

State or Process Requirements?

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In his ‘Wide or Narrow Scope?’, John Broome takes issue with the main contention of my ‘Why Be Rational?’ The source of our disagreement, I suspect, is that Broome believes that the relevant rational requirements govern states, whereas I believe that they govern processes. If they govern states, then the debate over scope is sterile. The difference between narrow- and wide-scope state requirements is only as important as the difference between not violating a requirement and satisfying one. Broome’s observations about conflicting narrow-scope state requirements only corroborate this. Why, then, have we thought that there was an important difference? Perhaps, I conjecture, because there is an important difference between narrow- and wide-scope process requirements, and we have implicitly taken process requirements as our topic. I clarify and try to defend my argument that some process requirements are narrow scope, so that if there were reasons to conform to rational requirements, there would be implausible bootstrapping. I then reformulate Broome’s observations about conflicting narrow-scope state requirements as an argument against narrow-scope process requirements, and suggest a reply.

1. State and process requirements distinguished

State requirements require that you *be* a certain way at a given time. Process requirements require you to *do* something over time, where ‘do’ is understood broadly, so as to include forming and revising beliefs.¹ Broome tends to think that requirements of rationality are state requirements, whereas I tend to think that they are process requirements. This is, I suspect, the source of our disagreement.

I focused on process requirements in Kolodny 2005 for two reasons. First, our ordinary attributions of irrationality are at least sometimes about what people do, or refuse to do, over time. This suggests that at least some requirements of rationality are process requirements. Second, I aimed to account for the thought that at least some requirements of rationality are normative or deontic: that they can function as advice or guide one’s deliberation. Process requirements can be normative in

¹ This distinction between process and state requirements is close to the distinction between requirements that do and that do not take ‘agentive’ propositions as complements. Roughly, if ‘You X’ is an agentive sentence, then it can be re-expressed as: ‘You see to it that you X.’ See Belnap, Perloff, and Xu 2001, p. 5–9, 15. The only difference is that I allow that process requirements may require you to see to, directly, the formation or revision of nonvoluntary attitudes, such as beliefs.

this sense, since they tell you to do something. But state requirements cannot be normative in this sense, since they do not tell you to do anything.² At most, state requirements might be evaluative requirements: that is, necessary conditions for qualifying for a certain kind of appraisal.³ Such requirements merely reflect the fact that unless you are a certain way, you cannot be rated in a certain way. Compare the ‘requirements’ of beauty. Beauty ‘requires’ that you have symmetrical features, look healthy, and so on.

Consider Broome’s:

- (W) Necessarily, rationality requires of you that, if you believe you ought to *X*, you intend to *X*.

Understood as a state requirement, this is:

- (WS) Necessarily, rationality requires of you that you *not be* in the following state: that you believe at *t* you ought to *X* but you do not intend at *t* to *X*.⁴

Understood as a process requirement, it might be:

Necessarily, rationality requires you *to avoid or exit, in whatever way you like*, the following state: that you believe at *t* you ought to *X* but you do not intend at *t* to *X*.

This requirement is not valid. It is rational of you to avoid or resolve this conflict in certain ways, but not in others.

What is the valid process requirement here? Let us focus, for simplicity, on the case of resolving a conflict. It is hard to see how else you could *rationally* resolve a conflict if not by revising one conflicting attitude (or forming the attitude whose lack is part of the conflict), on the basis of the content of another attitude. If we make the assumption that this other attitude is itself part of the conflict (an assumption I relax when I consider (WP2) in section 4), then we have the basis for what I

² Apart from the difference mentioned in the previous footnote, this is similar to the ‘restricted complement thesis’ of Belnap, Perloff, and Xu (2001, pp. 13 and 298) that ‘deontic constructions take agentive sentences as complements’.

³ This is compatible with a ‘buck-passing’ view that reduces evaluative claims to normative ones. An evaluative claim about an agent’s state might be reduced to a deontic claim about how others should respond to it.

