What does morality have to do with it?

What Haidt and Moral Foundation Theory reveal about why white evangelical

Christian women advocate for politician Donald J. Trump

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Abstract:

There has been considerable discussion in the media vis-a-vis evangelical Christian’s ostensibly paradoxical political support of Donald J. Trump. This research offers an explanatory framework to identify potential moral motives evangelical Christian women demonstrate when championing a man who clearly defies biblical morality. By utilizing Haidt’s Moral Foundation Theory (MFT), which hypothesizes that conservatives rely on all five of his moral value pairings in their moral implementation, this qualitative study juxtaposes whether MFT idioms are applied when evangelical white Christian women expound on their furtherance admiration for Trump. The findings from this study suggest that MFT jargon accounts for a considerable amount of moral rational from the study’s participants, white evangelical Christian women who consider their religious faith to be first and foremost in their lives, when discussing politics and their support for Trump. These conservative Christians’ long-established sanctified realm of religion, family and sovereign-state holds firm in today’s political debate.

Introduction:

Evangelical Christians constitute a sizeable faction of Donald J. Trump devotees; Pew Research Center (2016) election exit polls in November of 2016 revealed that 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Trump. In that group, a substantial portion were evangelical Christian women. These women have been particularly scrutinized for backing a political candidate who has an alleged history of misogyny (Zuckerman, 2016). Notwithstanding copious immoral scandals, on both a personal and professional levels, Trump’s inequities have been rationalized, and his brash personality has been viewed in a positive light by Christians, as being a strong, capable leader, a problem-solver who doesn’t let political correctness get in his way (Brisbane, 2019). Fault-finding news stories about Trump have little significance or are disregarded completely as “fake news” (Polletta & Callahan, 2017). This qualitative research offers an explanatory framework with the aim of identifying potential moral motives white evangelical Christian women exhibit for championing a man who clearly defies biblical morality by juxtaposing whether MFT idioms are applied when the participants expound on their furtherance admiration for Trump.

Literature Review:

 When it comes to morality, the Bible leads us to believe God has etched morality into our hearts, while Darwinism would argue our morality evolves from our moral emotions (Haidt, 2012). A Pew Research Center polling (2011) examined evangelical Christians’ beliefs and practices which showed that 56 percent of evangelical Christians believed that in order to “be a good evangelical,” one needed to “take a stand on issues in conflict with moral and Biblical principles.”

 In the 1920s, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1932) defined a two-stage process of moral development suggesting that it is a constant progression through our lifetime. Decades later, psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) built on Piaget’s effort by offering six stages of moral development with three distinctive levels: preconventional, conventional and postconventional.

An overall assessment in this early scholarship was that if you believe moral knowledge is the result of nurturing, you were considered an empiricist (Haidt, 2012). Yet, if morality fluctuates across time and cultures, then it can’t necessarily be inherent (Haidt). In the late twentieth century, moral psychology scholarship was focused on a third answer, rationalism. As a response to Kohlberg’s work, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2012) argued that in rationalism “kids figure out morality for themselves, but only when their minds are ready, and they are given the right kinds of experiences” (Haidt, p. 6). In other words, it is a continuous process throughout childhood and beyond. “Rationality is our nature, and good moral reasoning is the end point of development” (p. 7). Haidt continued, “If morality doesn’t come primarily from reasoning, then that leaves some combination of innateness and social learning as the most likely candidates” (p. 26). Haidt gives three principles of moral psychology, the first principle being, “Intuitions comes first, strategic reasoning second” (p. xiv). The second principle is, “There’s more to morality than harm and fairness” (p. 110). And the third and final principle is, “Morality binds and blinds” (p. 191).

