

The Dunning-Kruger Effect in Extremist Belief and Reasoning

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According to the Dunning-Kruger theoretical framework, people are often not in a position to know when they lack expertise and, thus, often act out of ignorance, error, or misinformation without knowing it. Such epistemic circumstances can make people susceptible to extremist beliefs or reasoning no matter how flawed or resistant to arguments against such beliefs. I discuss two specific issues that a Dunning-Kruger framework highlights about extremist epistemology. First, although the Dunning-Kruger framework is a purely cognitive one, devoid any discussion of human motivated biases in human cognition, it does suggest why ideas held because they serve important motives will be especially difficult to modify. Second, current characteristics associated with artificial intelligence suggest it is prone to fuel extremism. AI easily provides details making any belief, no matter how false, seem coherent. It is also sycophantic, agreeable and flattering to human clients so much as to deceive. In a society where roughly half of respondents believe in the haunting of ghosts and the power of psychic healing, and 2% firmly assert the earth is flat, there is much room for extremist views to grow among those without expertise.