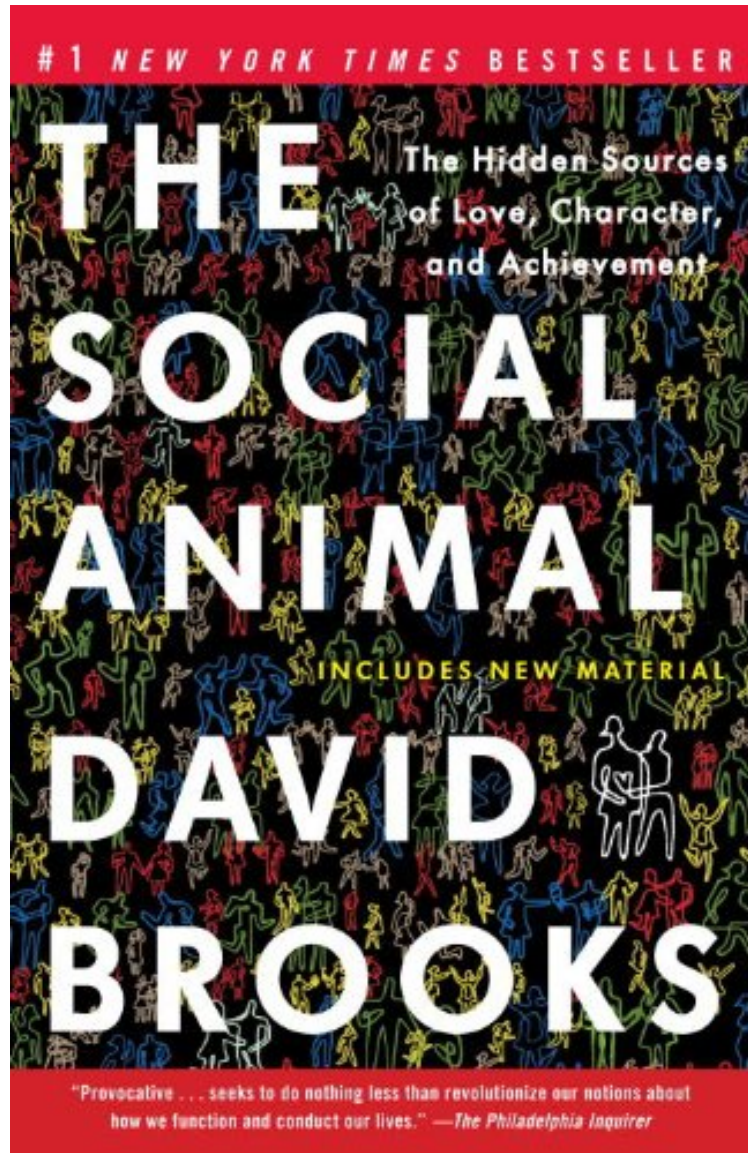


(Download pdf) The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement

The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement

David Brooks

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David Brooks : The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Love, Character and AchievementBy CustomerTime is racing, the world changing beyond recognition, and we find ourselves feeling lost, not knowing how to make sense of the events

and seemingly familiar people around us. David Brooks successfully explains it all in *The Social Animal*--we recognize our friends or neighbors in his characters, find a name and a reason for what we see on the news, and moreover, finish the book with a sigh of relief, with a renewed feeling of hope that we as humans are still the same, humane and social, ever struggling and always capable of finding what we yearn for--love, character and achievement. Did the author just create a new genre? It is a life story of a modern couple with its very common personal and relational ups and downs, deftly interspersed with the theories and findings of research in the areas of human development--sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc., presented in a most palatable manner. Brooks' writing style, well polished in New York Times reporting, is superb and highly believable, so at times you wonder to what extent the book might be autobiographical.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. David Brooks, patron-saint of the unconscious

