

Phil 290–2, September 11, 2006

A few scattered comments on Broome

1. Broome’s requirements are requirements that you not be in a certain *state*: “When I say something is wrong, I mean you ought not to be in the state you are in” (412). They are not requirements that you *do* anything. “See to it that” is not being used in its usual, “agentive” sense (399). “See to it that” = “Be such that.”

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|--------------|------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | | $B_tOr \rightarrow O_{BST}r_t$ | $O_{BST}(B_tOr \rightarrow r_t)$ |
| B_tOr | r_t | As you ought to be | As you ought to be |
| B_tOr | $\neg r_t$ | Not as you ought to be | Not as you ought to be |
| $\neg B_tOr$ | r_t | As you ought to be | As you ought to be |
| $\neg B_tOr$ | $\neg r_t$ | As you ought to be | As you ought to be |

What is the difference? What turns on the choice between these forms?

Now take “see to that” as (closer to, but still not quite*) agentive and so as calling for a response over time.

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|-------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---|
| $B_{t+}Or \ \& \ \neg r_{t+}$ | | $\dots \rightarrow O_{STIT}r_{t+}$ | $\dots \rightarrow O_{STIT}(B_{t+}Or \rightarrow r_{t+})$ |
| $B_{t+}Or$ | r_{t+} | See to what you ought | See to what you ought |
| $B_{t+}Or$ | $\neg r_{t+}$ | Don’t see to what you ought | Don’t see to what you ought |
| $\neg B_{t+}Or$ | r_{t+} | See to what you ought | See to what you ought |
| $\neg B_{t+}Or$ | $\neg r_{t+}$ | <i>Don’t see to what you ought</i> | <i>See to what you ought</i> |

Now there is a difference.

2. In “Reasons,” Broome observes:

Suppose you believe the world was made in less than a week. Suppose you believe the world was made in six days, and you do not believe it was made in less than a week. Whatever evidence you may have one way or another, your beliefs are definitely not as they ought to be.

He argues that this observation cannot be explained by the view that beliefs are pro tanto reasons. Because

So far as this view is concerned, [your beliefs] might be entirely as they ought to be...

However, it can be explained by

the general normative principle that you ought to believe the obvious consequences of your beliefs: if q is an obvious consequence of p, you ought (to believe q if you believe p) (50).

There is, however, another explanation. It assumes:

1. that evidential support is transmitted across obvious consequence: that if the evidence is such that you ought to believe that p, then the evidence is such that you ought to believe the obvious consequences of p, and

* Not quite agentive, because we want to allow for responses, such as beliefs, that are not under one’s voluntary control.

2. that there are no mere epistemic permissions: either the evidence is such that you ought to believe that p, or the evidence is such that you ought not to believe that p.

From this it follows that, if you believe p, but do not believe q, then “whatever evidence you may have one way or another, your beliefs are definitely not as they ought to be.”

Why? Whatever the evidence, either it is such that you ought not believe that p, or it is such that it is not the case that you ought not believe that p.

Suppose it is the case. Then you ought not believe that p, but you do.

Suppose that it is not the case that you ought not believe that p.

Then, since there are no mere epistemic permissions, you ought to believe that p.

Then, since evidential support is transmitted across obvious consequence, you ought to believe that q. But you don't.

In a nutshell, facts about the *transmission of reasons, or the patterns that reasons take*, may account for much of the evidence that Broome takes to support *normative, or rational, requirements*.

3. What exactly is the “bootstrapping” objection, and what explains its force? The objection may rest on:

Attitudes are *Not Reasons*: the mere fact that one has some attitude does not provide one with reason to have *some attitude*.

We accept this claim, if we do, either because we agree, on reflection, that attitudes have no justificatory significance. Or we accept this claim because we can think of particular counterexamples. We imagine circumstances as inhospitable as possible to one's having reason to have attitude A. We then imagine that in these circumstances, one has attitude B. We do not judge that, in that case, one has reason to have A.

Alternatively, or additionally, the objection may rest on:

Attitudes are *Not Reasons For Themselves*: the mere fact that one has some attitude does not provide one with reason to have *that same attitude*, where *For Themselves* has some support that does not depend on *Not Reasons*.

