



Irrationality

Stuart Sutherland

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Why do doctors, generals, civil servants and others consistently make wrong decisions that cause enormous harm to others? Irrational beliefs and behaviours are virtually universal. In this iconoclastic book Stuart Sutherland analyses causes of irrationality and examines why we are irrational, the different kinds of irrationality, the damage it does us and the possible cures.

Irrationality Details

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Author : Stuart Sutherland

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Paola says

This is the first pop science book on rationality I ever read, and it made a great impression on me. Of course, this is now more than twenty years old (the first edition dates from 1992), and probably nowadays there are many equivalent books, but this one gives a good overview of many common pitfalls in decision making, illustrating many cognitive biases: from selective evidence, to overconfidence and ignoring or misinterpreting evidence. So you won't get exposure to the latest developments on decision making, but the topics he treats are still current - Sutherland was a psychologist by trade, and he seems to know very well what he was writing about, adding to this a gripping writing style.

One thing I learned is: if you phone your friend to tell him you wrecked his car, then tell him it was a joke, he will forever think of you as a bad driver, even if you returned the car he lent you in absolutely pristine conditions! The moral of it - careful when making jokes :-)

Smyrnall says

Ki?isel geli?im kitaplar? ile u?ra?aca??n?za bunu okuyun.

Orestes says

This book shows a number of psychological biases during human assessment of reality which, the author claims, moves us away from taken optimal decisions. It does so by means of captivating and many times funny examples, mainly drawn from psychological experiments, but also from interesting historical events and common behavior.

The author is competent in explaining each type of irrational behavior, but the book lacks a global perspective. The instances of irrational behavior introduced in the book could be classified into three categories: psychological biases, sociological base biases and biases due to the lack of knowledge. This classification is only implicitly present, and in this case only partially, since the chapters slightly follow it, but the fact that it is never made explicit impoverishes the book's explanatory capacity of irrationality and reduces the chances that the reader acquires a permanent idea of the most important biases. I think that a book whose main purpose is to inform should be written in a way to help the reader get an overall idea of the main topics explained. This book lacks such structure. A complementary negative effect of this decision is that when every single instance of irrational behavior is isolated, it is more difficult to explain the causes of the behavior. In the last chapter the author dares to approach this issue, but at that point he can only relate single causes with single instances of behavior, missing the whole picture again.

This book deals with irrationality so the author begins describing what we should understand from that word. I would not apply that word to many instances of behavior in the book. For example, I find that the behavior based on sociological factors is not irrational. Rather it responds, most of the time unconsciously to social

incentives. It is important to observe how they are affecting us, but I would not say that it is irrational. However, the name we attach to this behavior is not as important as its identification. I myself find important that for all of us the word irrationality to mean the same so that semantic conflicts could be avoided, but it is far more important to identify all these different type of behavior to get conscience about ourselves, whether this is irrational or not.

And nevertheless, I gave it four stars out of five. The issues this book handles are essential for a better individual life and a better social engagement. They show us some biases that make our judgement poorer, and therefore our decisions. And we know so little! I would like these issues to be treated in schools so people could grow up taking better decisions. Wouldn't it be great if we were just a little bit less stubborn? If each person recognizes that he or she may be wrong because of some of the reasons outlined throughout the book, it might be that we could live in better harmony with each other.

Since this book does not offer a comprehensive idea, a better title should be 'Instances of Irrationality'. This is not a treatise on human irrationality, but it is an entertaining, funny and very valuable array of examples that everybody should be more conscious of.

Elif says

<http://kitaplikkedisi.com/kitaplar/ir...>

Rachel says

I'm soooooo bored with this.

Reads like a GCSE social psychology text book.

At times like this I really wish I was so OCD that I have to finish every book I start. This one is never ending.

I've abandoned it. Really dated, and really, really boring. It now has the honour of being the first ever book I've started but not finished, and has annoyed me further by making me create a new 'abandoned' shelf on Goodreads, which clutters things up.