 Haidt, along with colleague Jesse Graham, went on to develop Moral Foundation Theory. The researchers identified five opposing moral value pairings that form the basis of our political ideology: 1) care/harm, 2) fairness/cheating, 3) loyalty/betrayal, 4) authority/subversion, and 5) sanctity/degradation (Haidt, 2012). In 2011, more than 130,000 people participated in their research by taking a Moral Foundation Questionnaire on-line. Researchers found that liberals are mainly concerned with just the first two foundations of morality: care/harm and fairness/cheating. However, “conservatives endorse all five foundations more or less equally” (p. 161). Thus, they deduced Democrats are so focused on issues such as equality and supporting marginalized groups that they fail to deliberate the other three moral foundations: loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation. Haidt argued that Republicans have had a better understanding of moral psychology than Democrats, by appealing to all five values in their campaign strategies. Republican politicians often use “scare” tactics to heighten the anxiety to the point of increased activism by their constituents (Peters, 2020). In doing so, the Republican Party is responsive to all the moral concerns that conservatives share. Haidt’s was inspired by French sociologist Emile Durkheim’s vision of society:

A Durkheimian society at its best would be a stable network composed of many nested and overlapping groups that socialize, reshape and care for individuals who, if left to their own devices, would pursue shallow, carnal, and selfish pleasures. A Durkheimian society would value self-control over self-expression, duty over rights, and loyalty to one’s groups over concerns for out-groups.

(p. 166)

Research has shown that, when there is no accountability for people, they can be lazy and selfish (Tetlock, 2002). However, when it comes to politics, people care about their groups, whether those be racial, regional, religious, or political (Westen, Glagov, Harenski, Hamann, and Kilts, 2006).

Haidt (2012) lists three ethics that affect our moral foundation:

1) The ethic of autonomy, based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, autonomous individuals with wants, needs, and preferences.

2) The ethic of community, based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, members of larger entities such as families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations.

3) The ethic of divinity, based on the idea that people are, first and foremost, temporary vessels within which a divine soul has been implanted. (pp. 99-100)

For atheists and agnostics, there are only two possibilities, the first two ethics. However, for religionists, the ethic of divinity speaks to the core of their identity, a metaphysical reality that is not understood by those outside of religion. This misconstruction could be one of the primary instigators of a great chasm between believers and non-believers.

Morality is a key component to evangelical Christians’ religious identity. A perceived lack of morals in our modern-day society can cause great distress for evangelical Christian women, who embrace their role as maternal nurturers, and are also expected to be caretakers of higher moral standards than men (Smith, 2000). There are other crucial perspectives to keep in mind when cogitating the current political divisiveness. An “ideal,” orderly society needs to have rules and accountability. “Democrats often say that Republicans have duped these people into voting against their economic self-interest. But from the perspective of Moral Foundation Theory, rural and working-class voters were, in fact, voting for their moral interests” (Haidt, 2012, p. 185).

Methods:

Focus groups and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted for this research. Snowball sampling was utilized to recruit the participants. At the outset, the researcher approached acquaintances who were known to be evangelical Christian women through email and social media and asked them to participate in the research. Every woman recruited not only identified themselves as evangelical Christians, but also acknowledged that they voted for Donald Trump. They were then asked for recommendations of other women who might be willing to take part in the study. This type of recruiting was necessary for this study because of the political and religious location of the individuals who were being studied.

Three focus groups were conducted in the following states: Idaho, Colorado and Arizona. The focus groups were conducted prior to the in-depth interviews. The Idaho and Arizona focus groups took place in the homes of one of the participants, the “host”. The Colorado focus group took place at the researcher’s home. The age range of participants was from the early 30s to early 80s, with the largest group of women being in their 50s.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 women. The interviews were conducted in person whenever possible, however, most of the interviews were done over the phone or by video conferencing application like Skype. The interview participants lived in different states including, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri and Utah. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Both the focus groups and interviews were audio recorded for accuracy and promptly transcribed by the researcher. The researcher attempted to recruit participants from the Midwest and east coast, but was unsuccessful.

Discourse analysis coding was employed to dissect the dialog from the focus group and interview research. The five-step process recommended by Davis (2016) was utilized. First, the sessions were recorded and transcribed by the researcher soon after the sessions. The thorough transcription of the recordings facilitated a preliminary discernment of the data collected. After the data was gathered, the researcher performed an initial read-through of all the transcripts. Themes emerged from the data during the first open coding pass. This was followed by a second coding pass, or constant comparison, allowing for categories to be broken apart, combined or re-categorized. Similar responses were also tallied to determine equivalent sentiments. The researcher created summaries of each focus group and interview transcript in order to better visualize the themes and match similar attitudes and then compared them once again to the complete transcripts. As the findings were deliberated, a few more analytical passes were performed in which bigger-picture ideas and conclusions were formulated and associated to the preexisting moral foundation theory.

