A Problem for the Unity of Normativity

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A prevalent assumption is that normativity is a unity. In this paper I argue against this assumption by demonstrating the problems it poses to a well known answer to a well known problem for taking rationality to be normative. Consider the poisoner's hypothetical imperative. If you want to poison your wealthy aunt (who has left you all her money in her will) you ought to use cyanide. You *do* want to poison your aunt and so by modus ponens you ought to give her cyanide. But plainly you ought not. This is the bootstrapping problem. We need to avoid this spurious normativity.

Broome's proposed solution is his normative requirement relation (1999). In his terms, wanting to kill Auntie normatively requires you to give her cyanide. This relation holding implies only the wide scope modal conditional: 'you ought, if you want to kill Auntie, to give her cyanide'. It does not imply the narrow scope modal conditional 'if you want to kill auntie, you ought to give her cyanide'. Formulating instrumental rationality in terms of normative requirements avoids the problem of licensing the spurious obligation just because you want to kill auntie.

In this paper I show that insofar as the normative requirement relation is supposed to go beyond this and offer a *general* characterisation of the normativity of rationality, it fails. It fails because it cannot capture an important aspect of the normativity of rationality. I show that if we distinguish two kinds of normativity, which I call correctness and directivity, it need not fail in this way. Correctness is the intrinsic normativity of items such as the rules of chess, social institutions, proper functions. It is in some sense *mere*. Directivity, on the other hand, is full blooded; it is the normativity had by the deontic and evaluative features spoken of in ethics.[1] Broome, by contrast, says 'I see no need to divide normativity' (Broome 2005:327).[2]

To illustrate the strength of the intuition that, contrary to Broome's solution, rationality gives rise to narrow-scope conditionals consider these remarks 20 years apart:

> If…an intelligent man studies…a valid philosophical argument, understands it, accepts the premises as true and the reasoning as valid…he *ought* to accept the conclusion. (Taylor 1979:341, his emphasis).

[1] See this distinction in Shackel 2004 ch. 2 and Shackel MS. I intend a different distinction from that drawn by Thomson (2008) with similar terminology. Her distinction between correctness properties and directives lines up with the standard distinction between the evaluative and deontic.

[2] In fairness, Broome has recently modified his position somewhat. See Broome (2013:27 fn.31) where he references my paper on this distinction (Shackel MS) and identifies correctness with what is had by "requirements of any sort" and directivity with what "helps determine what you ought to do…what I called 'true normativity'". For this reason I shall confine myself to his position as expressed in papers up to and including Broome 2002 and Broome 2005 for the sake of the clarity of the example it gives us.

> Someone who believes that *P*, and that if *P* then *Q*, *ought* to believe that *Q*. (Jackson 2000:101, his emphasis)

These are not in the least atypical and similar remarks can be found in the work of many philosophers.[3] Granted the division in normativity we have a way of countenancing this intuition without falling into bootstrapping. We can take the intrinsic normativity of instrumental rationality to be correctness alone. The narrow-scope conditional tells us about what is rationally required. The implausible conclusion that you ought to give her cyanide is a result of reading this mere correctness as if it were directive. Then the wide-scope conditional tells us of directivity's relation to taking the means, since the wide-scope conditional licences concluding that you ought to give her cyanide provided you ought to want to kill her.

The virtue of simplicity will steer us towards Broome's solution provided it accounts for all normativity in evidence in the cases to which it applies. I shall now argue that it fails to do this: it fails to properly encompass the normativity of rational guidance to action.

In his cases of practical reasoning (1999:86 ff.), and it is intended quite generally, Broome subsumes the normativity of rationality into the normative requirement.

> To a large extent [rationality] consists in following normative requirements (Broome 1999:98-9)

Broome explains why he has come round to agreeing with Moore's view that 'you can never know for certain what you ought to do' (1999:93). He thinks it possible 'that practical reasoning [may] require you to go sailing' (1999:94) and yet 'it does not follow that you ought to go sailing'(1999:94).[4]

The terminology here is treacherous. When speaking of what practical reason requires we may be speaking of practical reason as the totality of determinants of right actions, when what practical reason requires is what is (directively, as I would put it) required by whatever practical reasons there are. Alternatively, we may be speaking of practical reason as a faculty, and so about what reasoning correctly on the basis of my beliefs, values and desires would require. In these terms, Broome is contrasting what the faculty of practical reasoning requires with what (directive) practical reasons require.

