REASONING:

THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND APPLIED PERSPECTIVES

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

We reason all the time. We think about what to have for breakfast, how to get to the cinema the fastest, what will happen if I eat one more pizza before bed, etc. This reasoning takes two distinct forms: practical and theoretical. Both are super interesting because even though we do it all the time, we seem to have very little idea about how it works exactly! Is reasoning *always* and explicit mental process? Is it a process at all (and thus takes time), or does it work a-temporally? Are there any strict rules that govern reasoning, and differentiate good from bad reasoning? If yes, do the same rules apply for both practical and theoretical reasoning?

To make it more concrete, here are a couple of super intriguing puzzles for you. The **first one** is this: **What is the conclusion of practical reasoning?** Take an example: *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** puzzle, 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. This is what Kant (and arguably Aristotle) thought and Hume, for instance, denied.

Fourthly, there's a particularly interesting puzzle concerning how we actually reason. As has been shown by psychologists and behavioral economists like Kahnemann and Tversky, **we seem to robustly make certain 'mistakes' in reasoning**. For instance, we often prefer A over B, and B over C, without preferring A over C. That's obviously mistaken, but we do it all the time! We also seem to let the descriptions of cases influence our judgments – but rationally speaking, whether we talk about ice cream or lumps of fat and sugar should not matter in our reasoning. The question then is whether such demands should still be in place, or whether we should give up these normative aspects of reasoning in light of the continuous mistakes we make.

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 since we can talk about psychological experiments, we can make the topic super applied if we want to!

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"