

In his book *Thinking Fast and Slow* Nobel Laureate Richard Kahneman tells a story of how an investment professional makes a poor decision. This poor decision provides a useful analogy that will explain the relationship President Trump will have with the American public over the next four years.

In the story, the investment professional was given a difficult task. He had to figure out if buying Ford Motor Company stock was a good investment. In order to do this job well, he would have to estimate the company's future profits. Next, he would have to evaluate this profit stream against the current price of the stock. Even if he expected the company to be very profitable in the future, it is possible that the company's stock price would be too high for this purchase to be a good investment. In short, this is difficult endeavor and the investment professional had his work cut out for him.

However, the investment professional did not do any of this hard work. Rather, he went to a car show and fell in love with the latest cars Ford was producing. After all, what is not to love about the latest Ford Mustang? The executive came back from the car show and announced that he recommends that his company purchase Ford stock because the company makes great cars.

Notice what the investment professional did. He substituted an easy question — "do I like Ford cars?" for a hard question — "should my company invest in Ford motor company?" The human mind does this frequently. We try to conserve the cognitive effort that we must expend, so we answer simple questions instead of the harder questions that we really should be addressing. For instance, when people are asked the hard question, are you happy with your life? — they may answer the easier question, am I happy right now?

As the Trump presidency unfolds, the executive branch will put forward and champion many policy proposals. The American public will face tough questions, such as "do the benefits of the proposal outweigh the costs?" and "is the proposal better than other options?" These are tough questions for us to get our heads around. Instead of answering these tough questions, Americans are likely to answer a simpler question instead. The simpler question is "do I like Trump?" Those that like Trump will find that they favor his various proposals without ever really knowing much about the proposals. In contrast, those that dislike Trump will find fault with his proposals without really understanding the merits of the policy. In this case, I expect that Trump will offer some proposals that some Americans would have liked if Obama or Hillary Clinton had been the one championing the issue. Nevertheless, because Trump is behind the proposal, they will reject it as a bad policy almost immediately.

Trump will serve himself well if he avoids presenting the American public with hard questions. If he can clearly explain what he wants to do, then people will feel that they have an easy question in front of them as they determine whether to support a policy. However, if Trump does not explain an issue clearly, then the American public will feel that they have a complex question at hand. Rather than answering this hard question, the public will answer the question of whether or not they like Trump, rather than a question that actually involves the issue. Because so many people dislike the president, he will be able to enact more of his policies if he can present a policy as an easy question rather than making the policy debate about his likability.

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