

# How to be reasonable

## Synopsis

Reason is humanity's most valued quality. Most people agree that we could solve most of our problems if only we had more of it. Yet we struggle to grasp what it really is. This book offers a new and clearer sense of reason and what it means to be reasonable.

To answer the question of what reason is, I first deal with some misconceptions about logic; clarify the meanings of experience, knowledge and beliefs, and present a theory of how we develop ideas by natural processes alone. Reason is then explained as the special process by which we test and develop our ideas. Finally, I explain how this way of seeing reason can overcome some of our most debilitating doubts and paranoid delusions, as well as help guard against the dangers of tribalism.

Beginning with the "age of reason", we find that this was all about scepticism, while an idea of reason was inherited unchanged from ancient times. This inherited idea equates reason with logic, and so imposes the limits of logic on reason. In reality, logic only describes mechanical inferences, not how we really form ideas. This was recognised by some Philosophers way back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it led them to assume we have built-in ideas. In fact, we only have built-in dispositions, while ideas are learnt. How ideas emerge in purely physical brains is explained by our dispositions, how our brains work and our unique, social, learning context.

The first idea we get is the idea of existence. Then, using similarity without identity, we can extend ideas beyond experience. The process is analogous to metaphor-making, so I call it "metaphorics". This brings us to the meaning of "reason". The word has various uses, but beneath them all is a common intuition, which relates to a particularly human form of social grooming. Reason is essentially dialogue characterised by the giving and getting of relevant plausible causes for actions and ideas.

Ideas are of two kinds. To know something is to act on it as if it were true, to believe something is to propose that something is true. Beliefs are uniquely human. Dialogue, even in the imagination, exposes and examines beliefs. It can, as it were, unpeel metaphorics toward raw experience, but it settles when it reaches common intuitions from which new knowledge and beliefs can be built. This kind of dialogue is reason.

Understanding reason this way can be very useful. Consider for example, the popular old aphorism "I think, therefore I am", which implies that the only thing you can believe in is your own mind. In fact, because beliefs need the idea of existence, it's impossible to have them without believing in an independent reality. The sense of reason explained here also helps us grasp how our logical failings don't make us irrational, they're really due to distraction or deliberate misdirection.

The opposite of reason is the refusal to engage in dialogue and to question beliefs. This is a common definition of "faith". Faith, in its many forms, draws a line under dialogue, with dangerously divisive consequences. Modern multiple-truth and post-truth rhetoric promotes various forms of faith over reason, pushing us toward a dangerously tribal and unreasonable world. The idea of reason explained in this book can help us guard against it.

**If you can help publish this book, please contact me**

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