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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Brunero's Non-Normative Disjunctivism and Means-Ends Reasoning

Byeong D. Lee*

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Abstract: On Brunero's non-normative disjunctivism, agents exhibiting means-ends incoherence are irrational because they are guaranteed to have at least one attitude that fails to achieve its constitutive aim, and such an aim failure is not a failure of reason. This paper primarily aims to show that this account fails to adequately explain the irrationality of means-ends incoherence. More specifically, I argue that agents exhibiting this incoherence can be justifiably criticized for irrationality, and they cannot ward off such criticism by claiming that there is no reason to be means-ends coherent. Furthermore, I argue that Brunero's three objections to the strong normativity of means-ends coherence are not successful.

Keywords: means-ends incoherence; means-ends reasoning; constitutivism; non-normative disjunctivism; Brunero.

1. Introductive Remarks

Means-ends incoherence is widely regarded as a form of irrationality. Consider, for example, a case in which an agent, S, intends to visit Venice,

* Sungkyunkwan University
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7080-6702
Department of Philosophy, Sungkyunkwan University, 25-2, Sungkyunkwan-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea
bydlee@skku.edu

believes that buying a ticket is necessary for doing so, but fails to intend to buy one. If S holds such a combination of attitudes, he is means-ends incoherent. Why then does rationality require us to avoid such incoherence?

In his 2020 book, *Instrumental Rationality: The Normativity of Means-Ends Coherence*, John Brunero defends a *non-normative disjunctivism* about means-ends incoherence. According to this view, agents exhibiting means-ends incoherence are guaranteed to have at least one attitude that fails to achieve its constitutive aim: either they have an intention that does not result in the intended action, or they hold a belief that is false. This view has three origins. To begin with, Brunero borrows the idea from David Velleman (2000) and others that belief constitutively aims at truth. He also borrows (and modifies) the idea from Michael Bratman (2009a; 2009b) that intention constitutively aims at controlled action. Moreover, he borrows the 'disjunctivism' part of his approach from Niko Kolodny (2008, esp. 368). One important thing to note about Brunero's non-normative disjunctivism is that the failure involved in means-ends incoherence is to be explained in terms of a constitutive aim failure, and such an aim failure is not a failure of reason. According to Brunero, the aims of belief and intention do not generate normative reasons for achieving them. Instead, these constitutive aims are to be understood in terms of their roles within our psychological apparatus. A normative reason for (or against) a response, such as having an attitude or performing an action, is roughly a consideration that counts in favor of (or against) the response.[1] Hereafter, by 'reasons' I mean normative reasons.

This paper primarily aims to show that Brunero's non-normativist approach fails to adequately explain the irrationality of means-ends incoherence. Additionally, it seeks to refute his three objections to the strong

[1] Normative reasons should be distinguished from motivating and explanatory reasons. Motivating reasons are considerations for which, or in light of which, one makes a response, such as having an attitude or performing an action. Explanatory reasons are considerations that explain such a response without necessarily justifying it or being the reasons that motivated it. But motivating reasons for a response can be understood as a subset of explanatory reasons because a reason that motivates the response can always explain it. These distinctions are standard. See Alvarez (2016) for an overview.

normativity of means-ends coherence – the view that one should always be means-ends coherent. This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 argues that Brunero's account fails to adequately explain the irrationality of means-ends incoherence. More specifically, it argues that agents exhibiting this incoherence can be justifiably criticized for irrationality, and they cannot ward off such criticism by claiming that there is no reason to be means-ends coherent. Section 3 argues against Brunero's claim that rational requirements are not normative. Finally, Section 4 addresses Brunero's additional arguments for his non-normativist view. He presents three significant objections to the strong normativity of means-ends coherence, but I argue that these objections are unsuccessful.

2. Brunero's Non-Normativist Approach

On Brunero's non-normativist account, agents exhibiting means-ends incoherence are irrational because they are guaranteed to have at least one attitude that fails to achieve its constitutive aim. However, Brunero does not regard such an aim failure as a failure of reason. He interprets the constitutive aims of belief and intention in terms of their 'job descriptions' – their roles within our psychological apparatus. If this is correct, these aims do not generate reasons for achieving them. Let me explain this view further.

As mentioned in section 1, Brunero borrows the idea from Velleman that belief constitutively aims at truth. According to Velleman (2000, esp. 246), what distinguishes belief from other cognitive attitudes is that belief aims at truth. And he provides a functional interpretation of this aim. On this interpretation, to say that belief constitutively aims at truth is to say that truth is the constitutive function of belief. The proper function of the liver is to filter impurities and toxins from the bloodstream, and having this function is part of what it is for something to be a liver. In a similar vein, on this interpretation, the proper function of belief is to regard something as true only if it really is, and having this function is part of what it is for something to be a belief.[2] Brunero accepts this functional interpretation of

[2] For a more detailed discussion of the functional interpretation about the aim of belief, see Côté-Bouchard (2016, 3187–89).

the aim of belief. So, on his view, the constitutive aim of belief has nothing to do with *reasons*. Instead, the constitutive aim of belief is its 'job description' – the role of belief within one's psychological apparatus (see Brunero 2020, 177).

