

# Moral Choices VI

## The intellect struggles to find a “reason” for the feelings

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

Haidt found that the human mind is divided into two parts, which he described using the metaphor of a rider on an elephant. The rider can sometimes control the elephant, but the elephant tends to go where he will and at the speed he chooses. The mind is like that: the emotions are the elephant, and our responses to moral questions are first of all based on our emotions. The rider is the intellect. If the emotional response is questioned, the intellect must find a justification to either sustain the direction set by the elephant or to change direction. Think about the man who ate the chicken after having sex with it: it raises disgust, and that is universal. But when the rider [the intellect] comes into play, if the only basis for moral justification is “harm and fairness” the rider can set aside those feelings in favor of an intellectual justification “it didn’t harm anyone else.” If the rider sustains the disgust by appealing to other moral foundations, such as “purity,” the rider maintains the emotional response. In both cases the rider [intellect] serves the elephant [emotions]. When morally dumbfounded, having a strong gut reaction, the intellect struggles to find a “reason” for the feelings. People don’t “figure out” the truth; they react and then seek to justify their reactions. Therefore in order to change someone’s mind when talking about a politically or religiously charged issue, “talk to the elephant.” If you ask someone to believe something that violates their intuition [their emotional response] they will devote their efforts to find an escape hatch: a reason to doubt your argument or conclusion. They will almost always succeed.

**IHM Pray for us.**

*Fr. Jerry*