By LaneMr. Brooks provides an accessible scholarly work here dealing with the under-appreciated role of the unconscious mind in decision-making---and the social, educational, and political ramifications that follow. Like his popular science peer Malcolm Gladwell, Brooks calls into question conventional wisdom on social and psychological matters, with a keen eye for those of an educational nature. A few chapters in, for instance, he draws attention to the fact that, "Children are coached on how to jump through a thousand scholastic hoops. Yet by far the most important decisions they will make are about whom to marry and whom to befriend, what to love and what to despise, and how to control impulses," highlighting a host of essential skills with no formal learning process. Certain parts of the book like this do read like a parenting guide---e.g. work ethic trumps intelligence; repetition, organization, and meditation are prerequisites for mastery over a subject---but these are proverbs worthy of a little boosterism. Brooks continues by exploring poverty and socioeconomically-imparted, psychological handicaps (and the resulting negative-feedback loops they produce), connecting them to poor educational performance and ultimately friction in social mobility. This section might be polarizing, depending on which side of the political spectrum you fall. One of the most interesting sections to me was the discussion of culture as a form of external memory. Briefly, people develop heuristic models based on repeated observations and push these down to the unconscious. In addition, more structured models of the world are developed and stored in society itself (through writing, texts, software, science engineering disciplines, etc.). Both mechanisms of information encoding enable faster decision making without the need to involve the conscious mind, freeing it to think about higher-level problems. The ability to make faster decisions is interesting and must in some way relate to abstractions and simplified models of the world. While these subjects may not be new to psychologists or computer scientists, it seems like a nice area of convergence between the two disciplines. Throughout the book, Brooks uses the story of a couple (Erica and Harold) as a learning tool -- first told in parallel through their upbringings and later together in matrimony. The narrative is serviceable--although as fiction it's a bit underdeveloped and not all that compelling. If there was any doubt that Brooks is a primarily non-fiction writer, his more saccharine poetic flourishes (particularly his end-of-life passages) are a clear reminder. Overall, there aren't many authors who can draw from such a large body of psychological, sociological, neurological and economic research, let alone synthesize it all, and fewer still who would aim such a work at non-academics. In this respect Brooks provides a meaningful and useful book -- there's enough breadth here for most people to find a chestnut or two to meditate on, and the societal prescriptions the author lays out might be useful for policy makers. More personally, I've often wondered after surveying the books on my shelf with forgotten characters and lessons whether all that reading was a worthwhile pursuit. Brooks' contention that learning seeps down to and persists in the unconscious, even if we're not actively aware of it, makes it a little more comforting that I can't recall the entire squadron of Heller's *Catch 22*. And having now read *The Social Animal*, that's a lesson likely to stay with me---even if it does slip from my waking self.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An astounding new view of human nature

By William E Kaufman EVERYONE who wants to understand what it means to be human should read this unique book, which---in the style of Rousseau's novel *Emile*--- alternates between the story of Harold and Erica, "who led wonderfully fulfilling lives", and an extensively documented account of the "revolution in consciousness" which has emerged from recent science, and is changing everything we thought we knew about happiness and success. By giving us two concrete lives to follow, Brooks shows how our new knowledge of the ways our brains function actually plays out in real life. The scope of this book is immense, and his straightforward journalistic style makes it an easy read. This is the most important book I've read since *The Empathic Civilization* by Jeremy Rifkin.

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER With unequalled insight and brio, New York Times columnist David Brooks has long explored and explained the way we live. Now Brooks turns to the building blocks of human flourishing in a multilayered, profoundly illuminating work grounded in everyday life. This is the story of how success happens, told through the lives of one composite American couple, Harold and Erica. Drawing on a wealth of current research from numerous disciplines, Brooks takes Harold and Erica from infancy to old age, illustrating a fundamental new understanding of human nature along the way: The unconscious mind, it turns out, is not a dark, vestigial place, but a creative one, where most of the brain's work gets done. This is the realm where character is formed and where our most important life decisions are made; the natural habitat of *The Social Animal*. Brooks reveals the deeply social aspect of our minds and exposes the bias in modern culture that overemphasizes rationalism, individualism, and

IQ. He demolishes conventional definitions of success and looks toward a culture based on trust and humility. The Social Animal is a moving intellectual adventure, a story of achievement and a defense of progress. It is an essential book for our timemdash;one that will have broad social impact and will change the way we see ourselves and the world.BONUS: Includes new material.