

# Moral Choices XI

## After the “Enlightenment” did we in the West lose the moral compass?

### [Reflections based on J Haidt The Righteous Mind]

Historically in the West since the “enlightenment” we have made morality a function of our minds and intellect. As such we have reduced the moral palate to the concern about fairness or harming others. However historically and in other non-western cultures there are other foundations, which guide moral decisions. These include loyalty, authority and sanctity. Recall that I am basing these observations on Haidt’s book on morality. In the book he describes a visit to a remote village in India where he did research. As a typical Western man he was confused at the way he was treated: He was given a servant, and told not to thank the man – it was merely his duty. Served dinner by silent women, only men ate, and the women ate in the kitchen, which seemed “unfair” to him. People bathed and cooked with visibly polluted water, which was held by the locals to be “sacred”. In other words; a sex-segregated, hierarchically stratified and devoutly religious society. But for him the kicker was that he “liked these people.” They were kind to him and open with him and he found that his elephant was leaning toward them as he continued to associate with them, even though he did not understand the basis for their moral behavior. He wrote “My elephant leaned toward them; rather than automatically rejecting the men as sexist oppressors and pitying the women, children, and servants as helpless victims, I began to see a moral world in which families, not individuals are the basic unit of society, and the members of each extended family [including its servants] are intensely interdependent. In this world equality and personal autonomy were not sacred values. Honoring elders, gods and guests, protecting subordinates and fulfilling one’s role-based duties were more important.” Clearly this was not America of 2012.

**IHM Pray for us.**

*Fr. Jerry*