

Rationality₂: No guide for the perplexed?

My aim in this paper is to suggest that the dual notion of rationality cannot be sustained. More specifically, I argue against the notion of normative rationality, the Rationality₂ of the Evans and Over (1996) concept of dual rationality, based on having ‘a reason for what one does sanctioned by a normative theory’ (ibid, p. 8). To elucidate the difference between these two type of theories, I draw on an example from linguistics where the distinction is well established, and suggest that the same would benefit the rationality debate in reasoning and decision making. I propose that normative rationality is commonly conflated with a computational level analysis, and that this muddle gives rise to the ‘is-ought’ fallacy. This fallacy means that, while one can empirically arbitrate between competing computational accounts, there is not way to do so for competing normative ones. To demonstrate how acute is the need to decide between normative theories, I examine two extreme cases, first, where there are too many normative theories, and the secondly where there is not not even one. I then proceed to examine two prominent rationality agendas, rational analysis of Oaksford and Chater (e.g., 1998) and the use of the understanding / acceptance principle in Stanovich’s individual differences programme (e.g., 1999). Each of these programmes commits the is-ought fallacy in some part of its arguments. I conclude that normative rationality cannot be an issue for empirical research, and that dual process theories of reasoning are better off without the dual normative framework.