Brunero also borrows (and modifies) the idea from Bratman that intention constitutively aims at controlled action. According to Bratman (2009a, 2009b), just as truth is a constitutive aim of belief, coordinated and effective control of action is a constitutive aim of intention. Brunero agrees with Bratman's general strategy of appealing to the constitutive aim of intention as part of an explanation of intention-belief consistency and means-ends coherence. But he does not agree with a particular way in which Bratman carries out this strategy. Instead, he defends a weaker view that the constitutive aim of intention is effective control of action by jettisoning 'coordination'.[3] He also holds that the constitutive aim of intention is its 'job description' – the role of intention within one's psychological apparatus (see Brunero 2020, 185). Accordingly, the constitutive aim of intention also has nothing to do with reasons.[4]

Brunero does not deny that drawing attention to someone's means-ends incoherence is likely to create pressure for them to adjust their attitudes in order to resolve this incoherence. However, he attributes this pressure to the roles of our beliefs and intentions in our mental lives. He writes:

> We can hold that an intention, unlike a wish or a desire, *just is* the kind of mental state that generates pressure in the direction

[3] On Bratman's view, there is an important disanalogy between the aims of belief and intention. When we assert that belief aims at truth, we imply that a specific belief 'p' aims at getting things right with respect to 'p'. Notably, the aim of a specific belief does not make reference to one's other beliefs. In contrast, a specific intention to do X aims at effective control of doing X in coordination with one's other intentions. So, unlike belief, the aim of a specific intention makes reference to one's other intentions. Brunero argues that his weaker view has the advantage of preserving the parallel with belief, as the constitutive aim of a belief does not make reference to one's other beliefs.

[4] I accept neither Brunero's view that belief constitutively aims at truth, nor his view that intention aims at controlled action. But it is beyond the scope of this paper to refute these views.

> of being means-ends coherent. Part of what it is for you to *intend* an end, as opposed to merely desire it or hope that it obtains, is for you to feel pressure to intend believed necessary means when it's pointed out to you that you fail to do so.…We don't need to rely upon an agent's beliefs about normative reasons to explain pressure toward compliance. It can instead be explained by looking at the very attitudes governed by means-ends coherence, intentions and beliefs, and the roles they play within our mental lives (Brunero 2020, 208–209; original italics).

So, according to Brunero, we would feel pressure to revise our attitudes to resolve means-ends incoherence, mainly because an intention is the kind of mental state that generates pressure in the direction of being means-ends coherent; nevertheless, there is no reason to be means-ends coherent. Therefore, on his view, the rational requirement of means-ends coherence is only apparently normative. Against this view, however, I will argue in the remainder of this section that agents exhibiting means-ends incoherence can be justifiably criticized for irrationality, and they cannot ward off such criticism by claiming that there is no reason to be means-ends coherent.

Before presenting detailed arguments, five key points need to be clarified.

First, our concept of rationality is closely tied to rational criticism. For instance, if it is rational for you to hold a belief, you should not be criticized for holding that belief. Conversely, if it is irrational for you to hold a belief, you can be criticized for it. In this context, it is important to recognize that attributing irrationality is a form of criticism. On this point, Benjamin Kiesewetter and Errol Lord write, respectively, as follows:

> [O]rdinary attributions of irrationality are commonly understood as criticism. Moreover, the criticism involved seems to be personal criticism: when agents get called irrational, they do not merely understand this to mean that they fall short of some evaluative standard; they feel personally criticized for their responses (Kiesewetter 2017, 39).

> When one is rational in the relevant way, one is worthy of a certain kind of praise. And when one is irrational in the relevant

> way, one is open to a particular kind of criticism. When one is incoherent one is open to this sort of criticism (Lord 2018, 4).

Second, following Kiesewetter (2017, 2), we can distinguish between two senses of 'rationality'. The first is the *capacity sense* of rationality, according to which we are rational beings because we possess the capacity for rationality. If a creature can believe or act in compliance with norms of rationality, such as modus ponens and means-ends reasoning, we may say that the creature is rational in this capacity sense. In this context, 'rational' contrasts with 'arational', not with 'irrational'. The second sense is the standard-related sense of rationality, where 'rational' contrasts with 'irrational'. There are certain standards or norms that are authoritative or binding for any rational being. For example, suppose X is an arbitrary rational being. If X believes that $\sim q$, despite believing both that if p then q, and that p, then X can be rationally criticized for being irrational on the grounds that X fails to adhere to the rule of modus ponens, which is a norm of rationality. As this example illustrates, irrationality involves the violation of a standard or norm of rationality that applies universally to all rational beings.

Third, rational criticism is closely tied to justification. For instance, if one's attitude or action is justified, it should not be subject to rational criticism. Conversely, if a response is unjustified, it may be subject to rational criticism. Furthermore, if an individual is criticized for their response, they have the right to demand justification. If this demand cannot be met, they can rightly dismiss the criticism.

