Means/end-incoherence

Starting Point (SP):
If A intends to \( \phi \), and A believes that \( \psi \)-ing is a necessary means to \( \phi \)-ing, and A does not intend to \( \psi \), then (at least apart from exceptional cases) A goes wrong in some way.

Question:
What norm do agents violate when they are means/end-incoherent?

The hypothetical imperative

Imperative: A mandatory ought-claim that entails reasons for conformity.
- Background assumption: Agents go wrong in violating a norm only if they have reasons to conform to the norm.
- This is the sense of “imperative” in which Foot (1972), Dreier (2001) and others doubt the existence of non-hypothetical imperatives.

Structure

I. The hypothetical imperative
II. The anti-structuralist view
III. The underdetermination problem
IV. A proposal for solution
V. Conclusion

The hypothetical imperative

Hypothetical Imperative (HI):
A purely structural ought-claim that demands means/end-coherence as such.

Categorical Imperative (CI):
A non-hypothetical ought-claim.

Narrow vs. wide scope

The narrow-scope view (NS): If A intends to \( \phi \), and A believes that \( \psi \)-ing is a necessary means to \( \phi \)-ing, then A ought to intend to \( \psi \).
(Korsgaard 1997, Schroeder 2004)

The wide-scope view (WS): A always ought to (not intend to \( \phi \), or not believe that \( \psi \)-ing is a necessary means to \( \phi \)-ing, or intend to \( \psi \)).
(Bratman 2009, Broome 1999)
The bootstrapping problem

Narrow Scope (NS)
• licenses unacceptable bootstrapping.

Wide Scope (WS)
• licenses unacceptable bootstrapping when
  combined with independently plausible
  transmission principles (Raz 2005, Setiya 2007).
• Necessary means transmission: If A ought to φ, and
  ψ-ing is a necessary means for A to φ, then A ought to ψ.

The guidance problem

• A reason in favour of (WS) is a reason that can be
  satisfied either by revising a m/e-belief, or by
  revising your intentions.
• Such a reason should thus be able to rationally
  guide you in either revising a belief, or
  alternatively revising your intentions.
• But there is no such reason.

The anti-structuralist view

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The anti-structuralist view

The anti-structuralist view (AS):
Either A ought not to intend to φ, or A ought not to
believe that ψ-ing is a necessary means to φ-ing, or
A ought to intend to ψ.

(AS) avoids the troubles of (NS) and (WS), but is in
need of explanation itself.

The anti-structuralist view

1. If A lacks sufficient evidence for her means/end-
   belief, then A ought not to have the belief.
2. If A does not lack this evidence, then there are three
   logical possibilities:
   2.1 A’s reasons count decisively against φ-ing. In
       this case, A ought not to intend to φ.
   2.2 A’s reasons count decisively in favour of φ-ing.
       In this case, A ought to intend to ψ.
   2.3 A’s reasons count neither decisively in favour,
       nor decisively against φ-ing.
       (= A’s φ-ing is underdetermined by reasons)

Problem: (AS)* does not explain (SP).
The underdetermination problem

What explains that means/end-incoherent agents go wrong even in underdetermined cases?

Balance-tipping views

Adopting an end-intention in an under-determined case tips the balance in favour of adopting the means-intention.

- Direct views: Intentions provide additional reasons (Cheng-Guajardo 2014), at least in underdetermined cases (Raz 1998, Chang 2009).
- Indirect views: Adopting the end-intention strengthens the reasons for the means by making it more effective (Scanlon 2004, Kolodny 2011).

Against balance-tipping views

1. The objection from changing one’s mind
2. The counterbalancing objection

A proposal for solution

- Intentions are partly constituted by dispositions for further deliberation and planning, and for taking means (cf. Bratman 1987).
- Means/end-incoherence increases the risk to deliberate and plan in unnecessary ways and take means to actions that one will not perform.
- One generally has good reason to avoid increasing the risk of wasting one’s resources in pointless activity.
A proposal for solution

These economical considerations support:

Reason to decide (RTD): If A intends to φ, A has sufficient evidence that ψ-ing is a necessary means to φ-ing, and yet A does not intend to ψ, then (at least apart from exceptional cases) A has decisive reason to make a decision between φ-ing and not-ψ-ing.

⇒ RTD explains why means/end-incoherent agents go wrong even in cases of underdetermination.

(RTD) vs. (WS)

1. (RTD) is a reason for action rather than an attitude (or disjunction of attitudes).
   ⇒ Not a structural requirement of attitudinal coherence
   ⇒ No bootstrapping

2. (RTD) is conditional on evidence and cannot be satisfied by revising a belief.
   ⇒ No guidance problem

Conclusion

Common position:
All (practical) normativity has to be explained in terms of the normativity of instrumental rationality.

• Example: Foot’s “Morality as a system of hypothetical imperatives” (1972).

To the contrary, I argued:
⇒ The assumption of hypothetical imperatives is questionable.
⇒ The wrongness of means/end-incoherence can be explained in terms of “categorical” reasons or imperatives

Thank you very much.
References