Jacob says

I didn't realize this is a reprint of a work that is 20 years old, but it's still quite relevant. Just a little harder to get ahold of. Like most psychology books written by academics, this reads like a textbook so it's a bit of work to get through. Still, Sutherland injects a lot more wit into his writing than most, such as mentioning students who had ten grandparents with a distressing mortality rate. The material is quite good as a survey of various human tendencies to make irrational decisions. The purpose is for the reader to appreciate poor fallible human nature, and maybe avoid a few of the frailties that plague human cognition. Most of the examples I have read in other work, and even though this predates most of where I've seen it before, I found myself wishing studies would find more examples to use.

Can E?ridere says

?nsanlar?n i? d?nyas?, maddi konular, insan ili?kileri, e?itim, siyaset ve benzeri konularda verdikleri kararlar?n ne kadar mant?k d??? oldu?unu bir ?ok bilimsel deneyden ?rnekler vererek g?steriyor. Asl?nda yaz?ld??? tarihin ?zerinden ?ok zaman ge?mi? olmas?na ra?men konular halen g?ncelli?ini koruyor.

Benzer konularda kitaplar okuduysan?z biraz s?k?c? gelebilir. Ama o ?ok bilindik deneyleri insan psikolojisi, antropoloji ve mant?k a??s?ndan de?erlendirdi?i i?in ufuk a??c? bir kitap.

•Karen• says

This is a catalogue of wrong thinking: inconsistency, misinterpretation, false inferences, distortion, overconfidence, conforming to the general opinion, obeying authoritative figures and making bad bets. We form instant impressions and then only look for the evidence that will support our view, we suffer from availability error, meaning that we give more weight to the dramatic and memorable, or the most recent, and ignore the less exciting evidence, and after reading the chapter on reward and punishment, you begin to wonder how any kind of education has ever worked at all. What always fascinates me about books like this is the ingenuity of psychologists in devising experiments that will expose the specific ways how our minds work. The only slight irritation was the 'raised finger' approach that Mr Sutherland takes. Irrationality is A Bad Thing, and We Shouldn't Do This. But it's just how we function. Unstoppable, like the glaciers.

Caner Ergen says

?rrasyonelin s?zl?k anlam?, ak?l, mant?k ve sa?duyudan yoksun demek. Bu kitap da g?nl?k hayatta verdi?imiz kararlar?n b?y?k ?o?unlu?unun irrasyonel oldu?unu say?s?z psikolojik deney ile ortaya koyuyor. ?rrasyonellik yanl?? g?zlem, uyum g?sterme ihtiyac?, yersiz tutarl?l?k, kan?tlar? g?zard? etmek, hatal? neden sonu? ili?kileri kurmak ya da a??r? ?zg?ven gibi bir?ok alt ba?l?k alt?nda inceleniyor kitapta. Giri? a?amas?nda biraz s?k?c? olsa da ileriki sayfalarda nispeten ak?c? bir hal al?yor kitap. ?nsan psikolojisi ?zerine okumak istiyorsan?z bu kitap k?t?phanenizde bulunmal?. ?zetle "hepimiz irrasyoneliz!"

Aybike says

agree with one point: don't keep reading not to waste your money, at the end money won't be the only thing wasted.

one more book telling you what to do as if you didn't have a brain, irrationality comes from here.

Sofia says

Posted on my blog.

Background: I was given this book by a friend on Christmas, and I started reading it soon afterward, but unfortunately had to stop for a couple of months and just recently finished it. This is unfortunate, since I recall a lot of things I thought about the book while I was reading it, but didn't mark any of the pages for quoting. Oh well.

Review: This book in a nutshell: humans can be very irrational at times. The book goes on to try to explore, explain and offer solutions to the various forms of human irrationality, always relying on studies to back up the conclusions. Unfortunately, in my opinion, it just fell short of what it was trying to do.

