



Hope and Despair: How Perceptions of the Future Shape Human Behavior

Anthony Reading

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Humans, unlike all other animals, are endowed with the capacity for hope and despair. This unique ability allows us to generate positive or negative expectations about the future, regardless of present circumstances, and engage in behaviors that shape our future. Although hope has been the engine of civilization, its evanescent nature has made it an elusive target for the behavioral sciences, which have largely ignored the topic. Hope has more often been the province of philosophy, religion, and poetry.

For psychiatrist Anthony Reading, hope's power to shape human behavior is worthy of scientific investigation and provides a remarkable opportunity to understand the relationship between mind and brain. Hope and despair dramatically illustrate the capability of the human brain to construct imaginary representations of the universe, allowing us to disengage from the present, recall the past, and forecast the future independent of any current sensory input. Consciousness then enables us to choose among these past, present, and future scenarios and integrate them into coherent plans for action.

Reading's wide-ranging work focuses on the ways we process sensory information and their implications for our current understanding of memory, learning, and consciousness; how the brain's ability to transcend time affects our language, emotions, evolution, and individual development; and the light that hope and despair shed on important aspects of our function as individuals and as a species. Bridging many disciplines, *Hope and Despair* is a major contribution to our knowledge of human behavior.

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