

Describing rationality

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Abstract This critical study of John Broome’s *Rationality Through Reasoning* (i) raises some questions about the various requirements of rationality Broome formulates, pointing out some apparent gaps and counterexamples; (ii) proposes a general description of rationality that is broadly consistent with Broome’s requirements while providing them with a unifying justification, filling the gaps, and removing the counterexamples; and (iii) presents two objections to the book’s broader argument concerning the nature and importance of reasoning.

Keywords Rationality · Reasoning · Reasons · Normativity · Rule-following · Intention

John Broome’s *Rationality Through Reasoning* is a major contribution to helping us understand the content of rationality and the nature and importance of reasoning.¹ My main aim in the discussion that follows is to build on this strong platform, advocating a view about the relationship between rationality and reasons that tries to supplement and improve on Broome’s views in several significant respects, in a way that is consistent with his overall approach to thinking about rationality. There are three main sections. In Section 1, I examine the requirements of rationality that Broome formulates in the central chapters of the book, 7–11. I point out some apparent gaps—important kinds of irrationality which we can exhibit while satisfying the requirements of rationality Broome describes—as well as some

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apparent counterexamples—apparent instances of rationality which violate Broome’s requirements. These are not reasons for rejecting Broome’s views outright, but they do suggest the desirability of supplementing and amending it.

Section 2 presents my proposed supplementation. This takes the form of what I call a “standard-fixing” view of the relationship between reasons and rationality. On this view, we can explain why requirements of rationality have the content they do by understanding the point of the evaluative standard which we employ when we judge people’s thought and conduct to be rational or irrational. I argue that this provides a unifying justification for those of Broome’s requirements which are correct, generates further requirements that fill the gaps in his account, and provides a basis for the refinements that are needed in order to remove the counterexamples.

In Sect. 3, I turn from the topic of rationality to the book’s broader argument concerning the nature and importance of reasoning. A theoretical question we face as practical philosophers is “the motivation question” (p. 1): how does the belief that you ought to do something cause the intention to do it? And a practical question we face as agents is: how can we improve our rationality? Broome’s book delivers a single answer to these two questions: through reasoning. Reasoning gives me something I can *do* to satisfy the requirements of rationality—I can follow rules that bring me to satisfy them. In doing so, I motivate myself. Section 3 raises two objections to this. One concerns the further account he gives of rule-following. The other concerns how satisfactory this proposal is as an answer to the motivation question.

1 Requirements of rationality

The central chapters of *Rationality Through Reasoning* contain the most careful attempt to date to formulate some of the most prominent requirements of rationality: the requirement of enkrasia, for example, which concerns deciding to do what you think you ought to do, and the requirement of instrumental rationality, which concerns taking the appropriate means to your intended ends. Broome’s formulations of these requirements are defended largely on intuitive grounds, by looking at their adequacy to account for examples of obviously rational or irrational patterns of thought. There is much to be learned from the attempt to do this, and future efforts to state such requirements—and, more generally, to say what rationality *is*—should start from Broome’s work. I begin by describing some respects in which it appears to me that further improvements and additions are needed.

1. Time-lag.

Broome settles on this version of the enkrasia requirement:

Enkrasia

Rationality requires of N that, if

(1) N believes at t that she herself ought that p , and if

(2) N believes at t that, if she herself were then to intend that p , because of that, p would be so, and if

- (3) *N* believes at *t* that, if she herself were not then to intend that *p*, because of that, *p* would not be so, then
 (4) *N* intends at *t* that *p*. (p. 170)

The temporal reference in this principle provokes the following worry. It implies that you are irrational during the time (however short) that it takes you to make the transition from the beliefs at (1)–(3) to the intention at (4). This sounds incorrect. There are of course many respects in which we are all less than fully rational, as Broome points out; but there being some time greater than zero that it takes to make the transition from a belief-state to an intention-state does not seem to be one of them. If a non-human agent whose mind supervened on a different physical structure was able to make this transition faster than the most enkratic human, it would not thereby be more rational: just faster in operating rationally.

