



F.E.L. PRIESTLEY LECTURE SERIES

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE



“Rationality: What It Is, Why It Seems Scarce, Why It Matters”

Dr. Steven Pinker

Johnstone Professor of
Psychology, Harvard University

**Thursday, September 22
7:00-9:00PM
Science Commons Atrium**

Free. Everyone welcome.
No RSVP required.
Free parking.

Today, humanity is reaching new heights of scientific understanding—and at the same time appears to be losing its mind. Why do we find ourselves flooded with fake news, medical quackery, conspiracy theorizing, and “post-truth” rhetoric? It can’t be that humans are just an irrational species — cavemen out of time saddled with biases, fallacies, and illusions. After all, we discovered the laws of nature, lengthened and enriched our lives, and discovered the benchmarks for rationality itself.

Instead, we think in ways that are sensible in the low-tech contexts in which we spend most of our lives, but fail to take advantage of the powerful tools of reasoning our best thinkers have discovered over the millennia: logic, critical thinking, probability, correlation and causation, and optimal ways to update beliefs and commit to choices individually and with others.

Also, the rational pursuit of self-interest, sectarian solidarity, and uplifting mythology by individuals can add up to crippling irrationality in a society. Collective rationality depends on norms that are designed to promote objectivity and truth. Rationality matters. It leads to better choices in our lives and in the public sphere, and is the ultimate driver of social justice and moral progress.

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