Indeed, many appear to believe that *For Themselves* has support that does not depend on *Not Reasons*:

- Broome seems to think this, or at least to expect that some of his readers will think this. He says: “For example, suppose you ought not to believe p, though you do. Then it plainly may not be the case that you ought to believe q or that you have a reason to believe q.” He then “reinforces” this point by saying: “[R]emember that p itself is a consequence of p. A belief in p is plainly not self-justifying” (405) (Compare, “Reasons,” 49).*

* A related argument: “Should we say BOr oughts r? Certainly not; your belief cannot make itself true” (404). Is Broome here appealing to the general claim that no belief can make itself true? This claim seems doubtful. For example, I might believe that I believe

- Parfit, in an earlier version of his manuscript *Climbing the Mountain* (which he is, I think, now revising), made the following argument against desire-based theories: According to desire-based theories, we cannot have reason to desire anything for its own sake. Such reasons would have to be provided by those very desires themselves. But no desire can be a reason for itself.*
- A point once heard after a talk: “The claim that intending the end gives one reason to take the means is not bootstrapping, or at any rate not objectionable bootstrapping. What would be objectionable is that intending the end gave one reason to *intend the end*.”**

However, some who appear to deny Not Reasons also appear to deny For Themselves.

- Harman: Having a belief is some justification for it.
- Korsgaard: “In willing the end, we make it normative for us.”

I wonder about this. Suppose that one denies Not Reasons. What reason might one have for accepting For Themselves?

Violation Must Be Possible: If p is a reason for one to A, then possibly, p is the case, but one does not A.

But why should we accept Violation?

- “If one will A if p *anyway*, then it makes no difference whether p is a *reason* for A.”
—Not clear what this means. It certainly makes a *normative* difference. To say that p is a reason for A is to say something more than that one will A if p.
- “If one will A if p anyway, then there is no point in advising someone to A because p.”
—This isn’t obviously true. It is not true that the only point of advice is to get people to do what we advise.
—At any rate, it seems more a point of pragmatics than semantics. Even if there is no point in advising someone, the content of the advice can still be meaningful and true.

4. Last time, I mentioned that we should be careful not to assimilate, at least not automatically, rational requirements and the “available” ought. Broome seems to do this: In responding to a view like Moore’s, people sometimes call on the idea of a ‘subjective ought.’ About my example, they would say that, whatever you ought

something. If Broome isn’t appealing to this general claim, what is his argument exactly? Is it independent of Not Reasons?

* This argument is not convincing even if we accept For Themselves, since a desire-based theory might hold that what gives me reason to desire X as an end is not that I in fact desire X as an end, but instead that in ideal conditions, I would desire X as an end.

** This reply doesn’t achieve much, since in most cases intending the end *is* a necessary means. One won’t achieve the end unless one intends it.

objectively to do—and you do not know—subjectively you ought to go sailing. I think this amounts to just another way of saying that your beliefs and probability assignments normatively require you to go sailing. I think ‘subjective ought’ is really just an alternative term for ‘normative requirement.’ (415).

This is not obvious. Suppose that all of the weather reports predict a hurricane, an emergency has been declared, coastal dwellers are fleeing for higher ground, etc. But you are confident that the weather will be fine for sailing because your horoscope tells you so. I don’t think that the people that Broome has in mind will say that subjectively you ought to go sailing. They will say that subjectively you ought *not* go sailing. This is because the “probabilities available” (414) argue against it, even though “your beliefs and probability assignments” (415) argue for it. The subjective ought—the ought that plays the kind of role that Broome has in mind—is at least as naturally taken to be relative to the *evidence*, as to your *beliefs*. In that case, it isn’t a kind of normative requirement.

Indeed, Broome provides further evidence of this. Explaining why, although ‘subjective ought’ means the same as ‘normative requirement,’ we should avoid using ‘subjective ought,’ Broome says:

[I]f you have inconsistent beliefs or intentions... it may happen that some of your beliefs and intentions normatively require you to see to something, and others normatively require you not to see to it.... But it is not comprehensible to say you subjectively ought to see to something and also you subjectively ought not to see to it; this looks like a contradiction (415).

Perhaps this is because, while one can both believe that the weather will be good for sailing and that it will not be good for sailing, it is less clear that it can both be the case that there is sufficient evidence that the weather will be good for sailing and that there is sufficient evidence that it will not be good for sailing.