

Moving Beyond Duality

Group Discussion Questions

1. In Chapter One, the author states that, as people become used to a constant stream of input (with the increase in personal media technologies), the ability to explore a single concept in depth is being lost. Conversely those who focus intently in only one area may miss the richness of diverse input. Where do you fit on this continuum? Discuss examples of how to maintain a balance between breadth of input and depth of analysis, and the importance of that balance.
2. “Remember that much of what we store in long-term memory is placed there without critical evaluation” (page 6). Do you see this as dangerous or necessary? How might this process lend itself to prejudices?
3. Schemas or stereotypes help us categorize objects and people. How might stereotyping be helpful? How can we manage data input to guard against negative stereotyping?
4. Creating or choosing a schema with only two categories is known as a dichotomy. The author states that using dichotomies can create problems for us. Do you agree? If so, what kinds of problems might be created? How does this process reinforce dualistic thinking?
5. The author states that there are at least five ways in which we use false dichotomies to rationalize a dualistic reality. She goes on to suggest that “glorifying the indication” (or making the defining characteristic “better,” see pages 24-25) is possibly the most socially dangerous type of distortion. If you agree with the author, discuss why and how this is fundamental to the process of stereotyping.
6. On page 26 the author states that, “We evaluate everything emotionally *as* we perceive it. We think about it *afterward*.” What are the implications of this?
7. Explain moral exclusion (page 45) and the dangers of this. Can you think of a time when you have morally excluded someone?
8. Do you agree with the definition of personhood on pages 45-46? How does or could the acknowledgement of personhood change how we think and act?
9. What does it mean to deny personhood to oneself or to others? How does this depersonalization generate harm?
10. The author cites research that less than five percent of us are free from prejudice. Were you surprised by this finding? Why, or why not?
11. Of the five methods of depersonalization explored in Part Two (hostile bigotry, benevolent bigotry, stereotyping, invisibility, objectification), which are you most likely to do? Why?
12. Throughout the book and in Appendix B the author presents extensive research on the “personhood” of a range of nonhumans. Was any of this new to you? What do you feel are the implications for yourself and for society in general?
13. Do you believe the neuroplasticity of our brains can help us shift the way we behave and view the world by “intentionally laying down new tracks”? Can you think of one or two examples of what you could do to achieve this?

14. In reading the material and research in the first eight chapters, do you believe we can move beyond “us” versus “them” thinking? If no, why? If yes, how?
15. How would your experience in the world change if you were more mindful of how you categorize and describe your experience?
16. What did you find surprising about the facts introduced in this book?
17. Has reading this book changed your understanding of why we believe our reality to be dualistic?
18. Does the author present information in a way that is interesting and insightful? If so, how does she achieve this?
19. What one new fact did you learn from reading this book?
20. What part of this book inspired you in some way? Explain.
21. Did you find the exercises in the book helpful – why or why not? Which exercise in the book was the most meaningful to you?
22. Do you think the book will impact how you move forward in your life?
23. Will you read other books by this author? Why or why not?