
In what sense is normative decision theory a theory of rationality?

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Résumé

Abstract :

Normative decision theory is typically viewed as a theory of practical rationality, and in particular a theory stating rationality principles (or, requirements) about preferences and choices. Since two decades or so, several authors tried to characterize rationality (e.g., Broome 2013, Wedgwood 2017, Kiesewetter 2017, Worsnip 2021). They do it either in terms of attitudinal coherence or in terms of adequate responses to reasons. Some think that one of these characterizations is primitive, while others (like Worsnip, 2021) endorse a dualistic view according to which there are two irreducible notions of rationality (so-called " structural " and " substantive " concepts of rationality). Some of the principles of decision theory like the principle of transitivity of preferences is often used to illustrate the notion of rationality. But one could wonder more generally what is the status of normative decision theory in view of these recent developments in the philosophy of rationality. In this talk, I will focus on key axioms on preferences like the Independence Axiom in expected utility theory under risk (von Neumann & Morgenstern) or the Sure-Thing Principle in subjective expected utility theory (Savage), and tackle the issue of knowing whether they fit current characterizations of rationality. In particular, I will discuss the thesis that they express requirements of attitudinal coherence (aka structural rationality) and consider in particular the view of structural rationality defended by Worsnip (2021).

References :

Broome, J. (2013) *Rationality Through Reasoning*, Wiley Blackwell

Kiesewetter, B. (2017) *The Normativity of Rationality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Lord, E. (2018) *The Importance of Being Rational*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wedgwood, R. (2017) *The Value of Rationality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Worsnip, A (2021) *Fitting Things Together: Coherence and the Demands of Rationality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mots-Clés: decision theory, rationality, preferences, choice

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