

Enkrasia

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ABSTRACT: Rationality requires you to intend to do what you believe you ought to do. This is a rough formulation of the requirement I call ‘Enkrasia’. This article presents a precise formulation. It turns out to be complicated, and the article also explains the need for each complication.

KEYWORDS: Enkrasia – intention – ought – practical reason – rationality – requirement.

Necessarily, if N is within the domain of rationality, rationality requires of N that

- if (1) N believes at t that she herself ought that p**
and if (2) N believes at t that, if she herself were then to intend that p , because of that, p would be so
and if (3) N believes at t that, if she herself were not then to intend that p , because of that, p would not be so
then (4) N intends at t that p .

This is the requirement of rationality I call ‘Enkrasia’. To put it very roughly, ignoring the many qualifications that are embedded in the formulation: rationality requires you to intend to do what you believe you ought to do.

Enkrasia is a central feature of our rationality; it is at the heart of how a rational person conducts her life. It constitutes one of the main bridges between theoretical and practical rationality. We often spend time thinking

about what we ought to do. This is an exercise of our theoretical rationality; theoretical rationality is concerned with beliefs, and this process aims at forming a belief about what we ought to do. But it generally has a practical purpose. Thinking about what we ought to do is generally part of a longer process of deliberation that ultimately aims at deciding what to do.

When you think about what you ought to do and reach a conclusion, the belief you emerge with – the belief that you ought to do some particular thing – engages your practical rationality. Specifically, it engages with this requirement Enkrasia. If you are practically rational to the extent of satisfying Enkrasia on this occasion, you end up intending to do what your theoretical deliberation brings you to believe you ought to do.

The precise formulation of Enkrasia is complicated. This paper explains and justifies the complications, one fragment at a time.¹

Necessarily

I assume that enkrasia, if it is a feature of rationality, is a necessary feature. It could not be a contingent matter whether or not rationality requires you to intend to do what you believe you ought to do.

if *N* is within the domain of rationality

Rationality is one of a class of things that, for want of a better name, I call ‘sources of requirements’. Other sources of requirements are morality, fashion, the rules of chess and the law of each country. Sources issue requirements, but not universally; each source has a domain of application. For example, UK law requires people to drive on the left, but UK law has a limited jurisdiction that determines its domain of application. With some exceptions, it applies only to people in the UK. So, if you are within the UK, UK law requires you to drive on the left.

Similarly, rationality has a limited domain of application and issues requirements only to things within that domain. It does not apply to stones, trees, sheep or babies. I shall not try to specify the limits of the domain except to say that presumably only things that have some rational capacity fall within it. I assume that, as a matter of contingent fact, only people have this capacity, so rationality applies only to people.²

¹ It is explained in more detail in my book (2013), particularly in section 9.5.

² This issue is more thoroughly explored in Julian Fink’s (ms).

Since rationality has a limited domain, we may say that it is conditional in its application.

rationality

Even someone who agrees that you are required to intend to do what you believe you ought to do might doubt it is rationality that requires it. She might think it is morality, for example. She might think that conscientiousness consists in intending to do what you believe you ought to do, and that conscientiousness is a part of morality.

However, it cannot always be morality that requires you to do what you believe you ought to do, because you often believe you ought to do something on grounds that have nothing to do with morality. For example, you might believe you ought to drink some water because otherwise you will get a headache. Your belief stems from self-interest rather than morality. Enkrasia nevertheless applies to you, and it could not be a requirement of morality in this case.

Could it be that in this case it is self-interest that requires you to intend to do what you believe you ought to do? In general, could it be that the requirement to do what you believe you ought to do issues from whatever source you believe the ought derives from? That would be odd. You may believe the ought mentioned in Enkrasia derives from various sources, but what is derived from these sources is always the same, all-things-considered ought that is described below. So it would be odd if Enkrasia issued from different sources in different cases.

Moreover, you may have no belief about what is the source of the ought. Perhaps your friend tells you that you ought to do something, and you believe her, but she does not tell you why. On other occasions too, you may believe your ought derives from more than one source. For instance, if you are a parent, you may believe that prudence and morality together determine that you ought not to climb dangerous mountains, although neither would do so on its own. Then the requirement not to be akratic in this case cannot issue from either prudence or morality.

