

Can Men Be Rational?

1. How does Russell define Rationality in his essay “Can men be rational?”

In his essay titled “Can men be rational?” Russell defines rationality as the habit of taking account of all relevant evidence in arriving at a belief. Where certainty is not possible a rational man will attach the greatest importance to the most probable opinion, while keeping other opinions in his mind as alternatives which subsequent evidence may show to be preferable.

2. What according to Russell is the meaning of irrationality?

According to Bertrand Russell, Irrationality is disbelief in objective facts. It arises mostly from the desire to assert something for which there is no evidence, or from the desire to deny something for which there is sufficient evidence.

3. Discuss the usefulness of psycho analysis in the light of Russell’s essay “Can man be rational?”

According to Russell, Psycho-analysis can prove very useful in the cultivation of rationalism. Psycho-analysis provides a technique by which we are enabled to see ourselves as others see us. Combined with training in the scientific outlook, this method could help people to become much more rational than they are at present regarding their beliefs about matters of fact and about the probable effects of any proposed action.

4. How does the *Outline of Psychology* define Intellect?

According to the *Outline of Psychology*, “The intellect is above all things an instrument of partiality. Its function is to secure that those actions which are beneficial to the individual or the species shall be performed and that those actions which are less beneficial shall be inhibited.”

5. What are the main reasons that lead to differences of opinion on practical questions?

Differences of opinion on practical questions spring from two sources: first, differences between the desires of the disputants, secondly, differences in their estimate of the means for realising their desires. For example, some authorities believe that our first line of defence should consist of battleships, others that it should consist of aeroplanes. Here the end is the same i.e national defence, only the means advocated are different.

6. What are Russell’s views on Enlightened self interest?

Enlightened self interest refers to the habit of taking into account the interests of others. Self interest is harmless if does not clash with the interests of others. While pursuing our own interests, we should be mindful that it does harm the interests of others. What injures others also injures us. Therefore, one should practice enlightened self interest to make the world a better and happier place.