



Summary of OpenMind Content

Step 1: Explore the irrational mind

Key concepts covered:

- Dual process theory
- Metaphor of the rider (slow, conscious reasoning) and the elephant (automatic, intuitive thinking)
- Visual and cognitive illusions
- Post hoc reasoning
- Confirmation bias
- Motivated reasoning

Summary:

- Even when presented with the same information, two well-intentioned and well-informed people often still end up with very different beliefs. The particular way in which our minds work can help us understand why this happens so often.
- Our minds are divided into two parts that sometimes conflict, like a small human rider sitting on top of an elephant. The *rider* represents our slow, conscious reasoning. The *elephant* represents all of the automatic, intuitive processes that occur rapidly and often outside of our conscious awareness.
- While we think that our rider (conscious reasoning) is in control, it's often actually our elephant that holds the power.
- This division often causes us to fall prey to *post hoc reasoning*, the process in which our elephant makes a snap judgment, and our rider works to justify it.
- A common form of post hoc reasoning is when we seek or interpret information in a way that confirms our preexisting beliefs, which is called *confirmation bias*.
- Our reasoning becomes even less reliable when we are motivated to reach a particular conclusion, especially when a moral issue is at stake. This can lead to *motivated reasoning*.
- As a result, it can be difficult to convince other people to change their minds, especially on moral issues—because their brains, just like ours, are wired in these ways.

Step 2: Uncover the roots of our ideological differences

Key concepts covered:

- The moral matrix
- The six taste receptors of morality
- Moral foundations theory
- Moral roots of political differences
- Breaking free from our moral matrices

Summary:

- We all live within a *moral matrix*: a consensual hallucination that we believe represents objective reality. Many different moral communities exist, each with its own set of shared values, and each convinced that its group alone sees truth as it really is.
- The moral mind is like a tongue with six different taste receptors. We all share these same foundations, but we build upon them in different ways to create our own moral matrices. The six *moral foundations* are: Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority, Sanctity, and Liberty.
- Many disagreements can be attributed to the application of different moral foundations. There are also cases when different people apply the same moral foundation in different ways.
- We can break free of our moral matrices by learning to identify the moral foundations that we and others use to reach our conclusions.

Step 3: Cultivate intellectual humility

Key concepts covered:

- Intellectual humility and the value of acknowledging and learning from our mistakes
- The illusion of explanatory depth
- The theory of growth versus fixed mindset
- How to cultivate a growth mindset

Summary:

- Most of us are under the illusion that we know a lot more than we actually do. We also often go to great lengths to avoid being wrong. These tendencies can limit us in a variety of ways.
- We can avoid these issues by cultivating *intellectual humility*. This helps us become wiser by allowing us to recognize the limits of our knowledge.

- With intellectual humility, we don't need to fear being wrong. Instead, we can view it as a benefit – we now know something we didn't know before.
- Those with a *fixed mindset* believe that intelligence and ability are set in stone, which makes it harder for them to learn and grow because they prioritize looking smart over learning. Those with a *growth mindset* believe that intelligence and ability can develop, which makes it easier for them to learn and grow because they relish accepting new challenges.
- We can apply these insights to how we behave in disagreements. We can be curious, and we can seek to *understand* (like a detective) rather than to *win* (like a knight going to battle).
- There are three methods of injecting more growth into your mindset:
 - Acknowledge that your abilities are fluid
 - View each mistake as a learning opportunity
 - Challenge yourself to do things you haven't already mastered

Step 4: Appreciate the value of diverse perspectives

Key concepts covered:

- Absorbing and adjusting
- Groupthink
- Engaging with diverse perspectives:
 - Helps you uncover things you can't see by yourself
 - Enables you to make wiser decisions and new discoveries
 - Is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy

Summary:

- In today's hyper-polarized climate, it often seems easier to avoid "the other side" entirely. We're going to explore three reasons why engaging with diverse perspectives can be beneficial, even if it doesn't always seem pleasant at first.
- The first benefit of speaking to people you disagree with is that it helps you uncover things you can't see by yourself. We all have limitations to what we can see from our particular perspectives.
- The second benefit is that it helps you make wiser decisions and new discoveries. The Bay of Pigs fiasco highlights why simply adding more people to a group doesn't necessarily lead to good decision-making. Groups run the risk of falling prey to *groupthink*. You need a diversity of perspectives among the members of the group, as well as the right conditions to lead to wise decision-making.

- The third benefit is that engaging with diverse perspectives is the cornerstone of a democracy. Democracy relies upon us not only living together peacefully, but also engaging with one another.
- Despite these benefits, at times engaging with diverse perspectives and having your views challenged can be frustrating and uncomfortable. The science of learning helps us understand why this is the case.
- There are two types of learning that complement one another: *absorbing* is when we encounter new information that we are able to fit it into our pre-existing mental structures, and *adjusting* is when we encounter new information that doesn't fit. It takes extra effort (and sometimes discomfort) to adjust to new information by changing our existing mental structures. This process is an essential part of growth and learning.

Step 5: Prepare for constructive disagreement

Key concepts covered:

- Cognitive reappraisal primer
 - Identifying automatic thoughts
 - Dispelling cognitive distortions
- Skills for constructive disagreement
 - Active listening
 - Acknowledgement
 - Moral reframing

Summary:

- We can engage in *constructive disagreement* by seeking to learn, rather than to be right. The key to constructive disagreements is mastering the language of the elephant (automatic, intuitive thinking).
- Sometimes, our automatic thoughts (generated by our elephants) aren't accurate, and these *cognitive distortions* can cause negative feelings. Our riders can rein in our elephants by examining our initial thoughts, and—over time—training them to be more accurate.
- We can also hone our ability to communicate effectively with other people by focusing on their elephants. We can: respect their elephants (don't criticize people or make them feel stupid); understand their elephants (learn about what other people care about and why); and appeal to their elephants (convey your thoughts in a language that will resonate with them).

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