

Notes on
The Happiness Hypothesis:
Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom
Book by Jonathan Haidt
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1 Chapter 1: The Divided Self

We are all a combination of an elephant and a rider. The Elephant SIM ID, and the rider is trying to control it.

Divisions:

Mind vs Body: Sometimes our body has a mind of its own. An obvious case is when we have to go to the bathroom. But there is a synergy– when we are nervous we may get a stomach Ache

Left vs Right: The left and right parts of the brain control diff things.

New vs Old: The brain develops over time.

Controlled vs automatic: Experiment: subjects given 5 words scrambled and have to unscramble them and assemble the words into a sentence

If the words are about kindness, people are kinder

If the words are about old people, people move more slowly.

If the words are about professors, people are better at trivial pursuit

Others.

Not sure I believe this one.

Failure of Self Control: The marshmallow experiment.

Mental Intrusions: We often think of inappropriate things to say or do and have to stop ourselves from saying or doing them. MANY random things pop into our head, but these we remember BECAUSE they are inappropriate.

Difficulty of winning arguments: Incest example. Its hard to change peoples minds on intuitive feelings. Opinions come first, reason is found later to support them. Religious, Political conversions. Here it is the Elephant, though note that this time its not like the ID– it is just following its emotions even in a diff direction than the ID might.

2 Chapter 2: Changing your Mind

Events in the world affect us only through out interpretation of them. (We can choose: not-care/care do nothing/care do something. What we do also varies- give money or work in a soup kitchen.)

ADVICE: Be aware of this and try to CHOOSE how you react ot news.

Subliminal stuff- words flashed for 1/100 of a second has an affect.

Names- People named Dennis are more likely to be Dentists. I am skeptical this has a big effect.

Negativity Bias: People see negative more than positive- Evolution made us that way to avoid tigers. It takes five good actions to make up for one bad action.

The cortical lottery: People born with positive or negative outlooks. Left side: Approach Oriented, Right side: Withdrawal oriented.

ADVICE: reduce anxiety, inc contentment: Meditation, Cog Therapy, Prozac

Does Prozac make us NOT us? Interesting question, but its like asking if a medical procedure makes us NOT us.

3 Chapter 3: Reciprocity with a Vengeance

Experiment: Alice and Bob do not know each other and will never meet. In a lab Alice is given 20 1-dollar bills and is told to divide them into a,b $a+b=20$, and give herself and Bob b. If Bob declines they BOTH get NOTHING. If Bob accepts then Alice gets a, Bob gets b. RATIONAL: Alice sets $a=19$, $b=1$, Bob takes it since something is better than noting. REALITY: Alice usually sets $a=10$, $b=10$ and Bob takes it. Even $a=13$, $b=7$, Bob takes. $a=16$, $b=4$ Bob usually does not take. The experiment has been done while looking at peoples brains and there is a region that it maps to.

We have a sense of reciprocity and fairness.

Chimpanzees groom each other to bond. Humans talk- Lang has replaced grooming. Gossip is actually good in some sense.

We all have the urge to tell others something interesting— scandalous or not. Reminds me of Gibbs's 4: The best way to keep a secret is to not tell anyone. The second best way is to tell only one person. There is NO third best way.

Gossip is reciprocity but also helps other do fair reciprocity.

Reciprocity can also be a trick- charities that give you free calendars to guilt you into giving them money Doesn't work anymore as we get used to it. (We got 20 free calendars this year.)

Also be careful- reciprocity has to be timed right. e.g.- oversharing on a first date.

ADVICE- Do reciprocity carefully. And okay to be the first one to give.

4 Chapter 4: The Faults of Others

We are all hypocrites.

We can talk ourselves into anything.

Experiment: There is a real court case about a motorcycle accident. A) Alice is told she will be arguing for the injured party and Bob is told she will be arguing for the insurance company. THEN they read the case and try to come to an agreement. (the penalty for not coming to an agreement is a court-imposed one) Most pairs DO NOT come to an agreement.

B) They both read the case and THEN are told which side to argue. Most pairs DO come to an agreement.

ADVICE: Recognize your own faults and biases.

There is no such thing as pure Evil- people doing Evil think they are doing good.

The four main causes of violence: Greed, Sadism (this is rare), HIGH self-esteem, Moral idealism. The last one is for mass murderers. Gee- maybe the self-esteem movement is a bad thing.

