

SUBJECTIVE RATIONALITY AND THE REASONING ARGUMENT

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ABSTRACT: My main aim in this paper is to show that Kolodny's intriguing argument against wide-scopism – 'the Reasoning Argument' – fails. A proper evaluation of the Reasoning Argument requires drawing two significant distinctions, one between thin and thick rational transitions and the other between bare-bones wide-scopism (and narrow-scopism) and embellished wide-scopism (and narrow-scopism). The Reasoning Argument is intended by Kolodny both as an argument against bare-bones wide-scopism and as an argument against embellished wide-scopism. I argue that despite its formidable virtue of demonstrating the need for an account of thick subjective rationality, the Reasoning Argument works neither against bare-bones wide-scopism nor against embellished wide-scopism.

KEYWORDS: rational requirements, wide scope, narrow scope, subjective rationality, objective rationality

1. Introduction

Rationality, theoretical or practical, forbids incoherence among one's attitudes. It is irrational to be *akratic*: it is irrational of one not to intend to X , if one believes that one ought to X ; and, conversely, it is irrational of one to intend to X , if one believes that one ought not to X . It is irrational to be *means-end incoherent*: it is irrational of one not to intend to Y , if one intends to X and believes that Y is necessary for X . It is irrational to be *meta-incoherent*:¹ it is irrational of one to believe that p while also believing that it is irrational to believe that p .

The kind of rationality that depends on coherence relations among one's attitudes is sometimes called 'subjective' rationality – the contrast here being with 'objective' rationality, which is roughly a matter of being supported by one's reasons or evidence.² It is one thing to hold that one's attitudes are supported by one's reasons or evidence, and it is an at least nominally different thing to hold that

¹ The term 'meta-incoherence' is adopted from Huemer (2011).

² In this paper, I adopt Kolodny's (2005) terminology for the distinction under consideration between two kinds of rationality, as I will be discussing his views on the matter. However, it is worth noting that the terms preferred in recent years by the literature to express the distinction Kolodny is interested in are 'structural' and 'substantive' rationality, the former corresponding to the 'subjective' part and the latter 'objective.' See, for instance, Fogal & Worsnip (2021).

one's attitudes fit or match together well. The first claim concerns objective rationality, and the latter subjective rationality. Believing what one's reasons *in fact* support is the objectively rational thing to do, and believing what *one believes* one's reasons support is a subjectively rational thing to do.³

There is a major debate between wide-scopers and narrow-scopers about the nature of subjective rationality, which centers on the logical form of its requirements. Wide-scopers hold that the 'rationality requires' operator always takes wide scope over an entire conditional and that a requirement of subjective rationality always takes the following form: rationality requires one (to *Y*, if one *Xs*).⁴ This is equivalent to claiming that rationality requires one *either* not to *X* *or* to *Y*: no particular attitude is required. So, for instance, a wide-scoper for akratic constraints on rationality holds that if I find myself believing that I ought to quit smoking while lacking the intention to do so, I am required, subjectively speaking, either to abandon the belief in question or form the relevant intention. Narrow-scopers, on the other hand, hold that the 'rationality requires' operator sometimes takes narrow scope over the consequent of the relevant conditional and that a requirement of subjective rationality sometimes takes the following form: if one *Xs*, then rationality requires one to *Y*.⁵ This means that, according to narrow-scopers, rationality sometimes requires one to take a particular attitude. So, for instance, a narrow-scoper for akratic constraints on rationality might hold that if I find myself believing that I ought to quit smoking while lacking the intention to do so, I am required, subjectively speaking, to form the relevant intention: abandoning the belief is not the correct subjective response to the incoherent combination of attitudes I happen to have, despite the fact that by abandoning the belief, I end up with a *coherent* state.

³ It is important to note that the terms 'structural' and 'substantive' capture the point of the relevant distinction better than the terms 'subjective' and 'objective' do. The point of the relevant distinction is that rationality as it pertains to the *coherence relations* between one's attitudes is to be distinguished from rationality as it pertains to the support relations between one's attitudes and reasons. Contrary to what the term 'subjective rationality' suggests, the 'domain' of coherence as such is not restricted to the relations that hold between a subject's attitudes and her 'perspective' on (or her beliefs about) whether those attitudes are supported by reasons. It is, for instance, incoherent to believe that *p* is true and also to believe that *p* is false, and the incoherence here has nothing to do with the subject's 'perspective' on whether those two beliefs are supported by reasons.

⁴ For recent defenses of wide-scopism, see, for instance, Broome (1999; 2007), Brunero (2010; 2012), Wallace (2001), and Way (2011). For earlier presentations and defenses of this view, see Darwall (1983), Greenspan (1975), and Hill (1973).