Fourth, it is inevitable to address any rational question on the basis of our social practice of demanding justification and responding to such demands. Let me explain. As Ludwig Wittgenstein (1969, §§341–43) points out, genuine doubt is possible only against a background of beliefs that are not simultaneously doubted. Additionally, according to Immanuel Kant (1996b, 5:16), reason has its own sovereignty, meaning that reason must answer any question about itself and its principles from its own resources upon due reflection. To put it differently, our conceptual framework provides the norms, criteria, or rules for defending or criticizing any claim. Therefore, it is inevitable to address any demand for justification on the basis of our conceptual framework. Consequently, it can be argued that

meeting such a demand requires engaging in rational discourse grounded in that framework. In other words, any demand for justification is not intelligible outside of our conceptual framework. Here 'a conceptual framework' can be understood roughly as a framework on the basis of which we can settle genuine doubt or meet demands for justification.[5]

In addition, according to Sellars (1963), our concept of justification has been developed on the basis of our social practices of demanding justification and responding to such demands (or giving and asking for reasons). So our concept of justification should be understood in accordance with this social practice model of justification. And on this social practice model, we have no other rational way to address any demand for justification except on the basis of our social practice of justification.[6]

Moreover, as Robert Brandom (1994, esp. 204–206) argues, our social practice of justification requires the default-and-challenge structure of justification. In the first place, the infinite regress of justification is impossible in our social practice. Suppose that we defend a claim by offering a ground, *p*. A challenger can call this ground into question by saying, 'Why *p*?' To meet this challenge, we might provide another ground, *q*. The challenger can, in turn, call this ground into question by saying, 'Why *q*?' Here it should be noted that if the challenger were allowed to keep raising a question, 'Why is that?' to any of our replies, there would be no claim that we can ultimately justify. In the second place, we are justified in accepting a claim just in case we can answer all objections raised against it within our social practice of justification. It is important to note that such objections can be addressed only on the basis of a background of beliefs and norms

[5] Building upon this perspective, Sellars (1963, §36, 169) distinguishes the logical space of reasons from the realm of law. Objects within the realm of law are those which can, in principle, be explained by natural sciences. But reasons are not the kind of thing that can be explained by natural sciences. To put the point another way, causal relations are one thing, and justificatory relations are quite another. Consequently, the logical space of reasons are *sui generis* in that it cannot be conceptually reduced to the realm of law. Therefore, we have no other rational way to address any demand for justification except on the basis of reasons within this logical space.

[6] For a detailed defense of a Sellarsian social practice theory of justification, see my previous work (Lee 2017; Lee 2021).

that hold positive justificatory status within that practice. Therefore, the possibility that we can defend something requires that some claims (or norms) be treated as having default positive justificatory status in our social practice of justification, unless they are successfully challenged with good positive reasons. And as for claims that have default positive justificatory status, we can shift the burden of proof to a challenger, if any.

Fifth, and finally, there are valid rules of reasoning which have positive justificatory status in our social practice of justification. To illustrate, consider the following two arguments:

(1) If it is raining, then the ground is wet. It is raining. Therefore, the ground is wet.
(2) I shall visit Venice. Buying a ticket is a necessary means of visiting Venice. So I shall buy a ticket.[7]

(1) is an instance of modus ponens, which has the following form: "If *p*, then *q*. *p*. Therefore, *q*." This rule of theoretical reasoning can be considered valid because the joint truth of its premises is incompatible with the falsity of its conclusion. In other words, the joint truth of its premises implies the truth of its conclusion.

Let us now turn to (2), which is an instance of means-ends reasoning, which has the following form: "I shall do *E*. Doing *M* is a necessary means of doing *E*. Therefore, I shall do *M*." And we can defend the validity of this rule in the following way. Suppose that S intends to do *E*. Here it might be worth distinguishing between expressing an intention and describing an intention. S can express his intention of doing *E* by saying 'I shall do *E*'. And we can describe this intention by saying 'S intends to do *E*'. Admittedly, expressions of intention, unlike descriptions of intentions, are neither true nor false; in other words, they do not have truth conditions. Nonetheless, we can think of them as having the following success conditions: S's intention to do *A* is realized if he does *A*, otherwise it is unrealized. Now observe that insofar as S's doing *M* is a necessary means of doing *E*, S's intention to do *E* is realized only if his intention to do *M* is realized. In other words,

[7] In this paper, following Sellars (1967, 179), I will use 'shall' and 'will' in such a way that 'shall' expresses an intention, whereas 'will' expresses the standard indicative future.

when the second premise of means-ends reasoning is true, the realization of its first premise is incompatible with the non-realization of its conclusion. Therefore, we can regard means-ends reasoning as a valid rule of practical reasoning.

Now, with the above five key points on the table, consider a scenario where S believes the two premises of (1), but fails to believe its conclusion, despite caring about whether the conclusion is true. In this scenario, S can be criticized for being modus-ponens incoherent. If S is criticized in this manner, he has the right to demand justification. But this demand can be met on the grounds that he violates a valid rule of theoretical reasoning. Let me elaborate on this point a bit further.

To begin, we need to distinguish between the following two questions:

(3) Why are we all bound by authoritative norms of rationality?
(4) Which norms are authoritative norms of rationality?

We can address (3) based on a Kantian view of rational beings. According to this view, we differ from mere animals because we are normatively bound by authoritative norms of rationality, which apply to all rational beings. Thus, the reason why we are all bound by those norms is that we are rational beings.[8] We can address (4) based on the aforementioned Sellarsian social practice theory of justification. According to this theory, we are normatively bound by a norm of rationality insofar as it holds positive justificatory status within our social practice of justification. As mentioned earlier, modus ponens can be regarded as a valid rule of theoretical reasoning because the joint truth of its premises is incompatible with the falsity of its conclusion. Thus, this rule holds positive justificatory status within our social practice of justification. In other words, we may regard modus ponens as a valid rule of theoretical reasoning unless we are given reasons to override its positive justificatory status within that practice. Hence, we can explain why S can be justifiably criticized for violating modus ponens: the rule holds positive justificatory status as a valid rule of reasoning within our social practice of justification.

