

Rationality

Lecture 3

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We have distinguished between **practical** and **theoretical** reasoning:

- ▶ Practical reasoning is reasoning directed toward action: figuring out what to *do*
- ▶ Theoretical reasoning is reasoning directed towards an informational state: figuring out how the facts stand.

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Practical Reasoning

Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do.

1. How do we make sense of the fact that deliberative reflection can directly give rise to action?
2. Is practical reasoning genuinely a form of reasoning?
3. Which norms for the assessment of action are binding on us as agents? What about *moral norms*?
4. How should we understand what it means that we 'ought' to have some attitude: to believe, desire, intend, or feel something?

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Practical reasoning takes a distinctively normative question as its starting point: give a set of alternatives for action, none of which has yet been performed, what should/ought one do, what is the best thing to do? It is not concerned with matters of fact and their explanation, but with matters of value. This is a distinctively first-personal point of view.

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Expressionism: evaluative and normative claims of these kinds to not represent genuine cognitive achievements, judgements that are literally capable of being true or false....they give expression to desires, sentiment, plans and other pro-attitudes.

Reasoning

“Reasoning is not the conscious rehearsal of argument; it is a process in which antecedent beliefs and intentions are minimally modified, by addition and subtraction, in the interests of explanatory coherence and the satisfaction of intrinsic desires.”
(G. Harman, pg. 56, “Practical Reasoning”)

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the contrast between practical and theoretical reason is essentially a contrast between two sets of norms: those for the regulation of action and those for the regulation of belief.

theoretical reasoning leads to modifications of our beliefs, whereas practical reasoning leads to modifications of our *intentions*.

Theoretical and Practical Reasoning

“Practical reasoning is, like theoretical reasoning, holistic. In practical reasoning, one seeks a conception of one’s life that is both explanatorily coherent and coherent with one’s desires. One can increase coherence by adopting means to already existing ends—but that is not the only way. One can also increase coherence by adopting new ends, either because the adoptions of those ends will help get one something previously wanted, or because adopting those ends gives a significance to things one has already done or plans to do.”

(G. Harman, “Practical Reasoning”)

Next week: rational requirements