

The Practical Authority of Normative Beliefs: Toward an Integrated Theory of Practical Rationality

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RECEIVED: 03-10-2012 • ACCEPTED: 25-06-2013

ABSTRACT: People who do not act on their judgments regarding what they ought to do—their practical judgments—are often considered weak-willed, especially when the judgment is made at a time when the act it favors is plainly possible. Is this a kind of practical irrationality, perhaps due to an incoherence between practical reason, which should guide intention and action, and behavior that fails to conform to a guiding directive? More generally, do normative beliefs with the same kind of self-directive content as practical judgments possess the same sort of rational authority, if indeed they must have any such authority? At least since Aristotle, weak-willed action has often been considered irrational. This paper indicates why that view is plausible, but also why it is too strong. The paper shows how the practical authority of normative judgments can be overridden and why, on the theory of rational action suggested by analysis of such cases, certain initially plausible action-guiding principles are too strong. The concluding part of the paper briefly indicates how that theory can do justice to the analogy between practical and theoretical reason and to the essential connection between the two.

KEYWORDS: Coherence – *Enkrasia* – grounds – intention – instrumentalism – integration – judgment – practical reasoning – rationality – reasons – weakness of will – well-groundedness.

Our knowledge of other people's mental states is at least largely based on our perceptions or knowledge of their behavior, and in normative matters it is especially natural to think that "actions speak louder than words."

It certainly seems that, usually, when people say they ought to do something and, given an opportunity, do not, we tend to wonder whether they really believe they ought to do it. It is also natural, moreover, to think that people tend to feel motivated to act on their practical judgments. Taken together, these widely assumed ideas incline many moral philosophers and action theorists to think that, at least normally, if one judges that one ought to do something, then one intends to do it. That rationality requires conformity to this principle is an *enkrasia requirement*. The main action-theoretic question here is the relation between such self-addressed judgments – and I assume the focus is *overall* judgments – and motivation, above all intention.¹ The question may be broadened to include normative beliefs as distinct from normative judgments, and I shall address both. My major concern, however, is with a related question in the theory of practical reason: Does rationality require conformity to an “*enkrasia requirement*” such as this: if one judges (or even simply believes) one ought to do something, then one intends to do so (Broome 2010, 290)? This question is important for the overall theory of rationality, which concerns not only rational action but also what I call *global rationality*, the overall kind that encompasses both practical and theoretical rationality. Roughly and somewhat metaphorically, global rationality is a matter of the rationality of both intellect and will.

1. Weakness of Will, Practical Judgment, and Rational Action

My point of departure is the nature and status of that perennial challenge to the theory of action, weakness of will. There is at best limited agreement on what weakness of will is, but a common element in at least most of the plausible accounts is the notion of action against one’s better judgment. To act against one’s better judgment – “incontinently,” for short – is roughly to do something intentionally, such as take another drink, while in some sense aware of one’s judging that doing something else would be best (or, on some accounts, better). More explicitly, we might plausibly adopt the following rough criterion of incontinence:

¹ Overall judgments are sometimes called “all things considered” judgments. But here I avoid such terminology, in part because not all such judgments emerge from or are even preceded by *consideration*.

An agent, S, acts against S's better judgment at time t, in A-ing, if and only if, at t (1) S A's intentionally (or at least knowingly),² (2) there is at least one other action (type) B which S takes to be an alternative and with respect to which S has judged, or makes or holds a judgment, that it would be best (or that it would be better) to B, (3) S has not abandoned this judgment, and (4) S is aware (under some appropriate description) of (2) and (3).

The relevant kind of awareness need not involve entertaining the judgment; but where S is plausibly said to act *against* S's better judgment in the way required for incontinence, there must be a sense in which S is aware of holding the judgment.³

If action can be incontinent, surely intention can be. My will can be weak when I form the intention to have another drink even if the bartender wisely refuses me. Thus, incontinence extends beyond action. Intention is of course not action, and even forming an intention is at least not typically action. That intention and its formation can be incontinent should not be surprising. After all, if action should be responsive to practical judgment, so should intention, which is commonly a route to action and is rational for a person under conditions at least approximately equivalent to those applying to the act intended. Incontinence may also be instantiated by omissions;

² For purposes of this formulation, the difference between knowing and believing is not crucial; moreover incontinence may be manifested by a "side effect," as where S judges S must not offend X, believes that nominating Y will do it, and intentionally nominates Y, truly believing but not knowing that S is thereby offending Y, and doing the latter *non-intentionally* (though not *unintentionally*). Both actions, of course (or one under both descriptions), may be incontinent.