In saying 'it does not follow…', Broome is committed to asserting of some cases that sailing is practically required (i.e. correct practical reasoning would lead you to believe you ought to sail) and that it is not the case that you ought to sail (the balance of practical reasons do not obligate sailing). Broome rejects explaining such cases in terms of objective and subjective 'ought's:

> people…say that, whatever you ought objectively to do — and you do not know — subjectively you ought to go sailing.…[this] is an unsatisfactory term (1999:94)

Rather, the normativity of sailing being a requirement of practical reasoning and the normativity of it not being the case that you ought to sail are one and the same. But if normativity is a unity, we seem to be close to a contradiction: that sailing is required and it is not the case that sailing is required.[5]

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[3] There is an extensive literature on bootstrapping and the wide-scope/narrow-scope issue. See Dancy 1977; Bratman 1987; Broome 2001; Schroeder 2004; Kolodny 2005; Brunero 2010; Way 2010 among many others.

[4] This example shows that Broome's 'ought' marks directive normativity.

[5] I have avoided using the tempting general term 'normatively required' since here that is reserved for Broome's relation, and I have avoided 'ought' because we are worrying about 'ought's and so

The normative requirement relation is supposed explain why there is no contradiction. It is not the case that you ought to sail, but nevertheless sailing is normatively required. I shall now explain why I don't think this works. The essential point is that Broome is having it both ways with the valency (adicity) of the term 'normative requirement': given his position about the unity of normativity, in order to avoid the contradiction he needs 'sailing is normatively required' to be a relational assertion in which a term for a relatum has been suppressed, whilst to retain the normativity of rational guidance he needs it to be monadic. But if normativity is a unity and if it is not the case that you ought to sail, then the very property of the normative requirement relation which blocks the derivation of a spurious obligation (which property is reflected in the logical factor of a normative requirement being a wide scope modal conditional) also blocks the derivation of the normativity of a rational requirement to attach monadically to sailing, and so the normativity of rational guidance is lost.

To spell that out, let's see first how it goes if, *contrary* to Broome's intentions, we assume that the normative requirement relation subsumes two normativities, the normativity of directive requirement *and* the normativity of a distinct (practical) rational requirement whose normativity we take to be correctness alone. The following schemas give the analogous formal inferential properties to these relations which the normative requirement relation has:[6]

Directivity Schema	*Rationality Schema*
p directively requires *q*	*p* rationally requires *q*
p directively ought to be	*p* rationally ought to be
q directively ought to be	*q* rationally ought to be

Take *C* to be the considerations related to going sailing which normatively require going sailing, and *S* to be going sailing. Premiss 2 below expresses the subsumed dual normativity. Grounds for the truth of Premiss 3 could be, for example, that the rational coherence of your general intentional state requires you to have the considerations, *C*, in mind. Premiss 4 is stipulated by our example. Having *C* in mind may be rational, but it must also be mistaken in some respect, since reasoning soundly on its basis will lead you to conclude that you ought to *S*, when by the stipulation of our example, you ought not.

1. *C* normatively requires *S*
2. (*C* normatively requires *S*) only if (*C* directively requires *S* and *C* rationally requires *S*)
3. *C* rationally ought to be
4. not-(*S* directively ought to be)
5. *C* rationally requires *S* (1, 2, MPP, $\wedge$-elim)
6. therefore *S* rationally ought to be (5, *Rationality Schema*)

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have resorted to the term 'required'. Given the claimed unity of normativity, I might also have expressed the contradiction as 'sailing is normative and it is not the case that sailing is normative'. I should point out that the reason this contradiction is a threat for Broome is that he intends his use of 'ought' to be only all-things-considered, and never prima facie. When he uses 'normative requirement' he is making an implicit use of an 'ought', as is shown by the form of what he calls the logical factor of a normative requirement (see footnote 6).

[6] Broome says that the logical factor of '*p* normatively requires *q*' is 'O($p \rightarrow q$)', but he is unhappy to commit himself to any specific detachment principle. The inferential relations I have used here require only the *K*-principle of modal logic.

7. therefore not (*S* directively ought to be) and *S* rationally ought to be (4, 6, ∧-intro)

So with dual normativity we can derive the assertions that Broome wishes to make about the case.

But if normativity is undivided and the normative requirement relation is consequently univocal, the derivation of the rational normativity is blocked. The point of the normative requirement relation is *p* normatively requiring *q* does not allow the detachment of '*q* ought to be' unless *p* ought to be. Hence we can't detach that *S* rationally ought to be whenever we can't detach that *S* directively ought to be. We can't detach the latter by the stipulation of the example. So Broome has no basis for the thought that going sailing could be rationally required even though it is not what ought to be. Furthermore, if it *could* be derived, we'd be back with the contradiction because of the unity of normativity.

Can Broome get round this problem by appealing to what makes the normative requirement and its logical factor inequivalent? The force of the normative requirement is from *C*, and not from other things logically equivalent to *C*. That force can be felt by *S* because *it* is what *C* (but not other things) normatively requires. So *sailing* is rationally required, although being so does not permit the detachment of 'sailing ought to be'. Such an answer, however, amounts to accepting that there is additional normativity in play, which is detachable given *C*.

