

Thought for the Day

Excerpt from *Thinking, Fast and Slow*



LIVINGSTANDARDSNZ

5 December 2013

Source: Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux

Thinking, Fast and Slow

When confronted with a problem – choosing a chess move or deciding whether to invest in a stock – the machinery of intuitive thought does the best it can. If the individual has relative expertise, she will recognize the situation, and the intuitive solution that comes to her mind is likely to be correct. That is what happens when a chess master looks at a complex position: the few moves that immediately occur to him are all strong. When the question is difficult and a skilled solution is not available, intuition still has a shot: an answer may come to mind quickly – but not an answer to the original question. The question that the executive faced (should I invest in Ford stock?) was difficult, but the answer to an easier and related question (do I like Ford cars?) came readily to his mind and determined his choice. This is the essence of intuitive heuristics: when faced with a difficult question, we often answer an easier one instead, usually without noticing the substitution.

The spontaneous search for an intuitive solution sometimes fails – neither an expert solution nor a heuristic answer comes to mind. In such cases we often find ourselves switching to a slower, more deliberate and effortful form of thinking. This is the slow thinking of the title. Fast thinking involves both variants of intuitive thought – the expert and the heuristic – as well as the entirely automatic mental activities of perception and memory, the operations that enable you to know there is a lamp on your desk or retrieve the name of the capital of Russia.

The distinction between fast and slow thinking has been explored by many psychologists over the last twenty-five years. For reasons that I explain more fully in the next chapter, I describe mental life by the metaphor of two agents, called System 1 and System 2, which respectively produce fast and slow thinking. I speak of the features of intuitive and deliberate thought as if they were traits and dispositions of two characters in your mind. In the picture that emerges from recent research, the intuitive System 1 is more influential than your experience tells you, and it is the secret author of many of the choices and judgments you make.