

Essay unpacking kit A

When should we discard explanations that are intuitively appealing?

This kit contains three candidate essays. Two of the essays are accompanied by examiner's comments and marks, while the third is presented here for you to read and mark yourself.

The examiner comments and marks for the third essay are available in Appendix 1.

Unpacking

Identify key words and phrases

- discard, explanation, intuitively, appealing

TOK contestable concepts

- explanation

What do you understand by explanation? Is it a clarification or is it more "solid" than that? Does it reveal causes to the knowledge situation? Does it provide support for the knowledge situation? What sort of evidence does it require to support the knowledge it explains?

Compare explanations that rely on different WOKs. Are they equally reliable/valid?

- intuitively

What do you understand by "intuitively"? Intuition is a WOK but seems to require other WOKs in order to facilitate knowledge since, like reason, it can predict; like language, it communicates and, like emotion, it involves feeling. What is the nature of this WOK? How much will you decide that intuition is an entirely discrete WOK? How can it be all of a feeling, an instinct, an emotion, a kind of unconscious perception, a strange rational connection and even—according to some—a paranormal process like telepathy?

Is intuition a particularly personal WOK?

Does the WOK integrate aspects of other WOKs in a particular way in order to acquire knowledge in a unique manner?

Ambiguous words or phrases

- Appealing

What is meant by "appealing"? Is it "attractive", "interesting"? In what way does it appeal? Is an intuitive appeal different from other types of appeal?

To whom does an explanation intuitively appeal? Is the appeal personal, or must it be shared?

Command term

- When... discard

You are being asked to evaluate the circumstances under which intuitively appealing explanations could be rejected and when they might be accepted.

Assumptions in the title

- that there are criteria upon which explanations can be chosen or discarded
- that there are conditions in which an explanation appeals to intuition
- (possibly) that intuitively appealing explanations may not be as effective as other types (of explanation)
- that appealing intuitively could be more or less successful depending upon particular identifiable factors.

The above propositions need to be considered in order to decide the exact nature of the KQs that are being assumed or implied by the title.

Rephrase the title to check your understanding

Here is one possibility:

Under what circumstances should we abandon an account of why something happens that just seems "right" to us?

This is just one way the title could be rewritten. This interprets "when" as asking for a list of conditions for deciding to abandon an explanation, sees "explanation" as stating why an event occurs, and interprets "intuition" as an immediate judgment of correctness. Your unpacking of the terms may be different from this.

Identify the knowledge questions

The title very clearly raises the KQ "when should we discard intuitively appealing explanations?" However, to address this question you are very likely to encounter others, such as:

What exactly is the nature of an intuitively appealing explanation?

How, if at all, does intuition as a WOK depend on other WOKs such as emotion or faith?

When (under what circumstances) are intuitively appealing explanations either reliable or unreliable?

Is an intuitive explanation more subjective than other types of explanation?

Can an intuitive explanation function as shared knowledge or is it essentially personal knowledge?

Do intuitive explanations require confirmation by other WOKs such as reason?

Does whether an intuitively appealing explanation can be regarded as valid depend upon the accepted methodologies of the AOK?

In what ways, other than appeal to intuition, can explanations be appealing?

Are some AOKs more productive of explanations that are intuitively appealing?

To what extent do intuitively appealing explanations depend on culture or perspective, and how do these factors influence what can or should be discarded?

What roles do other WOKs play in the support of explanations?

Are intuitively appealing explanations more likely to be true than explanations supported by other means?

Brainstorming

Consider AOKs and WOKs

This question leaves it open to you which AOKs and other WOKs you will consider.

Does the nature of explanation differ between different AOKs? Choose two or three AOKs to discuss which have contrasting styles of explanation.

In what ways do intuitively appealing explanations interact with (support, oppose) other types of explanation? Might intuition simply be one aspect of an explanation? Is confirmation of the explanation by another WOK required in the case of intuitive explanations or does this depend upon the AOK concerned?

For each of your AOKs, jot down ideas about what makes an explanation found via the WOK intuition within that AOK appealing. Now jot down other factors that make explanations appealing, so you can compare and contrast.

Who uses intuitively appealing explanations and in what situations or contexts?

Make claims and develop perspectives using authentic examples to illustrate and support your discussion.

Provide your own examples of different kinds of explanation within the AOKs you have chosen. Consider whether they relate to different kinds of knowledge.

Intuition is clearly related to how we know things, but how will you clarify in what way it can form part of the appeal of an explanation?

Try to find examples based upon your own experience or that of others. One way to compare different AOKs is by considering professions that look at similar occurrences through different AOKs—a firefighter with a combustion chemist, or a horse trainer with an artist who paints horses or a novelist of a book with a library that stocks the novel.

Does it matter whether the knowledge involved in the example seems more personal or more shared? Can an explanation that intuition provides on a personal basis become a publicly shared explanation? Does this need the support of other WOKs? How dependent is this on the AOK concerned?

Analyse and argue

Look at the material you have gathered and develop a line of argument through it. Will you claim that intuition is never, on its own, sufficient to establish an explanation, no matter how appealing? Does this mean we should discard it, or will you say we should take further steps—if so, what? Consider why your reader ought to accept the points in your argument, and include and analyse this support. Consider what might be said against your argument and deal with these counter-claims.

You may find an example of a situation where it could be claimed that intuition is a WOK used by a firefighter or a horse trainer and thus reflected in explanations of their work. However, you may later wish to question this with a counter-claim that the firefighter or a horse trainer is using another WOK rather than intuition.

Can explanations that are intuitive also be explained by other WOKs?

A counter-claim can open the way for in-depth analysis, thus you could follow your counterargument with analysis of the possible relationship or dichotomy between intuitive explanations and other kinds of explanation.

Evaluate and conclude

Is intuitive appeal a possible aspect of explanations in every AOK?

Are intuitive explanations more relevant to certain AOKs than others?

Are intuitively appealing explanations unreliable? Why?

Does the appeal of intuitive explanations depend upon whether they involve knowledge that is more personal than shared?

Can different types of explanation co-exist depending upon whether they are personal or shared knowledge, or depending upon the AOK concerned?