

to jump to premature conclusions and more likely to revise their beliefs in response to evidence.

That might be good news for rationalists—maybe we can think carefully whenever we believe it matters? Not quite. Tetlock found two very different kinds of careful reasoning. *Exploratory thought* is an “evenhanded consideration of alternative points of view.” *Confirmatory thought* is “a one-sided attempt to rationalize a particular point of view.”¹³ Accountability increases exploratory thought only when three conditions apply: (1) decision makers learn before forming any opinion that they will be accountable to an audience, (2) the audience’s views are unknown, and (3) they believe the audience is well informed and interested in accuracy.

When all three conditions apply, people do their darnedest to figure out the truth, because that’s what the audience wants to hear. But the rest of the time—which is almost all of the time—accountability pressures simply increase confirmatory thought. People are trying harder to *look* right than to *be* right. Tetlock summarizes it like this:

A central function of thought is making sure that one acts in ways *that can be persuasively justified or excused to others*. Indeed, the process of considering the justifiability of one’s choices may be so prevalent that decision makers not only search for convincing reasons to make a choice when they must explain that choice to others, *they search for reasons to convince themselves* that they have made the “right” choice.¹⁴

Tetlock concludes that conscious reasoning is carried out largely for the purpose of persuasion, rather than discovery. But Tetlock adds that we are also trying to persuade ourselves. We want to believe the things we are about to say to others. In the rest of this chapter I’ll review five bodies of experimental research supporting Tetlock and Glaucon. Our moral thinking is much more like a politician searching for votes than a scientist searching for truth.