A parallel argument can be made about means-ends incoherence. To illustrate, consider again the scenario where S intends to visit Venice,

[8] For a detailed defense of this Kantian view, see Lee (2023).

believes that buying a ticket is necessary, but fails to intend to buy one. In this scenario, S can be criticized for means-ends incoherence. In this context, two things are worth pointing out. First, Brunero acknowledges that means-ends coherence is a genuine rational requirement. This stance leads him to reject the myth theory, which holds that the rational requirement of means-ends coherence is a myth.[9] Second, he admits that agents exhibiting this incoherence are irrational. His claim is that this irrationality is best explained by his non-normative disjunctivism. However, when criticized for means-ends incoherence, an individual has the right to demand justification. This demand can be met on the grounds that the individual violates a valid rule of practical reasoning, which holds positive justificatory status as a norm of rationality within our social practice of justification. Let me elaborate on this point further.

To begin, as previously mentioned, we are all bound by authoritative norms of rationality because we are rational beings. Additionally, we are normatively bound by a norm of rationality if it holds positive justificatory status within our social practice of justification. As previously argued, means-ends reasoning can be defended as a valid rule of practical reasoning because, when the second premise of means-ends reasoning is true, the realization of its first premise is incompatible with the non-realization of its conclusion. Therefore, we may regard it as a valid rule of practical reasoning unless we are given reasons to override its positive justificatory status. Therefore, we can explain why S can be justifiably criticized for violating means-ends reasoning: this rule holds positive justificatory status as a valid rule of practical reasoning within our social practice of justification.

In addition, being subject to rational criticism can be best understood as being normatively bound by norms of rationality. As noted, when an individual is criticized for irrationality, they have the right to demand justification. This demand can be best met by appealing to our norms of rationality, which hold positive justificatory status within our social practice of justification. For example, consider a scenario in which S believes the two premises of (1) but fails to accept its conclusion, despite caring about the truth of that conclusion. In such cases, S can be criticized for modus

[9] See Brunero (2020, 212). The myth view is defended notably by Kolodny (2005) and Raz (2005).

ponens incoherence. His demand for justification can be met by pointing out that modus ponens is a valid rule of theoretical reasoning. Consequently, if S fails to correct this violation and does not offer an adequate justification, he can be criticized for being irrational. An analogous point can be made about norms of practical rationality. Therefore, if one believes or acts in a way that violates a norm of rationality, one is open to rational criticism. This shows that our social practice of rational criticism involves the assumption that we are bound by norms of rationality.

Moreover, it can also be argued that there is a reason to be means-ends coherent. Since the argument (2) is valid, if its premises hold, then its conclusion must also hold. Consequently, if S is justified in accepting these premises, then S is also justified in accepting the conclusion. Therefore, if S believes that the premises of (2) are justified (or correct), these premises provide him with a reason to form the intention expressed in the conclusion – particularly in light of his practical goal of visiting Venice. On this basis, it can be argued that the premises of a valid practical argument provide S with a reason to form the intention expressed in the conclusion, provided that those premises are justified. This reason also serves as a consideration against not intending to buy a ticket. Thus, S has a reason against not intending to buy a ticket, at least insofar as he cares about visiting Venice. If this is correct, we can also explain why S can be justifiably criticized for means-ends incoherence: the premises of (2) provide a reason against not intending to buy a ticket. Note that if S does not intend to buy a ticket, he is unlikely to achieve his goal of visiting Venice. Therefore, S's failure to form this intention is not justified, insofar as he genuinely cares about visiting Venice. I will say more on this point in the next section.

3. The Normativity of Rational Requirements

Brunero argues that rational requirements are not normative. He writes:

> Niko Kolodny, in his influential paper "Why be Rational?," presents several challenges to the idea that rationality is normative. According to one challenge, if one always has a reason to be

> rational, we should be able to state *what* that reason is. But it is not clear what the reason is (Brunero 2020, 17; original italics).
>
> For prudence, we can say that if prudence requires you to *X*, then there's a reason for you to *X*. And for morality, we can say that if morality requires you to *X*, then there's a reason for you to *X*. … But for rationality, we *can't* say that if rationality requires you to *X*, there's a reason for you to *X*. In short, the requirements of prudence and morality are normative, whereas the requirements of rationality are not. (Brunero 2020, 210; original italics)

As the above quotations indicate, Brunero claims that rational requirements are not normative (in the reasons-providing sense of 'normative'). On this point, he concurs with Kolodny (2005, §2). In this section, however, I argue against this claim.

