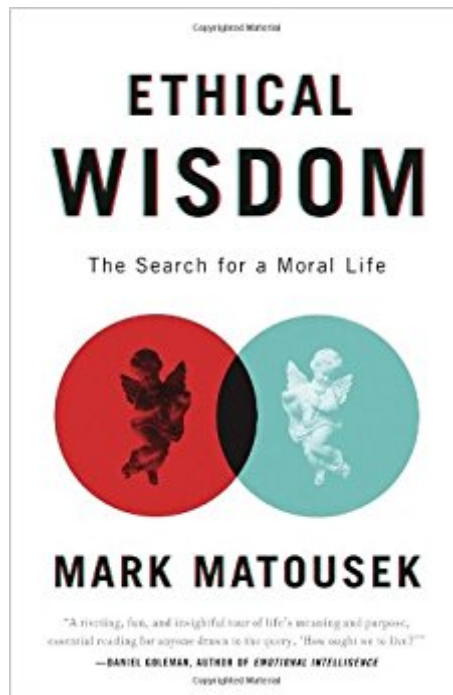


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Ethical Wisdom: The Search For A Moral Life



Synopsis

In this engagingly written and deeply insightful book, bestselling author Mark Matousek explores a perennially troubling question: How can we be both good and evil? Contrary to what we've been taught in our reason-obsessed culture, argues Matousek, emotions are the bedrock of ethical life; without them, human beings cannot be empathic, moral, or good. But how do we make the judgment call between self-interest and caring for others? What does being good really mean? Which parts of morality are biological, which ethical? When should instinct be trusted and when does it lead us into trouble? How can we know ourselves to be good amidst the hypocrisy, fears, and sabotaging appetites that pervade our two-sided natures? Drawing on the latest scientific research and interviews with social scientists, spiritual leaders, ex-cons, altruists, and philosophers, Matousek examines morality from all angles in this thoroughly entertaining and helpful guide to crossing one's own murky moral terrain.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This seems to be intended to be uplifting and inspirational -- "positive" -- rather than particularly thoughtful or searching. It draws on many sources, but doesn't seek out the disagreements and tensions between those sources. It assumes that morality has five common supports or pillars, and therefore, that ethics/morality is more or less universal and stable over time. This seems highly dubious, so I would have appreciated a deeper look at the differences between moralities and mores in different cultures. But it seems that this subject is raised and then abandoned. The mix here is Buddhism + Judaism + feminism + liberalism + contemporary American cultural influences +

environmentalism + evolutionary biology + brain research. (But none of the inevitable disagreements between these perspectives are really explored.) There's nothing wrong with that -- it's rather congenial to me, but not challenging. It seems that Matousek doesn't bother to get a lot of little things right, and simply makes stuff up when he wants to. For instance, is it meaningful or correct to say we only use twenty percent of our brains? Another example: A reference to a funny scene in "Being John Malkovich" which misunderstands the reason why everything becomes "Malkovich": The reason is that it's a feedback loop caused by the bizarre situation, *not* that the *director* ventures inside the movie star's head. In sum: In large and in small, this raises a lot of interesting points and theories but doesn't synthesize them well, or discuss them perceptively, so I don't think it's worth a highly careful read or a thorough critique. It's really more of a feel-good, try-a-little-harder sort of book. Not as deep as your average New Yorker article, and more scattered.

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