"Moral Tribes is a masterpiece—a landmark work brimming with originality and insight that also happens to be wickedly fun to read. The only disappointing thing about this book is that it ends."
—DANIEL GILBERT, Professor of Psychology, Harvard University; author of the international bestseller Stumbling on Happiness

MORAL TRIBES

EMOTION, REASON, AND
THE GAP BETWEEN US AND THEM

JOSHUA GREENE

Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them

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Our brains were designed for tribal life, for getting along with a select group of others (Us) and for fighting off everyone else (Them). But modern times have forced the world's tribes into a shared space, resulting in epic clashes of values along with unprecedented opportunities. As the world shrinks, the moral lines that divide us become more salient and more puzzling. We fight over everything from tax codes to gay marriage to global warming, and we wonder where, if at all, we can find our common ground.

A grand synthesis of neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy, *Moral Tribes* reveals the underlying causes of modern conflict and lights the way forward. Greene compares the human brain to a dual-mode camera, with point-and-shoot automatic settings ("portrait," "landscape") as well as a manual mode. Our point-and-shoot settings are our emotions—efficient, automated programs honed by evolution, culture, and personal experience. The brain's manual mode is its capacity for deliberate reasoning, which makes our thinking flexible. Point-and-shoot emotions make us social animals, turning Me into Us. But they also make us tribal animals, turning Us against Them. Our tribal emotions make us fight—sometimes with bombs, sometimes with words—often with life-and-death stakes.

An award-winning teacher and scientist, Greene directs Harvard University's Moral Cognition Lab, which uses cutting-edge neuroscience and cognitive techniques to understand how people really make moral decisions. Combining insights from the lab with lessons from decades of social science and centuries of philosophy, the great question of *Moral Tribes* is this: How can we get along with Them when what they want feels so wrong to Us?

Ultimately, Greene offers a set of maxims for navigating the modern moral terrain, a practical road map for solving problems and living better lives. *Moral Tribes* shows us when to trust our instincts, when to reason, and how the right kind of reasoning can move us forward. A major achievement from a rising star in a new scientific field, *Moral Tribes* will refashion your deepest beliefs about how moral thinking works and how it can work better.

Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them Details

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From Reader Review Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them for online ebook

John says

Greene takes pains to source philosophy, social and cognitive sciences, psychology, and other material pertinent to having a reasoned conversation about why different groups of people can disagree about things each is so sure is moral and right[eous]. By chapter 5 he's plainly depicted the landscape of our biological proclivities, inherited perspectives, decision making, and biases. He's set upon that landscape metaphysical and reasoning tools with which you expect him to construct and reveal grand insight.

Perhaps because of this groundwork, even more than the desire for understanding between the seemingly irreconcilable, Greene tragically disappoints the reader by repeatedly begging appeal for open-mindedness followed by what can only be described as half-assed, rushed, shoddy hand-waving rather than concerted (let alone rigorous) use of the tools he's laid out. No, the reader isn't left with insight beyond what a high school debate coach might give. They're left knowing Greene as a partisan hack, as convinced of his moral superiority as anyone else on the partisan spectrum.

Summing Greene's position: Utilitarianism is the only means by which compromise can be attained. Though you may find Utilitarianism unworkable idealistic and its result morally reprehensible, this is simply because you've failed to use reason over emotion... ...or if you have used reason, because you've done so only to further rationalize your own position (something Greene provides heaping examples of in his own rhetoric). "You see", Greene says, "disagreeing with Utilitarianism is ridiculous because it means forsaking the /deeply pragmatic/ compromise required of reason." Wherein such a compromise demands judgement? These are precisely the situations in which one would turn to an expert... ...this expert just sticks his finger in the air and spouts the American Liberal line verbatim.

Bruce says

4 stars for the science related material, a generous 2 stars for the philosophical goop, which comprises the bulk of the book. To deflect criticisms of utilitarianism, Greene qualifies its "rules" to such a degree that nothing is left save: think carefully about things and your obligation to help others. That's fine, but I don't need to read hundreds of pages to arrive at that dictum.