Intuitively, rationality is concerned with coherence in your mind. Since Enkrasia requires a sort of coherence, this is a reason for thinking it is a requirement of rationality.

One argument may suggest it is not. Satisfying Enkrasia may demand an effort. It often involves overcoming a strong pull in the opposite direction. You may believe you ought to do something that you hate doing. We

might think rationality should not demand that sort of effort. Rationality is a matter of getting your attitudes into coherent order. That may demand a certain sort of ability, but we might think it should not demand effort.

However, we have to recognize that rationality does sometimes require effort. Suppose you believe you are a man and that all men are mortal. You may find it very hard to bring yourself to believe you are mortal, or to give up either the belief that you are a man or the belief that all men are mortal. Nevertheless, you are definitely irrational if you do not do one of these things. So the difficulty of satisfying *Enkrasia* is a weak argument against the view that it is a requirement of rationality.

requires

Compare 'Survival requires you to have a functioning liver' with 'The law requires you to wear a seat-belt'. 'Requires' has different meanings in these two sentences.

In the first, the subject of 'requires' is the name of a property, survival. 'Requires' has what I call 'the property sense'. The sentence means that having a function liver is a necessary condition for having the property of survival.

In the second sentence, the subject of 'requires' is the name of a source of requirements, the law. 'Requires' has what I call 'the source sense'. The law places requirements on you, which are specified in the legal code. True, the law's requirements are connected with a property; satisfying each of them is a necessary condition for having the property of being law-abiding. Wearing a seat-belt is a necessary condition for being law-abiding. But 'The law requires you to wear a seat-belt' says more than this; it implies also that not wearing a seat-belt is against the law. Not every necessary condition for being law-abiding is required by the law. A necessary condition for being law-abiding is to have a level of competence that allows you to understand the law. But the law does not require this level of competence; being legally incompetent is not against the law.

The names of some properties have, by the process of reification, become also the names of sources of requirements. 'Morality', 'prudence' and 'rationality' are examples. So 'rationality' has two meanings; it is the name of a property and also the name of a source of requirements. Consequently 'rationality requires' is ambiguous; 'requires' might have either the property sense or the source sense.

We might acceptably say that rationality requires you to have a functioning liver, since having a function liver is a necessary condition for being alive and being alive is a necessary condition for being rational. This is to use the property sense of 'requires'. However, the property sense is not very natural for rationality, and I do not use it.

As I use 'rationality requires', in Enkrasia and elsewhere, 'rationality' is the name of a source of requirements and 'requires' has the source sense. Rationality as a source places requirements on us, which we may call the 'code' of rationality. Not every necessary condition for being rational is required by rationality in this sense. For example, a necessary condition for being rational is to have some mental capacity: stones and snails are not rational. But having mental capacity is not in the code of rationality.

Enkrasia does not merely say that intending to do what you believe you ought to do is a necessary condition for being rational. It says further that this requirement is part of the code of rationality.

of

Rationality places the requirement specifically on the person *N*. *N* herself and no one else has the responsibility of intending to do what she believes she ought to do. The requirement is 'owned' by her, as I put it. It is a satisfactory feature of the locution 'required of' that it makes the ownership of the requirement explicit. Conversely, it is an unsatisfactory feature of 'ought' that it lacks this feature, as I shall explain below.

N

Strictly Enkrasia is a requirement schema rather than a requirement. To get a requirement, take the schema and make appropriate substitutions for the schematic letters. An appropriate substitution for '*N*' is a term. In practice, this term will always refer to a person, since only people are within the domain of rationality. Informally, I often use the generic 'you' instead of '*N*'.

if

What rationality requires of *N* is a conditional proposition. The requirement stated in Enkrasia is conditional in two different ways. First, it is conditional in its application, as I have explained: it applies only to things that are within the domain of rationality. Second, it is conditional in its content: what is required is a conditional proposition.

