A Justification for Teaching Children to be Rational

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Although many philosophers of education seem to feel fully justified in teaching children to be rational, there is much controversy over whether rationality is really a good thing and worth defending as a fundamental educational ideal. In this paper, I first argue that rationality is not defensible in the forms of classical and means/end conception. Instead, I suggest that rationality be construed as a tripartite concept comprising cognitive, practical and evaluative rationality. Based on this tripartite conception of rationality, I then put forward four arguments – grounded on pragmatic, ontological, moral, and hedonic considerations – for teaching children to be rational.
Chapter 1  Introduction

Many philosophers of education seem to feel fully justified in teaching children to be rational. For instance, while Scheffler (1973) claims that the importance of rationality as a fundamental educational ideal lies in its contribution to not only the intellectual but also the moral life of students, Greene (1984) points out that some philosophers of education stress the centrality of critical reflection in lived situations when they speak of rationality as fundamental to the literacy sought by means of education: “For them, this type of reflection constitutes the most productive mode of rational action; they view it as a way of transforming the lived world” (p. 547).

However, not all philosophers regard such capability of “transforming the lived world” as a blessing. Just as what Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) assert that the extraordinary success of reason, in the form of scientific rationality and means/end calculations, in offering mankind domination over nature leads inexorably to domination of humans over humans, Niznik (1998) criticizes rationality for creating an illusion of controlling the world and thus failing to secure not only human solidarity but even human survival. Besides, many feminist philosophers also argue against rationality on the grounds that our traditional ideals of rationality are often modelled on stereotypically masculine traits (e.g. being dispassionate) and then used to denigrate the stereotyped nature of women (e.g. being emotional). As Ruddick (1989) puts it, “Reason, at least as Western philosophers had imagined Him, was infected by - and contributed to - the pervasive disrespect for women’s minds and lives ... For a woman to love Reason was to risk both self-contempt and a self-alienating misogyny” (pp. 4-5).

In the face of these contrary views on rationality, a question arises whether rationality is really a good thing and worth defending as a fundamental educational ideal. In the following discussion, I shall first make a detailed analysis of the concept of rationality (Chapter 2) and then put forward several arguments for teaching children to be rational (Chapter 3). Finally, I shall give a brief summary of the points presented (Chapter 4).
2.1 Rationality in Ancient Greek Thought

According to Welsch (1998), manifold conceptions of rationality in modern times originate from a traditional and undifferentiated concept of reason. As this traditional concept of reason has not developed fully until such ancient Greek philosophers as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle conceive it as something that can account for our cognitive abilities and the role thought plays in action, it seems logical to embark on the conceptual analysis of rationality by examining the notions of reason these philosophers have. Here, despite the differences they may have in other respects, the notions of reason as conceived by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all share two crucial features (Frede, 1996). First, reason has its own desires, like the desire to know the truth or to obtain what is considered as good. Second, reason is at least partly constituted by a basic knowledge about the world. Indeed, it is these two common features that underlie the function of reason to guide us in our lives, for they reflect a cognitive ability which provides us with both the necessary knowledge about the world and the ability to recognize what is good and to move us towards it.

However, as maintained by Frede (1996), this general conception of reason takes rather different forms with the above-mentioned philosophers. In brief, while Socrates claims that life is entirely guided by reason whose sole function is to determine what we do and how we live and that there is no need to gain theoretical knowledge about the world / reality since we are already born with the necessary knowledge we need to lead a good life, both Plato and Aristotle disagree. Although they grant that it is a function of reason to determine the way we live, they do not think that this is the sole function of reason: reason is also concerned to understand things theoretically, and must do so because gaining an adequate general understanding of the world is crucial for a good life. Moreover, contrary to Socrates’ view that all desires, in being beliefs, are desires of reason, Plato and Aristotle conceive that some of our desires are irrational in the sense that they do not have their origin in reason, but in an irrational part of the soul which has a certain degree of autonomy. As the supposed autonomy of irrational desires implies that reason may fail to determine what we do, Plato and Aristotle claim instead that reason ought to determine what we do and will do so when it functions well.

2.2 Classical Ideal of Rationality

2.2.1 Major Characteristics

It is against a background of such emphasis on a preeminent role reasoning ought to play in the way we live that the classical ideal of rationality emerges. Based predominantly on the writings of Plato, Nathanson (1994) identifies three major characteristics of the classical ideal of rationality, viz. striving for maximum deliberation, perfect objectivity, and pure knowledge. The rationale behind this characterization is that living by the dictates of reason necessitates the pursuit of pure knowledge, which can only be achieved by maximizing the use of deliberations in making judgements and by viewing things from an impersonal perspective. Here, it is important to note from Plato's (1961) description of knowledge as “true belief with the addition of an account” (p. 908) in the Theaetetus that justification is another requisite for knowledge besides truth. Indeed, this classical rationalist quest for believing for the right reasons is also well accepted by many modern thinkers like
Clifford (1901) who, while framing an “ethics of belief”, asserts bluntly that “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” (p. 175).