The science portions of the book could have been better directed. The author goes into great detail regarding the trolley dilemma. While this discussion was interesting, and this dilemma nicely traces the interplay between emotion and reason, other emotional modules are highly relevant to group/tribe formation and interactions; these should have been discussed (in addition to the trolley stuff). These other modules may be especially important, since in modern Western society, groups do not result from geographical isolation.

Group formation in modern societies may depend on one's location on the individualist vs. collectivist spectrum, which might be determined from a complex interplay between genetics and one's assessment of whether one will benefit or be harmed by redistribution of wealth. In turn, one's location on this spectrum may influence group membership, and that membership likely profoundly affects the emotional (mis)interpretation of real world data (even by a Harvard professor). I don't require a book on groups to adopt my view, but in such a book, I really want to read an attempt to understand what underpins group

formation in Western society.

Kaj Sotala says

The moral psychology felt top-notch; however, the author's defenses of utilitarianism in the later chapters felt like they were showing the same rationalization biases that he had spent several chapters warning his readers about (and I say this as someone who's generally sympathetic to utilitarianism). Still worth reading for at least the early chapters, though.

Teo 2050 says

~7.5h @ 2x. If you're into all three of these, relevant background reading before & referenced in *Moral Tribes* might include The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion (Haidt) & Thinking, Fast and Slow (Kahneman). I agree that utilitarianism (or 'deep pragmatism') basically is what we do when trying to find common ground (weighing harms & benefits), and I'm sympathetic to these kinds of 'Morality, Fast and Slow' trains of thought & research. (It's good to have Moral Cognition labs.) But I've yet to look into whether this/they help disagreeing moral tribes find common currency or manage to mostly preach to the already utilitarian crowd. Ultimately, harmonizing moral intuitions might require education in science & changes in metaphysical views. And maybe *Moral Tribes* falls under such education; but is it accessible enough to have effects outside the already sympathetic camp?

Contents:
(view spoiler)

Duncan Mclaren says

For a book described in its jacket quotes as 'a landmark', 'brilliant' and 'a masterpiece', this was a big disappointment. It is no such thing, and that Steven Pinker and Peter Singer should make such comments about it is - I suspect - testament to the power of confirmation bias.

So why I am I still awarding it 3 stars? Because it is in many ways two books woven into one, and one of the two books is indeed stimulating, challenging and innovative (sadly the other is almost entirely without logical foundation. Book one is the melding of psychological research and moral philosophy to demonstrate the ways in which differently evolved cultures have developed distinctive moral approaches which can be internally consistent, and yet generate conflicts in which each group (or 'tribe') believes itself morally correct. In doing this he contrasts the parable of 'the tragedy of commonsense morality' with the 'tragedy of the commons'. Greene's innovative approach is to weave together evidence on humans' two-speed brains (as elaborated in Daniel Kahneman's 'Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow') with evidence on how we approach moral dilemmas. The research findings he presents on how test subjects (albeit primarily weird (western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) people) respond differently when triggered to use their gut reactions, rather than considered rationalism should provoke all philosophers to think hard about how far they are and should seek to 'justify their instincts'.

Book two attempts (and imo, almost completely fails) to demonstrate that a variant of utilitarianism that Greene calls 'deep pragmatism' can provide a universal language and currency for negotiation and compromise between different 'moral tribes'. His quest fails on at least three counts. Most fundamentally he cannot escape the accusation he levies at almost all other philosophers - including such eminences as John Rawls - that he is seeking intricate ways to justify his own gut instincts. For instance his cultural setting means he largely fails to recognise the extent to which our biological and cultural evolution has not left humans as competitive savages with a veneer of collaborative culture, but as highly evolved collaborators with a healthy streak of competitiveness. Moreover, he redefines happiness or welfare (the underlying currency of utilitarianism) in ways that leave it almost meaningless (and certainly distinctive from other utilitarian scholars) - as including sacrifices on behalf of others, and over indefinite time periods. Worse he redefines the 'moral community' - by suggesting that anyone who doesn't get their happiness in the same way, is simply 'not part of the we in this conversation'.

