The Essential Role of Reasons in Reasoning

Many believe that there a tight connection between the normative reasons we have to believe or do things, and the mental activity of reasoning through which we form beliefs and intentions. Some understand normative reasons in terms of correct reasoning: According to the *Reasoning View* of normative reasons, what makes a fact a normative reason to φ is its (potential) role as a premise in correct reasoning (Way 2015; Gregory 2016; Setiya 2014). Others reverse the order of explanation and understand reasoning in terms of normative reasons. Put roughly, the *Reasons View* states that to reason correctly is to respond correctly to reasons.

We cannot accept both these view on the pain of circularity. In this paper, I defend the latter. I aim to establish a particular link between the normative and the mental within a realist framework. My approach offers an account of what the commonly assumed human capacity to respond to normative reasons may consists in. It further allows scrutinizing some forms of normative constructivism (Southwood forthcoming), as well as hybrid views about the grounds of normative truths (Chang 2013). I conclude that, while we can detach normative reasons from rationality (Broome 2007, 2013; Worsnip 2015; Fink 2014), we cannot separate theories of reasons and theories of reasoning. The project contributes to the increasingly striven for endeavour of unifying practical and theoretical normativity, for it explains practical and theoretical reasoning in an analogous manner.

The *Reasons View* is, first and foremost, a theory of reasoning. Reasoning here refers to the mental *activity* through which we form, revise or discard attitudes, specifically beliefs and intention. It is something you *do*, rather than a mere unconscious or sub-personal process (Grice 2001, Broome 2013, Boghossian 2014).

Various versions of the *Reasons View* have been assumed or defended (Piller 2001; Raz 2015; Dancy 2014, Kauppinnen forthcoming), but none is detailed enough to be adequately measured against rival views of reasoning ((Broome 2014; Valaris 2016; McHugh and Way 2016, Pettit 2016). A theory of reasoning has two components. First, it answers the question of what reasoning *is* (i.e. how it differs from mere sub-personal information processing), giving an account of the nature of reasoning. Second it defines what *correct* reasoning. The *Reasons View*, I argue, can do both.

In section 1, I present a novel version of the *Reasons View*, referring to previous proposals. In sum, the view states that to reason from a set of premise-attitudes to a conclusion-attitude is to *treat* the contents of the premise-attitudes as giving you sufficient reason for a belief or action. Suppose you reason "It is Sunday. If it is Sunday, then the bookshop is closed". You treat the state of affairs described by 'it is Sunday', and 'if it's Sunday, then the bookshop is closed' as giving you sufficient reason to believe that the bookshop is closed. Equally, when you reason "I promised to go to lunch. So, I shall go to lunch", forming the intention to go to lunch on the basis of the consideration that you promised to go, you treat the latter as giving you sufficient reason to go to lunch. To treat a set of considerations *s* as giving you sufficient reason is to a) form a belief or intention on

the basis of attitudes towards *s*, and b) to hold an affirmative attitude towards this process. The latter plays a role that is analogous to that of Boghossian's (2014) "taking condition" and Broome's (2013) attitude of "seeming right". It is notoriously difficult to precisely explain what this role is. We cannot, however, deny its presence and adopt a deflationary account of what it is to treat something as sufficient reason, for we would then not be able to distinguish reasoning from unconscious, sub-personal mental causation. Fortunately, I do not need to specify condition (b) in detail to argue that the *Reasons View* can explain the nature of reasoning at least as well as the rival rule-following views. Importantly, the objection that you need normative beliefs to reason is unwarranted; reasoning merely commits you to certain normative beliefs.

In section 2, I argue that a plausible account of *correct reasoning* can be directly derived from the view just defended, namely that reasoning is essentially treating considerations as reasons for action or belief.

As a preliminary, I explain what assessing the correctness of an instance of reasoning involves, and how it differs from assessing the functional goodness of reasoning as well as the normative status of instances of reasoning. The central point is that the correctness of reasoning is a matter of the relation between, on the one hand, the implicit and explicit premises and, on the other hand, the conclusion of the reasoning. The agent's general state of mind is not taken into account. I then defend

Correct Reasoning:

Agent N reasons correctly from the implicit and explicit premise-beliefs A_1 , A_2 , ..., A_m to the belief that p [the intention to φ] only if the truths of the contents of A_1 , A_2 , ..., A_m imply that N has sufficient truth-related reason to believe p [sufficient practical reason to φ].

The account avoids the problem of *bad starting points* as well as *the wrong kinds of reason problem*, and that yields a plausible picture of the aim reasoning. It is thus not subject to the objections McHugh and Way (2016) raise. I argue that the account adequately captures the correctness of (i) non-defeasibly correct patterns of reasoning (e.g. modus ponens), (ii) defeasibly correct patters (e.g. inductive reasoning, practical reasoning on the basis of pro tanto reasons), and (iii) akratic reasoning, i.e. reasoning to the intention to φ one the basis of the belief that you ought to to φ (Broome 2013); Southwood 2016).

In section 3, I address instrumental reasoning, which is, in its canonical form, reasoning from the intention to E and the belief that E only if M, to the intention to M. I argue that all previous attempts to extent the *Reasons View* so that it explains the correctness of instrumental reasoning, in particular Kauppinnen's (forthcoming) proposal, fail. I propose an alternative account, according to which instrumental reasoning is correct only if the intention to M is based on (implicit) premises the truth of which would give the reasoner sufficient reason to E. This implies that instrumental reasoning, as commonly understood, is incorrect, and only its cousin is correct. In support of conclusion, I point to the difference between instrumental *reasoning* and *structural requirements* of instrumental rationality (Kolodny 2005).

I end by mentioning potential weaknesses of the *Reason View* and ways to overcome them. Finally, I briefly link the view to the debate on rationality and reasons, as well as the debate on normative constructivism, as indicated above.

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