

On Confirmation Bias

I heard something interesting by an evolutionary psychologist recently. He said that he believed that our ability to reason was *not* born out of a desire to search for truth. Instead, it came from our need to persuade others toward our opinions. Nobody wants to get kicked out of their tribe for seemingly incompatible behavior, so we learned to argue in self-defense, perhaps. He also connected this to the phenomenon of confirmation bias. What is that? Confirmation bias is “the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one’s existing beliefs or theories.” Nobody wants to be caught holding opinions contrary to their tribe, lest they get kicked out. If it’s true that our reasoning capability as a species was born from a need to persuade others, and it was preferable to avoid offending them in the first place, then perhaps we should elevate confirmation *bias* to confirmation *imperative*. The result is the recognition that this phenomenon is much more than a mere tendency. It’s an imperative toward our survival, and thus saturates our thinking. Understanding that insight should help all of us be a little more careful about how we judge new evidence relevant to our existing opinions. And that’s today’s two cents.