So ultimately Greene's effort to transcend moral differences through utilitarianism fails. But his book is still valuable as it illuminates important obstacles that will have to be overcome in any other effort to develop a universal ethical framework, whether based in human rights, cosmopolitanism or recognition, for example. But here lies what I see as Greene's final failure: in his determination to find in 'deep pragmatism' the one and only way to something approximating moral universalism; he becomes increasingly determined to rubbish any alternative approaches, and rather overlooks and demeans the massive progress made by non-utilitarian approaches which have incrementally widened the ambit of our moral community to increasingly accept differences in gender, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality. In this I think he is not only hampered by his own psychological blinkers, but the cultural blinkers of living in the current polarised era of US politics.

Nonetheless, I neither regret reading this, nor would I do other than recommend it to others ... despite my criticisms, it made me think and reflect, and there is little more that we could reasonably ask from a book of such ambition that attempts to present both science and philosophy to a mainstream audience.

David says

Humans have evolved the ability to be cooperative, in order to help our own survival in difficult times. This ability usually prevents us from being completely selfish. We cooperate with other members of our group, our "tribe", and solves the dilemma between "Me" and "Us". The problem is, that this same mechanism generates a different dilemma, a competition between "Us" and "Them". We find that we generally have the same moral outlook as others in our "tribe", and we do not even consider the moral outlook of outsiders.

This, in a nutshell, is the basic dilemma in this excellent book by Joshua Greene. Greene is the director of the *Moral Cognition Lab* in Harvard University's Department of Psychology. He conducts psychological experiments, and uses the results to develop some fascinating theories about the problem of morality.

I was very much surprised by some experiments concerning the perceived risks of climate change. Contrary to what I expected, the degree of scientific literacy and numeracy is *inversely* correlated with the perception of risk due to climate change. Instead, the membership in a political "tribe" is a much better predictor of belief in the risks. While the vast majority of scientists believe in the risks, most people do not want to "consult" with the experts in this area. They prefer to "consult" with other members of their political sphere.

Much of the book is devoted to the famous moral dilemma of the "trolley-car". Suppose a trolley car is out of control. It will soon run over and kill a group of five workmen, unless something is done immediately. You have access to a track switch, that will switch the trolley onto a siding where only a single workman will be killed. The question is, would you pull the switch? Most people would pull the switch.

But now, here is the moral dilemma, for a somewhat different scenario. Suppose the same trolley is on course to kill five workmen. But you are up on a footbridge, and immediately in front of you is a man with an oversized backpack. If you were to push that man over the side of the bridge, the trolley car would be stopped, but that man would die. Again, would you push the man over? Most people would not.

So, why not? What is the moral difference between pulling the switch and pushing the man over the side? The outcomes would be the same, so why do most people make a distinction? Here, Joshua Greene analyzes this question in great detail. The simplest explanation, is that in the switch case, the death of the lone workman is an incidental side effect, while in the case of pushing the man over the side of the footbridge, that act is the *means* to an end. Greene takes these scenarios and presents a compelling theory, why most people have such a strong aversion to pushing the man off the footbridge.

Joshua Greene discusses a moral philosophy called *utilitarianism*. This philosophy advocates that people should act to maximize the collective level of happiness. There are plenty of critics of this philosophy, but Greene does a good job of addressing their criticisms.

Greene looks at the controversy surrounding abortions. He shows that the two sides in the controversy claim certain rights; pro-lifers claim the right to life, while pro-choice people claim that a woman has a right to choose what happens to her body. Greene analyzes the controversy in some detail, and concludes that both sides have excellent arguments, and that both sides are somewhat hypocritical in their not taking their "rights" arguments to their logical conclusions. In the end, Greene concludes that any argument that relies on "rights" are specious. Instead, he recommends a pragmatic approach, that requires some deep "manual" thinking.

