The Jewish Art of Constructive Disagreement: Why it is so difficult, and necessary

Jonathan Haidt
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“Religiously observant Americans are better neighbors and better citizens than secular Americans—they are more generous with their time and money, especially in helping the needy, and they are more active in community life.”
Affective polarization

Warmth toward OWN party

Warmth toward OTHER party

Source: ANES, and Marc Hetherington, Vanderbilt U.
The Righteous Mind
Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion

Jonathan Haidt
Moral Psychology

A) Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second

B) There are 6 intuitive foundations of morality

C) Morality binds and blinds
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Plato: Reason is the Master

Reason can and should rule over the passions
Hume: Reason is the servant

“Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”
Motivated Reasoning

If we WANT to believe X, we ask: “Can-I-Believe-It?”

If we DON’T want to, we ask: “Must-I-Believe-It?”
Implications for Constructive Disagreement

1) As passions rise on both sides, so does motivated reasoning. We now have “post truth politics”

2) You must speak to the other’s emotions and intuitions first: build trust, reduce motivated reasoning. (Small groups are ideal)
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1. Care/harm
Care & Compassion are big at leftist events
2. Fairness/cheating
The left often sees fairness as equality, linked to compassion.
The right sees fairness as proportionality

No free riders, slackers, cheaters.

The law of Karma
3. Liberty/oppression
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On the left: the 1% and corporations are the oppressor.
On the right: Govt. is the bully, oppressor

Constraint triggers reactance: angry resistance
4. Loyalty/betrayal
5. Authority/subversion
5. Authority/subversion
6. Sanctity/degradation
Welcome to YourMorals.org, where you can learn about your own moral beliefs and/or values, while also contributing to scientific research. We are a group of professors and graduate students in social psychology at the University of California (Irvine), and the University of Southern California. (Find us here.)

Our goal is to understand the way our "moral minds" work. Why do people disagree so passionately about what is right? Why, in particular, is there so much hostility and incomprehension between members of different political parties? By filling out a few of our surveys, you'll help us answer those questions. We’ll give you an immediate report on how you scored on each study, and we’ll show you how your responses compare to others and what your friends might say about you.
The Left-Right Divide

Care
Fairness (proportionality)
Liberty (economic)
Authority
Sanctity
Loyalty

n=3,764
YourMorals.org
Implications for Constructive Disagreement

Pesach Jews V. Purim Jews: The Agony of our Dilemma

05.03.2013, by Yossi Klein Halevi

By YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI
Jewish history speaks to our generation in the voice of two biblical commands to remember.
The first voice commands us to remember that we were strangers in the land of Egypt, and the message of that command is: Don’t be brutal.
The second voice commands us to remember how the tribe of Amalek attacked us without provocation while we were wandering in the desert, and the message of that command is: Don’t be naive.
The first command is the voice of Passover, of liberation; the second is the voice of Purim, commemorating our victory over the genocidal threat of Haman, a descendant of Amalek.

“Passover Jews” are motivated by empathy with the oppressed; “Purim Jews” are motivated by alertness to threat. Both are essential; one without the other creates an unbalanced Jewish personality, a distortion of Jewish history and values.
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Large scale cooperation
Large scale cooperation
We circle around sacred objects & principles
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Circling around shared values creates a moral electromagnet
Manichaeism: the world is an eternal battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light
Heretics, Traitors, Apostates
Implications for Constructive Disagreement

Our politics is becoming more tribal, more passionate, more like (fundamentalist) religion...

Our religious community is becoming more tribal, more passionate, more like (hyper-partisan) politics

This is very dangerous for Jews everywhere....
But: Jews should be great at constructive disagreement!

1) We understand the NECESSITY of disagreement and argument to find truth, maturity, and wisdom
“He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion...”

--J.S. Mill, 1859
Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Bava Metzia 84a

Rabbi Yohanan: “In my discussions with Reish Lakish, when I would state a matter, he would raise twenty-four difficulties against me in an attempt to disprove my claim, and I would answer him with twenty-four answers, and the law by itself would become broadened and clarified. And yet you say to me: ‘There is a ruling . . . that supports your opinion.’ Do I not know that what I say is good? Being rebutted by Reish Lakish served a purpose; your bringing proof to my statements does not.”
Jews should be great at constructive disagreement!

