

## Moral Choices XIII

**What are these “Liberals” and “Conservatives”? And what do they value?**

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

In order to help understand and intelligently talk about the disconnect that arises from the collision between people who base their morality on different foundations; it is convenient to label the two opposing groups in the conventional way of politics, namely conservatives and liberals. It is understood that these labels are often unhelpful, but in order to understand why there is such a disconnect in our society I use these conventional labels as short hand. Last week I wrote about the first three foundations of morality, namely Care/Harm, Liberty/Oppression and Fairness/Cheating. These are three of six moral foundations, and these three are pretty much shared by all people, with some variations of interpretation. The remaining three foundations Haidt describes are “Loyalty/Betrayal, Authority/Subversion, and Sanctity/Degradation” and these show the biggest and most consistent partisan differences. Liberals tend to be ambivalent toward them at best, but social conservatives embrace them. However even though Conservative morality rests on all six foundations, Haidt concluded that they are more willing than liberals to sacrifice Care and let some people get hurt in order to achieve their many other moral objectives. You may recall that some weeks ago I wrote about how Haidt uncovered the last three moral foundations. He had lived in rural India in a much more communitarian society, he encountered` people with strong values of piety [who believed the polluted water of the local river were “sacred”] and with a strong sense of loyalty [the women and children seemed to be oppressed by the males and rulers, although they denied that]. Having suspended his initial discomfort, he found that these people were operating out of a moral foundation that was considerably more flexible and “larger” than his Western educated liberal bias.

**IHM Pray for us.**

*Fr. Jerry*