A leit motif throughout the book is a metaphor, which likens our moral outlook to a camera with automatic and manual settings. Evolution has given us an "automatic" mode of thinking, where we generally hold the beliefs of our tribe. But, tribes often have moral beliefs that conflict with those of other tribes, and neither set of beliefs are necessarily "better". So it behooves us to switch over to "manual" mode, and use reason to think about the issues. At the end of the book, Greene offers six pragmatic "rules" to help resolve moral issues.

If you are interested in philosophy, in morality, or sociology, I highly recommend this book.

Joshua Stein says

There's a lot to be said about *Moral Tribes* but I will divide the comment roughly into two parts: (1) the smart commentary on moral psychology and (2) the weak commentary on ethics. It is worth noting that the strong points and weak points should be unsurprising given Greene's background; he's a renown neuroscientist. It seems to make sense that his recapitulation of his groundbreaking work would be terrific and engaging, and that the book would weaken in discussions of other domains.

The opening chapters of the book, though, are even stronger than I anticipated. Greene talks elegantly through the game theory, evolutionary biology, and eventually neuroscience that underlie his theory of cognition. It is an absolute master class in science writing for a mainstream audience. For the first few chapters alone I recommend reading the book, if for no other reason than to glean the smart interdisciplinary methodologies of evolutionary psychology and neuroscience.

Greene's theory of moral cognition is compelling, but he also doesn't skimp on engaging with his competitors. His discussion of John Mikhail is the best I've read (I'll be reading Mikhail's major book next) and he has me convinced that the folks in this domain are really all having good, productive discussion, which isn't always the default in academia. I suspect that Greene's theory is incomplete, but I'm sure he'd be able to engage well with my technical concerns. (Several of them have already been engaged in his exchanges with some philosophers.)

The book goes off the rails in the philosophical discussion of the last 100 or so pages. My concerns are numerous, the first is that he is strikingly dismissive of rights based theories (pp. 305) without actually referring to any of the literature on said theories and then immediately turning around and suggesting that in some cases it's ok to used rights based theories to protect beliefs against the utilitarian arguments he advocates (pp. 308). It's not really a well developed step-change, and he stumbles over it in his attempt to illustrate the abortion issue, where he mangles together ethical and public policy considerations.

The book should be taken seriously for what it does well, offer a tremendous contribution to the blossoming field of moral psychology. It demonstrates the significant role neuroscience and psychology have to play in understanding social relations and, for that, we ought to be attentive. But it would be nice if the philosophical discussions were a bit more rigorous. I suspect there's a lot more to come from Greene, though, and that it will get more philosophically sophisticated in the future, as his work does include a lot of serious engagement with philosophers.

Richard says

Greene looks at the evolutionary origins of intergroup conflict, and attempts to demonstrate that "deep pragmatism" (a form of utilitarianism) can address the dilemma that arises due to human's evolution as a tribal species.

He doesn't succeed, however. His reasoning contains a few flaws, but ultimately he simply doesn't address the toughest cases and relies on something akin to an "appeal to urgency". That isn't listed as a fallacy in my textbook on critical thinking, but so what?

A wealth of background and history is given, though, which makes the book a fairly useful one. Greene does repeat himself somewhat (probably a subconscious effort to bolster his weak case), and a good editor could probably have shaved off a few dozen pages, at least.

The problem at hand is described as the Tragedy of Commonsense Morality. This is Greene's *intergroup* analogue of the well-studied *intragroup* paradox known as the Tragedy of the Commons. Both are gradually explored through the use of game theory, neuroscience and evolutionary psychology.

Trolleyology is used a lot in his analysis. This is understandable: Greene cemented his reputation as a cognitive researcher by asking test subjects about that infamous moral dilemma while inside of a fMRI machine. So it is a little ironic that this is also where he stumbles.