BUDDHA ADVICE: Stop taking the world so seriously and stop being so judgy.

ADVICE: Be honest about your own faults so you can be a better person (e.g., see the other persons viewpoint).

5 Chapter 5: The Pursuit of Happiness

Money does not make you happy.

Often the pursuit of what you want makes you happier than when you get it. Getting there is (more than) half the fun!

Our happiness is more a function of $f'(x)$, not $f(x)$.

Strong connections to friends, family, community are more an indicator of happiness than money, health, youth. (Though there is a floor- people who have to worry about basic needs are unhappy.)

Happiness formula:

$$H = S + C + V$$

H is happiness

S is your biological set point- so what you were born with

C is the condition of your current life (that you can't control, or not much)

V is what you VOLUNTEER to do, so in your control.

So SOME is in our control NOW.

ADVICE- Get V to line up with what you WANT to do and be.

Extreme NATURE says $H=S$ Buddha says V is important

There are things that you NEED to change: Noise Commute Lack of control Shame (he really means appearance) Relationships

People enjoy eating and sex, but also enjoy total immersion in a task. Pleasure should be savored- French and food.

Misguided Pursuits: People seem to want money more than free time, but they would be better off with free time. Why? Money=prestige. People brag about and compare salaries, not time off. (NOTE- as an academic I brag about other things, but its the same principle- it forced me to do things I don't really want to do.)

ADVICE: Don't be competitive- do what you want to do.

6 Chapter 6: Love and Attachments

People need Love and Attachment. All animals do.

Love- why are humans monogamous and other animals aren't?

Humans eventually have big heads, but when they are born they do not, so when born their brains are not developed. SO humans need A LOT more parental care. So dads need to hang around.

Romantic Love is in 86% of all human cultures.

Sex and Love: after a while the Sex part can wear off. People should not get married until that happens so they can see if they still want to get married when they are not high on sex.

Suicide: higher if you have LESS social constraints. Social Constraints

may seem like a drag but they are correlated to social COMMUNITY. Introverts that are forced to socialize are healthier.

7 Chapter 7: The Uses of Adversity

What doesn't kill me makes me stronger- Nietzsche

Sometimes true as adversity:

1. Helps you find your hidden strengths.
2. Strengthens relationships (though may scare off fair-weather friends).
3. Changes your priorities.

Personality has three levels of personality:

1. Basic Traits: neuroticism, extroversion, openness to new experiences, agreeableness, conscientiousness.
2. Adaptation: personal goals, defense and coping mechanisms, beliefs and life-stage concerns,
3. Life story: an evolving story that integrates a reconstructed past, a perceived present, and a anticipated future into coherent narrative. (THIS will be important later.) The rider is in control of the life story, not the elephant.

People strive for 4 things

1. Work and Achievement
2. Relationships and intimacy
3. Religion and Spirituality
4. Leaving a legacy and contributing to society

People who focus on (1) are less happy than those that focus on the others.

Adversity might make you focus less on (1) and thus be better off in the long run.

Blessed are the sense makers: People like to make sense of the worlds, which may lead to rewriting their life story.

Trauma— the nature of it (e.g., losing a spouse to old age, a car accident, a suicide) is NOT as important as being able to talk about it and talk about it and thus make sense of it.

In western comfortable society Kids DO NOT NEED adversity to grow Teenagers might (at least some) Helps them write their life story.

SUMMARY: Adversity is good if it comes at the right time (15-25) to the right people (those that can rise to the challenge), and not be too bad as to cause major trauma.

8 Chapter 8: The Felicity of Virtue

Ben Franklin listed 13 virtues he linked to behaviors. behaviors. As an example Temperance: Eat not to dullness (So these are not boring Do's and DON'TS) He did a table and worked through one virtue a week.

See

<http://www.benjamin-franklin-history.org/personal-virtues/>
for Ben Franklin's virtues.

The Virtues of the ancients: The ancients had many ideas of virtue we would agree with: honesty, justice, courage, self-constraint. They emphasize practice, not theory. (I WONDER- what about treating their king like a god, What about stoning blasphemers.)

How the West Was Lot: The West began with this but tried to make it short and rigorous. This was a mistake and also made it too theoretical.

