

## Better Angels Book Discussion Guide

*The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics & Religion*, by Jonathan Haidt

An online discussion on February 19, 8pm-9pm, hosted by Better Angels library coordinator Jennifer Livingston

### Optional resources for pre-discussion reading and reflection

KnowledgeAtWharton video interview of Jonathan Haidt on “Why Liberals and Conservatives Can’t Get Along”: <https://youtu.be/qN42ZLwNFBY>

TED conversation with Jonathan Haidt, “Can a divided America heal?”: <https://youtu.be/D-Az5nZBBM>

Understand your own moral foundations with this short quiz: [www.yourmorals.org](http://www.yourmorals.org)

### Discussion questions

1. Haidt identifies differences in “moral foundations” as a primary driver of political polarization. Can you recall a specific experience of being in conversation with someone where you sensed you had significantly different moral value systems? How did those differences influence your ability to understand one another and have a productive conversation?
2. Most people are attracted to joining teams, clubs, and other group associations. Haidt calls the natural human tendency to promote our own group’s interests in competition with other groups “groupishness.” Discussions about political polarization tend to focus on the negative aspects of groupishness or political tribalism. Can you think of ways groupishness can be a positive force for democracy and anti-polarization?
3. Haidt compares role of reason in human decision-making and behavior to that of a rider on the back of an elephant, which embodies our feelings, intuition and pre-rational assumptions. In this metaphor, the elephant has more power than the rider, though the rider believes he or she is in charge. What do you think of this metaphor? What are the implications for our ability to connect across difference?

### The Better Angels Pledge

- As individuals, we try to understand the other side’s point of view, even if we don’t agree with it.
- In our communities, we engage those we disagree with, looking for common ground and ways to work together.
- In politics, we support principles that bring us together rather than divide us.