This example makes the essential point highly visible. Either some normativity (of some kind) attaches to going sailing or it doesn't. If we read Broome accurately, it doesn't, even though he needs it to if he is going to maintain the distinction between practical reasoning requiring you to go sailing and whether you directively ought to. I shall now elucidate the point more broadly.

Broome's terminology can make it sound as if there is something left over to be detached by speaking of the sailing being normatively required despite it not following that you ought to go sailing. Yet saying it is normatively required attaches no normativity to the sailing but merely expresses a relation that stands between your beliefs, values and desires, and going sailing. That Broome so intends is borne out by this passage about a different example:

> Instrumental reasoning does *not* lead to *any detached normative conclusion* for the tortoise, *nor* place him under *any detached necessity*. (1999:96, my emphasis)

The problem now is, if there is no normativity whatsoever attached to the conclusion, what justifies the force of requirement in the following remark?

> The tortoise seems to assume he is therefore not placed under any requirement of rationality. But he is: rationality requires him to intend whatever he believes to be a necessary means to an end he intends. (1999:96)

We can't detach that the tortoise ought, directively, to take necessary means in the absence of the end being obliged, and we are agreed that that is how it should be. But in this passage Broome is asserting that the tortoise *is* placed under a requirement of rationality. What exactly is it that is required? Is the requirement monadic and applying just to the means, or is it relational and standing between the means and the ends? If it is the latter, how are we getting anywhere? In particular, how are we getting ourselves into a position to say, truthfully, that whilst we cannot be certain that it is what we ought, directively, to do, *going sailing* is rationally *required*?

To sum up, the problem for Broome is that his normative requirement doesn't justify detaching a monadic rational requirement, and that is how Broome intends it to be. To avoid the derivation of spurious obligations from hypothetical imperatives he intends to confine the normativity to the relation.[7] When he says that the means is normatively required, that sailing the boat is required by practical reason, he intends that his expression is merely one in which the other relational terms have been suppressed, rather than one in which rational requirement has been detached because of the truth of the other terms.

Yet Broome needs to detach a rational requirement to intend the means, and elsewhere is implicitly doing so. For what else can he mean by saying that 'To a large extent [rationality] consists in following normative requirements' (1999:98-9)? I agree with him, but if rationality is to guide us to follow normative requirements we need to detach *intending the means* as a rational requirement, not merely leave it standing in the relation of normative requirement to beliefs and other intentions. The bootstrapping problem is that taking normativity to be a unity and taking rationality to be normative faces the problem of deriving spurious obligations. Broome's solution succeeds too far. Yes, it eliminates those spurious obligations, but it also eliminates the normativity of rational guidance to action. If the price of unified normativity is to find that there is no sense of 'ought' left to carry rational guidance, it is a price too high to pay. It won't help Broome to offer a further account of the normativity of rational guidance that is detachable but is also directive, since then we will face again the problem of spurious obligation and the contradiction of sailing being required and not required. On the other hand, taking the normativity of rational guidance to be correctness alone and taking Broome's normative requirement relation either to express the relation of rationality to directivity alone or, alternatively, to subsume the normativity of rationality and the relation of rationality to directivity, solves these problems.

Now in this paper I have taken one theory, Broome's, as the target for extended analysis. I have done this for the sake of an example in which it is clear that the assumption of the unity of normativity is what causes the problem. The problem, however, is not a problem for Broome alone. The essential root is that in accounting for the normativity of rationality we need to account for availing rational guidance whilst avoiding spurious normativity. Broome's normative requirement relation, and other wide-scope accounts of the normativity of rationality such as Brunero 2010 and Way 2010, satisfy the last but do so at the cost of the first, just because they cannot licence detaching a rational requirement. By contrast, narrow-scope accounts such as Schroeder 2004 and Kolodny 2005 can licence detaching a rational requirement, and thereby avail rational guidance, but fall into the problem of spurious normativity. In Kolodny's case this leads him to the position that the normativity of rationality is merely apparent, without noticing that doing this is giving up the normativity of rational guidance, and hence giving up availing rational guidance.

What appears to drive these authors to take one or other side of the debate is their intuition over whether availing rational guidance or avoiding spurious normativity is what really matters in accounting for the normativity of rationality. I say that both matter and that consequently, assuming as they do the unity of normativity, these authors thereby impale themselves on the horns of a dilemma. The cleanest solution, a solution that allows us to keep what each side of the debate was after, is to reject that assumption and allow of

[7] In this situation. There are other cases which he thinks make conditionals of the form $p \rightarrow Oq$ true: contrast with the logical factor of normative requirements: $O(p \rightarrow q)$.

the division in normativity. Then, as I showed above, we can account for the normativity of rationality in terms that explain availing rational guidance whilst avoiding spurious normativity. [8]

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