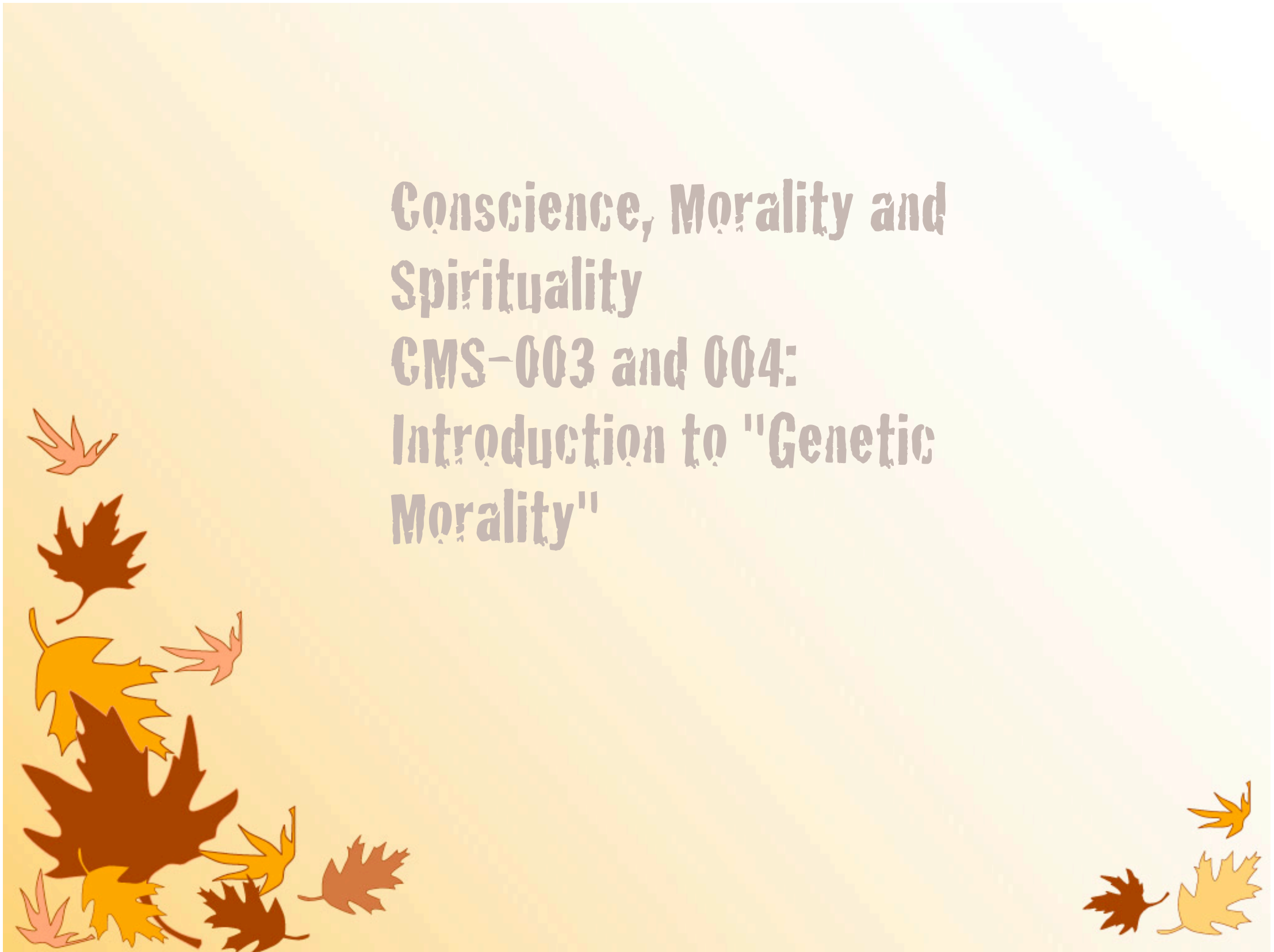
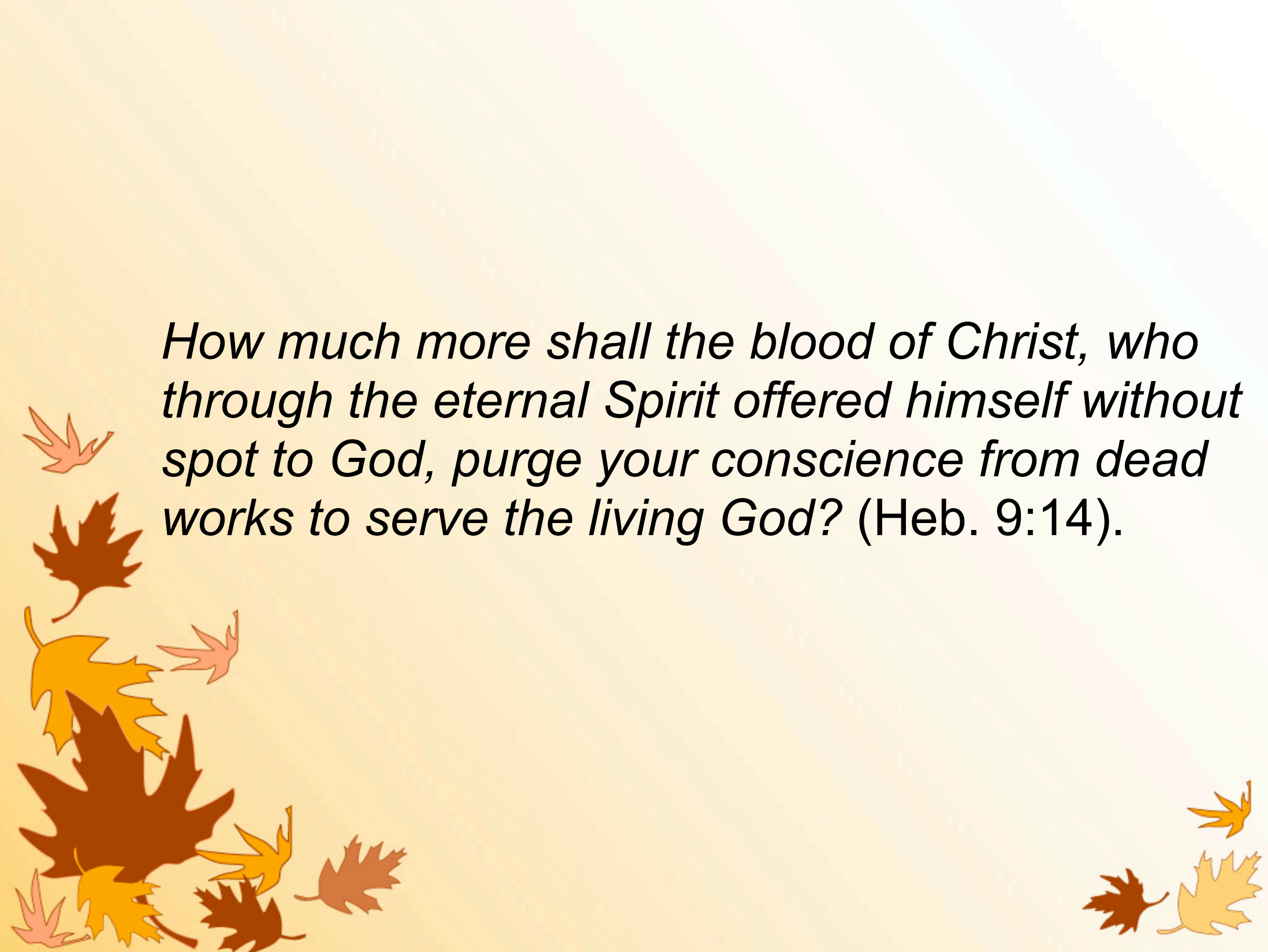