⁴ I suggested that I might accept (WS) as a standard of evaluation (2005, p. 517). But I do not think that even this is correct. It need not be irrational to believe at *t* that you ought to *X* while not intending at *t* to *X*. At *t*, you might have just formed the belief that you ought to *X* and not yet have had time to intend to *X* on the basis of it. Your rationality depends on what you do, or refuse to do, going forward.

called the ‘Reasoning Test’ of the scope of process requirements. As Broome notes, I never explicitly incorporated the Reasoning Test into my statement of I+(NS) and I+(WS). I also left other features of those principles unstated. More explicit formulations (although still not correct ones, mostly for reasons that Broome mentions) would have been:

- (NP) Necessarily, if you believe at t that you ought to X , but you do not intend at t to X , then rationality requires you to form going forward from t , on the basis of the content your belief, the intention to X .
- (WP) Necessarily, if you believe at t that you ought to X , but you do not intend at t to X , then rationality requires you (either to form going forward from t , on the basis of the content your belief, the intention to X , or to revise going forward from t , on the basis of the content of your lack of an intention to X , your belief that you ought to X).

I will revisit my arguments for favouring (NP) over (WP) later.

2. Another reason to think that process requirements are our proper topic: otherwise the distinction between wide and narrow scope has little interest

There is a third reason for thinking that our proper topic is process requirements. If our topic is state requirements, then the debate over scope has little interest.

You might expect the state requirements, (WS) and

- (NS) Necessarily, if you believe at t you ought to X , then rationality requires of you that you not intend at t to X

to ‘differ in violation’: that is, that there be some possible world in which you violate a requirement derived from an instance of (N) without violating the corresponding requirement derived from the corresponding instance of (W), or vice versa. (‘Corresponding’ instances fill in the schemata in the same way.)

However, if we interpret (NS) and (WS) strictly, as the state requirements that they are, then they do not differ in violation. Assume the following simple view of satisfaction and violation:

Necessarily, you are rationally required to F and you F if and only if you satisfy that requirement

and

Necessarily, you are rationally required to F and it is not the case that you F if and only if you violate that requirement⁵

so that

Necessarily, if you are not rationally required to F , then you neither satisfy nor violate that requirement

The following states are jointly exhaustive.

- (i) You believe at t you ought to X and you intend at t to X .
- (ii) You believe at t you ought to X and it is not the case that you intend at t to X .
- (iii) It is not the case that you believe at t you ought to X .

In (i), whether the principle is (NS) or (WS), rationality requires something of you and you satisfy that requirement. In (ii), whether the principle is (NS) or (WS), rationality requires something of you and you violate that requirement. The difference appears only in (iii). There, if the principle is (WS), then rationality requires something of you and you satisfy that requirement. If the principle is (NS), by contrast, then (for all that (NS) says, i.e. ignoring rational requirements of other kinds) it is not the case that rationality requires something of you, so you neither satisfy nor violate it. Both agree that in (iii), as far as they are concerned, you do not violate any requirement of rationality. There is a ‘difference in satisfaction’, we might say, but no difference in violation. This suggests that the choice between wide and narrow scope matters only in so far as the difference between satisfying a requirement and not violating it matters.

Broome proves a generalization of this point: that if you take a code of rationality that contains a narrow-scope conditional requirement, and change that requirement to be corresponding wide-scope one, leaving the rest of the code unchanged ... [t]hen the proposition that you are rational is unaltered by this change. (Broome 2007, p. REF)

⁵ I would prefer:

Necessarily, you are rationally required to F and you *refuse* to F if and only if you violate that requirement.

Thus, if you are rationally required to F , but neither F nor refuse to F , then you neither satisfy nor violate that requirement. This might happen, for example, if you are rationally required to F going forward, but you die on the spot. Needless to say, the notion of ‘refusing’ needs to be spelled out further. But some such notion is needed. See Belnap, Perloff, and Xu 2001, p. 40–5, for a discussion of the similar notion of ‘refraining’.

You are rational, for Broome, if and only if you violate no rational requirement.⁶

This is a remarkable turn of events. For years now, it has seemed to Broome and to the rest of us, who have been so stimulated by his work, that there is a crucial difference between the wide and narrow scope. Time and again, Broome has urged us to appreciate this important difference, and by and large we have been convinced. On closer inspection, however, the difference seems almost negligible.

