

Rationality

Lecture 4

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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.

Normative Concepts

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Normative claim: “You ought to go help her.”

Descriptive claim: “You are helping her.”

Ought

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Non-normative uses of 'ought':

- ▶ It ought to rain today
- ▶ He ought to be on time

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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 many others

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“the fact that p provides A with a reason to φ ”

- ▶ 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.

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- ▶ 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.

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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?

B. Williams. *Internal and External Reasons*. 1981.

A has a reason to φ

There is a reason for A to φ :

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1. *Internal*: A has some motive which will be served furthered by his φ -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.

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not just that A has a reason to φ but that she has more reason to do that than to do anything else.

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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.

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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 φ -ing if either the existence of D is dependent on false belief, or A 's belief in the relevance of φ -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 φ , though he does not know it.

But we should notice that an unknown element in S , D , will provide a reason for A to φ only if φ -ing is rationally related to D .

Internal reason statements can be discovered through deliberation

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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

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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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Hume: “reason is the slave of the passions”

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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 φ .

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 φ , if it is not the proposition, or something that entails the proposition, that if he deliberated rationally, he would be motivated to act appropriately?

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There are many things a speaker may say to one who is not disposed to φ (inconsiderate, cruel, selfish, imprudent, etc.)....but the external reason theorist must say that the agent is *irrational*.

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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
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We assess 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

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Instrumental Reasoning

1. I ought to drink a beer
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3. I ought to go to the bar. *belief*

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

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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)

Bootstrapping: self-justifying beliefs

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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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"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 $\{p, q, p \wedge q\}$ "

Preface Paradox

D. Makinson. *The Paradox of the Preface*. *Analysis*, 25, 205 - 207, 1965.

I. Douven and J. Uffink. *The Preface Paradox Revisited*. *Erkenntnis*, 59, 389 - 420, 2003.

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$B_A(\neg(s_1 \wedge s_2 \wedge \dots \wedge s_n))$

But $\{s_1, \dots, s_n, \neg(s_1 \wedge \dots \wedge s_n)\}$ 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 $\{s_1, \dots, s_n, s_{n+1}\}$ is rational
2. the set $\{s_1, \dots, s_n, s_{n+1}\}$ of beliefs is rational.

1. does not necessarily imply 2.

Lottery Paradox

H. Kyburg. *Probability and the Logic of Rational Belief*. Wesleyan University Press, 1961.

I. Douven and T. Williamson. *Generalizing the Lottery Paradox*. *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science*, 57, 755 - 779, 2006.

G. Wheeler. *A Review of the Lottery Paradox*. *Probability and Inference: Essays in honor of Henry E. Kyburg, Jr.*, College Publications, 2007.

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The probability that a given ticket will win is 0.000001 (1/1,000,000) 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 ($i = 1, \dots, 1000000$), the agent believes that t_i will lose $B_A(\neg 't_i$ will win')

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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 $P \wedge P'$

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.”

Next² Week: Subjective Probabilities