⁵ For a defense of narrow-scopism, see, for instance, Bedke (2009), Kolodny (2005; 2007), Lord (2014), Schroeder (2004; 2009),

The debate between wide-scopers and narrow-scopers concerns the scope of the *process*-requirements (as opposed to *state*-requirements) of subjective rationality. State-requirements “simply ban states in which one has conflicting attitudes,” while process-requirements say “how, going forward, one is to form, retain, or revise one’s attitudes so as to avoid or escape such conflict-states” (Kolodny 2005, 517).⁶ State-requirements are in the business of identifying conflict-states, and process requirements are in the business of identifying ways to avoid or resolve those conflict-states. We can judge whether a subject is rational or not by virtue of the attitudes she has at a given time, and we can also judge whether she is rational or not in virtue of how she transitions from one state to another over time. The former judgment is based on state-requirements, and the latter process-requirements.

State-requirements have, as Kolodny notes (2005, 540), wide scope because a ban on the combination of having *X* and *Y* can be satisfied either by not having *X* or by not having *Y*: there is no ‘asymmetry’ between these two ways of satisfying the ban in question. If I don’t have *X* but have *Y*, and you don’t have *Y* but have *X*, then you and I both satisfy the state-requirement ‘Don’t be in *X* & *Y*’. So, the debate between the narrow-scopers and the wide-scopers can only be about the scope of process-requirements. Thus taken, the narrow-scopers hold that there are some conflict-states that can only be rationally escaped in one way, by revising a particular conflicting state, whereas the wide-scopers hold that there are no such conflict-states, that all conflict-states can be rationally escaped in (at least) *two* ways, by revising one or the other of the conflicting states.

My main aim in this paper is to show that Kolodny’s intriguing argument against wide-scopism, which I call ‘the Reasoning Argument’, fails. Though I hold the Reasoning Argument in high regard, I also find it extremely dense and believe that it can appreciably benefit from some considerable unpacking. A proper evaluation of the Reasoning Argument requires drawing two significant distinctions, one between thin and thick rational transitions and the other between bare-bones wide-scopism (and narrow-scopism) and embellished wide-scopism (and narrow-scopism). The Reasoning Argument is intended by Kolodny both as an argument against bare-bones wide-scopism and as an argument against embellished wide-scopism. I argue that despite its formidable virtue of demonstrating the need for an account of thick subjective rationality, the Reasoning Argument works neither against bare-bones wide-scopism nor against embellished wide-scopism.

⁶ All page references below are to Kolodny (2005), unless otherwise noted.

2. The Reasoning Argument

One of Kolodny's claims that plays a critical role in the Reasoning Argument concerns what it is for a transition to be rational. Process-requirements are concerned with rational transitions from some conflict-states to some other non-conflict-states over time, and Kolodny contends that some transitions from a conflict-state to a non-conflict-state are not rational. He writes:

A bolt of lightning might jolt me out of a state in which I have two inconsistent beliefs and into a state in which I lack one or both of them. Although this process might be said to take me from an irrational state to a rational one, it would not, itself, be rational. (2005, 517)

According to Kolodny, then, a rational transition is not simply a transition from an incoherent state to a coherent state: *the way in which* the transition is made from an incoherent state to a coherent one is a significant factor that determines whether the transition is rational or not. Coming to resolve a conflict-state as a result of being hit by lightning is not a rational transition. And, since process-requirements specify the conditions under which a transition from one state to another is rational, Kolodny holds, their correct formulations must respect the idea that how the transition is made matters to its rationality.

There are two things it pays to be careful here. One pertains to the notion of rationality Kolodny has in mind when he claims that some transitions from an incoherent state to a coherent one are not rational. As observed above, rationality comes in two kinds, objective and subjective; so, correspondingly, we can speak of objectively rational transitions and subjectively rational transitions. There are surely some transitions from an incoherent state to a coherent one that are not objectively rational. For instance, the transition from an incoherent state $X \& Y$ to a coherent state X is not objectively rational, if X is not supported by reasons but Y is. However, Kolodny's point is obviously not about objectively rational but subjectively rational transitions, *viz.* that some transitions from an incoherent state to a coherent one are not *subjectively* rational, a thesis which I will hereafter call 'SRT'.