I should say straight away that I do not take that point to be a particularly strong objection. Even if you agree with me that this seems counterintuitive, it should not be an especially difficult consequence to accept in an account that otherwise made the best overall sense of judgements of rationality and irrationality. We might well be less rational than some of us intuitively think we are. However, it does prompt a question I shall return to: Is there a plausible account of rationality that avoids this consequence?

2. Fading intentions.

That first point concerns Broome's claims about rationality at a time. The second concerns his claims about rationality over time, which come in Chapter 10. There, he advocates the following diachronic requirement of intention-persistence:

Persistence of Intention

If t_1 is earlier than t_2 , rationality requires that of *N* that, if *N* intends at t_1 that *p*, and no cancelling event occurs between t_1 and t_2 , then either *N* intends at t_2 that *p*, or *N* considers at t_2 whether *p*. (p. 178)

“Cancelling events” include considering whether to do what you intend, believing you have done it, and realizing you cannot do it. He defends this principle by appealing to the practical point of intentions: “You could not manage your life if your intentions were liable to vanish incontinently.” (p. 177)

This seems sensible; but drawing from it a general requirement of intention-persistence appears too strong. The following kind of thing can happen: (i) one of a set of no-less-attractive options engages your attention; (ii) you decide to pursue it; (iii) over time, the reasons bearing on the options do not change, but the one you decided on gradually engages you less; and (iv) the intention gradually disappears. For example, you intend to visit Spain one day; but although you never actually reconsider the intention, gradually it disappears, to be replaced by others. This does not seem irrational. It is true that you could not manage your life if your intentions were liable to vanish incontinently; but you can manage it fine if some long-term intentions drift away like this.

This objection has the same status as the previous one. It is not in itself a decisive counterexample: an account that makes the best overall sense of judgements of

rationality and irrationality could carry a mildly counterintuitive consequence like this. But is there a plausible alternative that avoids it?

3. Self-prediction.

Now consider the requirement of instrumental rationality. Broome's formulation is:

Instrumental Requirement

Rationality requires of N that, if

- (1) N intends at t that e , and if
- (2) N believes at t that, if m were not so, because of that e would not be so, and if
- (3) N believes at t that, if she herself were not then to intend m , because of that m would not be so, then
- (4) N intends at t that m . (p. 159)

The point of the wording in condition (2) is to allow the principle to extend beyond the very narrow class of cases in which m is "indispensably necessary" to e , so that it covers the range of more usual cases in which there are alternatives to m , but they are worse, so you believe you will not take them.² He gives this example: to get some milk, it is not necessary to buy it from a shop, since you could find a cow to milk instead; but that is such a bad means that you believe you will not take it; so you believe that if you do not buy milk from a shop you will not get any; so rationality then requires of you that if you intend to get milk you intend to buy it from a shop.

Again, we have the time-lag problem, but in addition this seems too self-predictive. It is not because you predict you will not take the bad alternatives that rationality requires you to intend to take the good ones; it is because you can see that they are bad. Even if you believed you will not take the good alternatives, rationality would still require you to intend to take them.

4. Procrastinating over intentions.

The difficulty in finding a satisfactory formulation of the instrumental requirement is to capture more than a narrow range of cases of instrumental irrationality. One challenge, as we just saw, is to see how to cover more than just cases in which a means is indispensably necessary. But another is to cover cases of instrumentally irrational procrastination. Broome's Instrumental Requirement does not cover these. His condition (3) is only satisfied when you believe you have reached the last possible moment for forming the intention that m . But leaving it to the last possible moment to form an intention can itself be irrational. An important point of having intentions is to enable orderly planning ahead of time.

This is not a counterexample to Broome's Instrumental Requirement. Indeed, it does not show that it needs to be reformulated in any way. There may be many different requirements you need to meet in order to avoid instrumental irrationality, with his principle providing only one of them. However, there is much instrumental

² For the narrower formulation, see Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), 4:417.

irrationality that it does not capture, and it would be good to cover the other cases too.

5. Procrastinating over actions.

I just described one sort of instrumentally irrational procrastination that Broome's Instrumental Requirement does not capture. Another is forming the intention that *m* but never doing anything about it.