First, he conflates two sets of answers. He argues quite persuasively that evolution took some shortcuts in coming up with quick-and-dirty responses to different patterns, and that the divergence in those responses to very similar situations is arbitrary for an understandable reason. To put it very briefly, our different answer to the "footbridge" versus the baseline "switch" situations is because we are "blind to side effects" because evolution didn't give us the ability to intuitively keep track of multiple chains of causality (see page 225 and following). That's fine… except he later tells us that when philosophers created a deontological reason for the same thing, that we must dismiss their reasoning as mere rationalization. Uh, no: very poor logic. Even if it is true that the flawed evolutionary-constructed intuition is inconsistent in its conclusions, that doesn't mean that any other analysis of the same situation must be as well. The remainder of the book relies on his erroneous belief that he could effectively dispense with ethics.

Second, Greene introduces a very hard ethical case early in his discussion of trolleyology: that of a surgeon who is able to heal several other people by stealing organs from one healthy (albeit unwilling) donor (see page 109). He admits to being blindsided by that, so I anticipated him showing how it would be dealt with at some point with his utilitarian approach. But he never did. Instead, he relied on some hand-waving, asserting that utilitarianism, if *wisely applied*, would prove capable of being *deeply* pragmatic. Wait — we have to rely on *wisdom*? But isn't that precisely what is in short supply? In fact, he points out that just *thinking really hard* isn't going to help us — our brains are wired very poorly for that (page 296).

The "rationalizations" of ethics address the hard cases fairly well. Specifically, the doctrine of double effect in conjunction with Kant's categorical imperative, "God damn it, you've got to be kind." His goal was laudable, but the problem is harder than he perceived.

Ultimately, however, this wasn't the book I expected it to be. The word "tribes" in the title implied something a bit different to me than Greene intended, and I was disappointed about that, too.

As I've noted, the "tribe" Greene points to is the evolutionary source of our quite irrational thinking about intergroup conflict resolution. What I hoped the book was going to be about was the highly "tribal" partisan behavior that plagues society today. My favorite academic addressing this is still Dan Kahan, who researches *Identity-Protective Cultural Cognition* at Yale Law School. But he hasn't written any books that cover the subject broadly, and his risk-perception orientation isn't quite what I'm looking for. The basic idea is that the tribal roots of our cognition (what Greene is also pointing to) create a very strong impetus for us to "think" in terms of tribes even today, and that kind of motivated thinking is becoming increasingly prevalent. A good primer on that is the *New Yorker* article, *Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds* .

Postscript —

I will say: his endnote and bibliography are great. There are a lot of classic journal articles that I've always wanted the citations to, and he definitely delivers.

Post-postscript —

My original pre-review listed a number of reviews and interviews, which I'll tack on here, just in case someone wants to dig into the archives.

• Good hour-long radio interview with author on KQED Forum at https://ww2.kqed.org/forum/2013/11/14...

• Another interview with the author at the podcast *Inquiring Minds*: http://www.motherjones.com/environmen...

• Review in GuardianUK: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014...

• Review in Telegraph: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/bo...

• Review in Independent: http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-ent...

• Review in The Atlantic: http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/a... (by Robert Wright, researcher and author of a number of books on point)

• Review in the New Republic: http://www.newrepublic.com/article/11...

• Review in Boston Globe: http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books...

Annoyingly, the NY Times didn't bother with it.

Atila Iamarino says

Uma leitura que estava adiando mas caiu muito bem depois de ler o The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion. O Joshua Greene faz uma expedição por diferentes formas do Dilema do Bonde para demonstrar como as duas formas de pensar que temos (vide Rápido e Devagar: Duas Formas de Pensar) colocam emoção e razão em conflito quando tomamos decisões morais. Basicamente porque, como ele argumenta e acredito também, formamos nosso sistema moral dentro de um ambiente muito mais particular e cercado só de pessoas que conhecíamos ou com quem nos relacionávamos. Tanto que muitos

conflitos éticos acontecem na fronteira entre nosso bando e outros bandos – refugiados, por exemplo.