In order for SRT to be true, there must be something that is required for a transition to be subjectively rational (and not necessarily objectively rational) over and above the fact that it results with a resolution of a conflict-state. The objective rationality of a transition plausibly requires adequate sensitivity to epistemic support relations; and, accordingly, the subjective rationality of a transition might be plausibly conceived as demanding adequate sensitivity to coherence relations. However, if a transition in a given case results with a resolution of a conflict-state, is not it thereby adequately sensitive to the coherence relations operative in that

case? What more can it be plausibly required for it to be subjectively rational? The answers to these questions – which I will, *inter alia*, address in what follows – are not obvious; so, it is not obvious at this point that SRT is true.

The other thing I wish to say pertains to the risk of question-begging: SRT can be adequately deployed in an argument against wide-scopism only if it does not beg question against wide-scopism. Now, there is a clear sense in which wide-scopism is committed to *rejecting* SRT: there are (at least) two ways to escape an incoherent state, by revising either one or the other of the two conflicting attitudes; and, wide-scopism says that both are subjectively rationally acceptable, which amounts to saying that (there is a sense in which) all transitions from an incoherent state to a coherent one are subjectively rational. Furthermore, there is a clear sense in which narrow-scopism is committed to *accepting* SRT: there are two ways to escape an incoherent state; and, narrow-scopism says that there are some cases in which only one of those two ways is subjectively rationally acceptable, which amounts to saying that (there is a sense in which) not all transitions from an incoherent state to a coherent one are subjectively rational.⁷ In order for SRT to play a dialectically effective role in an argument against wide-scopism/for narrow-scopism, what it means to be asserting should not prejudge the outcome of the debate between these two positions in one way or another. So, how exactly should we understand SRT?

Kolodny's defense of SRT proceeds by appealing to certain cases in which the transition from an incoherent state to a coherent one occurs as a result of what we might call 'brute' or 'mere' causes such as being hit by the lightning or given an electric shock. This appeal can be deployed in an attempt to specify what Kolodny means to be asserting by SRT, which might plausibly go as follows:

CSRT Merely causal transitions from an incoherent to a coherent state are not subjectively rational.

CSRT does not prejudge the debate between wide-scopism and narrow-scopism. The 'bare-bones' versions of these two positions, the versions which I have been taking for granted so far, are equally *incompatible* with CSRT. Neither bare-bones wide-scopism nor bare-bones narrow-scopism excludes the possibility that the rational transitions sanctioned by their requirements are merely causal. Consider the following requirements:

(WS-BB) If a subject believes that she ought to *X* but does not intend to *X*, then rationality requires her either to form the intention to *X* or to drop the belief that

⁷ Henceforth, I will, for convenience's sake, sometimes omit the qualifier 'subjective' and I will always mean subjective rationality by 'rationality' unless otherwise noted.

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she ought to X .

(NS-BB) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her to form the intention to X .⁸

WS-BB is a bare-bones wide scope requirement, and NS-BB is a bare-bones narrow scope requirement. Obviously, there is no mention in either of these two formulations of how the transition from the conflict-state to a non-conflict-state must occur: they only tell us that the transition must *somehow* occur. This means that both NS-BB and WS-BB allow the possibility that the rational transition from an akratic state to forming the relevant intention while keeping the relevant 'ought-belief' might occur as a result of an electric shock.

Furthermore, both bare-bones wide-scopism and bare-bones narrow-scopism can be straightforwardly revised in a way to accommodate CSRT. A suitably revised wide scope requirement might go as follows: if one finds oneself in an incoherent state X & Y , then rationality requires that either X or Y is dropped *in a way that is not merely causal*. Similar remarks apply to the bare-bones narrow scope version of this schema. Hence, we get the following theses for akrasia:

(WS-NC) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her either to form the intention to X in a way that is not merely causal or to drop the belief that she ought to X in a way that is not merely causal.

(NS-NC) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her to form the intention to X in a way that is not merely causal.

CSRT can thus be accommodated, equally directly, by wide-scopism and narrow-scopism.

There is a point that is worth emphasizing here. In order for the accommodation of CSRT by wide-scopism to be genuine but not a mere verbal façade, it should be possible to take either of the routes identified by a given wide scope requirement of resolving a certain conflict. Take for instance WS-NC, and suppose that it is not possible for a given subject to drop the belief that she ought to X in a way that is not merely causal. If this is so, then what rationality in effect requires of an akratic subject is to form the intention to X in a way that is not

⁸ Kolodny's discussion in (2005) focuses on the 'reason' (rather than the 'ought') versions of these requirements. So, for instance, his version of (NS-BB) goes like this: if one believes that one has conclusive *reason* to X , then rationality requires one to intend to X (p. 528). In (2007, 3), however, the focus is on the 'ought' versions. Nothing much hangs on this distinction for the purposes of this paper, and for convenience's sake, I prefer the 'ought' versions presented above.

merely causal, which means that WS-NC collapses into NS-NC and narrow-scopism wins the day. However, there is no reason at this point for wide-scopism to worry about this “collapsing threat” because we have not yet been given any reason to think that it is not possible to take one of the routes identified by WS-NC (or by other wide scope requirements that accommodate CSRT).

