

# Squirrel In Hell

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## Non-Fiction Book Reviews

These are fairly well known, however there is a chance you haven't read all of them - in which case, this might be helpful.

### Good and Real - Gary Drescher ★★★★★

This is one of my top favorites from rationality-themed books. Goes over a lot of philosophy, while showing a lot of clear thinking and meta-thinking. Number one replacement for Eliezer's meta-philosophy, if it had not existed. The writing style and language is somewhat obscure, but this book is too brilliant to be spoiled by that. The biggest takeaway is the analysis of ethics of non-causal consequences of our choices, which is something that actually has changed how I act in my life, and I have not seen any similar argument in other sources that would do the same. This book changed my intuitions so much that I now pay \$100 in counterfactual mugging without second thought.

### 59 Seconds - Richard Wiseman ★★★

A collection of various tips and tricks, directly based on studies. The strength of the book is that it gives easy but detailed descriptions of lots of studies, and that makes it very fun to read. Can be read just to check out the various psychology results in an entertaining format. The quality of the advice is disputable, and it is mostly the kind of advice that only applies to small things and does not change much in what you do even if you somehow manage to use it. But I still liked this book, and it managed to avoid saying anything very stupid while saying a lot of things. It counts for something.

### What You Can Change and What You Can't - Martin Seligman ★★★

It is a heartwarming to see that the author puts his best effort towards figuring out what psychology treatments work, and which don't, as well as building more general models of how people work that can predict what treatments have a chance in the first place. Not all of the content is necessarily your best guess, after updating on new results (the book is quite old). However if you are starting out, this book will serve excellently as your prior, on which you can update after checking out the new results. And also in some cases, it is amazing that the author was right about them 20 years ago, and mainstream psychology is STILL not caught up (like the whole bullshit "go back to your childhood to fix your problems" approach, which is in wide use today and not bothered at all by such things as "checking facts").

### Thinking, Fast and Slow - Daniel Kahneman ★★★★★

A classic, and I want to mention it just in case. It is too valuable not to read. Period. It turns out some of the studies the author used for his claims have been later found not to replicate. However the details of those results is not (at least for me) a selling point of this book. The biggest thing is the author's mental toolbox for self-analysis and analysis of biases, as well concepts that he created to describe the mechanisms of intuitive judgement. Learn to think like the author, and you are 10 years ahead in your study of rationality.

### Crucial Conversations - Al Switzler, Joseph Grenny, Kerry Patterson, Ron McMillan ★★★★★

I have almost dropped this book. When I saw the style, it reminded me so much of the crappy self-help books without actual content. But fortunately I have read on a little more, and it turns out that even while the style is the same in the whole book and it has little content for the amount of text you read, it is still an excellent book. How is

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that possible? Simple: it only tells you a few things, but the things it tells you are actually important and they work and they are amazing when you put them into practice. Also on the concept and analysis side, there is precious little but who cares as long as there are some things that are "keepers". The authors spend most of the book hammering the same point over and over, which is "conversation safety". And it is still a good book: if you get this one simple point than you have learned more than you might from reading 10 other books.

#### **How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big - Scott Adams ★★★**

I don't agree with much of the stuff that is in this book, but that's not the point here. The author says what he thinks, and also he himself encourages you to pass it through your own filters. Around one third of the book, I thought it was obviously true; another one third, I had strong evidence that told me the author made a mistake or got confused about something; and the remaining one third gave me new ideas, or points of view that I could use to produce more ideas for my own use. This felt kind of like having a conversation with any intelligent person you might know, who has different ideas from you. It was a healthy ratio of agreement and disagreement, such that leads to progress for both people. Except of course in this case the author did not benefit, but I did.

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