

Opening Lecture

27 February 2017

Preaching Schism:

Why what good people say can have unintended consequences for the Church

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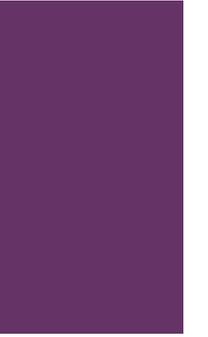


Research is important for a church that is intentional about living and growing, and being relevant in the contemporary world.



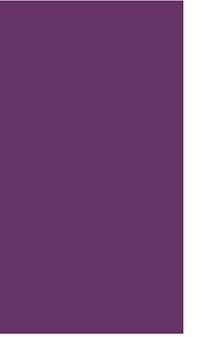
Research can often

- challenge and confront us
- help us to look at ourselves, our identity and our behaviour in new ways
- lead us in unexpected directions

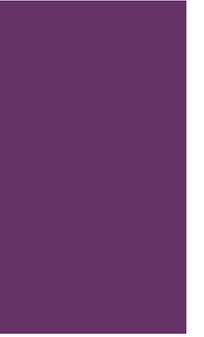




Research always starts with a question



What causes people to radicalise?



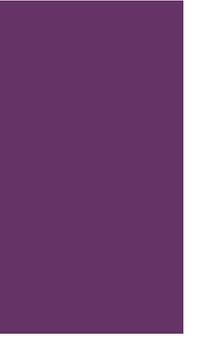
When individuals within a religious group radicalise or a religious group moves towards schism, it's not about doctrine or religion. It's about morality.

Fundamentalism or a shift towards conservative values is triggered by a fear of loss of the sacred.



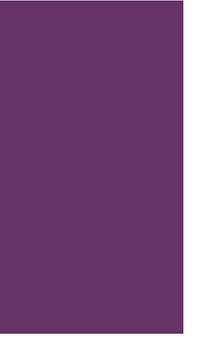
Part One

Methodological presuppositions





- A religious movement, denomination or sect is a social group
- Religious groups are not special. They form and behave in the same way as other social groups.
- Morality is the primary force that binds social groups together.
- Morality = functional morality (the values we operate by without thinking), not ethics (the values we aspire to).



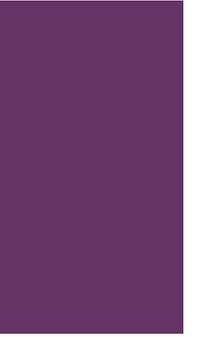
For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I persist in doing.

Romans 7:19



Part Two

The Brain and Morality





“On dual processing accounts of cognition [...] our cognitive activities fall into two basic types: effortful, deliberative and conscious (‘reason’); and automatic, intuitive and non-conscious (‘intuition’).”

Steve Clarke, *The Justification of Religious Violence*, Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, 75.



Morality and Cognition (Gazzaniga 2010)

Insights more or less uniformly accepted by neuroscientists:

1. morality is largely universal, that is, cross-cultural
2. there are, however, many moral judgments that do not fall into a universal category and that appear to be influenced by local culture and learning
3. *all* decision processes resulting in behaviours, regardless of category, are carried out *before* conscious awareness of them (they result from a micro-second intuitive/'gut' response)
4. there is a special device, usually in the brain's left hemisphere, that seeks to understand the rationale behind the pattern of behaviour in others and/or oneself (the interpreter).

Michael Gazzaniga, in *Does Moral Action Depend on Reasoning? Thirteen Views on the Question*, Spring 2010, www.templeton.org/reason.





“The emotional dog and its rational tail”

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, New York: Vintage Books, 2012, 32-60.

J. Haidt, "The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment", *Psychological Review* 108.4 (2001): 814-834.

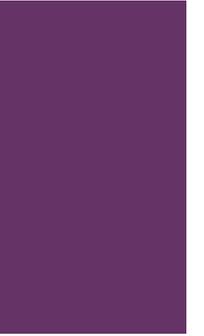


- groups share some core values
- each group's philosophy is woven into its daily life
- each group has its own version of moral common sense
- they fight, not because they are immoral, but because when they come into competition, they view the contested ground from very different moral perspectives.

“From an evolutionary perspective, morality is built to make groups cohere, not to achieve world peace.”

Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2013, 4-5.





“It binds us into ideological teams that fight each other as though the fate of the world depended on our side winning each battle. It blinds us to the fact that each team is composed of good people who have something important to say.”

Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 366.



Moral Foundations Theory



J. Graham, J. Haidt, S. Koleva, M. Motyl, R. Iyer, S. Wojcik, and P.H. Ditto, “Moral foundations theory: The pragmatic validity of moral pluralism”, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 47 (2013) 55-130.