Having argued that CSRT does not appear to prejudice the debate between wide-scopism and narrow-scopism, let me briefly note that it has a counterpart thesis regarding the objective rationality of a transition:

CORT Merely causal transitions from a state unsupported by one’s reasons to a supported one are not objectively rational.

Consider the following case. I believe that p , while my evidence supports not- p . Suppose that I come to drop the belief that p and form the belief that not- p as a result of an electric shock. My transition in this case is merely causal, and it appears that there is a clear sense in which this transition is not objectively rational, despite the fact that it ends up with my coming to form an attitude supported by my evidence (more on this later).

It is fair to proceed, then, by granting CSRT. What is it, according to Kolodny, that explains why CSRT is true? What is it about a merely causal transition that disqualifies it from being subjectively rational? Suppose that I am in a conflict-state $X \& Y$, and then come to drop Y , thereby resolving the conflict, as a result of being hit by lightning. This is not, CSRT entails, a subjectively rational transition; and what is missing, Kolodny notes (p. 520), seems to be *reasoning*: the transition from $X \& Y$ to X would be a subjectively rational transition if, for instance, it resulted from the fact that, having recognized the conflict between X and Y , I *reasoned* to revising Y . So, it seems that the way in which a subjectively rational transition is made has to do with the fact that the subject goes through a process of reasoning. On Kolodny’s account, a given rationality process-requirement can be adequate only if the transitions it requires of a subject to resolve a given conflict can be made via reasoning.

So, we arrive at the following thesis:

RSRT Transitions from an incoherent to a coherent state that are not based on reasoning are not subjectively rational.

There are four quick points I want to make here. Firstly, I take it that RSRT is purported to provide an explanation of why CSRT is true: CSRT is true, the intended explanation goes, because RSRT is true. How does RSRT explain that CSRT is true? One option is to maintain that RSRT explains CSRT because what it is for a transition to be merely causal is simply for it not to be reasoning-based (i.e.,

because a transition is merely causal *if, and only if*, it is not reasoning-based). However, this equivalence-thesis is unnecessarily strong for present purposes.⁹ Another, weaker option is to maintain that RSRT explains CSRT because *if* a transition is merely causal, then it is not reasoning-based (or, equivalently, there are no merely causal but reasoning-based transitions). If this weaker sufficiency-thesis is true, then it follows from RSRT and the fact that a given transition is merely causal, that that transition is not subjectively rational, which is also the verdict CSRT delivers about that transition.

Secondly, it is plausible that if a transition is merely causal, then it is not reasoning-based, so the move from CSRT to RSRT appears to be acceptable. It seems clear that there is a substantive difference between reasoning-based transitions and merely causal transitions. Compare the following three transitions from $X \& Y$ to X . One is based on reasoning, another is caused by a head injury, and the final one is caused by a bolt of lightning. Despite the fact that each of these transitions differs at a certain fine-grained level from the others, a natural classificatory strategy would be to treat the one based on reasoning as substantially different from the other two. The naturalness of this classification plausibly reflects the fact that if a transition is merely causal, then it is not reasoning-based.¹⁰

Thirdly, the plausibility of the move from CSRT to RSRT does *not* require that reasoning not be a causal process. Reasoning might be causal without being 'merely' causal (whatever that exactly comes to), and CSRT claims only that merely causal transitions cannot be subjectively rational and does not thereby exclude the possibility that some causal transitions are subjectively rational.

⁹ Additionally, the equivalence thesis at hand appears to be independently implausible. It seems that there might be some transitions that are neither reasoning-based nor merely causal. If my wish that my son will be a good person causes my belief that he will be a good person, then it seems that the transition from my wish to my belief is not reasoning but it is not merely causal either. This transition at least appears to be substantially different from the sort of merely causal transitions (e.g., coming to form an attitude as a result of an electric shock) that Kolodny points out we need to distinguish from rational ones.

¹⁰ There might be different ways to account for the fact that a merely causal transition is not reasoning-based and our classificatory intuitions regarding the cases presented. A prominent one, an agency-oriented explanation, goes roughly as follows: reasoning-based transitions is something that we 'do' whereas merely causal transitions is something that 'merely happens to us', which grounds our attributions of praise and blame to the former ones but not to the latter. It is because reasoning-based transitions are something we do, the agency-oriented explanation goes, that a merely causal transition, which cannot ground our attributions of praise and blame, is not reasoning-based. For the purposes of this paper, I remain non-committal about what it is that ultimately explains that a merely causal transition is not reasoning-based.