³ The account as stated does not preclude compelled actions, as Audi (1990) does. Perhaps it should be revised to do this. Suppose S is tortured for information about fellow soldiers and, after two days of excruciating pain, gives it against S's better judgment and with a deep sense of guilt. Here S satisfies (1) – (4) yet acts under compulsion and is not plausibly said to have exhibited weakness of will. Granted, there is some degree of weakness *in* S's will as compared with the will of the very bravest. But is the highest humanly possible level of strength of will the standard for determining whether an act is *weak-willed*? Very strong people – and wills – need not be the strongest there are. Given normal standards for weakness *of* the will, as opposed to lacking the strongest of wills, S has held out longer than most normal agents would and even then acts quite *unwillingly*, though, it would seem, not incontinently. This paper does not turn on the difficult question whether compulsion rules out incontinence, and I leave it open.

these may be actions as opposed to mere non-performances. If one judges that (despite risking retaliation) one must speak in support of a friend but fails to form the intention to speak so, is this not incontinence? Here, as with “positive” action, the agent fails to respond to a self-addressed directive that apparently has, as its proper function, guiding the will.

The conception of weakness of will just articulated makes it easy to see why, on a kind of consistency view of practical rationality, incontinent actions are *prima facie* irrational: they contravene one’s judgment of what one should do and thus exhibit a kind of inconsistency between one’s action and one’s assessment – which is often backed by good reasoning – of what one’s action should be.⁴ The same applies, of course, to other forms of weakness of will, such as incontinent intention.

Perhaps, however, even practical judgments of the self-addressed, over-all kind in question are not something a rational agent must obey. Why should our intentions and actions never deviate from what our practical judgments call for? This question of course concerns why there should be an *enkrasia* requirement – one calling for intention to conform to such practical judgments – at all.

We should first indicate whether the point of view of our inquiry is cognitivist. If so – and cognitivism is the position I take here – then there is (at least normally) a truth of the matter concerning what we ought to do, what is good, what is obligatory, and so forth for other normative notions indicating goals of action (we can leave open whether, as some philosophers deny, cognitivism entails realism). Second, we must indicate whether the rationality of practical attitudes is considered subordinate to normative standards, prominently including the good and the obligatory – two notions central in (respectively) axiology and deontology. I assume this, with the qualification that actions and, correspondingly, intentions are rational when, given the agent’s rational beliefs or evidential basis for rational beliefs, the acts or intentions are reasonably aimed at the good or some other appropriate normative goal, such as achieving what is obligatory. This cannot be shown here, though it will be supported by some of our examples. In any case, few would deny that it is at least plausible to hold that if I do

⁴ Cf. Scanlon’s claims that “A rational creature is, first of all, a reasoning creature – one that has the capacity to recognize, assess, and be moved by reasons” (Scanlon 1998, 23) and “Irrationality in the clearest sense occurs when a person’s attitudes fail to conform to his or her own judgments” (Scanlon 1998, 25).

what I *rationaly* believe will realize more overall goodness than any alternative I have, I do something that is rational for me. The same holds if we put overall obligation in place of overall goodness.

There is one quite general point that, without a great deal of elaboration, can be seen to support not only some version of the “*enkrasia* requirement” but also the quite general view that practical rationality depends partly on theoretical rationality – or at least on cognitive attitudes. This is the point that (intentional) action is aimed at bringing something about and that our aim in acting is either broadly intrinsic or broadly instrumental: we normally act to bring about something, such as enjoying a tennis game, either for its own sake or for a further purpose, such as getting exercise. But this strongly suggests that actions must be guided by beliefs: either instrumental or to the effect that what we do will have the property for which we want to do it, say being enjoyable.⁵ In any case, if it is irrational to believe that playing tennis will be enjoyable, it will not be rational to play it for enjoyment. One might still rationally play it for exercise, but even that will not be rational if we cannot rationally believe that playing will constitute or lead to exercise. In this way, theoretical reason, as a source of knowledge and rational belief, has authority over practical reason in certain cases. Above all, if we rationally believe, or even have grounds sufficient for rationally believing, that an act will not realize the relevant end(s), then (on the view I am taking here) it is not rational for us to perform it. Positively, beliefs (“outputs” of theoretical reason) are normally needed to guide action to its end(s); this implies a kind of authority to tell us how we can (and often how best) to realize our aims. (Practical reason does not have a comparable authority over theoretical reason, but that is not the point here and will not be argued.)

