**The Righteous Mind – Jonathan Haidt - Notes Week 3**

**Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? Page 323**

In the 1980s, when scientists began analyzing large databases that allowed them to compare identical twins (who share all of their genes, plus, usually, their prenatal and childhood environments) to same-sex fraternal twins (who share half of their genes, plus their prenatal and childhood environments), they found that the identical twins were more similar on just about everything.

We’re not just talking about IQ, mental illness, and basic personality traits such as shyness. We’re talking about the degree to which you like jazz, spicy foods, and abstract art; your likelihood of getting a divorce or dying in a car crash; your degree of religiosity, and your political orientation as an adult. Whether you end up on the right or the left of the political spectrum turns out to be just as heritable as most other traits: genetics explains between a third and a half of the variability among people on their political attitudes.

…

One study found that women who called themselves liberals as adults had been rated by their nursery school teachers as having traits consistent with threat insensitivity and novelty-seeking. Future liberals were described as being more curious, verbal, and self-reliant, but also more assertive and aggressive, less obedient and neat.

…

So if we could observe our fraternal twins in their first years of schooling, we’d find teachers responding differently to them. Some teachers might be drawn to the creative but rebellious little girl; others would crack down on her as an unruly brat, while praising her brother as a model student.

But dispositional traits are just the lowest of the three levels, according to McAdams. The second level is our “characteristic adaptations.” These are traits that emerge as we grow. They are called adaptations because people develop them in response to the specific environments and challenges that they happen to face. For example, let’s follow our twins into adolescence, and let’s suppose they attend a fairly strict and well-ordered school. The brother fits in well, but the sister engages in constant battles with the teachers. She becomes angry and socially disengaged. These are now parts of her personality—her characteristic adaptations—but they would not have developed had she gone to a more progressive and less structured school.

By the time they reach high school and begin to take an interest in politics, the two siblings have chosen different activities (the sister joins the debate team in part for the opportunity to travel; the brother gets more involved with his family’s church) and amassed different friends (the sister joins the goths; the brother joins the jocks). The sister chooses to go to college in New York City, where she majors in Latin American studies and finds her calling as an advocate for the children of illegal immigrants. Because her social circle is entirely composed of liberals, she is enmeshed in a moral matrix based primarily on the Care/ harm foundation. In 2008, she is electrified by Barack Obama’s concern for the poor and his promise of change. The brother, in contrast, has no interest in moving far away to a big, dirty, and threatening city. He chooses to stay close to family and friends by attending the local branch of the state university. He earns a degree in business and then works for a local bank, gradually rising to a high position. He becomes a pillar of his church and his community, the sort of person that Putnam and Campbell praised for generating large amounts of social capital. The moral matrices that surround him are based on all six foundations. There is occasional talk in church sermons of helping victims of oppression, but the most common moral themes in his life are personal responsibility (based on the Fairness foundation—not being a free rider or a burden on others) and loyalty to the many groups and teams to which he belongs. He resonates to John McCain’s campaign slogan, “Country First.”

By the time they reach adulthood they have become very different people whose one point of political agreement is that they must not talk about politics when the sister comes home for the holidays.

What experiences in your life helped shape your perspective of the world?

Consider a loved one with a differing political perspective. Which experiences might have molded their views?

What would the world miss if your loved one’s perspective were not honored?



Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 328 · Location 4701

When asked to account for the development of their own religious faith and moral beliefs, conservatives underscored deep feelings about respect for authority, allegiance to one’s group, and purity of the self, whereas liberals emphasized their deep feelings regarding human suffering and social fairness.

Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 330 · Location 4725

Each narrative, he says, identifies a beginning (“ once upon a time”), a middle (in which a threat or challenge arises), and an end (in which a resolution is achieved). Each narrative is designed to orient listeners morally—to draw their attention to a set of virtues and vices, or good and evil forces—and to impart lessons about what must be done now to protect, recover, or attain the sacred core of the vision.

Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 330 · Location 4728

One such narrative, which Smith calls the “liberal progress narrative,” organizes much of the moral matrix of the American academic left. It goes like this: Once upon a time, the vast majority of human persons suffered in societies and social institutions that were unjust, unhealthy, repressive, and oppressive. These traditional societies were reprehensible because of their deep-rooted inequality, exploitation, and irrational traditionalism.… But the noble human aspiration for autonomy, equality, and prosperity struggled mightily against the forces of misery and oppression, and eventually succeeded in establishing modern, liberal, democratic, capitalist, welfare societies. While modern social conditions hold the potential to maximize the individual freedom and pleasure of all, there is much work to be done to dismantle the powerful vestiges of inequality, exploitation, and repression. This struggle for the good society in which individuals are equal and free to pursue their self-defined happiness is the one mission truly worth dedicating one’s life to achieving. 28

Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 331 · Location 4743

In this narrative, Fairness is political equality (which is part of opposing oppression); there are only oblique hints of Fairness as proportionality. 29 Authority is mentioned only as an evil, and there is no mention of Loyalty or Sanctity.

Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 332 · Location 4747

Reagan defeated Democrat Jimmy Carter in 1980, a time when Americans were being held hostage in Iran, the inflation rate was over 10 percent, and America’s cities, industries, and self-confidence were declining. The Reagan narrative goes like this: Once upon a time, America was a shining beacon. Then liberals came along and erected an enormous federal bureaucracy that handcuffed the invisible hand of the free market. They subverted our traditional American values and opposed God and faith at every step of the way.… Instead of requiring that people work for a living, they siphoned money from hardworking Americans and gave it to Cadillac-driving drug addicts and welfare queens. Instead of punishing criminals, they tried to “understand” them. Instead of worrying about the victims of crime, they worried about the rights of criminals.… Instead of adhering to traditional American values of family, fidelity, and personal responsibility, they preached promiscuity, premarital sex, and the gay lifestyle … and they encouraged a feminist agenda that undermined traditional family roles.… Instead of projecting strength to those who would do evil around the world, they cut military budgets, disrespected our soldiers in uniform, burned our flag, and chose negotiation and multilateralism.… Then Americans decided to take their country back from those who sought to undermine it. 30

Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 333 · Location 4761

This too is a heroic narrative, but it’s a heroism of defense. It’s less suited to being turned into a major motion picture. Rather than the visually striking image of crowds storming the Bastille and freeing the prisoners, this narrative looks more like a family reclaiming its home from termites and then repairing the joists.

Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 333 · Location 4763

The Reagan narrative is also visibly conservative in that it relies for its moral force on at least five of the six moral foundations. There’s only a hint of Care (for the victims of crime), but there are very clear references to Liberty (as freedom from government constraint), Fairness (as proportionality: taking money from those who work hard and giving it to welfare queens), Loyalty (soldiers and the flag), Authority (subversion of the family and of traditions), and Sanctity (replacing God with the celebration of promiscuity).

Can’t We All Disagree More Constructively? > Page 334 · Location 4773

But when liberals try to understand the Reagan narrative, they have a harder time. When I speak to liberal audiences about the three “binding” foundations—Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity—I find that many in the audience don’t just fail to resonate; they actively reject these concerns as immoral. Loyalty to a group shrinks the moral circle; it is the basis of racism and exclusion, they say. Authority is oppression. Sanctity is religious mumbo-jumbo whose only function is to suppress female sexuality and justify homophobia.