Fourthly, there appear to be cases for which CSRT and RSRT fail to deliver any clear verdict about the subjective rationality of a given transition. For instance, consider the following scenario. Suppose that having recognized the conflict between X and Y , I have reasoned to the conclusion that Y is to be dropped. However, suppose further that I find myself unable to drop Y as my psychological attachment to it proves to be stronger than my willingness to drop it. Under these circumstances, let us further suppose, I deliberately take an electric shock, knowing that its effect will be dropping Y . Now, what can we say of the *entire* process that ends up with dropping Y ? Is it merely causal or reasoning-based? The process taken in its entirety has an initial reasoning-based stage and a subsequent merely causal stage, and it seems that we cannot say either that it is, as a whole, merely causal *simpliciter* or that it is, as a whole, reasoning-based *simpliciter*. If this is so, then we cannot get any clear guidance about the subjective rationality of this process either from CSRT or from RSRT. However, as I don't think such cases as these cast any serious doubt on the plausibility of CSRT or of RSRT (but I think they call for an account of the individuating conditions of 'a transition'), I will not base my attack to the Reasoning Argument on the possibility of those cases.

Having made these clarificatory remarks about the relationship between CSRT and RSRT, let me raise the following question: can RSRT be deployed in an attempt to arbitrate between wide-scopism and narrow-scopism? Consider the following wide scope and narrow scope requirements for akrasia that accommodate RSRT:

(WS-NR) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her either to form the intention to X in a reasoning-based way or to drop the belief that she ought to X in a reasoning-based way.

(NS-NR) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her to form the intention to X in a reasoning-based way.

The collapsing threat that we have pointed out arises in regard to wide scope requirements that accommodate CSRT rears its head once again but now, one might plausibly think, *much more glaringly*. Suppose that it is not possible for an akratic subject to reason to dropping her ought-belief. If this is so, then WS-NR collapses into NS-NR and narrow-scopism wins the day. Furthermore, it might as well not be possible for an akratic subject to reason to dropping the ought-belief because it seems plausible that there are some constraints on a reasoning process, some of which might not be satisfied by the subject's transition to dropping her ought-belief. Reasoning is an evidently demanding cognitive process, and it is this evident demanding character that renders the collapsing threat for wide-scopism much more glaring than before.

Kolodny's take on the collapsing threat for wide-scopism is formulated in terms of what he calls 'the Reasoning Test' (pp. 520-521), which goes as follows:

The Reasoning Test: The process-requirement governing the conflict between X and Y is wide scope only if (i) it is possible to reason from the content of X to dropping Y and (ii) it is possible to reason from the content of Y to dropping X .

According to the Reasoning Test, if one cannot reason, for instance, from the content of X to dropping Y but can only reason from the content of Y to dropping X , then the process-requirement governing the conflict between X and Y is not wide scope but can only be narrow scope. In other words, if either (i) or (ii) is false, then the wide scope version of the process requirement in question collapses into the relevant narrow scope version, and narrow-scopism wins.

Here is how the Reasoning Argument goes, focusing on WS-NR. Consider the conflict-state of believing that she ought to X while not intending to X , which the wide-scooper thinks is governed by WS-NR. In order for WS-NR to pass the Reasoning Test, it must be possible to reason from the content of not intending to X to dropping the ought-belief and also possible to reason the other way around. However, it is not possible, Kolodny argues (p. 528), to reason from the content of not intending to X to dropping the ought-belief; and this is because not intending to X (or lacking an attitude in general) has no content. So, WS-NR collapses into NS-NR. However, it is possible, Kolodny notes (p. 527), to reason from the belief that there is conclusive reason to X to forming the intention to X . So, NS-NR is the requirement governing the given conflict.

The case for narrow-scopism can be reinforced, Kolodny thinks, by considering the 'converse'-akratic wide scope and narrow scope requirements:

(WS-CNR) If a subject believes that she ought not to X but intends to X , then rationality requires her either to drop the intention to X in a reasoning-based way or to drop the belief that she ought not to X in a reasoning-based way.

(NS-CNR) If a subject believes that she ought not to X but intends to X , then rationality requires her to drop the intention to X in a reasoning-based way.

