

KBNS A priori 2019 March 19th

Attending: Giovanni, Giacomo, Sonia, Moritz, Asgeir, Peter, Indrek, Paul, Jonathan, Crispin, Xintong

Presenting: Moritz

Reading: McHugh and Way 'What is reasoning?'

1. preliminaries

'By 'reasoning' we mean **personal-level, conscious, active reasoning**. We do not mean subpersonal, unconscious, or automatic information-processing. (168)'

Peter: What is one supposed to be conscious of in reasoning? If I was asked whether I would go to Perth for a conference, upon realizing that Perth is in Australia, I answered no. Is that a case of conscious reasoning?

Giacomo: In reasoning, one doesn't need to be aware that what one is doing is reasoning. It would be counted as reasoning on M&W's view as long as there is a transition regulated by an aim to get fitting attitudes. So even forming basic perceptual belief can be a case of reasoning on their view.

Moritz&Giovanni: There is room to describe the Peter's case as an episode of unconscious information processing or sub-personal transition.

2. Reasoning and basing

Crispin: Basing is a relation between attitudes that can arise without reasoning. I may base my belief on beliefs that do not figure in my reasoning. Reasoning is dynamic whereas basing is static. Reasoning may be sensitive to the basing relation but is not itself a kind of basing.

Giovanni: Perhaps their point is simply that reasoning is a particular kind of basing. Reasoning is some kind of psychological process, which takes you from a to b; and a and b are related in a basing relation.

3. On M&W's criticism against Broome

Jonathan: There are two distinctive kinds of bad reasoning: 1. following bad rules 2. doing a bad job following a good rule. This can be an independent problem for Broome's type of view where reasoning is defined in terms of following a rule because it is insensitive to the distinction. I may try to follow a rule but fail to follow a rule; defining reasoning in terms of rule-following is going to be a problem.

Jonathan: M&W's appeal to R1-R4 seems problematic. There is reason to be suspicious about these rules given their specificity. The kind of rule in reasoning is general. R1 is general, but it is not clear that R1 is not a case of reasoning.

Crispin: Can one comply with R1-R4 without reasoning? If I try to comply with the regularity, am I rule-following? To follow rules will be reasoning of some kind. There has to be something to draw the distinction between mere compliance and rule-following.

Peter: On M&W's view, following rules like R1-R4 wouldn't count as reasoning; but on Broome's view, they would. Is this an indication that they are doing different things? Someone who follows R1-R4 are forming crazy attitude. However, if the person is consistent, you would recognize the pattern in it, e.g., R1-R4. In this sense Broome can capture the distinction

between random madness, and madness with a pattern. That distinction is not what M&W is targeting.

4.2 against “**get rational attitudes**”. “**get attitudes supported by reasons**”. (176)

- satisfying rational requirements does not seem valuable for its own sake and need not be a means to anything else worth doing

Peter: Why does this show that ‘satisfying rational requirements’ isn’t the point of reasoning? Cutting is not valuable for its own sake; but it is not thereby ruled out as the aim of using knife.

- attitudes that are supported by some reason are easy to come by without reasoning.

Paul: Suppose that I believe that q for some reason other than reasoning from p. Can I report that p supports q? Or report that p is a reason for q?

Indrek: This is Crispin’s previous point; one’s belief can base on beliefs that don’t figure in one’s reasoning.

Giacomo: There is a distinction between the way in which you form your belief and the way in which you should form your belief.

1. The rules of good theoretical reasoning clearly have something to do with preserving truth

2. Preserving Fittingness *makes* such reasoning good.

Jonathan: It is not obvious why preserving fittingness has something to do with reasoning; one way to preserve fittingness is to refrain from doing any reasoning at all.

Giacomo: There might be pragmatic reason to engage with reasoning, to expand fitting attitudes.

Paul: If the goal is to maximize fittingness, there is going to be a problem of trivialness, e.g., maximize fittingness by having trivial true beliefs.

Giovanni: Is the aim preserving truth or preserving fittingness?

Peter: In theoretical reasoning, preserving fitting belief is to preserve truth. It is valuable, presumably because fitting beliefs lead to successful action. The point of theoretical reasoning, in so far as it has truth in it, seems to be its role in guiding successful action.

Crispin: Aiming at truth and aiming at conditions for truth aren’t the same. BIV is doing well in having a coherent system of beliefs even if those beliefs are not true. We need to acknowledge that there is a sense in which BIV is doing well.

Peter: The question that interests Boghossian is what kind of psychological process, above a causal process, is reasoning. There is no indication that M&W’s account of reasoning as a kind of regulated activity has any psychological realization at all.

Crispin: A transition can be regulated by an aim without me aiming at it.

Giacomo: You can be sensitive to the transition without representing the transition as preserving fittingness.