He discusses this issue in Chapter 9 and gives an example where there is a deadline for acting. If you believe the bus is about to leave, and you believe that you will miss it if you do not get on now, but you do not act to get on when there is nothing stopping you from doing so, then you do not *have* the intention to catch it: an intention, after all, is a disposition to act. This seems plausible. But what about cases in which there is no deadline? Suppose you intend to attain the end of becoming an opera singer, this leads you to intend to have singing lessons as a means to your end, but you keep putting it off. Here, it is true that actually having singing lessons cannot be required by rationality—the world might prevent that without any failure of rationality on your part—but it can be irrational never to have tried, if good opportunities have presented themselves and you have not tried to take them. Again, this is not a counterexample to anything Broome says, but a gap in what is covered.

6. Basing prohibitions.

In the requirements listed above, what rationality requires of you is that you satisfy a material conditional. The requirement has “wide scope”: it covers the whole conditional (p. 132). So there are two ways to satisfy it: by instantiating the consequent of the conditional, or by not instantiating the antecedent. The Enkrasia requirement, for example, gives you this disjunctive instruction: either do not have one of the beliefs at (1)–(3), or have the intention at (4). As Broome acknowledges, this prompts the following worry: you could satisfy this requirement by dropping the belief that you ought to do something whenever you find yourself without the intention to do it, but that would not be rational. He accordingly supplements Enkrasia by adding a further “basing prohibition”, according to which rationality requires that normative beliefs are not based on intentions in this way (p. 141).

A concern this raises is that postulating basing prohibitions is an ad hoc solution to the problem: it responds to the problem for his Enkrasia requirement by simply asserting a further requirement that rules out the problem-cases. It would be good to have some further explanation of why there are prohibitions such as this.

7. Over-reasoning.

I add one further point. Broome endorses Gilbert Harman's observation that it cannot be a requirement of rationality that you believe all the implications of your other beliefs. Invoking this “clutter avoidance” constraint on requirements of rationality, he adds that it cannot be a requirement of rationality that you either believe what is implied by your current beliefs or drop them. This seems sensible; but it carries further implications. It also implies that it would be irrational to clutter

your mind with constant reasoning—or constant checking of whether you are complying with the requirements of rationality—as surely it would. Broome does not suggest otherwise. But this invites the question: is it possible to give a more general account of what rationality *is*, that would explain these constraints on it?

8. Background questions.

That gives us a series of individually small points: some mildly counterintuitive implications of Broome's requirements of rationality, some gaps, and some justificatory questions they raise. But now let us add some more ambitious questions. What explains why principles such as the ones formulated by Broome do intuitively capture requirements of rationality (to the extent that they do)? Why does rationality matter (when it does), as it does? And how should we describe the relationship between reasons and rationality? I now describe a proposal for answering those questions that I think can help us to address issues 1–7, vindicating the overall thrust of Broome's treatment of rationality while supporting the amendments and additions it needs.

2 A “Standard-Fixing” account of rationality

“Responsiveness accounts” of rationality, we can say, are those that explain it as proper responsiveness to reasons or apparent reasons. Broome rejects these accounts in Chapters 5 and 6: rationality does not consist in responding correctly to reasons (pp. 71–87), nor to your beliefs about what your reasons require (pp. 89–96), nor to your beliefs about what your object-given reasons require (pp. 97–100), nor to those beliefs whose content would, if true, be a reason (pp. 97–107). These are all attempts to say what rationality is by stating its one requirement. As Broome sees it, they all fail because rationality places many requirements on us. The project of giving an account of rationality therefore needs to be complex, formulating many requirements, and it is in that spirit that he presents the formulations discussed above. (He does not claim that his account is complete; so in pointing out some “gaps” above I am not contradicting anything he says).

I agree that rationality does not impose only one requirement. However, I think we can give a general description of rationality that explains what its various requirements have in common, and why they matter (when they do). We can approach this via a further objection to responsiveness accounts, beyond the ones Broome raises. Suppose you violate both the Enkrasia and Instrumental Requirements. You are Hamlet's akratic cousin. Although you know that there is no good reason to get revenge for the wrong you have suffered, you angrily decide to do so—so you are akratic. But when you are presented with what you believe is your only opportunity to harm the target of your resentment, you are too timid to decide to do it—so you are instrumentally irrational. Now it turns out that you did not get revenge, as you knew you ought; so you have responded correctly both to your reasons and your beliefs about your reasons. But you achieved this through your double irrationality.

