Instrumental rationality as a system of categorical imperatives

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Means/end-incoherence

Starting Point (SP):

If A intends to ϕ , and A believes that ψ -ing is a necessary means to ϕ -ing, and A does not intend to ψ , 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?

Structure

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

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.

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 ϕ , and A believes that ψ -ing is a necessary means to ϕ -ing, then A ought to intend to ψ .

(Korsgaard 1997, Schroeder 2004)

The wide-scope view (WS): A always ought to (not intend to ϕ , or not believe that ψ -ing is a necessary means to ϕ -ing, or intend to ψ).

(Bratman 2009, Broome 1999)

The bootstrapping problem

Narrow Scope (NS)

- licenses inacceptable bootstrapping.
- Wide Scope (WS)
 - licenses inacceptable 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 $\psi.$

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.

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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/endbelief, 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 .
 - A's reasons count neither decisively in favour, nor decisively against φ-ing.
 (= A's φ-ing is underdetermined by reasons)

The anti-structuralist view

(1)-(2.3) give us:

(AS)* Unless A is in an underdetermined case, 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 .

Problem: (AS)* does not explain (SP).

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The underdetermination problem

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

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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

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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.

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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.

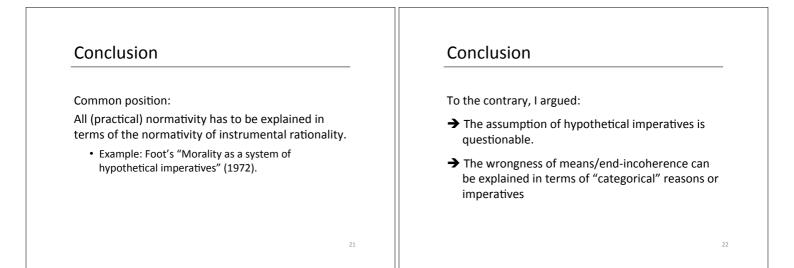
➔ RTD explains why means/end-incoherent agents go wrong even in cases of underdetermination.

(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.

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→ No guidance problem



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