

**Stephen Stich:  
Could Man Be An Irrational Animal?**

[1] **Traditional claim: Man is a Rational Animal (Aristotle).**

[2] **Humans are irrational.**

\_\_\_ Bacon, Hume, Freud, etc.

\_\_\_ Psychologists

[3] **Philosophical defense of human rationality**

\_\_\_\_\_ Dennett; Davidson

**Q: Can irrationality be experimentally demonstrated by psychologists?**

1. Selection task (p. 116)
2. *prima facie* deviation from normative standards of inference
3. belief perseverance

**§ Dennett's Claim:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Human beings *must* be rational. Belief ascription presupposes full rationality.

**Dennett's First Argument from Intentional System**

1. When we attribute beliefs, desires, and other states of common sense psychology to a person, or for that matter to an animal or an artifact, we are assuming or presupposing that the person or object can be treated as an *intentional system*.
2. An intentional system is one which is rational through and through; its beliefs are those it ought to have, given its perceptual capacities, its epistemic needs, and its biography.... Its desires are those it ought to have, given its biological needs and the most practicable means of satisfying them.... And its behavior will consist of those acts that it *would be rational* for an agent with those beliefs and desires to perform. [beliefs + desires → action]
3. If rationality is absent, we cannot coherently ascribe beliefs at all.
4. Therefore, no experiment could demonstrate that people systematically invoke invalid or irrational inferential strategies.

**Dennett's Second Argument from Natural Selection**

1. Natural selection will favor (i.e. select for) inferential strategies which generally yield true beliefs. This is because, in general, true beliefs are more

**adaptive than false ones; they enable the organism to cope better with its environment. After an extended period of natural selection we can expect that the inferential strategies an organism uses will be ones which generally yield true beliefs.**

- 2. An inferential strategy which generally yields true beliefs is a rational inferential strategy.**
- 3. Therefore, natural selection will favor rational inferential strategies.**

**§ Cohen's Claim:**

**— There are different individualized intuitions about reasoning.**

**— A normative theory of reasoning is simply an idealized theory built on the data of people's individualized intuitions about reasoning.**

**Q: Are there multiple norms of rationality in any given society?**

**Q: Is rationality based on majority rule? Or:**

**Q: Is rationality simply individualistically relative?**

**§ Stich's Claims**

- 1. Normative rationality is not innate, but acquired.**
- 2. Not all mature, normal, adults are equally competent in their judgments on standards of rationality.**
- 3. Experts in inferences can decide whether lay people are committing reasoning failures.**
- 4. Cognitive competence can be improved through education and practice.**