The fact that in combination your akrasia and your instrumental incompetence have produced a good result does not prevent them from being forms of irrationality. It makes sense for us to evaluate these as defects, and it makes sense for you to care about being defective in these respects—to think of them as defects you have good reasons to repair. Your akrasia and instrumental incompetence should matter to you, because even if they can accidentally produce good outcomes, having these dispositions will tend to impair your responses to the reasons you have. The tendency of irrational dispositions to impair our responses to reasons supports our adopting a practice that evaluates them negatively, including on the occasions where they accidentally produce good results.

The corresponding point is true of many evaluative standards: my clumsy fumbling might defuse a bomb, my polite enquiry might cause offence; but “clumsy” and “polite” still function as negative and positive evaluative terms in those remarks. There is a broad family of evaluative terms through which we express evaluative standards the point of which is to support important dispositions. The importance of the dispositions provides us with good reasons to hold each other, and ourselves, to these standards, making negative and positive judgements in accordance with them, even in cases where our performance produces aberrant outcomes. “Rational” is one of these terms, and rationality one of these standards.

The task of giving an account of any evaluative standard belonging to this family is to specify the disposition it supports. Here is my attempt to do so for rationality:

Standard *S* is part of the set of standards of rationality if and only if:

- (a) the disposition to conform with *S* is important because of its exercise in the thought through which one responds to one’s reasons, whatever their content; and
- (b) the importance of this disposition gives us collectively a decisive reason to support it by employing *S* as an evaluative standard.³

This does not state *the* requirement of rationality. It says what its various requirements—enkrasia, instrumental rationality, intention-persistence, non-contradiction, believing the implications of your other beliefs, and so on—have in common.

We saw above some of the places where Broome defends his requirements of rationality by appealing to the practical point of conforming to them: for example, in the remarks about intention-persistence I quoted at 2., and the agreement with Harman at 7. The standard-fixing account is a generalization of that way of thinking about rationality. It emphasizes the point that our evaluative practice has in supporting dispositions we have good reasons to cultivate. In doing so, it inherits what is attractive in responsiveness accounts, but avoids the objections to them. It ties the point of our evaluations of rationality and irrationality to supporting good forms of responsiveness to reasons. I call it a “standard-fixing” account of rationality, because it claims that what fixes the content of standards of rationality is their application to our responses to reasons. But it explains why it makes sense for

³ This supplements the fuller discussion of standard-fixing accounts of rationality in Garrett Cullity, “Decisions, reasons and rationality”, Section VII. That paper defines such accounts as those that impose two necessary conditions on rationality. Here, I refine those conditions and claim that they are sufficient.

us to apply those standards, as we do, to evaluate failures which are not failures of responsiveness to reasons. Hamlet's cousin is irrational not because he is failing to respond to reasons or beliefs about reasons, but because he fails to meet standards that are important in supporting the dispositions through which we do respond to our reasons.

Condition (a) contains the qualification, "whatever its content". This is needed in order to distinguish standards of rationality from the various other specialized evaluative standards through which we support a proper sensitivity to particular reasons. For example, in evaluating attitudes as *considerate* we employ an evaluative standard that supports a disposition which is important because of its exercise in the thought through which we respond to certain particular reasons—reasons connected with other people's welfare. Standards of rationality, by contrast, are those the disposition to conform to which is important in responding to reasons of any kind. There are particular kinds of irrationality that give us a more fine-grained evaluative vocabulary—"weak-willed", "gullible", "procrastinating", "muddled", "inefficient", "impulsive", and so on. But these are not failures of responsiveness to particular kinds of reasons: they are failures with respect to standards whose importance comes from what is needed to respond well to reasons, whatever their content. These standards are the ones we are trying to describe in formulating requirements of rationality such as Broome's.

