

Is Hate Innate?



disinterested spectator

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In the aftermath of the violence in Charlottesville, Barack Obama [quoted](#) Nelson Mandela in a tweet:

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No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

In addition, Nikki Haley issued an [email](#) to her staff condemning the hatred in that same event, noting that "People aren't born with hate." These remarks are in response to President Trump's failure to unequivocally condemn Nazis, Klansmen, and white supremacists generally, who are [undoubtedly filled with hatred for blacks and Jews](#) especially, but for anyone who is not white or not Christian. But what caught my attention here is the fact that Obama and Haley were not content merely to condemn hate; they went further and insisted that we are not born with hate.

Presumably, they suppose that by denying the innate existence of hate, they are making some kind of case against hatred. However, as they do not explicitly make that case themselves, it is left to us to try to figure out what they have in mind and what they suppose it proves. Hopefully, their point is not that babies do not emerge from the womb filled with hate for people of a different race or religion, for that would be a simplistic argument against a position that no one has ever held. Rather, the only interesting question is whether people are born with a disposition to hate, an emotion that will become manifest under certain circumstances. In other words, the question is whether people are born with a natural inclination to have feelings of enmity toward those who are different. Therefore, let us be generous and suppose not that Obama and Haley were making a case about what the newborn baby is thinking and feeling before the umbilical cord has been cut, but that they are talking about the child after birth. There are no unread comments at this time.

Obama and Haley would seem to be of the same frame of mind as Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his book *Émile*, Rousseau averred that "all is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things, all degenerates in the hands of men." In an earlier work, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men*, he argued that it is civilization that has corrupted man; for in a state of nature, he is noble and good. For writing such things, Rousseau was accused of impiety by the archbishop of Paris, because his assertion that man is basically good contradicted the doctrine of original sin, which held that man was basically evil. The question as to whether man is basically good or evil is not the same as the question as to whether man has a natural inclination to love or to hate, but they are close cousins.

Given that Obama and Haley do not believe people are born with a disposition to hate, we do not know, unfortunately, whether they believe that people are born with a disposition to love. But given the readiness with which a baby comes to love its mother and the universal tendency for people to fall in love later in life, hopefully they do accept that at least love is innate. But to say as much for love, yet deny the same for hate would be bizarre. In defending the doctrine of original sin, St. Augustine pointed out that if babies had the size and strength of adults, they would be monsters. In his *Confessions*, he says:

Who can recall to me the sins I committed as a baby? For in your [God's] sight no man is free from sin, not even a child who has lived only one day on earth.... If babies are innocent, it is not for lack of will to do harm, but for lack of strength.

I have myself seen jealousy in a baby and know what it means. He was not old enough to talk, but whenever he saw his foster-brother at the breast, he would grow pale with envy.... Such faults are not small or unimportant.... It is clear that they are not mere peccadilloes, because the same faults are intolerable in older persons.

It may be that Obama and Haley are trying to say in their incomplete way that while indeed people have innate dispositions to love and to hate, the object of their love or hatred is not inherited but acquired. In the old days, when marrying well was an important goal for young women, it was often said that they went to college to get their MRS; for while no one can be taught to love one person rather than another, it is nevertheless true that we tend to fall in love with someone we are around a lot rather than someone we run into only occasionally. Love, that is to say, cannot be taught, but it can be encouraged and abetted.

In a similar manner, hate cannot be taught, but it can be encouraged and abetted. But only up to a point. My grandfather belonged to the Ku Klux Klan. My father never joined, but he would have fit right in. And he used to say, regarding the Jews, that Hitler had the right idea. Raised in the Jim Crow South, I was taught not to use the water fountains or restrooms marked "Colored." I observed the rule much in the same way that I used the silverware at the dinner table in the proper manner. But my heart was never in it. I have often thought that many of us in the Jim Crow South really did not believe in segregation, but we went along with it in order not to incur the wrath of those who were filled with hatred for blacks. So when integration was finally imposed on the South, it met with no resistance from people like us. Had all whites hated blacks, the Civil Rights movement would have failed. But as the haters were in the minority, it succeeded. The main point of all this, however, is that while I was taught to hate blacks and Jews, I never did. In other words, people are born with varying dispositions to love and to hate, and those dispositions can be stronger than the influence of education.

