

Reason and Nature

Essays in the Theory of Rationality

Reason and Nature investigates the normative dimension of reason and rationality and how it can be situated within the natural world. Nine philosophers and two psychologists address three main themes. The first concerns the status of norms of rationality and, in particular, how it is possible to show that norms we take to be objectively authoritative are so in fact. The second has to do with the precise form taken by the norms of rationality. The third concerns the role of norms of rationality in the psychological explanation of belief and action. It is widely assumed that we use the normative principles of rationality as regulative principles governing psychological explanation. This seems to demand that there is a certain harmony between the norms of rationality and the psychology of reasoning. What, then, should we make of the well-documented evidence suggesting that people consistently fail to reason well? And how can we extend the model to non-language-using creatures? As this collection testifies, current work in the theory of rationality is subject to very diverse influences ranging from experimental and theoretical psychology, through philosophy of logic and language, to metaethics and the theory of practical reasoning. This work is pursued in various philosophical styles and with various orientations. Straight-down-the-line analytical, and largely a priori, enquiry contrasts with empirically constrained theorizing. A focus on human rationality contrasts with a focus on rationality in the wider natural world. As things stand work in one style often proceeds in isolation from work in others. If progress is to be made on rationality theorists will need to range widely. Reason and Nature will provide a stimulus to that endeavour.

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