

„Practical reasoning as normative reasoning“

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Abstract

In my talk I want to stress the point that we explain human actions by giving *reasons* – not by identifying *causes*. I will explicate some differences between both. In particular, the essential difference between reasons and causes can be seen in their normative role they play in our language. Reasons are something from which the resultant action becomes understandable as something that *should have been done* or that was *a good thing to do* from the perspective of the agent (in the given circumstances of the action). It is for this peculiar normative character that reasons for actions can *justify* actions, in contrast to causal explanation which explain *how* the occurrence of the action in question came *about*.

One benefit of understanding the explanation of actions by reasons as normative in character is, that it dissolves some notorious obscurities in prominent accounts of practical syllogism, namely: a) That the conclusion of a practical syllogism is allegedly itself an action, and b) the claim that practical reasoning is no form of “logical demonstration”, because the premises allegedly don’t necessitate the conclusion. However, I want to show that a) the conclusions of practical syllogisms are not actions – although the conclusions are intimately connected with actions and b) that the premises of a practical syllogism do necessitate the conclusion. There is indeed a difference between practical and theoretical reasoning – but it is rooted finally in the difference between normative and descriptive language use.