

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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Title: Summary of Steven Pinker's - Chapter 21: Reason

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Summary/ Abstract: This is a summary of Pinker's book, *Enlightenment Now*, Chapter 21: reason.

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Summary of Steven Pinker's Chapter 21: Reason

In this chapter, Steven Pinker did not draw from history of philosophy from Descartes to Whitehead. Instead he draws from psychology and faulty daily reasoning, quoting Dan Kahn (p. 357) see reasons / opinion as affirmation of belief study to a group / identity. He dealt on motivated reasoning (p. 359), my-side bias, (self-complacency thesis), availability of heuristics, confirmation bias, faulty economicized reasoning (p. 362 - 365), 538 forecasting (p. 367), sober superforecasters (p. 370) working on probability. He also quoted Tetlock and Duarte on the fallacy of leftist ideology on research.

But we have seen that when a creed becomes attached to an in-group, the critical faculties of its members can be disabled, and there are reasons to think that has happened within swaths of academia.⁵⁸ In *The Blank Slate* (updated in 2016) I showed how leftist politics had distorted the study of human nature, including sex, violence, gender, childrearing, personality, and intelligence. In a recent manifesto, Tetlock, together with the psychologists José Duarte, Jarret Crawford, Charlotta Stern, Jonathan Haidt, and Lee Jussim, documented the leftward swing of social psychology and showed how it has compromised the quality of research.⁵⁹ Quoting John Stuart Mill—"He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that"—they called for greater political diversity in psychology, the version of diversity that matters the most (as opposed to the version commonly pursued, namely people who look different but think alike).⁶⁰

Steven Pinker also cited "debiasing" program in college to fight faulty reasoning.

thinking." Students are advised to look at both sides of an issue, to back up their opinions with evidence, and to spot logical fallacies like circular reasoning, attacking a straw man, appealing to authority, arguing ad hominem, and reducing a graded issue to black or white.⁸² Related programs called "debiasing" try to inoculate students against cognitive fallacies such as the Availability heuristic and confirmation bias.⁸³

R: It appears good reasoning can be taught.