'Decay in the founding virtues is problematic for human flourishing' (p. 266), Murray says. These virtues have a direct and strong relationship to self-reported happiness (p. 255), and he argues that they may already have been lost to the extent that American exceptionalism (freedom coupled with responsibility, the product of the cultural capital bequeathed by the founders) is threatened. 'Discard the system that created the cultural capital, and the qualities we have loved about Americans will go away' (p. 305).

Being the libertarian he is, Murray makes no case for government intervention to support the founding virtues. Indeed, one of his fears is that America will adopt the 'welfarist' policies of Europe and let bureaucrats fix things. This would be a mistake, he says, even though the new upper class might be comforted by the salve of paying higher taxes. 'Taking the trouble out of life strips people of major ways in which human beings look back on their lives and say, "I made a difference."' (p. 283).

Rather, Murray seeks a return to the founders' conception of limited government. At various points in its history, three or four religious Great Awakenings have swept across America. Now Murray proposes—or rather, pleads for—'a civic Great Awakening' to stir the new upper class in their SuperZips. His vision of an upper class civic awakening 'starts with a question that I hope they will take to heart: How much do you value what has made America exceptional and what are you willing to do to preserve it?' (p. 305).

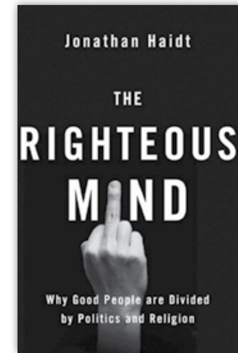
In Coming Apart, which, he says, is his 'valedictory on the topic of happiness and public policy' (p. 308), Murray builds a statistically detailed case for the renewal of the American project. Yet the book is more than an exercise in social science. It is a call to attend to the threat posed by a widening cultural divide in twenty-first century America.

Unless heeded, Murray cautions that the Jeffersonian experiment in ordered liberty, 'unique among the nations, and immeasurably precious' (p. 306) may yet fail.

Reviewed by Peter Kurti

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion

By Jonathon Haidt
Pantheon Books, New York, 2012
US$18.97, 419 pages
ISBN 9780307377906



The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion is an important book that is also fun to read. Drawing on the latest discoveries of evolutionary psychology, author Jonathon Haidt investigates where our most fundamental moral ideas come from, and why we cling so tenaciously to our version of what is right when we get into arguments with people whose political or religious beliefs differ from our own. The sub-title suggests we should accept that political and ethical positions radically different from our own still have moral validity, although it seems to me that the book inadvertently demonstrates the superiority of conservative ethics over socialist or libertarian ones (Haidt, as a man of the left, can't quite bring himself to acknowledge this, and I suspect many readers of Policy might be reluctant too!).

The first part of the book is fascinating. It shows how core elements of human morality appear to be grounded in instinct, not reason. We react first and rationalise our reaction afterwards. Even when we find it difficult to offer a logical explanation for a gut feeling that something is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, we feel it deep in our soul, so much so that we are often willing to sacrifice our own interests to stop other people from doing the wrong thing, or to punish those who do. Humans apparently are naturally righteous.

Philosophers have tried to explain morality logically, deriving rules from a few basic axioms (e.g. that something is wrong if it harms others). But they have got things the wrong way around. Our brains are already wired to tell us what is good and bad, right and wrong. We learned this in the course of hundreds of thousands of years of individual and

group evolution. It is only since we developed language that we have felt the need to reflect on why we feel the way we do. Using language, we select arguments that fit our intuitions. Ethical thinking is confirmatory, not exploratory.

Haidt doesn't just assert that morality is grounded in evolved instincts; he demonstrates it, drawing on a wide range of experimental and other evidence. For example, show a six-month-old infant a puppet struggling to climb a hill. Now introduce a figure that tries to help the climber's efforts, and another that does its best to hinder them. Which of these two figures does the infant select to cuddle afterwards? The helper, of course. And if the climbing puppet is shown embracing the hinderer, the infant stares perplexed, for this is not what its brain is hard-wired to expect. As early as six months, long before parents or school teachers can teach us the appropriate rules or reason with us about why something is the right course of action, we already know the rudiments of how we should behave (although Haidt also shows that it is more important for us to demonstrate our goodness to others than to actually be good).

Of course, Haidt recognises that people who grow up in different cultures often subscribe to very different sets of moral rules. He also knows that even within the same culture, people disagree passionately about right and wrong. So if ethics are instinctive, why doesn't the whole world agree on what constitutes morality?

The answer is that instincts are triggered or smothered by cultural socialisation. Everyone (barring psychopaths) knows, for example, that you shouldn't hurt other people for no reason. Haidt calls this the 'care/harm' instinct, and in one form or another, it appears to be universal among humans. Bentham tried to explain and justify it by his utilitarian ethics, just as Kant did with his categorical imperative, but Haidt says it derives not from such abstract principles but from an evolved need for humans to protect and care for children who cannot survive without nurturing. Those of our ancestors who lacked this instinct are likely to have died without successfully bringing their children to maturity, which is how more compassionate genes gradually spread among human groups.

Once this 'care/harm' instinct had evolved, however, it could be mobilised by all sorts of other cultural stimuli in addition to needy children. Signs of 'cuteness,' for example, tend to bring forth a strong urge to care, nurture and protect whenever we encounter them, and today in the West, this often translates into compassion for animals and even cartoon characters. The caring instinct is common to all of us, but it is triggered differently in people growing up in different cultures (or even in different families within the same culture). Indeed, religions and political movements deliberately target these triggers to elicit emotional commitment to their cause. The things that trigger kindness and compassion thus vary over time and across places, and they are to some extent learned or even manipulated.