2. Four Models of Rational Action

There are many ways to conceive the rationality of actions and intentions, even in the special case that concerns us, in which S holds a judg-

⁵ There is a possible exception: if I perform a simple basic action, such as raising my arm, for its own sake, must I believe, e.g., that *this* is how one does it (where my belief is indexical), or can my desire yield the action “directly”? If not, note that there is still a *potential* negative role for belief: if I believe, even falsely, that my arm is paralyzed, I might not raise it or even try to raise it, even when I have a very strong desire calling for that act.

ment (or at least a belief) favoring a specific act. One model, perhaps found in places in Plato's Socratic dialogues, *the executive model*, takes that cognition to be a normatively governing directive of practical reason. A second model, *the instrumentalist model*, is derived from a kind of Humean instrumentalism: on a generic version of this model, actions are rational on the basis of how well they serve the agent's non-instrumental desires. A third model, *the fidelity to premises model* – is based on the idea that what we have best reason to do, and hence are rationally required to do (and to intend), is what is favored by our *practical reasoning* (or at least the relevant premises) – at least in the very common cases in which we engage in practical reasoning on a matter before acting in that matter. The fourth model (developed in many works of mine) is holistic; call it *the well-groundedness model*: actions and intentions are rational on the basis of how well supported they are by the agent's relevant normative grounds, which prominently include reasons for action. In framing a general conception of rational action (one applicable to intention as well), I will consider each of these models in relation to examples that bring out their contours.

I want to begin with an extended example:

Consider John, a practiced and conscientious retributivist. He believes that he should punish his daughter for talking hours on the phone when she knew she should study. On reflection, he judges that he should deny her a Saturday outing. But a day later, when it comes time to deny her the outing, he looks into her eyes, realizes that she will be quite upset, decides to make do with a stern rebuke, and lets her go. He feels guilty and chides himself. It is not that he changed his mind; he was simply too uncomfortable with the prospect of cracking down. Suppose, however, that he also has a strong standing belief that he must be a reasonable parent and is well aware that the deprivation would hurt the child and cause a rebellious reaction. He might be so disposed that if he had thought long enough about the matter, he would have changed his mind; but that is perfectly consistent with the assumption that if his will were stronger, he would have punished her. Thus, his letting her go may still be incontinent. But it is irrational? I cannot see that it is. (Audi 1990, 276-277)

In evaluating the case, we might first note that John's action is not a case of "passional" incontinence – perhaps the most typical kind – or in any other way tainted by appetitive influences. Moreover, it is backed by, and

hence coheres with, good reasons rooted deep in his character, for instance his desire not to hurt his daughter and not to provoke a rebellion so severe as to undermine the good moral effect of the punishment. In addition, he may have rational doubts about the retributive view on which his practical judgment is based, though he has not given up that view. But even though his incontinent action accords with a civilized and generally admirable compassionate desire, it *does* go against his standing better judgment and its underlying retributive beliefs and desires. Still, the overall rational basis of that judgment is too narrow and is outweighed by the larger rational considerations producing the incontinent action and apparently rendering it rational.

The example indicates a defect in the executive model: it shows that, and how, the normative authority of a practical judgment may be overridden. This is not to say that it is entirely eliminated; the case requires overriding considerations sufficient to render the action rational, not denying that the practical judgment provides *any* reason. On the instrumentalist model, the example may or may not be conceived so that it undermines the executive model. Take first the undermining case. John's merciful action may maximize the satisfaction of his relevant non-instrumental desires. Since John is conscientious and, we may assume, a loving father, we may suppose that, regarding his daughter, he above all wants what is best for her and has other normal parental desires. All of these together can outweigh the desires that support his retributive judgment (or belief) and the punitive action. In coherence language, the action better coheres with his overall belief-desire system than with his practical judgment. We again have rational action against one's better judgment, contrary to what the executive model requires.

