

## Philosophy 290-2, August 28, 2006

### Overview:

*Two kinds of normative demand:*

1. Some fact about your situation is a *substantive reason* for you to have or lack some attitude.
2. The fact that you have or lack some attitude makes it *structurally irrational* of you to have or lack some other attitude.

*Requirements of structural rationality:*

1. Requirements of formal coherence:

- i. Means-End: You are rationally required to intend to M, if you intend to E, and believe that you E only if you M.
- ii. Simple Intention Consistency: You are rationally required not to intend to Y, if you intend to X and believe that if you X, then you will not Y.
- iii. Simple Belief Consistency: You are rationally required not to believe that not p, if you believe that p.
- iv. Simple Belief Closure: Where q is a logical consequence of p, you are rationally required to believe that q, if you believe that p.
- v. Probabilistic coherence: For all p, you are rationally required
  - (i) to have degree of belief in p, or  $D(p) \geq 0$ ,
  - (ii) to have  $D(p)=1$  if p is a logically true, and
  - (iii) to have  $D(p)$ ,  $D(q)$ , and  $D(p \text{ or } q)$  such that  $D(p) + D(q) = D(p \text{ or } q)$ , if not q is a logical consequence of p.

2. Requirement of normative coherence:

Believed Reason: You are rationally required to have A, if you believe that you have conclusive reason for A, and you are rationally required not to have A, if you believe that you lack sufficient reason for A.

3. Requirements of stability:

In belief: You are rationally required to believe at  $t^+$  that p, if you believe at some t earlier than  $t^+$  that p, and if you are exposed to no new information between t and  $t^+$ .

Are all of these rational requirements valid? Do they need to be qualified in certain ways? Are some derived from others? Does anything explain why these are the requirements of rationality? Why must beliefs and intentions be consistent, but not imaginings and desires, for example?

*Rationalism*

Some philosophers view these requirements of rationality as the core or foundation of what we ought to believe and do. Either there are no substantive reasons, or these substantive reasons can be constructed from requirements of rationality. Has many sources of appeal. Foremost, perhaps: that the requirements of rationality seem uncontroversial. Are the attractions of this rationalist view genuine? Can it succeed?

*The problem of significance:*

If rational requirements are genuine requirements, then they are either normative demands, or evaluative standards. What, if anything, explains the normative or evaluative significance of rational requirements?

*The problem of conflict:*

In certain cases, rationality seems to require us to defy reason: to oppose what the evidence supports, or what it would be valuable for us to pursue. This may happen in the paradox of the preface, as well as in similar paradoxes having to do with other attitudes, such as intention and degrees of belief. Are there such conflicts? Are they problematic? Can they be avoided?

### **Clarifying our topic:**

*Attitudes as reasons*

Consider:

1. Because I have some paranoid belief, I ought to believe that my medicine is wearing off.
2. Because I have a hunch that this is the right move in this game of chess, I ought to believe that it is indeed the right move.
3. Because I have decided not to board the plane, I ought not to plan on arriving at the destination.

Is the “ought” here of reasons or rationality?

“Attitude-given” reasons: The fact that one has the attitude constitutes a reason in virtue of a more basic principle that makes no necessary reference to attitudes.

1. The presence of some effect a reason to believe the likely cause obtains.
2. That some reliable authority believes that p is a reason to believe that p.
3. If some impediment prevents one’s intention to E from bringing about one’s E-ing then it is not a reason to intend to E that doing so will bring about one’s E-ing.

Some other marks of “attitude-given” reasons:

- a. That the attitude is only *contingently* a reason. (A sufficient, but not necessary, condition. For example, that I believe something is a reason to believe that someone believes something, because the presence of an instance is a reason to believe the corresponding existential generalization.)
- b. That the attitudes can be reasons for *someone else* in much the same ways. My paranoid belief is a reason for my doctor to believe that my medicine is wearing off. My not intending to board the plane is a reason for my wife not to plan on arriving at the destination with me. By contrast, my attitudes cannot rationally require anything of anyone else.

*Relations between perception and belief:*

If there are nondoxastic perceptual states, and if they stand in normative relations to beliefs, then are these relations of reason or of rationality?

While such perceptual states are psychological and possibly have propositional contents, they are not attitudes for which one can properly be asked for reasons. They are part of one's "situation," not in the sense of what lies outside of one's psychology, but instead in the sense of what lies outside of one's sphere of normative responsibility. In this respect, the relations between such states and beliefs are quite unlike the rational requirements that we listed earlier.

*Simplicity, generality, abstractness:*

A possible further qualification: rationality requires only suitably simple, general, or abstract relations among attitudes. Otherwise, rational requirements may no longer be, even superficially, uncontroversial, and rationalism may lose its appeal.

*A possibly different concern about "availability":*

Some philosophers write about "subjective rationality" with an interest in the "available" ought.

*Available ought:* Depends only on what is "available" to one. Arguably, this is what one can be fairly, or reasonably, be expected to comply with.

*Absolute ought:* Depends on what is actually the case, whether or not it is "available" to one.

The available ought, they suggest, is a function solely of the contents of one's present attitudes. What is "available" to one is all and/or only the contents of one's present attitudes. (E.g., Ralph Wedgwood, "Choosing Rationally and Choosing Correctly")

This seems to me a different topic. First, the available ought need not be understood as a function of the relations among one's attitudes, in abstraction from the reasons for them.

- (i) The available ought might be a function of *reasons that the subject is aware of*.
- (ii) The available ought might be a function of *reasons that meet some other condition of availability*, besides awareness. (It might be, for example, that the subject could easily become aware of them, if, say, he paid attention.)
- (iii) In the case of reasons for action, the available ought might be a function not of available reasons for action, but instead about *reasons for belief about what it would be worthwhile to do*.
- (iv) The available ought might be a function of the nonnormative contents of one's present attitudes plus *facts about what is a reason for what*. Thus, if one falsely believes that p, and if p's being the case would be a conclusive reason to X, then one ought, in the available sense, to X.

Second, some might insist both that the available ought is a function of the contents of one's present attitudes and that the available ought is somehow the "true" or "primary" ought. Their concern, presumably, would be to ensure that oughts are somehow fair, or reasonable. However, the rationalist project that I have had in mind is driven by different concerns, about justifying normative principles and reconciling them with the natural world. Its representatives are not generally committed one way or the other to the thesis that oughts must be available. Some focus on the absolute ought, aiming to construct it out of the combination of rational requirements with relevant nonnormative facts, whether or not these are available to the agent.