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The Brain's Role in Determining the Nature of Politics

DR. JOHN MEDINA'S BRAIN RULES

Many have tried and continue to try to understand the nature of the human brain; Dr. John Medina's brain rules provide an explanation for the brain's role in everyday life in various environments. The brain rules about schema, attention, and survival all explain the current conduct of public policy, political debate, and political culture.

SCHEMA AND ITS ROLE IN POLITICS

The schema is a foundation that allows information to be applied to a substantive topic, described in Dr. Medina's brain rules. The schema in politics is one's own morality, which generally determines the course of public policy. One's morality provides a framework of life and society, giving one a worldview that helps form the role of government in their own mind. Because every person has their own sense of morality, their approach to the role of government will be different.

The polarization of American politics is due to the vast differences in morality; of course, people of different worldviews will favor different government policies and this difference is the cause for the stark division of political ideologies. Conservative morality is based on equality of opportunity, where freedom to do things without legal restrictions dominate the schema; government compulsion in society and a higher order lawfully deciding how to allow people to live their life is truly evil. Liberal morality is based on equality of outcome, where helping others to achieve equality through government intervention dominate the schema; allowing people to live in poverty and the government not doing anything about it is truly evil.

Both conservatives and liberals have solutions to all of the issues that could possibly face society, yet all of the solutions are different from each other. To limit poverty, conservatives say charity and religion will help the poor, so people who do not want to help do not have to help, because they have freedom. To limit poverty, liberals say government programs will help the poor, so people who do not want to help have to help, because those at the top need to pitch in their fair share. Political debate revolves entirely on the schema, which creates the foundation for understanding issues that face society. Understanding the other side's schema is essential to winning a debate against the other, and political debate usually ends up with debates on schema.

ATTENTION AND ITS ROLE IN POLITICS

The brain's attention focuses on important things, does not pay attention to boring things, and is more riveted to information with a high emotional content, according to Dr. Medina. Political debate is pretty boring: no one wants to listen to the repercussions of high or low taxation and the effects of a government mandated health insurance program; people want to hear debates on schema, or morality, and why others' morality is good or evil.

No one tunes into political debates to hear debate on policy, people want to see the gritty debates with political candidates calling each other names and explaining why the other is definitively evil, because they disagree with their morality. This type of debate creates emotional responses, which Mr. Medina says are the responses that make things more engaging, explaining the tendency for people to want to usually hear non-substantive debates about good and evil. Conservatives say liberals are evil because they want forceful government intervention, impeding the individual freedoms of people. Liberals say conservatives are evil because they do not want to contribute to a common good in society, forcing down the lower class while the elite bathe in more than enough money.

Again, no one's brain wants to hear boring things, so the brain's attention turns to political debates based on morality, which creates emotional responses, making them more popular. Millions of people do not want to watch a debate where politicians argue about the consequences of an increase in income tax and government spending related to the national deficit and economic growth, millions of people want to watch a debate where politicians call each other liars and point out how their policies hurt or help the people, whether it is true or not.

SURVIVAL AND A FIGHT AGAINST ALLIANCES

The brain ultimately developed to survive; it has allowed humans to conquer the globe, with people negotiating and cooperating with each other, while also striving to best each other, using survival instincts to try to topple their human enemy. Politics is the same way: politicians form alliances amongst each other and fight the side that has a different sense of morality: those who do not fight are left on the sidelines with whatever policy is chosen, which may defy their morality. A good politician will defend their morality in an effort to advance certain policies that abide by their schema.

CONCLUSION

Dr. Medina's brain rules help understand some aspects of politics. The schema in politics is one's morality, which defines their position on policy. Because people don't pay attention to boring things, they turn to nasty debates that may lack substance, but elicit emotional responses that make them interesting. The survival instinct the brain has developed is used to fight the foundations of morality in politics, and those who choose not to fight have to deal with whatever policy that comes their way. Mudslinging debate, while indeed engaging, is not the best way to approach debating public policy. Both sides must understand the schema of the other and every individual must find their own sense of morality to properly progress the state of society.