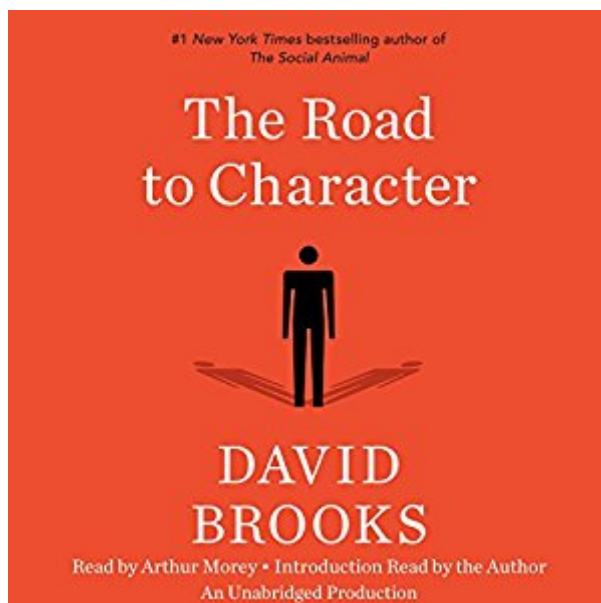


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The Road To Character



Synopsis

"I wrote this book not sure I could follow the road to character, but I wanted at least to know what the road looks like and how other people have trodden it." (David Brooks) With the wisdom, humor, curiosity, and sharp insights that have brought millions of readers to his New York Times column and his previous best sellers, David Brooks has consistently illuminated our daily lives in surprising and original ways. In *The Social Animal*, he explored the neuroscience of human connection and how we can flourish together. Now, in *The Road to Character*, he focuses on the deeper values that should inform our lives. Responding to what he calls the culture of the Big Me, which emphasizes external success, Brooks challenges us and himself to rebalance the scales between our "rÃfÆ'Ã Â©sumÃfÆ'Ã Â© virtues" - achieving wealth, fame, and status - and our "eulogy virtues," those that exist at the core of our being: kindness, bravery, honesty, faithfulness, and relationships. Looking to some of the world's greatest thinkers and inspiring leaders, Brooks explores how, through internal struggle and a sense of their own limitations, they have built strong inner character. Labor activist Frances Perkins understood the need to suppress parts of herself so she could be an instrument in a larger cause. Dwight Eisenhower organized his life not around impulsive self-expression but considered self-restraint. Dorothy Day, a devout Catholic convert and champion of the poor, learned as a young woman the vocabulary of simplicity and surrender. Civil rights pioneers A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin learned reticence and the logic of self-discipline, the need to distrust oneself even while waging a noble crusade. Blending psychology, politics, spirituality, and confessional, *The Road to Character* provides an opportunity for us to rethink our priorities and strive to build rich inner lives marked by humility and moral depth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have opted for a "3" rating, which may be a little harsh for this well-written book, but that's because I found myself vacillating between enjoying parts of this book while disliking others. The book opens well with an interesting comparison of resume virtues vs eulogy virtues. Resume virtues are the accomplishments and skills we put on our resumes; eulogy virtues are the characteristics that are at the core of your being. Brooks then describes this contrast as Adam I vs Adam II and goes on to cite various examples of how our society has been taken over by resume virtues and Adam I beliefs and actions. He compares a football player's over-enthusiastic response to a touchdown with the more humble reactions to the US victory in WWII. I enjoyed this opening discussion as well as several of the examples of individuals who had found their "vocation" (rather than "career") often through a circumstance in their life which propelled them toward it. Many times, their calling found them. I liked the emphasis on humility and the importance of being a good person not just doing good deeds. I also enjoyed reading about the Triangle Factory Fire and other incidents which pointed certain individuals toward their ultimate destinies. I truly admire the values he promotes and was pleasantly reminded of my father's generation which lived many of those values through WWII and other historic events. But as I continued to read the book, I started to get a sense of "back in the good old days" nostalgia that implies (or blatantly states) that somehow suffering is the key to nobility and a good person. Stories are told of individuals who survived deaths of close family or children, endured hazing or torture, and it all started to sound a little preachy, no matter how eloquently it was stated. I am not someone who holds much for the "good old days"-- they weren't so good for women, minorities, the poor, etc. And Brooks acknowledges that early on, but he seems to forget that, and after awhile I grew tired of reading the book. For every person who survives a hazing/torture event and thrives, there are others who are crushed and destroyed, and I'm not sure that's because they lack character. It's inspiring to read about those who triumph in dire circumstances, but I'm left with trying to figure out what that means-- should life be harder, the rules be harsher so we will have greater character? There's a tone of "life was harder then" and forged stronger people, and I'm not sure I agree. Bottom line-- it's an interesting and well-written book and I truly recommend the first portion of it. But after that, I felt like I had gotten the point. It just wasn't as compelling to read after the first few chapters.

