Blink Journal Questions

Answer the following questions in full detail. You need to be making consistent references to the text.

Chapter 1 / The Theory of Thin Slices
1. The central argument of this chapter is that our unconscious is able to find patterns in situations and behavior based on very narrow slices of experience. This is called “thin-slicing.” What kinds of phenomena, if any, do not lend themselves to thin-slicing and why?

2. Gottman decodes a couple’s relationship and predicts divorce by identifying their patterns of behavior. Can we change our natural and unconscious patterns of behavior? Would awareness of these patterns with our partner be enough to avert an otherwise inevitable breakup?

Chapter 2 / The Locked Door
3. Should we introduce priming in schools to encourage better behavior or more diligent work patterns? What about the service industry? Could employers prime their staff to be more polite to customers?

4. If an individual’s behavior is being influenced unbeknownst to him, when can priming become manipulative? How is it different from the controversy back when cinemas used subliminal advertising during previews to encourage people to buy from the concession stand?

Chapter 3 / The Warren Harding Error
5. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) shows that our unconscious attitudes may be utterly incompatible with our stated conscious values. Do you find it plausible that we, like car salesmen who unconsciously discriminate against certain groups of potential customers, or businesses that appear to favor tall men for CEOs, are not accountable for certain actions because they are a result of social influences rather than our personal beliefs?

6. Do you accept the argument that we are completely oblivious to our unconsciously motivated behavior (like disturbing IAT results that show 80 percent of test takers have pro-white associations)? Is this just a convenient excuse to justify our biases?

Chapter 4 / Paul Van Riper’s Big Victory
7. Can one ever really prepare for decisive, rapid-fire scenarios? Is planning for the unpredictable worthwhile or a waste of time and energy? For example, if improvisational comedy, like any sport, is governed by rules and requires practice, could anyone become a stand-up comic or performer? Or will some people always be naturally better at thinking on their toes and more adept at unleashing spontaneity?
8. Van Riper says, “When we talk about analytic versus intuitive decision making, neither is good or bad. What is bad is if you use either of them in an inappropriate circumstance.” But is decision making all about the circumstances or more about the personality of the decision maker? For example, do circumstances have more impact on decision making if you are a more cerebral, logical individual rather than an indecisive, instinctual one?

Chapter 5 / Kenna’s Dilemma
9. The cases of Kenna’s music and the Aeron chair show us that first impressions can often lead us astray. What we initially think is disapproval may merely be a case of confusion or mistrust of something new and different. How can we distinguish a decision motivated by fear of the unknown from the ones that stem from a genuine dislike of something? Are we better off leaving it to the experts to tell us what we should like?

10. Do you believe our unconscious reactions come out of a locked room that we can’t ever truly see inside? Can we ever know ourselves wholly and understand the motivations and reasons behind our every move? If an individual claims to be completely know how his or her mind works, is s/he incredibly self-aware or is s/he delusional? And if we can’t ever get behind that locked door and fully know why we react the way we do, is psychiatry an overpriced limited exercise?

Chapter 6 / Seven Seconds in the Bronx & Conclusion
11. The Diallo shooting is an example of a mind-reading failure. It reveals a gray area of human cognition: the middle ground between deliberate and accidental. Do you think the shooting was more deliberate or more accidental?

12. Ekman and Friesen’s work of decoding facial expressions reveals that the information on our face is not just a signal of what’s going on inside our mind; it is what is going on inside our mind. But what about politicians or celebrities and other figures constantly in the public eye? Do you believe they are always feeling their expressions or are they just camera-savvy poseurs who defy Ekman and Friesen’s expression theory? How about extremely stoic individuals? Do they have diminished emotions in keeping with their limited expressions? Have you ever been two-faced or watched someone else speak badly about another individual, only to turn around and greet them with a warm, gushy hello? Is that “friendly” expression false or an attempt to make amends?

13. We always wonder how some individuals become heroes in certain situations, like the fireman who ran into the burning building or the ER doctor who operated in the nick of time. Do you think that what separates the “men from the mice” is an ability to control or master one’s reactions in moments of extreme stress and arousal?