We can now return to the issues I raised in Section 1, and examine how this account of rationality helps to deal with them. We can start with the background questions raised at 8. The plausibility of the answers it gives to these is an important part of the case for the standard-fixing account. Its explanation of the relationship between reasons and rationality improves on the one offered by responsiveness accounts. It also explains why rationality has the intuitive features Broome invokes in defending his requirements of rationality. The dispositions to be enkratic, instrumentally rational and so forth are important because of their exercise in responding to reasons of any kind. And more generally, it explains why rationality matters (when it does). Rationality matters because (and to the extent that) these are dispositions that we have good reasons to care about. Rationality is usually something we have good reasons to conform with, because it usually helps us to be and do what we have good reasons to be and do. But sometimes this is not so: for example, in a "Schelling case", where only irrationality will spare me from being manipulated by a calculating adversary. If I successfully manage to render myself irrational in such a case, my behaviour then does fail to meet a standard the point of which is to support the important dispositions mentioned above; but here, there is no good reason to meet that standard. This is a case in which the evaluative and the normative come apart. Your irrationality in a Schelling case is a defect, calling for negative evaluation, but the fact that rationality requires you not to conduct yourself in this way is not a reason against doing so.⁴

⁴ In Chapter 11, Broome says he finds it plausible that rationality is normative is plausible, but cannot find a convincing argument that it is. I suggest that this idea gets its plausibility from the fact that rationality is usually derivatively normative; but that there is no convincing argument for the claim that it is itself normative, because it is not.

So the standard-fixing account has those general attractions; but it also helps us with the earlier issues, 1.–7. On this account, assessments of rationality are assessments relative to normal human capacities, since our normal capacities provide the background against which our evaluative standards have their point. This explains (1) why you are not irrational during the time it takes for your intentions to be caused by your normative beliefs. In the Enkrasia and Instrumental Requirements, the final “at t ” should be replaced by “as soon after t as is reasonable”. (The relevant standard of “reasonableness” is itself fixed in the same way: it is the standard the disposition to conform to which we collectively have a decisive reason to support.) It explains (2) why sometimes, gradually losing an intention is not irrational. Retaining one’s intentions is important because of the role they play in facilitating inter- and intra-personal coordination and planning over time. So the standard for evaluating the rationality of intention-persistence is one that supports this role; and when it does not disrupt that role, losing an intention need not be irrational. So in Persistence of Intention, we can add a further condition, “unless N ’s intention that p disappears between t_1 and t_2 through the exercise of a non-disruptive disposition” (where a non-disruptive disposition is one that does not disrupt that important role of intentions). It also explains (3) why it is irrational not to take what you believe to be the only suitable means to achieving your intended ends—in the sense of the only means that allows for the realization of your other intended ends—irrespective of what you predict you will do. So in the Instrumental Requirement we can replace its second condition with “ N believes at t that e will only suitably be achieved if N intends that m ”. Beyond this, it explains why (4) procrastination over intentions and (5) procrastination over actions are irrational. Here is my attempt to formulate further requirements of rationality that cover these two forms of procrastination:

Intention-Formation Requirement

Rationality requires of N that if, throughout a period of time,

- (1) N intends that e ,
 - (2) N believes that e will only suitably be achieved if N herself intends some particular means to e , and
 - (3) N believes that not choosing a means until after that period will make the corealization of N ’s intentions more difficult, or less likely, and no better in any other respect,
- then, during that period, there is a particular means m of which
- (4) N forms the belief that m is a suitable means to e , and
 - (5) N forms the intention to take m .

Intention-Implementation Requirement

Rationality requires of N that if, throughout a period of time,

- (1) N intends that m , and
 - (2) N believes that not taking m until after that period will make the corealization of N ’s intentions more difficult, or less likely, and no better in any other respect,
- then

(3) during that period N forms and retains the belief that N has taken or tried to take m .⁵

It is true that there are irrational ways bringing yourself to satisfy these requirements—for example, by making your beliefs insensitive to the evidence for them. But there are many requirements of rationality—having evidence-sensitive beliefs is another—and for each of them there are irrational ways of satisfying it, by breaching others. This was the point Broome made in introducing basing prohibitions. But now we can add an explanation of (6) why there are such prohibitions. The disposition not to base one's normative beliefs on one's intentions is a disposition we have good reasons to support. In the same way, this account explains (7) why clutter-producing over-reasoning is irrational.

