

The “Costanza Maneuver”

What it is:

“Doing the opposite of what I would normally do”.

- 1) Must admit of exceptions (if I am inclined to do the opposite, etc...)
- 2) So it only applies to natural, basic inclinations (not to itself)
 - a. So it’s coherent—a *candidate* for rationality
- 3) It’s a *rational* guideline, not a moral one

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Reason vs. right:

- a. Rational requirements don't entail moral requirements (there are some amoral action-guiding guidelines)
- b. Rationality pertains to satisfying one's own desires, while morality need not do this

What might be an example of a rational behavior that is not compatible with moral requirements?

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Three ways of speaking about rationality:

Rationality in what one *thinks*:

- Certain beliefs *make sense* to have given other beliefs

Rationality in what one *does*:

- Certain behaviors *make sense* given certain aims

Rationality in what one *wants*:

- Can we say that some desires make more sense to have than other desires?

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Three types of rationality:

Minimal rationality:

- An act is minimally rational just in case there is some corresponding belief/desire pair that explains the behavior

Maximal rationality:

- An act is maximally rational just in case it satisfies a desire in the most efficient manner possible

Medial rationality:

- An act is medially rational just in case it satisfies a desire that is less than maximally efficient, but more than minimally efficient

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Holt proposes the following test:

The Costanza Maneuver is medially rational for George to use iff George has good reason to think it **both** reliable **and** feasible.

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Does George have good reason to think it’s reliable?

It’s not enough to appeal to the fact that it *works*

- Success might be a matter of dumb luck

Nor is it enough to appeal to the fact that his normal inclinations are irrational

- The “opposite” of an irrational act isn’t necessarily rational

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Does George have good reason to think it’s reliable?

“George’s primary pleasure comes from success, but there is also—look for it—the more ironic pleasure of knowing he does not, in any sense, deserve it. That is part of the reason his success is so funny, precisely because it is based on a strategy that we all know is unreliable—George included. It shouldn’t work, but does.”

Has Holt convinced you that George lacks good reason for thinking the C. Maneuver is reliable?

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Is the maneuver feasible as a long term strategy?

“The more one does the opposite, the more one becomes habituated to it, and the more one becomes habituated to it, the more ‘natural’ the behavior becomes. But the more natural the behavior becomes, the more one is so inclined, and the being inclined *that* way means *not* being inclined the way the Costanza Maneuver requires.”

Habit seems to get in the way of the long-term feasibility of the maneuver.

How about short-term feasibility?

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Is the maneuver feasible as a short-term strategy?

- Two psychological barriers:

- George is impulsive (and so unlikely to succeed in adhering to the maneuver)

- George suffers from *akrasia* (weakness of will)

- Consider the experience of eating chocolate cake even when you really desire to stick to your diet.

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Is the maneuver feasible *at all*?

Nope. In addition to George’s psychological barriers and the problems inherent to overcoming habits, he faces a *conceptual* problem:

The “opposite” is indeterminate.

-Suppose George is inclined to say “These pretzels are making me thirsty!” What would “the opposite” be?

George *knows* that “the opposite” is indeterminate, and thus has no good reason to believe he’ll be able to use the Costanza Maneuver as a long-term strategy