

## TOWARD AN ARISTOTELIAN ACCOUNT OF THE NORMATIVITY OF RATIONALITY

Project: i) explore the thought that an Aristotelian conception of rationality does not necessarily commit us to considering the issue of whether rationality is normative as trivial and ii) offer a preliminary sketch of what an Aristotelian account of this issue might look like.

Strategy: 1) describe the issue of normativity of rationality: ‘Why be rational?’ 2) articulate the initial unease with the issue as described in 1) that emerges from within an Aristotelian conception of rationality 3) identify the Aristotelian resources to address some central concerns that underpin ‘Why be Rational?’ 4) show how reflecting on these resources might lead us to reframe the central question as one of unity between different types of rational requirements.

1) Why be rational?

### Coherence

Requirements of internal coherence among our psychological attitudes (Southwood 2010)

Whether we should have attitudes that fit in a coherent way (Way 2010)

### Rationality requirements:

Intention consistency

Modus ponens

Enkrasia

### Reasons vs Rationality

Reasons are relations between facts and attitudes; rationality is a set of relations among attitudes in abstraction from the reasons for them (Kolodny 2005)

Reasons derive from the facts, rationality from the beliefs we have about the facts (e.g. Parfit 1987)

Therefore: Rationality requirements are not (in and of themselves) reasons.

### An Illustration: ‘Inverse Akrasia’

Huck Finn: doing the right thing while acting against one’s better judgement. Reasons-responsiveness without internal coherence.

### Status of rationality requirements. Weak vs. Strong normativity:

Standard of evaluation of acts or states vs. standard of evaluation of agents (Marques 2007).

Correctness vs. Directivity (Shackel 2015)

Normativity of rationality is about justifying or rejecting the claim that rationality requirements are normative in the stronger sense.

## 2) Aristotelian misgivings about ‘Why be rational?’

Wrong conception of rationality at the heart of the question. Rationality is just reasons-responsiveness. Coherence of reasoned attitudes only.

An Illustration: Rejection of ‘Inverse Akrasia’

Huck Finn’s classical counterpart: Neoptolemus. Doing the right thing while still learning to be good. Acting against one’s better judgement is irrational only when that judgment is correct.

Scepticism about the normativity of rationality?

There seems to be no interest in rational requirements per se, only in so far as they are backed up by (independent) reasons.

## 3) Rethinking the normativity of rationality: some Aristotelian resources

Strong normativity of rationality at the heart of Aristotle’s ethics

The virtuous person is the ‘standard and measure’ of virtuous actions (NE VI). Derivative, weak normativity: the positive appraisal of actions that match ‘what a virtuous person would do’ without being performed by such a person. Learning to be good as an example.

The unity of virtues

Asymmetry between praiseworthy and blameworthy attitudes and dispositions. Close integration and inner coherence as an ideal. Variety of apparent reasons that turn into false leads without the calibrating/ organising lens of phronesis.

Yet, some kinds of (dynamic) disunity, e.g. dissatisfaction, regret and remorse are treated as redeeming features in less than fully praiseworthy/ somewhat blameworthy sets of attitudes and dispositions (e.g. the ‘decent disposition’ (EE VIII); shame; akrasia).

The coherence of unrepentant (fully) blameworthy dispositions is only apparent: disintegrated set of attitudes and dispositions that hold together in the absence of inner dynamic through recognised conflict that would allow for improvement. The contrast between akolasia (incorrigibility) and akrasia (NE VII).

Two separate kinds of eudaimonia

The requirements of theoretical and practical reason tend to converge but neither is reducible to the other.

## 4) Normativity of Rationality: an Aristotelian sketch

Central question: Is there unity between the different types of rational requirements?

The challenge is to say how the demands of theoretical and practical reason relate to one another.

An illustration: Positive Illusions. Apparent conflict between the requirements for believers/ knowers and the requirements for agents.

A possible solution: acknowledging the unifying capacity of the norms of success for action. Subsuming theoretical pursuits under the general model of action (in the broad sense of activity). Strengthening the unity of virtues beyond Aristotle’s thesis (which appears to exclude all virtues of the intellect, but phronesis).