Here is how the Reasoning Argument goes, focusing on WS-CNR. Consider the conflict-state of believing that one ought not to X while intending to X , which the wide-scooper thinks is governed by WS-CNR. If WS-CNR has wide scope, then it must pass the Reasoning Test: it must be possible to reason from the content of the intention to X to dropping the belief that she ought not to X and also possible to reason the other way around. However, it is not possible, Kolodny argues, to reason from the content of the intention to X to dropping the ought-belief in question because reasoning is, in his words, not 'upstream:' "it is not reasoning to

cling to what one judges to be an unfounded intention and to support it by revising one's belief about one's reasons" (p. 529), it is some other process, "such as self-deception or wishful thinking" (p. 530). So, WS-CNR collapses into NS-CNR. However, it is possible, Kolodny notes, to reason from the belief that one ought not to X to dropping the intention to X . So, NS-CNR is the requirement governing the given conflict.¹¹

The Reasoning Argument is ingeniously crafted. It starts with a thesis, CSRT, that is apparently neutral between narrow-scopism and wide-scopism. And, from CSRT, it convincingly moves to RSRT. Surprisingly, despite the fact that CSRT is apparently neutral and the move from CSRT to RSRT is evidently plausible, Kolodny shows that RSRT can be deployed in an argument against wide-scopism. This is, Kolodny goes on to argue, because there appears to be some substantive constraints on what it takes to reason, constraints that can be uncovered with some analytical ingenuity. The guiding insight is that reasoning is not just any mental transition from one attitude to another. More specifically, in order a process to be a process of reasoning, there must be something (namely, *content*) to reason from (in a slogan form: all reasoning is content-processing) and that something must be processed in a certain way (in a slogan form: upstream content-processing is not reasoning). The Reasoning Argument attempts to show that once these constraints are adequately appreciated, it can be seen that there are some conflict-cases in which the wide scope requirements that one might think govern them collapse into their narrow scope versions.

3. Bare-Bones Wide-Scopism Goes Unscathed

I will argue in this section that the starting move of the Reasoning Argument – namely, CSRT – can be resisted by wide-scopism. The wide-scooper can plausibly dig her heels in and stick with *bare-bones* wide-scopism, a position incompatible as I have maintained in the previous section with CSRT. If bare-bones wide-scopism does not need to be revised to accommodate CSRT, then the Reasoning Argument does not get off the ground.

Let us start with granting that there is a clear sense in which CSRT is true, that there is a sense of 'subjectively rational' in which a subjectively rational

¹¹ It must be clear that the argument from 'the downstream character' of reasoning also applies to WS-NR because if it were possible to reason, *per impossibile* according to Kolodny, from the content of *not* intending to X to revising the belief that one has conclusive reason to X , that reasoning would be 'upstream,' which is itself deemed impossible by that argument. So, WS-NR collapses, on Kolodny's account, into NS-NR not only because it is, implausibly, entitled to reasoning from lack of content but also because it is, implausibly, entitled to upstream reasoning.

transition requires more than moving from an incoherent state to a coherent one: *how* the transition is made, whether it is merely causal or not, matters to the rationality of the transition in this sense of the term. So, on this sense of a rational transition, a transition caused by a bolt of lightning is not subjectively rational even if it is a transition from an incoherent to a coherent state. Let us call the sense in which merely causal transitions are not subjectively rational, the sense in which CSRT is true, the *thick* sense of a subjectively rational transition.

However, there is another, less demanding, and still perfectly intelligible sense of 'subjectively rational' in which it suffices for a transition to be subjectively rational that it is from an incoherent state to a coherent one. If, for instance, I believe that I ought to *X* but do not intend to *X* at a certain time, and then, at a later time, I come to drop the ought-belief or come to form the relevant intention, then I have surely made a subjectively *rational* progress: my attitudinal system has now become more coherent and thereby more rational than before. On this conception of a subjectively rational transition, a given transition is subjectively rational just in case it is a process as a result of which one's attitudes come to comply with the requirements of coherence. After forming the intention to *X*, for instance, I come to comply with the relevant coherence requirement I am under and therefore the transition that I go through ending with compliance is rational in *this* sense. Let me call the sense in which all transitions from an incoherent to a coherent state are rational, the sense in which CSRT is false, the *thin* sense of a rational transition.

