

Haidt: The Divided Self

Your honesty is cherished. Thank you all. This honesty shows you attacking your ignorance.

You seemed to like the turn in this assignment that was asking you to consider how you might apply the reading in your lives, in your understandings of “self.” Score!

Megan quoted Haidt, “It is only because our emotional brains work so well that our reasoning can work at all.” Share a real-life experience of this.

Riley asks us why we can’t seem to move from “inkling” (“I really shouldn’t begin my days mindlessly scrolling on my phone”) to “commitment” (“I will begin each day with 30 minutes of meditation and yoga”).

Sakura asks us to consider Falstaff as the desire-pursuing, appetite-led elephant and Hal, by contrast, as the ever-more-reasonable rider. Boom!

Sterling connected Haidt’s two charioteers with Plato AND with David Hume’s controversial (at the time) observation that reason is a slave of our passions.

Maria claims to have “trained my elephant to make the right decisions.” This is, of course, most impressive. Can she teach the rest of us how to do this?

Sage unspooled this electric phrase: The self as a “flesh prison piloted by an extremely and amazing little piece of meat.” This wonderful phrase is still bouncing around my parietal cortex. I’ve appended her full submission to this document (below).

Mackenzie described the mental intrusions that might turn into sarcasm, and she proposed that this conversion or expression might be automatic. As a supremely, even dangerously sarcastic person, this theory is winsome.

Sarah helps us better understand Freud and, in that understanding, to be able to put the renowned psychoanalyst back in place.

And a note about metaphor, from my chapter on *Richard III*:

Before exploring Shakespeare’s use of **metaphor**, it is important not to underestimate the value and power of metaphor not only as rhetorical device, but **as a way of seeing and relating to the world**. As Lakoff and Johnson argued, understanding experience in terms of objects allows people to pick out parts of their experience and treat them as “discrete entities or substances of a uniform” and, therefore, translatable and referent kind. Once a person has thus made his or her experiences concrete in some way, they can be referred to, compared, classified, quantified, and

reasoned about. Metaphors are not merely a feature of language, therefore, but ways of understanding and of mediating reality. Once expressed, typically in language, metaphors begin to structure thoughts, attitudes, and even actions, a causality on bold display in *Richard III*. The metaphors of professional football and war are so conflated, for example, that warfare has become something of a game, even a videogame, as remote-controlled, drone-dropped explosives emphasize, while football is celebrated for its aggressive, male-on-male violence in the valorized "fight" or "ground game" to win territory.

...

Though grounded in the historical accounts available in the late sixteenth century, primarily Thomas More's *The History of King Richard III*, Shakespeare's Richard is a product of embellishment and a rather intricate layering of signification. It is also important to note that for Elizabethans, the "history" or "chronicle" play, one based on a chronicle account, fulfilled much of what they considered to be the "legitimate purposes" of history. According to Ribner, the chronicle play, therefore, required a looser correspondence between event or person and account of that event or person. Such a correspondence gave playwrights room to maneuver, and it opened the door to use metaphor to frame action and thought as part of what Lakoff and Johnson call "**metaphorical systems.**" Such systems, including those of rite and ritual characterize, mark, and make manifest religions and cultures. The rites of baptism and communion are powerful examples because by incorporating physical or bodily experiences, these metaphors are lived even while they seek to provide understanding and meaning. They become the stuff of memory.

Sage's response:

In this excerpt, Haidt puts into words how separate parts of one's self battle over differing needs and desires. These parts are distinctive, such as the mind versus the physical body, and intentional versus unconscious action. Coming from a non-spiritual point of view, I agree with much of Haidt's explanation for human behavior, my own included.

I like to think of myself as just another flesh prison piloted by an extremely complex and amazing little piece of meat. This isn't to denounce the incredible things that we can achieve as humans, but it does mean that I don't believe we have souls or anything that makes us more special or meaningful than any other animal. For this reason, I appreciate Haidt's metaphor of the rider and the elephant. My "self" - my intentional thoughts, actions, desires, and everything that makes me me - is always being influenced and created by the other factors that come with being human as described by Haidt (mind vs body, left vs right, old vs new, and controlled vs automatic). Those things that would generally be seen as shortcomings aren't lesser parts of me, though, or "bad" parts. I will never be perfect, and I will always be flawed; I will struggle throughout my entire life as I try to live a good life, and that's okay. It's the most natural thing there is because "I" am not only the rider, but the elephant, too; all of the physical and mental defects,

the unhealthy or self-destructive inclinations, and the stupid decisions I make are as much “me” as the good things I do.

Like everybody else, I’m always trying to make sense of my life and figure out the meaning of it all. I don’t believe in fate or any kind of greater power, but I’m completely okay with knowing (or at least believing) that all of my philosophizing and rationalizing is confabulation. It’s me dealing with everything I experience the best I can in order to live as well as I can, and it works.

Dr. Carroll’s residuals

In the chapter’s first paragraph, how is the mid-brain revealed when Haidt’s mind prefers “going over the edge” to “looking stupid” in front of the others?

Paragraphs 20 and 21 on page 8 (“When Gazzaniga flashed...”) present several insights into how our brain creates a sense of self and “external reality” through the concept of “confabulation.” Our “left brain” has a “desire” to create a “plausible and coherent” story of the raw data it receives—even if that data has to be “altered” to make “reality” “acceptable.” What new perspective(s) on mind and self are implied here?

On page nine, the last three or four sentences of the paragraph that begins “Science has made...”: What point does Haidt point to about the “rider” (our conscious self—the part of the brain that “makes sense of experience through language”) that is a bit surprising?

Page 11, paragraph 28 (“There is, however...”): Explain the “flaw” in your own words. What are central implications of the “flaw” for one’s understanding of self?

Explain why paragraph 31 on page 13 (“Human rationality depends...”) is a key insight into “self” and into how we “choose the better or worse.”

Paragraph 39 on page 16 (“Evolution never looks...”) is an “eye” opening paragraph. What perspective on “reason” is offered? How does this new perspective differ from Aristotle?

What implications for “control” of one’s self are contained in the last few sentences of paragraph 40 on page 16 (“One use of language...”)?

Paragraphs 44 to 46 on page (“Now let’s jump...”) are key to this article. What are those key ideas and what significance do they offer as an attempt to understand the “self”?

Using the last paragraph of the article (“This, then...”) as source material, summarize your new perspectives on self as a result of “retrieving” Haidt’s ideas and as a result of attempting to group some of the significance on application of those ideas?