

'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ ALL THE BOOKS?

Join the '**CliffsNotes' club**—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a **summary of highlights** from a recently-published business book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. **Register here** for upcoming events.



November, 2022

Humankind: A Hopeful History

By Rutger Bregman

Discussion Highlights

Presented by Cate Rodman

Radical idea: Most people, deep down, are pretty decent.

Introduction

Psychology of the Masses (WW2) influenced military leaders in UK, US, Germany.

Britain didn't cover during Blitz as Germans expected.

Yet Allies still did mass civilian bombings.

More killed in Dresden in one night, than London whole war.

Bombing focused on civilians, not strategic targets.

Ineffective strategically and motivationally.

A New Realism & The Real Lord of the Flies

- **Veneer theory:** Civilization is nothing more than a thin veneer that will crack at the merest provocation.
 - Hurricane Katrina. Wrong presentation of events during and after.
 - R Solnit views that "elite panic comes from powerful people who see all humanity in their own image." They resort to brute force to prevent scenarios that exist only in their own heads, on the assumption that the average Joe is ruled by self-interest, just like them. (p. 7)
- **Placebo effect:** Fake pill but told will help; people feel better.
- **Nocebo effect:** Fake pill but told will hurt; people feel worse.

Ideas are never *merely* ideas.

We are what we believe.

We find what we go looking for.

And what we predict, comes to pass. (p. 9)

Part 1 The State of Nature

Introduction Hobbes & Rousseau

Hobbes: Nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Humans are driven by fear. Fear of the other, Fear of death. Long for safety. A condition of war of all against all.
Therefore: Leaders say, "Give us power, or all is lost."

Rousseau: Civil society is not a blessing, but a curse. Man is naturally good, but institutions make them wicked. Farming, urbanization, statehood hasn't lifted us out of chaos, but enslaved and doomed us.
Therefore: "Give us liberty, or all is lost."

The Rise of Homo puppy

- ❖ **Myth:** Darwin's research revealed survival of the fittest.
- ❖ **Reality:** Research indicates that cooperation is more critical for survival than struggle and competition, but all are factors.
- **Domestication via friendliness.** Darwin noticed that domesticated animals have similarities. Smaller stature, brains, teeth physical characteristics that their wild ancestors. Retain juvenile traits their whole lives. Bred for friendliness.
- **Ultrasocial learning machines.** Chimps and orangutans can do spatial understanding, calculation, and causality as well as toddlers. Humans unique due to social learning.
 - People care what others think, which fosters trust and enables cooperation.
 - Whites in our eyes reveals attention, inner thoughts, and emotions.
 - Eyebrows convey information (protruding ridge might have stopped that.)
 - Language is copycat, learned from each other and may be a product of our sociability.

Colonel Marshall & The Soldiers Who Wouldn't Shoot

- ❖ **Myth:** Man tends to violence and is motivated by ideology.
- ❖ **Reality:** Man tends to avoid violence, especially in proximity and is not strongly motivated by ideology.
- **Conundrum of cruelty.** Our kindness also makes us the cruelest as we feel more affinity for those who are most like us. Oxytocin enhances affection for friends, but can also intensify aversion to strangers. "My people first."
- Soldiers over time have avoided shooting the enemy. Guns throughout history have been found with bullets still stuffed in them. Greater distance (dropping bombs, drones) makes it easier to do.
- Murder rate went up after farming, domestication of horses, rise of settlements.

The Curse of Civilization

- ❖ **Myth:** Our ancestors were violent and brutish, e.g., Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals. Led to portrayal as such in works such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Planet of the Apes*.
- ❖ **Reality:** Earlier societies did not tolerate pride, greed, or inequality. Collective work events created cities, etc., without hierarchies.
- After Ice Age, climate encouraged settlement, then people began accumulating possessions. At that point, cave paintings show conflict. Military installations started.
- Genuine progress is recent. French Revolutions in 1789, but in 1800, 3/4 of global population lived in bondage to a wealthy lord.

The Mystery of Easter Island

- ❖ **Myth:** Stories often shared about mass slaughter and environmental destruction.
- ❖ **Reality:** Bregman shares evidence that suggests the myth is not likely and instead they were resilient and resourceful.

Part 2 After Auschwitz

In the Basement of Stanford University

Stanford Prison Experiment – Philip Zimbardo

- ❖ **Myth:** People turn into "bad guards" when given power over "prisoners." Not "bad" people, but a bad environment can alter people's behavior profoundly.
- ❖ **Reality:** Guards were trained prior with specific instructions on how to dehumanize. Creates a "demand" for specific behavior. During the experiment guards continued to be "incentivized" to be rough.
- **Bonus:** Zimbardo traded on that experiment without ever letting on it was a lie, became President of APA.