Some authors formulate Enkrasia as conditional only in its application and not in its content. They deny that rationality requires of you that, if you believe you ought to do something, you intend to do it. Instead, they assert that, if you believe you ought to do something, rationality requires of you that you intend to do it. I call their claim ‘Narrow-Scope Enkrasia’, because it gives ‘requires’ a narrower scope than Enkrasia does.

Narrow-Scope Enkrasia has the consequence that rationality is not normative in a particular sense. When I say that a source of requirements is normative, I mean that, when the source requires something of you, that fact constitutes a reason for you to do what it requires. Narrow-Scope Enkrasia implies that rationality is not normative in that sense.

Here is why. Suppose you believe you ought to do something. According to Narrow-Scope Enkrasia, it follows that rationality requires you to do it. If rationality is normative, it follows that you have a reason to do it. So from merely believing that you ought to do something it follows that you have a reason to do it. But it is implausible that that could be so. Suppose your belief is mistaken, and actually you had no reason at all to do this thing before you formed the belief. How could your mistaken belief bootstrap into existence a reason when there was none? It is implausible that it could. On the basis of an argument like this, and assuming that Narrow-Scope Enkrasia is true, Niko Kolodny draws the conclusion that rationality is not normative (cf. Kolodny 2005).

But that is an undesirable conclusion, and it is certainly undesirable to rest it on the assumption that Narrow-Scope Enkrasia is true when the alternative of Enkrasia is available. Enkrasia itself implies no such conclusion.³ This is my main reason for adopting it in preference to Narrow-Scope Enkrasia.

In my formulation of Enkrasia, ‘if’ denotes material implication.

believes

N's belief has a normative content. Noncognitivists claim that to believe you ought to do something is to have some noncognitive attitude such as favouring towards doing it. Nevertheless, modern noncognitivists do not deny that you may have normative beliefs (for instance, Allan Gibbard 2003). They think it may be true that you ought to do something, and that therefore you may believe it. So a noncognitivist can accept Enkrasia.

³ Setiya (2007) claims it does, but I reject this claim in Broome (2013, sec. 5.7).

at *t*

Appropriate substitutions for '*t*' are terms that refer to times. The same letter '*t*' occurs in each clause of Enkrasia. This indicates that this is a synchronic requirement; it connects together contemporaneous attitudes. This means that the requirement does not directly regulate processes of deliberation, which take time. Suppose you believe you ought to *F* and then you come to intend to *F* as a result of deliberation. Your deliberation may not bring you to satisfy Enkrasia, because by the time the deliberation is completed you may have ceased to believe you ought to *F*.

she herself

'She herself' is a reflexive pronoun. It represents in indirect speech the first-person pronoun 'I' in direct speech. *N* would herself express the content of her belief by saying 'I ought that *p*'. (I assume she uses my grammatical innovation 'ought that', explained below).

Enkrasia would be false if it did not have a reflexive pronoun in this position. Suppose a donkey lies dead, and you believe that its owner ought to bury it. Suppose that actually you are its owner. Then you believe in a sense that you ought to bury the dead donkey. But suppose you do not realize the donkey is yours, so you could not express your belief by saying 'I ought to bury the dead donkey'. You do not believe that you yourself ought to bury the dead donkey; you do not self-ascribe the ought. Given that, you might not intend to bury the dead donkey, and nevertheless be perfectly rational.

It is often said that practical rationality is 'first personal'. This is one sense in which that is so. The normative belief must be self-ascribed.

ought

Some philosophers use the expressions 'morally ought', 'rationally ought', 'prudentially ought' and so on. They also use 'all-things-considered ought'. By 'ought' I mean what they mean by 'all-things-considered ought'.

I do not use 'morally ought' or other adverbially qualified 'ought's. Instead of 'You morally ought to *F*' I say 'Morality requires you to *F*'.

There are various sources of requirements, such as morality, self-interest and the law. Some of these sources are normative in the sense I explained: you have a reason to satisfy their requirements. For some *F*, you may be under one or more normative requirements to *F* and one or more

not to *F*. You then have some reasons to *F* and some not to *F*. Whether or not you ought to *F* is determined in some way by the combination of these reasons. It does not matter here how it is determined. It might be that the reasons weigh against each other in some way, or it might be that some reasons override others.

