

RENEWING OUR MINDS – Class Five

Exploring Brain McLaren's

Why Don't They Get It: Overcoming Bias in Others (and Yourself)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:2)

Outline

Week One (May 26, 27) – Introduction; Enter Jesus; Confirmation Bias

Week Two (June 2,3) – Complexity Bias; Community Bias

Week Three/Four (June 16,17) – Complementarity Bias; Competency Bias; Consciousness Bias; Comfort Bias

Week Five (June 23, 24) – Conservative/Liberal Bias; Confidence Bias; Catastrophe Bias;

Week Six (June 30, July 1) – Contact Bias; Cash Bias; Conspiracy Bias; Next Steps

Conservative / Liberal Bias (Chapter 8)

Conservative / Liberal Bias: “I lean toward nurturing fairness and kindness, or towards strictly enforcing purity, loyalty, liberty, and authority, as an expression of my political identity.”

“For many years now, psychologists and political theorists have been studying the brains and thinking patterns of people who identify as conservative and liberal, and their discoveries are fascinating.

First, they found that all or nearly all moral arguments fit into six categories: fairness vs. unfairness; kindness vs. cruelty; purity vs. degradation; loyalty vs. betrayal; liberty vs. oppression; authority vs. rebellion.”

“Next, they found out that people who identify as liberal or progressive favor arguments about fairness and kindness, and tend to be suspicious of arguments based on purity, loyalty, liberty, and authority.”

“Then, they found out that people who identify as conservative or traditional are comfortable with all six lines of argument. This may help explain why conservatives often feel they are more moral than their liberal counterparts: they can sense that they're running on more cylinders, so to speak, than their counterparts.”

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“These differences suggest that liberals work with a ‘nurturing parent’ model, assuming that people want to be good and do right, but just need to be encouraged and supported to do so. In contrast, conservatives work with a ‘strict father’ model, assuming that people are lazy and bad and need strict discipline, threats of punishment, and tough treatment to keep them in line.”

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt, “The Moral Roots of Conservatives and Liberals” TED Talk
(https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en)

~ liberals value care and fairness; conservatives value care, fairness, authority, loyalty (to the in-group) and purity

~ explore your own at “yourmorals.org”

Overcoming Conservative / Liberal Bias (Chapter 24)

In Responding to Conservative / Liberal Bias – “Jesus started with moral values of fairness and kindness (justice and compassion/*mercy*), but then he masterfully brought in purity, loyalty, liberty, and authority as well, always to support fairness and kindness, never to undermine them.”

Jesus leveraged the four conservative lines of moral argument “in service of the higher values of justice (fairness) and mercy (kindness), which he encompassed in what he called the new and greatest commandment, the ultimate moral value, the prime directive of love.”

~ Jesus declares woe on the religious authorities, “For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.” (Matthew 23:23)

“Instead of allowing people to reject, shame, or scapegoat ‘the other’ in the name of loyalty to the in-group, Jesus expanded the circle of loyalty to include the last, the least, the lost, the outsider, the outcast, the enemy, and even the nonhuman parts of creation, including ‘the birds of the air’ and ‘the flowers of the field.’ Why? Since God loves all, so should we.”

~ regarding purity, Jesus said, “Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” (Matthew 15:1-20)

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~ regarding authority, *Jesus washed the feet of the disciples during the Last Supper and said, "You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."* (John 13:13-15)

“In these ways, Jesus neither absolutized nor ignored the four primarily conservative moral values, but instead, he included them and integrated them with the values of fairness and kindness, or justice and compassion/*mercy* ... all in service of love.”

Confidence Bias (Chapter 9)

Confidence Bias: "I am attracted to confidence, even if it is false. I often prefer the bold lie to the hesitant truth."

"This bias makes sense if we remember how our brains are wired by millions of years of evolution to alert us to and protect us from danger. In a time of danger, we look for the bold, confident leader who won't waste time in indecision and will lead us to safety, fast.

The problem is that certain people learn to manipulate our built-in preference for confidence. We call these manipulators confidence artists. They learn to use our susceptibility to their confidence for their advantage, which explains why con artists and con men often win political elections and make a lot of money too.

Meanwhile, honest and humble people, people who may in fact be far more trustworthy, don't attract our confidence because they don't barge in with boldness and brashness."

Overcoming Confidence Bias (Chapter 27)

In Responding to Confidence Bias – "Jesus was bold, yet invited people to question, test, and evaluate. Jesus was confident, but didn't have a 'messianic complex.'"

"The crowds were impressed that Jesus spoke 'with authority,' not like their conventional teachers. (*Matthew 7:28-29*) His boldness was attractive." And he "welcomed questions, and also asked lots of questions, initiating empowering dialogue and repeatedly inviting listeners to test or challenge what he said."

