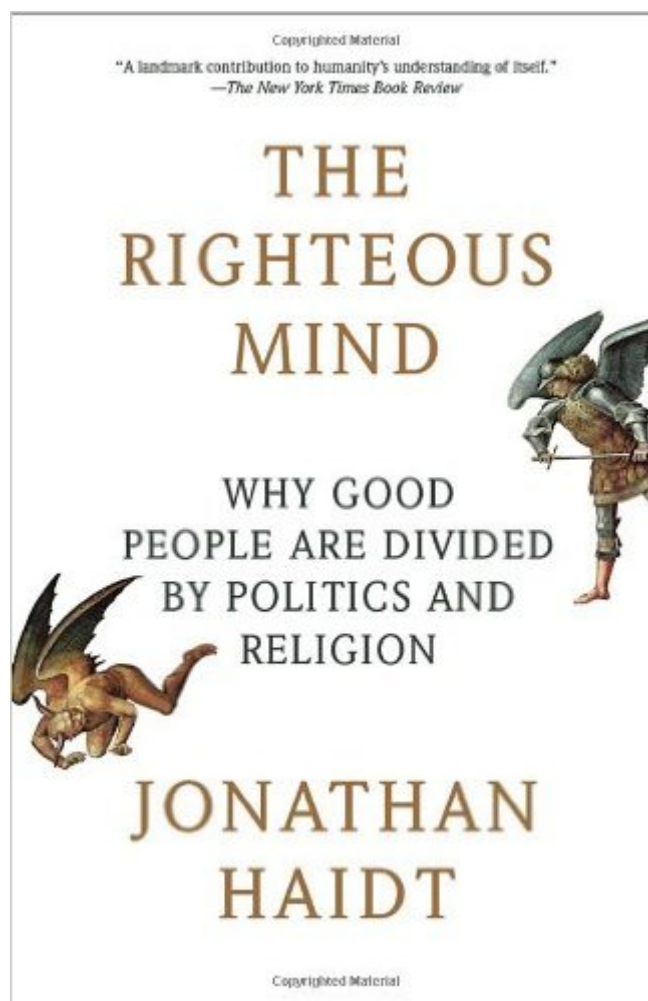


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# The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided By Politics And Religion



## Synopsis

As America descends deeper into polarization and paralysis, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has done the seemingly impossible—challenged conventional thinking about morality, politics, and religion in a way that speaks to everyone on the political spectrum. Drawing on his twenty five years of groundbreaking research on moral psychology, he shows how moral judgments arise not from reason but from gut feelings. He shows why liberals, conservatives, and libertarians have such different intuitions about right and wrong, and he shows why each side is actually right about many of its central concerns. In this subtle yet accessible book, Haidt gives you the key to understanding the miracle of human cooperation, as well as the curse of our eternal divisions and conflicts. If you're ready to trade in anger for understanding, read *The Righteous Mind*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I do not exaggerate when I say this is one of the best (nonfiction) books I've read this year. Haidt is a great writer, and has a real knack for explaining a wide variety of things with clarity and wit. Here, Haidt is concerned to walk us through the world of morality and politics, explaining some of the reasons why very smart and good people disagree on such things as the value of equality, authority, tradition, and other thorny topics. In 2006, Haidt wrote *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, part of whose thesis was that cognition is primarily based in emotion, with reason coming in after the fact, most often to justify what has already been 'decided' on. Section 1 of this book (one of whose chapters is titled "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail, also the title of an earlier article by Haidt) picks up where Haidt's previous book left off. There is

evidence from neuroscience (Who's in Charge?: Free Will and the Science of the Brain, behavioral psychology Simple Heuristics That Make Us Smart, and other areas (

Published at the perfect time in American politics, *The Righteous Mind* belongs next to other scientific gems by Pinker (*The Blank Slate*), Sagan (*The Demon Haunted World*), Wright (*The Moral Animal*), Ariely (*Predictably Irrational*), and Wilson (*Strangers to Ourselves*). The main thesis is morality tends to operate by initial, intuitive reactions and only then do people respond with post-hoc strategic justifications. This seemingly small idea alters dominant theory and research on moral psychology. Why should you read this particular book?<sup>1</sup> Haidt does not try to persuade you with a smattering of self-selected studies. He carefully walks the reader through multiple philosophical traditions and quite an impressive body of research spanning ethology, behavioral economics, neurobiology, and psychology. The descriptions of these studies are stimulating and everything is in the service of setting up a revised conceptual model of morality. I love the fact that he wants to neutralize the readers natural defenses (reflexive mental processes outside of conscious awareness). Thus, he does not offer a definition of morality until p. 274. This is one example of Haidt's careful structuring of topics, examples, and data. There appears to be a motive for every decision. Something that is far too rare in a culture where speedy presentation and publication is the norm.<sup>2</sup> Haidt's personal journey, involving several changes in moral beliefs, is a secondary storyline. By presenting his own biases, the reader is able to focus on the persuasiveness of his arguments. Again, this is all in the service of reducing defensive reactions in readers and I believe it works quite well.<sup>3</sup> There is a perfect blending of philosophy and science.

I was first introduced to the striking findings of Dr. Jonathan Haidt's research when I heard him speak at a conference on ethics and human research. The combination of his engaging speaking style married to hard data from his psychology experiments was impressive, as was his ability to constructively engage both the liberal and conservative members of the audience. I was intrigued enough to read the book-length version of the lecture, and I was greatly rewarded. Haidt shows how our minds have evolved to make us prone righteous disagreement. He hopes that a better understanding of our predisposition to take uncompromising moral stands can be a starting point to reverse the increased contentiousness of our politics. Reading Haidt's "*The Righteous Mind*" was in some ways like taking a college survey course in moral psychology. In particular, the early chapters take a reader through the controversies and the limitation of prior attempts to study the psychological underpinnings of why we think the way we do. Experiments in psychology are

accessible and illuminating in ways that other fields can only envy, and Haidt's book is full of absorbing descriptions of the research. Throughout, this book is highly data-driven (it concludes with nineteen pages of references to the scientific literature). What sets it apart is Haidt's ability to weave into the science both his own research and his evolving understanding of his personal moral frameworks. This human element makes the book both accessible and engrossing. Haidt wraps each section of the book around a "central metaphor" and then demonstrates the fascinating studies that validate that metaphor. Section 1: Central metaphor - Our minds are like a rider on the back of an elephant.

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