

Rationality - A Good Choice – For Life

Monart Pon May 2022

To be rational is to choose to be good so as to live as a human being. Rationality is good for happiness.

A basic fact of life is that its existence is conditional. Life needs values for sustenance. Human life needs rational values and the work to produce them. Success is neither automatic nor guaranteed; it depends on will and skill. Rationality is a choice and requires effort.

If the choice is to live, then choosing to think and be rational is a good choice, because rationality sustains and promotes life and so is good for life. A good life is the way to a happy life, so rational actions lead to a successful life of happiness. Reason and rationality is the only human, moral way to live.

Rationality is the virtue of acting in accordance with reason. Reason is the ability to know reality through sense and logic – identifying, abstracting, and integrating sensory, perceptual observations into concepts and propositions.

Forming concepts, making words, is a uniquely human method of knowing: the basic means by which are possible the philosophy, science, technology, art, religion, all the cultures of modern civilization that bring unprecedented comfort and convenience, safety and security, entertainment and exploration, health and happiness, etc. All these life-enhancing conditions and opportunities are products of reason needed and to be enjoyed for a fully realized life (but too often taken for granted or, worse, depreciated and decried).

Rationality is the ethical source of the virtues of independence, integrity, honesty, justice, and courage. Without rationality, there is no real reason for those virtues. It is rationality's grounding in reality that gives the reason for all the values of rights and romance. From rationality come truth, goodness, and beauty. By rationality and its connection and correspondence to reality is sanity maintained. Rationality ensures against being a stupe and a fool, or a crook and knave.

Since reason can know what is real and true, it is the source of what one feels or experiences as being for or against the well-being of life. Without reason, the feelings of emotions are blind and shallow, unconnected with or opposed to reality. With reason, emotions are solid, deep, and in harmony with reality. Rationality ensures feelings are pure and do not conflict with true thinking, bringing the bliss which is the reward of life. "Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy." –Ayn Rand.

To reason is to live as a human being. Reason is the source and means by which human life survives and flourishes. A successful, thriving life is a happy life. Rationality is the good choice for life and happiness.

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The following are excerpts elaborating the meaning of rationality, excerpted from the single most important essay in all history that validates an objective, rational ethics for human happiness: Ayn Rand's "Objectivist Ethics". (I first read it fifty years ago and have reread and studied it uncounted times since; it forms the enduring core of my ethos. No one who truly cares about life could do without understanding, integrating, and practicing the principles defined therein.)

Consciousness—for those living organisms which possess it—is the basic means of survival. For man, the basic means of survival is reason. Man cannot survive, as animals do, by the guidance of mere percepts. A sensation of hunger will tell him that he needs food (if he has learned to identify it as "hunger"), but it will not tell him how to obtain his food and it will not tell him what food is good for him or poisonous. He cannot provide for his simplest physical needs without a process of thought. He needs a process of thought to discover how to plant and grow his food or how to make weapons for hunting. His percepts might lead him to a cave, if one is available—but to build the simplest shelter, he needs a process of thought. No percepts and no "instincts" will tell him how to light a fire, how to weave cloth, how to forge tools, how to make a wheel, how to make an airplane, how to perform an appendectomy, how to produce an electric light bulb or an electronic tube or a cyclotron or a box of matches. Yet his life depends on such knowledge—and only a volitional act of his consciousness, a process of thought, can provide it.

Rationality is man's basic virtue, the source of all his other virtues. Man's basic vice, the source of all his evils, is the act of unfocusing his mind, the suspension of his consciousness, which is not blindness, but the refusal to see, not ignorance, but the refusal to know. Irrationality is the rejection of man's means of survival and, therefore, a commitment to a course of blind destruction; that which is anti-mind, is anti-life.

The virtue of *Rationality* means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one's only source of knowledge, one's only judge of values and one's only guide to action.

It means one's total commitment to a state of full, conscious awareness, to the maintenance of a full mental focus in all issues, in all choices, in all of one's waking hours.