Conscience, Morality and Spirituality

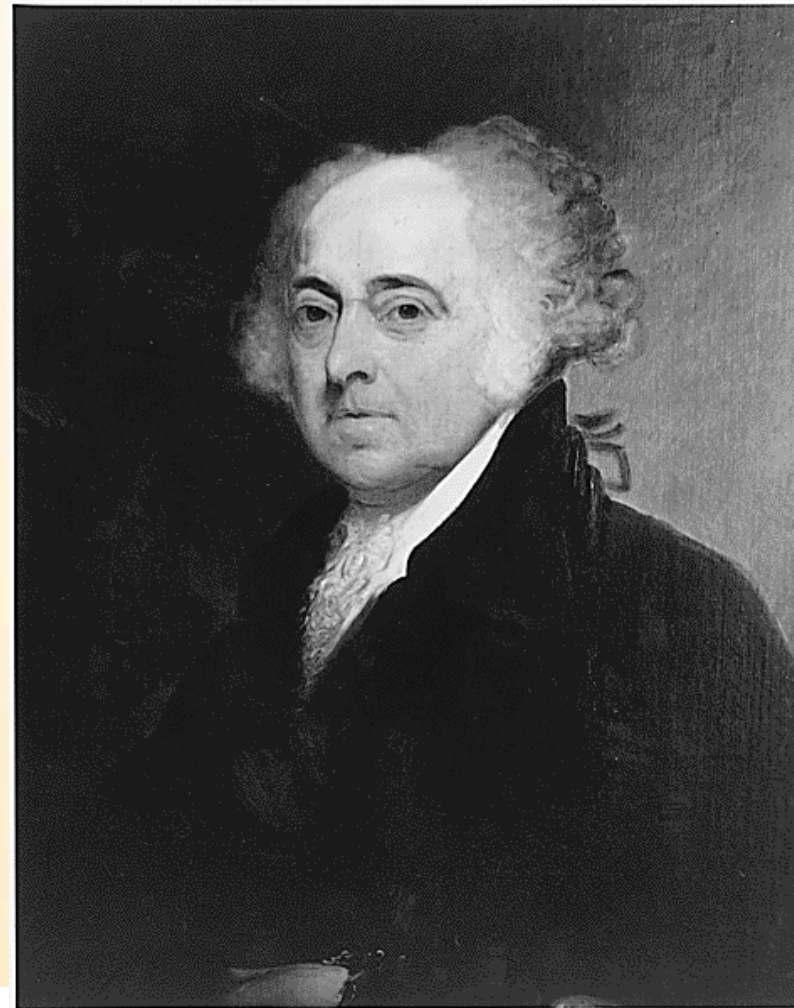
CMS-003 and 004: Introduction to "Genetic Morality"





How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:14).

"We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution is designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other." -John Adams, 2nd president of the United States



- The Happiness Hypothesis by Jonathan Haidt of the University of Virginia was published in early 2006 and offers his take on the ten Great Ideas taken from the Ancients and tested by modern science.
- He has selected ten great ideas previously discovered by several civilizations which he proposes to present and then analyze based on currently available science.
- All this with the purpose of developing lessons useful to modern life.
- He has frequently and unabashedly confessed to being an Atheistic Jew - a "Materialist" as we have seen in earlier studies on the Brain and Thinking. (See Website)



Therefore, let's look at a criticism of Materialistic Moralists:

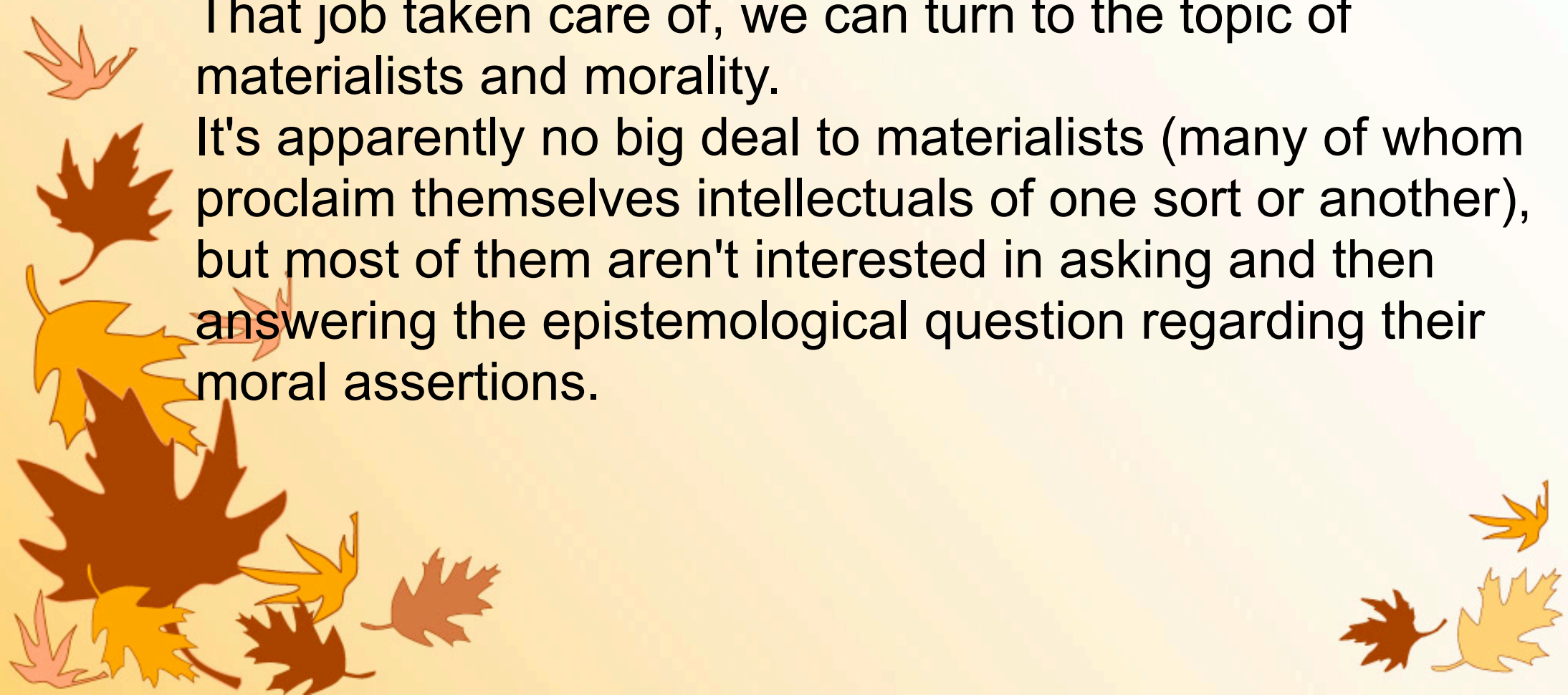
Epistemology, materialists, and morality

By A.J. DiCintio

Let's begin by defining epistemology simply as the branch of philosophy that asks this essential question about knowledge: "How do you know that?"

That job taken care of, we can turn to the topic of materialists and morality.