As I see it, the fact that a standard-fixing account can supplement Broome's treatment of the requirements of rationality by providing an intuitively appealing explanation for these revisions and additions speaks in its favour.

3 Correct reasoning

The treatment of requirements of rationality in the central chapters of *Rationality Through Reasoning* is framed by a broader argument. The book begins with the motivation question: how does the belief that you ought to do something cause the intention to do it? A quick response is: through a disposition we have to make that transition—the enkratic disposition. But, dismissing that response as too easy, Broome wants to know: how does this disposition work? The latter chapters of the book present an answer with the following form. We can (sometimes) bring ourselves to satisfy the requirements of rationality through reasoning. Reasoning is active: it is a mental activity through which we can bring ourselves to satisfy requirements of rationality by following rules. In enkratic reasoning, we follow a rule that tells us to derive intentions from normative beliefs. Since in enkratic reasoning we are active, we thereby motivate ourselves. (p. 294)

I close with two questions about this argument.

1. Rule-following and rightness.

Reasoning is active, Broome maintains, because when you reason you actively follow a rule, being guided by what it specifies as the right or correct way to proceed. In order for you to be reasoning, the rule you are following does not itself have to be correct—you could be reasoning according to an incorrect rule. Moreover, you could be actively reasoning, but making a mistake in what you think is required by the rule you are following, whether the rule itself is correct or

⁵ These are attempts to improve on the formulations offered in Cullity, "Decisions, Reasons and Rationality", pp. 72–74. For Broome's objections to those formulations, see John Broome, "Reply to Southwood, Kearns and Star, and Cullity", pp. 104–108. One of his objections concerns a case in which you falsely believe that you have chosen a means to your intended end. The Intention-Formation Requirement still classifies cases of that kind as irrational, correctly in my view—even if we should agree with Broome that they should not be called cases of *instrumental* irrationality.

incorrect. This kind of case Broome describes as one in which you are following a rule incorrectly. What distinguishes the case of following a rule incorrectly from not following a rule at all is that when you follow a rule, the process you are following *seems* right to you: “if you make a mistake in following a rule, you count as following the rule, so long as what you do seems right to you.” (p. 240)

So: what is it for a process you are following to seem right? One kind of response to this would be just to say that talk of “seeming right” refers to a state with which we are all familiar, and leave it at that. Another would be that this is the state you are in when it seems to you that the two kinds of correctness Broome distinguishes are instantiated: it seems to you that there is a rule that has the property of correctness, and it seems to you that your own mental activity has the property of correctly following that rule. So seeming right is an attitude that you take towards the instantiation of the further property of rightness or correctness.

However, Broome does not give either of those responses. First, he says this:

An essential part of [seeming right] is being open to the possibility of correction. When a process seems right to you, you are open to the possibility that the process might no longer seem right to you if a certain sort of event were to occur. We may call the event ‘checking’. (p. 238)

That may sound as though it is indeed explaining seeming right as an attitude towards the instantiation of the further property of correctness, since checking is ascertaining whether the process you are following has that property. However, surprisingly, Broome actually goes on to offer an explanation that runs in the *opposite* direction: one that seeks to explain what correctness—rightness—itself is by appealing to the state of seeming right.

[F]or a process to be right is for you to have a steady disposition for it to seem right. By this I mean that, were you to check several times, the process would generally seem right.... On this definition, being right is given by your own dispositions, rather than by some external criterion. (p. 239)

However, it is hard to make sense of this. In remarks of the form, “*O* seems *F* to *N*”, the phrase “seems *F*” can refer to either of two different kinds of state. It can refer to a state with a distinctive phenomenal character: “seems red” normally works that way.⁶ If we say the oriflamme seems red to Norma, we are attributing to Norma an experience with a distinctive visual phenomenology. Alternatively, it can refer to a propositional attitude that has no distinctive phenomenal character: the attitude of seeming-true, directed towards the proposition that *O* is *F*. So suppose Ned is colour-blind, and the only thing he knows about the oriflamme is that he has overheard other people describing it as red: then we could describe his epistemic state by saying “the oriflamme seems red to Ned”, attributing to him a propositional attitude of this second sort: it seems true to Ned that the oriflamme is red. When

⁶ In fact, I would say that “seems red” is ordinarily the name of a complex state: a state in which one has the attitude of seeming-true towards the proposition that the object is red, because of the way it looks—that is, because of the distinctive phenomenology of one’s visual experience when presented with it. (So it seems—in the second sense—to me).