As argued in the previous section, if you violate a rational requirement such as means-ends coherence, you can be subject to rational criticism. In this context, it is worth noting the distinction between the deontological 'ought' and the propriety 'ought'. If one's failure to act in accordance with an 'ought' implies one's being culpable or blameworthy for it, then the 'ought' is the deontological 'ought'. The representative example is the moral 'ought'. But there is another kind of 'ought' which does not imply such culpability or blameworthiness. For example, if a botanist says about a trillium that it ought to have three petals, then they do not mean that the trillium is culpable or blameworthy for not having three petals; instead, what they mean is just that it is appropriate or proper for the trillium to have three petals. In such cases, the 'ought' is the propriety 'ought'.[10]

Given the above distinction between deontological and propriety normativity, it can be argued that rational requirements such as means-ends coherence are normative in the deontological sense. For example, as argued in section 2, individuals exhibiting means-ends incoherence can be justifiably criticized on the grounds that they violate a valid rule of practical reasoning or that the premises of means-ends reasoning provide a

[10] For the distinction between the deontological 'ought' and the propriety 'ought', see Wolterstorff (2005, 330).

subject who accept these premises with a reason to form the intention expressed in its conclusion. And such criticism involves demanding that they revise their attitudes to comply with the relevant norms of rationality. Along these lines, it can be argued that the rational requirement of means-ends coherence is normative in the deontological sense. In addition, the fact that a means-ends incoherent agent can be justifiably criticized for breaching a norm of rationality is clearly a consideration that counts against this incoherence. In other words, one ought to comply with means-ends coherence because failing to do so renders one liable to rational criticism for violating a valid rule of reasoning. Therefore, we can also argue that means-ends coherence is normative in the reasons-providing sense of 'normative'.

At this point, it is worth considering a possible objection. Attributing impoliteness is a form of criticism, but it does not necessarily imply that one is under an obligation to be polite. Analogously, attributing irrationality may likewise be a form of criticism without thereby implying an obligation to comply with rational requirements. However, as Brunero (2020, 209–214) points out, rational requirements differ fundamentally from those of chess, law, grammar, or etiquette, as they are not grounded in non-universal social rules or conventions. This distinction is crucial: whereas criticism for impoliteness is grounded in socially contingent norms, criticism for irrationality is not. Nevertheless, individuals who wish to avoid being criticized for impoliteness have a reason to adhere to the norms of etiquette. By parity of reasoning, all rational agents have a reason to comply with rational requirements, since doing so is necessary to avoid rational criticism. Accordingly, the fact that attributing impoliteness as a form of criticism does not provide everyone with a reason to be polite does not undermine the claim that attributing irrationality provides all rational agents with a reason to adhere to rational requirements. The key difference between etiquette norms and rational requirements is that, unlike the former, the latter apply universally to all rational beings. This difference does not weaken, but rather supports, the claim that there are reasons to comply with rational requirements. In this light, the absence of an obligation to be polite does not undermine the claim that rational requirements are normative – in the reasons-providing sense of 'normative'.

4. Brunero's Objections against Strong Normativity

As additional grounds for his non-normativist view, Brunero raises three important objections against the strong normativity of means-ends coherence (Strong Normativity, henceforth), the view that one always ought to be means-ends coherent. This section argues that those objections are not successful.

His first objection is that being means-ends incoherent can be advantageous (2020, 131–37). To illustrate this point, Brunero provides the following example: Professor Henri Liable, despite his sincere intentions, struggles to fulfill his departmental service responsibilities due to his incompetence. Recognizing Henri's consistent lack of follow-through, his department chair, adept at understanding people, reassigns his service responsibilities to other members of the department. Under this situation, consider the following instance of means-ends incoherence. Although Henri plans to certify his new course for general education credit and understands the need to contact relevant administrators, he has no intention of doing so. His plan to get his new course certified will secure the good will of the chair, who reliably detects such intentions, while his not intending to talk with the administrators could reduce the likelihood of being burdened with future service assignments. According to Brunero, this case poses a serious problem for Strong Normativity, because this view implies that Henri ought not to have the incoherent combination of attitudes. But the incoherent combination of attitudes is advantageous to him, and hence he has a good reason to remain means-ends incoherent, rather than abandoning one of the attitudes in this incoherent combination.

However, Strong Normativity is not undermined by such a case. We can concede that Henri's means-ends incoherence might be practically beneficial to him, at least for a while. But it is important to recognize that if an agent's attitude is really rational, the agent should not be rationally criticized for holding that attitude. But Henri can be criticized for violating means-ends reasoning. As previously emphasized, means-ends reasoning is a valid rule of practical reasoning. And its validity is not affected by any potential practical benefits that might be obtained from its violation. Therefore, it is one thing for an agent to violate such a valid rule of reasoning; it

is quite another thing for that violation to be practically beneficial to the agent. Most importantly, if the department chair demands certification for Henri's new course, Henri cannot dismiss this demand by arguing that avoiding contact with the administrators is practically beneficial to him. If he were to argue in that manner, he would lose the chair's goodwill. Furthermore, as long as Henri cannot dismiss the chair's demand for certification, he cannot justify violating means-ends reasoning on the grounds that such a violation is practically beneficial to him. Therefore, Brunero's first objection, illustrated by the case of Henri Liable, doesn't undermine Strong Normativity. For Henri's violation of means-ends reasoning is open to rational criticism, and he can hardly ward off such criticism by claiming that it is practically beneficial to him.

Let us now turn to Brunero's second objection against Strong Normativity (2020, 137–41). This objection pertains to a scenario where an agent, despite being means-ends incoherent, is unable to alter either their goal or their instrumental belief. To illustrate, Brunero presents the following example from Kieran Setiya (2007, 672). A certain agent, say S, intends to smoke, but fails to intend to buy cigarettes, despite believing that buying cigarettes is necessary to smoke. In this example, it is not the case that S ought to intend to smoke. Unfortunately, however, both his intention and instrumental belief are psychologically unalterable. Thus, the only way he can comply with means-ends coherence in this case is to intend the means. Then Strong Normativity seems to imply that S ought to intend to buy cigarettes. But this consequence is implausible.