As deliberation helps produce evidence required for justifying beliefs and actions, it is regarded as central to the ideal of rationality: how rational a person is rests on how much and how well s/he deliberates about matters of belief and action. A good example of what is involved in deliberation can be found in Black (1972), who claims that “A man will be acting reasonably to the extent that he tries to form a clear view of the end to be achieved and its probable value to him, assembles the best information about available means, their probable efficacy and the price of failure, and in the light of all this chooses the course of action most strongly recommended by good reasons” (p. 205). Moreover, since subjective features of a person like emotions are seen as obstacles to making rational judgements, classical rationalists also demand that we must try not to be influenced in our judgements by accidents of our nature / situation in order to achieve objectivity. It follows that the most perfect form of objectivity, which conduces to the truest vision of the world, is taken to be the one that describes reality as it would appear from an impersonal point of view or, in Smart’s (1975) words, that sees the world “apart from any particular or human perspective” (p. 68).

2.2.2 Implausibility of This Ideal

Despite the greatness and importance of the tradition from which the classical ideal of rationality emerges, according to Nathanson (1994), it is not itself a worthy ideal for three reasons. First, it exaggerates the importance of deliberation about action, while ignoring the results of actions as a test of rationality. Just as what James (1918) maintains that “There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subjects of express volitional deliberation” (p. 122), so it is not a desirable goal to maximize the role of deliberation in life. Indeed, an adequate account of rationality should focus not only on the method by which decisions and judgements are made but also on the results of the actions being considered. What James’ point makes clear is that deliberation is irrational when it is used to decide trivial matters and thus unlikely to yield any benefits.

Moreover, it is wrong for the classical ideal to suggest generalizing from the truth that emotions and other features of ourselves sometimes get in the way of rational thought to the false conclusion that we would be more rational if we were completely without emotions or completely detached from all concerns. For one thing, our emotions and other subjective features of ourselves such as needs, desires and goals are what motivate our thinking and our interest in knowing the truth. As Deutscher (1983) puts it, “To lose our interests does not make us disinterested, but merely indifferent and bored; we do not enquire and we do not find out. To lose one’s passions is to lose one’s capacity for that close and continued involvement with things and people without which one cannot bear with the difficulties, pains, and shocks of discovery and continual acquaintance” (p. 50). For another, being rational generally requires us to strive to realize our goals, meet our needs and satisfy our desires. Therefore, the demands for total objectivity and detachment are absurd: instead of leading to a perception of the real nature of things, they would only produce boredom, indifference and even irrationality.
Besides, while tending to place an absolute value on truth, knowledge and high
standards of evidence, the classical ideal denigrates the importance of other aspects of
human life. This is revealed prominently in Plato’s (1961) *Phaedo*, where Socrates
makes the following remarks:

“So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this
imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our
object, which we assert to be truth. In the first place, the body provides us
with innumerable distractions in the pursuit of our necessary sustenance,
and any diseases which attack us hinder our quest for reality. Besides, the
body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a
great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an
opportunity to think at all about anything ... We are in fact convinced that
if we are ever to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the
body and contemplate things by themselves with the soul itself” (p. 49).

What Socrates seems to be doing here is evaluating everything in terms of its
relationship to the quest for knowledge. Not only is the body regarded as a
hindrance to the pursuit of knowledge and thus not to be valued, but also such
valuable aspects of human life as concern for nature, art and the well-being of people
if they do not contribute towards the acquisition of knowledge. Given the plurality
of important things in life, however, this way of attaching a supreme and exclusive
value to knowledge is hardly acceptable.

2.3 Means/End Conception of Rationality

2.3.1 Origins and Attractions

Despite the attack on the classical ideal, the results of the discussion in 2.2.2 are
not entirely negative. They suggest that a reasonable ideal of rationality should
attend to the results of actions, take seriously the agent’s perspective when assessing
beliefs and actions, and acknowledge the plurality of interests, values and ideals that
are important to human life rather than restricting itself to cognitive ideals. Putting
these ideas together results in a pragmatic conception of rationality, sometimes called
the means/end conception, that an action is rational if it is the act most likely to
produce consequences the agent desires (Nathanson, 1994). As this conception
implies that the function of reason is not to set our ends but to determine the proper
means for acting so as to ensure satisfaction of our desires, it happens to coincide
with the conception of rationality advocated by Hume (1978). As he puts it,
“Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to
any other office than to serve and obey them” (p. 415). Since what determines the
choice of ends are the “passions”, the particular desires or aversions one chances to
have, the means/end conception in principle permits the adoption of any ends.

