

The Beauty of Being Rational

Being rational just means avoiding thinking errors and testing your thinking to make sure you are not subscribing to fallacies.

One fallacy is the ad hominem argument. It attacks the person saying something while making it look like you are attacking what they said. For example, "The pope has lied about being head of the church so he is lying about that clerical child abuse case now." It looks like thinking but it is not and is nasty and personal. Fallacies lead to ad hominem arguments.

Runaway train is an interesting fallacy. It says that it is right to do action x when in fact more than x would be justified. For example, restricting access to a violent scripture will result in children being more sensitive to religious violence. Then why not ban access? Runaway train pretends to care and is ad hominem in the sense that it accuses those responsible for the way things are presently of not caring and thus of not being credible.

The analogical fallacy is fascinating too. For example, the primary school has teachers and classrooms and blackboards and so on. It is for children. The university has those things too so it is for children. That is plainly nonsensical. It is the analogical fallacy. The fallacy is to assume that entities which are similar in one or more respects must be similar in all respects. However if you change it to entities which are similar in one or more respects could be similar in all respects that is fine. Hypocrites in politics say that religionists are just good so anything bad done in the name of religion is only pretending to be about the religion and inspired by it.

First thoughts

Reason and philosophy, the search for wisdom and the study of wisdom go together. Philosophy is about grounding yourself in and discovering reality and avoiding the act of self-contradicting.

Our reason, our power to think, is to be used for our betterment and our happiness. We cannot feel safe in a world where nonsense matters or only feelings matter. Error and stupidity and over-emotionalism only get worse in time not better. We cannot debate and challenge those around us unless they have suitable regard for reason. If we have the free and proper exercise of our abilities to think and to reason we can be happier and will be happier.

Consciousness is the power by which you perceive that you exist. It is a perception. It is for you and for you alone. It is an attempt to connect with reality so you damage yourself if you are not careful about reasoning and about learning the main truths of life and surviving the world. The perception as far as perception goes is self-sufficient. You don't ask why you are conscious - you just are. This brute fact is the most basic fact in your life. You would still be you without your memory. But you would still perceive your existence. You would simply be there and asking no questions and you could still be happy. Indeed some people who lose their memories gain a happiness they never had when they had them. So consciousness by itself has the power to let you be happy and make you happy. Consciousness is about avoiding contradiction and trying to perceive reality. So it is self-defilement to let religion and people take you away from reason and lead you into absurdity and nonsense and delusion and self-contradiction. Your perception that you exist will necessarily matter more than any God or anything. To ask why you are conscious when there is no answer that matters as much as being conscious is foolish. It is like drinking poison and wondering when and where the poison was made. Reason when used properly is atheistic. You always reason so you must try to reason correctly. Even when you follow your feelings you reason that your feelings are telling the truth. Strictly speaking the unreasonable are still reasoning but in a distorted way that needs help and correction.

Using invalid arguments to convince people of things might habituate them to bad reasoning habits in general. It is certainly an attempt to open them up to developing that bad habit. It is a kind of seduction and dishonest and is pure manipulation. It's bad medicine even if it cures something. The cure is a dodgy one and the risk of a the cure ending up as bad as the disease is always there.

Wisdom is rationality

Philosophy means the love of wisdom and the best way to love wisdom is to work out what you know and believe and face your reasons for holding that you know and believe. Philosophy is the study and examination of the reasons why you say you know or believe something. Philosophy calls for reason. Reason can be understood as avoidance of the circular argument - a circular argument is one where the answer leads you around in a circle. The argument goes around and around feeding on itself. For example, it rained and the street is wet and the street is wet because it rained. Such arguments are no

good. They are attempts to cheat truth and yourself and possibly others.

Philosophy is based on reasons and not assertions. Ayn Rand is considered a philosopher but because of her overuse of assertion - making statements - she is not a philosopher any more than anybody else is.

Why are people irrational?

There is no point in wondering how to make reason attractive and to encourage and assist people in becoming more rational if you do not firstly check out why people are so irrational. Then you can form a strategy for doing something about it and helping them to do something about it.

Why are we so prone to irrational ideas and beliefs?

One reason is that we have no time or not much time and thinking and trying to be coherent takes time.

To live our daily lives smoothly, we have to take things for granted. If we only did something if we knew it was right or sensible we would hardly ever get anything done. But there are huge things we should not take for granted. For example, the existence of Hell or God or Jesus being God or that condoms help you to catch HIV.

A second reason is that the opportunity to check may not be there.

People in the past followed their religion simply because it was there and there seemed to be no alternative voice. Nowadays with religious freedom and the internet there is no need for that.

A third reason is that because we don't have the time/opportunity to look for evidence and proof we are prone to the bad habit of further lazy and illogical thinking. If I assume that Annie next door is reliable and forget that I don't actually know her well enough to be so positive about her, then it will be far easier for me to think the same thing of the next stranger I meet. The problem gets worse and the dangers deepen.

