

**teorema**

Vol. XXXIV/2, 2015, pp.105-116

ISSN: 0210-1602

[BIBLID 0210-1602 (2015) 34:2; pp. 105-116]

## **Rationality, Capacity and Inference**

Olav Gjelsvik

John Broome's new book is a major contribution to philosophy. It is thoroughly and also beautifully argued; it is novel and at times breath-taking. I admire every page of it. Still, I happen disagree with important points. I believe the most interesting disagreement I have with Broome is about the big picture. The aim of this short paper is to try and locate the most important source of this disagreement, and present some its consequences. I acknowledge how feeble some of my objections seem compared to the force and details of Broome's arguments. I present my view nevertheless.

### *Broome's Aim*

Broome's states his aim this way: "When you believe you ought to do something, your belief often causes you to intend to do what you believe you ought to do. How does that happen? I call this 'the motivation question' [p. 1]. I shall try to answer it in this book." Shortly put, Broome's answer is that we can reason our way from this belief to an intention. We achieve rationality through reasoning. A feature of his answer is that it makes him able to dispose of Humeanism about practical reason, the view that a belief must always combine with a specific motivational state, typically desire, for intention or intentional action to result. I am happy with this consequence. The question is whether it is reached in the right way.

## FIRST PART: VIEWS AND DISAGREEMENTS

*Two Questions of Method**First Issue: Avoiding the Mind-Body Problem and the Conception of the Mind*

Early on in *Rationality through Reasoning* where Broome states his aim, he immediately goes on to say:

It is also true that, when you believe you ought to do something, your belief often causes you actually to do it. We could also ask how that happens. This question raises the mind–body problem. When you believe you ought to do some bodily act, and this belief causes you to do the act, a state of your mind causes a physical movement. One part of the mind–body problem is to understand how a state of mind can have a physical effect like that. I wish to set this problem aside, and I do that by focusing on your intention rather than your action. The motivation question is about your mind only” [p. 1].

Broome here imposes a specific limitation on his whole investigation into reasoning. The account is limited to causation in “*the mind only*” (to the exclusion of seeing what we do intentionally as reasoned output). This raises questions about how we think about the mind and its workings.

Here is the first issue: Broome is on methodologically sound footing in bracketing the mind/body problem. But Broome does that by focusing on the intention rather than the action. That is a move with consequences because it places specific restrictions on how to think of outputs of reasoning. Such restrictions, however, have nothing essentially to do with the motivation for bracketing the mind-body problem, which is to avoid grappling with the relationship between mental and other types of causation.

The methodologically sound move, to my mind, is just to *bracket* the mind-body problem and let the investigation into reasoning proceed entirely on its own terms. To put it differently: If our investigation into the motivation question leads to a result which is in some tension with some approach we happen to favour to the mind-body problem, we should face that issue about that tension then and there.

We should not let our actual or present conception of the mind-body problem structure the way we answer the motivation question. Or to put it differently again: It might be that the deeper problem with Humeanism (and Broome is out to reject Humeanism) is in the way it conceives of the mind.

There are several reasons for saying this. One such reason is that it might, for all we know, benefit an account of practical reasoning that we see doing something intentionally as the actual conclusion of practical reasoning. We must not prejudge this point. Seeing the conclusion as action is a position with a long history that is presently re-asserting itself.

*Second Issue: Where, How, or With What, to Start?*

Where to start is often the hardest of all questions in philosophy.

Broome basically sees rationality as a source of requirements. I basically see rationality as a capacity; a meta-capacity for employing a number of rational capacities in the best way. These are very different starting points. Mine is a neo-Aristotelian picture of sorts. We have capacities for taking the world in in experience. We have capacities for reasoning and inferring. We have capacities for intentional action. I see all these as rational capacities. I see rationality itself as a capacity for employing these rational capacities (or perhaps I should say sub-capacities) in the right way in the specific contexts our lives provide.

A picture like mine has methodological implications. We explicate what a capacity is by explicating how it is employed when things go as they should in the employment. A capacity for riding a bicycle can serve as an example. We have to start from riding a bicycle to get at this capacity; it is a capacity *for* doing that. A capacity for inferring is explicated by identifying the correct inferences it is a capacity for. Correctness of inference is then presupposed in the specification of the capacity.

Now, it is agreed ground between us that reasoning has correctness-conditions. There is then the further issue of how to think about correctness conditions for reasoning, and what they are. If we limit ourselves to deductive inference, at least for the present discussion, then we can, for the inferences we make, identify correctness and logical consequence, and use the normal soundness and completeness proofs in logic as establishing this correctness. The Aristotelian ap-

proach also sees practical and theoretical inference as exhibiting the same inferential capacity; they are distinguished as theoretical and practical by the two basic ways we relate to the contents that stand in logical relations. These ways of relating to contents display specific rational capacities, different from the capacity for inferring.