Indeed, it is this feature that renders the means/end conception so attractive to
many recent thinkers: it allows them to decide empirically the rationality of actions
without committing themselves to value judgements that are controversial or
insusceptible to empirical verification. In Nathanson’s (1994) words, “If we know
what someone desires and what actions she can perform, the rational action is,
roughly, the one with the highest probability of bringing about the desired end. To
know which action is rational does not, on this view, require that one judge whether
the agent’s aims are themselves valuable” (p. 103). Moreover, it is important for
this conception to allow passions to play such a central role in determining our ends
because it implies that rationality not only does not demand the shedding of our emotional nature but actually depends on our having emotion.

2.3.2 A Fatal Attraction

However, what makes the means/end theory attractive appears to be fatal to the theory at the same time. In the following famous passage, Hume (1978) reveals both explicitly and extremely the attractive feature of the means/end theory that reason does not rule out any object of desire and thus allows any end to be chosen:

"'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter" (p. 416, emphasis in original).

Yet, not all philosophers find it attractive to allow such free choice of ends. For instance, while Baier (1958) claims that the actions Hume describes in the above quotation reflect exactly the absurdity of the means/end theory since they are paradigm cases of "what is meant by 'contrary to reason'" (p. 91), Gert (1998) argues that there exists five basic desires which are simply intrinsically irrational - the desires for death, pain, disability, loss of freedom, and loss of pleasure - and that it is irrational for anyone to desire any of them without an adequate reason. As we do ordinarily think it irrational to aim at the things Hume describes as "not / little contrary to reason" or Gert calls "intrinsically irrational", it is plausible to claim that rationality does exclude certain ends. If this is true, the means/end theory which allows the choice of any ends must be false. In fact, even if the theory is not false, it is still inadequate because it concentrates only on the practical side of rationality, or the rationality of actions. To achieve a more complete understanding of the concept of rationality, I think three different contexts within which rationality functions have to be considered.

2.4 Rationality as a Tripartite Concept

2.4.1 Its Demands and Predicament

According to Rescher (1988), rationality consists in the appropriate use of reason to resolve choices in the best possible way. Corresponding to three major contexts of choice (i.e. those of belief, action and evaluation), there are three types of rationality, viz. the cognitive / theoretical (reasoning about matters of information), practical (reasoning about actions) and evaluative (reasoning about values, ends and preferences) rationality. Here, despite the very different contexts within which rationality operates, it demands a common task of resolving choices in accordance with the best reasons. While the best reasons refer to those whose guidance can optimally serve our real / best interests in the matters at issue, rationality is basically a matter of seeking to do our very best to work cost-effectively towards the realization of our cognitive, practical and evaluative goals. As a result, rationality in all its forms calls for the comparative assessment of feasible alternatives and thus five faculties: the faculties for contemplating alternatives, determining what can and cannot be done, appraising alternatives, effecting a choice between alternatives, and implementing choices.

Additionally, owing to its systematic nature, rationality demands five other
things whether in matters of belief, action, or evaluation: consistency (to avoid self-contradiction), uniformity (to treat like cases alike), coherence (to ensure that our commitments hang together), simplicity (to avoid needless complications), and economy (to be efficient). The systematic character of rationality inheres in its drive for intelligibility, or in its demand for ways of proceeding whose appropriateness other rational agents can in principle perceive. Indeed, Rescher (1988) claims that it is in this sense alone that one can maintain the universality of the force of rationality: “Whatever considerations render it rational for someone to do A will ipso facto render it rational for anyone ‘in his circumstances’ to do A - anyone placed in conditions sufficiently like his” (p. 17, emphasis in original).

However, there exists an awkward predicament of rationality every rational agent needs to face. While rationality is information-sensitive in the sense that exactly what qualifies as the most rational resolution of a particular problem of belief, action or evaluation depends on the precise content of our information about the situation at issue, our information in the real world is always incomplete. Since mere additions to our information can always disprove the initial optimum decision, there is no guarantee that what seems the best thing to do actually is so. This reflects an important fact that rationality is always a matter of optimization relative to constraints like imperfect information, of doing the best one can in the prevailing circumstances (Rescher, 1988).

