Rationality

Lecture 4

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Rationality

Rationality is commonly taken to designate a capacity or set of capacities: an agent is rational to the degree that he or she possesses and manifests the relevant range of capacities this involves.

▶ the capacity to recognize or make correct judgements about reasons and other normative facts or truths
▶ the capacity to reason well — to engage in valid forms of reasoning, to have one's reflections and deliberations proceed in ways that satisfy various formal constraints.
Rationality is commonly taken to designate a capacity or set of capacities:

- **Rationality** is the capacity to recognize or make correct judgements about reasons and other normative facts or truths.
- It also includes the capacity to reason well — to engage in valid forms of reasoning, to have one's reflections and deliberations proceed in ways that satisfy various formal constraints.
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- the capacity to reason well — to engage in valid forms of reasoning, to have one’s reflections and deliberations proceed in ways that satisfy various formal constraints.
Normative Concepts

Normative repertoire:

- ought, should, must, duty, obligation,
- right, wrong;
- claims about what is justified, warranted, merited, reasonable, permissible;
- evaluative concepts: good, bad, better, and worse.

We will focus on two exemplarily normative concepts: ought and a reason.

Normative claim: "You ought to go help her."

Descriptive claim: "You are helping her."
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Descriptive claim: “You are helping her.”
Ought

Oughts specify *requirements on agents*. 
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Non-normative uses of ‘ought’:

- It ought to rain today
- He ought to be on time
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A Reason

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“A reason for you to perform something is a consideration that favours you performing it; a reason to believe some fact is a consideration that counts in favour of believing it;
A Reason

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“A reason for you to perform something is a consideration that favours you performing it; a reason to believe some fact is a consideration that counts in favour of believing it; there being a reason to feel a certain way indicates that there is some feature of one’s situations that favours or merits so feeling.”
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Reason can be used non-normatively

1. The reason the care broke down was my heavy clutch work
2. he rejected her application for the reason that she is a redhead
3. the reason he believes the moon is made of cheese is that he is eccentric
Reasons and Oughts

Reasons in this sense are *pro tanto*: “as far as it goes”

Oughts entail reason but not the other way around.

That you ought to perform a particular action entails that you have reason to do so; nonetheless there may also be reasons not to perform the action, as well as reasons to perform other other actions you ought not to perform.

A reason can be only one reason amongst may others
‘A has a reason to $\varphi$’
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A relation between some agent $A$ and some act $\varphi$ (e.g. an action, belief or feeling).
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“the fact that $p$ provides $A$ with a reason to $\varphi$”

- the fact that it is raining provides $A$ with a reason to take her umbrella
- the fact that drinking a cold beer would be pleasant is a reason to drink it
- the fact that she paints with such subtlety is a reason to admire her.
‘A has a reason to $\varphi$’

the set \( \{p_1, \ldots, p_n\} \) contributes to there being a reason for A to $\varphi$
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That you would enjoy climbing the mountain, together with the fact that the rock is in good condition today, that it will rain tomorrow and that your equipment has just arrived all contribute to you having a reason to go climbing today.
‘A has a reason to \( \varphi \)’

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Many issues:

- Shouldn’t ‘double count’ reasons by citing different facts as providing different reasons when they do not
‘A has a reason to φ’

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Many issues:

▶ Shouldn’t ‘double count’ reasons by citing different facts as providing different reasons when they do not

▶ Not all fact contributing to a given reason-relation contribute in the same manner (pre-conditions, intensifiers)
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Many issues:

- Shouldn’t ‘double count’ reasons by citing different facts as providing different reasons when they do not.
- Not all fact contributing to a given reason-relation contribute in the same manner (pre-conditions, intensifiers).
- Evaluative facts may/also also be reason-giving: that she is an excellent painter is a reason to admire her.
A rational agent is a *reason sensitive* agent.
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A has reason to $\varphi$ iff, were A to deliberate rationally on the relevant (non-normative) facts, A would judge that he has a reason to $\varphi$. 
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A has reason to $\varphi$ iff, were A to deliberate rationally on the relevant (non-normative) facts, A would judge that he has a reason to $\varphi$.

