

The Biased Mind

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The Biased Mind

How Evolution Shaped Our Psychology
Including Anecdotes and Tips
for Making Sound Decisions

 Springer

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*“At fifteen, I became an evolutionist, and it all became clear.
We came from mud.
And after 3.8 billion years of evolution, at our core is still mud.
Nobody can be a divorce lawyer and doubt that.”*

*Gavin (Danny DeVito) in
The War of the Roses (directed by Danny DeVito, 1989)*

Preface

In 2009, Michel and Jérôme embarked on a research project on risk perception with the Paris School of Economics.

Michel is an academic, professor, and researcher at the French institution Ecole des Ponts ParisTech. He develops mathematical methods for the sustainable management of natural resources—like fisheries, epidemics, and renewable energies—which involves among other things investigating the mathematical and economic aspects of risks.

Jerome had been a marketing professional for twenty years when, as an international consultant, he came across the issues of sustainability and strategy in the food and wine industry. He soon widened his expertise to people's perception of ecological threats, such as climate change and air pollution, which seemed to be the core motivation for moving towards sustainability, and to be the source of a problematic gap between corporations and public decision-makers, and their audience.

The project at the Paris School of Economics dealt with human perceptions and motivations. What makes people "tick"? How does each of us, family, friends, colleagues, movie characters, politicians, etc., form beliefs, make choices, and act?

Reading dozens of books and hundreds of articles, we had a Eureka experience.

Like Danny DeVito's character, suddenly "*it all became clear*": catching how evolution shaped our psychology helps to figure out how we connect with others, forge beliefs, and make suitable choices.

This is how *The Biased Mind* project was ignited.

We turned back to the material we had accumulated in economics, cognitive science, neuroscience, and evolutionary psychology. As we grew more aware of our mind biases, we decided to package the fascinating ideas we had come across in palatable snacks, full of visuals and anecdotes, our mind's mother tongue.

We soon realized that, by better sizing the adaptive biases of our mind, we could better appraise, decide, and communicate. So we have bottled useful tips for you, whether for job interviews, weighing the pros and cons in order

to reach a decision, appraising marital happiness, becoming a wine tasting expert, or framing messages.

Reading *The Biased Mind* should give you a better feel for, and a better ability to act on your beliefs, choices, and relationships. You should also be able to answer intriguing questions like:

- Why is an upside-down red triangle such a powerful warning sign?
- How does one produce a good alibi?
- What makes the number 7 so special?
- Will your recent marriage last?
- Why do the French eat snails not slugs?
- Why is our brain tuned towards paranoia?

These questions have to do with our mind's limitations and biases. On a more mundane level, we tend to have strong first impressions and find it hard to change our views; we often avert regret and waver between gut instinct and reason. At other times, we may feel influenced as if just the right chords have been struck in our mind.

What are mental biases? Where do they come from? You may be surprised to discover that the Pleistocene hunter-gatherer still lurks in our minds and influences our daily assessments and decisions. By becoming aware of the various aspects of human bias and applying our helpful tips, you should be better equipped to understand yourself and others, to interact in different social contexts, reach better judgements, make better decisions, avoid manipulation, and communicate more efficiently.

This is what *The Biased Mind* is about.

Key

In the following, you will come across three symbols or pictograms.

The symbol  signals a helpful tip dealing with a specific bias.

The symbol  introduces a small dose of theory.

And finally, the pictogram  indicates an amusing test.

At the end of *The Biased Mind* you will find a list of all the anecdotes and tips, should you wish to choose “à la carte” from our mouth-watering menu.

Acknowledgements and Other References

Follow us on our website

www.thebiasedmind.com

(From the authors of *The Biased Mind*).

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