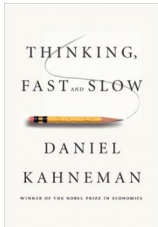


The blank slate : the modern denial of human nature

Good Pop Psych Reads



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Daniel Kahneman's Thinking Fast and Slow is still a bestseller and heavily in-demand at the library, after receiving lots of publicity late last year. This exploration of intuitive vs. deliberate thinking makes fascinating points about what motivates decisions both personal and business-related. It's top notch popular psychology, a genre I really love for the way it forces you to examine actions and thoughts that seem simply natural or logical. Here are a few other great examples.

- Another newish title that's making a splash is Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking. The subtitle pretty much sums it up. It explores the differences between introverts and extroverts and makes the case for the values of introversion, which are often ignored in a society that holds extroversion to be the ideal.
- Malcolm Gladwell is a giant in this area. One of his great books is Blink, which, like Kahneman's, uncovers what's really going on in our heads when we make decisions, illuminating everything from how prejudice works to why marriages fail.
- Oliver Saks, a neurologist, also has several great books. The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, for example, demonstrates how complex the brain is by showing how weirdly things can go wrong. It's more neuroscience than psychology, perhaps, but seeing how knocking out one little area can cause hallucinations or destroy one very limited function, is fascinating.
- Steven Pinker recently wrote a book (The Better Angels of Our Nature) proposing that humans are becoming less violent, but I really like his 2003 book The Blank Slate. It touches on the emerging field of evolutionary psychology, arguing that people aren't born with completely plastic minds, but that we all have certain (possibly very powerful) innate tendencies and capabilities.
- In The Psychopath Test, Jon Ronson teaches us how to spot a psychopath, and finds that, far from being universally confined to mental hospitals, they are all among us--especially, it seems, in the world of business.
- The Believing Brain takes a critical look at how belief--not just religious, but in general--is formed and reinforced. Michael Shermer argues that it is natural, but that we need to temper such instincts to see the world clearly.

- Snoop has a fun (and kind of unsettling premise): the things we surround ourselves with and the way we arrange them speak volumes about who we are. Our personalities leak through in what seem like insignificant places.

For more similar books, here's a nice [Goodreads](#) list, and a [LibraryThing](#) one.

Posted by mkinney on April 17, 2012

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