



Reasons without Persons: Rationality, Identity, and Time, by Brian Hedden

Matthew Kopec

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BOOK NOTE

Hedden, Brian, *Reasons without Persons: Rationality, Identity, and Time*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. viii + 210, £40 (hardback).

Brian Hedden's *Reasons without Persons* is inspired by Derek Parfit's work, which suggested that personal identity is utterly perplexing and that theories that do not drag us into such difficult matters are preferable whenever possible. Hedden defends 'Time-Slice Rationality', which holds, roughly, that the requirements of rationality, whether epistemic or practical, do not depend upon the beliefs or preferences the agent had (or will have) at another time. Since we can determine whether an agent is rational simply by examining her attitudes at that time-slice, we don't need to settle any personal identity issues.

Although Time-Slice Rationality might seem extremely radical, Hedden shows that the view can accommodate many of the standard norms that we think apply to people over time. For example, Bayesian conditionalization can be recovered, as could norms that dictate some preference stability (if those exist). And the view drops some counterintuitive norms, like the subjective Bayesian's insistence that forgetting is inherently irrational. Hedden makes his case by skilfully employing many of the standard tools in the analytic epistemologist's toolkit, like eliciting intuitions from cases, presenting mathematical proofs, and devising partners-in-crime arguments. The result is a rigorous, comprehensive, and thought-provoking argument that many will find compelling (especially fellow evidentialists).

There are some aspects that might leave various readers unsatisfied. First, Time-Slice Rationality is best understood as an account of *ideal* rationality. So, although Hedden argues that concerns over normative guidance will favour his view (since it allows a kind of mentalistic internalism about justification), readers will find very little on how to actually reason or act better. (Hedden makes it clear that cognitively limited people, like us, are simply not his primary target, which makes forgivable his relative lack of engagement with related empirical literature.) Second, Hedden's entire recovery of the standard temporally extended norms within his framework relies upon the Uniqueness Thesis (very roughly: there is a unique rational belief set, given the evidence). Uniqueness is highly contentious, and, while his arguments for it surpass most, unmoved permissivists will find important sections wholly unconvincing. Last, practical rationality is understood through the lens of decision theory, and so readers accustomed to inherently moral notions of practical rationality should know that Hedden has a different target.

Such quibbles aside, the book is a masterful work of analytic philosophy. Given the material's technical nature, it is best suited for advanced students and professional philosophers with some background in either formal epistemology or decision theory.

Matthew Kopec

Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6475-4368>

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