

Toward a New Morality: Consciousness and Evolutionary Change

The ongoing culture wars in the U.S. amount to polar opposites (extremists) continuing to fight each other without finding common ground. That's because both sides are stuck in opposing realities where they cannot see the forest from the trees, and both have fears of potentially having something valuable (their values) taken from them. As a result, both sides want to impose their "authoritarian" moral codes on others. Both sides accuse the other of being fascist and the truth is that both sides are right; they both share fascist tendencies, but they can't see their shadow selves in the mirror. Whether the battle is for abortion rights, gays in the military, Jr. ROTC programs in high schools, first-amendment "hate" speech, church-state separation, environmental changes, or economic justice, both sides continue to fight for their own right to choice at the expense of the others'.

There are those of us who are trying to move beyond this paradigm of polarization. Despite mounting tensions and ongoing political debate, we're trying to look at all sides of the current dramas and figure out moral codes that can benefit all. We're also trying to look at ways to live together with a common set of codes that we can abide by, outside of church and state mandates. To do this requires compassion, judiciousness, temperance, and discernment. It also requires an ability to take personal responsibility for what we do as individuals, to design moral codes democratically, and to implement and apply the codes in our surrounding communities.

As an example of the need for a new code of morality, take, for instance, hate speech. Do we really want government to mandate what we can and can't say to each other? Or do we want government to butt out, while at the same time we still refuse to tone down our rhetoric so that it doesn't offend others or instigate others to violence? This is a good example since both sides of the culture wars continue to goad each other along and inflame passions, by refusing to look at their own behaviors and actions as being the source of the problem. Those of us trying to move beyond this paradigm understand that we all need to step up to the plate and walk our talk, without expecting others to agree with us. So we walk our talk, take responsibility for living up to our own expectations and codes, do not engage in hate speech or try to impose our codes on others, and hope that others will do the same; that is, live up to their codes without imposing them on us.

Our basic and mutual expectations are that others will provide us with the same respect that we offer them: the sanctity to engage in their own moral conduct without expectations that they will change. What we all agree on is that instigating others to violence through hate speech does not remedy the situation at hand, but inflames the other side. So those of us who wish to move forward are taking responsibility for our own words and deeds by disengaging from the debate instead of using hate speech and fiery rhetoric to criticize another's conduct. One advantage is that we won't need thought police to monitor our every word or deed. And as a result, we can continue to think and practice what we believe to be personally moral, and also engage with others, when it is to our mutual benefit, for an extended dialog to address the common good. The purpose of this extended dialog is to develop a new moral code based on mutual respect and common objectives, to move our consciousness forward, despite our differences.

While cultural, religious and political wars may continue based on authoritarian models of extremism and repression, those of us who are moving away from these models are developing new ones. These models respect everyone's individual contributions and choices, as long as they are not otherwise forced upon or detrimental to those who disagree, including those who may fall into that culture. In those cases, we will offer a helping hand, just as we will uphold the rights of those whose choices are different than our own, as long as they are not imposing. We are defining a new morality, based on an evolving consciousness of democratic principles that those involved can live with.

If you live in a community that has diverse needs, then everyone's community needs should be addressed, whether you personally agree or not. Those of us moving in that direction understand that we don't always have to agree with our neighbors to respect their own personal choices, which are based on their personal experiences and values.

An example of diverse needs is the argument for and against the Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) in high schools. Many anti-war protesters are trying to strip schools of these programs, which perform a valuable service to many young adults in the community who would otherwise have no opportunity to find discipline and a way out of at-risk environments. Anti-war activists think the presence of ROTC is a way that the military exploits young and naïve youth. But since many community voices want these programs, the issue here is "choice". And with all issues in regard to choice, one must compromise based on community need because many choices impact the needs of the community at-large, yet still be allowed to maintain and practice personal choice.

That provides us all the opportunity to live up to our ideals, whether we like what the other side is doing or not. We can respect another person's viewpoint even if we don't agree with it. Then, if there is a mutual respect, we can find common ground and possibly even work together to solve some of our country's greatest social problems without imposing our own restrictive and limited perspectives on others. We can, instead, explore our perspectives to see how one might be a viable extension of the other. That definitely means working with people whose viewpoints and cultural perspectives are different than ours, and that is the delicate balance that we must maintain to move forward as a society. And from my perspective, there are people on both sides of the battle who are willing take this non-combative approach to engaging with those who hold different values.

The biggest obstacles to a common path of respect for diverse beliefs and practices deal with social/cultural mores. Many affect women and children. Most of the culture wars today revolve around what each group perceives as criminal and delinquent behavior: abortion, the sex trade, genital mutilation, female honor deaths, and child labor. These are hot button issues that bring out the best and worst in people, depending on their resolve. But these issues go beyond choice: to perceived exploitation and opposing views on the sacredness and value of life. As such, many of these issues have religious implications. Additionally, while most everyone can agree that life is sacred, circumstances and enforced laws cause many people/institutions to make often hard decisions regarding life choices such as abortion, euthanasia, and death. Many religions have different beliefs about when life begins and whose life is worth saving (abortion vs. death penalty).

Legislators, like church officials, try to enforce upon us, particularly women, what we can and can't do with our bodies. Church and state have been unsuccessful in changing an opposing group's mind, thus, what we do with and to our bodies must be a personal decision and cannot be legislated or mandated by religious edicts, despite continued attempts to do so. Imposing laws on women that warrant us little more than livestock to be used for breeding purposes is a key element of religious and culture wars. How do we remedy this?

First and foremost, women need to be seen as human beings: not breeders, sexual objects, or commodities for marriage contracts and trade. Women must be allowed to make the choice about who can have access to their bodies, not men or society. Religions and societies that show reverence to women will survive, move forward, and become sustainable. That will eliminate the need for abortions, the exploitive sex trade, genital mutilation, and even child labor as long as women can control their own bodies, birth and contraceptive methods. This divisive issue has no chance of being resolved otherwise; a new paradigm must exist for it to be realized. And many men understand that they need to move beyond raping, pillaging and death, which all tie into our current culture of war and ethnic cleansing. This means that a new paradigm with a reverence for women would eliminate many of the social and cultural problems that so perplex us now.

Regarding the death penalty, we can eliminate the death penalty only if we understand what causes poverty and crime. And again, this has to do with the lack of reverence for and the continued exploitation of women. With limited control over their lives and bodies, women get caught up in a cycle of violence and poverty with no way out. Unless a woman is educated and is provided economic options, with full control over her body and her destiny, she will not have the same opportunities and tools as educated men to fend for herself and her children. The exploitation and economic injustices result in unwanted births that result in children without the resources and support to survive. So these children become criminals and later are locked up for life or executed.

Many of us are looking at the old morality models and saying "enough is enough". We are looking at changing the battleground to a playground where everyone is supported and provided winning hands. Rather than competitive games that are later used for warfare, we are encouraging cooperative games where we can nurture each other and provide win-win solutions that empower us. Only the staunchest fundamentalists are against empowerment. But many of us -- men and women, right-wing and left-wing -- are ready to move forward and become personally responsible for implementing these changes for ourselves, our kids, and the planet. This is our "choice", and it is an attempt to find common ground from many of the opposing values and factions that we grew up with, which cannot be otherwise reconciled. The choice, based on a conscious effort to evolve away from cultural, religious, and social wars, is to come together in mutual respect, re-address what's sacred, and develop a working relationship based on democratic principles. That would include acknowledging and respecting each others' values by creating a common pool of objectives instead of enforcing moral standards or laws, and then pressing forward as a viable consciousness movement and contingency to remedy our existing social and cultural ills. That is the basis for a new planetary morality.