The instrumentalist model does not, however, adequately account for cases like John's. Suppose John had been extremely angry, to the point that his non-instrumental desires would be best satisfied by punishing. We may also suppose that he has an irrational though well rationalized belief that the punishment will be good for his daughter, so that even his non-passional desires in the matter also favor the punishment. Where this combination of desires is responsible for his practical judgment, punishment might both accord with the executive model and also maximize satisfaction of his relevant non-instrumental desires. Administering the punishment, then, like intending it, is instrumentally rational for John – in the sense appropriate to our Humean model. But we need not take it to be rational on balance, and we should reject the instrumentalist model in question. To

be sure, Hume himself stressed the calm passions;⁶ with that and related points in mind, one might constrain instrumentalism in the way Brandt (1979) and later writers have done. But the point remains that a broadly instrumentalist desire-satisfaction account of rational action too often gives the wrong results in cases like that of John.

More can be learned from noting that the instrumentalist model (like the others) allows, though it does not require, that John have *reasoned* to his practical judgment. As John's case is described, he need not have reasoned to that judgment or a conclusion favoring punishment. If he had, however, he might well have come to the merciful conclusion that goes best with the rationality of his relenting action. Reasoning about action can reverse initial desire-based behavioral inclinations. Reasoning is indeed perhaps likely to do so when these inclinations discernibly oppose the values deepest in our motivational and cognitive character. In suggesting that John is not rationally required to punish his daughter and that his merciful abstention is rational, I am not denying that he might be *excusable* if he did punish her – an important normative point – but the kind of case the example highlights apparently shows that, overall, practical reason favors the merciful route he took.

These points about the commonly salutary effects of practical reasoning might seem to support the third model. But surely we cannot plausibly claim that the conclusions of practical reasoning, such as practical judgments, much less the actions based on it, are invariably rational. Reasoning from an irrational belief is one factor that can prevent the reasoning in question from giving rational support to an action it favors. The same limitation applies to irrational desire: if, depressed at a professional setback, an author irrationally but predominantly wants to burn a carefully written, competent manuscript, we may reasonably urge delay, and he may rationally agree to it. Nonetheless, the contents of our beliefs and desires can figure in determining the premises of our practical reasoning even when those beliefs and desires are irrational – or at any rate normatively defeated by better grounded elements in our psychology. The fidelity to premises model, then, is unsound. Just as one can be faithful to the wrong person, one can act (or believe) on the wrong premises.

⁶ Hume (1739-40/1978, 418) says, e.g.: "Men often act knowingly against their interest: For which reason the view of the greatest possible good does not always influence them ... What we call strength of mind, implies the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent."

Reflection on the fidelity to premises model brings out something quite general. Our premises in a piece of reasoning are not our ultimate grounds for action; our premises themselves need adequate grounds and may still not be justified by such grounds. The well-groundedness model is designed to take account of this point as well as the multiplicity of relevant grounds we may have for action or intention. Might that model avoid the defects we have seen in the others? I believe that it can at least capture what is plausible in them. Unlike the other models, it calls for a holistic assessment of action: a rational action is conceived as one that is based, in the right way, on sufficiently good normative grounds, regardless of whether they figure in premises leading to the making of a judgment that favors that action. These grounds may be numerous and diverse. Actions based on them will at least strongly tend to cohere with them, but this is to say that the model takes account of such coherence considerations; it is not itself a coherence model.

Here are three broad points central to the associated conception of (objectively) rational action:

First, reasons and grounds must meet minimal objective standards (e.g., in terms of both the quality of the agent's evidence for the belief(s) involved and the degree of support relevant grounds provide for the agent's cognition or motivation). It is not enough for rational action that the agent believe the action is best, or believe that it is supported by the best reasons, or that it will yield optimal results, or the like. If the belief or desire is irrational, as where it is produced in a certain way by brain manipulation or by unfounded fears, then it does not imply the rationality of the action (whether the type or the token) for the agent in question.

Second, in order to render an action rational, the reason(s) or ground(s) must motivationally explain the action. A reason we have for an action may provide a *rationalization* for it without explaining why we are performing it, but (on my view and on most other views on the matter), reasons that do not, at least in part, motivationally explain an action do not render its actual performance rational. They are like a vertical column just tangent to the bottom of a bridge span but bearing none of its weight: in both cases, the ground exhibits potentiality for support but provides none of it.

