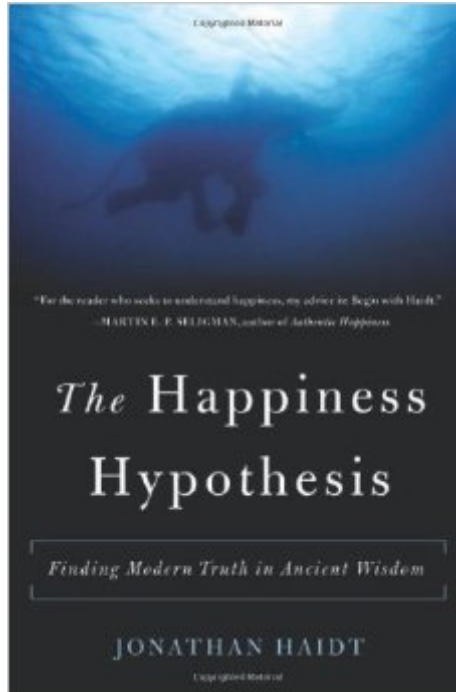


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The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth In Ancient Wisdom



Synopsis

In his widely praised book, award-winning psychologist Jonathan Haidt examines the world's philosophical wisdom through the lens of psychological science, showing how a deeper understanding of enduring maxims-like Do unto others as you would have others do unto you, or What doesn't kill you makes you stronger-can enrich and even transform our lives.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I saw Chris Anderson (Wired Editor and TED co-founder) asked by Charlie Rose to name his favorite book of the last few years. "The Happiness Hypothesis" was the immediate response. Now this book is one of my favorites, too. The Happiness Hypothesis compares traditional philosophical traditions with the latest scientific discoveries, and the two ends meet well in the center. The author's own experiences provide narrative glue. A major finding is that happiness is a set point for us, and that after good times and bad, we tend to return to our general level of happiness. At the same time, we can do things that help or hurt our happiness, and we can understand better how our minds and emotions work. Factors that decrease happiness include persistent noise, lack of control, shame, dysfunctional relationships, and long commutes. Strong marriages, physical touch, meaningful relationships and religious affiliation tend to improve happiness. Activities with others enhance our happiness; status objects tend to separate us from others. In terms of parenting, Haidt finds that secure children are well supported by parents who are nearby, providing safety and security. Avoidant children are neglected by their parents. And resistant children have parents who alternate between support and neglect. Haidt also shows how moral relativism is not good for

children. I was also fascinated by Haidt's observation that modernity and commercial culture slowly replaced the ideal of character with the idea personality, leading to a focus on individual preferences and personal fulfillment. This movement reached a height during the "values clarification" movement of the 1960s which taught no morality at all.

Jonathan Haidt has written a brilliant exploration of modern and ancient ideas about happiness and the inner workings of the human behaviors that affect it. This book reads like a great conversation with the reader. From the beginning he employs the right balance of simple explanation - such as the central metaphor of the 'Rider and Elephant' (the conscious and autonomous aspects of your mind, respectively) - and deep, nuanced examinations of the ancient ideas and what the light of modern research shows about them. The chapters are structured to first present a couple of quotes that encapsulate an ancient idea, such as "The Golden Rule" (do unto others...). He explains the ideas, gives some of the ancient context in which they developed (sometimes at very interesting length) and then starts to weave in the nuance and finer detail that modern study has brought to these ideas. He usually frames things in the context of their effect on happiness and other continuums of human state of being (such as spiritual elevation). Haidt is pretty balanced even when he has to point out problems that some of the ancient ideas have. There's never a sense that 'science is right' and 'the ancients were wrong' in an absolute way. Often he does quite the opposite, he points out what ancient intuition did get right compared to the very unbalanced thinking behind some of the past popular movements within his profession, such as Behaviorism. Also, Haidt is laugh-out-loud funny a couple of times in the book!

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