Findings:

Moral Values and Conservative Philosophy:

 Religiosity and conservativism have been intrinsically linked. Therefore, it was anticipated that the participants would have conservative morals and political philosophies. Many of the interview participants articulated that their principal moral values included biblical directives, such as the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. The moral values mentioned most often were, honesty/truth, integrity/high character, kindness/compassion/empathy/love. Furthermore, other analogous comments included, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself,” “the Bible tells us to, you know, love one another.” A few of them also mentioned terms involving chastity and virtuousness, for instance, “I consider important morals to be sexual purity, and marriage between a man and a woman,” as well as, “I value life,” and “I believe strongly in sanctity of life… I believe in marriage and um, keeping yourself, um, sexually pure, um not compromising in areas.” Christian marital ideals were brought up by several interviewees. One participant said, “I put a high value on my husband and giving him respect. And respecting authority and respecting the president.” Not surprisingly, the conservative philosophy, pervasive in both methods, was also ardently against abortion or being pro-life, and in opposition to the “gay agenda,” while additionally valuing patriotism, including being tough on immigration. “I think it is, it is Christian and biblical for us to be protecting our country from people that want to come in here illegally and take away from others. Because taking away is never Christian, giving is,” declared one participant. In this case, the participant utilized biblical doctrine to justify her opposition to people who come to the United States illegally without remorse or empathy. While Christianity is thought of as a religion that cares for the poor and needy, giving the appearance of a heterogeneous directive there is a circumvention, suppression, and a homogeneous assessment of out-groups.

Moral Perspective:

Christianity has a binary view of morality, established through the mandates in the Bible. What God commands is right and good, and all the decrees in opposition of God’s word are sinful and immoral. When considering Haidt’s (2012) five moral foundations; 1) care/harm, 2) fairness/cheating, 3) loyalty/betrayal, 4) authority/subversion and 5) sanctity/degradation, in this study, the participants predominantly acknowledged the moral values that held the highest importance to them were fairness/cheating (e.g. “honesty,” “integrity” and “truth” were the terms used the most often). Yet, during the discussions, the opposing morals referenced repeatedly as important were authority/subversion (e.g. “respect our president,” and “let him run the country”) and sanctity/degradation (“sanctity of life,” “sanctity of marriage” and “sexual purity”).

Upon closer inspection, however, analogous to Haidt’s study, all five of the opposing moral foundations arose during the data collection. The care/harm foundation emerged, but for reasons diverse from the liberal agenda of caring for the poor and afflicted. Several participants acknowledged that unborn aborted babies were the afflicted group that deserved more care and required outrage from conservatives for the harm they suffered. “There is nothing more evil than what is going on in our country, and our systematic murder of unborn children,” said a participant. Fairness/cheating and care/harm foundations materialized during the contemplation of liberals and Democrats. Only two interview participants volunteered that the term “liberal” did not have a bad connotation for them. The remaining interviewees labeled them in negative terms such as “angry,” “intolerant,” “post-logical,” “free-wheeling,” “less patriotic,” “too extreme,” “unstable,” wanting “too many social programs,” or “wanting to spend my money.” The idioms used for Democrats were less of a personal attack, instead more in-line with tenets. Democrats were regarded as “wanting to be taken care of,” “entitled,” “wanting free stuff,” “all-inclusive,” or “pushing immigration and socialistic agendas.”

When considering the loyalty/betrayal foundation, they enjoyed steadfast in-group members, while equally or more so hating traitors and enemies. The participants see liberals as traitors to the American way of life and capitalism. “They don’t care about America,” as one participant put it. Liberals and Democrats are deemed to wanting completely open borders, being fiscally irresponsible, taking money from hardworking capitalists and giving it to undeserving, lazy freeloaders. “I think of somebody who wants to maybe spend my hard-earned money, um, on something I don’t agree with,” one participant commented when asked about her opinion of liberals.

