

Drake – Motivating reasons to slow the factive turn

Brian T. Miller

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Overview

Like others we've read, Drake is concerned with the factivity of reasons.

Like Dancy, he denies the factivity of the *motivating* reasons relevant to *practical* rationality

Unlike those others, Drake also denies the factivity of *normative* reasons relevant to *practical* rationality

He further holds the following thesis:

Uniformity: *ceteris paribus*, the best theory of reasons will hold just one position about the factivity of reasons, which is true of every kind of reason.

Hence the ultimate upshot of the paper: normative *practical* reasons aren't factive, and the correct account of reasons is the same across domains, so normative *theoretical* (i.e. epistemic) reasons aren't factive either

In defense of Uniformity

Drake doesn't argue for Uniformity; he takes it as the default position, is content to defend it from a particular objection.

Objection: epistemic reasons are truth-related in ways that practical reasons are not, so why expect that practical and theoretical reasons would be alike in their factivity?

Response: truth *is* important to epistemic reasons, but not in the sense imagined by the objector

- if *r* is a reason for *p*, then (plausibly) the truth of *r* must increase the truth of *p*
 - *that's* the sense in which truth is relevant to theoretical reasons
- but the factivity debate is about something different: it's about whether *r* itself is true
- *r* doesn't need to be true to be positively correlated with *p*¹

¹ Drake cites the analogy of valid arguments, on which premises and conclusion are related in ways independent of the actual truth of the premises.

Acting in light of a falsehood

Drake motivates the non-factivity of normative practical reasons with (non-familiar) cases:

SKATING: Imagine a pond that has thin ice in the middle. Edna takes it that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. So, when she skates, Edna keeps to the edge of the pond. You are on a nearby hill, and you see Edna skating. You ask her why she is skating as she is, and she tells you that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. (7)

Drake's pre-theoretic intuition is that Edna's motivating reason is: that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin

Theoretical reason for accepting that same account: motivating reasons explain actions, and Edna's actions are explained by the thinness of the ice. If you doubt it, just ask Edna.

New case:

TWO SKATERS: Imagine two adjacent ponds. Edna takes it that the ice in the middle of one pond is thin. So, when she skates on it, she keeps to the edge of the pond. Edmund takes it that the ice in the middle of the other pond is thin. So, when he skates on it, he keeps to the edge of the pond. You are on a nearby hill, and you see both skaters skating – but you have no view about how things are with the ice. As they finish, you ask them both why they keep to the edge while they skate. They both tell you that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. When you get home, your sister tells you that the ice in the middle of Edmund's pond is just fine. (8-9)

Drake's intuitions, and the theoretical motivation for accepting that motivation, are the same: both Edna and Edmund act for the same reason: that the ice in the middle of their respective ponds is thin (even though Edmund is wrong about that).

Acting *rationally* in light of a falsehood

Consider another pair of cases:

JUST SKATING: Imagine that Edmund is about to go skating. As he heads out, Edna tells him that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. When Edmund goes out to the pond, the ice in the middle of the pond looks thin to him. Edmund takes it that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. So, when he skates, Edmund keeps to the edge of the pond. Meanwhile, you are on a nearby hill, and you see Edmund skating. You approach him and ask him why he is skating as he is. He responds by saying that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. (10)

SKATING IN IGNORANCE: Imagine that Edmund is about to go skating. As he heads out, Edna tells him that the ice in the middle of

the pond is thin. When Edmund goes out to the pond, the ice in the middle of the pond looks thin to him. Edmund takes it that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. So, when he skates, Edmund keeps to the edge of the pond. Meanwhile, you are on a nearby hill, and you see Edmund skating. You approach him and ask him why he is skating as he is. He responds by telling you that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin. **Unbeknownst to Edna, Edmund, and you, the ice in the middle of the pond is not thin.** (11, emphasis added)²

² The only difference between the two cases is the addition of the last sentence in SKATING IN IGNORANCE.

Intuition: Edmund acts rationally in both cases.

Why that matters:

- Rational action is a matter of acting in light of the actions that favor the action, i.e. on a coincidence between the facts that motivate and the facts that favor.
- Edmund acts rationally in both cases
- Edmund's motivating reason in both cases is: that the ice in the middle of the pond is thin
- so if he's acting rationally, that must also be a reason that favors his action in both cases: it must be a normative reason
- but the ice in the middle of the pond is not thin in SKATING IN IGNORANCE, so there the normative reason is false
- so, some normative reasons are false

Claim: Irrational action isn't action in light of reasons that are *false*, it's actions in light of propositions that wouldn't support the action *even if they were true*:

SENSELESS SKATING: Imagine that Edmund is about to go skating. As he heads out, Edna tells him that the weather is nice, and that it is a great day for skating. When Edmund goes out to the pond, he does not notice anything strange about the ice. So, when he skates, Edmund keeps to the edge of the pond. Meanwhile, you are on a nearby hill, and you see Edmund skating. You approach him and ask why he is skating as he is. He responds by telling you that the weather is nice, that it is a great day for skating, and that he noticed nothing strange about the ice. (12)

Motivating Reason to slow the factive turn

This is all to support Drake's 'master argument'³

1. In some cases where A ϕ s for the reason that r, it is not the case that r.⁴
2. In some cases as described in (1), A's ϕ ing is rational.⁵
3. A's ϕ ing can be rational only if A ϕ s for a good reason.⁶
4. In such cases as described in (2), r must be a good reason for ϕ ing.⁷
5. Some good reasons for ϕ ing are things that are not the case.⁸
6. If the Nonfactive ViewN is true of practical reasons, then it is true of epistemic reasons⁹
7. Some epistemic normative reasons are things that are not the case.

³ Perhaps not the best descriptor for an argument. For one thing it's kind of presumptuous. For another the strongest association most philosophers have with that title is Berkeley's 'I can't even imagine something isn't an idea, so only ideas exist' argument for idealism. But that's a notoriously bad argument! Don't associate yourself with notoriously bad arguments!

⁴ From TWO SKATERS

⁵ From JUST SKATING and SKATING IN IGNORANCE

⁶ From SENSELESS SKATING

⁷ from (1)-(3)

⁸ from (4)

⁹ from UNIFORMITY