Consider my friend Mary, whose attitudinal system is imbued with many inconsistencies at a certain time, and suppose that being frustrated with those inconsistencies, I decide not to see her for a few months. Months pass, and we meet again. Now, I realize, to my pleasure, that Mary has become much more coherent than she was before: those inconsistencies that were once so frustrating to me are now removed from her attitudinal system. I don't know *how* she has managed to pull that off, but I am glad that it is done, one way or another. Surely, I can now correctly say that Mary has made a subjectively *rational* progress, despite the fact that I don't know how – perhaps, a benevolent demon intervened and made the relevant revisions, or perhaps, she carefully reflected on those inconsistencies and dedicated some mental effort to eradicate them, or perhaps, she was hit by lightning, which caused the necessary changes in her brain states. There is a clear and intelligible sense of a subjectively rational progress in which *how* Mary has managed to make the progress does not matter to the accuracy of my judgment that Mary has made a rational progress – and this is the thin sense of a subjectively rational progress.

On the thin sense of a subjectively rational transition, all transitions from an incoherent to a coherent state are subjectively rational, and CSRT is false. It is instructive here to compare CSRT with its objective counterpart introduced above:

CORT Merely causal transitions from a state unsupported by one's reasons to a supported one are not objectively rational.

When I move from the belief that p , unsupported by my evidence, to the belief that not- p , supported by my evidence, there is a clear sense in which I make an objectively rational progress, irrespective of whether the progress is due to a mere cause or not. It is on the thin sense of an objectively rational transition that my transition is objectively rational, and it is on this sense that CORT is false.

The distinction I draw between the thin and the thick senses of an objectively rational transition can be plausibly traced back to a distinction commonly drawn between two types of objective (epistemic) justification, i.e., “propositional” versus “doxastic” justification.¹² If I have good evidence that supports a belief, I am propositionally (objectively) justified to have that belief, irrespective of whether I have it or not and *irrespective of whether I have formed it in a particular manner or not*. However, if I come to form that belief in a deficient manner (for instance, in a merely causal way), then I am not doxastically justified in having that belief (despite the fact that I have that belief and I have evidence that supports that belief). So, the objective rationality, in the doxastic sense, of a transition is sensitive to the way in which a given belief is formed. However, we can also intelligibly speak of the objective rationality, in the propositional sense, of a transition. If I have good evidence that supports a belief at a certain time and if I come to have that belief at a later time, then the transition that I thereby make is objectively rational, in the propositional sense, irrespective of the particular manner in which I come to have that belief. What *solely* matters to the objective rationality, in the propositional sense, of a transition is that it results with forming attitudes that are supported by one's evidence – and this is the thin sense of an objectively rational transition.

Now, a parallel distinction can be drawn with respect to subjectively rational transitions, in this case between propositional and what one might call ‘attitudinal’¹³ rationality. We can say that if a certain attitude coheres with my

¹² For a book-length discussion on the nature of the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification, see Silva & Oliveira (2022).

¹³ Since doxastic rationality, by definition, pertains only to the rationality of doxastic attitudes such as beliefs, and since subjective rationality pertains to the coherence of all sorts of attitudes including intentions as well as beliefs, the term we need here to cover the opposing class must be broader in its application than ‘doxastic.’

current attitudes, then it is propositionally (subjectively) rational for me to have that attitude, irrespective of whether I have it or not and *irrespective of whether I come to have it in a particular manner or not*. However, if I come to have that attitude in a deficient manner (for instance, in a merely causal way), then I am not attitudinally (subjectively) rational in having that attitude (despite the fact that I have that attitude and that attitude coheres with the rest of my attitudes). So, the subjective rationality, in the attitudinal sense, of a transition is sensitive to the way in which a given belief is formed. However, we can also intelligibly speak of the subjective rationality, in the propositional sense, of a transition. If an attitude coheres with the rest of my attitudes at a certain time, and if I come to have that attitude at a later time, then the transition that I thereby make is subjectively rational, in the propositional sense, irrespective of the particular manner in which I come to have that attitude. What *solely* matters to the subjective rationality, in the propositional sense, of a transition is that it results with forming attitudes that cohere with the rest of my attitudes – and this is the thin sense of a subjectively rational transition.

Given the distinction between the two senses of a subjectively rational transition – the ‘thick’ (or ‘attitudinal’) sense Kolodny endorses and the ‘thin’ (or ‘propositional’) sense I have articulated – we are in a position to see that it does not follow, contrary to Kolodny’s claim, from the fact that process-requirements are in the business of identifying subjectively rational transitions, that their correct formulations must respect the idea that how the transition is made matters to its subjective rationality. If process-requirements are in the business of identifying subjectively rational transitions in the *thin* sense, then their correct formulations might be entirely ‘oblivious’ to the way in which those transitions are made – or in other words, bare-bones wide-scopism might be true.