Universal morality is not just about caring for people. There are other evolved ethical instincts that also get triggered to varying degrees in different cultures. The 'fairness/cheating' instinct generates the anger we feel against those who gain individual advantage through deceit and free-riding; the 'loyalty/betrayal' instinct is reflected in the pride of belonging to a group and the rage felt against traitors; the 'authority/subversion' instinct generates feelings of respect and deference based on one's place in perceived pecking orders; the 'sanctity/degradation' instinct makes us recoil from the unfamiliar and inspires feelings of piety and disgust; and the 'liberty/oppression' instinct is expressed in an emotional reaction against oppressive domination. All these evolved as adaptive solutions to the struggle for individual and group survival.

It is at this point in the analysis that Haidt, a self-confessed 'progressive,' finds himself sliding towards the apparent conclusion that conservative ethics are superior (in the sense of being more comprehensive and more in tune with human nature) to social democratic or socialist ones. The universal foundations of human morality are built, he says, on all six of these evolved instincts, but the Left in modern Western societies barely recognises more than two of them. It's very alive to the importance of showing compassion for those who suffer (hence, the passionate support for state welfare) and to challenging oppressors (particularly when they take the form of banks, big corporations, or fascist dictators). But it's a bit lukewarm when it comes to enforcing just deserts by punishing free-riders (the fairness/cheating module), and it is downright uncomfortable with expressions of group loyalty (like patriotism); respect for authority; and observance

of shared, sacred totems and taboos. Conservatives may be a bit less compassionate and bolshie than socialists, but their ideologies do manage to straddle all six moralities, whereas those of the Left concentrate only on two or three (p.184).

This sounds like political dynamite to me, so after I finished reading his book, I emailed Haidt (he's an approachable chap) suggesting that 'if conservatives are the only people to embrace all six [modules], doesn't this mean conservatism is the most (or superior) moral political stance, and that we should therefore all be conservatives?' He replied: 'I think the answer is no ... In a modern society with strong institutions, it's possible to "off-load" much of the burden of creating order or social capital onto institutions. The Scandinavian countries do that well, and seem to rely less on loyalty, authority and sanctity, and they report the highest levels of happiness.'

This looks like a cop-out to me. For a start, the Nordic nations actually emphasise loyalty and authority quite strongly (take a look at all the Danish flags in people's gardens; see what happens if you flaunt social conventions in Sweden). More importantly, a political ethic that encourages people to abdicate personal moral responsibility by allowing the state to look after things is surely a negation of morality. Morality governs how we as individuals are meant to behave towards each other, so how can it be ethical to shrug your shoulders and leave others to do what has to be done? The Good Samaritan didn't call up the social workers, he dealt with the problem himself.

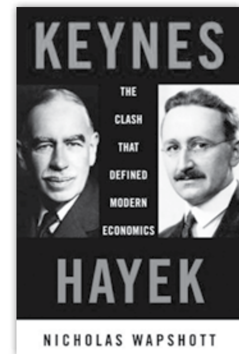
Of course, it is not just socialists who are likely to be discomfited by this book. There is a challenge for classical liberals and libertarians, for they too are shown by Haidt to be preoccupied with just two of the core moralities ('liberty/oppression' and 'fairness/cheating') to the neglect of all the others. If Haidt is right that human beings have gut instincts about all six, this might explain why libertarians have made such little headway in popularising their arguments about the good society.

The Righteous Mind is a stimulating, rewarding and well-written book. I found it a bit less convincing towards the end, where Haidt complains about political polarisation in modern America and tries to get us all to accept the socialist case for more regulation, the classical liberal case for free markets, and the conservative case for treasuring cultural homogeneity. 'Each team,' he says, 'is composed of good people who have something important to say.' (p. 313) This sounds a bit too cosy for my taste. But perhaps my cynicism is just an atavistic throwback to that evolved instinct driving me to defend my own group and attack everyone else's.

Read this book. It's important, and it may turn out to be an agenda-shifter and a debate-changer.

Reviewed by Peter Saunders

Keynes Hayek: The Clash that Defined Modern Economics
By Nicholas Wapshott
W.W. Norton & Company, 2011
$16.91, 400 pages
ISBN 9780393077483



I cannot recommend that anyone read this book. For those who already know the story of Friedrich von Hayek and John Maynard Keynes, there is little new. For those who do not, the story is distorted and they would likely get the wrong impression.

There are some factual errors that although trivial, Australian readers would find annoying. We are told that John Curtin attended Lord Keynes' memorial—yet Curtin died in 1945 and Keynes in 1946.

Nicholas Wapshott's thesis is that Keynes was a pragmatic do-what-it-takes defender of capitalism while Hayek was some sort of abstract theorist.

While Hayek concentrated on an abstract utopia, progressives were winning battles over civil rights for African-Americans, women, homosexuals, and the disabled …

Yet the public debate slowly moved in Hayek's favour. In Chile in the 1970s, Hayek was invoked to counter communism. (p. 292)

Yet Wapshott is unable to provide any evidence that Hayek opposed civil rights for African-Americans, women, homosexuals, or the disabled. Similarly, the gratuitous reference to Chile is a dog-whistle to the left. Wapshott doesn't actually tell us that