Abstract

Akrasia has been traditionally defined as a failure to do what one has most reasons to do, or what one judges that one ought to do (McIntyre 2006; Wedgwood 2007). Traditional conceptions on akrasia take it as a violation of a commitment of the agent: “[for traditional conceptions] an agent who decisively judges it best to A is thereby rationally committed to A-ing, in the sense that (as long as the judgment is retained) the uncompelled, intentional performance of any action that he believes to be incompatible with his A-ing would open him to the charge of irrationality”¹. This conception of akrasia is based on what Wedgwood calls *Normative Judgement Internalism* (NJI): necessarily, if one is rational, then, if one judges ‘I ought to φ’, one also intends to φ. The irrationality of akrasia can be seen as a violation of the NJI maxim, which has been recently labelled *enkrasia* (Broome 2007). Thus, NJI claims that there is an internal connection between an agent’s normative judgements and her disposition to act. This view relies on the assumption that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention (Stroud 2003).

My aim in this paper is to argue that NJI is false, and that the formulation of the enkratic requirement entailed by this view is too demanding. In the first part of this paper, I will present two arguments against the claim that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention. My aim is to show that a complete and correct process of practical reasoning does not necessarily ends up in the formation of an intention. Practical reasoning is frequently, but not necessarily, prompted by a situation in which the agent has to choose a path of action, and thus it is able to guide intentions; however, advice as second-person practical reasoning, and cases in which the conclusion of the reasoning process is negative, do not lead to intention formation. In the second part of the paper I will suggest that enk rasia is better understood as a restriction, and provide an alternative formulation of this rational constraint.

I. The conclusion of practical reasoning

Practical reasoning contrasts with theoretical reasoning: while the former is directed towards action, the latter aims to elucidate how the facts stand. This starting point has led the majority of philosophers to claim that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention (Brandom 1998; Broome 2002; Stroud 2003), or an action (Dancy 2004; Tenenbaum 2007), or any of them—decisions or actions (Alvarez 2010). Following Audi (2006), I believe that the conclusion of

practical reasoning is a normative belief. I will provide three arguments to support this thesis: (i) the possibility of reasoning about what someone else should do, and (ii) the possibility of concluding that one ought not to do something.

First, although practical reasoning is directed towards action, it is not necessarily one’s own action; I can deliberate about what you should do, and judge that you ought to φ. Theories defending that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention, or an action, consider this form of reasoning theoretical. I find this misleading, for the kind of inferences that one makes when deliberating about what one should do are essentially the same to those made when deliberating about what a team, or someone else, should do. It can be argued that one has no agential authority over someone else’s actions; this is, that I can deliberate about what you should do given my policies, deliberative commitments, values and so on. The difference between first and second-personal practical reasoning lies in (1) the amount of information available for each agent, and (2) the evaluation mechanisms used to assess the reasons for and against studying philosophy or law. Although, as Andreou (2006) argues, judgements about what an agent ought to do can be made from within the deliberative agent’s (the adviser) standards and values, or within the advisee standards and values, through a process of empathy; thus, the difference stated in (2) is not always the case.

Second, it is possible to deliberate about whether we should do something in particular; and the answer can be negative, as well as positive. If I wonder now whether I should do φ, and I conclude that I ought not, requiring me to form the corresponding intention not to do φ seems too strong as a condition for rationality. I can avoid irrationality by merely not intending to do what I believe I ought not to do. Failing to intend to do what one judges best is different from acting intentionally against one’s better judgement. It is far from clear that, by not intending to do what she believes she ought to do, and agent holds inconsistent beliefs and intentions. In fact, the distinction between the absence of intention and the presence of a negative intention is often overlooked. This is, intending not to φ is quite different from not intending to φ. I assume that the difference is clear and unproblematic; my claim is that this difference is relevant for the understanding of the normative relation between judgements and intentions. In fact, the problem with NJI is that it assumes that it is irrational to believe that I ought to φ and, at the same time, not to intend to φ. It follows from NJI that rationality requires that, if I believe I ought not to do something, then I (actively) intend not to do it. This formulation fails to gather the normative relation between judgements and intentions.

To sum up, these two cases of practical reasoning show that it does not require to form an intention; practical reasoning is a process of evaluation of reasons, and although it usually prompts choice, intention and action, it is not necessary. Thus, NJI relies on a false assumption
and, as I will argue in the next section, its formulation of enkrasia is too demanding.

II. Enkrasia as a restriction

Although I do not agree in that an intentional state necessarily follows from a practical judgement (judgement internalism), I will defend a version of volitional internalism, which claims that an agent’s choices and intentions do bear a internal relation to her practical judgements.

Akrasia requires, on the one hand, having formed a judgement, either positive or negative, about what one ought to do; on the other it requires, as I will argue in this section, that the agent holds an intentional state. The irrationality of akrasia lies in an incorrect relation with an intentional state of the agent. Given that an agent can intend to do something, or to intend to refrain from doing something (i.e. not to do something), and that she can also lack the relevant intentional state, the following combinations may obtain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bφ</th>
<th>Iφ</th>
<th>Enkrasia</th>
<th>B¬φ</th>
<th>Iφ</th>
<th>Akrasia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I¬φ</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>Akrasia</td>
<td>¬Iφ</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¬Iφ</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>¬I¬φ</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Combinations of judgements and intentions

It should be noted that I am using here the concept of intention in a broad sense, to refer both to actions that are made intentionally, and to future-directed intentions. Of course, there are differences between the two of them. Mainly, in order to avoid akrasia, an agent who holds a future-directed intention to do something she judges she ought not to do can drop her intention; an agent who is acting intentionally against her better judgement can stop acting.

