

The Social Distance Between Us

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Synopsis

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Britain is in a long-distance relationship with reality... From poverty and policing, homelessness and overrun prisons to Grenfell and hostile environments, Britain has long been failing those who need our help the most. There is arguably one unifying theme that links all these afflictions: proximity. Proximity is how close we are to the action and how that affects how we assess, relate to and address whatever that action happens to be. Almost every job requires a level of experience and training with the notable exception of the most powerful people in the country—our political class.

So this is a book about the distance, whether geographical, economic, or cultural, between those who make decisions and the people on the receiving end of them. The distance between the affluent and the poor, how their interests and values diverge, and the assumptions they make about each other's experiences and intentions in the absence of any meaningful interaction. How even those with the noblest aims, inadvertently cause harm as a result of their social remoteness and fail to advance anybody's interests but their own misguided ones.

Could Britain's problem be, not that there is a lot of inequality, but that for generations, a small group of people, who know little about it, have been charged with discussing, debating, and sorting it out? At what point do we look for answers, not to the people who are hardest up, but the apparently educated and sophisticated, whose dominance of Britain's institutions has been virtually unbroken for centuries?

Reader's comments

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