

The Age of Empathy Summary

 fourminutebooks.com

1-Sentence-Summary: *The Age of Empathy* debunks popular theories which suggest that human nature is inherently selfish, cutthroat, and prone to violence.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



The next time you find yourself having a philosophical discussion with family or friends, try throwing out this question: Do you believe that humans are evil by nature?

I'm willing to bet that you will not get a consensus among the group.

If you're more of an optimist, like me, you might be in the camp that believes humans are, good and generous beings by nature.

There are always those who maintain that humans are evil and self-serving creatures. This is also a biblical assertion via man's fall to sin, as described in the book of Genesis. Frans De Waal's book, *Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*, takes a closer look at the innate instincts that reside within us all.

Here are 3 lessons to help support the theory that we are empathetic beings:

1. A closer look at science and history shows that warfare was not always present in the world.
2. The herd instinct stems from the sense of interconnectedness existing in humans.
3. Empathy plays a crucial role in ensuring human survival.

Is caring for our fellow humans something that comes naturally to us? Turn on any news feed, and it seems unlikely. However, biology and science appear to show that living in peace, harmony, and helping one another are inherently human traits. What's your position on this topic? Let's look at some theories we might not have otherwise considered and see if it sways our thinking.

Lesson 1: Violence and war haven't always been part of the human experience.

Winston Churchill once remarked, "The story of the human race is war." **Upon closer observation of human history, you will find long stretches of peacetime and harmony, while the periods of war and violence are brief.**

Take, for example, the biblical account of the walls of ancient Jericho, chronicled in the Old Testament. The barrier has long been considered a structure for the defense of the city. Modern research and archaeology suggest that this might not be accurate, though. There's evidence that indicates these walls were likely built as a fortification to protect the city from mudflows.

Our ancient ancestors were constantly at risk for extinction. They lived in small, widely dispersed communities with populations of merely a few thousand. Given this scenario, it's likely that warfare wasn't a common threat or concern. These hunter-gatherer ancestors were probably more like the Bushmen of Africa. In these societies, violent confrontations would likely be rare.

Lesson 2: Synchrony and herd instinct play a vital role in the bonding that humans and animals experience.

Have you ever noticed how contagious the act of yawning is among people? Often, the mere mention of the function is enough to elicit the response. This is known as unconscious synchrony, more commonly known as the "herd instinct." It's not only a term that applies to humans but is also evident in animal behavior.

To demonstrate the phenomenon among animals, research teams at

Synchrony is the same survival mechanism that compels birds to flock together and fly in formation towards the same destination. Even their stopping for food and rest is a coordinated activity. This ensures that everyone sticks together to survive, allowing necessary bonds to form.

Interestingly, experiments in social behavior indicate that synchrony even plays a part in the service that we receive. The findings show that a waiter can double his tips by simply repeating a customer's order, rather than just replying with something like, "Great choice!"

Lesson 3: Empathy and cooperation come naturally to us and play a big part in why we're here today.

Have you ever given someone a helping hand? I'm guessing you have, and I bet you didn't require any special conditioning to do so. **The truth is we likely wouldn't be here if our default disposition were to be insensitive and uncompassionate to our fellow humans.**

Biology and history both support that we as humans have a strong sense of compassion and cooperation that tend to be an instinct for us. Consider parenting where empathy is second nature. Parents just have a natural sensitivity toward their offspring as a means to keep children healthy and safe.

Imagine the fate of a helpless newborn if the parents were instinctively uncaring and dismissive. The chances of survival for the infant would be slight without outside intervention.

Ulf Dimberg, a Swedish psychologist, conducted a research study on involuntary empathy by showing participants pictures of happy and sad faces to gauge their reaction. As you can guess, people frowned when shown the angry images and smiled at the happy ones.

Unless you have some psychopathic tendencies and are incapable of feeling compassion, being devoid of another human plight is not in our biological makeup.

The Age of Empathy Review

I found *The Age of Empathy* really interesting because it provided some fresh food for thought. When you consider our human origins, it doesn't matter if you're coming from an evolutionary, creationist, or intelligent design worldview. There's no escaping the fact that in any scenario, we've had to survive, help each other, and adapt together to get where we are today. This book really had me observing people a bit closer for a while.

[Read full summary on Blinkist >>](#)

[Free Preview >>](#)

[Learn more about the author >>](#)

Who would I recommend The Age of Empathy summary to?

The 38-year-old car salesman who is feeling like he needs to do something more meaningful for people, a 45-year-old bible scholar who wants to explore origins from the evolutionary perspective, and anyone wishing to make their corner of the world a little bit happier.