There are four uncontroversial cases in the table above: two of akrasia, and two of enkrasia. Either the agent’s intentions are in line (enkrasia) or contradict (akrasia) the agent’s normative judgement. However, the absence of intention has to be examined more carefully.

First of all, it is unclear in what sense not intending to φ and not intending not to φ are distinct. Usually, when an agent intends to φ, she lacks the intention not to φ; and vice versa, if she intends not to φ, she lacks the intention to φ. But it may well be the case that she intends neither to φ nor not to φ. For example, I do not intend neither to go to Thailand next year, nor I

---

2 The difference between judgement and volitional internalism is presented by (Hinchman 2009).
3 I am assuming here that the agent holds consistent intentions.
do not intend not to go. It is simply an intention I do not have. Therefore, it is not true that every time an agent does not intend to φ, she intends not to φ, or that if she does not intend not to φ, then she intends to φ.

Given that, as I have argued in the previous section, practical reasoning does not necessarily ends up in the formation of an intention, and that akrasia is a failure of consistency between intentions and normative judgements, it is necessary that an akratic agent has an intention. Hence, my suggestion is to formulate enkrasia as a restriction, rather than a positive requirement to form an intention:

**ENKRASIA (NARROW+):** If you believe that you ought to φ, then rationality requires that you do not [intend not to φ].

**ENKRASIA (NARROW -):** If you believe that you ought not to φ, then rationality requires that you do not [intend to φ].

This narrow-scope formulation states that the only thing that is required from an agent who judges she ought (not) to do something is that she does not intend to do something that violates her judgement. To put it differently: you ought not to intend to do something that you judge you ought not to do. This is why I have some reservations about considering enkrasia as a form of requirement: it is rather a prohibition. We are not required to do something, but to abstain from doing it. Of course, unintentional and non-reflective abstentions also count as complying with enkrasia. If I believe I ought not to lie, I do not need to form the intention not to lie every time I talk; not forming the intention to lie suffices for not violating enkrasia.

Furthermore, a narrow-scope formulation of enkrasia does not exclude the possibility of exiting from the requirement by reconsidering one’s judgements. Given that narrow-scope formulations are conditionals, denying the antecedent makes the consequent no longer required. But, as Lord points out, exiting from the requirement—i.e. making it no longer apply to us through denying the antecedent—is not a form of complying with it, but it does not violate it either.

This table represents the possible relations between judgements and intentional states, regarding enkrasia and akrasia:

---

4 In fact, this formulation is logically equivalent to a wide-scope one relating the judgement and the intentional state (or its absence) through conjunction rather than implication, given that ¬(p ∧ ¬q) is equivalent to p → ¬¬q. I prefer the narrow-scope formulation because it gathers the directionality of the normative constraints, but I find this version of the wide-scope also acceptable. The wide-scope formulation could go as follows:

**ENKRASIA (WIDE -):** Rationality requires that you do not [believe that you ought to φ, and intend not to φ].

5 (Lord 2011)
I have made a threefold distinction regarding enkrasia. In the formulation I have suggested, an agent is enkratic as long as she does not intend to do something she believes she ought not to do, and vice versa. Also, if an agent intends to \( \varphi \), then she does not intend not to \( \varphi \); otherwise, she would have inconsistent intentions\(^6\). Therefore, if an agent intends to \( \varphi \), and believes she ought to \( \varphi \), she is being enkratic, given that, by intending to \( \varphi \), she is also not intending not to \( \varphi \). The label 'enkratic-derived', thus, aims to stress that the rationality of acting according to one's judgements is derived from a requirement of not holding inconsistent attitudes. Finally, the 'enkrasia-compatible' case is such that the agent believes she ought to \( \varphi \), and she does not intend to \( \varphi \), or vice versa. This case is a bit more complicated. Suppose that Hannah judges that she ought to \( \varphi \), and at the same time she does not intend to \( \varphi \). This absence of intentional state is both compatible with not intending anything at all (which does not violate the enkratic requirement) and also with intending not not to \( \varphi \) – which does violate enkrasia. Thus, merely by not intending to do what one judges best, an agent is not violating the enkratic requirement, but akrasia is not ruled out. We lack of sufficient information to know whether, having judged she ought to \( \varphi \), the agent is being akratic (if she also intends not to \( \varphi \)) or enkratic (if she does not intend anything at all).

Enkrasia is not the only normative requirement: for instance, rationality requires that an agent does not hold conflicting intentional states, and requires that an agent intends the means the achieve the end she intends. Insofar rational agency is a temporally extended process, with different interrelated steps, rational failures can occur in any of the stages. The formulation of normative requirements has to be general enough in order to cover the scope of rational actions; I have tried to show that the enkratic requirement as suggested by the normative judgement internalism is too demanding, and is based on a false assumption: that the conclusion of practical reasoning is an intention.

\(^6\) Of course, it is possible for an agent to intend to \( \varphi \) and to intend not to \( \varphi \) at the same time; it is irrational, but possible. I am assuming here that the agent is rational.
References