This calls for a theory of error. How could it have seemed obvious that there was an important difference, when now it goes missing? Let me answer the question in my own case. Why did it seem to me, when first presented with it, that the choice between wide and narrow scope mattered? I considered an uninterpreted principle like: ‘If you believe something, then it is irrational of you to refuse to believe what obviously follows from it.’ Why did it seem to me false to interpret this as narrow scope? I imagined a situation in which you believed that p , and q obviously followed from p . The narrow scope interpretation seemed to imply that unless you believed that q , you violated what rationality required of you. ‘But,’ I thought to myself, ‘you might instead give up your belief that p . When you find yourself believing p , there are really *two* rationally permissible things that you can do. You can conclude that q , or you can give up your belief that p . So the principle has wide scope.’

In other words, it seemed to me that there was an important difference between narrow and wide scope, because first, there *is* an important difference when the relevant requirements are *process* requirements, and second, I was implicitly taking the relevant requirements to *be* process requirements. I was implicitly asking: ‘If you believe at t that p , what are you rationally required to do *going forward from t* ?’ The narrow-scope interpretation says that you are rationally required to believe that q going forward, whereas the wide scope interpretation says that you are rationally required either to believe that q going forward, or to drop the belief that p going forward. Suppose what you do next is to drop the belief that p , without forming the belief that q . On the narrow-scope interpretation, you violate a rational require-

⁶ Broome might have proved a still more general claim: ‘Take two codes of rationality according to which (however different they may otherwise be) the proposition that you are rational is the same. Add a narrow-scope conditional requirement to one code and the corresponding wide-scope requirement to the other. Then the proposition that you are rational remains the same.’ This claim entails, whereas Broome’s does not, that if two codes are the same, except that the first has (say) *two* narrow-scope requirements whereas the second replaces those *two* narrow-scope requirements with the corresponding wide-scope requirements, then the proposition that you are rational is the same.

ment, whereas on the wide-scope interpretation, you do not. This is a difference in violation, and it seems to tell against the narrow-scope interpretation. For, intuitively, you do not violate a rational requirement if you drop the belief that p without forming the belief that q . After all, q might seem to you patently absurd.

Similarly, while the state principles (WS) and (NS) do not differ in violation, the process principles (WP) and (NP) do. It is possible that you violate a requirement in an instance of (NP) without violating the requirement in the corresponding instance of (WP). Suppose you believe at t that you ought to X , but you do not intend at t to X . Then you refuse to form going forward from t the intention to X , but you do revise going forward from t , on the basis of the content of your lack of an intention to X , the belief that you ought to X .⁷ In this case, you violate (NP), but you do not violate (WP).

This shows *that* Broome's proof does not apply to process requirements such as (WP) and (NP). The reason *why* it does not is that the proof applies only to pairs of the form: 'If p , then you are rationally required that q ', and 'You are rationally required that if p , then q '. Although (NP) is of the form: 'If p , then you are rationally required that q ', (WP) is of the form: 'If p , then you are rationally required that either q or r '.

3. Broome's remarks about conflicts within rationality only illustrate the previous point

The conclusion of the last section may have seemed too quick, since Broome suggests that (NS) and (WS) differ in another way. In effect, Broome contrasts a code, call it 'Code Narrow', that consists just in (NS) and:

- (CS) You are rationally required not both to intend to X and to intend not to X ⁸

with a code, call it 'Code Wide', that consists just in (WS) and (CS). According to Code Narrow:

⁷ Actually, this is not the best example, since this second disjunct has to be qualified as *per impossible*, if section 4 is correct.

⁸ As it happens, I am not sure whether to accept (CS) (or (CP) discussed below), because I doubt that it is irrational, in general, to intend things that one knows are incompatible. But this does not matter, since I agree that there are circumstances, compatible with one's believing that one ought to X and one's believing that one ought not to X , in which it would be irrational of one both to intend to X and to intend not to X .