Presumably, then, Obama and Haley wish to emphasize the goodness of man and the importance of education in their remarks. It is an optimistic ideology, for if hate is not innate and if education is efficacious, then we can all look forward to a future in which racism and other forms of discrimination no longer exist. But I doubt that "love comes more naturally to the human heart than hate." It all depends on the heart. Hatred will always be with us, for many people are born with a natural disposition to hate those who are different, and that disposition can be easily reinforced through education and friendship.

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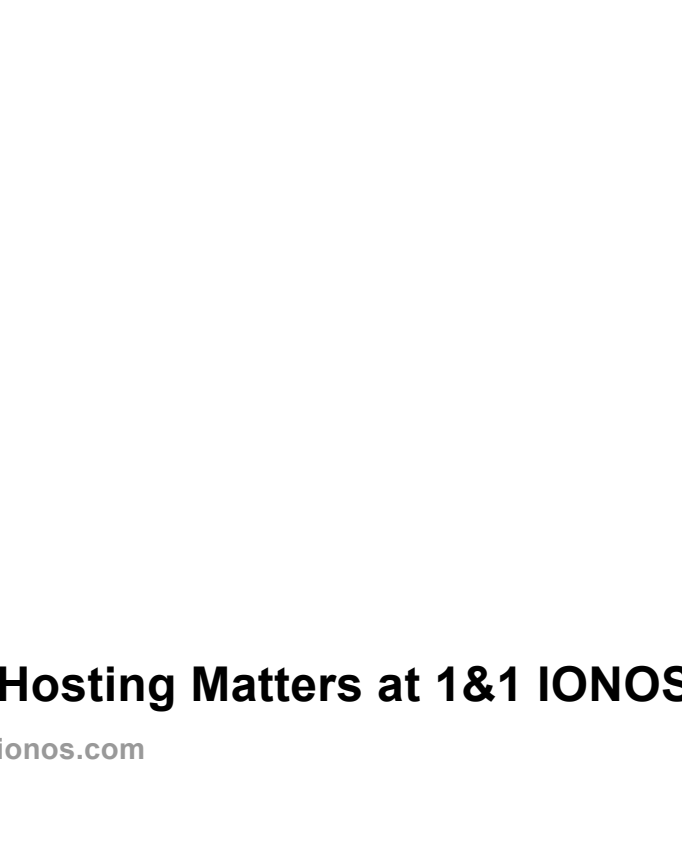
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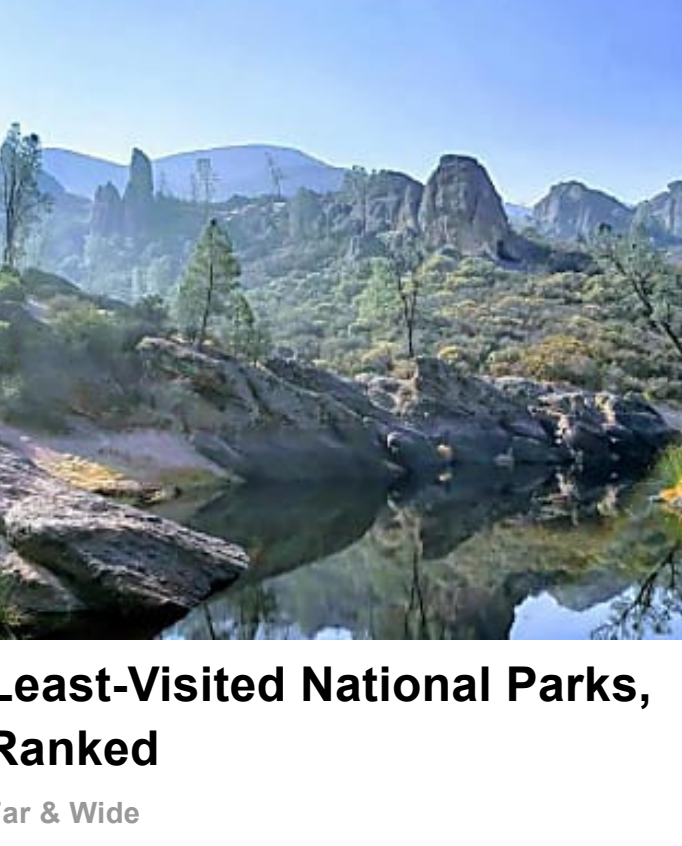
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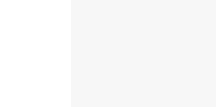


disinterested spectator **AUTHOR**

Aug 19, 2017 at 01:54:29 PM

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BlueDream

Aug 19, 2017 at 02:07:18 PM

But I doubt that "love comes more naturally to the human heart than hate." It all depends on the heart. Hatred will always be with us, for many people are born with a natural disposition to hate those who are different, and that disposition can be easily reinforced through education and friendship.