The participants, for the most part, reject the ethics of autonomy. The “liberals” look through a lens of autonomy, which the participants consider to be “self-absorbed,” “free-wheeling” and “intolerant”. This ethic dominates the secular world, where individuals’ wants, needs and preferences are most important. For the participants, the last two ethics are more coveted. The ethic of community and the ethic of divinity. As a part of a community, there is an obligation to perform delegated roles. Preserving the Christian America viewpoint is an in-group charge. While Trump is seen as loyal to Christianity and to the United States, the liberals and Democrats are viewed as anti-Christian with a primarily global view. “Look at Clinton… Obama sold out Christianity in so many ways”. Another participant’s values also revolve around her patriotism and loyalty to the president.

I will vote in favor of anything that protects our country, over, even over environmental issues… You may have not voted for Trump, but he is your president, and you are being disloyal to your citizenship by claiming that you are disowning the president. (Jennifer)

The ethic of divinity in the data collected is primarily projected by a few participants through comments about the sanctity of life, sanctity of marriage and sexual purity. The legality of gay marriage has always been objected to by a majority of evangelical Christians. One participant felt that the term “marriage” is biblically consecrated and shouldn’t be used for a gay “union,” any sexual perversion should be kept private and the government’s slide into sexual humanism is wrong.

It isn’t the government’s right to try to change, uh, our country that was built on biblical principles, try to change that. Like we’re hatemongers if we talk about passages in the Bible, that, that talk about the sins of homosexuals. (Renee)

Most of the dialog involving the ethics of divinity comprised of pro-life adages such as, “It comes down to the sanctity of life and preserving that life and protecting that life. Um, it’s precious because God created it” (Roxanne).

Moral Dissonance:

An unyielding sense of morality or a fundamental moral foundation is a key component in evangelical Christian women’s sense of social/religious identity. It advises their views on political issues, yet their morality doesn’t inevitably translate completely when affecting their voting behaviors. Ethics become situational. Morality is stressed when contemplating outcomes or political gains, such as achieving a conservative Supreme Court that will have an enduring conservative effect on issues such abortion, gay rights and religious freedoms in the United States. “If I don’t help make a stand for what I feel is right by voting [conservatively], then I’m just handing it over to the bad guys… or the enemy,” said a participant. Yet, morality is minimized or rationalized when taking into account the immorality of their president, Donald Trump’s character. “All of the crying about that he’s [Trump] a pig and this and that. You know what? They are all pigs. He just doesn’t care and doesn’t try to hide it,” exclaimed a participant.

For the participants, any sense of cognitive dissonance can be quickly set aside because “no one’s perfect”. Providing Trump is defending their political causes and surrounding himself with Christian leaders, the dissonance of voting for an iniquitous man can be resolved and justified. In fact, at the end of the Idaho focus group, the researcher was scolded for even conducting the research. “It’s like saying that we’re stupid, how on earth could you vote for him? … it’s condescending and insulting,” she declared. The gist of her argument being, “of course we voted for Trump when Hillary was our only other choice.” Another participant added, “I don’t understand how someone who is an evangelical Christian woman could vote for Hillary or anybody like Hillary.”

 In electing Trump to be the leader of the free world, many of the participants had less ethical requirements of him than someone ensconced in their religious identity. Several participants mentioned that they weren’t voting for a “Sunday school teacher,” a “pastor,” a “religious leader,” or a “Savior”. Another participant said, “He isn’t supposed to be Jesus.” They defend their choice of Trump by pointing to other politicians and even religious leaders who have also sinned. They have been disappointed in the moral behavior of many evangelical Christian leaders over the past few decades, in countless church scandals, as well as past U.S. presidents who have been unfaithful to the sanctity of marriage. “I’m not his moral judge. I didn’t have to work through the conflict. A high percentage of previous presidents have done immoral things, cheated on wives. Look at Clinton,” said a participant.

Evangelical Christians’ support helped Trump get elected because of his straightforward political alignment with many Christian principles, thereby attempting to reestablish Christian authority. There became an expectation of reciprocity the evangelicals had of Trump, and Trump was determined to come through with his campaign promises to them (e.g. conservative Supreme Court justices, attempted ban of transgenders in the military, travel ban of Muslims, hardened stance on immigration, etc.). Few politicians have followed through on their campaign pledges. Subsequently, Trump’s countless violations of decorum and reasonableness do not offend evangelical Christians because the umbrages are mostly directed against out-groups that are perceived to be dangerous to their identity: liberals, Democrats and news outlets.

