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt explores the origins of our divisions and points the way forward to mutual understanding. His starting point is moral intuition - the nearly instantaneous perceptions we all have about other people and the things they do. These intuitions feel like self-evident truths, making us righteously certain that those who see things differently are wrong. Haidt shows us how these intuitions differ across cultures, including the cultures of the political left and right. He blends his own research findings with those of anthropologists, historians, and other psychologists to draw a map of the moral domain, and he explains why conservatives can navigate that map more skillfully than can liberals. He then examines the origins of morality, overturning the view that evolution made us fundamentally selfish creatures. But rather than arguing that we are innately altruistic, he makes a more subtle claim - that we are fundamentally groupish. It is our groupishness, he explains, that leads to our greatest joys, our religious divisions, and our political affiliations. In a stunning final chapter on ideology and civility, Haidt shows what each side is right about, and why we need the insights of liberals, conservatives, and libertarians to flourish as a nation.

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Customer Reviews

I've read a lot of books in my life. Psychology, Poetry, Biology, Business Theory, Self-Help, Nutrition, Economics and so many other subjects are represented in my home library. *The Righteous*

Mind is hands-down the most important book I've ever consumed. Haidt's understanding of human morality and the science of communication and decision making are weaved together into an approachable, beautiful and potentially life changing symphony. Enough has been said about why you should read this book so I want to use the rest of this review to tell you exactly what I experienced after finishing this book and how it became "The most important thing I've ever read". I have struggled for years to communicate with some of my friends and family. So many words were wasted discussing politics, religion and conspiracy theories and all we ever accomplished was self-fulfillment. We never had resolution and we never succeeded in convincing the other side. I'm a person who considers myself well-read and a champion for pragmatism and logic. You can probably imagine how frustrated I felt when I was consistently unable to win arguments about out-there, government's coming for us-so buy some guns, conspiracy discussions. Something had to give, so I went searching and ended up on this book. I read it, digested it and decided to try and apply the principles to my communications. I was determined to "align with their elephant" first so I could then shift their mindset to my point of view. Let's be honest: I was just trying to manipulate other people into seeing things my way. Well, something incredible and completely unintentional happened: I realized I was wrong, a lot. One of the foundational pieces discussed in the book is the fact that we, as humans, make decisions in the parts of our brain that aren't subject to critical thinking. If you want to sway someone's opinion, Haidt suggests, you must first appeal to their elephant (the emotional part of their brain or "why they feel the way they do"). In the effort to start practicing this: I dedicated myself to asking "why do they believe this way?" first and only made suggestions after I felt that I could articulate what the other person was "feeling" about the subject. A crazy thing happened: many times I would find myself changing my mind about a subject mid conversation. As it turns out, other people aren't quite as crazy as I thought, they just have different experiences than I do. After I spent some time training my brain, I started to converse this way without any conscious effort. I actually seem to have re-wired my brain. The implication of this can't be overstated. I now see the world in completely different ways and I feel that I can actually empathize for the first time in my life. I only wish everyone could read this book, understand their natural decision making process and be aware of what's happening to them when they have disagreements or strong opinions on a subject. You need to read this book. Everyone does. To the author: Thank you, Jonathan, for giving your life to understanding us a little better and for taking the time to write it all down and pass these lessons onto the rest of us.

This book was stressful for me to read because I really wanted to keep not liking the people I don't

agree with. Challenge you to consider that those who do not agree with are not necessarily the devil. I will continue to refer to this in the future in my work as a therapist and minister.

Excellent read. Made me think about a lot of cultural and social factors I would never have considered. I lean toward "liberal" ideologies, but this book made me realize the value of a more diverse perspective for the survival of the human race and how my anti-religious viewpoints had incorporated "sacred" elements of their own. Subsequently, a few of my liberal views which I would not allow to be challenged in my own mind, I am now open to considering broader implications. In summary, this book moved a few of my black and white viewpoints back into the gray and was unexpectedly life changing for me.

The book reveals important understanding about how the human mind works. This is realism that could help to make our world better: Appearance is usually far more important than reality for most of us. We care so much about what people think about our moral opinions. Therefore, our social environment forms our moral. If you belong to a clan, you obey and feel it is right to obey the clan's moral. If you are a western liberal, you tend to follow a set of moral shared values that you believe is right and don't question. You judge the world around you based on those values. We are guided by intuition and then use reason to justify our values! Tests and research by cognitive scientists indicate that conscious reasoning is carried out largely for the purpose of persuasion, rather than discovery! Well, we seem to be hypocrites most of us! Or to be less cynic - moral values binds us together in a society. But moral values appear to be human inventions that have evolved through our history. Moral values are shaped by cultures (in the view of Durkheim). Haidt has a very deterministic view of how genes and evolution determine our behavior and values. But epigenetic science also indicates that genes can change as a cause of our behavior and lifestyle. Our will change how we develop. The famous study of how the hippocampus part of the brain increases in size when people become taxi drivers in London reveals that. The individual has decided to become a taxi driver, and as a consequence the part of the brain that deals with orientation increase up to 60%. This is a result of an individual's decision to become a taxi driver, not genes! A very interesting part of the book is the role of religion, and Haidt attacks the new atheists, like Richard Dawkins. Religion is not just a stupid belief in life after death and a commanding God. It is rather a manifestation of our human longing to be a part of and explain our relation to a community and the universe. A religious community also shares a set of norms, relationship, and institutions that can promote trust that is helpful for business. While religious influence has weakened in the western

world, Haidt describes how politics in US has become more polarized. Politicians and people in general are encouraged to not socialize with groups of opposite or different opinions. This means less opportunity to understand the opposite or diverging point of view. Opinions you don't agree with or hurt your feeling may be called hate speech. People put a censorship wall around their minds. It could lead us towards anomie, a less cohesive and tolerant society, back to tribalism.

I'm using this book for a Political Reporting class. It's very provocative and useful for those of us trying to figure out what's happening in American politics. Haidt offers a remarkable amount of scholarship coupled with good writing to attempt to explain some of the puzzles about why people choose candidates. Newer research seems to say it also helps explain even why people choose to live where they do.

Every active citizen in the US should read this book. You will better understand what's happening with your friends and coworkers on the other side of the political divide, and, just as importantly, what's going on with you. A little self-awareness and understanding that everyone is working based on their own strongly-felt reality can help us get through this mess.

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