1. What is the relation between correct normative conclusions and the (non-normative) facts, knowledge of which is relevant to arriving at such conclusions?
A rational agent is a *reason sensitive* agent.

A has reason to \( \varphi \) iff, were A to deliberate rationally on the relevant (non-normative) facts, A would judge that he has a reason to \( \varphi \).

1. What is the relation between correct normative conclusions and the (non-normative) facts, knowledge of which is relevant to arriving at such conclusions?

2. What is the nature of this rational deliberation?
A has a reason to $\varphi$

There is a reason for A to $\varphi$: 
A has a reason to $\phi$

There is a reason for A to $\phi$:

1. **Internal**: A has some motive which will be served furthered by his $\phi$-ing. and if this turns out not to be so the sentence is false

2. **External**: there is no such condition, and the reason-sentence will not be falsified by the absence of an appropriate motive.
The Internalist Position

A has a reason to $\varphi$
A has a reason to $\varphi$ only if there is a sound deliberative route from A's subjective motivational set ($S$) to A's $\varphi$-ing.
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A has a reason to \( \varphi \) only if there is a *sound deliberative route* from A’s subjective motivational set \( (S) \) to A’s \( \varphi \)-ing.

not just that A has a reason to \( \varphi \) but that she has more reason to do that than to do anything else.
Does every element of $S$ give rise to an internal reason?
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Elements of $S$ may be based on false beliefs:

“The agent believes that this stuff is gin, when in fact it is petrol. He wants a gin and tonic. Has he reason, or a reason, to mix this stuff with tonic and drink it?”

1. He has no reason to drink it, though he thinks he does
2. If he does drink it, we do have a “reason-for” explanation of this action.
On the objective analysis, because reason are determined by the facts —
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Is this plausible?
The internal reason connection is not concerned *only* with explanation but also with the agent’s rationality.

A member of $S$, $D$, will not give A a reason for $\varphi$-ing if either the existence of $D$ is dependent on false belief, or A’s belief in the relevance of $\varphi$-ing to the satisfaction of $D$ is false.
A may falsely believe an internal reason statement about himself

A may not know some true internal reason statement about himself

An agent may have a reason to $\varphi$, though he does not know it.

But we should notice that an unknown element in $S$, $D$, will provide a reason for A to $\varphi$ only if $\varphi$-ing is rationally related to $D$. 
Internal reason statements can be discovered through deliberation

A has reason to $\varphi$ does not mean the action which A has overall, all-in, reason to $\varphi$. He can have reason to do a lot of things which he has other, stronger reasons not to do.
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We should not then think of $S$ as statically given. The processes of deliberation can have all sorts of effect on $S$, and this is a fact that the theory of internal reasons should be very happy to accommodate.
Internal Reasons as Needs

A has a reason to pursue $X$, just on the ground that he needs $X$.

If an agent really is uninterested in pursuing what he needs; and this is not the product of false belief; and he could not reach any such motive from motives by deliberation; then we do have to say that, in the internal sense, he indeed has no reason to pursue these things.
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When we say a person has reason to take medicine which he needs, although he consistently and persuasively denies any interest in preserving health, we may well still be speaking in the internal sense, with the thought that really at some level he *must* want to be well.
External Reasons

Owen has no desire to join the army. But his family urge on him the necessity and importance of joining the army, since all his male ancestors were soldiers and family pride requires him to do the same.
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His family might express themselves by saying *there was a reason for Owen to join the army* despite knowing that nothing in Owen’s *S* would lead to him join the army.
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*A’s believing an external reason statement about himself* can explain the action.

Owen might come to join the army because (now) he believes that there is a reason for him to do *so that his family has a tradition of military honour*. 
Does believing that a particular consideration is a reason to act in a particular way provide, or indeed constitute, a motivation to act?

this agent, with this belief appears to be one about whom, now, an internal reason statement could truly be made.
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So, by coming to believe an external reason statement, Owen must acquire a new motivation. How can that be?

Hume: “reason is the slave of the passions”
The external reason theorist must conceive, *in a special way*, the connection between acquiring a motivation and coming to believe the reason statement.