Motivating People to Love Reason

If people are irrational, it is always because they are rationalising things. Rationalising is when you use arguments to avoid admitting what is plainly a fact. For example, if you don't want to admit it is raining you may say that the drops on your window must have been caused by somebody sprinkling water on it. Rationalising is when you make up your mind prior to examining the evidence carefully and objectively and then only accept evidence that backs up what you want to think. That is not treating evidence as evidence but as a deception tool. The honest person is guided by the evidence no matter what it points to. The rationalising person is actually showing they believe reasoning is a good thing. They abuse reason. The person must be guided to see how they pay homage to reason just as the reasonable person does. They just need to be encouraged to see that they do use reason and it helps them and you can offer to help them form guidelines to make it more empowering for them.

Abusing reason means your abuse could get worse. Bad habits spread to other people.

Knowledge is power and the source of power. Atomic energy is no good if you don't know its there and how to harness it. Belief is not knowledge. You don't know Jesus rose from the dead the same way as you know that you have eaten your banana. In fact you believe the first and know the second. Belief is referred to by many as knowledge in a looser sense of the word. Belief then is a threat to knowledge - no matter how well-grounded the belief is. The worse the evidence for the belief the more the belief is a threat. We will believe things no matter what. To make the best of the necessary evil of belief, we must make sure our beliefs are well grounded and well thought through.

Locke was right when he claimed that humankind is free and humankind is free for he or she has reason and can reason. People need to see that reason and freedom go together. It is better to make yourself your own man or woman by reconsidering all that you have been told and challenging it. You need to challenge what you are told for your own sake.

It would be great if we knew what the facts are and make decisions in accordance with them. But we prefer to follow our whims. We like ignoring facts to follow our prejudices. We like to follow our beliefs. Facts do not determine what we will do and why. A belief and a desire produces an action. Preferring to follow beliefs rather than facts is a habit and it can be broken.

If you let society influence you to get used to using weak or bad arguments/reasoning in one area of your life say religion then it is impossible to prevent that flaw from seeping over into other areas of your life. Apply the standards of reason to your whole life even at the risk of being criticised and condemned. If you are unreasonable in one area of your life, you will

soon feel its okay to be unreasonable in other areas too. You ask people not to trust your logic or to trust you when you spout nonsense. Do yourself a favour and use reason honestly. You have to stand up to the bullies for if you don't you are making the problem stay put. They won't give you any real respect in return for your going along with them.

Religion

We notice that children easily inherit the religious beliefs of their parents. That is why one child can accept the Mormon notion that God is a tangible man with magical powers and why the child next door will just as strongly accept the notion that God is not a tangible man but a spirit that is everywhere.

Is it better to say that the children inherit the irrational thinking of the parents in religion rather than the religious beliefs as such? Yes. Irrational thinking that produces religious belief is the real problem. Deal with that and you deal with the beliefs as a side-effect.

Doing philosophy

To do philosophy

You must ask yourself a question.

Then you analyse the question- simplify complicated questions by breaking them down into smaller ones. For example, the evidence for God is very complicated. You would need to ask the question if God is a good explanation for the existence of the universe. You would ask if the universe was made by a designer God. You would ask if God would have personal characteristics. And you would ask if God is compatible with the cat tormenting a rabbit to death last week in your back yard? You would ask where your experience comes into all this. There are hundreds of questions.

The big question asks all those other ones by implication. The big question is really just the smaller ones being summed up.

You must assess - assess is about evaluating the credibility of a claim and the opposing claims. This involves examining and testing the evidence. You weigh one evidence against the evidence that contradicts it and the heaviest is what you go with.

You must then argue or produce arguments - arguments are not fights but merely setting out the reasons for accepting a view. To assert that a view is correct is automatically to assert that other views are wrong and to be opposed. To say any different is just being fake and manipulative.

It is easier to avoid mistakes in simple things such as the statement, "Apples are edible." The more complex it gets the easier it is for mistakes to creep in. And some simple things we think to be correct are actually incorrect. For example, we might think that our floor is solid but its actually nearly all space.

Philosophers tend to hold that the simplest statements are statements of knowledge - there is no chance of making a mistake. They think this is objective truth. They think that everything else is opinion or subjective.

Even in cases that seem reasonably simple, problems can arise.

#Socrates is a dad.

#The dog has a dad.

Therefore Socrates is the dog's father.

The laws of logic take you to that conclusion.

The lesson then that what you want to think plays a part in it.

The more complex an argument is the more then the more that happens.

LASTLY

Reasoning can be made into a heart-warming exciting adventure. We all reason. It is just that many of us need to understand and use the rules for getting the best out of it. You hear some assertions. Logic cannot tell if they are true. It only tells you what follows from them. Logic only shows an argument is valid not that it is true. Arguments from logic

that God must exist are fraudulent same as arguments that anything must exist. Logic is tautological. Logic is able to show that if religion claims to be logical if it is or is not. So logic can refute a religion that is based on false claims about logic or on the abuse of logic.

Technically, logic and reason are not the same thing. The difference is that logic is rules and reason is processing the rules. Logic is what is in the books and reason is about you personally applying logic. Logic is not linked to you personally but reason is. See reason as a tool which you use to protect yourself from lies and foolishness.