It's apparently no big deal to materialists (many of whom proclaim themselves intellectuals of one sort or another), but most of them aren't interested in asking and then answering the epistemological question regarding their moral assertions.

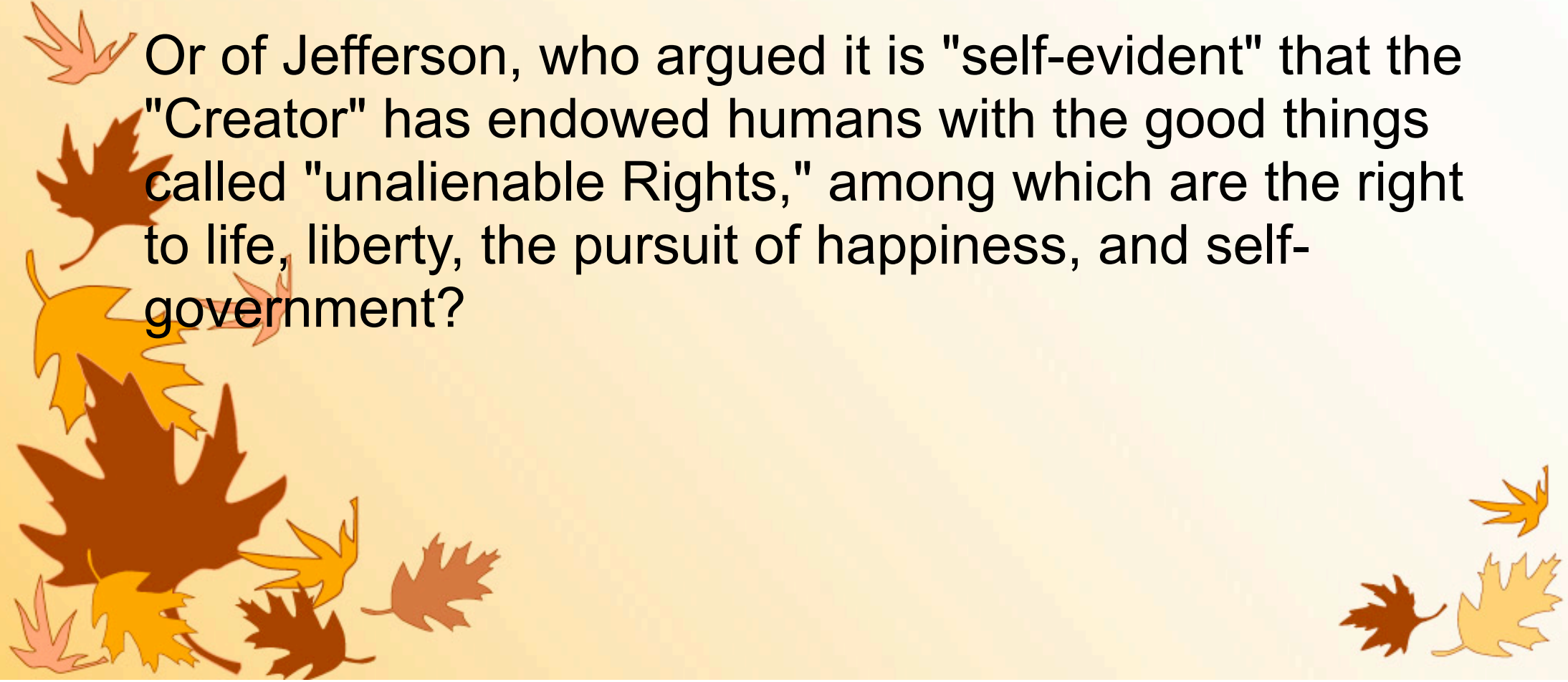


To complicate matters, this problem doesn't represent just an academic exercise; for materialists disproportionately favor the liberal side of the American political spectrum and therefore exhibit a ravenous appetite for enacting their moral beliefs into law. Moreover, like all other political elitists who have ever existed, liberals attempt to satiate that appetite exclusively at the level of government most remote from the Constitution's "We the People."



So, since materialists are loath to take on this important issue, let's ask some questions ourselves:

How do materialists explain the difference between the source and, therefore, the validity, of their morality and that, say, of Moses, who claimed he received the Ten Commandments from God?

A decorative border of autumn leaves in various shades of orange, yellow, and brown is scattered along the left and bottom edges of the slide.

Or of Jefferson, who argued it is "self-evident" that the "Creator" has endowed humans with the good things called "unalienable Rights," among which are the right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and self-government?

How, indeed, do materialists explain the difference, given that their view of existence requires them to regard the tablet held up by the ancient Israelite as the work of a wily political Moses; a pathological prankster Moses; a drugged-out hallucinatory Moses; or a voice-in-his-head schizophrenic Moses?



(Regarding the appropriateness of the word "religion," note, for example, that ACLU materialists not only are devoted to making metaphysical assertions about rights (divining new ones by the bushel full every day) but also are governed by a hierarchy that, from high priests at the top, works its way down to pastors of local congregations that hold services replete with the passing of collection plates to further the cause, including by funneling money to a missionary effort.)



Interestingly, there are a few materialists who have tried to answer the questions.

Carefully leaving God out of it, they claim to have shown that morality exists in the physical world independent of human imagination. Therefore, they argue, humans don't invent or hallucinate morality but discover it.

But how scientific are such assertions?



But the Doppler Shift is entirely consistent and predictable *in every instance* in which scientists are able to observe and measure it.

Yet Bronowski has not a word to say about how that kind of predictability applies to a humanistic assertion such as the following:

"A murderer serving a life sentence not only has a right to an organ transplant but also enjoys the right equally with other citizens."



- Robert Wright, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, has also taken on the problem (NY Times, "A Grand Bargain Over Evolution") by turning to Harvard's evolutionary psychologist and "contented atheist" Steven Pinker.
- He quotes Pinker as follows:
 - "There may be a sense in which some moral statements aren't just . . . artifacts of a particular brain wiring but are part of the reality of the universe, even if you can't touch them and weigh them.. . [These realities are] . . . independent of our existence. I mean, they're out there and in some sense — it's very difficult to grasp — but we discover them, we don't hallucinate them."



Let's think about this "science."

Pinker surely will say that on an insignificant planet orbiting a quite ordinary star on the edge of one among billions of galaxies, a fortuitous meeting of some common chemical compounds gave rise to proteins which eventually evolved into a sentient species that in numerous instances displays not just Wright's "reciprocal altruism" but what Wright calls a "moral sense."