Robbers Cave Experiment

- ❖ **Myth:** Summer camp boys became Lord of the Flies over a neighboring group.
- ❖ **Reality:** Camp staff aka researchers manipulated games and activities to provoke kids and didn't allow peaceful or collaborative efforts.

Stanley Milgram & The Shock Machine

- ❖ **Myth:** People willing to give shocks when given orders to do so.
 - ❖ **Reality:** People trusted the researcher and believed they were doing "bad" in the service of doing "good."
 - People were effective at saying 'no' in the Milgram Experiment by:
 - Talking to the victim.
 - Reminding the man in the grey lab coat of his responsibility.
 - Repeatedly refusing to continue.
- **Communication and confrontation, compassion, and resistance.
- Nazis / German people were indoctrinated by relentless propaganda prior to war and atrocities. Eichmann "joined" and thought he was doing a great deed. However, Nazis in Denmark, away from propaganda and exposed to Danish humanism, became less justified in their cause and allowed Jews to escape. "Open native resistance and changed their minds" H Arendt. (p. 178)

The Death of Catherine Susan Genovese

- ❖ **Myth:** 29 neighbors witnessed the murder of Kitty in their apartment complex without helping her.
- ❖ **Reality:** Multiple people called 911. Most weren't aware because they were asleep or couldn't see the situation. She died in her friend's arms. Details not included in NYT and others because "wasn't as good of a story."
- **Bystander Effect:** If others are around, people won't try to help. This does happen, but, much more frequently—90% of the time—having others around actually encourages more people to help.

Part 3 Why Good People Turn Bad

Mismatch between lack of physical or mental prep for modern times.

How Empathy Blinds

- ❖ **Myth:** Ideology provides the purpose for soldier's drive.
- ❖ **Reality:** Based on interviews of German POWs, their motivation was their comrades.

How Power Corrupts

- **Myth:** If you want power, you have to grab it. (Machiavelli)
- **Reality:** Individuals who rise to positions of power are the friendliest and most empathetic. (p. 225)
- **Reality:** There is a corrupting influence of power *once in power*.
- **Cookie Monster study.** Acquired sociopathy shows up as ruder drivers, messier eaters.
- Corruption comes once one *has* power.

- People in power don't have to justify their actions, can develop a blinkered view.
- Their *mirroring genes* stop working, so they become *disconnected* and stop blushing (shameless).
- Others have to have empathy to understand leaders and dominant culture.
- Hunter-Gatherer society values.
 - Generous
 - Brave
 - Wise
 - Charismatic
 - Fair
 - Impartial
 - Reliable
- Tactful
- Strong
- Humble

What the Enlightenment Got Wrong

(Summary of preceding chapters)

- ❖ **Myth:** Disaster brings out our inner nature, i.e., selfish, competitive brutes. (Blitz expectations)
- ❖ **Reality:** Disasters bring out the best in us.
- ❖ **Reality:** Tragedy of war is that the best facets of human nature—loyalty, camaraderie, and solidarity—inspire us to take up arms.
- ❖ **Reality:** This occurs despite a deep-rooted aversion to violence.
- ❖ **Reality:** Once in power, there is a corrupting influence.

- Pre-settlements, Homo puppy was successful. However, our nature became mismatched once settlements were established.
- **Along came "Reason"** – Enlightenment came with elevation of the power of rational thought.
 - Hume believed we should act as though people have a selfish nature, even though we know they don't. (Nocebo)
 - Greed and self-interest were motivators.
 - US Constitution requires "checks and balances."
- Economists assume that people are innately selfish, they advocate policies that fostered self-serving behavior.
- When politicians convinced themselves that politics is a cynical game, then it becomes one.

Part 4 A New Realism

- **Pluralistic ignorance:** People don't challenge when it looks like others are understanding. Homo Puppy finds it hard to stand up to a group. "We prefer a pound of the worst kind of misery over a few ounces of shame or social discomfort." (p. 261)
- **Pygmalion effect:** High expectations of others (and rats) contributes to improved performance. (Placebo)
- **Golem effect:** Low expectations of others (and rats) contributes to decreased performance. (Nocebo)

The Power of Intrinsic Motivation

- ❖ **Myth:** People need carrots (capitalist) or sticks (communist) to be motivated.
- ❖ **Sub-Myth:** Actually "I" don't need that kind of motivation, *but others do*.
- ❖ **Reality:** Incentives can reduce performance. Transactionalism. Targets creating perverse incentives. People doing what they *want* to do is more powerful than extrinsic motivation.