Crispin: There can be aimless reasoning just like there can be aimless chess playing. Why isn’t reasoning just like playing chess?

Giovanni: Perhaps to play chess is to play with an aim of winning; other ways of playing chess are parasitic on it. Likewise, to reason is to reason with an aim of preserving fittingness; other ways of reasoning are parasitic on it.

What is Reasoning?

(2017) McHugh, Conor and Jonathan Way: *What is Reasoning?* In: *Mind* 127: 505. 167-196

1. Preliminaries

By 'reasoning' we mean **personal-level, conscious, active reasoning**. We do not mean subpersonal, unconscious, or automatic information-processing. (168)

Reasoning is a functional kind: it has a constitutive point or aim that fixes the standards for good reasoning. (168)

The aim of reasoning is **to get fitting attitudes**. (168)

2. Responding to normative Support (Contra Wedgwood)

"in *reasoning* you form a conclusion-attitude *because* it is supported by your premise-attitudes. (169) In a slogan, reasoning is attitude-revision in response to rationalization. (169)"

- it **doesn't account for bad reasoning**. In reasoning badly, your premise-beliefs do not make your conclusion-belief rational; nor do they give or correspond to reasons for it. But clearly it is possible to reason in this and other bad ways. (169)

Nonetheless, this suggests a natural way of generalising Wedgwood's account. ...The suggestion, in effect, is **that reasoning is simply a kind of basing** - of forming attitudes for motivating reasons. (169)

- Basing is as much in need of explication as reasoning. Many of the problems discussed here regarding reasoning have analogues for basing. (170)
- it is highly controversial whether reasoning necessarily involves taking your premises to be normative reasons for your conclusion. (170)

3. Rule-Following (Contra Broome)

Reasoning constitutively involves **following rules**. (171) Think of reasoning as rule-following attitude-revision. (172)

Good reasoning can be understood in terms of good *rules* or patterns of reasoning And even when you are reasoning incompetently, you are still following rules—just the wrong ones.

- The rules you follow in reasoning appeal to contents and attitude-types.
- Rule-following must not be conceived as itself involving reasoning.
- Rule-following is not intentional and one should not read 'construct' or 'derive' as synonyms for 'reason to'.

Criticism

- following rules for operating on attitudes seems insufficient for reasoning.

4. Reasoning as a goodness-fixing kind

1. Reasoning is good *qua* reasoning.
2. Reasoning is a functional kind and has an aim.
3. The aim of reasoning fixes the constitutive standards of *good* reasoning.
4. The aim of reasoning is to get fitting attitudes.
5. Only activities regulated by this aim count as reasoning.
6. In being guided by the aim of reasoning, one does not reason.
7. Reasoning is attitude-revision that follows the General Rule

4.1 Reasoning is good in itself and a functional kind.

1. **There is such a thing as *good* reasoning.**
2. By 'a good F' we mean something what that is good *qua* F.
3. The standard for being good *qua* F is fixed by what it *is* to be an F.
4. When there is such a standard, F is a 'goodness-fixing kind'.
5. **'Good reasoning' is good *qua* reasoning. (a goodness-fixing kind)**

To say that someone is engaged in good reasoning is not to say that their reasoning is good for this or that contingent end, but that it is good *qua* reasoning. And it is highly plausible that what counts as good reasoning has to do with what reasoning is. (175)

1. **Reasoning is a functional kind.**
2. It is in the nature of reasoning that it has a certain point or aim.
3. **The point or aim is what fixes the constitutive standards of good reasoning.**

A natural hypothesis, then, is that reasoning, like knives and housebuilding, is a functional kind. On this hypothesis, it is in the nature of reasoning that it has a certain point or aim. (176)

4.2 The point of reasoning is to get fitting attitudes.

Two (bad) candidates: "**get rational attitudes**". "**get attitudes supported by reasons**". (176)

- satisfying rational requirements does not seem valuable for its own sake and need not be a means to anything else worth doing
 - attitudes that are supported by some reason are easy to come by without reasoning.
1. **The rules of good theoretical reasoning clearly have something to do with preserving truth.**

True beliefs have a normatively significant property: they are correct, right, or, as we will say, *fitting*. So, in preserving truth, good theoretical reasoning also preserves fittingness. (177)

2. **Preserving Fittingness *makes* such reasoning good.**

It is plausible that the point of theoretical reasoning is to acquire beliefs which have the normative property of fittingness; theoretical reasoning aims at truth because truth is what counts as getting things right in belief (177)

3. **Other attitudes have standards of fittingness too**

'Fitting' is something of a term of art. As noted above, we can also talk of correctness or getting it right (177)

4. The ultimate point of reasoning is to get fitting attitudes. In other words, it is to get things right

4.3 Only activities regulated by (that) aim count as reasoning.

Reasoning is like house-building: **it has an aim in the strong sense that only activities regulated by this aim count as reasoning.** (179)

- when you reason, you can't be indifferent to the standards of good reasoning.
- there are some cases of reasoning for which it seems clearly true that they are regulated by the aim of getting things right.
- reasoning is always *directed*.