Heard Sam Harris podcast with Brooks, was a bit disappointed Sam did not give him more grief; but

the point of those podcasts is to air influential opinions not just to cultivate enemies. Book poses moral ethics as question whether to build a power/wealth resume for one's life, or to cultivate the resume for one's funeral oration. Yep, it's posing for the pearly gates. However, the portraits of his exemplary lives, including Eleanor Roosevelt and other sub-luminaries one has only vaguely heard of, are edifying .

Those of us who fret over our undernourished Adam II side (your values and character) will be enthralled by the depth and erudition Mr. Brooks brings to the study of character and morality by using as his lens a series of careful 'warts and all' biographic portrayals of marvelous individuals from the past. Writing about character, morality and virtue could easily lead to arid or soporific prose, but I read the book in a single sitting on a flight returning from the UK. The prose perfectly animates his character sketches and his compelling style as an essayist is displayed throughout the text. As I read the book, I examined my own life and measured it against the featured individuals. I did not measure well against such fine characters, but instead of being depressed by my shortcomings, I felt inspired. It made me want to be a better man. It takes a damn fine book to do that.BDB

Captivating personal portraits of selected American heroes and heroines who worked to help others and change America for the better.Filled with good insights and lessons, but urge to create a formal list of lessons falls short of being useful in my mind.Too disjointed and even contradictory to be of much policy use -- even for an individual to follow comprehensively..Better to pick and choose among the examples and lessons he presents, and hope for the best.It was a shock to read his comment that he wrote this book to "save his own life" -- meaning his sanity.He was depressed in his own life.I do mine pro-football players celebrating a touchdown, as long it does not delay the game for long.

David Brooks writing is clear and to the point. I love this book and have given it away to friends. We all need to read it. I feel the teaching of the church on how to live life has moved to authors alive and deceased. The wisdom of Van Zeller being my favorite. The teachings of the faith still stands but the church's do not know how to address the world as it exists today. The end of Road To Character sums it up a few messages. I am in the throws of reading his social animal book. Love this book!Other authors of interest are Rohr, Rolheiser, Nepo, Nouwen, Welwood and Bourgeault. Just love to read!! It calms my soul and brings back the beauty and truths of a life well lived.

This book only is mildly disappointing. There is much about it to admire and recommend. I found the historical and biographical essays concerning individuals Mr. Brooks believes exhibit various facets of character to be engaging and informative. I don't quibble with his choices. The last couple of chapters, following the sketch of Samuel Johnson, become prescriptive. While it is easy to imagine why the book ends this way ("David, you can't simply stop here," says his editor, "you need to tie it altogether neatly."), it caused it to lose power, in my estimation. If the reader has failed to figure out the dimensions of character by then, Mr. Brooks summing it up with crib notes for dummies shows a lack of faith in what he had up to that point accomplished. Some of his rumination concerning the cost of social media is valid, but hardly is worth the verbiage devoted to it. It felt to me like a couple of essays tacked onto a well-reasoned body of work.

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