Third, even beyond these requirements, the reason(s) must meet adequately high standards. A reason that renders an action based on it rational must be adequate to bear the normative burden of conferring rationality on the action. There may also be a coherence requirement – or what might better be called an incoherence requirement: incoherence of certain kinds

defeats rationality. The action should be based on grounds sufficiently (if imperfectly) harmonious with the agent's overall framework of beliefs and desires, since action based on reasons – such as certain fleeting emotional desires one disapproves of – discordant with the agent's overall makeup, is, even if not *irrational*, not clearly rational. To take a case similar to that of John, suppose Maria wants above all to be moral, and that this (presumably rational) desire expresses a carefully considered set of ideals and principles to which she is single-mindedly devoted. A clearly rational action on her part would be one she performs on the basis of this desire and in the reasonable belief that the action is her overall obligation. If, however, her governing desire and her belief that it requires the action were not rational, the action would be rational only in some subjective sense. If, by contrast, they are rational but do not explain the action, which she performs, say, for a foolish reason, then it is not well-grounded by them, though it is rationalizable by appeal to the reasons they express. They make it rational for her *to perform* an action of that type but do not render rational her *performing* an action of that type. Doing what it is rational to do does not entail rationally doing it.

3. Belief, Judgment, and Enkratic Principles

So far, I have distinguished between judging, and simply believing, that one ought to do something. Simply believing that I have my car keys does not imply judging this. Judging that *p*, by contrast, does entail believing *p*, at least if we consider making a judgment in the common sense that implies coming to *hold* it (at least for a time), as opposed to the *activity* of judging a proposition, which may of course lead to judging it false and thereby rejecting it. Given the spontaneity and scriptedness of so much of our action, it is important to avoid intellectualism in the theory of action. We reach for a key in order to open a door; no practical reasoning is entailed. We enter a meeting, take a seat, and greet our neighbor as if we had internalized a script; no practical reasoning is needed. How much behavior is thus “scripted” is a contingent matter, but it can be a considerably complex sequence of deeds.

To be sure, even reasoning to a conclusion does not entail *reflecting* on the matter it concerns, nor does every case of reflecting on something entail reasoning about it. But both reflection and reasoning processes can lead

us to new grounds for action, belief, desire, intention, or all four. Some of these grounds are intuitions; some may be propositions inferred from what we believe; some may be emotions. The passage of time allows for thoughts, inferences, and, where there is enough time, reflection. Much can occur in the mind even in a short interval. This is a main reason why principles concerning reasons and rationality must be temporally qualified. To see this, compare two principles. A plausible *moderate enkratic principle* is:

If, at t , S believes S ought (on balance) to A , but does not intend to A , then, at t , S is *prima facie* irrational.⁷

This is synchronic and does not entail the following related *diachronic principle of enkrasia*:

If, at t , S judges, forms the belief, or appropriately considers S 's already held belief, that S ought on balance to A , then, at the "next moment," S should *form* the intention to A if S does not have it or, if S does, then S should retain it rather than cease holding the belief.

In practice, then, if, in the important case of considering what to do, we arrive, with or without reasoning or reflection, at the belief that we ought on balance to A , a moment may (and I think typically will) pass *before* we form the intention to A . Here we may immediately see the prospect of A -ing as aversive, and rationality may call for reconsidering the matter rather than forming the intention.⁸ Moreover, as the case of John shows, supposing we do form the intention to A , we may still rationally give it up in response to adequate grounds. This is possible even if their good influence does not (as it would naturally tend to) unseat the normative belief favoring A -ing.

⁷ For Broome (1999), a conditional like this is material, and the rationality requirement has (as I intend here) wide scope; it is thus that *either* one cease holding the belief or have the intention in question. It is not implied, moreover, that even unrepudiated intentions generate reasons for action.

⁸ This point is not uncommonly overlooked, e.g. apparently by Niko Kolodny in one place: he says, speaking of rational requirements in general (practical as well as theoretical), "When a person satisfies the antecedent of $B+$, for example ["Rationality requires one to believe that p , if one believes that there is conclusive evidence that p "], if he *then* goes on to form the belief that p , *thereby* complying with $B+$, he does so on the basis of the evidence he believes there is ..." (Kolodny 2005, 547, my italics).

