

Reflection on Thinking Fast and Slow

I chose the book because I found its topic and description to be really interesting. Based on my own life experience and on some literature I had previously read I already felt that humans are pretty bad at making objective, or unbiased, decisions so reading a whole book dedicated to this topic was intriguing. I had probably seen this book to have been referenced in some other book I had read but other than that I didn't have any previous knowledge about the book nor about the author. However I had heard quite many of the described biases in some other context. Despite this I was surprised how big of an impact these biases can actually have on our thinking.

I really liked the two system model that was introduced at the beginning of the book although its justification was a bit fuzzy. However the rest of the book proved that biases are based on scientific studies and since the two system model describes them well this itself justified the use of the model. In short the model says that human mind consists of two systems. The system 1 is automatic and fast and can't be directly controlled where as the system 2 allocates attention to demanding mental tasks and it is associated with the feeling of control. Examples for the system 1 could be doing simple calculations, driving on an empty road or recognizing familiar faces and for system 2, evaluating complex logical argument, comparing two products in a shop or maintaining faster walking speed than usually. These systems made the following biases much easier to understand.

My favorite biases, so to say, were WYSIATI, answering an easier question and less is more (or conjunction fallacy). WYSIATI, or “what you see is all there is”, means that our decisions and thoughts are based only on things that are currently in your mind. This seems obvious but it has really drastic consequences: things that we observe but have nothing to do with the decision that we are trying to make can affect the decision greatly. Furthermore taking into account all the necessary factors when doing a decision, in other words searching one's memory for these factors, requires significant mental strain and is nearly impossible without external stimulus. One extreme example of this is that if we are told about old people we tend to act a bit slower after that because we associate slowness with old people. The effect can't be reversed without conscious effort. I felt that WYSIATI was interesting because it is connected to the most of the other biases in one way or the other and because it is so obvious yet at the same time very

hidden. The next bias, answering an easier question, means that when we are faced with a difficult question we replace it with easier one in your minds and we aren't aware of the replacement. Example of this is the situation where one is trying to decide if he should vote for a candidate in a governor election. Instead of answering the question "how competent governor this candidate would be" he might actually be answering the question "how many facial features that I associate with leadership this candidate has?". Evaluating the candidate's competence is really demanding task where as the recognition of "leader's features" is something the human mind does automatically. This bias has had and probably will have huge impacts for mankind. For me it was interesting because by consciously avoiding it people should be able to make much better decisions quite easily. Thirdly the "less is more" or the conjunction fallacy says that under certain circumstances people make decisions that are almost obviously illogical. Example of this is the study where subjects were told about 31-years old woman who is single, outspoken and very bright. She has studied philosophy and is deeply concerned with discrimination and social justice. After description the subjects were asked to evaluate the probability of certain statements. The interesting point was that subjects thought that statement "She is a feminist bank teller" was more likely than the statement "She is a bank teller" even if this is logically impossible. This fallacy happens because the description brings to mind thoughts associate with feminism and so it is easier to imagine the person to be a feminist bank teller than just a bank teller even if the first scenario is actually included in the second one too. This is interesting because generally logical thinking is associated with intelligence but studies have showed that intelligent people are about as likely to be affected by conjunction fallacy as any other people. It should be noted that all these biases are from the first half of the book and I have to say that towards the end of the book the concepts started to get really complicated and I struggled quite a bit to understand them.

As dramatic as all these biases seem it is still important to remember that they are very human features and they have played important role in mankind's history and evolution. However as we continue to evolve I think it is important to be more and more aware of these biases to be able to avoid them in cases where they are harmful. It's actually really intriguing to imagine how the world would be if our thinking would evolve like that because I believe that most of the mental suffering, at least in individual's personal life, is due to them not being aware of why they think or feel the way they do and then getting upset because of that. After reading the book I feel that I definitely got better understanding on my own thought processes as well as others' and this will probably prove out to be beneficial for me. All in all I found the book to be very interesting as well as thought-provoking and I'm definitely going to read more about this subject.