Para mostrar como nossa ética é falha, ele usa o utilitarismo ao longo do livro todo. Que serve muito bem para apontar discrepâncias em uma situação como salvar alguém que estamos vendo vs. salver alguém que não vemos, já que o "benefício" nas duas situações é o mesmo. Só não compro muito o argumento final de que o utilitarismo seria o sistema ético global ideal, capaz de unir todos. Acho que somos egoístas demais para algo assim, pelo menos no futuro próximo.

Eliana says

So when my mom got this book I was sure it was going to be either about how Group A is right, and everyone else should GTFO, or about how really dead down we all agree on everything and conflict is really the vault of *insert group name here*. It turned out to be neither of those things. Instead, it's an extremely interesting look at why some actions make humans uncomfortable, why that impulse isn't always correct, and how to make ethical decisions without completely relying on "gut feeling".

Joseph Stieb says

I listened to this book as a follow up to Jonathan Haidt's excellent "The Righteous Mind." I didn't enjoy this book as much even though I probably would agree with Greene on more things than with Haidt. Haidt just had the advantage of going first and introducing me to the field of moral cognition. Greene is still a great read, and I recommend it to people even if they've already read Haidt.

This book centers around the quest for a universal moral currency that can adjudicate disputes between moral tribes, or the communities that the modern world increasingly throws into contact and conflict with each other. The book starts with the concept of the tragedy of the commons. In order for any community to work together, they need to mitigate the tragedy of the commons. Morality, in this evolutionary sense, is essentially a set of rules designed to facilitate cooperation within a group. However, we also have evolved, automatic settings that police our behavior from within, making us cooperative in the in-group almost by nature. We blush, gossip, get angry at taboo violators, have awe for the principles and sacred objects of the group, etc., and these automatic responses bolster (and are the basis of) the more abstract rules of humanity. Groups need this in-group harmony to survive, and the better they are at cooperation the more likely they are to survive.

So, the tragedy of the commons is solved! However, Greene says that this solution engenders its own new problem: the tragedy of common sense morality. When we meet other groups, we say "Hey, you guys don't do things like we do! What the heck! Let's fight." Each group's norms and values seem like "common sense" to the group, but they are nonsense (or worse) to the other group. Thus, Greene says we need a common language of morality

For that common language, Greene proposes happiness. It's something that we all agree that human beings should want. Ideally, we can put aside our common sense moralities and figure out what make human beings the happiest. Greene is a utilitarian in the spirit of Mill and Bentham, but he has drawn out a much more sophisticated version of utilitarianism than what most people associate with that term. Utilitarianism seeks the greatest good for the greatest number, but it also treats everyone's happiness as equally valuable. Slavery,

for example, is not justified in utilitarianism because it makes some people a little happier but others a lot less happy. Greene argues that our debates about our ways of life should be based around figuring out what makes people the happiest without taking too much from any individual or group. Strangely enough, this reminds me a lot of Fukuyama's argument that liberal democracy is best at satisfying the individual's "struggle for recognition," dignity, and happiness.

In order to do this, Greene argues that we will have to rely much more on manual-mode, conscious reasoning to figure out what makes people the happiest. At this point he builds heavily on Kahneman and Tversky's Systems 1 and 2 arguments. Our automatic settings are too focused on in-group cooperation and out-group distrust, and they have a lot of weird biases to be reliable guides to inter-group disputes. For example, in the trolley problem, our automatic response is that pushing the person is wrong but pulling the switch is okay, even though they are the same result! Utilitarianism focuses on the outcomes rather than the inputs of these processes, helping us get closer to what ways of life work best in cases where we have to decide (abortion or gay marriage, for instance). I like the Greene puts more credence in our ability to consciously reason, whereas Haidt is a bit heavy on the point that our reasoning is just post hoc rationalization of our instincts.