Kant: X is ethical if you do not mind if others all do X (so lying is unethical since you don't want to be lied to)

Bentham: X is ethical if it benefits more people. Utilitarian.

While Kant and Bentham argued, they both wanted a short rigorous rule. Good for Laws.

But TERRIBLE for people since it leads to obscure moral arguments instead of people character.

The ancients were concerned with your character, from which good moral actions would naturally flow.

The moderns are only concerned with Is Action X moral.

Morality has gone from character to problem-solving, and has thus been weakened.

It also doesn't work— teaching children HOW to think about moral problems rather than WHAT to think, or better just developing good character, does not help people act ethically.

The Virtue of Positive Psychology: Trying to see what is common to morality in general (also- most psychology is concerned with pathology, so good to get out of that rut)

Peterson and Seligman did a study of morality and got it down to certain agreed characters. They succeeded!

1. Wisdom: curiosity, love of learning, judgments, ingenuity, Emotional intelligence, Perspective.
2. Courage: Valor, Perseverance, Integrity
3. Humanity: Kindness, Loving
4. Justice: Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership
5. Temperance: Self-control, prudence, humility
6. Transcendence: Appreciation of Beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Spirituality, Forgiveness, Humor, Zest

ADVICE: work on your strengths, not your weaknesses.

How do virtue and happiness line up? It goes both ways

Happy people are virtuous

but also, if people are forced to (prob not quite forced) to be virtuous they end up happier. Especially if this forces them to have more social networks.

The Future of Virtue: Old days: a common broadly shared morality but minorities were treated badly. Today: Much more inclusive but a breakdown of a shared morality.

Another issue is that when we were all farmers producers were valued. Now consumerism is valued and not considered bad.

9 Chapter 8: Divinity with or without God

Disgust is an aspect of all religions. It may be there to help us with health issues. But this also extends to other things- purity of the soul.

Religion is GOOD socially since you are member of a social group but BAD socially since you are opposed to other groups.

Religion makes some things sacred, but even atheists thing of SOME things as being sacred, just not with a God-reason.

People feel elevation (this is good). People respond positively to beauty and achievement. Elevation different from admiration. Elevation leads to love and trust (the breast-feeding study)

People who take psilocybin feel far more more awe than others (needs to be very controlled env to avoid harm)

Science has unfortunately gotten out of the awe-business. This is bad. See historians Loraine Daston and Katherine Park.

Ethic of Autonomy vs Ethic of Divinity. Ethic of Autonomy: Individuals left to make their own choices. (Liberal) Ethic of Divinity: Should make choices God would approve of. (Conservative)

The Liberal-Conservative seems to only apply to moral issues, not to economic ones, though in an earlier era they applied there also.

If religious people are happier, perhaps we can learn from them even if we don't believe.

10 Chapter 9: Happiness comes from between

Meaning of life is two sep questions

1) What is the purpose for which human beings were placed on earth? Religions gives an answer. Atheists really dont have one'

2) How ought I live? What should I do to have a good, happy, fulfilling, and meaningful live?

Religion teaches that these two questions are related.

The Enlightenment book says that question 2 is the one we should look at.

KEY- these are two DIFF questions

People have an urge to MAKE THINGS HAPPEN even if it is not useful. Monkeys solve problems for the joy of solving them. (Does this conflict with evolution?)

People need to feel like they are useful. Marx was right about one thing- Capitalism and assembly lines make people not feel useful.

Studies show that people who get to choose there own way to do the jobs they do are HAPPIER than those that have to follow a boss.

This seems INDEPENDENT of status- some Janitors are happy, some doctors are not.

ADVICE: Line up your job with what you want to be doing and do it in a way that you make your own.

Market forces change the nature of jobs. Journalists are less happy than the used to be See John Oliver's segment on journalism here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq2_wSsDwkQ

Cross-level coherence- get your lower lever traits AND your coping mechanisms AND your life story to cohere. Culture can help this.

This is why Empty rituals seem empty- the people who do them for real have the context and background woven into their lives. Example— A Buckingham palace God— their life looks so boring (for that matter, so is the Queen's life) but THEY understand and believe in its meaning.

Evolution- we are partly evolved as individuals and partly evolved as as one entity.

Religions that preach both love and war are not hypocritical: Love people IN your group, hate those OUTSIDE. Or a greater-good argument.