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Book Review:

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman¹

Review by Raj Johri

If ever there was a book that made the reader introspect after reading it, it is this. With *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Nobel Prize winning economist Daniel Kahneman has written what is widely considered one of the best non-fiction works of 2011. Kahneman has contributed tremendously to the field of psychology, particularly behavioral decision making. This book is a culmination of his many years of research and experience. It forces its way into your mind, making you question the very basis of your choices, while simultaneously offering comforting explanations for the same.

The central theme is quite straightforward—basically, there are two paths, or systems, that govern the way we think about anything. System 1 is the fast one, which relies on basic instinct and emotion to make quick, if somewhat prejudiced, decisions. System 2 is the slow approach, the one that is more rational and deliberative. The problem, as pointed out by Kahneman, is that System 1 is often wrong, but since it is more easily engaged as compared to System 2, we tend to use it more often.

I never thought of myself as an impulsive person, until I read this book. Kahneman uses thought-provoking examples from everyday life to get his point across: how our biases often get in the way of what may appear to be perfectly rational decisions, and how the two systems (fast and slow) work together, making us who we are. The example of the pro golfer, the Linda survey and the “Law of Small Numbers,” in particular, expose the fallibility of our reckless, emotional side.

The book is delightfully interactive, as though you are having a face-to-face conversation with the author. Kahneman’s insight about what goes on in our heads is based on years of experience and meticulous research, and elucidated with the help of choice examples from daily life. However, the “eye-opener” is only one of the two hats donned by Kahneman. He also plays the role of “mentor,” telling readers when to trust their intuitive side, and when to disregard it. He teaches us to reduce our

tendency to have prejudicial thoughts, and offers some simple but effective techniques for helping us do so. The language is simple and jargon-free. I recommend the book to anyone who is even remotely fascinated by the human mind and its wonders. ●

ENDNOTES

¹ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1st edition (Oct. 25, 2011), 512 pages.



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