

## PHIL 5983: Rationality Seminar

University of Arkansas, Fall 2004

**Handout Topic:** What is at issue when philosophers and psychologists debate whether human beings are (theoretically) rational?

### Definitions:

Cognitive performance error: A psychological inference that is invalid or unacceptable, given the norms of deductive logic and probability theory (or whatever standards hold for rationality).

Strong cognitive competence: Possessing the “program” needed to reason correctly (in some domain), though this program may fail in a given performance due to some kind of interference or psychological limitation (e.g., memory limitations, sleepiness, etc.).

Weak cognitive competence: Possessing the ability to acquire a strong cognitive competence (in some domain), but lacking the proper education, exposure, effort, etc. to have actually acquired the strong cognitive competence.

### A spectrum of dynamic rationality:

1. Humans never perform (i.e., infer) irrationally, and strongly possess every cognitive competence.
2. Humans only occasionally commit cognitive performance errors, and strongly possess every cognitive competence. (Cohen?)
3. Humans systematically commit cognitive performance errors, though still strongly possessing every cognitive competence.
4. Humans systematically commit cognitive performance errors, due to following certain faulty heuristics, though still strongly possessing every cognitive competence. (Tversky and Kahneman?)
5. Humans systematically commit cognitive performance errors, due to following certain faulty heuristics (or for some other reason), and only weakly possess some cognitive competencies (while strongly possessing others). (Tversky and Kahneman?)
6. Humans systematically commit cognitive performance errors and there are some cognitive competencies that they do not possess even weakly.
7. Humans do not even weakly possess any cognitive competencies.

### A spectrum of static rationality:

1. Humans must have all true beliefs.
2. Humans must have mostly true beliefs. (Davidson; Dennett?)
3. Humans have mostly true beliefs.
4. Humans have mostly false beliefs.
5. Humans have (almost) all false beliefs. (Radical skepticism)

\*Connections between positions on dynamic and static rationality?