

we should consider them to be free lunches—mechanisms that provide net benefits to all parties.

IF I WERE to distill one main lesson from the research described in this book, it is that we are pawns in a game whose forces we largely fail to comprehend. We usually think of ourselves as sitting in the driver's seat, with ultimate control over the decisions we make and the direction our life takes; but, alas, this perception has more to do with our desires—with how we want to view ourselves—than with reality.

Each of the chapters in this book describes a force (emotions, relativity, social norms, etc.) that influences our behavior. And while these influences exert a lot of power over our behavior, our natural tendency is to vastly underestimate or completely ignore this power. These influences have an effect on us not because we lack knowledge, lack practice, or are weak-minded. On the contrary, they repeatedly affect experts as well as novices in systematic and predictable ways. The resulting mistakes are simply how we go about our lives, how we “do business.” They are a part of us.

Visual illusions are also illustrative here. Just as we can't help being fooled by visual illusions, we fall for the “decision illusions” our minds show us. The point is that our visual and decision environments are filtered to us courtesy of our eyes, our ears, our senses of smell and touch, and the master of it all, our brain. By the time we comprehend and digest information, it is not necessarily a true reflection of reality. Instead, it is our representation of reality, and this is the input we base our decisions on. In essence we are limited to the tools nature has given us, and the natural way in which we make decisions is limited by the quality and accuracy of these tools.