Lawyers and consultants who are paid by the hour put a price on all their time, even outside the office. The upshot? Lawyers who meticulously log their hours are also less inclined to do pro bono work. (p. 270)

Homo Ludens (Playing Man)

- ❖ **Myth:** Children require raising and need education to prepare them for contributing.
 - "He that plays when he is a boy, will play when he is a man." (John Wesley) If they were born wicked, then you couldn't leave them to their own devices.
 - Supports creating "national citizens." (p. 284-5)
- ❖ **Reality:** Researchers found that fully a quarter of respondents doubt the importance of their own work. (p. 293)
- The data show that most 'meaningless jobs' are concentrated in the private sector – In places like banks, law firms and ad agencies. Judged by the criteria of our 'knowledge economy,' the people holding these jobs are the definition of success. They earned straight As, have sharp LinkedIn profiles and take home fat pay checks. And yet the work they do is, by their own estimation, useless to society.
- Bullying pervasive in *total institutions* not necessarily our nature. (p. 291)
 - Everybody lives in the same place and is subject to a single authority.
 - All activities are carried out together and everybody does the same tasks.
 - Activities are rigidly scheduled, often from one hour to the next.
 - There is a system of explicit, formal rules imposed by an authority.

"Better a broken bone, than a broken spirit."

This is What Democracy Looks Like

- ❖ **Myth:** Tragedy* of the Commons; People will *inevitably* abuse communal resources. *In the Greek sense, i.e., regrettable, but inevitable.
- ❖ **Reality:** Eleanor Ostrom* formulated a set of "design principles" for successful commons based on over 5000 examples, so not inevitable. *First woman Nobel Prize in Economics recipient.

Seven Plagues and Remedies:

- From cynicism to engagement
- From polarization to trust
- From exclusion to inclusion
- From complacency to citizenship
- From corruption to transparency
- From self-interest to solidarity
- From inequality to dignity

Part 5 The Other Cheek

- **Non-complementary behavior:** instead of mirroring (positive or negative), responding positively even to negative behavior. (See: Jesus, Gandhi, MLK, Jr.)

Drinking Tea with Terrorists

- ❖ **Myth:** Broken Windows theory. Treat the smallest infraction to prevent larger criming.
- ❖ **Reality:** Drops in crime rates not attributable to increased policing. In fact, *police* misconduct went up.
- Original researcher meant to focus on the windows themselves, not the arrest/incarceration. Addressing the situation can have positive effect on reducing crime based on creating community and connections.
- When applied to the people causing the broken windows, it becomes based on "veneer theory," aka the "thin blue line" for law enforcement.
- !! P. Zimbardo "research" provided foundation for this theory.

"Our response is more democracy, more openness, and more humanity."
— Norwegian Prime Minister after 2011 attack (p. 343)

"How did we think it was okay to put human beings in cage-like settings?"
— Leann Bertsch, Director, North Dakota Dept of Corrections (p. 344)

The Best Remedy for Hate, Injustice & Prejudice

- ❖ **Myth:** Melting Pot approach (CR example)
- ❖ **Reality:** People can change through contact and retaining own identity.
- **Contact theory:** Prejudice, hatred, and racism stem from a lack of contact. "We can only love what we know."
 - Contact works, but not quickly.
 - Prejudices can be eliminated only if we retain our own identity. (p. 362)

When the Soldiers Came Out of the Trenches

- ❖ **Myth:** Christmas Eve, 1914 soldiers German, French, British soldiers came out of the trenches and celebrated, sang together, and shared food.
- ❖ **Reality:** 🤝🤝🤝 More than 100,000 soldiers laid down their arms.
- Greater distance from the war, the greater the hate. Soldiers couldn't believe how friendly the others were after propaganda enemy images.

TEN RULES TO LIVE BY

Delphi – Oracle...Know thyself

1. When in doubt, assume the best.
2. Think in win-win scenarios.
3. Ask more questions.
4. Temper your empathy, train your compassion.
5. Try to understand the other, even if you don't get where they're coming from.
6. Love your own as others love their own.
7. Avoid the news.
8. Don't punch Nazis.
9. Come out of the closet: don't be ashamed to do good.
10. Be realistic.

About the Book Club In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).