

Moral Choices X

Making the choices? Are we simply moral midgets at heart?

[Reflections based on J Haidt The Righteous Mind]

The moral psychology researchers concluded after experimenting that our mental rider [intellect and reason] has to work overtime to get our moral elephant [our emotions] to change. We seldom change our opinion by reason alone. Our choices can be changed, however when we are placed into the context of others who are admired, and for whom we hold affection. In the desire to please the other person, our elephant tends to lean toward friends, and is easily steered by the mere presence of other friendly elephants. This is called “social persuasion” and because humans have a certain “herd” mentality, we tend to want to associate with people who are friendly. When we encounter hostility the odds of change are slight. Our emotional elephant leans away from opponents and our intellect [the rider] works frantically to rebut the opponent’s charges. Now for many modern Americans the only basis for morality is “harm and fairness” and those who base their morality on these foundations, tend to lean in the same direction. When any other basis for morality is injected into the conversation, it is perceived as an opponent and we automatically lean away from it. Thus when we find ourselves confronted by someone whose morality is responding to a different set of moral foundations, we tend to lean away from them, dismiss them and actively oppose them. Most educated Americans have limited the moral realm to “fairness and prevention of harm;” this is an ethic based on autonomy independence and individualism. When we encounter a more community based morality or one based on religious principles we sense an opponent and our elephant leans away. But truth to tell, from the standpoint of history, and most other cultures on this earth, we are simply morally midgets.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry