



# Democratic Humility: Reinhold Niebuhr, Neuroscience, and America's Political Crisis

*Christopher Beem*

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American politics is in a state of crisis but it is not clear why. Nor do we know what to do about it. Reinhold Niebuhr helps us understand what is wrong with our politics and research into the workings of the brain confirms his analysis. Call it sin or motivated reasoning and confirmation bias, the bottom line is that all of us are what Niebuhr calls “Children of Light.” We are all vain and self-righteous about our beliefs and values, and far too quick to reject any information that goes against them. The unprecedented rise of talk radio and cable news helps to account for why things are so bad. We all want to hear that our group is smarter and more moral than others. To restore a democracy that functions, we need to understand ourselves better and develop the humility that such knowledge should engender.

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