2.4.2 A Remedy for the Means/End Conception

In spite of its inherent predicament, this rather comprehensive tripartite conception of rationality appears reasonable and acceptable. More importantly, it can effectively remedy the deficiencies and mistakes of the means/end conception. Admittedly, the means/end conception has been a very widely held view of rationality among philosophers all along. For instance, while Aristotle (1984) asserts that “We deliberate not about ends but about what contributes to ends” (p. 1756) in the Nicomachean Ethics, Russell (1962) states even more unequivocally that “‘Reason’... signifies the choice of the right means to an end that you wish to achieve. It has nothing whatever to do with the choice of ends” (p. viii). Important as they are in the history of philosophy, Aristotle and Russell are mistaken as they focus exclusively on cognitive rationality that relates to the choice of means without paying attention to the role evaluative rationality plays in the choice of ends. In other words, the means/end theorists’ grievous error lies in their mistaking a part of rationality for the whole of it. Indeed, such preoccupation with means in preference to ends has been criticized by many critical theorists for bringing disastrous consequences for both individuals and society. In Gibson’s (1986) words, “It is a kind of intellectual activity which actually results in the decline of reason itself, and it therefore stultifies, distorts and malforms individual and social growth” (p. 7).

Accordingly, rationality as a whole must care for the worth of ends as well as the efficacy of means. After all, if our ends are themselves inappropriate, or if they run counter to our real interests, then we are not completely rational, no matter how wisely we cultivate them. But a question arises here: what is it that is in a person’s real interests? Is it just a matter of what one simply happens to want as those means/end theorists imagine it to be? According to Rescher (1988), the answer to the latter question is definitely negative because any want-related interest of a person is valid as such only if it can be subordinated to a universal interest: the fact that X wants A remains a mere motive (as opposed to a reason) for his / her action in
pursuing A until such time as it is rationalized through the fact that X recognizes A to have the desirable feature, which is not just something that X wants, but is something that *any and every reasonable person would want*. Obviously, what rationality demands in this process of interest validation is an assessment of “preferability” rather than a mere expression of “preference” - that’s where evaluative rationality comes in while the means/end conception comes to grief.
Chapter 3  Arguments for Teaching Children to be Rational

3.1  A Pragmatic Answer to the Question “Why be Rational?”

3.1.1  A Practical or Rational Justification

Apart from remediying the deficiencies of the means/end theory, the tripartite conception of rationality suggested above is also conducive to justifying a commitment to rationality. Indeed, it is the emphasis of this conception on the quest for optimality that underlies a practical justification for why we should be rational. This can be understood in two ways. First, although rationality does not afford assurance of success due to its own “predicament”, its demand for adopting the overall best available alternative (i.e. the apparent optimum) does afford the best overall chances of reaching our goals and thus makes following the path of rationality the rational course. Second, the demand of rationality for “the best available” leads one to fix on that alternative at which others could also be expected to arrive in the circumstances so that they are able to explain, understand and anticipate one’s choices. Here, rationality is justified in the sense that it provides a principle for the guidance of action that can achieve the crucial requisites of social co-ordination - mutual predictability and mutual understanding - in the most efficient and realizable way (Rescher, 1988).

However, in the face of such practical line of argumentation, a sceptic may seem to be correct in objecting that it actually conforms to the circular pattern: “You should be rational just because that is the rational thing to do!” After all, is it possible to justify rationally, if not practically, a commitment to rationality? Many eminent philosophers are pessimistic about the possibility of doing so. For instance, while O’Hear (1980) claims that since it is logically impossible to provide a noncircular justification of rationality the demand for such a justification is false per se, Popper (1966) also admits to the impossibility of rationally justifying rationality and suggests that what he calls the critical rationalism should be based on an irrational faith in reason. Despite these rather pessimistic views, I think an illuminating point made by Siegel (1997) can help resolve the problem. He maintains that the above-mentioned circularity - establishing the jurisdiction of reason by appealing to the judgement of reason itself - is not problematic at all because a justification of rationality must be self-reflexive. As he puts it,

“To ask ‘Why be rational?’ is to ask for reasons for and against being rational; to entertain the question seriously is to acknowledge the force of reasons in ascertaining the answer. The very raising of the question, in other words, commits one to a recognition of the epistemic force of reasons. To recognize that force is to recognize the answer to the question: we should be rational because (for the reason that) reasons, as the rationalist holds, have force” (pp. 82-83, emphasis in original).

3.1.2  A High Price to Pay for Being a Sceptic

Persuasive as Siegel’s rational justification is, it appears hard to meet another practical challenge of the sceptics that rationality is not realizable at all. The rationale behind this sceptical challenge is that we can never accept anything which does not come with ironclad proofs. As the apparent optima pursued by rationality are not necessarily the real ones, according to the sceptics, the products of rationality (i.e. the beliefs, action recommendations and evaluations) are all unacceptable.
Admittedly, if what the sceptics insist is correct, rationality is really not realizable. However, judging from the fact that the object of rational endeavour is not just to avoid error but to achieve our cognitive, practical and evaluative goals, the sceptics’ policy of systematic avoidance of risk - and thus avoidance of acceptance - is basically insensible since it blocks from the very beginning any prospect of realizing these goals. To be sure, the policy of rationality to accept the apparent optima is a risky one, for it cannot guarantee they are the right choices, let alone the best choices. But I agree with what Price (1996) holds that it is reasonable to take this risk and unreasonable not to take it: “If we refuse to take it, we have no prospect of getting answers, not even the most tentative ones, for many of the questions which interest us” (p. 128).

