

## BULLETIN -- MARCH 12

**Fairness and injustice** are the next pair of opposites which social psychologist Dr. Jonathan Haidt has enumerated in discussing the five basic foundations of morality. We all know, or eventually learn, that life is not fair. Some people, through no fault of their own, are born with no arms or legs, or are born addicted to crack cocaine. Some are born into indescribable wealth, others into grinding poverty. Some use their wealth to keep themselves sedated and insulated from all the world's problems. Some emerge within or from their poverty to be family and community champions. The privileges and challenges of life and our responses to them are as varied as the number of individuals who have them.

Some seem to have a constitutional need to intervene to level the playing field, so that everything will be "fair" for everyone. There are folks who invent and distribute prizes and gold medals for mere participation. They are careful never to reward or recognize achievement and accomplishment, lest they hurt the feelings of those who, for one reason or another, have not achieved or accomplished anything. We don't keep score, we applaud both success and failure because they are meaningless concepts. Et cetera. The harm that is done to the psyches of children when they are immersed in such an atmosphere of pseudo-fairness becomes evident only when, for instance, in middle age they are still living in mommy's basement because they can't face the real world, where there ARE winners and losers.

Apart from that caricature, we all have a certain concept of fairness and injustice. We don't mechanically raise the basketball hoop up and down as the teams are coming down the court, based on who's got the ball. We don't allow one team unlimited strikes while holding the other team to three. The Old Testament book of Leviticus in chapter 19 provides numerous examples of God's commands to form his people into a JUST people. We could sum them up by saying, "Do not take advantage of or in any way mistreat the vulnerable." Hence God's commands about not cursing the deaf, nor putting a stumbling block in the path of the blind. To be a just person, you look out for those who cannot look out for themselves.

That seems easy enough to comprehend. But then we get into the thorny issues in which there seem to be conflicts of interest, or where one degree of unfairness is or is not remedied by another. An example? How about illegal immigration? It all seems rather clear. Nations have laws. If you break the law to get into a country, no matter how long you live there under the radar, you must know that there's always the chance the law will catch up with you. You knew it when you came in, or when you began to raise a family here *after* you came in. But what seems to be very clear becomes blurred when we begin asking *why*. Just because a person could not qualify for political asylum doesn't mean their life or livelihood was not under threat. Let's follow one possible thread. *Why* is someone risking life, limb, and deportation? Because their home village has become so physically dangerous. *Why* has it become dangerous? Because competing drug cartels have turned the town into a shooting gallery with numerous unintended victims. *Why* doesn't *their* government do something about that? Because their government is full of people who have close ties with the cartels. *Why* is that *our* problem? Because the drugs are being sold here, in the largest, most profitable drug market in the world. Anyone who buys and uses illegal drugs in our society is fueling the illegal immigration of people who

would be happy to stay home if there were the jobs, security, and freedom that any country should be able to provide. So to “solve” the problem simply by belling “Deport ‘em” overlooks the fact that the thousands of us who crave and use mind-numbing narcotics in what should be the richest, freest society in the history of the world are complicit in creating the problem in the first place.

Another example, perhaps even closer to home: the money spent on school breakfasts and lunches. Since when is it the responsibility of schools, funded by taxpayers through the state and federal governments, to feed the children who come for an education? *Why* has it become the role of government to perform the basic day-to-day functions for children that parents have always done as a matter of course? Because many parents *don't* do it anymore, and children can't be educated when they're hungry or malnourished. *Why* don't the parents do what they're supposed to do in raising a family? Because many of them in the last 50 years have grown up in homes where *their* parents didn't do it. *Why* did such a pattern of parental neglect get so firmly established? Because the government fell all over itself stepping in to answer particular needs (not a bad thing in a true emergency), but purposefully neglected to stress the values that had previously been the work of families to teach and pass on. *Why* did that happen? Because like any bureaucracy, government will, left to itself, expand to “govern” every aspect of life. AND, frankly, because many politicians find that they can get re-elected indefinitely by giving people lots of free stuff. *Why* can't we just end these school lunch programs and tell the parents it's up to them? Because they've been taught for half a century that it's not their concern. If we simply ended the programs, the children would be hungry again and the state of education and public health would be even worse than it is now. Not so easy, is it? When you try to solve one injustice, the solution is often another injustice, even if the aim is to restore a right and proper order.

It should be obvious that real fairness involves *equity* far more than *equality*. All people are created equal, but that applies to our fundamental human dignity and rights, not to our individual attributes. *Equity* means you generously feed and nourish both your 3-year-old daughter and your 15-year-old football-player son--you just don't feed them the same thing, nor in the same portions! There's no unfairness in that, and that's due to their respective *capacities* as well as their needs. For the 3-year-old to claim “victim” status because she's not getting the same quantity of food as the fullback would be ludicrous. Yet look how many individuals make unreasonable demands on society as though the whole universe were made to revolve around *them*. Imagine a female cyclist demanding that the bicycle shop provide her a new boy's Schwinn to replace her old girl's bike free of charge because she now identifies as a man. I guess they should've known, duh!! If it hasn't happened yet, keep your eye on the headlines. It can't be far off. God bless you!

Fr. Den

**Thought for the week:** To pay a sincere compliment, make sure that your focus is not about how perceptive or thoughtful you are.