When the Idaho focus group was asked how Trump represents their Christian values there was a long awkward pause before anybody answered. The first response was, “Good question! I’m not going to judge him.” Almost everyone appreciated that he surrounded himself with Christian leaders and turned to the Christian community for support, namely Ben Carson and Mike Pence. In a way, the participants view Trump’s simple association with Christian leaders as admittance into their religious identity.

Discussion:

Evangelical Christians’ support of Donald Trump is paradoxical and hypocritical to everyone except a majority of white evangelical Christians. They believe that by supporting Trump, they voted in support of, not against, their religious identity and moral values. Most of the participants perceive Trump as being an imperfect and ill-mannered man; however, in his politically incorrectness, they also see him as a strong leader who is willing to fight for their beliefs and values with the gloves off, an intimidating enforcer who can do their dirty work. They wanted and needed someone who was willing to take a stand against liberal politicians and go to war for their families against the evil schemes of the world. They perceive liberals to be trying to unravel and destroy their collective religious identity

An acute sense of morality is a chief component to evangelicals’ religious identity.

When considering the participants moral values in respect to their characterization of political out-groups, or liberals and Democrats, the participants, for the most part, had a binary assessment: anything biblical is virtuous and anything contradictory to biblical virtues is malevolent. Therefore, contrasted with biblical morality, the principles of out-groups are deficient or criminal. This line of reasoning also correlates to creating a homogeneous out-group effect. The data showed that the participants perceive liberals and Democrats to primarily covet the ethic of autonomy, where individuals’ freedoms considered to be of the utmost importance. The participants considered Democrats and liberals to want to “be taken care of,” get “free stuff,” “take my hard-earned money,” and do not have “compassion for life”. In other words, they view these out-groups to be predominantly concerned about Haidt’s (2012) care/harm moral foundation. Contrariwise, the participants judge the ethic of community and the ethic of divinity as more imperative. “I’m all about God and country,” one interviewee declared. The impression of a “Christian America” advocate for the responsibility of citizens to enhance society and acknowledge the importance of maintaining godly principles. They believe people aren’t entitled to handouts and instead should be contributing to the community. “At what point do you start taking responsibility and stop blaming others for your lack of success and your difficulty,” said another interviewee. Throughout the data, at one point or another, the participants contemplated all five of Haidt’s (2012) opposing moral foundations, particularly authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation. While the participants deem themselves as respecting authority and sanctity, liberals and Democrats are subversive to the authority of Trump as president and degrade the sanctity of life and marriage with their anti-Christian, immoral scruples.

Summary:

Contemplating the moral perspective, the overall research data revealed the existence of all five of Haidt’s opposing moral values. However, when considering the concept of fairness, unlike liberal Democrats’ agenda to help the poor and needy, the participants’ notion of fairness concentrated more on what was fair for themselves or their in-group (e.g. lower taxes, less of their money going to social programs, their right to freedom of religion, etc.). Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity foundations were also present: patriotism, respect for the president, protecting our border. Additionally, they feel the need to strive to live a moral life, for instance, upholding the sanctity of life and marriage, as well as sexual purity.

There is an obvious paradoxical paradigm in how the participants assessed Trump and Bill and Hillary Clintons’ morality. Discriminatory behavior and derogatory criticism are common approaches when an in-group senses that it is being threatened. Hillary Clinton was regarded a foe, whereas Donald Trump is viewed as a fighter for the conservative cause. Much of the discrepancy could be from decades-long loathing of powerful and self-confident progressive women who are not satisfied with strictly having maternal, domestic accomplishments. For the participants, Bill Clinton’s iniquities remain unforgiven and horrendous. However, the participants absolve any immoralities committed by Trump. In standing by and supporting her husband, Hillary Clinton has been even further disparaged by evangelical Christian women, even though evangelical Christian women pray for and encourage Christian male leaders who have committed similar transgressions. His brashness and sexual immorality were overlooked because he’s a successful “Type-A” businessman and he’s given “an allowance” for questionable morals.