One very interesting argument in this book is that the concept of rights aren't very good for settling tough inter-tribal disputes. Greene portrays rights as trumps: my right to speech, privacy, religion, etc trumps almost anything you can put against it. Rights claims are designed to end conversations about morality as final arbiters of what we can and can't do. However, in cases like abortion, rights-talk doesn't get us very far. One side says "right to life" and the other says "right to choose," but Greene says we don't get very far from those competing claims. You are likely to agree with the one from the tribe you come from, after all. Instead, Greene says that the common currency of happiness can help adjudicate these disputes. He concludes that outlawing abortion reduces happiness, especially the burden put on women, much more than it improves the happiness of somewhat theoretical lives, given that there's no scientific way to decide when "ensoulment" occurs. This is the pro-choice utilitarian argument that goes around the rights impasse.

Greene has a great section on why he's a liberal that successfully counters a lot of Haidt's arguments. Haidt argues that liberals have an impoverished moral palate. They are only sensitive to care/harm, fairness, and liberty arguments, whereas conservatives respond to these and other moral taste buds, including sanctity/defilement, authority/tradition, and loyalty. Haidt says that liberals have this problem because too many of their beliefs come from abstract moral reasoning, Enlightenment style, which is deeply disconnected from our social lives and evolutionary nature.

Greene's counterpoint is great: This removal from the common sense morality of one's tribe, this ability to reason more abstractly, is the core strength of liberalism. Unlike virtually any other code, liberalism strives to be a form of universal moral currency by basing its judgements not on what any given tribe finds to be right or wrong, but more objective measurements of happiness like harm and fairness. Liberalism arose from theorists like Locke, Mill, Bentham, Rawls, and others who were trying to figure out how to live peacefully and cooperate with different tribes than there own. They couldn't just command those tribes (other religions, peoples, etc) to obey their common sense moralities, so they had to figure out common principles that both sides could agree to: rights, balanced government, tolerance, the harm principle, equality, and fairness.

Social conservatism, in contrast, is in Greene's telling just a reflection of the common sense morality of each tribe. Do social conservatives value patriotism, sanctity, and tradition in the abstract, as Haidt claims? No: they value their own forms of patriotism, sanctity, and tradition. When Iranians rebel against their government, violating patriotism and respect for authority, American social conservatives rejoice. Social conservatives treat the traditions of other societies as wrong, weird, or sacrilegious, and, unlike liberal utilitarians, would never consider adopting those practices if they were proven to be more effective or better

at generating happiness. If social conservatives value sanctity so much, why have so many of them been willing to desecrate the Qur'an, or support this kind of action? Why do they rejoice when Trump speaks of killing terrorists with bullets dipped in pigs blood? Social conservative movements operate from the common sense morality of "how we do things is how everyone else should do things, and our preferences should win out when they come into conflict with other tribes." This summarizes why Greene, and I, are liberals. I think we can see this point playing out right now in the great state of North Carolina.

I have two main problems with this book. First, I think the argument about rights is overstated. Greene doesn't really deal with the social contract aspect of liberal thought, which actually approaches rights from a fairly utilitarian perspective as well. Second, the book is a bit scattershot in its organization, and it has a little more philosophy than I wanted. Still, I recommend it highly to everyone. Yes, everyone! Moral cognition is an expanding field of moral psychology, and it cuts through so much BS and explains so much of our behavior that we should all at least engage with it.

Eduardo Santiago says

As a fresh take on utilitaniarism it's first-rate: new perspectives, new research, insightful questions. But ultimately he's just preaching to the choir because the single most important question of our age is not even mentioned: how to reach those who don't realize they are immoral? That is, people whose brains—through no fault of their own—consider Loyalty To Tribe and Obedience To Authority to be moral, rendering them vulnerable to charismatic psychopaths like Rush Limbaugh or evangelical preachers or anyone on Fox "News". They're not going to read this. They're not going to question their gut reactions or listen to anyone suggesting that they do ("heresy!"). This is a very real problem, and unfortunately no amount of philosophical arguing is going to address that. And on that depressing note, Happy Newtonmas!