“seems *F*” works in the first way, a definition of *F*-ness in terms of seeming *F* can make sense. Where “seeming red” functions as the name of a distinctive kind of phenomenal state, it becomes possible to give an intelligible definition of redness as the property of being disposed to produce this state in normal human observers under certain conditions. But it is hard to see how a definition with this structure can work when “seems *F*” is the name of a propositional attitude with no distinctive phenomenology. If we deny that there is a distinctive phenomenology of seeming *F*, so that “*O* seems *F* to *N*” just says that *N* has the attitude of seeming-true towards the proposition that *O* has the property *F*, we cannot then define *F* as the property *O* has when we have a disposition for it to seem *F*. A definition with that structure cannot do anything to distinguish one property *F* from any other.

The problem, then, is that seeming *right* is not a state with a distinctive phenomenology—Broome accepts this (p. 238). But the only apparent alternative is for it to be a propositional attitude. For a process to seem right to you is for you to have the attitude of seeming-true towards the proposition that the process is right. But if so, the property of rightness cannot be defined in terms of an attitude taken towards the instantiation of that very property. A definition of that form cannot succeed in distinguishing rightness from any other property.

2. Enkratic reasoning and the motivation problem.

That is an objection to Broome’s account of rule-following. However, it should not lead us to doubt whether rule-following is active—only to wonder whether we can come up with a better explanation of how it is active.

Accordingly, that first objection leaves intact Broome’s broader argument that since (as we should accept) reasoning *is* active, it gives us an answer to the motivation question. How does the belief that you ought to do something cause the intention to do it? His answer is: this can happen through reasoning. So suppose my rationality is imperfect, because I have a problem with akrasia. Perhaps (to reverse one of his examples) I think I ought to be at my desk rather than taking a break. He maintains that reasoning can help me: it gives me something I can *do* to satisfy the enkrasia requirement—I can follow a rule. In doing so, I motivate myself.

My last objection is to this broader argument. According to Broome, enkratic reasoning can help me with my akrasia-problem, by giving me something I can do to get myself from the belief that I ought to return to my desk to the intention to do so. However, to reason enkratically is just to follow the rule: From the belief that you ought to *F* and the belief that *F* is up to you, derive the intention to *F* (p. 290). So does the rule not simply amount to: “Don’t be like this:”, followed by a description of the problem-state that I am in when I am failing to intend what I think I ought? If so, Broome’s answer to the motivation question just amounts to the assertion that we *can* make the transition from belief to intention through our own activity. It is not a solution to the problem of explaining how this is possible.

Again, I worry about the direction in which Broome’s proposed explanation travels. Amongst the rules that we sometimes conform to, there are some we can actively comply with, and others we cannot. For example, there is the falling-asleep rule: “When you need sleep, and are finding it difficult to get to sleep, fall asleep”. I

agree with Broome that the rule for enkratic reasoning is unlike the falling-asleep rule, in that we can actively follow it. *Therefore*, the rule for enkratic reasoning is a candidate for a rule of reasoning and the falling-asleep rule is not. It is *because* the enkrasia rule is a rule we can actively follow and the falling-asleep rule is not that following the former can count as reasoning and conforming to the latter cannot. Broome wants to make the inference: “We can reason enkratically; therefore there is something we can actively do to make ourselves rational.” But the correct inference actually runs in the opposite direction: “We have the ability to make ourselves enkratic through our own activity; therefore the enkrasia rule can count as a rule of reasoning.”

Broome is trying to answer the motivation problem by getting beyond the easy answer that the belief that you ought to do something causes the intention to do it through the enkratic disposition. He can add to the easy answer the true observation that when we reason enkratically we are active. But I do not think he successfully explains how this disposition is active by characterizing it as an exercise of reasoning. The explanation runs the other way.

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