Similar points hold for action. On the plausible assumption that it is rational to do what it is rational to intend, one might hold a diachronic principle such as this *enkratic principle for action*:

If, at t , it is rational for S to intend to A , then, at t or as soon as possible after t , it is rational for S to A .

But for the kinds of reasons we have seen, the passage of even a moment can bring some new consideration to S 's mind (and, of course, A -ing may be impossible until long after t). The most one can say is that rational intention possessed at a time entails that doing the thing in question *at that time* – which may be a practical impossibility at the first moment of intention formation – is *prima facie* rational for the agent to the same extent as the agent's intention "directed" toward it.

4. Focal Versus Global Rationality

So far, my concern has been a kind of focal rationality: mainly that of a single action, intention, belief, or desire. But the rationality of persons is a global matter. I take it to be determined by an appropriate integration of theoretical and practical rationality and to have a complex relation to the rationality of actions and of other elements. We can be globally rational (though not *perfectly* so) even if certain of our beliefs, desires, or actions at the time are not rational. Since some of these elements are far more important than others, there is no simple way to determine when irrationality in one kind of element (say in beliefs) counts decisively against one's being globally rational. To consider theoretical rationality here would be a major task. Let us pursue just the relation between practical principles we have considered and global rationality.

I have so far granted the plausibility of a *moderate judgmental grounding principle*:

If, at t , (1) S holds a practical judgment favoring S 's A -ing, and (2) the judgment is at least minimally rational, then, at t , (3) S has *prima facie* reason to intend to A , and (4) S 's not (at t) intending to A is *prima facie* (practically) irrational.⁹

⁹ The formulation does not imply that the reason is that one intends to A . The reason is likely a ground of that intention, e.g. relieving one's pain.

Suppose the judgment is *irrational*. May an irrational practical judgment, if strong and held on reflection, have such normative authority? This is debatable. Granted, other things being equal, one is better *integrated* if, given even an irrational practical judgment favoring A-ing, one intends to A, rather than lacking this intention. If integration (which I take to be largely a matter of coherence) is by itself a ground for intention, the suggested principle apparently holds. But, as the case of the retributive father apparently shows, our achieving integration of this narrow kind is neither necessary for global rationality nor sufficient for the (overall) focal rationality of action.

The matter of how to assess practical rationality in relation to theoretical rationality and to global rationality raises a further problem. The issues central in this paper concern the normative authority of judgments and beliefs that I am taking to be truth-valued or, in any case, otherwise appraisable from the point of view of theoretical reason. Insofar as cognitive matters are crucial for practical rationality, whether of intentions or actions themselves, it would seem that, in deciding what to do and, where the possibility of action is not at hand, what to plan or intend, a rational agent might well want (on balance) to give priority to beliefs – especially if they provide grounds for normative judgments and other beliefs. This implies that it will be normal and indeed common to arrive at a judgment or belief as to what we ought to do *and then* either do it or form an intention to do it. This pattern, however, often contains enough of a time gap to enable us to savor the prospect of the favored action, to recall similar cases, or to see how some principle or standard we hold bears on the matter. In even a short time, the degree of support a practical judgment provides for the action it favors may diminish, as with the retributive father portrayed earlier. We may think of a conflicting normative principle, realize we have a strong competing desire, or feel a sudden aversion to the prospect of A-ing. Such changes may result in its ceasing to be rational for us to perform (or intend) the action in question.

To be sure, much of our behavior, including much that is rational, is automatic or scripted or both. But much is not, and there we must be wary of principles of practical or theoretical reason that do not do justice to the multitude of grounds for action or belief that determine focal rationality and to the importance of temporally restricting our normative principles.

5. Rationality as Responsiveness to Grounds

The view that rationality is a matter of responsiveness to reasons is now widely held in some version (e.g. by Scanlon 1998, 17–49),¹⁰ and, for a broad notion of reasons, it has much plausibility. If reasons are taken to be facts, as is common, the view seems too narrow (as is argued by, e.g., Parfit 2011, Chap. 1). That reasons need not be so conceived I have argued in Audi (2010); but even on the wider view proposed there, reasons are still, as on the factivity views about reasons, the kinds of things that represent contents of propositional attitudes and are expressible in *that*-clauses – though not only in those. John’s reason for punishing the child, if he did, would have been (e.g.) *that* it was needed for her rectification (something he believed) or *to rectify* her conduct (something he wanted). But did he have a reason for the merciful action of (say) reprimanding her instead? And must he have had some reason for the action, if it is to be rational?

