

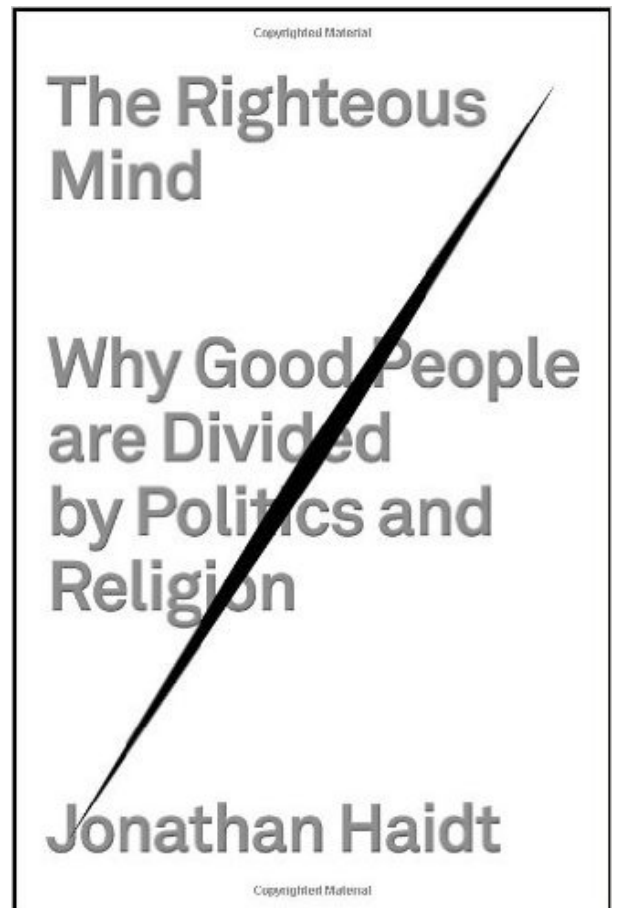
How to discuss politics calmly with anyone



It is possible to discuss politics (and religion) without starting a fight, when we understand how it is possible to heal social rifts with moral psychology.

“Happiness comes from between. It comes from getting the right relationship between yourself and others, yourself and your work, and yourself and something larger than yourself.”
– Jonathan Haidt

If you're concerned about discussing politics over the holidays following this year's presidential election, you're not alone. When conversations about politics and religion come up, things can get quite touchy—but there is a way you can still stay calm and carry on a respectful conversation.



Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt asks the excellent question in his book, [The Righteous Mind](#), “Why do good people get divided by politics and religion?”

One thing that moral psychologists do is to take a look scientifically at answering the question, “What does it take to be a moral person?” You might think this would simply be a matter of knowing the difference between good and bad. And of course, it is. But how can we determine the simple difference between good and bad? How do people do that? Why is it that amongst cultures in the world some people’s idea of what’s good and bad are so very different than someone else’s? Yet overall, the things that help us decide whether something is good or bad are very similar.

Why is it that liberals and conservatives, in times of political elections, can get so upset to the point that they have trouble seeing straight, let alone finding common ground, when they really are smart people with good hearts? How can

that be?

These are the questions that moral psychologists seek to answer. By asking really difficult questions that were extremely uncomfortable for the people being asked those questions, moral psychologists such as Jonathan Haidt, have been able to determine “the five taste buds of morality.” And these five taste buds that form the basis for Moral Foundation Theory are extremely interesting:

Care versus Harm;
Fairness versus Cheating;
Liberty versus Oppression;
Loyalty versus Betrayal;
Authority versus Subversion; and
Sanctity versus Degradation.

These five are a bit similar to taste bud senses of like: savory, salty, sweet, sour, and bitter—except these are moral tastes.

In general, people who are strong in exhibiting conservative traits care just a little bit less than liberals about things like Care versus Harm and Fairness versus Cheating, but they care a whole lot more about Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity. When you start thinking about things in this way, you can begin to bridge the gap that sometimes develops between people who are quite conservative or quite liberal.

Another big idea from [The Righteous Mind](#) is that when people come to a decision about something, like whether they are conservative or liberal, or how they feel about a certain contentious subject, they will tend to make decisions first and foremost not from their heads, but from their intuitive-emotional body, which often doesn't necessarily know why it's leaning one way or another. Jonathan Haidt describes this with a metaphor of a person riding an elephant. The elephant has a tendency to want to go one way or the other, and the person riding the elephant—the rational mind—then comes up with

reasons why this may or may not be a good idea.

Follow the Sacredness

Many of us are wondering what we can do this holiday season to keep peace in our family and at home.

Something we can do whenever noticing differences of feelings and opinions is to do what Jonathan Haidt calls: "Follow the Sacredness."

What that means is, look for that relationship between someone and something bigger than themselves. And keep an open heart and an open mind when you're looking for this, so that you can better empathize, and get a little glimpse of what's going on with the moral foundations within that group. Maybe they're not only looking at Care versus Harm and Fairness versus Cheating, but maybe they're looking at a lot more. And maybe these things matter a great deal to them. By following the sacredness, it makes it easier for all of us to appreciate and truly "get" what makes somebody else tick. What it is that they're living for that is larger than themselves.

I hope this is helpful for you, and I invite you to keep asking "How good can it get?"

Cynthia Sue Larson is the best-selling author of six books, including Quantum Jumps. Cynthia has a degree in Physics from UC Berkeley, and discusses consciousness and quantum physics on numerous shows including the History Channel, Coast to Coast AM, the BBC and One World with Deepak Chopra and on the Living the Quantum Dream show she hosts. You can subscribe to Cynthia's free monthly ezine at: <https://www.RealityShifters.com>
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