Jonathan Haidt, , *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, Allen Lane/Penguin UK, 2012.

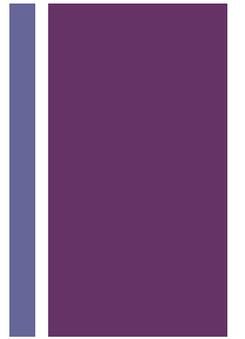
Cf. Ryan McKay and Harvey Whitehouse, “Religion and Morality,” *Psychological Bulletin* 141.2 (2015): 447-473.



Moral Intuitions/Foundations

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012), 146

	Care / harm	Fairness / cheating	Loyalty / betrayal	Authority / subversion	Sanctity / degradation
Adaptive challenge	Protect and care for children	Reap benefits of two-way partnerships	Form cohesive coalitions	Forge beneficial relationships within hierarchies	Avoid contamination
Original triggers	Suffering, distress, or neediness expressed by one's child	Cheating, cooperation, deception	Threat or challenge to group	Signs of dominance and submission	Waste products, diseased people
Characteristic emotions	Compassion	Anger, gratitude, guilt	Group pride, rage at traitors	Respect, fear	Disgust
Relevant virtues	Caring, kindness	Fairness, justice, trustworthiness	Loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice	Obedience, deference	Temperance, chastity, piety, cleanliness



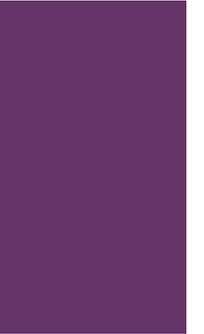


Moral Foundations (Haidt et al.)

1. care
2. fairness / reciprocity / justice
3. ingroup / loyalty
4. authority / respect / tradition
5. purity / sanctity

1-2 are individualizing foundations, which generate virtues and practices that protect individuals from each other and allow them to live in harmony as autonomous agents who can focus on their own goals. (The **contractual** approach)

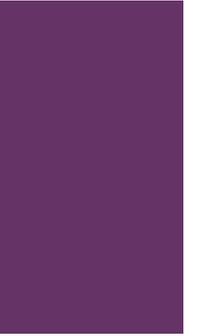
3-5 are binding foundations, because the virtues, practices, and institutions they generate function to bind people together into hierarchically organized interdependent social groups that try to regulate the daily lives and personal habits of their members. (The **hive** approach)





1. The Hive Approach

- the group and its territory are the fundamental units of value
- individuals come and go, but the hive lives for a long time and each individual has a role to play in fostering its success
- the two fundamental problems of social life are attacks from the outside and subversion from within; either can lead to the death of the hive, so all must pull together, do their duty, be willing to make sacrifices for the group
- the goal is a world not of individual freedom but order and tradition in which people are united by a shared moral code that is effectively enforced, allowing people to trust each other and play their interdependent roles





2. The Contractual Approach

- the individual is the fundamental unit of value
- individuals often hurt each other, so we create implicit social contracts and explicit laws to foster a fair, free, and safe society that allows individual freedom
- the goal is maximizing happiness and minimizing suffering – let people make their own choices, as long as they harm nobody else





Neil Ormerod, "Secularisation and Sacralisation:
False alternatives for a missionary Church",
Australian eJournal of Theology 23.1 (April 2016): 32-
42.



“...a major aspect of the strategy of re-evangelization under John Paul II and Benedict XVI has been the strong assertion of a distinctive Catholic identity, one which re-asserts its liturgical and religious-cultural aspects, such as forms of piety and religious observance, in the face of the desacralizing power of secularity. Benedict in particular placed a strong emphasis on the role of the liturgy, lifting restrictions on the use of the Latin mass and returning on occasion to the pre-Vatican II practice of facing the altar while celebrating the mass. At least in English speaking countries these moves were accompanied by the introduction of a new translation of the mass which sought to resacralize liturgical language, adding an aesthetic dimension that had supposedly been lost in the translation post-Vatican II. ... a key strategy of the new evangelization was to attract people to the Church through the beauty of its liturgical celebrations. At the same time, however, there was debate over the notion of the ‘smaller, purer Church’, a more devout, more religiously intense, more loyal band who would carry the Church into the future.” (33)