The present Aristotelian approach to practical reasoning starts, in the central case, from being engaged in doing something intentionally, and ends in the same. Such an Aristotelian approach exhibits a parallel to a Fregean approach to inference: the Fregean approach to (theoretical inference) starts from categorical inferences, inferences between categorical (true and correct) judgments (and in Frege's own case, stays with them) as opposed to inferences with hypothetical judgments (we will want to generalize to them in the theoretical case). The Aristotelian parallel in the basic practical case is starting with a practical premise that relates the inferring person to something she is engaged in doing, and then by inference takes the person to engaging in other things needed for doing the first thing. Doing something intentionally is the practical analogue of the categorical premises. Intending to do something is furthermore explained from doing something intentionally; they are related in the same capacity of being practically engaged.

The huge difference from Frege is the acknowledgement of practical as well as theoretical inferences. The present Aristotelian operates with two basic ways of being related to a propositional content, not just the Fregean judgment stroke, but also a parallel practical stroke. I shall turn to an example, to make things clearer.

### *An Example of Aristotelianism About Inference*

I shall use the Fregean judgment stroke to represent the way we relate theoretically to a content, but also index the stroke as to whether it is a normal theoretical judgment we are speaking about (Frege's case), or whether we are speaking about the practical way of being related to a propositional content. Inference is always seen as a *transition* from premises to a conclusion. Let us start with a simple case, while we also note that there are delicate issues about how to express the propositions that describe what we do in English, issue that are less pressing in some other languages. I stipulate a non-habitual reading for the verb phrase in the consequent in premises 2 a) and b).

- 1a.  $\vdash_J$  (I am driving to Stockholm)  
 2a.  $\vdash_J$  (If I am driving to Stockholm, I am turning left at crossing X)  
 3a  $\vdash_J$  (This place is crossing X)
- 
- 4a.  $\vdash_J$  (I am turning left at this place)

Note that the approach works with the concept of *legitimate inference*, where inference is such that one reaches a conclusion legitimately when everything is correct (and thereby legitimate) in each premise, including the way one holds the premise, and the conclusion legitimately follows from the premises. In that case the inference is knowledge extending when the inferential skills are adequate for that. Legitimacy can then be seen as correct response to reasons, in relating practically (practical knowledge), theoretically (theoretical knowledge) and inferentially (knowledge-extending inference). We can, especially if we do virtue epistemology, go further into levels of aptness in the way we relate to contents, and also in the case of inferring.

This example above is deliberately chosen because we can also use it as a case of practical reasoning. The only difference will be the way we relate to the propositional contents (thoughts), not in the thoughts themselves or the way they relate semantically and formally. This practical way is a way of being related to contents that cannot be subject to correctness-conditions from the point of view of the Humean conception of reason. Here is the practical example

- 1b.  $\vdash_P$  (I am driving to Stockholm)  
 2b.  $\vdash_J$  (If I am driving to Stockholm, I am turning left at crossing X)  
 3b  $\vdash_J$  (This place is crossing X)
- 
- 4b.  $\vdash_P$  (I am turning left at this place)

Things said about legitimacy in the cases of the theoretical inference above carry over to this inference as well. The main difference is that we here have a practical way of relating to the first premise, and also to the conclusion. The practical way is in this example an action, both

in the first premise and in the conclusion. <sup>1</sup>

*The Enkratic Inference Itself*

This is the enkratic inference according to Broome: ('B' stands for the belief way of relating to a content, 'I' for the intending way.)

5. B (I ought to take a break)

5\*. B (It is up to me whether or not I take a break.)

---

6. I (I shall take a break)

On the view I am pursuing, this is not correct reasoning, and Broome is wrong. The inference he appeals to is not generally knowledge-extending (in both the theoretical and practical case), and therefore not legitimate. There is a logical step from the modal verb 'ought' (which I take to express obligation/command) to the modal verb 'shall' (which expresses future tense in the first person, and can also be used in prediction). Therefore this is not a correct inference – satisfying the one modal predicate does not logically entail satisfying the other.

One correct enkratic inference on my view is this:

7.  $\vdash_P$  (If I ought to take a break now then I shall take a break now)

8.  $\vdash_I$  (I ought to take a break now)

---

9.  $\vdash_P$  (I shall take a break now)

The elements of this inference exhibit the basic rational capacities involved: the theoretical and the practical ways of relating to contents, the contents, and the inferential capacity. When the employment of all capacities is legitimate or correct, the whole inference is correct and knowledge extending. (And extends either theoretical or practical knowledge (in E. Anscombe's sense of practical knowledge).)

## SECOND PART: THE REJECTION OF HUMEANISM

*The Two Ways of Resisting It*

Broome takes himself to dispose of Humeanism about practical reason by his answer to the motivation question. I do the same by mine, but in a different way.