The above objection does not pose a serious problem for Strong Normativity, either. Consider the following normative means-ends reasoning:

> S ought to smoke. His buying cigarettes is necessary to smoke. So he ought to buy cigarettes.

This reasoning is valid. So, if S accepts the two premises, then he must also accept the conclusion. However, despite his psychological inability to abandon his intention to smoke, it can still be the case that S ought not to smoke. For instance, if he has lung cancer, smoking could be life-threatening. In this scenario, S could deny that he ought to smoke, while admitting that he cannot control his intention to smoke due to a psychological compulsion**.** In other words, by rejecting the first premise in this manner, he

may also dismiss the conclusion. The point is that S can reasonably deny the first premise, while admitting his irresistible urge to smoke.[11] Besides, one may have an obligation not to do something, even if one is unable to alter one's intention to do it.[12]

A related point is that the assumption that S's intention to smoke is irrational is compatible with his psychological inability to alter his intention. Consider an analogy from belief. If it is irrational for S to believe that p (due to the high likelihood of its falsehood), then he should not believe it.

[11] It is important to note that rationality is not confined to maintaining consistency and coherence among attitudes. In this case, S is justified in buying cigarettes only if his intention to smoke is justified. But this intention is arguably indefensible if smoking poses a life-threatening risk to him.

[12] To illustrate this point, consider a psychopath who can hardly restrain his impulse to harm others because of his antisocial personality disorder. Here it should be noted that, unlike mere animals, the psychopath is a rational agent, although we may admit that he is not fully rational in some sense. For example, he is capable of understanding that he is not morally allowed to harm others. As a consequence, he can resist his impulse to harm others under certain conditions, such as when a police officer is keeping an eye on him, and so he thinks he can hardly get away with his wrongdoing. Thus, given that he is a rational agent, it follows by Kant's Formula of Humanity that he should not be treated merely as a means to some other end (see Kant 1996a, 4:429). This is tantamount to saying that he should be regarded as a member of the moral community. If so, moral norms apply to him, because moral norms are universal norms. Unfortunately, however, he is morally defective. But this moral defect is not a sufficient reason for him to be excluded from the moral community. And insofar as the psychopath is regarded as a member of the moral community, he is responsible for his wrongdoing, such as killing an innocent child, even if he can hardly refrain from doing so due to his antisocial personality disorder. In this case, the psychopath could make an excuse for his wrongdoing by claiming that his antisocial personality disorder made it impossible for him to resist his impulses. And he could be less blameworthy to the extent that resisting his impulses was beyond his capacity in a specific situation. Insofar as he is a member of the moral community, however, he cannot be completely exempt from the relevant moral responsibility. So, he could be put into a mental institution or a prison, if necessary to protect innocent people. And we are allowed to do so precisely because even the psychopath is no exception to our moral norms. Along these lines, it can be argued that even if the psychopath cannot alter his intention to harm an innocent child, the universal moral norm that prohibits such wrongdoing still applies to him, as it does to every member of the moral community.

Yet, assume that he cannot help but believe that *p*. In this case, his psychological inability to believe otherwise is consistent with the irrationality of his belief. If there is a way to remedy his psychological inability, we can justifiably demand that he receive medical or psychological treatment. If it is incurable, he might be exempt from rational criticism, but this does not change the fact that his belief in '*p*' is irrational due to the high likelihood of its falsehood. The same point applies to intention. If it is irrational for S to intend to *X*, he should not intend to do so. Yet, assume that he cannot help but intend to do so. In this case, S's psychological inability is also compatible with the irrationality of his intention. If this irrationality is treatable, we can demand that he seek treatment. If it is incurable, although S might be exempt from rational criticism, the irrationality of his intention remains unchanged.

Here I do not mean to deny that if S fails to intend to buy cigarettes, he violates the rational requirement of means-ends coherence. However, it is important to recognize that his only alternative in this case is to violate his rational requirement not to smoke. Due to his psychological inability, he faces a dilemma: either violate the rational requirement of means-ends coherence or violate his rational requirement not to smoke. Given this dilemma, it might be more reasonable for S to be means-ends incoherent than to violate his rational requirement not to smoke. He could excuse his inevitable violation of the rational requirement of means-ends coherence by arguing that the life-shortening effects of smoking are far worse than the negative consequences of breaching this rational requirement. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that he is still rationally required to be means-ends coherent. In this case, S's point is that, despite the lack of justification for his smoking, he cannot resist it due to a psychological compulsion. He can acknowledge this compulsion precisely because his smoking lacks justification. If his smoking is unjustified, then the first premise – that he ought to smoke – is also unjustified. Consequently, the conclusion that he ought to buy cigarettes is unjustified as well. Therefore, S's case above does not show that Strong Normativity forces us to accept an unacceptable consequence that S ought to intend to buy cigarettes.[13]

[13] Bratman (2009c) also provides a significant reply to Setiya's argument against Strong Normativity. On Bratman's view, we have a reason to be self-governing, and

Finally, let us consider Brunero's third objection against Strong Normativity (2020, 141–45). According to the rational requirement of means-ends coherence, rationality requires that: if one intends to X, and believes that one will X only if one intends to Y, then one intends to Y. On the wide-scope interpretation of this requirement, the rationality requirement takes wide scope over the entire conditional. Brunero endorses this wide-cope view. Consequently, on his account, an agent can satisfy the requirement of means-ends coherence in any of three ways: by intending the means, by abandoning the end, or by rejecting the instrumental belief. With this point in mind, consider the following principle, which has some plausibility.

