Review

Joëlla Proust and Martin Fortier, *Metacognitive Diversity: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 464 pp. £60.00 (hbk). ISBN: 978-0-19878-971-0.

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Joëlle Proust and Martin Fortier's 2018 edited volume, *Metacognitive Diversity: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, proves to be what it says on the tin, with an extensive collection of papers examining the cultural influences that produce diversity in metacognition (i.e. the mental ability to think about one's own thinking) and mind-reading (that is, understanding intuitively the mental states of other individuals, also known as theory of mind, or ToM). *Metacognitive Diversity* is an impressive work, as the advanced praise testifies in its early pages, many by well-known names in the field. But the praise is warranted, both in the content and in the execution of the book. The papers situate the reader in an overview of the tendrils of metacognition, and effectively show the reach and breadth that its influence is felt across different areas of our lives, from politics to cultural taste to religious practise, including reconciling conflicting or redundant explanatory sources of how we understand the world.

The editors in their opening chapter make an eloquent case for metacognitive studies involving a diverse set of communities, as opposed to the bulk of the discipline's studies that analyse WEIRD (i.e. wealthy, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) individuals; as metacognition and its development is affected by environment, researchers should vitally be considering the range of human environments, considering the WEIRD group as just one, possibly outlying, group. This sentiment is carried through the rest of the chapters, where there has been an effort to include experiments that better address this necessity for diversity. As metacognition is definitionally self-aware, one gets the impression in reading the text that the compilation of these contributions has been carried out by authors that are aware of the importance that the breadth of human experience offers.

The most useful feature of the book is the synthesized literature presented of the most relevant studies to metacognition and theory of mind, especially in earlier and concluding chapters. But the collection does not just present a summary of the research; it situates the studies at different resolutions. The book is long; 19 chapters and six sections begin at the broadest philosophical resolution (such as Proust and Fortier's eloquent *Introduction*) and continue with a number of close-up case studies (such as Giovanni Bennardo's paper on Tongan metacognition). However, it does not feel too broad or disjointed at any point. The up-close anthropological chapters provide a "metacognition-in-practice" emphasis that allows readers to explicitly understand how these different environmental/developmental situations result in different metacognitive outcomes (as opposed to purely abstract or theoretical discussions). This zoomed-out, zoomed-in inclusion was helpful to appreciate factors affecting metacognition more graphic, especially when reading from the point of view of a WEIRD set of experiences.

One thing that struck me when reading this book was how significant certain metacognitive influences are in day to day interactions we all experience ourselves, read about or view in the media. In possibly the most provoking chapter, Norbert Schwarz explains how mundane, subjective attributes like "truth" and "beauty" are intrinsically caught up in *processing fluency*, or how easy it is to understand stimuli; things that are familiar are also easier to process, which can give the unfamiliar a negative quality – think accents, or an aversion to the spread of a new technology. The effect of this is far reaching, and one can easily imagine how political persuasion or cultural affinities are shaped by processing fluency.

In the following chapters, more examples of these frequent metacognitive effects are illustrated, both in relatable, familiar experiences, or due to widely different environments (those likely to be unfamiliar to most readers). The familiar and unfamiliar and its effects on metacognition are discussed in the context of metacognition, where Veronica X. Yan and Daphna Oyserman write about how metacognition frames identity. They present a model where one's culture (with predictable environments) allows a sense of fluency; however, when cultural frames are disrupted, we shift to a more active, systematic reasoning. This type of processing allows for increased cognitive performance, which in certain situations can of course be beneficial, but it can negatively affect one's certainty in oneself, and this can create issues with identity. As someone who moved to a new country as an adult and spent nearly a decade learning new, subtle (and sometimes not to subtle) cultural rules at every turn, this chapter was a confirming exploration of this interface between cultural knowledge, personal identity, and metacognitive processes.

In the final chapter, Cristine Legare and Andrew Shtulman present how individuals often hold more than one conflicting explanation for a number of different phenomena in our lives, from the origin of our species, to what happens when we die. They show that this explanatory pluralism is the norm, rather than the exception, and that it is a universal quality. As an example, people usually know that viruses are caught by being transferred from one host to another. Yet how many of us also believe that if we go out into the cold without proper clothing, we will become ill – or that we become ill on the first day of our holiday break? The chapter was a poignant end to the diverse ways metacognition shapes our thought, in reflecting on how we come to different conclusions by different means, and rather than being in conflict, we “collect” these different explanations for each phenomenon. I am sure this remains just as true for scientists – and if so, how would that play out in our interpretations?

By presenting a multitude of known cultural influences on metacognition and mindreading, Proust and Fortier’s book has a value to the discipline of those researching cognitive historiography, but it also has value to wider metacognitive and theory of mind discourses. Because of the broad synthesis of information, including more detailed case-studies, this book would be useful for those from aligned disciplines who are introducing themselves to the breadth of metacognitive study. It could be a useful read for undergraduate students, as well as specialists consolidating knowledge in what is a varied and interdisciplinary field. At £60, the book is also surprisingly affordable, when compared to other similar collections (and considering its length). But in truth the book is much more valuable, as it exudes explanations of the mechanisms behind the processes and behaviours that make humans really human. Metacognition is foundational to the complex life-ways that we consider inherent in our species, and Proust, Fortier, and the contributors offer a broad but thorough encapsulation of the state of the art of research into our reflective minds, why they are different, and the effect this has on our lived experiences as humans.