In answering these questions, I will assume that (normative) reasons are a subclass of grounds. If John’s reason for not punishing his daughter was to prevent harm to her, then it was also a (normative) ground for that; and, related to this fact, his action itself was (psychologically) grounded on a desire, or perhaps intention, to prevent that harm. To be sure, if my reason for buying a ticket to Boston is to attend a conference there, it might be odd to describe the action as my buying it on the ground that it is necessary for attending a conference there. But I am not making a synonymy claim about reasons and grounds, and this point may in any case be simply pragmatic: my view is that a normative reason that explains action in some sense grounds it, not that ‘reason for’ is synonymous with ‘ground for’.

For cases of belief in which grounds for belief are not properly considered reasons for it, think of perceptual belief. Suppose I see smoke billowing from a distant hillside. In such a case I will immediately believe something is burning there. My ground, both normative and psychological, for the belief is *my seeing smoke*. Suppose, however, I am talking by telephone to someone far away who has conflicting information and asks my reason for believing something is burning on that hillside. I will likely say *that I see*

¹⁰ The factivity view is not new: “Reasons are what we mean to reason from, and reasons are facts ... sailors who, believing that the earth is flat, declined to sail with Columbus had *in* that belief no reason to decline: since the earth is not flat, its being flat was no reason” (Stampe 1987, 337).

smoke billowing up from it. This that-clause does express a reason for my belief, but this smoke-belief is itself grounded in my seeing the smoke; and the belief is not the ground – at least not the *original* ground – of my believing that there is fire. We may also say that my visual perception of smoke is the reason *why* I believe that. But not every reason *why* someone holds a belief is a normative ground or indeed a ground at all, as brain manipulation illustrates. It can cause a belief without being even a psychological ground of it, much less a normative one; and seeing smoke – the perception itself – would not normally be called a reason for my belief.

A supporting point here is that normative reasons are always and naturally expressible in that-clauses, which have truth-valued contents, whereas grounds, such as sensory experiences and memory impressions, need not be so expressible but can still justify truth-valued attitudes. They can do this, moreover, by conferral rather than transmission. They thus do not invite the regress or circle encountered if one supposes that propositional attitudes are justified only by elements of the same truth-valued kind.

Recall John, the retributive father. May we say that John has one or more good grounds for withholding punishment of his daughter? That is the view I have defended by citing his normatively adequate grounds for this. Some of those grounds may be expressed in his beliefs and may be reasons for one or another action toward her, but some of his grounds might not be naturally described as reasons. Consider his sense of her fear and vulnerability as he looks into her eyes. This sense may arouse a strong desire not to hurt her or even a normatively relevant emotion, such as an empathic fear of hurting her. These phenomenal elements in turn might in some direct way lead him to pause, but they might also lead to a belief (not necessarily formulated or otherwise manifested in consciousness) that punishment would hurt her. That belief, together with the desire not to hurt her, could lead to pausing and, together with other cognitions or supporting emotions or both, might also lead to finding a reprimand best in the situation and to making a practical judgment favoring that alternative action.

Here, as in many cases, the executive and well-groundedness models might agree. We are psychologically so constructed that, commonly, our practical judgments do appropriately reflect our overall system of grounds. Their often doing so is certainly implied by a high degree of global rationality in the person in question. But even when we take time to reflect, we can make a practical judgment which conflicts with our most important grounds, beliefs, and desires relevant to the action. If these elements, in an appropriate

way, then determine action or intention that is against our better judgment, we may thereby exhibit weakness of will without irrationality.

Again, we find that at best the *enkratic* requirement is only a *prima facie* one and applies only synchronically, at a given time. One could put the point this way, echoing the moderate *enkratic* principle: at *t*, there is *prima facie* reason not to be in a *state* in which one believes or judges that on balance one ought to *A*, yet does not intend to *A*. Compare the counterpart for belief, a *moderate evidential grounding principle*:

At *t*, there is *prima facie* reason not to believe that there is conclusive evidence for *p*, yet fail to believe *p* at *t*.

