

How we vote, behave, and think is based on our view of the world. Whether consciously or not, we all have beliefs about human nature, and these views shape us. These worldviews are the product of our various religions and the experiences of our European, Asian, or African ancestors. They fall into the following categories:

\225 Man is basically evil (sinful), and must be restrained by firm governance ;  
\225 Man is born innocent and good, and learns evil from society;  
\225 Our behavior is governed by a combination of genes, environment, and history oric  
luck.

\225 Sinfulness. The view that man is basically evil (or sinful) belongs to all of our Western one-god religions, with a god who judges our behavior. The saving grace of such a view is that man can choose good or bad deeds, and this choice will be judged by God after our death. Zoroaster, an ancient Persian prophet, was the first to say that there was only one god of the universe who endowed his human creation with free will. Religious rituals and behaviors were designed to help the community support good, rather than bad, choices. Judaism and Christianity have adopted this view of man and free will. In Islam, free will is less emphasized than God\222s will (fatalism) and the duty of community is to \223promote virtue and prevent vice,\224 which assumes that man is naturally sinful.

Western conservatism going all the way back to the Puritans, assumes man\222s sinfulness. Because we are born inclined to sin, one must not spare the rod (punishment) lest we spoil the child. Virtue must be beaten into children so that they can learn to be decent, responsible adults. The primary duty of parents (and government) is to defend against outside evil and punish bad behavior. A subtext of this worldview is that only males can be the warriors for virtue; most women (and men of other races) are much more inclined to sin, and must be controlled. All religious fundamentalists today seem to adhere to this view.

Despite the Conservative view that man is flawed and subject to evil, Western Conservatives are willing to trust all human beings with governing themselves (small government, no governmental oversight), assuming that somehow they will choose such leaders well.

\225 Innocence. That man is born innocent (a blank slate) was the view of the French author, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who wrote this at the time of the French Revolution. In this worldview, society creates evil, not the individual human being. Society, he said, is corrupt and evil. In his view, children should be kept from all contact with social institutions (schooling, religions, and parental punishments) so that they grow up innocent and good, the innocence of nature. He also saw nature as benign, a view not shared by conservatives.

Extreme liberals and utopians believe that humans can be naturally good if only they have a good government that can support goodness through education and intervention. However, they cannot account for what motivates criminals or religious terrorists. They assume that a bad society is at fault, particularly a bad mother.

However, if man is born innocent and good, where did evil come from that corrupted society? This contradiction has managed to destroy every utopian society that spurred revolution or followed it. Today\222s anarchists and religious cults all fantasize about a brave new world after their triumphant world conquest. It never happens.

\225 Complex Human Nature. Brain scientists have begun to plumb the depths of what makes us human. We are programmed by our genes, although not doomed to be genetic automatons. Environment can moderate genetic problems, but can also bring out the worst in us. Our ability to live our lives as good people depends upon the luck of where, when, and how we were born, and how powerful were our genetic influences. I believe this, and so do most Americans who do not buy into either of the first two conflicting worldviews, the view of the American political fringes who dominate our primary presidential elections.

Do we need a national dialogue on worldview?

677 words

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