- (N1) If you believe now that you ought to walk the dog, then you are rationally required to intend now to walk the dog.
- (N2) If you believe now that you ought not to walk the dog, then you are rationally required to intend now not to walk the dog.
- (C1) You are rationally required not both to intend now to walk the dog and to intend now not to walk the dog.

According to Code Wide:

- (W1) You are rationally required that if you believe now that you ought to walk the dog, then you intend now to walk the dog.
- (W2) You are rationally required that if you believe now that you ought not to walk the dog, then you intend now not to walk the dog.
- (C1) You are rationally required not both to intend now to walk the dog and to intend now not to walk the dog.

Broome observes that it is possible that you satisfy all of (W1), (W2), and (C1), but not possible that you satisfy all of (N1), (N2), and (C1). This difference is important, Broome suggests, and it gives us a reason to favour (WS) over (NS).

On closer inspection, however, this is merely a difference in satisfaction, of the kind that we saw in the last section. Although it is not possible that you *satisfy all* of (N1), (N2), and (C1), it is possible that you *violate none* of (N1), (N2), and (C1). In fact, in precisely the same worlds in which you *satisfy all* of (W1), (W2), and (C1), you *violate none* of (N1), (N2), and (C1). In each of these worlds, you do not satisfy either (N1) or (N2), but only because it requires nothing of you in the first place. And in precisely the same worlds in which you do violate one of (N1), (N2), and (C1), you also violate one of (W1), (W2), and (C1). Once again, unless the difference between satisfying a requirement and not violating it matters, there is no reason to favour (WS) over (NS). At any rate, there is nothing new here.

When I first read Broome's comment, I thought that there *was* something new here. I thought this because I implicitly treated (N) and (W) as *process* requirements. Consider Codes Narrow-P and Wide-P, in which the state requirements (NS) and (WS) have been replaced by the process requirements (NP) and (WP). Suppose that, in the actual world, you believe now that you ought to walk the dog and you believe now that you ought not to walk the dog. Under Code Narrow-P, it is

not *historically* possible *relative to now* that you do not violate any rational requirement *going forward*. Under Code Wide-P, it *is* historically possible relative to now that you do not violate any rational requirement going forward.

This is an important difference, which is not a mere difference in satisfaction. And this, I take it, is the real worry about narrow scope in the vicinity. Marshalling our intuitions, Broome writes: ‘We should expect rationality to require you to get out of your irrational state, not to get in deeper’ (p. REF). But, in fact, we should not expect anything of the kind, if, with Broome, we view rationality as consisting solely of *state* requirements. For state requirements do not require you to *get out of* or to *get in* anything. They simply say something about *where you are*.⁹ The worry that Broome’s remark might most naturally be taken to express is that the narrow-scope *process* principle (NP) *forces* you, *going forward*, to violate some requirement, whereas the wide-scope process principle (WP) does not force you, going forward, to violate some requirement. (NP) requires you ‘to get in deeper’, whereas (WP) offers you a way to ‘get out’.

This is an important worry about (NP), which I will address in section 6. The present point is simply that if state requirements are our topic, then the worry never arises. This is another reason to think that, where state requirements are concerned, the debate over scope is sterile. And this is, in turn, another reason to think that process requirements are the topic of interest.

4. What is the argument that process requirements have narrow scope?

If we take process requirements as our topic, why favour:

- (NP) Necessarily, if you believe at t that you ought to X , but you do not intend at t to X , then rationality requires you to form going

⁹ Suppose at t you believe that you ought to walk the dog, believe that you ought not to walk the dog, intend to walk the dog, and intend not to walk the dog. Then, in the next instant, t' , you believe that you ought to walk the dog, do not believe that you ought not to walk the dog, intend to walk the dog, and do not intend not to walk the dog. Broome seems to suggest that in *losing* the belief that you ought not to walk the dog and the intention not to walk the dog, which ‘gets you out of’ your irrational state, you somehow violated (N2), but satisfied (W2). But this just confuses state and process requirements. In losing those attitudes, you neither satisfied nor violated (N2) or (W2), since both were silent on whether you should keep or lose them. Where they are not silent—on your states of mind at t and t' —they all but agree. At t satisfied (N1), (N2), (W1), and (W2) (but violated (C1)). At t' you satisfied (W1), (W2), (N1), (and (C1)) and neither satisfied nor violated (N2), because it required nothing of you.

forward from t , on the basis of the content your belief, the intention to X

over:

(WP) Necessarily, if you believe at t that you ought to X , but you do not intend at t to X , then rationality requires you (either to form going forward from t , on the basis of the content your belief, the intention to X , or to revise going forward from t , on the basis of the content of your lack of an intention to X , your belief that you ought to X)?