“Outside of first world countries such as Europe and the US, the picture of Catholicism is very different. Numbers are growing and the main ‘opponent’ so to speak, are not secularism or atheism but Pentecostals and Evangelicals siphoning off Catholics into their burgeoning communities. Religion is far from being on the wane in the two-thirds world of the South. The election of a new pope from the global south, Pope Francis, has brought a different vision for the future of the Church, one less tied to European forms and culture, less constrained liturgically, and more engaged with social issues around poverty and injustice. These issues, deemed peripheral by those opposed to secularisation, are now back into central focus for a new pontificate. Francis is committed to a Church that goes out to the margins, that does not wait for the world to come to it, but reaches out to the world with the Gospel message. The undoubted impact of the new papacy is evidence of a Church constantly able to renew and revitalise itself through a focus on its Gospel mission.” (33)





Ecclesiology A: “In terms of an ecclesial program, the Church then has two options: either sectarian withdrawal from the secular world in order to maintain its identity unsullied by contact with the world; or to subsume the secular within itself and thus sacralise it in a return to the idealised past of Christendom.”

Ecclesiology B: “In this vision, concern for the kingdom and working for its realisation transcend the boundaries of the Church; they are the ‘concern of everyone’ because ‘evil in all its forms’ both outside and inside the Church affect everyone, personally, culturally and socially. This focus on the kingdom rather than the Church moves the Church beyond itself and in the process the Church’s identity is transformed, taking on new social and cultural forms as it engages in its mission. It is also a vision that invites and even requires collaboration with those outside the Church, because the Church of itself does not claim to have the only resources to bring to bear on the problem of evil. ... There are of course risks to such a mission-oriented strategy, risks that the identity of the Church may be weakened, distorted, or otherwise compromised. Certainly it is possible to identify situations and contexts where this weakening of identity may be said to have occurred. However, if the alternative is sectarian stagnation and irrelevance to those outside the Church, then the risks may be worth taking.”





“Evil is whatever stands in the way of sacredness. ... Evil emerges as communities construct ideological narratives and converge on a shared understanding of what their problems are, who caused them, and how to fight back.”

“Ideological narratives...by their very nature, are always stories about good and evil. They identify heroes and villains, they explain how the villains got the upper hand, and they lay out or justify the means by which--if we can just come together and fight hard enough--we can vanquish the villains and return the world to its balanced or proper state.”

Jesse Graham and Jonathan Haidt, “Sacred values and evil adversaries: A moral foundations approach”, in Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, eds, *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012), 16.





“*Sacredness* refers to the human tendency to invest people, places, times, and ideas with importance far beyond the utility they possess. Trade-offs or compromises involving what is sacralized are resisted or refused. In prototypical cases...trade-offs or compromises are felt to be acts of betrayal.”

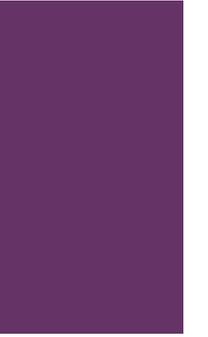
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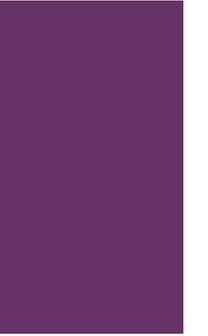




Part Three

Language and the Brain





“metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.”

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980; 2nd edn, 2003, 3.

See further Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn 2010.



Conceptual metaphors and framing

- Language activates conceptual metaphors that the brain uses to explain the world
- Moral conceptual metaphors are experiential (often learned in early childhood), and tend to be basic and a-cultural.





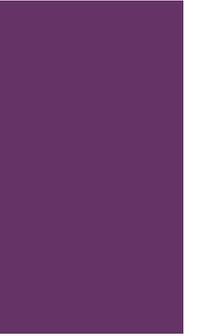
Habituated patterns of thought cause repeated activations of the same neural circuits.

Repeated activation causes a circuit to become more entrenched.

The more deeply entrenched a circuit, the more resistant it is to change.

Language plays a key role in this.

The more the same language activates a particular pattern of thought, the more convicted an individual becomes of the associated belief or opinion.





The Church is a Body ('the body of Christ')



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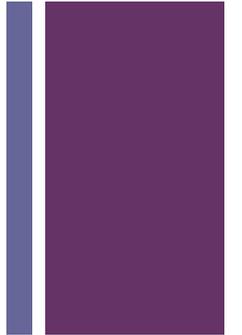
+ Morality is Health, Immorality is Disease



Moral Intuitions/Foundations

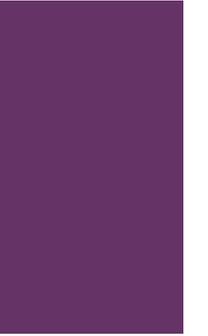
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Arab Muslim reactions to the literal cleanliness of Norman (Latin) Christians in Crusader Antioch



Éric Fournier, "Amputation metaphors and the rhetoric of exile: Purity and pollution in late ancient Christianity," in *Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity*, ed. Julia Hillner, Jakob Enberg, and Jörg Ulrich, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, forthcoming.