> *Transmission to Sufficient Means*: If you ought to do E, and doing M is a sufficient means of doing E, then there is a reason to do M.

Suppose that Bob ought to kill his colleagues. Additionally, assume that he believes poisoning them is a sufficient means of doing so, and that there is no epistemic reason for him to abandon this instrumental belief. In this

when self-governance is possible, there is a reason to be means-ends coherent. But when such self-governance is not possible, as when one's ends and instrumental beliefs are unalterable, there is no such reason to be means-ends coherent. In other words, on his view, the rational requirement of means-ends coherence is normative only if self-governance is possible. Against this claim, however, Brunero (2010) argues that self-governance is possible even when one's ends and instrumental beliefs are unalterable. To illustrate, he provides an example of a Frankfurtian counterfactual intervener: A certain intervener wants S to smoke. But the intervener will not interfere as long as S intends to smoke. However, if S decides not to smoke, the intervener will intervene and make S's intention ineffective. In this scenario, S cannot change his intention to smoke, but as long as he does not decide otherwise, he can carry out his intention without interference. Therefore, S is still capable of self-governance. But my response to Setiya's example is not vulnerable to this kind of problem with Bratman's view. On my view, Strong Normativity does not necessarily lead us to accept the unacceptable conclusion that S ought to intend to buy cigarettes. As argued in the main text, S can justifiably deny the first premise that he ought to smoke. It is crucial to note that his uncontrollable intention to smoke, stemming from a pathological mental condition, may not be justified. In such a scenario, the premise that S ought to smoke lacks justification. Consequently, the conclusion that he ought to buy cigarettes is also unjustified.

case, if Transmission to Sufficient Means is correct, it follows that Bob has a reason to intend to poison his colleagues. On the wide-scope view of means-ends coherence, Bob could comply with this requirement in any of three ways: by intending the means, abandoning the end, or rejecting the instrumental belief. In other words, each of these three responses is sufficient for satisfying means-ends coherence. On this basis, Brunero argues that if we accept Strong Normativity and Transmission to Sufficient Means, we must also accept that there is a reason for Bob to abandon his instrumental belief – even in cases where there is no epistemic reason to do so. According to Brunero, this is a very implausible consequence, because Bob's reason to abandon his instrumental belief is neither evidence-based nor pragmatically beneficial, and so we are forced to admit a new and problematic category of theoretical reason. However, this objection also does not pose a serious problem for Strong Normativity.

To begin, even if Bob in the above case does not intend to poison his colleagues, this does not necessarily imply that he is means-ends incoherent. He could acknowledge a reason to poison them, yet refrain from intending to do so on the grounds that he lacks a sufficient reason, and thus needs to explore a better means of achieving his goal. And insofar as he is not means-ends incoherent, he has no reason to abandon his instrumental belief, especially when there is no epistemic reason to abandon it. In addition, contrary to Brunero's claim, the acceptance of Strong Normativity and Transmission to Sufficient Means does not necessarily lead to the introduction of a new and problematic category of theoretical reason. Brunero's argument depends on the assumption that Bob has a reason to abandon his instrumental belief due to his means-ends incoherence. However, this assumption is very problematic. As we have previously argued, Bob may not be means-ends incoherent in the first place. Therefore, we may deny that Bob has a reason to abandon his instrumental belief. If so, embracing Strong Normativity does not force us to admit a new and problematic category of theoretical reason. For these reasons, Brunero's third objection also fails to successfully challenge Strong Normativity.

5. Concluding Remarks

On Brunero's non-normative disjunctivism, agents exhibiting means-ends incoherence are irrational because they are guaranteed to have at least one attitude that fails to achieve its constitutive aim, and such an aim failure is not a failure of reason. Against this view, I have argued that it fails to adequately explain the irrationality of means-ends incoherence. More specifically, I have argued that agents exhibiting this incoherence can be justifiably criticized for irrationality, and they cannot ward off such criticism by claiming that the rational requirement of means-ends coherence is only apparently normative. Furthermore, I have argued that Brunero's three objections against the strong normativity of means-end coherence are not successful.

If the arguments presented in this paper are correct, the rational requirement of means-ends coherence is strongly normative. For example, consider again the aforementioned scenario where S intends to visit Venice, believes that buying a ticket is necessary, but fails to intend to buy one. In this scenario, S can be criticized for means-ends incoherence. When criticized, S has the right to demand justification. As previously argued, this demand can be met on the grounds that S violates means-ends reasoning, which holds positive justificatory status as a valid rule of practical reasoning within our social practice of justification.

If this paper is correct in claiming that agents not adhering to rational requirements can be justifiably criticized, its implications extend beyond the critique of Brunero's non-normative disjunctivism. Let me mention two notable consequences.

