

RATIONALITY

HOW CAN A BELIEF BE
RATIONAL?



HELLO AND WELCOME

- It is common to hear that all beliefs are irrational, but is that really the case?
- In this SciPhi Short we will be briefly examining rationality and how it relates to belief.



WHAT IS A BELIEF?

- As we discussed in our previous short, a belief can be defined as:
 - Something accepted as true
 - Something thought most likely
 - A positive attitude towards a proposition
 - Something concluded is the case

WHAT IS RATIONALITY

- Rationality relates to the way something is reasoned. It speaks to the process of using our knowledge, experience, and reasoning with the best of our ability to the best possible outcome we could come to at the time.
- Therefore, rationality could be considered as; reasoning using the rules of logical and probability theory, whilst holding consistent and coherent beliefs.
- Rational does not always mean correct, however. You could reason rationally and be wrong or reason irrationally and be right.

LIMITS ON RATIONALITY

- It should be noted that people can only be as rational as they can be.
- The reasoning skills of a 3-year-old differ greatly from that of a 20-year-old and as such we ought to judge the rationality of both differently too.
- If we judged them the same, we would probably conclude the 3-year-old is always irrational, though I would consider rationality in a more relativistic way.

SO HOW DOES RATIONALITY RELATE TO BELIEFS?

- If we understand beliefs as the things we accept as true, or the conclusions we make, then rationality is a judgement on how we came to hold those beliefs aka how justified we are in holding them.
- This justification can be known as epistemic justification or the burden of proof.
- Beliefs can come in 3 states of rationality
 - Rational
 - Irrational
 - Arational

ARATIONAL

- Like how amoral means not related to morality (and therefore neither good nor bad) arational is similar.
- Arational is not related to rationality because it is not a reasoned belief.
- Instead, it speaks of something sensory e.g.
 - I like the taste of chocolate
 - I don't like the smell of dog poo
 - I feel horny
- Whilst not explicitly qualified by the word belief, if I did not accept these statements as true, then the opposite would apply

IRRATIONAL

- If something is irrational, it speaks to poor reasoning. It doesn't necessarily mean the belief is wrong, just that it has not been well thought through and justified.
- If you come to a conclusion with little or no reasoning, or your reasoning is fallacious then your position is an irrational one.
- An example of how we might come to an irrational beliefs would be "I believe this because":
 - My friend said
 - Most people believe it
 - I can't imagine any other way
- The conclusions are not necessarily wrong, but the reasoning is not sufficient.

RATIONAL

- For a belief to be rational it needs to be reasoned in accordance with the rules of logic and probability theory and be coherent and consistent with other beliefs you hold.
- Now, you don't necessarily need to know the rules of logic to be in accordance with them, though it helps as a check.
- For a belief to be consistent and coherent one of the things you need to have is no strong evidence against it, at least that you are not aware of.
- You can hold a rational belief and be wrong, although when shown how you are wrong, if you reject the evidence with no good reason, your belief becomes irrational.

IRRATIONAL VS RATIONAL

- If we consider something, like the shape of the earth, that is well evidenced, and how 2 agents accept this fact.
- Agent A's reason for accepting is "my dad said" - no thought has been put into this, they just trust their father. Their father isn't anyone that would know about this.
- Agent B accepts this due to several reasons; they've seen the evidence of things disappearing over the horizon, corroborated scientific evidence & satellite feeds.
- Both hold the same position, but agent A is irrational in their position.

SUMMARY

- Beliefs can come in 3 states, arational, irrational and rational.
- Arational speaks for a belief without reasoning, one that is sensory, e.g. taste, smell and sounds we like or dislike.
- Irrational and Rational speak to the way we have reasoned.
- We can have rational beliefs that are wrong, and irrational beliefs that are correct.
- There is a cap on rationality, we should realise that people can only be as rational as they can be, so our judgements on a child being rational should be different to that of an adult.
- There is far more to rationality, and if this topic interests you I suggest checking out some of our longer videos or articles on the matter!