2) We can handle contradiction, paradox, and uncertainty
Tosefta Sotah 7:12

A person might think 'since the house of Shammai declares [something] ritually impure and the house of Hillel declares it pure... how then can I learn Torah?" ... [But] all the words have been given by a single Shepherd. One God creates them... the Lord of all deeds blessed be He has spoken them.
A person might think 'since the house of Shammai declares [something] ritually impure and the house of Hillel declares it pure... how then can I learn Torah?"" ... [But] all the words have been given by a single Shepherd. One God creates them... the Lord of all deeds blessed be He has spoken them. So make yourself a heart of many chambers. Bring into it the words of the house of Shammai and the words of the house of Hillel, the words of those who declare “impure” and the words of those who declare “pure.”
Jews should be great at constructive disagreement!

3) We understand the value of humility and generosity of spirit
Ben Zoma says: Who is the wise one? He who learns from all men, as it says, "I have acquired understanding from all my teachers" (Psalms 119:99). Who is the mighty one? He who conquers his impulse, as it says, "slowness to anger is better than a mighty person and the ruler of his spirit than the conqueror of a city." (Proverbs 16:32).
One of the great challenges to Israel’s democracy today is not from the so-called “religious” parties but from the right. By the “right,” I do not mean the political Right, but those who are certain that they are right, and in no need of voices of dissent.
From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled, like a yard.

But doubts and loves dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.

And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined house once stood.
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Why?

The top 10 reasons American politics are so broken

By Jonathan Haidt and Sam Abrams  January 7, 2015
1) **Party realignment** and purification, 1964-1992
2) **Mass sorting** of lib vs. con voters, by 1990s
3) **Changes in Congress**, 1995—death of friendships
4) **Media fractionation (1980s)** then **Internet (1990s)**
5) **Residential homogeneity**, urban v. rural, 1990s
6) **End of the cold war**, loss of common enemy, 1990s
7) **Increasing immigration** and racial diversity, 1990s
8) **Increasing role of money**, negative advertising, 2000s
9) **Generational changing** of the guard, 1990s
10) **Increasing education**, since 1970s
Welcome

We are a politically diverse group of social scientists, natural scientists, and other scholars who want to improve our academic disciplines and universities. We share a concern about a growing problem: the loss or lack of "voice" in universities. When nearly everyone in a field shares the same political orientation, orthodoxy, dissent is discouraged, and errors can go unchallenged. To reverse this process, we have come together to advocate for a more diverse and heterodox academy.
The Viewpoint Diversity Experience:

Step 1: Understand the value of viewpoint diversity. Begin by learning about the advantages of having your beliefs challenged, and of discovering that you may have been wrong about something.

Step 2: Cultivate humility and open-mindedness. Read short quotations from wise thinkers—East and West—that will help you attain a mindset of humility and openness.

Step 3: Look inside the mind. Learn a little bit of psychology to see the tricks the mind plays on us, making us all prone to be self-righteous, overconfident, and quick to demonize “the other side.”

Step 4: Understand the moral matrix. Learn how each team or tribe builds a comprehensive worldview that can explain everything while making it harder for its members to think for themselves.

Step 5: Venture beyond your moral matrix. Step outside your own moral matrix by exploring the mindset, perspective, and principles of progressives, conservatives, and libertarians.

Step 6: Prepare for political conversations. Practice some skills—such as moral reframing, acknowledgement, and perspective taking—that will help you to talk, work, and engage productively with people whose politics and values differ from yours.
If you want the truth to stand clear before you, never be for or against. The struggle between "for" and "against" is the mind's worst disease.

--Sent-ts’an, c. 700 C.E.
In this world, hate never yet dispelled hate. Only love dispels hate. This is the law, Ancient and inexhaustible. You too shall pass away. Knowing this, how can you quarrel?

--Buddha, The Dhammapada
“We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”