Hume's view is a view about the understanding, reason and their connection. Here is Hume in two central quotes in Broome's book: 'The understanding exerts itself after two different ways, as it judges from demonstration or probability; as it regards the abstract relations between ideas, or those relations of objects, of which experience only gives us information'. Hume also says: 'Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood' [quoted by Broome, see p. 291].

Hume is sometimes seen as identifying the role of reason with that of the understanding. (I shall not here pursue Hume interpretation.) The more striking point is the limitations upon the workings of reason (and understanding). Note that reason (and the understanding) has for Hume no role in determining motivational states or in determining intentional action. It is indeed natural to have a broader notion of reason than that, and this the Aristotelian obviously has.

The difficulty with the Humean perspective, seen from this Aristotelian perspective on inference, is simply that it limits *reason* to relations between ideas or to relations between perceptions (ideas and impressions). Hume fails to recognize practical reasoning *because he fails to recognize practical ways of being related to contents, fails to recognize that actions can be both output and input to inference, and that there are rationality requirements on desires, motivations, intentions etc.*

Broome can from my perspective be seen as being half way between Hume and Aristotle: he surely recognizes practical ways of being related to contents and reasoning with intentions. But he bars himself from going all the way to Aristotelianism by limiting himself to 'the mind only'. In doing the latter, the conception of mind Broome works with has limitations that are not that far from the limitations in Hume's conception of mind: The 'reasons' that make up rationality are internal to the mind's representations/ perceptions and rationality is structural.

The basic point is that we can resist Humeanism in different

ways. Mine is by having a much broader conception of reason and rationality than Hume has. Rationality is a capacity for capacities, a central capacity for employing in a balanced way the distinct (rational) sub-capacities at work.

Broome's way is to provide a picture of how we can reach rational intentions by reasoning our way from beliefs about what we ought to do. This strategy respects limiting oneself to a Humean (not exactly Hume's, but with somewhat corresponding limitations) conception of the mind, but denies that that prevents us from doing practical reasoning, and develops a theory of how it can be done. This is quite an achievement.

### THIRD PART: SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST BROOME

I have now indicated some differences between this Aristotelian approach and Broome's approach. One deep difference is in the conception of the workings of the mind. This matters for *how* we think of rationality as a source of requirements. A range of issues will arise from the way we think of the relationship between 'ought' and 'can', and whether and how the rational requirements we are under are constrained by the capacities we (actually) have and the way we have employed them. The limitations of each of the capacities (or sub-capacities) might matter for the overall rational capacity and thereby for what can be rationally required. I only leave this hinted at here, and focus on some concrete issues in the light of the disagreement I have identified. I shall present some arguments in favour of my position.

#### *First issue. Arguments in Favour of this Approach to the Enkratic Inference*

The most important advantage of the present approach is simplicity; there is no work to be done by requirements of rationality in accounting for correct reasoning. All the work is done by what goes into the two ways of relating to propositional contents. The present theory moves only marginally beyond Frege's approach to theoretical reasoning, and it sees the correctness of the practical inference itself as reflected in standard logic. It sees the inference as an employment of a *general* inferential capacity we can identify from logic and see at



work both theoretical and practical inference.

I have some specific disagreements with Broome. I disagree with the ‘up to me’ bit in premise 5\* above. It is put there by Broome and serves as a simplified version of two extra premises expressing that without intending to take a break I would not take a break. Broome finds it difficult to ascribe these fairly sophisticated premises about intending to all reasoning people. I agree with the last point, but have the following objection to what he does: Being ‘up to me’ seems to me different in content from beliefs about intending and acting; it could be true that without intending to take a break I would not take a break, even if intending to take a break were not up to me. This is quite like the Martin Luther example discussed by Robert Kane: ‘up to me’ seems to involve a lot more than what goes into Broome’s use of it here [see Kane (1996) chapter 3, pp. 38-40, chapter 4 and 5]. If it only involves the two quite sophisticated premises, one would need to understand those premises to understand its content. (And the phrase was meant to replace those premises in the case where the reasoner does not have the concept of intending.)

There are also other problems here I shall only mention. The sophisticated premises seem far too strong: I simply do not have to believe that if I intend  $p$  I will  $p$  in order to form the intention  $p$ . Some probability that I will  $p$  seems enough.

This is all avoided on my approach, where the limits of my powers (and capacities) are reflected in the correct first premise (since ‘ought’ implies ‘can’).