Owen might be so persuaded by his family’s rhetoric that he acquired both the motivation and the belief.
The external reason theorist must conceive, *in a special way*, the connection between acquiring a motivation and coming to believe the reason statement.

Owen might be so persuaded by his family’s rhetoric that he acquired both the motivation and the belief. BUT “the agent should acquire the motivation *because* he comes to believe the reason statement.”
if the agent rationally deliberated then, whatever motivations he originally had, he would come to be motivated to $\varphi$.

But, by hypothesis, there is no motivation for the agent to deliberate from, to reach this new motivation.

*What* is it that one comes to believe when he comes to believe that there is reason for him to $\varphi$, if it is not the proposition, or something that entails the proposition, that if he deliberated rationally, he would be motivated to act appropriately?
Practical reasoning is a heuristic process, and an imaginative one, and there are no fixed boundaries on the continuum from rational thought to inspiration and conversion.
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There are many things a speaker may say to one who is not disposed to $\varphi$ (inconsiderate, cruel, selfish, imprudent, etc.)....but the external reason theorist must say that the agent is *irrational*. 
“Full-Information Analysis”

There is reason for $A$ to do $\varphi$ is revealed by what $A$ would judge there is reason for him to do were he to deliberate rationally.
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There is reason for $A$ to do $\varphi$ is revealed by what $A$ would judge there is reason for him to do were he to deliberate rationally \textit{in light of all the relevant non-normative facts}
“Full-Information Analysis”

There is reason for $A$ to do $\varphi$ is revealed by what $A$ would judge there is reason for him to do were he to deliberate rationally in light of all the relevant non-normative facts

1. I believe that she has ingested poison and needs urgent medical attention; I therefore judge I have a reason to phone for an ambulance. However, she is fine and needs no such assistance.
“Full-Information Analysis”

There is reason for $A$ to do $\varphi$ is revealed by what $A$ would judge there is reason for him to do were he to deliberate rationally *in light of all the relevant non-normative facts*

1. I believe that she has ingested poison and needs urgent medical attention; I therefore judge I have a reason to phone for an ambulance. However, she is fine and needs no such assistance.

2. I am lost in the forest and have the quiet reasonable aim of escaping before darkness encloses.
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There is reason for $A$ to do $\varphi$ is revealed by what $A$ would judge there is reason for him to do were he to deliberate rationally in light of all the relevant non-normative facts

1. I believe that she has ingested poison and needs urgent medical attention; I therefore judge I have a reason to phone for an ambulance. However, she is fine and needs no such assistance.

2. I am lost in the forest and have the quiet reasonable aim of escaping before darkness encloses.

Externalist: there is no reason for me to phone for an ambulance and you should take the objectively quickest way out of the forest even though you don’t know what it is.
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- the capacity to recognize or make correct judgements about reasons and other normative facts or truths

- the capacity to reason well — to engage in valid forms of reasoning, to have one’s reflections and deliberations proceed in ways that satisfy various formal constraints.
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We use the term ‘rational’ to signal something about the connections between an agent’s various attitudes (both normative and non-normative)

We asses as rational and irrational an agent’s *occurrent* mental states: “it is irrational to believe both that $p$ and that $\neg p$.”

Rationality also involves the capacity that takes an agent from one mental state to another (either explicitly or implicitly through reasoning).
Instrumental Reasoning

1. I ought to drink a beer
2. The necessary means for drinking a beer is going to a bar
3. I ought to go to the bar.

belief

1. I shall drink a bear
2. the necessary means to my drinking a beer is that I go to the bar
3. I shall go to the bar

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I may be *rationally required* to be in the relevant attitudinal state of mind (the content of which is expressed in the conclusion) *if* I am in the states of mind whose contents are specified by the premises.
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How are we to understand the rational relation?
Narrow vs. Wide Scope

Narrow scope: If I intend and end $E$ and believe that $M$ is the necessary means to $E$, then I am rationally required to intend $M$.