As argued in section 3, rational requirements such as means-ends coherence are normative in the deontological sense. Consequently, the arguments presented in this paper provide grounds for refuting any view that denies the deontological normativity of rational requirements. For example, according to Alex Worship (2021), there are requirements of structural rationality, which include means-ends coherence. He acknowledges that these requirements are normative – in particular, he regards means-ends incoherence as a kind of defect that can be criticized as irrational. Nevertheless, he contends that such a criticism is evaluative in nature, concerned with whether an agent falls short of an evaluative standard. As such, it is akin

to criticizing a person for being unintelligent in some respect, a performance for lacking skill, or an agent for failing to empathize with others. Therefore, the arguments advanced in this paper provide reason to reject Worship's account of rational requirements.

In addition, the arguments presented in this paper enable us to reject any view that denies the normativity of rational requirements. For example, Samuel Fullhart and Camilo Martinez (2024) agree with Brunero that means-ends coherence fundamentally concerns whether it is logically possible for one's attitudes to satisfy a certain success condition. They extend this view by arguing that the possibility of joint attitudinal success can explain coherence requirements in general. According to them, a set of attitudes is coherent if, roughly, it is logically possible for the attitudes to be jointly satisfied. Satisfaction here is understood as a kind of fit between each attitude and the world. For instance, a belief is satisfied if and only if it fits the world – that is, if it represents the world as it actually is. Therefore, their view of coherence as joint satisfiability does not construe failures of rational requirements, such as means-ends coherence, as failures of reason. As a result, it also fails to adequately explain why agents who do not comply with a rational requirement can be justifiably criticized.

Finally, I agree with Kiesewetter (2017) and Lord (2018) that we always ought to be means-ends coherent. However, there are important differences between my view and theirs regarding rationality and reasons. Most significantly, they endorse the reasons-first approach to rationality. According to this approach, the concept of a reason is more fundamental than the concept of rationality, and rationality is a matter of appropriately responding to reasons.

More specifically, Kiesewetter proposes the Evidence-Relative Account of Reasons, arguing that rationality consists in correctly responding to reasons available to us – where a reason is available if it is part of our evidence. On the other hand, Lord advocates the Reasons Responsiveness View, according to which rationality consists in correctly responding to the objective reasons one possesses. Consequently, on their view, means-ends incoherence is irrational because it involves a failure to correctly respond to some available reason or possessed objective reason. By contrast, I do not accept the reasons-first approach. Instead, I endorse a Sellarsian coherence theory of

justification, according to which any rational question can be addressed only within our social practice of demanding justification and responding to such demands. This is a coherence theory that rejects the idea that reasons are primitive or foundational in either epistemic or practical justification. Determining which of these views is ultimately correct lies beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to briefly indicate why I reject the reasons-first approach.

According to the reasons-first view, the concept of a reason is more fundamental than that of reasoning, and thus correct reasoning must be explained in terms of reasons rather than vice versa. However, this consequence is very implausible. To begin, the concept of a reason is inseparable from that of justification: x is a good reason for y only if x enhances the justification of y. Justification, in turn, depends partly on reasoning. For instance, suppose you assert that '*p*' is true. We can then ask why you assert this, effectively demanding that you justify the assertion. To meet this demand, you must offer a reason, say '*r*', for this claim. Your justification for '*p*' can thus be expressed as an argument: "*r*. Therefore, *p*." But a correct argument depends on two factors: the premises must be true (or correct), and the argument must be valid or good, meaning that if the premises are true, the conclusion is also true or likely to be true. Therefore, '*r*' can serve as a good reason for '*p*' only if the reasoning from the premise '*r*' to the conclusion '*p*' is valid or good. This strongly suggests that reasons do not take precedence over reasoning.

What then is a reason? On the Sellarsian social practice theory of justification, we must begin with a social practice of justification to address rational questions. The question 'What is a reason?' is no exception. As a coherence theory, this approach rejects foundationalist approaches to normativity, including any reductive account of reasons. On this coherence theory, although we cannot provide a reductive account of reasons, we can offer a conceptual explication of the concept of a reason. Roughly, to say that *X* is a good reason for *Y* is to say that *X* is a consideration that justifies, or contributes to justifying, *Y*. Justification, in turn, can be understood in terms of answering all objections or beating all competitors within our social practice of justification.[14] Two points merit emphasis. First, this explication

[14] For a detailed defense of this view of justification, see Lee (2022).

is based on a Sellarsian social practice theory of justification, which can appeal to the default-and-challenge structure of justification. Second, this explication also embraces concept holism, specifically in the form of an inferentialist theory of meaning. Accordingly, the conceptual interconnection between justification, reasons, and reasoning is not a problem but rather a natural consequence of concept holism. Therefore, despite this mutual dependence among these concepts, 'answering all objections' can still be regarded as a good explication, allowing us to understand the concept of justification more clearly. As noted earlier, a proper defense of this alternative account of reasons lies beyond the scope of the present paper. I intend to take up that task in a separate, independent paper.

What I want to emphasize, for the purpose of this paper, is that my account offers a better defense of the normativity of means-ends coherence than competing views, such as those advanced by Kiesewetter or Lord. On my account, means-ends reasoning has normative force because it currently holds positive justificatory status as a valid rule of practical reasoning within our social practice of justification. This contrasts with the view that an agent who fails to exhibit means-ends coherence is merely failing to respond correctly to some reason. If means-ends incoherence is conceived simply as a certain combination of attitudes, its normative status may appear obscure. However, when means-ends reasoning is understood as a norm of rationality that has normative force within our social practice of justification, it becomes clear why means-ends coherence is normative.

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