After all, we as rational animals have questions and want, nay need, to have answers to them. We cannot feel at ease in situations of which we can make no cognitive sense. And such a feeling of discomfort caused by lack of knowledge or understanding is of practical significance to humans from an evolutionary point of view. As James (1956) points out perceptively, “The utility of this emotional effect of expectation is perfectly obvious; ‘natural selection’, in fact, was bound to bring it about sooner or later. It is of the utmost practical importance to an animal that he should have prevision of the qualities of the objects that surround him” (pp. 78-79). Moreover, since the sceptics refuse to accept the ground rules of our reasoning as appropriate - and thus the ground rules of communication, they are also blocked from the enterprise of communication, thereby leading to a withdrawal from the human community (Rescher, 1988). A question arises here whether it is humanly possible to lead such a sceptical life, as even the founder of the sceptical tradition, Pyrrho, admits that it is difficult to rid oneself completely of one’s humanity. In a famous reply to his critic, Pyrrho says that “it was not easy entirely to strip oneself of human weakness; but one should strive with all one’s might against facts, by deeds if possible, and if not, in word” (Laertius, 1950, p. 479). Owing to the high price we must pay for being a sceptic - the collapse of the prospect of rational inquiry and effective communication, a commitment to rationality is obviously preferable to adopting a sceptical lifestyle.

3.2 Rationality as an Integral Part of Humanity

3.2.1 Presumption of Rationality

At any rate, as an integral part of what defines us as the sort of creature we are, rationality is crucial to humanity. Yet, a question remains why we should fix on rationality instead of another characteristically human capacity like imagination or deceitfulness or some such as our definitive trait while irrationality is so pervasive in human affairs. According to Rescher (1988), there are two main reasons. First, rationality is essentially the crossroads where all these characteristic attributes come together. Either these other capacities like imagination are essential resources for rationality, or the capacity for rationality is involved in their operations like deceit. Second, since only a creature that has the capacity for rationality can act irrationally, the very fact that we can exercise our rationality irrationally - self-destructively, for example - betokens our status as rational agents. Indeed, although people are not always rational, the fact that they are found to be so generally and ordinarily renders a presumption of rationality plausible: in the ordinary course of events people are assumed to be rational agents in the absence of convincing counter-indications.
This presumption is important in the sense that it not only allows us to explain people’s actions conveniently - simply by noting that they were, in the circumstances, rational, but also makes our activities predictable and intelligible to one another so that we can communicate and collaborate effectively with others (Cf. the discussion at the beginning of 3.1.1 above).

Despite its importance, the presumption of rationality is not widely accepted as correct. Many psychological studies have tried to establish with experimental precision that people are generally inclined to reason in inappropriate ways and thus by nature irrational (Rescher, 1988). However, just as Cohen (1986) has already pointed out that we frequently make substantive assumptions about how things stand in the world on the basis of experience, it is very questionable to interpret the incorrect conclusions people draw in these experimental studies as meaning that people are systematically programmed to fallacious processes of reasoning rather than merely indicating that they are inclined to various, sometimes debatable, substantive suppositions. Surely, the presumption of rationality is defeasible and defeatable. Bitter experience teaches us that all people are sometimes irrational and some people usually so. Yet, the fact remains that people generally have the capacity for rationality and most of them actually exercise this capacity some of the time. Accordingly, the presumption of rationality is still tenable, though in the statistical sense only: people often, but not inevitably, proceed as rationality requires.

3.2.2 A Duty to be Rational

However, does rationality advise or oblige us to do what it requires? According to Rescher (1988), there are at least two factors, viz. self-interest and self-realization, which contrive to thrust the rationality project upon us as one in which we are obliged rather than advised to be involved. Basically, we should behave rationally because rationality is an essential part of our self-definition as human beings and thus represents a critical aspect of our deepest self-interest - our being able to maintain a proper sense of self-worth and legitimacy by being able to see ourselves as the sorts of creatures we claim to be. Here, it is important to notice that an ontological imperative to rationality is at work: a creature that possesses the capacity for rational agency ought to realize this potential, i.e. to act so as to develop itself as a rational being. In other words, our obligation to be rational is essentially an ontological obligation that inheres in our capacity for self-development and self-realization - a commitment to the full development of our human potentialities. Indeed, our claim to be rational free agents by itself establishes our position in the world’s scheme of things so that rationality becomes a matter of duty for us. In Rescher’s (1988) own words,

