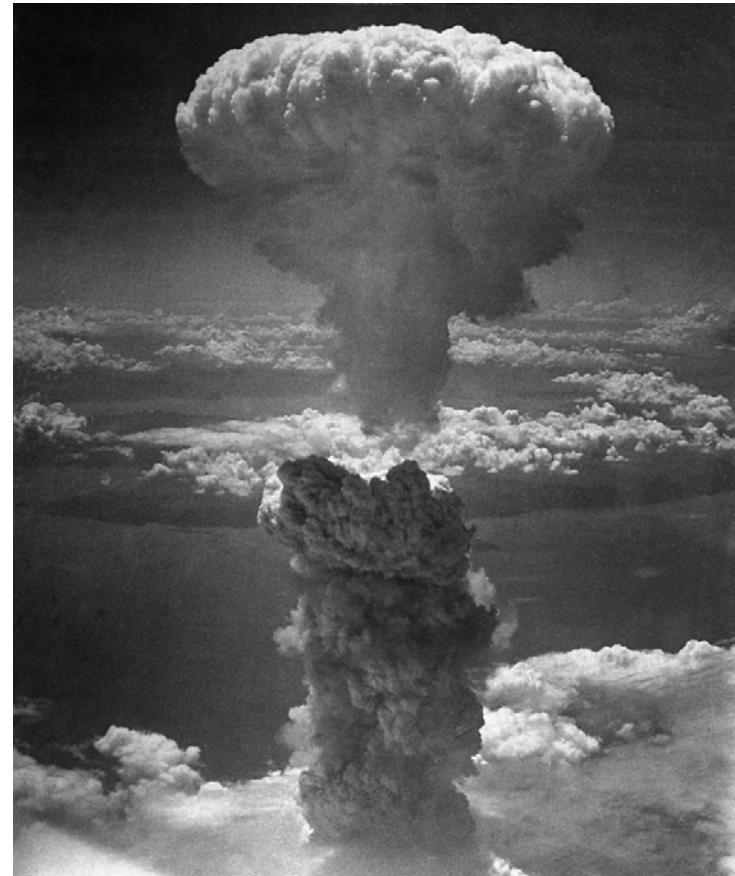


# Living in a Rough Neighborhood: The Play of National Narratives in the Caucasus

James V. Wertsch  
Washington University in St. Louis

Boris Mints Conference  
Tbilisi. September 11, 2017

# American vs. Russian Account of Truman and the Bomb



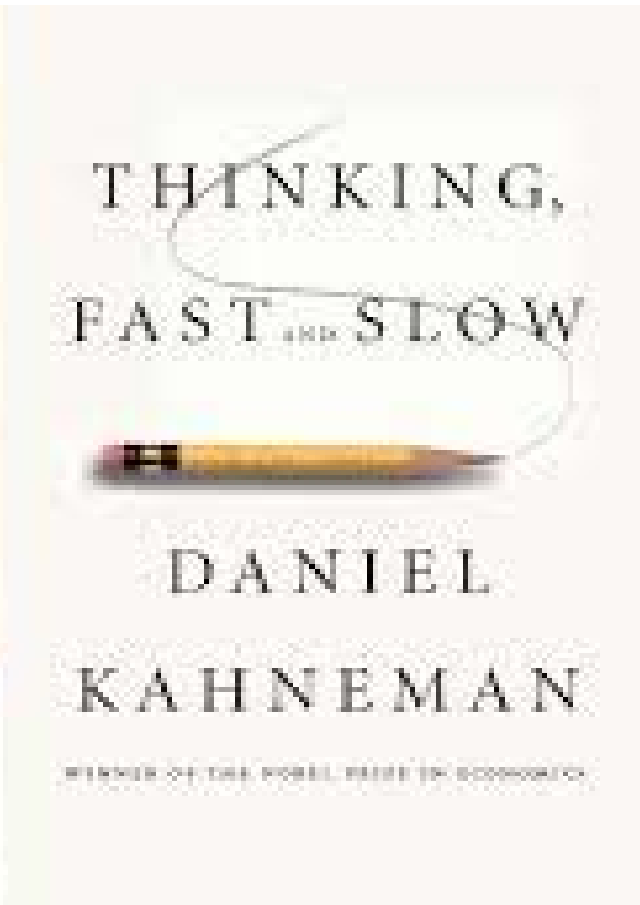
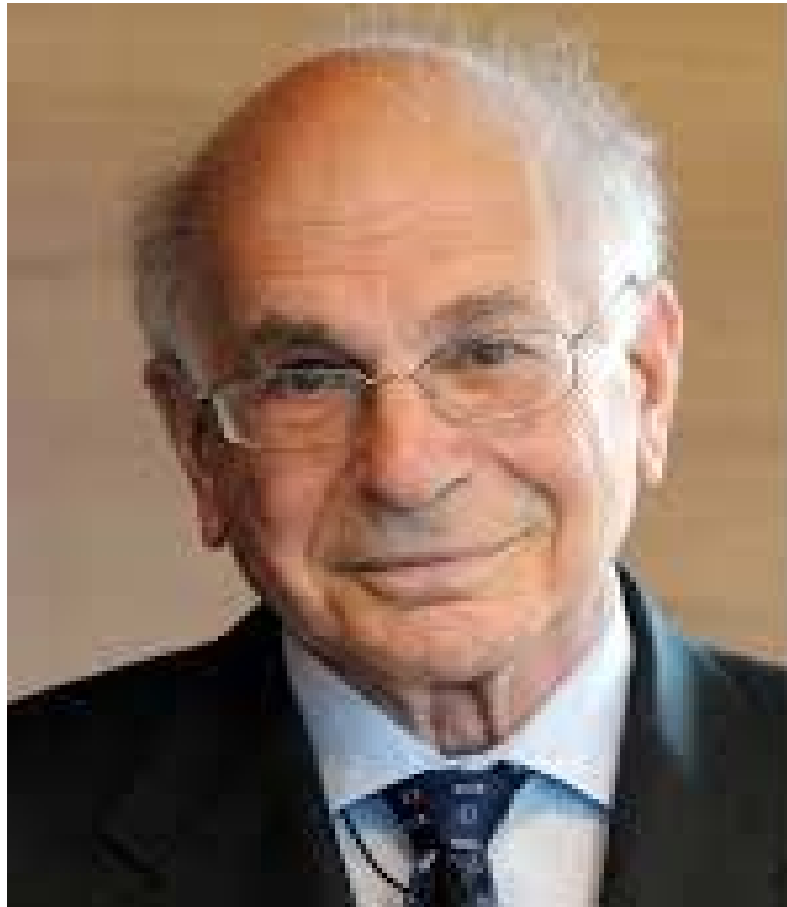
