Toward a Principle-Based Analysis of Dual-Scale Detachment

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The philosophical literature that tackles foundational questions about the nature of normativity and the architecture or logical structure of normative domains, such as morality, makes substantial use of the notion of normative reasons. Standardly, normative reasons are taken to be facts that obtain in a given normatively sensitive situation, and that either speak in favor or against the actions that an agent can take in response to the situation—cf. [3, p. 17]. Normative reasons are also taken to interact or compete and thereby determine the deontic status of actions that are available to the agent in the situation, or to determine which of these actions are permissible, which obligatory, and which forbidden. The interaction between reasons is usually made sense of by analogy with old-fashioned balancing scales [4,6,5]. So, reasons are taken to determine deontic status of actions by being weighed on normative balancing scales like marbles are weighed on physical balancing scales.

Knoks and van der Torre [2] have put forward a formal framework, called 'reason-based detachment', that models the interaction between reasons as a kind of inference pattern. Knoks et al. [1] have further extended this framework to allow for what they call 'numerical balancing' in which the weights of reasons are represented by means of numbers. These papers follow the methodology of principle-based analysis. The present paper extends this line of research to what we call 'dual-scale detachment' which is based on Chris Tucker's *dual scale model of weighing reasons*, as it is presented in his recent book "The Weight of Reasons: A Framework for Ethics" [5]. We express Tucker's model as dual-scale detachment and explore its connections to (some of) the detachment systems studied in [1,2] by means of a principle-based analysis.

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One of the core ideas of "The Weight of Reasons" is that normative reasons have two irreducible kinds of weights: *justifying* and *requiring*. "A reason's justifying weight is how good the reason is at making acts permissible/okay. A reason's requiring weight is how good the reason is at making permissible acts required" [5, p. 11]. For illustration, consider a scenario in which the agent is confronted with a choice between either saving their beloved partner (Option A), or two strangers (Option B). Intuitively, it's permissible for the agent to choose Option A in the scenario, even though it results in more deaths. It's also intuitive to hold that people's lives are equally valuable. One way to account for both of these intuitions is by holding that the justifying (but not the requiring) weight of the reasons that speak in favor of Option A outstrips the requiring weight of the reasons that speak in favor of Option B. Tucker's model is called 'dual scale' because it uses two scales: The 'permission scale' determines whether some given action is permissible by means of comparing the justifying weights of reasons that speak in favor of this action to the requiring weights of reasons that speak in favor of its alternative(s). The 'commitment scale' determines whether this action is required by means of comparing the requiring weights of reasons that speak in favor of this action to the justifying reasons that speak in favor of its alternative(s).

We consider four kinds of detachment systems—dual-scale detachment, single-scale detachment, max detachment, and uniform detachment—and explore the relations between them using 11 principles. We are particularly interested in the comparison between dual-scale and single-scale detachments systems, since these correspond to the models that are central to Tucker's book. The other two detachment systems function more like benchmarks. The principle-based analysis shows that single-scale and dual-scale detachments respond differently to the principles Unanimity, NoDilemmas, and NotBothWays: these principles are satisfied only by the former.

References

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