In different cases – partly depending on how rational the relevant intention or belief is – the *prima facie* reason may be stronger or weaker. Neither principle is on a par with a *coherence requirement* – or, better, an *incoherence requirement* – that arguably expresses a necessary condition for overall theoretical rationality, at least at its highest levels:

At any given time, *t*, one ought not to believe *p* and that *p* entails *q*, but also that not-*q*.

Even that requirement, however, is synchronic. Because of what can happen with the passage of time, we should not accept the superficially similar *diachronic modus-ponential principle* that

If, at *t*, one believes that *p* and that *p* entails *q*, then, at the “next moment,” one should infer that *q* (in the assenting way that entails forming the belief that *q*).

Nor should we accept – as some have apparently done in considering Kant’s hypothetical imperative – the *instrumentalist volition principle* that

If, at *t*, one *wills* (say in deciding or forming an intention) to bring about an end, one should then (at the “next” moment or as quickly as possible) will any action one takes to be within one’s power and an indispensable necessary means to this end.¹¹

¹¹ The hypothetical imperative is informatively discussed by Korsgaard (1997), though sometimes in versions that lead one to wonder whether she might have in mind a version of the instrumentalist volitional principle.

The *enkratic* requirement and similar ones have a plausibility we must account for; but in the versions we should accept, they must be understood as synchronic, and they should be applied to appraising rationality only in the wide context of a theory of an agent's overall grounds for action.

It should be added here that the well-groundedness view does not *depend* on distinguishing, as I do, grounds from reasons. If reasons encompass what I call grounds, we can speak instead of an adequate reasons view. But distinguishing them enables us to do better justice to the overall appraisal of rational action and, especially, rational belief, which may well be, in a certain way, a more basic normative notion than rational action. Our beliefs respond to the world more directly than our (intentional) actions. Beliefs may be rational when they rest on an experiential ground that is at best misleadingly called a reason. Action is essentially belief-guided in a way that belief is not action-guided – nor desire-based or even goal-based;¹² and, accordingly, rational action is (at least roughly) action for an adequate reason. This point is among the reasons for the plausibility of the *enkratic* requirement in the first place, since, commonly, judgments that one ought on balance to A are based on one or more grounds that support A-ing. If, however, we take normative grounds simply to be kinds of normative reasons, the points I have made about the holistic character of rationality are unaffected and the proposed partial account of rational action can be re-described.

* * *

A prominent though fallible indication of practical rationality is acting on one's normative beliefs, especially when one expresses them in a judgment as to what one should do here and now. But the normative force of practical judgment is not intrinsic to it; that force depends on grounding for such judgments in rationality-conferring elements in the agent. These include certain of the agent's beliefs, desires, and experiences at or near the time – whether reflective, perceptual, or emotional – as well as the precipitate of past experiences accessible to the agent through memory and, potentially, an influence on conduct. Rationality admits of degrees, and in

¹² The metaphorical idea that belief aims at truth concerns how beliefs are to be evaluated and should not be allowed to cause assimilation of beliefs to actions or even intentions.

highly rational agents there is a significant degree of coherence between overall grounds for action and self-addressed moral judgments, and indeed other cognitions expressing beliefs about what one ought to do. But judgments and beliefs may influence us even if they are, overall, unjustified or even irrational. A rational agent may often give up ill-grounded cognitions; but it is also possible that, under the pressure of time which life so often exerts, the influence of one's overall grounds for action may, as with the retributive father, fail to reverse an ill-grounded judgment one holds, yet still normatively outweigh such a judgment present in consciousness at the moment. These grounds may then lead to a rational action against one's better judgment. This action – and even the intention to perform it – will exhibit weakness of will at the time, though not necessarily a constitutionally weak will as an element in the agent's character. The global rationality of agents may override a directive of their will at certain times, and rational action, like rational belief, cannot be adequately appraised simply on the basis of any single judgment, or even any single piece of reasoning, that favors the action. Rationality is a kind of well-groundedness, and there are many kinds of normatively significant grounds and kinds of paths leading from these to rational action.¹³

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¹³ For helpful comments on, and discussion of main points in, earlier versions I am grateful to two anonymous referees and to John Broome, Robin Dembroff, Andrew Reisner, and Florian Steinberger. The paper has also benefited from discussion at the workshop on the Nature of the Enkratic Requirement of Rationality, held at the University of Vienna in April 2013 and organized by Julian Fink.

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