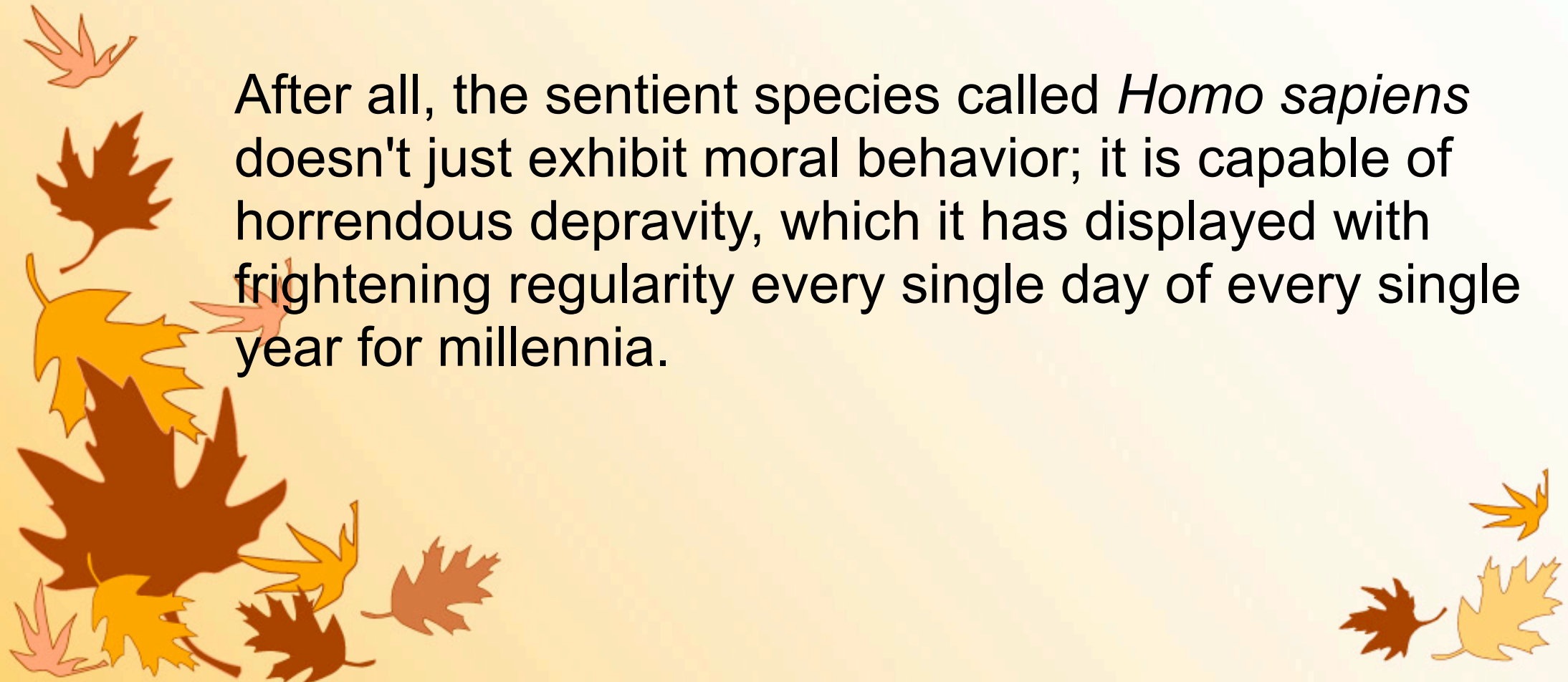
And bingo! From that observation, he concludes (without a bit of empirical evidence) that morality exists as part of the physical universe.

Talk about the need for epistemology!

Moreover, Pinker seems oblivious of the fact that his that wild speculation evokes this question:

Does an amoral reality also exist as part of the physical universe?

After all, the sentient species called *Homo sapiens* doesn't just exhibit moral behavior; it is capable of horrendous depravity, which it has displayed with frightening regularity every single day of every single year for millennia.



Why, according to Pinker's thinking, shouldn't there be some physical *thing* that impels humans to evil.

In sum, Pinker is asserting that God (The Good) and the Devil (Evil) actually exist — but as a form of matter or energy whose nature we can't even imagine but which was and still is part of the chemistry that gave rise to life on earth.



So, God and Satan exist as physical realities that permeate the entire universe. Next thing, we'll be hearing there is a purpose in nature.

Well, unlike a semi-conscious reveler who, unable to rise from his organic bed amid the mud and cowpies of a Woodstock meadow, feebly gesticulates as he croaks, "That's deep, man," scientists and common sense folks recognize such notions for what they are: a lame attempt to pass metaphysics off as science.



So, what are we to do in the face of materialists who refuse to explain how their ideas about morality are based in physical reality as well as those who, with the worst kind of doublespeak and gobbledegook, ascribe them to matter, energy, and forces boomed by the Big Bang?

Here's one suggestion:

In the first case, we can remain calmly persistent in asking the epistemological question.

Next we will look at a discussion of Haidt and view his TED video:

Why conservatives and liberals talk past each other on moral issues. By Erich Vieth on July 07th, 2007

Genetic Morals

I've studied moral philosophy for many years, mostly in frustration.

Though many philosophical theories of morality have offered tantalizing glimmers, they ultimately fail to account for the "moral" decisions people make in the real world.

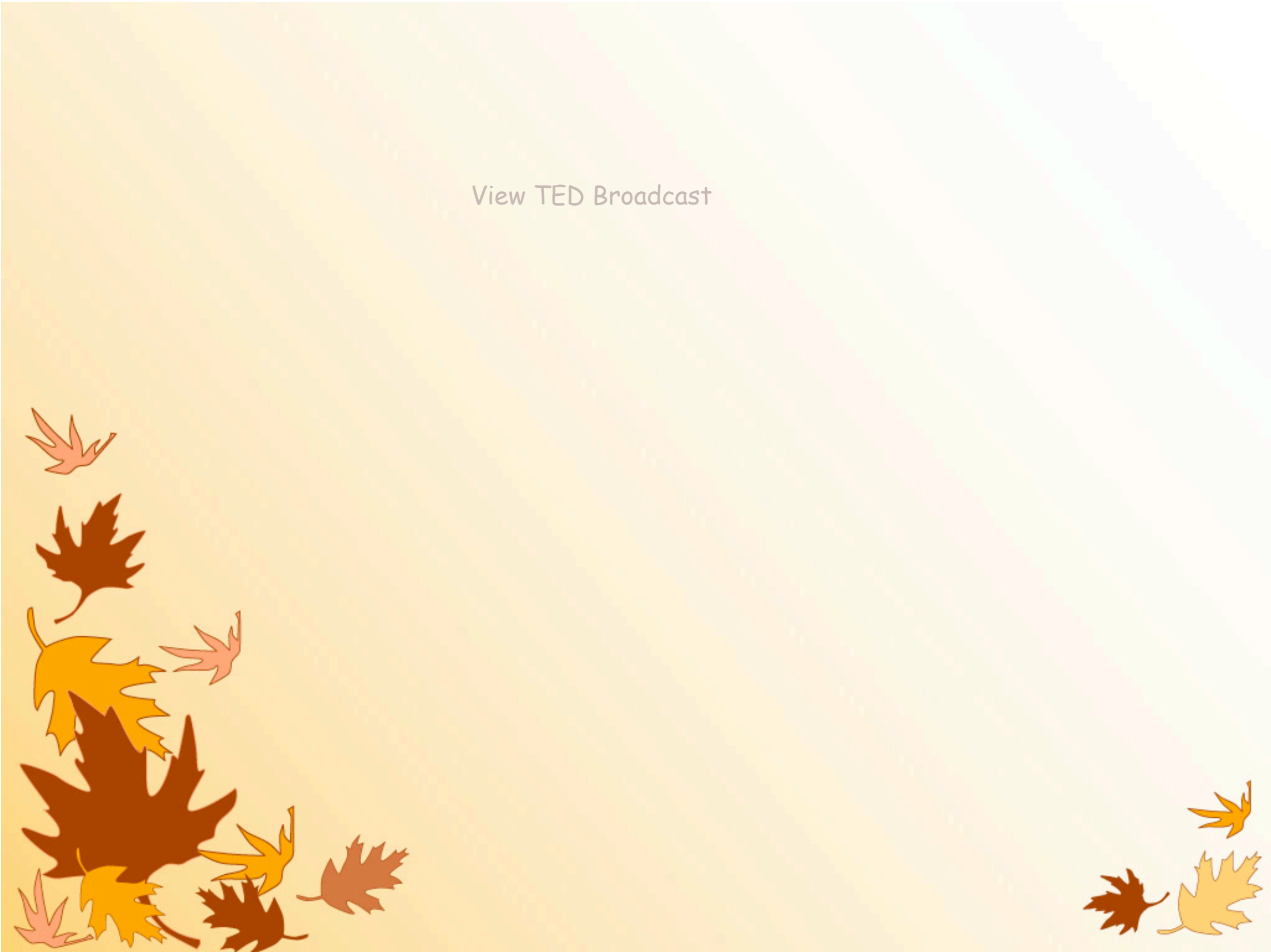
Traditional philosophical accounts of morality have appeared especially feeble in light of the ongoing and volatile American culture wars.