All the idioms the participants used for Trump were affirmative. Even his widely known undesirable traits were transformed into positive attributes. He is a “successful businessman,” “a family man,” and a “strong leader who can get things done.” His falsehoods were thought of as simply “bragging” or telling “silly stories”. His three marriages and alleged misogyny were excused as being something successful, type-A men do. His vulgarity and brashness are necessary characteristics, in order to stand up to and defeat out-group threats. By aligning himself with the conservative Christian agenda, Trump was viewed as their rescuer. Hence, the standards for Trump’s morality are diminished. This follows Haidt’s (2012) three principles of moral psychology, the first principle being, “Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second” (p. 1). Haidt utilizes an example he calls “The Elephant Rule”. “Thinking is the rider; the effect is the elephant” (p. 66). The key metaphor is “The mind is divided, like a rider on an elephant, and the rider’s job is to serve the elephant” (p. 1). The idea is that thinking often works independently of feelings; however, sometimes emotional reactions can happen so quickly and persuasively that they can “reduce the universe of alternatives available to later thinking” (p. 66).

The second of Haidt’s moral principles is, “There’s more to morality than harm and fairness” (p. 110). He reasons those experiences take on a different meaning when you are raised in a “Western, educated, industrial, rich and democratic nation” (p. 129). In this principle, Haidt argues that “if you are raised in a more traditional society or within an evangelical Christian household in the United States, you become so well educated in the ethics of community and divinity that you can detect disrespect and degradation even when the apparent victims see nothing wrong” (p. 128). The metaphor he employs with this principle is the righteous mind that is “like a tongue with six taste receptors” (p. 368). In other words, societies are complex and no single moral foundation or no “one true morality” can be used for everyone, everywhere, all the time. Evangelical Christians should not require non-believers to adhere to the same moral standards. The conflict here for the evangelical Christians in this study is the conviction that their morality and religious identity is the true religion, and their single veritable morality is vital for the good of society. Society’s progress toward inclusiveness is regarded as an offense to Christians’ religious freedom. One interviewee brought up the Supreme Court case of the Colorado baker who refused to produce a wedding cake for a gay couple. The argument was that Christians should be allowed to take a moral stand based on their religious identity even if it requires them to discriminate against people who do not maintain their matching moral convictions or are out-group members. In the participant’s mind this was not a discriminatory act; it was solely a Christian defending his religious right to not participate in what he deemed to be an immoral act, a homosexual marriage.

Lastly, Haidt explains that “morality binds and blinds” (p. 217). He asserts that we are both selfish and are drawn to groupism. Religion has a history of binding communities together in a positive way; however, it also can blind people when something is pronounced sacred. This can give believers the impression that they cannot question or think critically about something if it goes against what they consider to be biblical directives. This outlook emerges in the data. In a way, Trump, with all his known immoralities, is being considered by the participants to be hallowed, due to his taking up the shield for conservative Christians’ fight against a secular world. Furthermore, the patriarchal biblical principles are a cogent deduction for the participants’ tolerance of Trump’s moral flaws, even if their forgiveness is often inclusive to those who hold their own conservative views of morality or at least profess to be their combatant. The participants, over and over, referred to Trump as being redeemable in God’s eyes, which could be expected bearing in mind his perceived assistance to their causes (Smith, 2018; Wilson-Hartgrove, 2018). For these participants, there is no hypocrisy in their support of Trump, because they believe that, while he is deeply flawed, he is still useable by God to restore Christian principles (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2018). There is a restriction to the participants’ ability to question or criticize Trump’s words and deeds. In doing so they would be rebuffing their own religious identity or destabilizing one of their most vital identities.

Altogether the participants’ religious identity and moral values are aligned with their support of Trump as the president of the United States. He is both a warrior for their evangelical Christianity’s conservative efforts to bring God back into the political sphere and a protector of their patriotic sensibilities. The participants mainly voted based on their biblical values. However, in this paradigm their morality is situational. The participants minimize ethics considering their voting for Trump because the alternative would have been even less moral. Yet, the political conservatism the participants’ anticipated gaining was strictly due to high moral standards, and the desire to abolish or at least lessen secular society’s depravity. Any conflicting quandaries in supporting a presidential candidate and U.S. President who clearly lacked high moral standards were resolved in the participants’ minds by reasoning that “no one is perfect,” and “it is up to God to judge him,” and “anybody was better than Hillary.” Hence, the data appears to correspond to Haidt’s indication that moral intuition is often immediate and effortless, while reasoning is more of an afterthought.

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