# American vs. Chinese Account of 1999 Bombing of Embassy in Belgrade



## U.S. Response and Explanation: Talbott and Pickering



# Daniel Kahneman



Alexander Romanovich Luria (1902-1977)  
Moscow, 1976



## Lev Semënovich Vygotsky (1896-1934)





V.P. Zinchenko (1931-2014)  
and Merab Mamardashvili (1930-1990)





# Monument to Mamardashvili



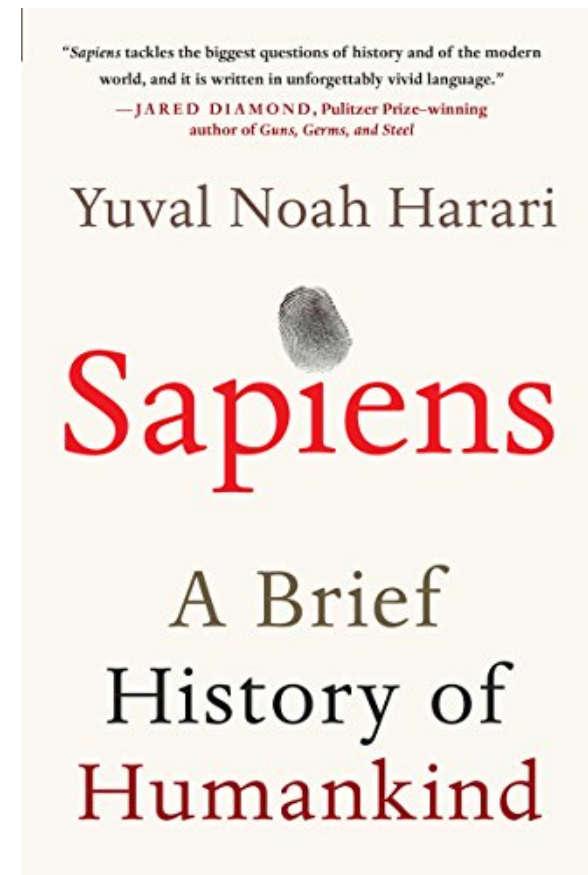
# Luria and Vygotsky: Effects of Literacy on Theoretical Thinking