Peter Mcloughlin says

The tragedy of the commons was proposed in 1968 by Garrett Hardin it involves the conflicting interests between the individual (me) and the group (us). Humans solved this dilemma many hundreds of thousands of years ago. Our minds according to Joshua Greene are packed with moral gizmos in our brain that make us excellent cooperates and solve the dilemma of Me vs. Us which is Common sense morality. Common sense morality is the kind of heuristics we have and emotional responses to others that makes this cooperation possible.
The catch is that common sense moral modules that help us form groups form them in the presence of in group/ out group competition. While we are social we are also very tribal. In the modern world this translates into the "Tragedy of Commonsense Morality". Our tribal groupishness which at one time was an advantage is divide the world into hostile tribes and is tearing nations apart.
The author argues that a meta-morality will be need to adjudicate conflict between tribal groups and he offers a form of pragmatism or utilitarianism as a meta-morality.
In this book we go on excursions of the famous "trolley problem" and into cognitive neuroscience and ethical philosophy. The author has a way of taking deep issues in neuroscience and complex issues in ethics philosophy and explaining it clearly and entertainingly. Much recommended.

Riku Sayuj says

The most detailed book-length treatment of Trolley-ology I have read. The best remains Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?. Looking for any recommendations on Morality and its origins in humans.

Mara says

I'm going to go ahead and assume that there are summaries out there that will tell you what this book is about, so I'm just gonna tell you why I think it was pretty great.

1. It's enormously readable - True to his affiliation as a *utilitarian*, Greene keeps his arguments clear and fairly concise. When he's gonna go more into depth on something that isn't crucial to understanding his overall point he tells you to go for it and skip ahead.
2. He summarizes the arguments of a lot of authors/books that I have enjoyed reading, but that might be less accessible. So, yay for TL;DR versions of a lot of Steven Pinker, Jonathan Haidt, Paul Bloom, and then the brigade of classic moral philosophers (e.g. Kant, Bentham and Mills etc.)
3. and beyond Whether or not you come out of this agreeing with Greene, you will have a much better, disambiguated sense of key concepts in moral philosophy/psychology, moral cognition and of the overall utilitarian (which he calls *deep pragmatism*) approach to moral philosophy.

The last time I read anything on utilitarianism I just remember walking away from it wanting to push Peter Singer in front of a trolley. (That's a joke, by the way, if you're not much of a trolley-ologist.) There are a bunch of ways in which utilitarianism is often (according to Greene) misconstrued, but the one that resonated most with me was Greene's response to the idea that *"Utilitarianism requires you to turn yourself into a happiness pump."*
This is what turned me off to, at the very least, Peter Singer's utilitarianism, but Greene brings up a really great point:

> There's a social dimension to the problem that may, in the long run, favor strong efforts over heroic ones. Your life is a model for others...If you improve the lives of hundreds of people every year through your charitable donations, but your life remains happy and comfortable, you're a model that others can emulate. If, instead, you push yourself to just shy of your breaking point, you may do more good directly with your personal donation dollars, but you may undermine the larger cause by making an unappealing example...

Yes! This is the point I wish I had been coherently able to make to the vegan in one of my classes (note: I am a non-dairy consuming vegetarian) who wouldn't drink beer because of the *yeast* in it. I'm sure there's some argument to be made for his case, but I just felt like he made vegetarianism and veganism seem absurd. And ridiculous. Ok, I'll move on.

This book is *applied* moral psychology. He explains how our brains work, why we might think the ways we do, when our intuitive thinking is useful, and when it causes trouble for us. What Greene addresses is how we, as a society, might be better off addressing issues that are *controversial*. He doesn't solve these issues, but he makes a good case for why (as we tend to do) having each side justify its own beliefs is a recipe for polarization and disaster.