(WP) is a non-starter, because the second disjunct makes no sense. Your lack of an intention to X has no content. But one might be inclined to deny (NP) as well. Why cannot you revise your belief that you ought to X on the basis of the content of another attitude? Here is a possibility:

(WP2) Necessarily, if you believe at t that you ought to X , but you do not intend at t to X , then rationality requires you (either to form going forward from t , on the basis of the content your belief, the intention to X , or to revise going forward from t , on the basis of *other relevant contents* that you believe, your belief that you ought to X).

I considered a similar objection in my paper. Let me try to clarify my reply.

First, even if you satisfy the second disjunct, you are, in the meantime, being irrational in not satisfying the first. You have already judged that you ought to X , and yet you are resisting that judgement. Of course, if some reasoning leads you to revise, at some later time, this judgement, then going forward from that later time, you will no longer be resisting your judgement. The point is that your judgement, now, is that you ought to X , and it will be otherwise, if it ever is, only at some later time. In the meantime, you defy that judgement. This is irrational.

This may seem rigoristic, unless we make explicit something that both Broome and I have hitherto suppressed, for simplicity. The relevant belief in all of these principles is not that you ought to X , but instead either that you ought to *intend now* to X .¹⁰ For example, if I believe now that I ought to behave bravely on my deathbed, which is hopefully decades from now, then it is not irrational of me to refrain

¹⁰ Or, as Broome prefers, there are two relevant beliefs at t : that you yourself ought that p , and that p is so if and only if you yourself intend at t that p (2007, p. REF, note 1).

from intending *now* to behave bravely then. I have (knock on wood) plenty of time to form such a plan. The relevant case, by contrast, is of someone who believes that he has conclusive reason to intend *now* to *X*—for example, to start running now, with an intention-in-action, for the train whose doors are closing—but refuses to intend *now* to *X*, embarking instead on a course of reasoning that may lead him to revise his judgement about his reasons. He is defying his own judgement. This is so, even if that reasoning leads him, at some later time (e.g. after the train has pulled out of the station) to revise that judgement—or rather to revise the judgement that he *had* conclusive reason to intend *at that time, which is now in the past*, to *X*. (One might suggest that the agent could anticipate, now, the change in his judgement to come, and so rationally postpone intending to *X*. But if ‘anticipate’ means that he does not really believe, now, that he ought to *X*, then neither (NP) nor (WP2) requires him to do anything.)

Second, the choice between (NP) and (WP2) does not matter for my bootstrapping argument, and it may not matter for my positive ‘Transparency Account’ of their ‘apparent’ normativity.¹¹

For the bootstrapping conclusion, we need only *one possible situation* in which rationality requires you to form the intention to *X* when, intuitively, it seems that it is not the case that you ought to *X*. Even if we accept (WP2), there is still such a situation: namely, a situation in which you have no beliefs with relevant contents. In this situation, you have only one option: to form the intention to *X*. (Why do you not also have the option of forming the needed beliefs, from whole cloth as it were, and then reasoning from them? Because it would not be rational of you to form the needed beliefs in that way.)

Once we take this into account, we see that, strictly speaking, (WP2) should read:

Necessarily, if you believe at *t* that you ought to *X*, but you do not intend at *t* to *X*, then ((if you believe other relevant contents, then rationality requires you (either to form going forward from *t*, on the basis of the content your belief, the intention to *X*, or to revise going forward from *t*, on the basis of other relevant contents that you believe, your belief that you ought to *X*)) and (if you do not believe other relevant contents, then rationality requires you to form, going forward from *t*, on the basis of the content your belief, the intention to *X*)).