“The crux here is the fundamental duty to make good use of the opportunities that come our way to realize ourselves as fully as possible - the fundamental duty of self-realization. In so far as one ‘owes’ it to anyone at all, one owes this duty to oneself and to ‘the world at large’ or, at any rate, to the community of conscious intelligences within it. The duty at issue is a duty at once to oneself and to the general scheme of things that brought one forth to develop one’s highest potential as the kind of creature one is” (p. 207).
3.3 Dependence of Morality on Rationality

3.3.1 Omnipresence of Rationality

Perhaps even more important, we not only have an ontological obligation to be rational but depend on rationality for fulfilling our moral obligations. For instance, Gordon (1998) points out that certain necessary characteristics of moral behaviour like intention, consequences and responsibility are dependent upon rationality in the sense that “We choose rationally between one intention and another. We give thought, or should give thought, to the consequences of what we do. We have to be aware of our responsibility” (p. 63). Yet, many philosophers refuse to acknowledge this rather decisive role of rationality in morality. While Hume (1978) asserts that reason, being the slave of the passions, “cannot be the source of the distinction betwixt moral good and evil” (p. 458), interestingly enough, a supposedly “postmodern” ethicist called Bauman (1993) still follows this modernist line of argument and claims that morality precedes thinking since “when concepts, standards and rules enter the stage, moral impulse makes an exit” (p. 61). Judging from the fact that many moral acts especially those impulsive ones seem not to arise from a process of thinking, the views of Hume and Bauman sound plausible. But is it the case that impulsive acts do not involve thinking / rationality? I’m afraid not. Here, I agree with what Gordon (1998) maintains that our impulsive act actually draws its impetus from our experience and from our beliefs influenced, perhaps even formed, by that experience and by reflection upon it at a level of self-consciousness not always apparent. Therefore, rationality is involved even though it is not recognized by the person who performs the moral act at the time of the action.

However, if Gordon’s view is correct, how can we reasonably account for such pervasiveness of rationality in ethical thought and behaviour? According to Ayala (1995), the answer lies in the fact that humans are ethical beings by their biological nature - possession of a well-developed intelligence:

“Humans exhibit ethical behavior by nature because their biological makeup determines the presence of the three necessary, and jointly sufficient, conditions for ethical behavior: (a) the ability to anticipate the consequences of one’s own actions; (b) the ability to make value judgements; and (c) the ability to choose between alternative courses of action. Ethical behavior came about in evolution not because it is adaptive in itself, but as a necessary consequence of man’s eminent intellectual abilities” (p. 118).

As the three “eminent intellectual abilities” mentioned above [i.e. (a), (b) & (c)] are in reality among the five faculties demanded by rationality (See 2.4.1), it seems impossible to deny the role of rationality in morality. Surely, we are unlikely to establish a perfect moral system. For morality, as Holowka (1998) asserts, frequently operates between two paradigms - code ethics and situation ethics - so that we are destined to vacillate continually and correspondingly between two strategies - crude rules and subtle recognition of the unique features of each singular case. Still, it does not mean that we must renounce rationality in morality but that we must be open to the merit of using mixed strategies.

3.3.2 Symbiosis Between Rationality and Emotion

Here, although rationality is shown to be necessary to morality, it is not sufficient by itself: emotion is needed too. Indeed, just as Jaggar (1996) claims that
emotions may be helpful and even essential, rather than inimical, to the construction of knowledge. I think emotions can be seen as a potential source of knowledge and have a part to play in determining our rational action. But what exactly is the relationship between emotions and rationality? According to Robertson (1995), it can be seen in at least two ways. First, emotions can be judged as rational or irrational themselves. For instance, fear can be a proper or improper reaction to one’s circumstances. Second, more controversially, emotions can be considered to have a cognitive role in rationality as a whole, or have an influence on the formation of beliefs and of judgements about how to act. For instance, traditionally, though not uniformly so, emotion has been regarded as a pernicious influence which must be suppressed or overcome in the quest for truth (See 2.2.1).

Nowadays, however, this rather negative and one-sided view on how emotions affect rationality is no longer tenable. For one thing, there exists some scientific evidence in support of the contrary position that emotions are “typically indispensable for rational decisions; they point us in the proper direction, where dry logic can then be of best use” (Goleman, 1996, p. 28, emphasis in original). This can be illustrated by a neurological research done by Damasio, et al. (1994) on a group of patients who have sustained injuries to a specialized region of the frontal cortex of the brain. The research shows that the patients experience difficulty with personal and social decision-making and with the processing of emotions, while they show no intellectual or neuropsychological impairment. After conducting further experiments on the patients, Damasio et al. hypothesize that the damaged region of the patients’ brains is connected with other brain regions that store emotional memories, and that people with damage to this region lose covert awareness of emotional reactions and it is this loss of access to their emotional learning that impairs their ability to make social and moral decisions. Accordingly, Damasio et al. infer that “emotion and its underlying neural machinery participate in decision-making within the social domain” (Ibid., p. 1104).