Yitzhaq Feder, "Contagion and cognition: Bodily experience and the conceptualization of pollution (*tum'ah*) in the Hebrew Bible", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 72.2 (2013): 151-167.

"Defilement, disgust and disease: The experiential basis of Hittite and Akkadian terms for impurity", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136.1 (2016): 99-116.

"Purity and sancta desecration in ritual law: A Durkheimian perspective", in P. Barmash (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law*, forthcoming.



The Church is a Family ('God the Father', 'Christ the Son')



Moral Conceptual Metaphors

Morality is

uprightness

light

purity

strength

health

beauty

honesty/fairness

happiness

following a path

obedience

discipline

Immorality is

being low

darkness

rottenness

weakness

disease

ugliness

unfairness/deceit

misery

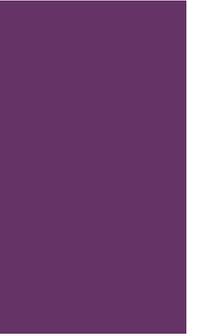
deviating

disobedience

lack of discipline

George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and its Politics* (2009), 96-98





'Strict Father' and 'Nurturant Parent' Morality

- authority
- obedience
- (self-)discipline
- punishment
- personal responsibility

= retributive justice

- empathy
- protection
- empowerment
- community

= restorative justice

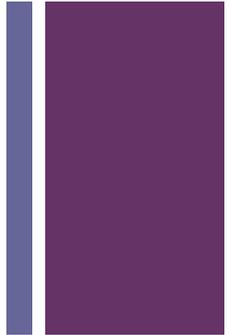
George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 2nd edn 2002, 65-140.



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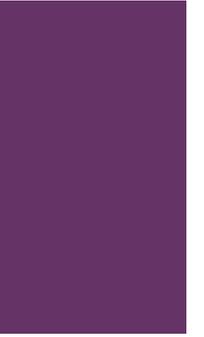
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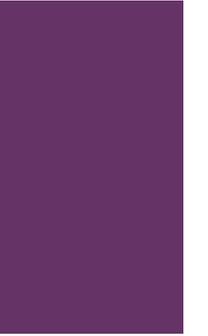


Conclusions



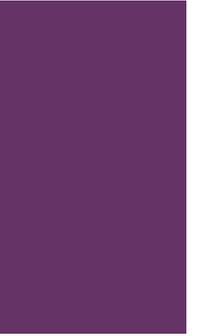


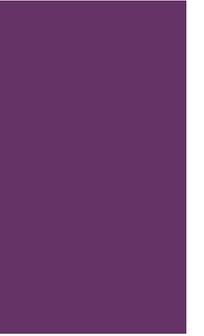
Firstly, this particular body of research suggests that the language we use matters and it matters a lot.





Secondly, it suggests that within religious groups a shift towards fundamentalism and appeal to the authority of Scripture or tradition in response to perceived threat of loss of the sacred are, from a social-functionalist perspective, perfectly moral, justifiable and natural. We could even say they are inevitable.





Thirdly, the science of moral cognition offers helpful explanations for what has previously been inexplicable on logical or rational grounds – most especially why a religious group that places emphasis on progressive values finds it difficult to talk to and understand the internal logic of a religious group that places emphasis on conservative values and vice versa.

The fact that the position of both groups is, from their own point of view and in reality, perfectly moral, makes the disconnect more understandable.

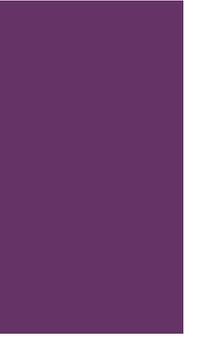


When we look at the situation in this way, the question then shifts from whether the position of each group is right or wrong (both are right) to whether the behavioural consequences of that position can, in any objective way, be assessed as beneficial or harmful.



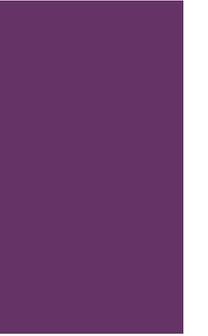


Finally, this research warns us not to be blind to the goodness in people who hold a position that we see as oppositional. In many ways it is a lesson in humility and self-examination. What this research strongly suggests is that self-righteousness is a trap into which the religious progressive is as prone to fall as the religious conservative or fundamentalist.



For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I persist in doing.

Romans 7:19



"...the thing that sucks is that every time we draw a line between us and others, Jesus is always on the other side of it."

Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Patrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint* (2013), 57.