¹¹ In Kolodny 2005, I offered a further reason. (WP2) is incompatible with the ‘local’ character of our ordinary attributions of irrationality. This is because the second disjunct appeals to attitudes that are not themselves part of the conflict whose resolution (WP2) is meant to govern. This was part of the point of saying, in section 1.7, that one would not be responding *to* the conflict of believing that one ought to *X* and failing to intend to *X*.

When there are no other relevant beliefs, (WP₂) collapses into (NP).

(WP₂) may also be largely compatible with the Transparency Account. For example, if the ‘relevant contents’ are ones that you take to provide sufficient evidence that it is not the case that you ought to *X*, then you, in revising your belief that you ought to *X* on the basis of those contents, are following your own assessment of your reasons.

5. Broome’s counterexample to (NP)

Broome offers the following counterexample:

Suppose you believe at some time *t* that you ought to *X*, and suppose that at that time you also intend to *X*. But suppose that immediately afterwards you stop believing that you ought to *X* and simultaneously stop intending to *X*. You might be perfectly rational; your attitudes might change because of new information, for example. (Broome 2007, p. REF)

(NP) (or an analogue) could not be correct, the argument runs, since in this case you (i) satisfy its condition at *t*, (ii) fail to do, going forward, what would be required of you if it were true, but (iii) this is, intuitively, perfectly rational.

I simply deny (iii). In the light of what did you revise your intention to *X*? Not in the light of what you came to believe *only after t*. By then, you had *already* revised your intention to *X*. So you must have revised your intention in the light of what you believed at *t*. But then you responded irrationally, because you believed at *t* you ought to *X*. You defied your own judgement.¹²

Of course, we cannot reject (iii) on the ground of how you responded, if we take the view that only static states, and not the responses that take you from one state to another, can be rational or irrational. But it is unclear why the example is supposed to convince us to take this view.

Perhaps Broome has a different example in mind. Suppose at *t* you have just come to believe that you ought to *X*. So, going forward, you start to form the intention to *X* on the basis of this belief. But, before you finish forming the intention to *X*, you rationally revise your belief. Then, in light of this revision, you ‘put the brakes on’ forming your intention to *X*, stopping yourself in time. You respond perfectly ration-

¹² In fact, the phrase ‘your attitudes might change because of new information’ may make the example incoherent. The word ‘new’ suggests that the information appeared only after *t*. But then your attitudes could not have changed ‘because of’ it. If instead the information that caused the change was already present at *t*, then (apart from ‘new’ being misleading) it is no longer clear whether you satisfied all of the state requirements that (Broome would say) applied to you at *t*, and so whether (by Broome’s lights) you were perfectly rational.

ally, and yet you at no point actually intend to *X*. In this case, you do not defy your judgement about what you ought to do. After all, you start to form the intention to *X*. It is just that your judgement changes before you finish. So you stop.

I have the pedestrian worry about this example that it does not take very long to decide to *X* on the basis of the content of the belief that you ought to *X*. I cannot, myself, conceive of a concrete instance of this sequence of ‘starting’ to form an intention, revising your belief, and then stopping yourself in time before you ‘finish’ forming the intention to *X*.

If there are such cases, then perhaps ‘to form the intention’ in (NP) should be replaced by ‘to carry forward the process of forming the intention’. I agree that it is obscure what ‘carrying forward the process of forming the intention’ might be, if not simply forming it. But this obscurity is not so much an objection to the revision as to the need for it.

In any event, the bootstrapping argument goes through on this revision, even if we suppose, with Broome, that ‘incredible’ bootstrapping requires not simply carrying forward the process of forming an intention, but seeing that process through. For there will be such bootstrapping in the less exotic case in which you come to believe that you ought to *X*, and then enough time to form the intention to *X* elapses without any opportunity presenting itself to revise your belief rationally. No ‘new information’ suddenly appears—whatever this is supposed to mean—and so you continue to lack (unless, again, you cut them from whole cloth) any ‘upstream’ beliefs on the basis of whose contents you might revise your belief that you ought to *X*. In this case, if you respond rationally throughout, then you do intend to *X*. Again, the bootstrapping argument needs only one possible case.