- For instance, some of us claim that torture is OK while others feel that we have a moral duty to impeach the President and Vice-President for failing to stop the torture.
- Starting with the assumption that both sides to this controversy are sincerely, no philosophical moral system begins to account for both of those positions.
- Luckily, we are in a new era with regard to understanding morality.
- Cognitive scientists such as psychologist Marc Hauser and primatologist Frans de Waal are studying morality with new sets of tools.



[View TED Broadcast](#)



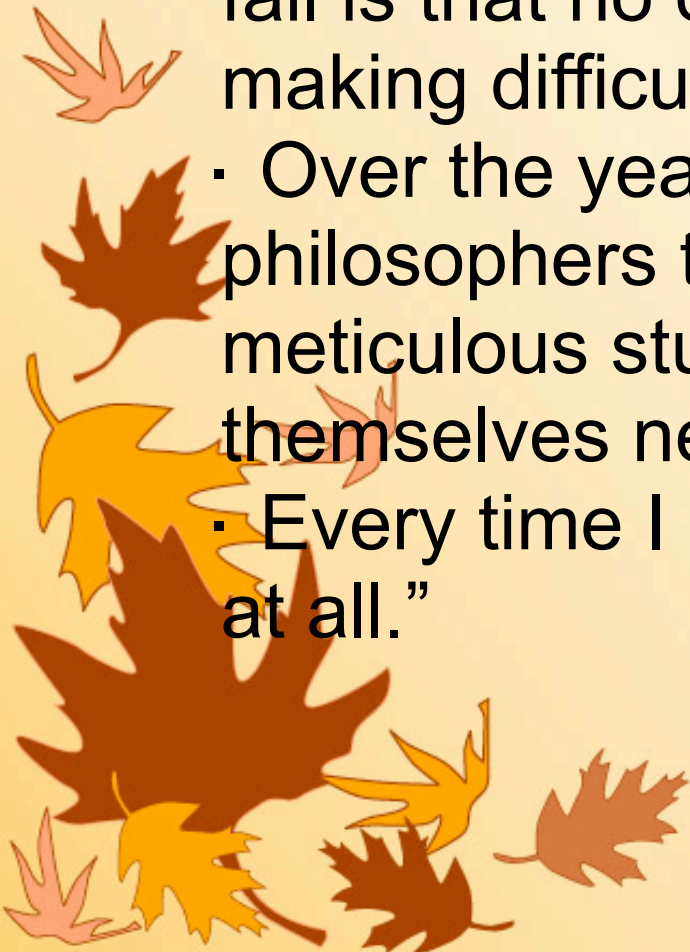
- The problem with most philosophical moral systems is illustrated by the story “The Blind Men and the Elephant.”
- In that story, each of the blind men was able to touch one body part of the same elephant but they drew conflicting conclusions about what an elephant is like.
- Invariably, they concluded that the elephant was fully-describable as the one particular part they touched.



- One of the blind men touched only the elephant's floppy ear and concluded that an elephant is like a fan.
- Another blind man touched only the elephant's leg and concluded that an elephant is like a tree.
- The blind men proceeded to get into a needless argument.
- One point to this story is that we must be careful so that we don't over-generalize.
- Because many things in life are multifaceted, they are not fully describable after a partial investigation.
- Nor are they capable of being simply described.



- There is no reason to assume that there is any “grand unification theory” of morality, all moral phenomena subsumed under a single formula or description.
- Philosophers have repeatedly made the mistake of trying to jam all “moral” phenomena into one tightly-defined category.
- The proof that traditional philosophical moral theories fail is that no one makes reference to them when making difficult moral decisions.
- Over the years, I’ve asked three tenured moral philosophers the extent to which they refer to their meticulous studies of moral theory when they themselves need to make a difficult moral decision.
- Every time I asked this question the answer was: “Not at all.”



- Here's another clue that traditional philosophical moral theories fail.
- Moral philosophers have traditionally used only a few select examples to illustrate their moral theories.
- For the most part, the theories of moral philosophers break down when people attempt to apply those theories to real world, which are inevitably complex.
- The real world always presents more that is "relevant" than traditional philosophical theories are capable of considering.



- For example, Immanuel Kant presented his “categorical imperative” as the solution to something he considered an anathema: ad hoc resolution of moral conundrums.
- Kant sought certainty and a deep-rooted analytical framework.
- In my opinion, Kant failed to deliver what he promised.
- I sometimes imagine filling a large room with the world’s best Kant scholars and asking them to apply the Kant’s categorical imperative to several real-world problems such as gay marriage, abortion, and telling lies.



- Every time I run this thought experiment, I imagine the Kant scholars getting into loud arguments (and fist fights!) and coming to no agreement at all.
- I suspect we'd get the same result if we filled a large room with utilitarians or virtue moralists.
- The categorical imperative (to use one example of a traditional philosophical approach) is utterly incapable of shedding any light on the reason liberals and conservatives so often talk past each other on matters of morality.



- None of these philosophical theories account for the obvious real-world chasm that exists between liberals and conservatives.
- It was with great satisfaction, then, that I learned that Jonathan Haidt is making serious use of the scientific method to understand the factors that drive real-work moral decision-making.
- His approach is especially interesting in its description of the moral differences between conservatives and liberals.



- Which group is more moral?
- That isn't the right question, according to Haidt.
- Both groups strive to be moral.
- The difference in the way they characterize morality is that conservatives and liberals base their moral sense on different measures.
- For conservatives, morality is a composite of five measures that are each taken seriously:



1. harm/care
2. fairness/reciprocity
3. ingroup/loyalty
4. authority/respect and
5. purity/sanctity.