I had a conversation with a friend on the subject of how is hatred, cruelty, bigotry, and racism are propagated from generation into new and future generations. Your article is well written and speaks to much of what we talked about.

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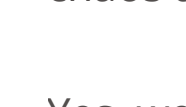
voidstuff

Aug 19, 2017 at 02:08:15 PM

Social psychology researchers have found that there's an innate preference for people who look like us and our parents. They've shown this with infants. We're born with tribal instincts. They evolved to protect us over millions of years when humans were living in the wild.

It's my belief that the -isms like racism and sexism are part of human nature with evolutionary roots. Being civilized means being taught NOT to indulge our worst impulses and instincts, including these. Enlightened people are those who understand the need to fight these things.

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FarWestGirl voidstuff

Aug 19, 2017 at 06:59:58 PM

Agreed, on all points.

I would, perhaps, amend 'fight to 'shape' or maybe 'resist'.

The fantasy that "in a state of nature, he is noble and good;" is silly and demonstrably false. The feral children who used to crop up occasionally, (raised by wolves, etc), were a perfect example. They existed as animals, they had missed the windows of development where there the human character of adults could have grown.

And they will never be complete, or anything like what they may have become with proper support and guidance.

Children who are raised in safe and supportive, (interactive), environments, with encouragement and enrichment, are almost universally better adjusted and resilient than those raised with chaos and rage.

Yes, we are born with our individual inclinations toward fight or flight, and the environment we're raised in can exacerbate or ameliorate our reflexive responses.

We are shaped by our environment, our culture, our families. Environment has input, but once old enough to think, we *can* choose among the inputs and focus on one over another.

And I'll default to my first Sociology teacher here-

Children Learn What They Live

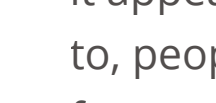
If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.
If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.
If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.
If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.
If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.
If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.
If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

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Sandy1

Aug 19, 2017 at 02:24:10 PM

When a person hates an entire group of people they didn't come by it naturally. They learned it from their environment. Hate of a particular person or thing is another matter, and I think we all have this form of hatred at times. Sometimes the hatred is justifiable and other times is a reflection of our own issues. The same can be said for stereotyping, and thinking our particular ethnic group is really superior to others. Anyone who claims to be totally immune to these lesser hates and prejudices is not being totally honest with themselves. As a total aside, I find Nikki Haley to be a smart, plucky woman. She's way too good for the Trump administration Repub or not.

0 Replies 3 Recommended

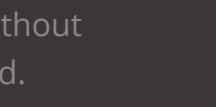


Catte Nappe

Aug 19, 2017 at 03:14:05 PM

it appears to be mostly innate that we prefer people like us — our "tribe". How we think about, and react to, people of other tribes is taught, and learned. Some teachers are more effective than others. We learn from many sources besides those who presume to teach us. That the racism of your parents and theirs didn't "take" with you has numerous causes, not least of which would be that you grew up in a world where it was less natural and acceptable and those influences were absent in their generations.

0 Replies 4 Recommended



BrianParker14

Aug 19, 2017 at 05:03:13 PM

Sociopaths are born and nurtured (ie.the rumpmeister).

It only takes a few committed sociopaths to overthrow a democracy.

America has an inordinate amount of sociopaths (ie republicans).

Capitalism is a petri dish were sociopaths easily rise to power and wealth. Thus the few required to kill the rest of us.

1 Reply 0 Recommended

Catte Nappe BrianParker14

Aug 19, 2017 at 07:35:35 PM

Sociopath does not equal Republican. Republican does not equal sociopath. It does not help us deal with the very real issues at hand to overstate your case so baldly.

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