Speculative as it is, this “evidence” does suggest that emotional awareness may play an important role in our practical judgement. But exactly what role it may play is not clear. An illuminating suggestion is made by Sherman (1989) that emotions can help direct our attention to particular aspects of the environment, thus stimulating thought in certain directions. She says,

“Often we see not dispassionately, but because of and through the emotions. So, for example, a sense of indignation makes us sensitive to those who suffer unwarranted insult or injury, just as a sense of pity and compassion opens our eyes to the pains of sudden and cruel misfortune. We thus come to have relevant points of view for discrimination as a result of having certain emotional dispositions. We notice through feeling what might otherwise go unheeded by a cool and detached intellect. To see dispassionately without engaging the emotions is often to be at peril of missing what is relevant” (p. 45).

However, even if we agree with what Damasio et al. and Sherman suggest that emotions have a positive influence on our practical judgement, we still need to be aware that whether they can help us become more effective agents or make sound moral judgements depends on how effective we use rationality to reflect critically on our characteristic responses and even to reeducate ourselves when our emotions are inconsistent with our best judgements. In other words, rationality remains an essential factor, not divorced from emotion, nor emotion from it: they form a
symbiotic relationship.

3.4 Rationality as a Basis for Reflective Happiness

3.4.1 A Distinction Between Reflective and Affective Happiness

In view of the complaint sometimes expressed by people that rationality can actually impede the realization of happiness, it seems impossible for us to evade the following question if rationality is to be justified. Does rationality pay off in terms of happiness? To deliberate sensibly about this crucial question, I agree with Rescher (1988) that we must distinguish between the affective (a psychological matter of how one feels about things) and the reflective (a judgemental matter of how one assesses the current situation) modes of happiness - between emotive pleasure and judgemental contentment of mind. For the answer hinges critically on whether we construe happiness in an affective or in a reflective sense. Indeed, if happiness is seen as reflective contentment, then rationality is undoubtedly a means towards greater happiness. For one thing, people who proceed rationally have a good chance of promoting their real interests. For another, even when things go wrong, rational people still have the consolation of rationality itself - of the recognition of having done their best, since they treasure rationality itself and take rational satisfaction in the very fact of having done what rationality demands.

However, if happiness is interpreted as affective pleasure, then there are at least three reasons why rationality is unlikely to promote happiness (Rescher, 1988). First, we can gain ready access to euphoria through avenues that are not particularly endorsed by rationality - through drugs, for example. This is hardly surprising because rationality, by its very nature, is geared not to our pleasure but to what is in our best interests. Therefore, there is no basis for thinking that satisfaction of the demands of rationality will advantage us in the pursuit of affective pleasure. Second, being largely a matter of moods and frames of mind, affective happiness is too ephemeral and capricious to lend itself to effective manipulation by rational means. Third, rationality itself teaches us in the school of bitter experience that pursuit of affective happiness not only does not provide greater pleasure in the long run but can be a hollow business. An illustrative example of such reflection on “bitter experience” can be found in Mill's (1960) *Autobiography* where he writes:

“The experiences of this period had two very marked effects on my opinions and character. In the first place, they led me to adopt a theory of life, very unlike that on which I had before acted, and having much in common with what at that time I certainly had never heard of, the anti-self-consciousness theory of Carlyle. I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. The enjoyments of life (such was now my theory) are sufficient to make it a pleasant thing, when they are taken en passant, without being made a principal object. Once make them so, and they are immediately felt to be insufficient” (pp. 99-100, emphasis in original).
What Mill’s deliberations indicate is an ironic situation that when hedonically affective happiness is pursued, however rationally, it tends to flee away. This virtually reveals the incapacity of rationality to deliver on the crucial matter of real contentment by way of reflective happiness in such a “hollow business”.

3.4.2 Some Misunderstandings

Yet, just because rationality is intrinsically more congenial to and supportive of the reflective mode of happiness, many people think that rationality is cold and inhumane: it stands in the way of many life-enhancing but largely unreflective activities - social intercourse, diversions, recreations, and so on - that have an appropriate place in a full, rewarding and happy human life. What is more, some ancient philosophers even maintain that only the purely intellectual activities like thinking and reasoning can yield true satisfactions for humans. For instance, Aristotle (1984) asserts in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that “Happiness extends, then, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not accidentally, but in virtue of the contemplation; for this is in itself precious” (p. 1863).