So even granted that morality is normative, if morality requires you to *F* it need not follow that you ought to *F*. Morality might be overridden by a stronger normative requirement not to *F*.

ought that *p*

An appropriate substitution for '*p*' is a sentence, which expresses a proposition. '*p*' does not necessarily describe an act, either of *N*'s or of anyone else's. For example, it might describe *N*'s having some intentional attitude such as a belief.

My expression 'ought that' is ungrammatical. I use it for a good reason. Enkrasia would be false if the ought was not *owned*, as I put it, by *N*. Suppose Alex believes that he himself ought to get a medal. He believe that he himself has done a heroic act, for which he deserves a medal. However, he does not think it is it down to him – it is not his responsibility – to get a medal; he thinks the authorities have the responsibility of awarding him one. Clearly he might be entirely rational even if he does not intend to get a medal.

So if Enkrasia is to be correct, *N* must believe that the ought mentioned in Enkrasia is owned by her herself – it is her responsibility. But there is no good way of expressing ownership of an ought in grammatical English. Compare the sentence 'Alex ought to get a medal' with 'Alice ought to get a haircut'. 'Ought' has different meanings in these sentences as they would most commonly be used. The second ascribes ownership of the ought to Alice; the first does not ascribe ownership of the ought to Alex. But these sentences have identical grammar. Ownership is therefore not grammatically represented.

I use my grammatical innovation 'ought that' as a means to specify ownership. The grammatical problem with 'ought' is that it is an auxiliary verb. It is always attached in use to a lexical verb, to form a single compound verb that has only one subject. In Alex's case, the single compound verb is 'ought to get'. 'Alex' is its subject. But we need room for two subjects: the subject of 'ought' should be the name of the owner of the ought, and the lexical verb should have a separate subject. In Alex's case, the own-

er of the ought is the authorities, and they should be named as the subject of 'ought', whereas the subject of the lexical verb 'get' should be 'Alex'. My construction allows this. I say "The authorities ought that Alex gets a medal".

Suppose Alex believes that the authorities ought that he himself gets a medal. However, suppose he does not believe that he himself ought that he himself gets a medal. Then he does not satisfy condition (1) of Enkrasia. So Enkrasia does not imply that Alex is not rational if he does not intend that he himself gets a medal. This is just as it should be.

By contrast, suppose Alice believes that she herself ought to get a haircut. More exactly, as I put it, Alice believes that she herself ought that she herself gets a haircut. Alice satisfies condition (1) of Enkrasia, so Enkrasia implies that she is not rational if she does not intend that she herself gets a haircut. This too is just as it should be.

Notice it is the ought that has to be self-ascribed. It does not matter whether or not there is any self-ascription in the proposition p . Suppose Alice believes her daughter Zuleika ought to get a bicycle, but that this is her own – Alice's – responsibility. In my language, Alice believes that she herself ought that Zuleika gets a bicycle. Enkrasia correctly implies that Alice is not rational if she does not intend that Zuleika gets a bicycle.

(2) N believes at t that, if she herself were then to intend that p , because of that, p would be so

Briefly, using an expression of Kant's, N believes that p is 'in her power'.

Suppose you believe that, for prudential reasons, you ought to believe God exists. You believe there is a possibility that God exists and that, if he does, things will go badly for you unless you believe he exists. However, you do not believe you could now bring yourself to believe God exists, in view of the lack of evidence for his existence. You do not believe that, if you were now to intend to believe God exists, you would believe God exists. In your position you might rationally not intend to believe God exists.

But then, is it not irrational for you to continue to believe you ought to believe God exists, given that you do not believe you can now achieve this result? The contents of your beliefs are apparently inconsistent with the principle that ought implies can, so are you not irrational on that account? Not necessarily. You may not believe that ought implies can. Even if ought actually does imply can in this case, it does not do so obviously. You might rationally not believe it. Alternatively, you might believe that, though in-

tending *now* would not bring you to believe God exists, you might later come to believe God exists. Then your belief is not inconsistent with the principle that ought implies can.

Clause (2) in Enkrasia is designed for people like you. You do not satisfy the condition stated in clause (2), so Enkrasia does not imply you are not rational if you believe you ought to believe God exists but do not intend to do so. This is as it should be.

