

ABSTRACT

Janus-Faced Rationality: How Norms for Reason Flow from Facts about Our Social Evolutionary History

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Approaches to the study of rationality can be grouped into two camps. Normative notions of rationality are traditionally the province of philosophers and logicians, who use a priori methods to ascertain canonically sound forms of reasoning but generally leave facts about how people actually do reason aside. Empirical approaches to rationality are the playground of psychologists and cognitive scientists, who use observational methods to determine how humans actually reason but often neglect (in the name of being scientific) to generate norms telling us how we ought to reason if we want to reason well. Here, I argue ecologically valid approaches to the study of rationality will have two faces: a genealogical historical component that tells us how these norms of reason came to be evolutionarily stable strategies for solving problems, and a norm-giving nomological component that justifies their use in appropriate circumstances. A comprehensive theory of rationality will thus be janus-faced, bridging the philosophical and psychological approaches to the study of good reasoning. One candidate for a good empirical cum normative theory of rationality takes our evolutionary history seriously, as both the source of and justificatory backstop for reasons. To be reasonable is just to use cognition in ways that allows us to adapt ourselves to our environments, and to adapt our environments to ourselves. This "fit-functional" notion of rationality illuminates several aspects of the heuristics and biases research program, and can also be used to explain why stories and narratives play an important role in shaping the reasons we share; it illuminates our social evolutionary history and gives normative force to some common-sense notions about what it means to think well.

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