

Cooperation: The Political Psychology of Effective Human Interaction

Edited by Brandon A. Sullivan, Mark Snyder and John Sullivan.
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Cooperation: The Political Psychology of Effective Human Interaction incorporates research from a number of sub-segments across the social sciences in an attempt to knit together the increasingly converging elements that are involved in the study of cooperation as a key factor in human functioning. The authors define cooperation as ‘behaviors undertaken by individuals and groups of individuals in the service of a shared collective and to promote well being’ and that typically this behavior ‘occurs voluntarily in the absence of duress’ (page 3). The authors recognize that the topic has an impact across many different areas of the social sciences and is becoming more central to both political and social science and the book is well-placed to take advantage of the popularity of the topic and its related research at this moment in time.

The primary authors have brought together contributors from the fields of political science, psychology, organizational behaviour and sociology to provide an overview of cooperation from the perspective of their area of work, and to convey an understanding of what is known and, some, reflect on what is yet to be determined. The motivation for Sullivan, Snyder and Sullivan to draw together a number of authors for comment and analysis was the apparent disconnect between theoretical social science and the practicalities of applying the theory to the modern world. They believe that the underlying problems stem from an inability of the majority of social science research to reach any comprehensive conclusions.

Consequently they charged each of the contributors not only to provide an overview of the current state of the research, but also to offer conclusive practical insight into how the theories within the book might be applied within a practical setting. This should involve reflecting on how the research may impact cooperation on both an individual and group level and then stating what they feel to be the current concluding arguments within that area. The finished book provides a multifaceted overview that is capable of providing insight across a wide variety of sub-groups within the social science arena which is able to cover a wider number of perspectives with greater certainty than could be achieved through the authors alone. This is incredibly beneficial to what is likely to be seen as a seminal text within this area of research.

The majority of the contributors are drawn from the United States but there are enough international contributors to ensure perspectives from numerous geographies. One might expect that drawing together several authors from numerous sub-groups within a research area would result in discordance on ideas and arguments but the contributors appear to share relatively consistent opinions and approaches across the various streams.

To enhance the congruity of the ideas the contributions from various authors have been grouped together according to underlying themes that specifically link different streams of research. This enables the reader to gain a sense of the convergence that is taking place within research in this area and how the different disciplines share similar perceptions about an individual subject matter and how a degree of harmony exists within the comparisons they draw regarding that individual area.

The nineteen individual chapters are grouped into eight key question areas that look at the underlying motivations for

cooperation on both an individual and group level and look at the functional value of cooperation and causes and consequences of loss of cooperation. They outline the mechanisms that bring cooperation in to place showing how developmental processes play a key role in bringing about cooperative actions. There are discussions devoted to the motivation and underlying reasoning behind cooperation within and between individuals and groups and there is critical discussion of the conditions required to promote or impede cooperation between diverse groups. The discussion develops to take in the causes and consequences of cooperation in the workplace as well as its role within negotiation, and concludes with an illumination of the importance of cooperation in promoting healthy, well-functioning individuals and groups

The style of the book makes it easy for both experts and novices to approach. The writing is brief enough not to distract more seasoned experts yet thorough enough, particularly for those new to the field, to pick up the key arguments quickly within a group of chapters and then further explore the more unknown aspects along with the experts and, at times, the contributors. This is all the more important if the book is read by the experts, students, public policy makers and interested laymen for which it is intended. Any practicing policy maker is likely to come away from reading the book well informed about the current research and able to put into practice the theories and ideas contained within the chapters to be able to successfully apply the research as part of solving real-world problems.