6. Broome’s worry about conflicts within rationality applied to process requirements

Let us return to the problem of conflicts within rationality, which, as we saw earlier, is a problem only for process requirements. Let us grant that there is a principle of rationality, (CP), that requires you not both to form, going forward from *t*, an intention to *X* and to form, going forward from *t*, an intention not to *X*. Suppose you believe at *t* that you ought to *X* and also believe at *t* that you ought not to *X*. If (NP) is correct, then, no matter how you respond going forward, you respond irrationally in at least one way.

Why exactly is this a problem? If we examine the particular case in question, it seems true that whatever you do next, you will be irrational in doing it. (NP) seems to deliver the intuitively correct result. You have painted yourself into a corner.

Is there some more general, theoretical reason to insist that you cannot paint yourself into a corner? Some might say that must be possible that you do everything that rationality requires you to do. But this idea can be interpreted in different ways. One interpretation is:

Rational Historical Possibility: For all worlds w , responses F , times t , if at w you are rationally required to F going forward from t , then there is some world w' historically accessible at t from w such that for all responses F' , times t' , if at w' you are rationally required to F' at t' , then at w' you F' at t' .

If this is correct, then you cannot paint yourself into a corner.

But why should we accept Rational Historical Possibility? It might be argued:

- (1) Reasons Historical Possibility (or Ought Implies Can): For all worlds w , responses F , times t , if at some w you are required by reason (i.e. ought, have conclusive reason) to F going forward from t , then there is some w' historically accessible at t from w such that for all responses F' , times t' , if at w' you are required by reason to F' at t' , then at w' you F' at t' .
- (2) Reasons Claim: For all worlds w , if at w you are rationally required to give some F at some t , then at w you are required by reason to F at t .

Therefore

- (3) Rational Historical Possibility.

But I deny, and Broome is unwilling to assert, Reasons Claim.

There is another interpretation of the idea that it is possible that you do everything rationality requires you to do:

Rational Ideal Possibility: For all worlds w , responses F , times t , if at w you are rationally required to F at t , then there is some world w' externally identical relative to you and to w such that for all responses F' , times t' if at w' you are rationally required to F' at t' , then at w' you F' at t'

where w' is externally identical relative to you and to w if and only if w' differs from w only because some response of yours differs. Put other ways: If you have painted yourself into a corner, then there was a way not to have done so. An ideal agent can make his way through any world without violating any requirement of rationality. Rationality does not set unavoidable traps.

I find Rational Ideal Possibility more plausible. Broome's example does not show that (NP) violates it. There may be some externally identical world in which you do everything rationality requires of you, but do not both believe at t that you ought to X and also believe at t that you ought not to X .

Suppose, however, that we accept (CP) (or (CS)),

Rational and Reasons Ideal Possibility: For all worlds w , responses F , times t , if at w you are rationally required or required by reason to F at t , then there is some w' externally identical relative to you and to w such that for all responses F' , times t' , if at w' you are rationally required or required by reason to F' at t' , then at w' you F' at t'

and

Evidence of Conflict: At some w , reason requires you, on the basis of evidence that is not due to your responses, to believe at t that you ought to X and to believe at t that you ought not to X .

Then (NP) is false. However, (WS) is also false. From Evidence of Conflict, at some w , you are required by reason to believe at t that you ought to X and to believe at t that you ought not to X . By Rational and Reasons Ideal Possibility and (CS), there is some externally identical w' where you believe at t that you ought to X , believe at t that you ought not to X , either do not intend at t to X or do not intend at t not to X , and satisfy all other requirements of reason and rationality. Since at w' you do not satisfy (WS) at t , (WS) is not a requirement of rationality.

Perhaps the moral is that if Rational and Reasons Ideal Possibility is true, you cannot have conclusive evidence that you face a deontic conflict. This may not be so surprising. If Rational and Reasons Ideal Possibility is true, then you cannot face a deontic conflict.¹³

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