- For liberals, however, the moral domain consists primarily of the first two of these five measures; the other three tend to fly under the liberal radar.
- Haidt describes each of these measures of morality on page 6 of his article.
- Here is a capsule summary of each:



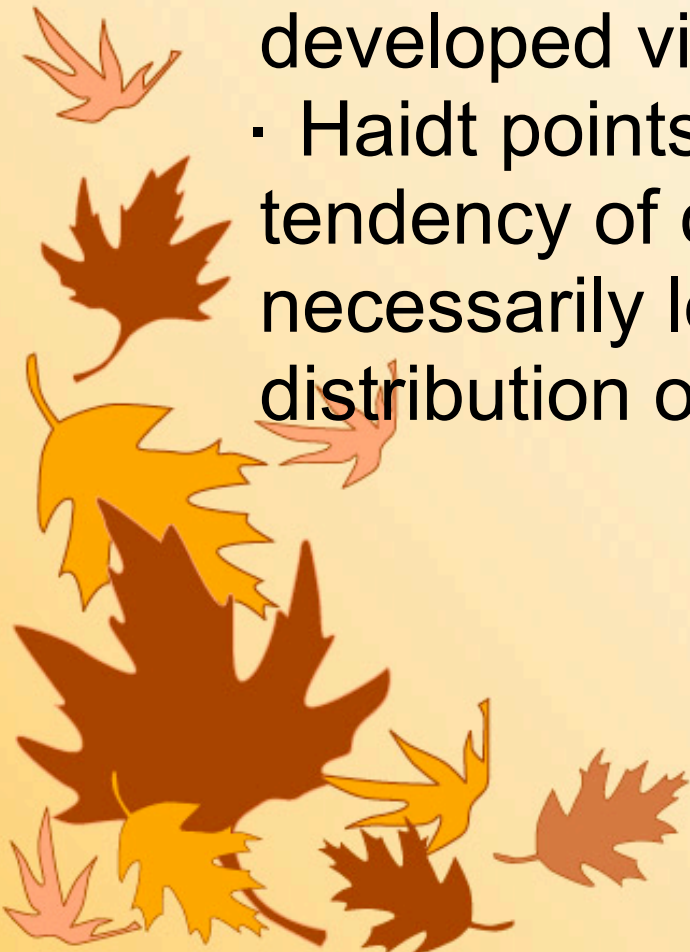
1. Harm/care.

- Evolution has shaped maternal brains to be sensitive to the suffering of offspring.
- In humans, this tendency has been generalized beyond our relationships to offspring.
- Human beings react to the suffering of other humans, whether child or adult, whether biologically related or not.
- Humans feel compassion when they see other humans suffer and they are disturbed by cruelty and harm.



2. Fairness/reciprocity.

- Humans, like many other primate species, readily form alliances.
- This tendency “has led to the evolution of a suite of emotions that motivate reciprocal altruism, including anger, guilt and gratitude.”
- As a result of these emotions, “all cultures have developed virtues related to fairness and justice.”
- Haidt points out, however, that the almost universal tendency of cultures to value reciprocity does not necessarily lead to a belief of individual rights, equal distribution of resources or equal status.



3. Ingroup/loyalty.

- Human animals have developed strong emotions “related to recognizing, trusting and cooperating with members of one’s co-residing ingroup, while being wary and distrustful of members of other groups.”
- As a result, many cultures have valued loyalty, patriotism and heroism.
- Cultures are thus commonly suspicious of diversity.
- Further, a member’s willingness to criticize his or her own ingroup is seen as betrayal or treason.



4. Authorities/respect.

- In many primate species, most members react to the physical force and fear displayed by those in leadership positions.
- For humans, “the picture is more nuanced, relying largely on prestige and voluntary deference.”
- Many societies have thus come to value “virtues related to subordination: respect, duty and obedience.”



5. Purity/sanctity.

- In most human societies, disgust has become a social emotion as well as a physical reaction.
- In these cultures, “disgust goes beyond such contaminant-related issues and supports a set of virtues and vices linked to bodily activities in general and religious activities in particular.
- Thus, those who are ruled by “carnal passions” are seen as corrupt or impure compared to those who are spiritual or sanctified.



- Haidt does not hide the fact that he is a liberal and an atheist.
- One thing he is not is an armchair philosopher.
- He is also a psychologist who is hungry for real-world data.
- His moral theory is based upon psychological experimentation and ultimately founded in evolutionary theory.



- Consequently, Haidt distrusts the reasons people give for their moral decisions.
- See, for example, his article: “The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment.”



- Intuitionism in philosophy refers to the view that there are moral truths, and that when people grasp these truths they do so not by a process of ratiocination and reflection, but rather by a process more akin to perception, in which one just sees without argument that they are and must be true . .



- Moral reasoning is usually an ex-post facto process used to influence the intuitions (and hence judgments) of other people . . . [In sum],
- 1) the reasoning process has been overemphasized;
- 2) reasoning is often motivated;
- 3) the reasoning process constructs post-hoc justifications, yet we experience the illusion of objective reasoning.



- Haidt's theory focuses on the undeniable chasm between self-described liberals and conservatives and proposes an explanation for this chasm.
- Liberals base their moral systems primarily upon the first two of the five foundations (harm/care and fairness/reciprocity).
- To the extent that something does not fall within these two categories, it simply is not a moral issue in the eyes of liberals.
- Conservatives disagree intensely.



- For a conservative, it matters greatly (in a moral sense) whether an act or omission offends one's conceptions of proper ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect or purity/sanctity.
- For liberals, these three measures, though they might be of Machiavellian interest, are simply not matters of morality.



- As Haidt points out,
- The five foundations theory can also explain to puzzling features of the 2004 American presidential election.
- The first puzzle is that a plurality of Americans who voted for George Bush said in a well-publicized exit poll that their main concern was “moral values.”
- The second puzzle is that political liberals in the United States were shocked, outraged, and unable to understand how “moral values” drove people to vote for a man who, as they saw it, tricked America into an unwinnable war, cut taxes for the rich and benefits for the poor, and seemed to have a personal animosity toward Mother Nature.



- Our explanation of these two puzzles and of the culture war in general, flows from this simple proposition: the morality of political liberals is built on the harm and fairness foundations, while the morality of political conservatives is built upon all five foundations.
- To test his theory, Haidt asked 1600 people to rate the relevance of 15 concerns to their moral judgments.
- Liberals rated concerns with harm and fairness as being significantly more relevant to moral judgment.



- Conservatives rated ingroup, authority and purity concerns as significantly more relevant than liberals.
- Extreme liberals said that only the first two foundations were highly relevant, while the other three foundations were not nearly as important.
- Extreme conservatives, in contrast, said that all five domains were equally relevant in making moral judgments.
- We are continuing to explore this difference between liberal and conservative moralities with studies on persuasion and implicit cognition.



- Do the two groups differ in their implicit attitudes as greatly as they do in their explicit values?
- Will moral appeals for liberal causes that press emotional buttons related to ingroup, authority and purity persuade political moderates, who make up most of the electorate, where more traditional liberal appeals have failed?
- We expect that the five foundations theory will be useful in the study of political action and rhetoric.



- If our initial findings hold up, they would indicate that justice (and related concerns derived from the fairness/reciprocity foundation) is literally half of morality for liberals, while it is only one-fifth of morality for conservatives.
- Haidt's own review of literature pertaining to morality indicates that most scholarly articles reject conservative concerns related to ingroup, authority and purity as "bad" on the grounds that they often conflict with proper measures of morality: harm and fairness.



- In short, most moral studies reject the legitimacy of several of the things that conservatives revere as moral measures.
- For a dramatic portrayal of this rejection of the bases of conservative morality, see the chart on page 16 of Haidt's article.
- I took Haidt's test and found that my moral foundation clearly fell into the "liberal" configuration, in that I tend to reject the measures of ingroup, authority and purity. I'll confess that these conservative measures seem immature and stunted to me.
- They seem like the sorts of reasons toddlers might drum up to justify their actions.



- For example, I consider it to be irrelevant what my alleged ingroup thinks.
- When someone tells me that I ought to support the Iraq occupation because I'm an American and a need to support America, I can barely contain my frustration. What comes to mind is this: if everyone else decided to jump off a cliff should you jump off a cliff?
- I reject authority as a basis for my own moral decision-making.