"When Jesus turned and saw [the two disciples] following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and see.'" (*John 1:38-39a*)

"Jesus said to Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'" (*John 11:25-27*)

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After his resurrection, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter responds, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus tells him, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-19)

"Jesus frequently warned people about false prophets and exposed the fraud and corruption of both religious and political authority figures."

Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit." (Matthew 7:15-17)

Jesus said during his Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24,25; Mark 13; Luke 21), "False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything." (Mark 13:22-23)

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward." (Matthew 6:2)

Jesus invited people to think for themselves, and "to think again, which is what repent [*metanoia, change mind*] means...both critically (by challenging convention) and creatively (by imagining new possibilities)."

"Equally important, Jesus modeled humility and vulnerability along with bold confidence."

Jesus said during his Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24,25; Mark 13; Luke 21), "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mark 13:32)

"Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'" (John 4:6-7)

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"Jesus wept" in empathy with Martha and Mary on the death of Lazarus. (John 11:35)

Jesus empowered his followers to carry on his mission. "In the end, he asked his disciples to pick up his work, and assured them they would do even greater things than he had done."

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

Jesus said to his disciples during the Last Supper, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12)

Jesus said to his disciples before his Ascension, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

"Yes, Jesus was confident, but he was the very opposite of a con artist. You might say he was a humility artist, a vulnerability artist, an anti-con artist. Rather than making people codependent on his confidence, he empowered them with their own."

Catastrophe Bias (Chapter 10)

Catastrophe Bias: “I remember dramatic catastrophes but don't notice gradual decline (or improvement).”

“You may have heard an old story (which is probably a fable) about a frog who was put in a pot that was heated so gradually that it never jumped out. Well, it turns out that there is something analogous in human behavior: catastrophe bias.”

“As we've already seen, our brains have evolved to protect us from danger, so dangerous situations make a big impression on us. For example, we may remember exactly where we were standing the moment when we first heard about this or that catastrophe, or we may feel triggered by words, sounds, or situations that remind us of trauma we have experienced.”

“If we experience gradual change or decline, our danger reflexes aren't activated, so we often sit in the pot with the frog until the water boils (and we boil with it).”

“Catastrophe Bias helps explain why we can get people to prepare for a dangerous weather emergency – an incoming tornado, hurricane, or blizzard, for example – but not climate change that happens less dramatically, even though its consequences will be far more catastrophic in the long run.”

“It also explains why, say, certain political or media figures can gradually erode standards of decency, undermine long-held values, or make what was once appalling seem normalized and acceptable: they introduce the change gradually and steadily, like a drip-drip-drip rather than like a sudden flood, so our brain's catastrophe responses are never activated. (The flip side of Catastrophe Bias, we might say, is Normalcy Bias.)”

Overcoming Catastrophe Bias (Chapter 28)

In Responding to Catastrophe Bias – “Jesus evoked catastrophe with intention and artistry. He also told stories of both dramatic and gradual positive change, through parables, signs and wonders.”

“Jesus seemed to know that only catastrophe would seize people's attention, awaken them from complacency, and awaken and activate their brains, so he used catastrophic language often, evoking, for example, apocalyptic images of a sudden earthquake [*Olivet Discourse – Matthew 24,25; Mark 13: Luke 21*], a nighttime robbery [*Matthew 24:42-44*], fire and brimstone [*Mark 9:42-48, Matthew 13:38-53, Matthew 25*], a collapsing Temple [*Mark 13:1-2*], and a plundered city [*Matthew 11:2-24*].”

“Jesus also knew that some of the worst catastrophes unfold gradually, not suddenly, so he carefully incorporated imagery of slow, steady decay...of moths consuming clothing, of worms decomposing carrion, of rust destroying metal [*Matthew 6:19-21*].”

On the positive side, Jesus acted to reverse catastrophe: “the hungry fed, the dead raised, the sick healed, a storm propelling a boat to its destination rather than sinking it, and so on.”

“He also used imagery of slow, gradual change for the better, evoking the gradual effects of yeast in dough [*Luke 13:20-21*], seeds in soil [*Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:26-29, Luke 8:4-15*], salt in food [*Matthew 5:13*], and fertilizer in a garden [*Luke 13:6-9*]. For that reason, he frequently called for patience, persistence, and unflagging hope in the face of delay, ultimately inspiring hope for new beginnings even on the other side of a catastrophic death.”

Jesus told the Parable of the Persistent Widow about his disciples' “need to pray always and not to lose heart.” (Luke 18:1-8)

Jesus said to his disciples during the Last Supper, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

Jesus said to his disciples before his Ascension, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

The Words of the Apostle Paul

"And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (Romans 5:3-5)

"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up." (Galatians 9:9)

"Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14)