

# Practical Reasoning

## WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

It's not controversial to claim that we engage in theoretical reasoning. Here's an example of this: *If one is a human being, then one is mortal. Socrates is a human being. Hence, Socrates is mortal.* This is just an instance of modus ponens. Described in rather abstract terms, what we have here are propositions that are formally related to one another in a way that makes the argument as a whole valid.

Plausibly, we also sometimes engage in "practical reasoning". Now, the **first question** is: **What form does proper practical reasoning take?** Take an example similar to the one above: *If Martin intends to go swimming, Martin has to travel to the lake. Martin intends to go swimming.* Now, what's the conclusion of this? *Martin intends to travel to the lake?* Well, that doesn't have to be the case. It might be that Martin's just ignorant of this relation. *Martin travels to the lake?* That also doesn't seem right. Intention doesn't automatically result in action. *Martin has to travel to the lake?* Well, that seems too far from the actual practical implications that we want practical reasoning to have. That is, it seems we would want the conclusion of practical reasoning to be stronger connected to actions than mere beliefs are.

There's a **second** question, however. Suppose we settle what practical reasoning looks like. The question that remains is: **Where does its normativity come from?** In theoretical reasoning, we might think that the normative demands governing the correctness and validity of arguments is derived from the formal relations that uphold between propositions. That's not as easily claimed in cases of practical reasoning. It seems that the relations between the propositions in the theoretical argument are more readily backed up by formal logic than the one's holding between the propositions in the practical example.

**Thirdly**, there's also the question of whether acting in accordance with correct or valid practical arguments (so, acting rationally) **necessitates acting well**, ethically speaking.

## WHY SHOULD WE PICK IT?

**First**, the topic **can be tackled from many different angles**. As such, we can take on points of views that will be of interest to as many of us as possible. We might, for instance, talk about the *ontology* of reasons, the nature of causation in action, the roots of *normativity* for practical considerations, the *philosophy of mind* backing up the propositional attitudes relevant for practical reasoning, etc.

**Second**, the topic can be both **very abstract and very accessible**. It's basically up to us how abstract we want the debate to become. As such, we can gauge how everyone is feeling towards the topic and read some more accessible stuff if the need arises. Especially if we have people who are relatively new to this, we can easily react to how they are doing.

**Third**, we have some really great people working on something like this at **our department**. There's obviously Hans Bernhard Schmid and everyone affiliated with him, but basically the whole P&E Master is engaged with this question. That way we can a) potentially attract new people from that MA program and b) have invited talks in between by our own faculty.

## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

### 1. Intersection PR / Philosophy of Mind

- 1.1. What kinds of propositional attitudes are involved in practical reasoning?
  - 1.1.1. What are intentions exactly?
- 1.2. Where does motivation come from?
  - 1.2.1. Do we need conative attitudes in order for deliberation to end in something that can motivate action?
  - 1.2.2. Can we have practical deliberation that involves beliefs only?
  - 1.2.3. Can only reasons motivate? If so, why?

### 2. Intersection PR / Metaphysics

- 2.1. What is the ontological status of reasons? Are they facts or propositional attitudes?
- 2.2. Can propositional attitudes cause actual events? If so, how?

### 3. Intersection PR / Normativity

- 3.1. What grounds the correctness or validity of practical reasoning?
- 3.2. What does it mean to act 'rationally'?
- 3.3. Does acting rationally entail acting well? Is it the other way round?

## POSSIBLE PAPERS

John Broome, "Normative Practical Reasoning"

G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, §§5-18, §§22-27, §§32-44

Michael Bratman, "Taking Plans Seriously"

Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes"

Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"

Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason"

James Dreier, "Humean Doubts about the Practical Justification of Morality"

John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason"

Philippa Foot, "Rationality and Virtue"

Anselm Müller, "Backwards-Looking Rationality and the Unity of Practical Reason"