Be warned. This book was written in 1992, and it shows. I noticed right away some very strange factual errors that, at times, by light of new evidence that has since been gathered, completely defeat the points being given by the author. I noticed this particularly with medical studies - having been in medical school myself I spotted the, at times, glaring mistakes, which didn't impress me at all. I guess I was using one of the irrational thought processes he described - the "halo effect", which when applied to this, means that when I saw that he was completely wrong in some thing he vehemently defended, it made me look at the rest of his book in a negative light. It probably means this review is tainted by irrationality as well.

I wish I had marked the exact quotes to back up what I'm saying. I recall at least that at some point in the book he goes on and on about how doctors were wrong to think that blood cholesterol levels had anything to do with what you eat, because a study had proven they had no correlation. Yeah. This reminded me of all the smokers who will quote one study that says that smoking is not bad for you at all and has nothing to do with lung cancer. Let's not ignore the rest of the studies who say otherwise. please.

I also had a problem with the tone of this book. It was too patronizing, and the author seemed to have personal vendettas against some members of society, namely feminists, members of the medical profession, and psychologists who do social experiments.

There were some positive aspects to it, and I found a few pearls of wisdom, but overall, the book was simply not worth it.

What's Next: If anything, reading this book made me wish there was a better one on the subject that I could read.

s says

This book is only actually interesting if you think people act rationally more than, say, 5% of the time. Otherwise it is just a book of commonplaces backed up by a lot of studies and anecdotes you've already heard about before.

Özlem Güzelharcan says

Halbuki heyecanlı? ba?lam??t?, bir ?eyler vadeder gibiydi, deneyler, gözlemler fena de?ildi. Ne gerek vard? o demode, ön yargı? cümlelere sonras?nda? Hele ki "sezgilere ba?lı? yan?lg?lar" bölümü beni benden aldı.

K?ssadan hisse: Bu kitap 1992 y?l?nda yaz?lm?? ve bu etki okurken hemen hissediliyor. Kitap akm?yor ve

yazarın dili oldukça *patronize*. Hali hazırda psikoloji, sosyoloji, vb. alanlarda kitaplar okuyan, araştırmalar yapan insanlar için yeni bir şey sunmuyor.

Bağlardaki ilginç deneyler hatırlanabilir..

Tim says

Just enjoyed, with qualifications, Stuart Sutherland's *Irrationality*, which I'd had sitting on my Amazon wishlist for ages and irrationally not got around to buying. It's a very enjoyable and robust exhortation to increase the rigour of our thinking, while acknowledging all the many reasons why that's extremely difficult. His enthusiasm for actuarial methods of decisionmaking is inspiring in some cases, but unconvincing in others, particularly the ones where he's forced to admit that in quite a few circumstances the more rigorous methods can't be shown to be more effective than more intuitive ones. A few of his choices of examples (perhaps deliberately) throw rather sharply into relief why statistical methods of decision might be a bit too heartless to be likely to be used (for instance, he thinks it would be great if older pregnant women could use probability calculations to decide whether to abort a foetus with Down's syndrome - which perhaps it would, but I suspect it's kind of hard to think about it in quite that way if you're the woman in question). All in all, recommended.

Ettore1207 says

Questo libro, opera dello psicologo inglese Stuart Sutherland (1927-1998) venne pubblicato nel 1992, ed è un peccato che sia rimasto senza traduzione in italiano fino al 2010. Si tratta di un'opera divulgativa seria e di livello abbastanza "alto" ma comunque sempre ben leggibile che, come dice il titolo, dimostra con una serie impressionante di esempi (alcuni dei quali divertenti) che l'essere umano è molto più irrazionale di quello che si pensa. E le conseguenze possono essere gravi o addirittura catastrofiche. Dopo aver letto questo libro ho rivisto il mio concetto di "buon senso" o di "senso comune".

Oltre che di piacevole lettura (tranne qualche raro passaggio un po' troppo tecnico), è un libro che può rivelarsi molto utile per tutti coloro che, soprattutto sul lavoro, si rapportano agli altri.