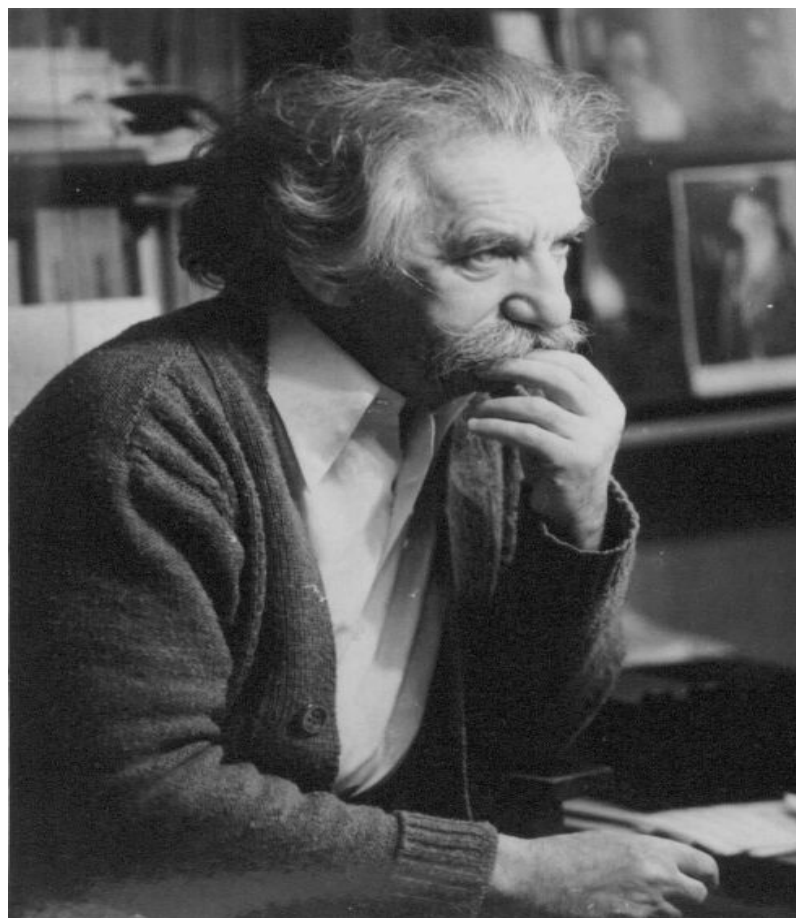
# Empirical Study of Syllogistic Reasoning

- Example:
  - In the far north where there is snow all bears are white.
  - Novaya Zemlya is in the far north.
  - What color are the bears there? (Luria, 1979)

# Yuval Noah Harari Hebrew University



# Y.M. Lotman (1922-1993)



Gustav Gustavovich Shpet (1879-1937)  
*The Inner Form of the Word* (1927)





# Surface Level: “Specific Narratives”

- Surface form:
  - Includes concrete information about times, places, and actors
  - Example:
    - World War II started in 1939 with Germany’s attack on Poland. In 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and later that year Japan attacked the U.S. at Pearl Harbor. The war proceeded with battles near Moscow and at Stalingrad and the Kursk salient, followed by the Allied invasion of Europe on D-Day, and it concluded with the collapse and surrender of Germany in May 1945 and the atomic bombing of Japan followed by its surrender in August 1945.

## Russian Narrative Template: “Expulsion-of-Alien-Enemies”

1. Russia is peaceful and not interfering with others
2. A foreign enemy attacks Russia without provocation
3. Russia nearly loses everything in total defeat as it suffers from the enemy's attempts to destroy it as a civilization
4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, and acting alone, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the alien enemy

# National Mental Realities

1. Can manage, but not transcend conflicting mental realities
2. Need to address narrative templates/fast thinking
3. Need for humility
  - “Modern man lacks the humility to accept the fact that the whole drama of history is enacted in a frame of meaning too large for human comprehension.” (Niebuhr: *The Irony of American History*)
4. Education
  - Comfortable space for uncomfortable ideas: trust

South Caucasus as a “natural laboratory”?