- Many conservatives would support the war in Iraq (as a moral issue) because the president of the United States (a salient authority figure) has asked for that support.
- My gut reaction?
- Bush is either an idiot or evil.
- That he is an authority figure has no bearing on whether he is correct.
- Therefore, that he is an authority figure does not compel me to consider him to be a moral authority any more than I would consider any other human being.



- I recently wrote a post on the fifth measure of morality: purity/sanctity.
- I've struggled with this topic more than the others.
- My initial intuition is that the extent to which something disgusts me has nothing at all to do with morality.
- I've struggled with this purity measure, however, because, on many occasions, my feelings of disgust seem to fuel my own moral intuitions.
- Yet I am suspicious of disgust.
- In my experience, disgust is too often an unreliable indicator of what is moral or immoral.



- According to Haidt's research, conservatives strongly disagree with me.
- That disgust is critically important to conservatives comes even more clearly into focus when you consider that disgust is one endpoint on a continuum, the other endpoint being that which is sacred.
- For conservatives, things which are taken to be sacred are automatically deemed moral.
- Anything that defiles anything that is sacred is immoral.



- Haidt stresses that his five foundation theory is a cultural-psychological theory as well as a nativist theory.
- The virtues of a culture are constructions. “Children develop different virtues in different cultures and historical eras, yet the available range of human virtues is constrained by the five sets of intuitions that human minds are prepared to have.”
- Haidt also has a lot to say about the existence of long-standing cultural institutions.



- He cautions that such institutions often have “a collective wisdom incarnate in them.”
- As such, traditional institutions “should be given the benefit of the doubt; they should not be torn down and rebuilt each time one group has a complaint against them.”
- As an illustration, he uses gay marriage.
- Using Haidt’s approach, the conservative warning that gay marriage will destroy marriage “is no longer incomprehensible-it is correct.
- Legalizing gay marriage would be a change to an ancient institution.”



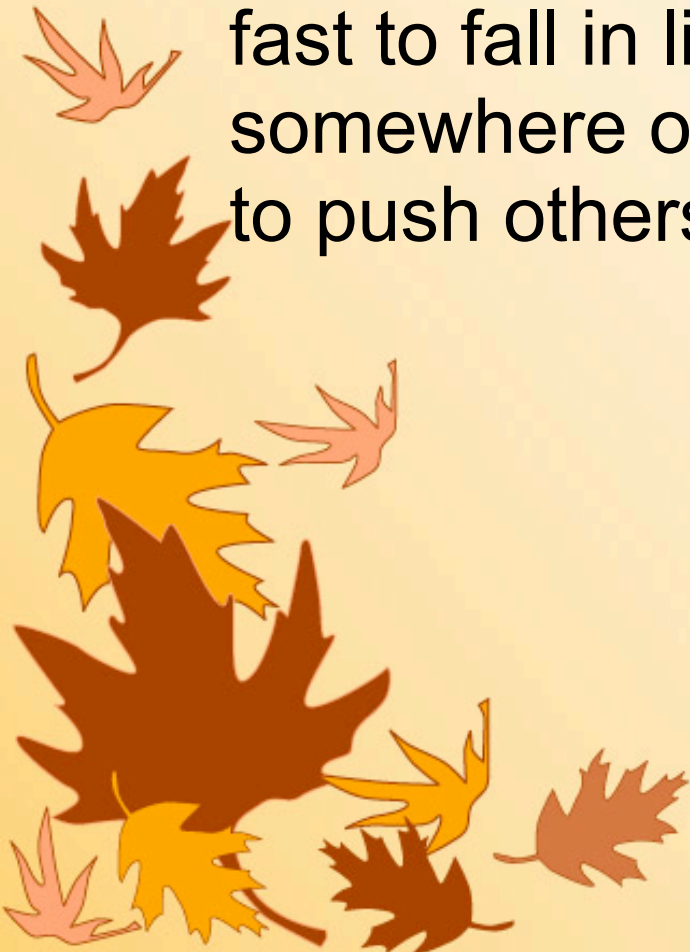
- Haidt's program is a strong beginning to a new round of study of the topic of morality.
- There is much more to explore within the framework he offers.
- Here is one topic on which invites further analysis: Consider the locus of control regarding the five measures of morality.
- Do you "own" the measures or do they "own" you?
- Using the measures of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, one is likely to feel as though one is an active participant working through social issues.



- Using these two measures, one might feel like one is actively tweaking a big hydraulic system that allocates risks and resources.
- On the other hand, the measures that conservatives tend to add to this mix (ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity) come predetermined and prepackaged, from “out there” somewhere.



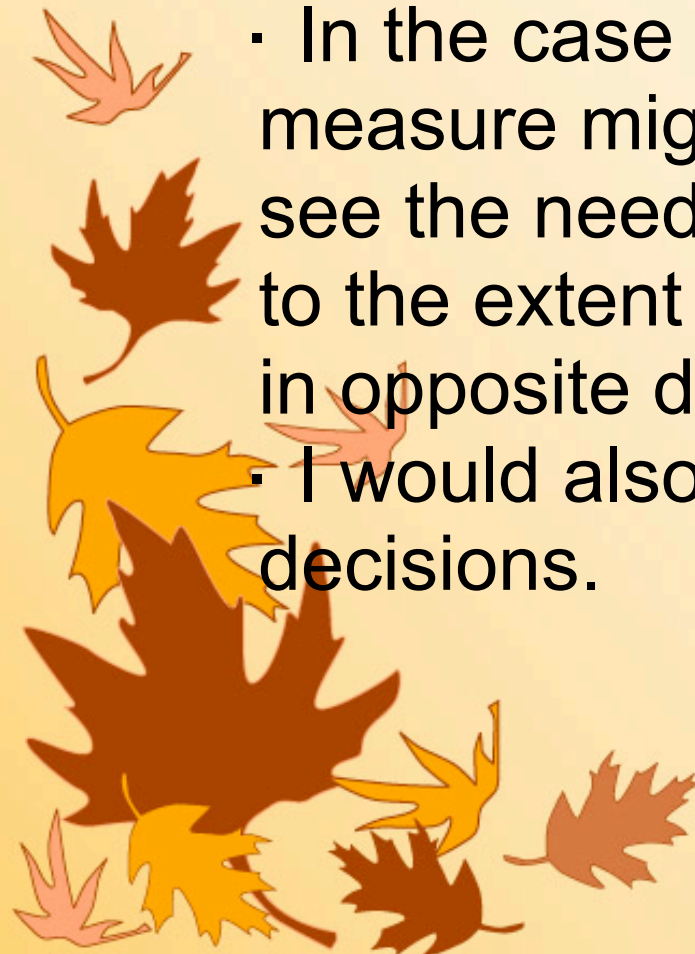
- People don't normally sit down and calculate how to assemble their social group, whether to give respect to the person in charge or consciously decide what is holy.
- For most conservatives, those things are "givens" that are not amenable to further analysis.
- For conservatives, the only calculation needed is how fast to fall in line with these measures that originate somewhere out there and to decide how aggressively to push others to do the fall in line too.



- Another issue inviting further analysis is the method by which people apply the five separate measures to resolve conflict.
- I doubt that we'll ever determine a specific calculus—people don't actually have the cognitive firepower to “weigh” the factors in a precise way, but I do suspect that people make use of recurring strategies when considering the emphasis to give each of the five measures.
- It might come down to a set of heuristics or people might develop strategies as a result of become culturally trained up, from childhood on.