It means a commitment to the fullest perception of reality within one's power and to the constant, active expansion of one's perception, i.e., of one's knowledge.

It means a commitment to the reality of one's own existence, i.e., to the principle that all of one's goals, values and actions take place in reality and, therefore, that one must never place any value or consideration whatsoever above one's perception of reality.

It means a commitment to the principle that all of one's convictions, values, goals, desires and actions must be based on, derived from, chosen and validated by a process of thought—as precise and scrupulous a process of thought, directed by as ruthlessly strict an application of logic, as one's fullest capacity permits.

It means one's acceptance of the responsibility of forming one's own judgments and of living by the work of one's own mind (which is the virtue of Independence).

It means that one must never sacrifice one's convictions to the opinions or wishes of others (which is the virtue of Integrity)

—that one must never attempt to fake reality in any manner (which is the virtue of Honesty)

—that one must never seek or grant the unearned and undeserved, neither in matter nor in spirit (which is the virtue of Justice).

It means that one must never desire effects without causes, and that one must never enact a cause without assuming full responsibility for its effects—that one must never act like a zombie, i.e., without knowing one's own purposes and motives—that one must never make any decisions, form any convictions or seek any values out of context, i.e., apart from or against the total, integrated sum of one's knowledge—and, above all, that one must never seek to get away with contradictions.

It means the rejection of any form of *mysticism*, i.e., any claim to some nonsensory, nonrational, nondefinable, supernatural source of knowledge. It means a commitment to reason, not in sporadic fits or on selected issues or in special emergencies, but as a permanent way of life.

“The Objectivist Ethics,” *The Virtue of Selfishness*, by Ayn Rand

From “This is John Galt Speaking”, *Atlas Shrugged*, by Ayn Rand:

Rationality is the recognition of the fact that existence exists, that nothing can alter the truth and nothing can take precedence over that act of perceiving it, which is thinking—that the mind is one's only judge of values and one's only guide of action—that reason is an absolute that

permits no compromise—that a concession to the irrational invalidates one’s consciousness and turns it from the task of perceiving to the task of faking reality—that the alleged short-cut to knowledge, which is faith, is only a short-circuit destroying the mind—that the acceptance of a mystical invention is a wish for the annihilation of existence and, properly, annihilates one’s consciousness.

To the extent to which a man is rational, life is the premise directing his actions. To the extent to which he is irrational, the premise directing his actions is death.

To live, man must hold three things as the supreme and ruling values of his life: Reason—Purpose—Self-esteem. Reason, as his only tool of knowledge—Purpose, as his choice of the happiness which that tool must proceed to achieve—Self-esteem, as his inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of living.

From “Apollo 11”, by Ayn Rand:

Nothing on earth or beyond it is closed to the power of man's reason. Yes, reason could solve human problems—but nothing else on earth or beyond it, can.

Image: The High Frontier, an orbital country in space, envisioned by Gerard O’Neill. Painting by Don Davis, circa 1975.



Postscripts:

"In psychological terms, the issue of man's survival does not confront his consciousness as an issue of 'life or death', but as an issue of 'happiness or suffering'. Happiness is the successful state of life, suffering is the warning signal of failure, of death." (Ayn Rand, "The Objectivist Ethics")

Because reason is the cardinal value and rationality the primary virtue - does that mean that one should be fully, 100% rational all of the time?

Yes, living isn't always easy; it's not without obstacles and oppositions, conflicts and confusions, mistakes and misunderstandings.

But rationality is the only true way to solve the problems of life and achieve full self-realization, which is happiness. Why should one not choose the best possible, using the best means possible? Why settle for less?

One is not infallible or invulnerable, not omniscient or omnipotent, but one is confident and competent to know and do the very best one can. That is the way to make and enjoy life. That is life's meaning and purpose: to achieve happiness by the best standards and all of the virtues of rationality.

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