The account explains why bad reasoning is nonetheless reasoning: what you're doing can be regulated by an aim even though you're not serving it well. (179)

The point is rather that it would depend on whether, in following them, you were aiming to get fitting attitudes. (180)

4.4 Pursuing and aim without reasoning.

If our account is to be tenable, it must be possible to be guided by an aim without reasoning.

- Although the transitions made in reasoning are made as a means to an end, the way in which they are guided by this end is not via a means-end belief, and thus does not involve reasoning. (180)
- Agents can be sensitive to fittingness-preservation in reasoning without representing their reasoning as fittingness-preserving. (180)
- In following the rules that you follow, you manifest your imperfect sensitivity to what will serve the aim of getting fitting attitudes.

For example, in following the Modus Ponens Rule, or the Means-End Rule, a reasoner manifests their sensitivity to the fact that these patterns of reasoning preserve fittingness. (180)

We think it is useful to understand your following rules in reasoning as a way of following a more general rule:

(General Rule) In revising your attitudes, get fitting attitudes and not unfitting ones! (181)

Worries

1. Circularity (181)
2. Grounding (182)
3. Defeat (183)
4. Backwards Reasoning (183)

Our overall pattern of reasoning dispositions thus strongly suggests an overarching, if implicit, concern with getting fitting attitudes. (183)

And this concern is not a contingent matter. It's not as though we just happen to reason in these ways. To follow our ordinary rules wherever they lead, even to belief in propositions

we are antecedently certain are false, or to intentions for courses of action we think disastrous, would not be recognisable as reasoning. (183)

5. Implications and attractions

5.1 Basing and deviant chains

5.2 Reasons

The best way to get a fitting attitude is to start from fitting attitudes, including true beliefs, and take steps that keep you on track—that is, fittingness-preserving steps. (184)

A normative reason for an attitude is a truth from which you can make a fittingness-preserving transition to that attitude. (184)

5.3 Aims of attitudes

Belief aims at truth in this sense: forming a belief through reasoning is forming it in a way that is regulated by the function of getting fitting, and therefore true, beliefs. (185)

5.4 Fittingness

Plausibly, holding an attitude of a particular type involves being disposed to use it as a premise-attitude in specific ways of reasoning. (186)

So an attitude-type's contribution to reasoning fixes certain features that an object must have, in order for reasoning from an attitude of that type, with that object, to tend to satisfy its point.

Since having such an attitude is in part being disposed to reason in these ways, this yields a sense in which it is appropriate to have the attitude only when its object has those features.

We suggest that this appropriateness just is fittingness, and that the features in question thereby constitute the fittingness condition for that type of attitude.

6. Objections

6.1 Hypothetical reasoning

Hypothetical reasoning, unlike 'straight' theoretical reasoning, involves attitudes other than belief. (187)

'Supposing' is like believing in that it represents a content as true. It is unlike believing in that it's not necessarily unfitting when its content is false. (188)

When you reason under a supposition, your further suppositional steps are answerable to the situation where the supposition you're reasoning under is true. (188)

Differences in the fittingness-conditions of belief and supposition reflect differences in their functional roles. (188)

6.2 Perceptual beliefs

The account we have offered seems to allow that transitions from perception to belief could count as reasoning, since they could aim at truth. (189)

If reasoning is understood as a conscious transition of thought, then beliefs acquired without any such transition, as many perceptual beliefs are, are not acquired through reasoning. (189)

And when such a transition from perception to belief does occur, and meets the conditions we have proposed, then we are happy to count it as reasoning. (189)

6.3 The Taking Condition

(Taking Condition) Theoretical reasoning necessarily involves taking your premises to support your conclusion.

We agree that what makes reasoning active is that it is aim-directed. If Boghossian is right that this aim-directedness entails the Taking Condition, then our account does after all vindicate the condition. If not, then there is no good motivation for the Taking Condition here. (191)

The Taking Condition may also be motivated by the thought that theoretical reasoning commits you to thinking that your premises support your conclusion.

Theoretical reasoning is guided by the aim of acquiring fitting beliefs. If p does not support q , then reasoning from p to q is not a good way to pursue this aim. (191)

6.3 Science

One might even wonder whether the account offered here isn't incompatible with empirical findings.

Our account does suggest that there are limits on the extent to which you can reason in a way that you are aware won't lead to fitting attitudes.