

# **Essay on Human Reason**

**On the Principle of Identity and Difference**

**Nikola Stojkoski**

**II II**



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*To those who can, without being entranced, plunge into the great abyss*



# Introduction

Dear reader, a certain pattern in the functioning of the human reason has been noticed which shows itself again and again on the examination on each separate appearance of reason. You will be acquainted with it in the pages to follow. On the basis of this 'pattern', an attempt will be made to answer the question how does the reason work and to derive its definition from there.

Reason has indirectly been the subject of study almost through the entire history of philosophy, with various individual appearances of the reason being most often the subject of philosophical investigation. By taking a step back, this work makes reason, in general, its subject of investigation and makes an attempt at comprehending its essence. What is the reason? According to its contemporary definitions, it is "the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgements logically"<sup>1</sup> or simply as "the sum of the intellectual powers."<sup>2</sup> Ayn Rand defines reason as "the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses" (Rand, 1964, 14) with it emphasizing also its cognitive function. The term 'reason' will be understood here in its broadest sense where the sum of the intellectual powers, aside from the cognitive function, also incorporates the power to cognize beauty, as well as the power to act in moral ways. In any case, it cannot be said that these and other existing definitions completely satisfy my philosophical curiosity because they simply inform about what the reason does and not the ways in which it does it.

In Western philosophy, reason is an essential property of man, their *differentia specifica* and privilege. It is the most complex ability a being can have considering its place of residence – the brain, which is the most complex material structure, therefore, the aim of this work – comprehending its essence – is, accordingly, extremely immodest. It is certain that the ultimate knowledge – what reason is in general sense – according to its definition, breezes through each separate appearance of reason. If it

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<sup>1</sup> "reason, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/reason>. Accessed 24 December 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Reason. (n.d.). Retrieved January 15, 2016, from <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reason>>

is present in each separate appearance of reason, then the ultimate knowledge is what is common for all – from the simplest to the most complex – appearances of reason. Searching for the common in countless different appearances of reason would be a remarkably extensive and practically impossible task. However, this task will be simplified for the purpose of this work by using the fact that the vast number of various appearances of reason is categorized under several general areas in philosophy.

I will move inductively, separately analyzing five of the most general forms of reason existence, in order to reach the sought after generalization in the end. The first appearance of reason which will be scrutinized is the cognitive process of objective reality where an attempt will be made to explain the manner in which reason processes material provided by the senses to create the things we know and these are the individual sensations, perceptions, and in the end – the universals. Here a new, alternative theory of knowledge will be offered, inspired by and based on a possible answer to the old metaphysical question – what is a thing. It can be said that all remaining conclusions are based on the theory of knowledge, as the most fundamental of philosophical disciplines, according to many – with greater depth than ontology. The second appearance of reason which will be examined is the thinking, considering the most important operations of the reason known under the common name – abstract logical reasoning. The next subject of analysis will be the nature of truth as a central logical category. Here an answer to the question ‘what is the truth’ will be offered, resulting in a new metaphysics along with possible solutions to the ontological status of truth-bearers and truth-makers. This will be followed by the investigation of reason as an aesthetical subject where the nature and origin of beauty will be analyzed. Based on this analysis surfaces the answer to the dilemma of objectivity and subjectivity in beauty. The appearances of reason as a moral subject are the final topic where I will deal with another old metaphysical question – what is goodness. Based on the possible answer to this question I will attempt to ground morality while offering solutions to the metaethical problems related to the justification and foundation of moral judgments.

Thus considered forms of reason existence are so general that they as a whole contain almost the entire reason activity. As it can be noted, fundamental philosophical disciplines are considered, such as the theory of knowledge, logic, aesthetics, and ethics. What is common for them is that they are all products of the reason and only the principle in which the reason functions is the principle which will unite everything.



Through these analyses, I will try to prove that if we go deep enough, each appearance of reason can be reduced to a same common core. The common core which all these reason forms of existence reduce to is the identification and differentiation. Everything the reason does, all its functions in its immense diversity, is reduced to two basic operations: identification and differentiation. Each activity of the reason, regardless of its kind and level of complexity, is a combination of miniature atom-like identifications and differentiations. Therefore, I will try to defend a bold thesis that reason functions on the principle of identity and difference, i.e. that it is an ability to identify and differentiate. With this, I will try to describe a very strong and clear relationship between ethics, aesthetics, logic, epistemology, and all other appearances of reason out of the scope of these philosophical disciplines which here fuse into one. Dear reader, finally, before you is an attempt of the reason to explain reason, to explain itself, elevating itself to a higher level of self-awareness.

