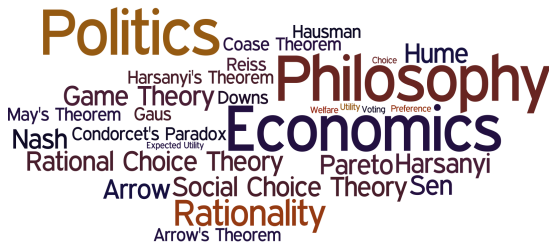


# PHIL309P

## Methods in Philosophy, Politics and Economics

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What does it mean (for an individual/group) to be *rational* (or *reasonable*) as opposed to *irrational* (or *unreasonable*)?

Two criteria for assessing “reasonableness” of a selected *option*:



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1. An option is **feasible** if it can be chosen, if it is *possible* for the decision maker.
2. The **desirability** of an option is the degree to which the decision maker *wants* it.

# Feasibility and Desirability



“It appears irrational to mix the two...there is a sharp distinction between desirability and feasibility. By sharp distinction we mean not only that the two can be told apart but also that they are causally independent; one does not affect the other.”

I. Gilboa. *Chapter 1 in Rational Choice*. The MIT Press, 2010.

# Feasibility vs. Desirability



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**Groucho Marx's Club:** "I don't care to belong to a club that accepts people like me as members"

# Instrumental Rationality

[illegible]

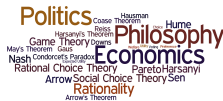
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# Instrumental Rationality



“The notion of instrumental rationality is a powerful and natural one...Instrumental rationality is within the intersection of all theories of rationality (and perhaps nothing else is). In this sense, instrumental rationality is the default theory, the theory that all discussants of rationality can take for granted, whatever else they think.

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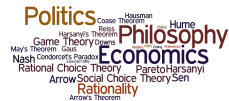


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(Nozick, pg. 133)

R. Nozick. *The Nature of Rationality*. Princeton University Press, 1993.

What does it mean for a decision maker to be instrumentally rational?

# Definition I





[illegible]

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**Rationality as Effectiveness:** Ann's action  $\alpha$  is instrumentally rational if, and only if, Ann's  $\alpha$ -ing is an *effective* way for Ann to achieve her goal, desire, end or taste,  $G$ .

Bob checks the forecast on the local radio, weather.com and the local newspaper.

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Charles never checks weather reports, but does consult his Ouiji board. On the day that Bob got soaked, Charles' Ouiji board told him to take an umbrella, so he stayed dry.

# Definition II



**Subjective Rationality:** Ann's choice of  $\alpha$  is rational iff when she chooses  $\alpha$ :  
(1) her choice was based on her beliefs ( $B$ ) and (2) *if*  $B$  were true, then  $\alpha$  would be an effective way to achieve her goals, desires, tastes, etc.

# Definition II

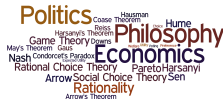


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Is Charles action deemed *irrational* according to the above definition?

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