



Blink of an Eye, by Malcolm Gladwell

When it comes to the task of understanding ourselves and our world, I think we pay too much attention to those grand themes and too little to the particulars of those fleeting moments. But what would happen if we took our instincts seriously? What if we stopped scanning the horizon with our binoculars and began instead examining our own decision making and behavior through the most powerful of microscopes? I think that would change the way wars are fought, the kinds of products we see on the shelves, the kinds of movies that get made, the way police officers are trained, the way couples are counseled, the way job interviews are conducted, and on and on. And if we were to combine all of those little changes, we would end up with a different and better world. I believe that the task of making sense of ourselves and our behavior requires that we acknowledge there can be as much value in the blink of an eye as in months of rational analysis.

I think we are innately suspicious of this kind of rapid cognition. We live in a world that assumes that the quality of decision is directly related to time and effort that went into making it. When doctors are faced with a difficult diagnosis, they order more tests, and when we are uncertain about what we hear, we ask for a second opinion. And what do we tell our children? Haste makes waste. Look before you leap. Stop and think. Don't judge a book by its cover. We believe that we are always better off gathering as much information as possible and spending as much time as possible in deliberation. We really only trust conscious decision making. But there are moments, particularly in times of stress, when haste does not make waste, when our snap judgments and first impressions can offer a much better means of making sense of the world. Decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately. [...]

Our unconscious is a powerful force. But it's also fallible. It's not the case that our internal computer always shines through, instantly decoding the "truth" of a situation. It can be thrown off, distracted, and disabled. Our instinctive reactions often have to compete with all kinds of other interests and emotions and sentiments. So, when should we trust our instincts, and when should we be wary of them? When our powers of rapid cognition go awry, they go awry for a very specific and consistent set of reasons, and those reasons can be identified and understood. It is possible to learn when to listen to that powerful onboard computer and when to be wary of it. Doctors and generals and coaches and furniture designers and musicians and actors and car salesmen and countless others, are very good at what they do and all of whom owe their success, at least in part, to the steps they have taken to shape and

manage and educate their unconscious reactions. The power of knowing, in that first two seconds, is a not a gift given magically to the fortunate few. It is an ability that we can all cultivate for ourselves.

--Malcolm Gladwell

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