- Pattern-matching makes much more sense to me than any detailed attempt at calculation.
- As Andy Clark wrote in *Being There*, people are “good at Frisbee, bad at math.
- I suspect further that for many people, the some measures would trump all other measures, at least on some issues.
- In the case of gay marriage, for example, the purity measure might trump all others—many people wouldn’t see the need for any attempt to “weigh” the measures to the extent that the measures might drive the decision in opposite directions.
- I would also suspect that attentional factors drive these decisions.



- It would thus be interesting to explore why and how certain measures become bright and shiny things in certain contexts.
- Haidt offers a deeper explanation as to why some people end up liberal while others are conservative.
- He starts with the presumption that it is normal to use all five measures of morality.
- It is historically normal to be conservative.
- What needs to be explained is why some people are liberal.
- For Haidt the answer has to do with social mobility:



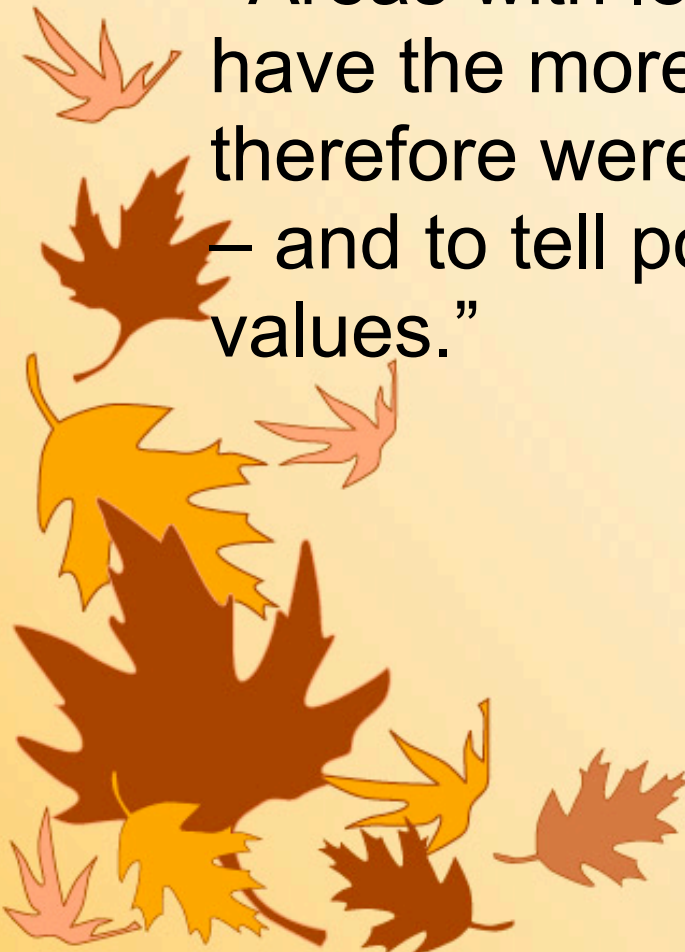
- Looking at the entire range of human societies, the statistically “normal” human society is built upon all five foundations.
- It is modern liberalism (not the “continent” of all other cultures) which requires a special explanation.
- Why is it that in a minority of human cultures the moral domain has shrunk?
- How did it come to pass that in much of Europe, and in some parts of the United States, moral concerns have been restricted to issues related to harm/welfare/care and justice/rights/fairness?



- We believe that a team of historians and sociologists could easily tell such a story, probably involving references to the growth of free markets, social mobility, science, material wealth, and ethnic and religious diversity.
- Mobility and diversity make a morality based on shared valuation of traditions and institutions quite difficult (Whose traditions? Which institutions?).



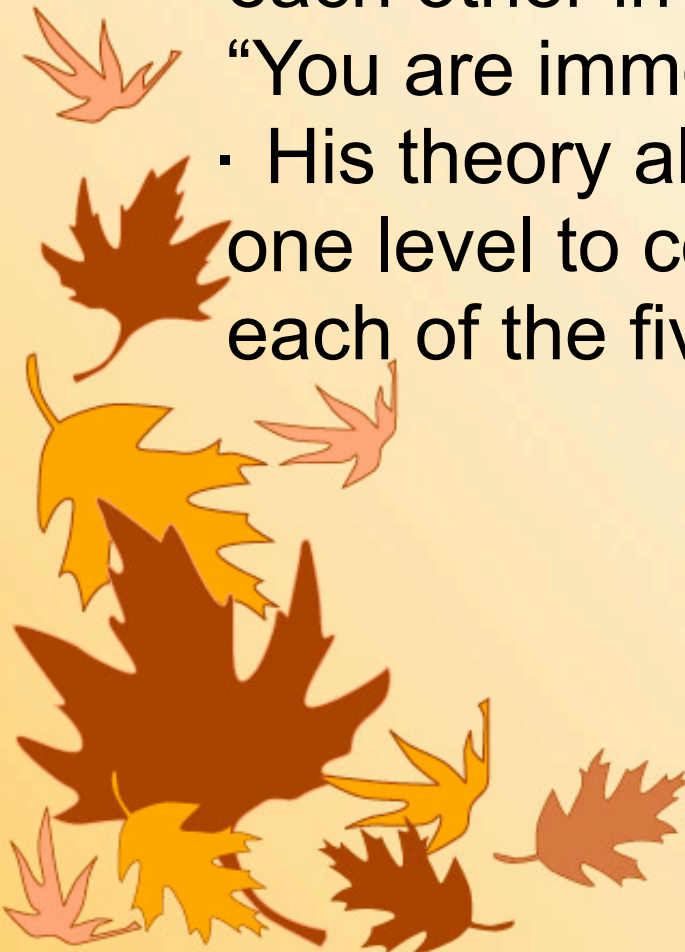
- These factors help explain the electoral map of the United States in the 2004 presidential election.
- When viewed at the county level, the great majority of counties that voted for John Kerry are near major waterways, where ports and cities are usually located and where mobility and diversity are greatest.
- Areas with less mobility and less diversity generally have the more traditional five-foundation morality, and therefore were more likely to vote for George W. Bush – and to tell pollsters that their reason was “moral values.”



- It makes intuitive sense that communities consisting of diverse mixes of cultures would need to downplay the three conservative measures.
- *Whose* ingroup?
- *Whose* authority figure?
- *Whose* version of the sacred/purity?
- Downplaying those three factors is an implicit truce.
- Failing to downplay these factors would result in high tension and even bloodshed.
- Compared to these three measures, the first two (harm & justice) invite pragmatic resolution, because liberals and conservatives both come equipped with a deep understanding of the measures of harm and justice.



- No matter what their background, everyone can roll up their sleeves and work through methods protect people from harm and allocate resources in the kinds of ways that avoid riots.
- Haidt's theory of the five measures of morality allows the two sides of the culture wars to communicate with each other in a fine-grained way, rather than shouting "You are immoral" at each other.
- His theory allows the discussion to move up at least one level to considering the validity and application of each of the five measures.



- With Haidt's approach, people can consider the merits of each of the five measures, based upon the function that those measures have traditionally served.
- Haidt's five measures approach assists the two sides in the culture war to identify what it is that they're not understanding about each other.
- It invites a real-life research agenda, one that is already bearing fruit, for studying and, perhaps, cooling down the culture wars.