Wide scope: I am rationally required to (intend $M$, if I intend $E$ and I believe that $M$ is the necessary means to $E$)
Suppose that you believe $p$
Bootstrapping: self-justifying beliefs

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‘If you believe that $p$, then you are rationally required to believe what $p$ entails’
Bootstrapping: self-justifying beliefs

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rationality principles give you conclusive reasons
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rationality principles give you *conclusive reasons*

\( p \) entails \( p \)
Bootstrapping: self-justifying beliefs

Suppose that you believe $p$

‘If you believe that $p$, then you are rationally required to believe what $p$ entails’

rationality principles give you conclusive reasons

$p$ entails $p$

You have conclusive reason to believe that $p$. 
I may be *rationally required* to be in the relevant attitudinal state of mind (the content of which is expressed in the conclusion) *if* I am in the states of mind whose contents are specified by the premises.

How are we to understand the rational relation? *We will return to this throughout the semester.*
We use the term ‘rational’ to signal something about the connections between an agent’s various attitudes (both normative and non-normative): eg. belief states
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We assess as rational and irrational an agent’s*occurrence of mental* states

“it is irrational to believe both that $p$ and that $\neg p$.”

Rationality also involves the capacity that takes an agent from one mental state to another (either explicitly or implicitly through reasoning):

“Move from believing $\{p, q\}$ to believing $\{p, q, p \land q\}$”
Preface Paradox


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Given each one of these, he believes that it is true (for each \( i \), \( B_A(s_i) \))
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$B_A(\neg(s_1 \land s_2 \land \cdots \land s_n))$

But $\{s_1, \ldots, s_n, \neg(s_1 \land \cdots \land s_n)\}$ is logically inconsistent.
Preface Paradox

A philosopher who asserts “all of my present philosophical positions are correct” would be regarded as rash and over-confident.

A philosopher who asserts “at least some of my present philosophical beliefs will turn out to be incorrect” is simply being sensible and honest.
Preface Paradox

1. each belief from the set \( \{s_1, \ldots, s_n, s_{n+1}\} \) is rational
2. the set \( \{s_1, \ldots, s_n, s_{n+1}\} \) of beliefs is rational.

1. does not necessarily imply 2.
Lottery Paradox


Consider a fair lottery with 1,000,000 tickets and one prize. The probability that a given ticket will win is $0.000001$ and the probability that it will not win is $0.999999$. "Surely if a sheer probability is ever sufficient to warrant the acceptance of a hypothesis, this is a case." For each lottery ticket $t_i (i = 1, \ldots, 1,000,000)$, the agent believes that $t_i$ will lose $B_A (\neg 't_i will win').
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“Surely if a sheer probability is ever sufficient to warrant the acceptance of a hypothesis, this is a case”

For each lottery ticket $t_i$ ($i = 1, \ldots, 1000000$), the agent believes that $t_i$ will lose $B_A(\neg \text{‘}t_i \text{ will win’})$
Lottery Paradox

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So, the conjunction $\bigwedge_{i=1}^{1000000} 't_i \text{ will not win}'$ should be accepted. That is, the agent should rationally accept that no lottery ticket will win.
Lottery Paradox

A rule of acceptance: If $S$ and $T$ are acceptable statements, their conjunction is also acceptable.

So, the conjunction $\bigwedge_{i=1}^{1000000} \neg t_i$ ‘$t_i$ will not win’ should be accepted. That is, the agent should rationally accept that no lottery ticket will win.

But, this is a fair lottery, so at least one ticket is guaranteed to win!
Kyburg: The following are inconsistent,

1. It is rational to accept a proposition that is very likely true,
2. It is not rational to accept a propositional that you are aware is inconsistent
3. It is rational to accept a proposition $P$ and it is rational to accept another proposition $P'$ then it is rational to accept $P \land P'$

Makinson:
“the author of the book is being rational even though inconsistent. More than this: he is being rational even though eh believes each of a certain collection of statements, which he knows are logically incompatible....this appears to present a living and everyday example of a situation which philosophers have commonly dismissed as absurd; that it is sometimes rational to hold incompatible beliefs.”
Next\(^2\) Week: Subjective Probabilities