

Adriana Placani

Authority Rules: Rule-Following and the Incompatibility Thesis

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation addresses a long-standing philosophical dilemma concerning rationality, rule-following, and authority. As such, it argues against and ultimately rejects the incompatibility thesis which purports that rationality is incompatible with following rules issued by authorities. Part One of this work develops a conceptual framework of rules and their usage by agents in practical reasoning. Part Two then employs this framework to advance a three-pronged thesis. First, of all the rule types analyzed, the dilemma or puzzle of rule-following only applies to one specific sort—prescriptive rules. Second, given features of prescriptive rules, such as content-independence and pre-emption, the puzzle's force is effaced. Third, these aforementioned features bind the justification of rule-following to the legitimacy of the issuing source of the rules, which in turn is established through Joseph Raz's service conception of authority. On the basis of the above three points the incompatibility thesis is rejected. As a final step, apart from the main thrust of this work's argument, Raz's conception itself is reviewed, and qualifications to aspects of it are proposed. Thus, this work contributes not only to a solution of a specific problem in political philosophy, but also offers a distinct perspective on the limits and strengths of Raz's account.