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This book is an original monograph. It is translated from Macedonian by Dragana Velkovska.



# 1.

## Reason as a cognitive subject

The first appearance of reason which will be considered here is cognition. We acquire knowledge of the world through the cognitive process using reason. Cognition is one of the fundamental appearances and functions of reason and the subject of study of epistemology. The most specific definition of epistemology or the theory of knowledge, as it is also called, is the study of knowledge. Knowledge usually means knowledge of propositions, however, I here will delve a little bit deeper and above all will deal with the knowledge of things themselves. I consider knowledge of things more fundamental than knowledge of propositions because things are their constituents and with that their knowledge is a necessary precondition for knowledge of the propositions.

In this chapter, first will be presented the initial ontological – gnoseological assumptions upon which an attempt will be made to build a new solution to the problem of knowledge. Then, the answer to the old metaphysical question – What is a thing, follows. This answer is the foundation of the theory set forth here; the defining of the nature of things will allow us to reflect on the way of their creation because each creation carries with itself information on the manner of its creating. Further, the topic of discussion will be the way of acquiring knowledge of sensations, perceptions, and in the end the universals, according to a unique principle that unites them all. From the presented solution of the problem of knowledge, interesting consequences result which will be analyzed at the end of the chapter and which relate to the problem of the non-being, the relation between reality as we know it and reality in itself, as well as the problem of justifying our beliefs of reality in itself.

### 1.1 It is all in our heads

The entire theory presented here, in the manner of naturalized epistemology, is built on the foundation of a causal sequence confirmed in the natural sciences which relates to the cognitive process. The firmness of this foundation comes from the firmness and reliability of scientific methods. The cognitive function of man is subject to an investigation of

modern psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, and other related scientific disciplines. All of these agree that the cognitive process happens in the following causal sequence: first of all, light, sound, and other external world signals reach our sensory organs. Sensory organs turn light, sound, and the rest of the sensory signals into electric impulses suitable to be processed by reason. These electrical impulses through the nerve pathways arrive in the brain which is the material carrier of reason. After they reach the brain, the processing of the electrical impulses by the reason begins, and as a result, we obtain sensations, perceptions, or content of sensory experience in general.<sup>1</sup> The manner of processing of the electrical impulses, which is one of the greatest mysteries of philosophy and science in general, is the main target of this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

First of all, based on this causal sequence I will arrive at several conclusions which will be useful to set the scene for a new insight into the problem of knowledge. These conclusions relate to the object and subject of cognition, to the sources of knowledge, and the distinction between reality in itself and reality as we know it.

What can be concluded?

1. From the fact that our sensory organs are reached by light, sound, and other signals from the outside world, one can conclude that there is an objective reality existing outside and independently of our reason and will. Contrary to this, there are opposing views in philosophy, such as subjective realism, for example, that reject the existence of objective reality. According to them, there is only reason and its ideas. However absurd, each theoretical attempt to refute the thesis that external reality does not exist, it has the counterargument that each theoretical attempt presupposes the existence of reason (subject) that theorizes, and with that the possibility of the existence of the Descartes' demon that deceives us. Consciousness can never be transcended. Kant calls this vicious cycle, the inability to prove the existence of the external world, 'Scandal of Philosophy.'<sup>3</sup> We are therefore left with the choice to accept this initial ontological principle as a self-evident and intuitive truth, merely as a belief, with no proof.

2. The sensory organs are the source of knowledge of the outside world. They provide the sensory material from which the reason creates

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<sup>1</sup> See *Principles of Neural Science* (Kandel, et al., 2000, chap. 21, p. [411-412]) or especially the conclusion, page 428.

<sup>2</sup> With these, relatively new, scientific notions, we have a certain advantage compared to classical philosophers which investigated the problem of knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> See Preface to Second Edition, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxl, p.121.

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