

Three Ways to be More Rational This Year

January 26, 2022

Many people use the New Year to turn over a new leaf – to act in a way that is more rational and in our better interests. Yet we all have to confess this is more difficult than it might seem.

Here are three examples from my series – Think with Pinker – of common irrationality traps and how to avoid them.

1. Future you

When people contrast what they are “thinking” with what they are “feeling”, often what they have in mind is the difference between immediate and longer-term enjoyment. For example – a feast now and a slim body tomorrow; a trinket today and sufficient funds when the rent is due; a night of passion and the facts of life nine months later.

This contrast between times can feel like a struggle between selves, as if we have one self who enjoys a streaming TV series and another who enjoys good grades in an exam.

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