

**Phil 154. Rationality and action.**

Fall 2008. MW 1-2:50. Dodd 175

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This class will work on some problems about practical reasons and practical rationality.

We'll start with some arguments for and against the "*Humean*" *theory of reasons*, according to which the fact that you have reason to do some act consists in or depends on the fact that it serves some desire that you have. Then we'll consider whether there's a genuinely normative standard of *instrumental rationality* requiring you to take the means to your ends. Then we'll ask whether you can have most reason to help other people to your own detriment—whether *altruism* is required by reasons. Then we'll ask whether the members of a population face demands of *collective rationality* that diverge from the individual requirements that govern their actions one by one.

These topics are linked in several ways. The first and third topics by the fact that, since some people don't want to help others, altruism requires the independence of some reasons from desires. The first and second topics by the question of whether practical reason asks that your attitudes agree with one another or with the normative facts. And the third and fourth topics by the issue of the difference that other people, other actors, should make to your thinking about what to do.

The written work for the class is three 5-page papers due on Oct. 27, Nov. 17, and Dec. 12.

schedule

Sept 29            **Introduction**

1. Reasons, desires, and motivation

- Oct 1            **Are all reasons based in desires?**  
Thomas Nagel, *The possibility of altruism*, pp. 27-8
- Oct 6            **Williams' argument against desire-independent reasons**  
Bernard Williams, "Internal and external reasons"
- Oct 8            **Is motivation necessary for reasons?**  
Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about practical reason", pp
- Oct 13           **Is desire necessary for motivation?**  
Thomas Nagel, *The possibility of altruism*, pp. 28-46
- Oct 15           **Is desire necessary for motivation?**  
Thomas Scanlon, *What we owe to each other*, pp. 33-50

2. The normativity of instrumental rationality

- Oct 20           **Rationality as coherence of attitudes**  
John Broome, "Rational requirements"
- Oct 22           **Why be instrumentally rational?**  
Christine Korsgaard, "The normativity of instrumental rationality", pp. 220-234
- Oct 27           **The bootstrapping problem and the wide-scope solution**  
Michael Bratman, *Intentions, plans, and practical reason*, pp. 23-7
- Oct 29           **Skepticism about instrumental rationality**  
Joseph Raz, "The myth of instrumental rationality"
- Nov 3            **Skepticism about instrumental rationality**  
Niko Kolodny, "Why be rational?"

### 3. Self- versus other-interested reasons

- Nov 5           **Subjective and objective reasons**  
Nagel, *The possibility of altruism*, pp. 79-98
- Nov 10          **Nagel's argument for altruism**  
Nagel, *The possibility of altruism*, pp. 99-128
- Nov 12          **Sufficient reason to favor yourself or others**  
Parfit, *Climbing the mountain*, pp. 59-68
- Nov 17          **A contractualist reconciliation of the standpoints**  
Nagel, *Equality and partiality*, pp. 10-20, 41-52

### 4. Individual versus collective practical reason

- Nov 19          **Collectively self-defeating individually rational action**  
Derek Parfit, *Reasons and persons*, pp.54-62, 87-91
- Nov 24          **The irrelevance of collective rationality**  
Erin Kelley and Lionel MacPherson, "Prisoner's mistrust"
- Nov 26          **What we have reason together to do**  
A. J. Julius, "Joined by reasons"
- Dec 1           **Acting together**  
Michael Bratman, "Shared agency"
- Dec 3           **Acting together by responding to collective reasons**  
Julius, "Joined by reasons"