

## Instrumental rationality as a system of categorical imperatives

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## Means/end-incoherence

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### *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?

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## Structure

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

## The hypothetical imperative

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*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.

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## The hypothetical imperative

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### *Hypothetical Imperative (HI):*

A purely structural ought-claim that demands means/end-coherence as such.

### *Categorical Imperative (CI):*

A non-hypothetical ought-claim.

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## Narrow vs. wide scope

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*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)

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## The bootstrapping problem

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### 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  $\phi$ , and  $\psi$ -ing is a necessary means for A to  $\phi$ , then A ought to  $\psi$ .

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## The guidance problem

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- 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

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*The anti-structuralist view (AS):*

Either A ought not to intend to  $\phi$ , *or* A ought not to believe that  $\psi$ -ing is a necessary means to  $\phi$ -ing, *or* A ought to intend to  $\psi$ .

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

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## The anti-structuralist view

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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  $\phi$ -ing. In this case, A *ought not to intend to  $\phi$* .
  - 2.2 A's reasons count decisively in favour of  $\phi$ -ing. In this case, A *ought to intend to  $\psi$* .
  - 2.3 A's reasons count neither decisively in favour, nor decisively against  $\phi$ -ing.  
(= A's  $\phi$ -ing is *underdetermined* by reasons)

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## The anti-structuralist view

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(1)-(2.3) give us:

(AS)\* *Unless A is in an underdetermined case, either A ought not to intend to  $\phi$ , or A ought not to believe that  $\psi$ -ing is a necessary means to  $\phi$ -ing, or A ought to intend to  $\psi$ .*

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

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## The underdetermination problem

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

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## Balance-tipping views

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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).

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## Against balance-tipping views

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

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## A proposal for solution

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- 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

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These economical considerations support:

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

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

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## (RTD) vs. (WS)

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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

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## Conclusion

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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).

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## Conclusion

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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

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Thank you very much.

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