(3) *N* believes at *t* that, if she herself were not then to intend that *p*, because of that, *p* would not be so

Briefly, *N* believes that *p* is 'up to her'. This is a converse of condition (2). Suppose you believe you ought to continue breathing, but you do not believe that your continuing to breath depends on an intention of yours. Then you can be rational even if you do not intend to continue breathing. More generally, rationality does not require you to intend anything you believe you ought to do, if you do not believe an intention of yours is needed to achieve your doing it.

she herself within (2) and (3)

Clauses (2) and (3) require self-ascription, for much the same reason as (1) does. Suppose you have found a dead donkey and you believe that the finder of any dead donkey has a responsibility for making sure it is buried (but not necessarily for burying it herself). That is to say, you believe that you yourself ought that the dead donkey is buried. However, you believe the owner will bury it. You are the owner, but you do not realize it. So although it is actually true, you do not believe that, were you yourself not then to intend that the dead donkey is buried, because of that the dead donkey will not be buried. You do not satisfy condition (3). In your situation, you may fail to intend that the dead donkey is buried, without violating Enkrasia.

That explains why (3) contains the reflexive pronoun. (2) contains it for a similar reason.

Within (2) and (3): **then**

'Then' in (2) and (3) represents in indirect speech the indexical 'now' in direct speech. *N* would express to herself the belief described in (3) using the sentence: 'If I were not now to intend that *p*, because of that *p* would not be so'.

Suppose you believe you ought to repent of your sins before you die. However, you believe you have plenty of time to make up your mind to do so, so you do not believe that, were you not now to intend to do so, you would not do so. Given that, you may rationally not now intend to do so. That is consistent with Enkrasia.

That explains ‘then’ in (3); ‘then’ appears in (2) for a similar reason.

Within (2) and (3): **were, because of that, and would**

The ‘because of that’ clauses in (2) and (3) are an abridgement. Spelt out more fully, the conditions are:

- (2) *N* believes at *t* that, if she herself were then to intend that *p*, *p* would be so because she herself then intends that *p*.
- (3) *N* believes at *t* that, if she herself were not then to intend that *p*, *p* would not be so because she herself does not then intend that *p*.

The embedded conditionals in these clauses are subjunctive and causal. They have to be both, because no weaker sort of conditional will do.

For example, Enkrasia would be false if we omitted the ‘because’ clauses. Suppose you believe that God decides who will go to heaven and who will not, and that he implants an intention to go to heaven in just those people who will go there. You believe that, were you to intend to go to heaven you would go there, and were you not to intend to go to heaven you would not go there, but you believe that your intention has no effect on whether or not you go there. Suppose you believe you ought to go to heaven. Then Enkrasia without the because clauses would imply you are not rational if you do not intend to go to heaven. But that is false. You could fail to intend to go to heaven and yet be rational. You believe intending to go to heaven is pointless, since it has no effect. So the because clauses are required.

intends

Enkrasia can be understood as the principle that rationality requires you not to be akratic. Traditionally, to be akratic is to fail to do something you believe you ought to do. But rationality cannot require you not to be akratic in this sense. Even a perfectly rational person might fail to do something she believes she ought to do. For example, suppose you believe you ought to catch the 12.35 train to London, but suppose the platforms are switched

without any announcements, and the result is that you actually catch the 12.35 train to Southampton instead. You fail to do what you believe you ought to do, but nevertheless you may be entirely rational.

This can happen because rationality supervenes on the mind, as Ralph Wedgwood puts it in (2002). Rationality requires your mind to be in good order. The example shows that, even when your mind is in good order, you may fail to do what you believe you ought to do. So rationality cannot require you to do what you believe you ought to do. However, intending to do what you believe you ought to do is a matter of proper order in your mind; your intention, which is a mental state, properly matches your normative belief, which is another mental state. This is why Enkrasia is about intending rather than acting.

Nevertheless, I still understand Enkrasia to be the principle that you should not be akratic. Defying tradition, I interpret akrasia as failing to intend to do something you believe you ought to do.

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