



Reason as a Way of Knowing

Reason and Knowledge

- What possibilities for knowledge are created by reason?
- What are the advantages of being able to reason about something rather than, say, feeling something, dreaming about something, wishing something to be the case?

Reason and Knowledge

- Does all knowledge require some kind of rational basis?
- If knowledge claims cannot be rationally defended, should they be renounced? Is the answer to this question dependent on the area of knowledge of the claim?

Reason and Knowledge

- Can reason on its own, independent of sense perception, emotion and language, ever give us knowledge? Or are reason and language inseparable in the quest for, construction and justification of knowledge?

Reason and Knowledge

- What constitutes a good argument?
What is the value of learning to distinguish between valid and invalid arguments?

Strengths and Weaknesses of Reason

- What are the advantages of discriminating between valid and invalid arguments, good and bad reasons, more or less persuasive reasoning, both for the individual knower and for society?

Strengths and Weaknesses of Reason

- Why are informal fallacies often plausible and convincing? When where and by whom are they formulated? Are there circumstances under which the use of informal fallacies can be justified, for example, in public advertising campaigns aimed at persuading us to donate money for good causes?

Strengths and Weaknesses of Reason

- How can beliefs affect our capacity to reason well and to recognize valid arguments? Can they affect a person's capacity to distinguish between fallacy, good argument and rationalization? What is the difference between a rational argument and a rationalization?

Strengths and Weaknesses of Reason

- What, if any, are the advantages of expressing arguments in symbolic terms? Are the ambiguity and vagueness of conventional language eliminated by this formulation?

Strengths and Weaknesses of Reason

- Are there some parts of human life or experience where reason has no real function?

Linking Questions

- To what extent do you agree with Andre` Gide's view that, "L'illogisme irrite. Trop de logique ennuie. La vie echappe a la logique, et tout ce que la seule logique construit reste artificiel et contraint. Donc est un mot que doit ignorer le poete, et qui n existe que dans l'esprit." [Lack of logic annoys. Too much logic is boring. Life escapes logic, and everything built on logic alone is artificial and limited. Therefore is a word that the poet must ignore, that exists only in the mind.]?

Linking Questions

- How does the role of reason compare with the roles of the other ways of knowing?
- Why might some people think that reason is superior, and what consequences does holding this position have for the knowledge pursued and the methods considered appropriate in the pursuit?

Linking Questions

- Does the role of reason affect the degree of certainty in, or the social status of, the various areas of knowledge? What are the implications of the answer to this question when disputes arise among practitioners and between cultures?

Linking Questions

- Attempts have been made to identify universal, self-evident and incontrovertible laws of logic, such as the law of identity (for example, “an apple is an apple”) or the law of non-contradiction (for example, “nothing can be an apple and also a non-apple”). Are these actually laws in the scientific sense of the term, or are they axioms?

Linking Questions

- How do logical axioms compare with axioms in mathematics, and with the underlying beliefs we take for granted in other areas of knowledge?
- What is the role of reason in ethical principles and their justification? Is reason more important to acting morally than other ways of knowing?