**Central Idea of the essay. “Can Men Be Rational?”by Bertrand Russel**

Ans:

This essay begins with Russell declaring himself to be a Rationalist. He defines rationality in his opinion 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.

The meaning of irrationality

Irrationality means 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.

The usefulness of psycho analysis

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 a 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.

The need of rationality in human life

Complete rationality is undoubtedly an ideal that cannot be achieved. However, it is possible to attain a fair degree of rationality. All solid progress in the world consists of an increase in rationality, both practical and theoretical. A man is rational in proportion as his intelligence determines and controls his desires. The control of our actions by our intelligence is ultimately of the utmost importance, especially because science has increased the means at our disposal for harming each other. At present all the great forces in the world—education, the press, politics, religion—are on the side of irrationality. It is to intelligence that we must look for the solution of the ills from which our world is suffering. A more sane and balanced view of our relations with our neighbours and with the world is urgently necessary.

Critical comments

Thus in this essay Russell opposes people’s tendency to hold beliefs for which there are no grounds. Blind faith and prejudices belong to this category, especially where ideas about our religion and our country are concerned. Rationalism is a means whereby harmony in social and international relations can be promoted. Nor can any enlightened man of today quarrel with Russell’s thesis. Orthodox religious persons will, however, never allow their beliefs to be subjected to the test of rationalism.

It is common for Bertrand Russell’s admirers to repeat his many quips about other people’s lack of good sense, for example, “most people would die sooner than think – in fact, they do so.” 1 But it is less common for them to assert that this view is one of Russell’s fundamental assumptions about human nature and at the core of his serious moral, social, and political thought. This essay aims to show that this expressed scepticism about human reason is indeed a core assumption of Russell’s public philosophy throughout his life. Even if one accepts this, however, one can still ask: “But is it true?” It will be argued that there is much support for Russell’s view of human reason in recent psychological literature. Examples of how this assumption affects Russell’s social and political thought are indicated.