However, according to Rescher (1988), these views are extremely mistaken. Not only does rationality not demand that we seek rational satisfaction alone and view intellectual pleasures as uniquely genuine, it actually can and does acknowledge the need for diversity and recognize the significance of those life-enhancing but arational - involving little or no use of rationality - activities. Indeed, what rationality emphasizes here is the importance of a balance of varied goods within a complex “economy of values”, even if this complex must itself include various arational goods. To insist that rational satisfaction rather than mere “pleasure” is the pivot of true happiness does not mean that ordinary pleasures have no legitimate place in a truly happy life. And hence, an adequate account of rationality must “rightly stress its importance and primacy and still at the same time recognize that the intellectual virtues comprise only part of the overall picture regarding the good life” (Ibid., p. 222).
Chapter 4  Conclusion

If I am not mistaken, the four arguments presented in chapter 3 - based on pragmatic, ontological, moral, and hedonic considerations respectively - should have demonstrated that rationality is a good thing and worth defending as a fundamental educational ideal for children. Yet, it does not mean that rationality is defensible in all forms, at least not in the forms of classical and means/end conception. Indeed, it is these two conceptions of rationality that are often subjected to blistering attack (See Introduction), with the result that many people forsake rationality simply because these conceptions are defective. Here I suggest construing rationality as a tripartite concept comprising cognitive, practical and evaluative rationality and base all the four arguments mentioned above on this conception. For one thing, this conception is comprehensive and thus able to remedy the defects of the “attractive” means/end theory. For another, the ideal of rationality implicit in this conception is an inclusive rather than an exclusive one: not only does it not force us to choose between the cognitive and emotional components of our nature as the classical rationalism does, it actually forbids nothing that is good for us.

The inclusive feature of the tripartite conception is particularly relevant and important to modern educational theory and practice, as they have been criticized for being infused with an exclusive notion of rationality that excludes other ways of thinking, or other ways of being rational. According to Kohli (1995), such exclusive view of rationality has grave consequences: it “limits and delimits our possibilities for creativity, democracy and freedom. It leads to immense conformity, for if we cross the border, we are often labeled ‘irrational’” (p. 112). Therefore, whether we should teach children to be rational or not depends largely on how rationality is conceptualized. And teachers must be keenly aware of the possibility that what they think they are doing rationally in the classroom may be in reality something educationally irrational under the guise of rationality.
References


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Teaching children responsibility is not an impossibility. Here you can find simple tips of how to teach kids to take responsibility for their actions. They key for how to teach a child to take responsibility for their actions is while when assigning chores to children as an activity or a task, ask him what he wants to do. If he for example wants to clean up his room rather than the lounge, let him do it. He would do his best if he does anything by his choice and it wouldn’t even make him feel that he has been doing work a duty that needs to be performed. Let him be responsible of his chores.

4) Don’t Expect Him To Be Perfect

A Justification for STEM Education. By Amanda Roberts. Learners in the 21st century will be required to exhibit understanding and skills that were unfathomable to us just twenty years ago. Playground equipment that resembles a tropical forest may encourage young children to climb like monkeys or sneak through tunnels like tigers. The equipment can meet regulations and intrigue children into participating. Pulleys, zip lines, climbing walls, and tunnels can be strategically placed on synthetic turf, which promotes useful water drainage to create an aesthetically pleasing playground.

A potential limitation of embedded-teaching for formal learning. In J. Moore & K. Stenning (Eds.), Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society (pp. 194-199). Teachers familiar with the Primer were asked for their all time favorite introductory lessons that would be compiled and rewritten to create a focused, week-long introductory unit. This compilation of introductory lessons and activities is this curriculum: Bioethics 101. CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK. This unit builds sequentially from Lesson 1 to Lesson 5. Concepts are introduced early in the unit and students are given the opportunity to practice those concepts using a variety of techniques. Please refer to the Concept Introduction and Reinforcement section of this Curriculum Overview. Co... This concept is extremely broad. On the one hand, it encompasses what would ordinarily be called justifications and excuses. It might be thought that all bars to successful prosecution deserve to be called defences. But this is doubtful. For the concept of a bar to successful prosecution also includes bars that are not in any sense defences at all, such as the death of a key eyewitness, or the loss or destruction of crucial evidence. Although such happenings might make successful prosecution impossible it would be odd to call them defences. My interest in teaching rational thinking began back in 2004, which might not seem that long ago, but it’s worth remembering that iPhone wasn’t launched until 2007. So, I think it’s reasonable to say that in those 16 years the world has changed much more than most of us recognise. This growth in politicians willing to be economical with the truth has been paralleled by the enormous growth of on-line news outlets willing to turn a blind-eye what in 2004 would have been seen as resignation-worthy behaviour. We thus find ourselves in the paradoxical situation that the growth in freely available information (that in 2004 I would have guessed would have boosted rational thinking), has had little impact and I now believe that the teaching of rational thinking is even more important than it was in 2020.