### *Second Issue: The Many Rational Capacities, and Malfunction of Some.*

The argument against seeing rationality as corresponding correctly to reasons makes up a central part of chapter 5 in Broome’s book, and is quite important. Shortly put this argument depends on the point that even a ‘rational person’ can make mistakes about external facts. No one disputes that this sort of thing can happen for what we normal call ‘rational people’. Let us leave aside this sense of ‘rationality’. In the neo-Aristotelian framework one crucial question is this: if some rational sub-capacity has not delivered the goods, then, in what ways one can be considered positively for overall rationality-requirements? In the case at hand, the case of false belief, it is the capacity for taking facts in that has not delivered the goods. What are the implications for

the overall capacity for rationality? It might simply seem that the overall rational capacity is undermined if a relevant sub-capacity does not deliver. If so, the argument Broome gives against the view that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons has no bite. The quick objection (this is Broome's name for it, p. 74) to the view that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons is a bit too quick in the face of the capacity view.

There is a parallel structure in several related problems discussed in *Rationality through Reasoning*. One such area concerns whether there can be a proper logic for the requirements and obligations [pp. 119-129]. Broome is quite negative about that. The issue connects with older debates about fundamental problems in deontic logic. Assume: You are obligated to do F and G. By standard deontic logic you are obligated to do F, and you are also obligated to do G when you are obligated to do F and G. Assume that you do not do F. Are you still obligated to do G? If not, as seems intuitively the case, must not the standard deontic logic be given up?

There is a general issue here, an issue about all practical normative notions: about obligations, requirements, and responding correctly to reasons. The issue concerns the cases where some normative or rational capacity has failed in some respect or other – what happens then to obligations, requirements and correctness of response? The following seems to be the case: Broome has strong arguments against a logic of requirements, based upon cases of false belief. There might, however, still be prospects for a serious logic for normativity, for rational requirements and also deontic obligations, if we limit ourselves to (ideal) situations where all relevant rational capacities have delivered the goods. This is, in a way, not surprising. It brings us back to Frege's conception of the categorical starting point for inference. In the theoretical case we can abstract from truth and go to hypothetical reasoning and even reasoning by *reductio*. Not so in the practical case, that case remains categorical, something which is explained by its point, namely to issue in action. It is a logic that takes us from legitimate premises to legitimate conclusions. There might not be a notion of practical validity operating on 'hypothetical' or illegitimate practical premises. If you go hypothetical you must go theoretical.

This leaves some hope for a proper logic for normative notions. That is a good thing about the present approach. But it also leaves us with a different picture of applying this logic, as it places quite differ-

ent constraints on applicability. However, the advantages of the present approach by far outweigh these disadvantages in applicability.

*Conclusion*

I have tried to identify the most important source of disagreement between Broome and myself, and motivate my alternative view. I have argued that our approaches deliver rationality through reasoning in quite different ways, and also resist Humeanism in quite different ways. I have argued that my approach do better than Broome's on some points. I still admire his work tremendously, and see it as the most important work on reasoning for a very long time.

*CSMN*

*Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas*

*University of Oslo*

*Box 1020 Blindern,*

*N-0317 Oslo, Norway*

*E-mail: olav.gjelsvik@ifikk.uio.no*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Julian Fink, Frøydis Gammelsæter, Torfinn Huvenes, Jon Litland, Anders Nes, Andrew Reisner, Monica Roland, Will Small and Leo Townsend for help and comments.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have argued that we need a practical way of relating to a premise in order to get a practical way into the conclusion in Gjelsvik (2013) ('Understanding Enkratic Reasoning'). Broome achieves the same thing by thinking of the judgment about what you ought to do as also motivational. I think this type of judgment-internalism is unfortunate, and that it creates problems for a good account of weak willed action.

REFERENCES

BROOME, J. (2013), *Rationality Through Reasoning*, London, John Wiley – Blackwell.

GJELSVIK, O. (2013), 'Understanding Enkratic Reasoning', *Organon F*, vol 20 (4), pp. 464-484.

KANE, R. (1996), *The Significance of Free Will*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo concuerda en líneas generales con Broome en que deberíamos abandonar el humeanismo respecto de la razón práctica. Con todo, subsiste todavía algún desacuerdo con Broome respecto de la concepción general. El propósito de este breve artículo es intentar localizar las fuentes más importantes de este desacuerdo, a saber: las diferencias en cómo concebimos la mente, la razón y la racionalidad y sus relaciones mutuas. Presenta también alguna de las consecuencias del desacuerdo respecto de la concepción general, en particular sobre cómo concebir la corrección del razonamiento encrático.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *razonamiento, racionalidad, mente, capacidad racional, inferencia práctica, inferencia encrática.*

#### ABSTRACT

This paper is in broad agreement with Broome in that we ought to dispose of Humeanism about practical reason. Still, there remains some disagreement with Broome about the big picture. The aim of this short paper is to try and locate the most important sources of this disagreement, namely differences in how we conceive of the mind, reason and rationality and the relations between these. It also presents some the consequences of the big picture disagreement, in particular about how to conceive of the correctness of enkratic reasoning.

KEYWORDS: *Reasoning, Rationality, Mind, Rational Capacity, Practical Inference, Enkratic Inference.*