

Ask HN: What books changed the way you think about almost everything?

2009 points by anderspitman on Feb 5, 2019 | unvote | hide | past | un-favorite | 1165 comments

I was reflecting today about how often I think about Freakonomics. I don't study it religiously. I read it one time more than 10 years ago. I can only remember maybe a single specific anecdote from the book. And yet the simple idea that basically every action humans take can be traced back to an incentive has fundamentally changed the way I view the world. Can anyone recommend books that have had a similar impact on them?

👤 nikivi on Feb 5, 2019 | next [-]

One book that changed me was reading Master and Margarita in Russian for the first time.

It was the first book I started reading I could not put down until the end. Gained a lot of appreciation for literature at that time.

The other book that I enjoyed and changed me was 'The Wisdom of Insecurity' by Alan Watts. I was a fan of Alan Watts works through his lectures already and it was wonderful to hear his ideas in writing for the first time.

The book is available to read for free online (<https://antilogicalism.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/wisdom-of...>).

I wish everyone read or watched Alan Watts lectures and books. The world would be a much nicer place if that was the case.

My favorite quote is by him:

'We thought of life by analogy with a journey, a pilgrimage, which had a serious purpose at the end, and the thing was to get to that end, success or whatever it is, maybe heaven after you're dead. But we missed the point the whole way along. It was a musical thing and you were supposed to sing or to dance while the music was being played.'

👤 Liquix on Feb 5, 2019 | parent | next [-]

Great quote, Watts is truly inspirational. What a happy surprise when Ctrl+F takes you right to the first comment ;)

If anyone doesn't have the time or attention span to commit to a full-blown book, *The Joyous Cosmology* [0] and *Become What You Are* [1] present some of Watt's ideas in a more condensed format. The former is a ~30 page essay freely available online. The latter is a collection of ~15 very short essays (1-12pg each) - a perfect replacement for smartphone scrolling when confronted with 5-10 minutes of free time.

<https://holybooks-lichtenbergpress.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content...>

<https://www.amazon.com/Become-What-You-Alan-Watts/dp/1570629...>

👤 otakucode on Feb 6, 2019 | root | parent | next [-]

There is a game available on most gaming platforms, PC and console, called Everything which is home to an experience crafted using Watts' lectures. It is quite an interesting experience. Not quite a game but more of an interactive philosophical exercise, but quite good, and a very interesting introduction to Watts' work.

👤 sorum on Feb 6, 2019 | root | parent | prev | next [-]

Is there a recommended order of Watts' books, a fundamental one to start with? I've ended up buying a few of his books, but haven't started on them yet.

👤 damontal on Feb 6, 2019 | root | parent | next [-]

The Wisdom of Insecurity is a good place to start unless you're interested in a specific topic like Zen or Taoism.

👤 saberience on Feb 5, 2019 | parent | prev | next [-]

Thanks for mentioning an amazing book of literature. The Master and Margarita is my favorite fiction book! I've read it in two translations and I prefer the Burgin & O'Connor to the Glenny, but both are great.

Everytime I read it I gain more insights. I absolutely recommend reading this book alongside a readers guide which gives more background and depth, there are many biblical, historical, and author-related references that won't be understood otherwise. The author's own life is massively relevant to the events of the novel. I recommend this guide:

<https://www.amazon.com/Master-Margarita-Critical-Companion-A...>