

Thinking Fast, Slow and Objectively

This post summarizes the book *Thinking Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman. He says that we have two thinking systems in our brain. We have one that operates fast, automatically and with built-in tendencies of which we might not be aware. The other system, the slow one, works slower and uses logic. This is similar to the work of Jonathan Haidt who describes these systems as an elephant and a rider. The elephant harbors millions of years of our evolutionary history and has immense inertia. The rider is our conscious mind which evolved much more recently and thinks it has total control over the brain's machinery.

- System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control.
- System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration.

Systems 1 and 2 are both active whenever we are awake. System 1 runs automatically and System 2 is normally in a comfortable low-effort mode, in which only a fraction of its capacity is engaged. System 1 continuously generates suggestions for System 2: impressions, intuitions, intentions, and feelings. If endorsed by System 2, impressions and intuitions turn into beliefs, and impulses turn into voluntary actions. When all goes smoothly, which is most of the time, System 2 adopts the suggestions of System 1 with little or no modification. You generally believe your impressions and act on your desires, and that is fine— usually.

The division of labor between System 1 and System 2 is highly efficient: it minimizes effort and optimizes performance. The arrangement works well most of the time because System 1 is generally very good at what it does: its models of familiar situations are accurate, its short-term predictions are usually accurate as well, and its initial reactions to challenges are swift and generally appropriate. System 1 has biases, however, systematic errors that it is prone to make in specified circumstances. As we shall see, it sometimes answers easier questions than the one it was asked, and it has little understanding of logic and statistics. One further limitation of System 1 is that it cannot be turned off.

Does this mean that thinking objectively is impossible? Not having finished Kahneman's book I don't know what he concludes. I say that objectivity is possible but it's not easy or effortless either. It's work!

I also believe this is something Objectivists don't acknowledge, probably because of the concern that yielding any ground on this subject could lead to rampant subjectivity. I don't believe it does. To me the key is working to recognize the

inherent tendencies of the brain, which includes things like confirmation bias where we look for evidence that supports our conclusions then stopping without checking to see if there is disconfirming evidence. It means objectively looking at the arguments and evidence of other positions to test your conclusions.