The fact that there is an intelligible sense of a rational transition that is compatible with wide-scopism – *viz.* the thin sense – suffices to undermine the Reasoning Argument as an argument against bare-bones wide-scopism. The Reasoning Argument assumes that there is only *one* intelligible sense of a rational transition and it is the thick sense, purported to be captured by CSRT. If this assumption is true, then bare-bones wide-scopism is not true because bone-bones wide scope requirements are designed to be oblivious to the way in which a transition from an incoherent state to a coherent one is made. However, the assumption is not true as there is also the thin sense of a rational transition, and the fact that there is *an* intelligible sense of a rational transition that is incompatible with bare-bones wide-scopism – *viz.* the thick sense – does not show that bare-bones wide-scopism is false. The upshot is that, in response to the Reasoning

Argument, wide-scopism can maintain its original bare-bones position, resting its case on the thin sense of a rational transition.

According to Kolodny, the explanation, at least in part, of why many (including, as he openly states, his former self) have failed to see that some rational requirements have narrow scope is that they focus exclusively on state-requirements, which after all have wide scope, and do not recognize the category of process-requirements. He writes: “It is only once we turn from state-requirements to process-requirements – only once we shift our focus from the rationality of synchronic states to the rationality of diachronic transitions among them – that we come to see that some rational requirements have narrow scope” (pp. 454-455). However, it must now be clear that this explanation will not do: turning from state-requirements to process-requirements explains the failure to recognize that some rational requirements have narrow-scope *only if* the thick sense of a rational transition is taken for granted as the only sense that can be legitimately appealed to in the course of formulating process-requirements. However, the thick sense of a rational transition is, as I have argued, not the only relevant sense of a rational transition.

Not only wide-scopers can retain their original bare-bones position by an appeal to the thin sense of a subjectively rational transition, but they *actually* take that sense for granted, which can be effectively illustrated by Broome’s (2007) response to Kolodny (2005).¹⁴ Consider WS-BB again:

(WS-BB) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her either to form the intention to X or to drop the belief that she ought to X .

Kolodny’s objection that WS-BB does not capture the relevant rationality requirement one is under is based on the observation that there are not two processes of *reasoning* by means of which one can bring oneself to satisfy it (and this in turn is because one cannot reason, as we have noted above Kolodny argues,

¹⁴ In his paper, Broome complains, rightly in my opinion, that he cannot “get [any] guidance from” Kolodny’s (2005) paper about “how to understand [a given requirement] as a requirement on processes” because, he notes, “none of the formulae for requirements of rationality set out in [that] paper mention processes; they all mention states only” (2005, 366). In his response, Kolodny accepts Broome’s point and goes on to provide “more explicit formulations” (2007, 3) of the process-requirements that he has in mind. Notwithstanding the soundness of Broome’s complaint about the unclarity of the content of process-requirements in Kolodny (2005), I believe that his ensuing defense of wide-scopism against the Reasoning Argument succeeds in getting across a valuable lesson about the (bare-bones) wide-scopers’ take on process-requirements.

from the absence of intention to dropping the belief). In his response, Broome simply grants Kolodny's observation, noting that "you can reason in one direction but not the other" (2007, 366), but he goes on to warn against equivocating on 'ways of satisfying [WS-BB].' Broome emphasizes that "there are two ways of satisfying [WS-BB] in the sense in which there are two ways in which a material conditional can be true: by its antecedent's being false or by its consequent's being true" (2007, 366). Broome's point against Kolodny is that there simply being two ways of satisfying WS-BB on account of the fact that it is a requirement to make a conditional true (and not whether there are two processes of reasoning by means of which one can bring oneself to satisfy it) is what is relevant to an assessment of WS-BB as a wide-scope requirement. And, Broome's emphasis on there being two ways to satisfy WS-BB can be plausibly read as involving a commitment to the claim that how the transition is made from an incoherent to a coherent state does *not* matter to the subjective rationality of the transition, and this claim is true on the thin sense of a subjectively rational transition.

I have argued in this section that the Reasoning Argument fails as an argument against bare-bones wide-scopism because it fails to acknowledge that there is a thin sense of a rational transition which is taken for granted by bare-bones wide-scopers. I anticipate three objections. One is that there is no such thing as the thin sense of a rational transition. Another one acknowledges the thin sense of a rational transition but holds that it is not relevant to subjective rationality. And, the last one acknowledges that the thin sense is relevant to subjective rationality but maintains that the process-requirements of subjective rationality govern not only rational transitions in the thin sense but also rational transitions in the thick sense. In what follows, I will not address the first two objections since they are, in my opinion, evidently mistaken: we can intelligibly speak of the rationality of a given transition from an incoherent to a coherent state without thereby committing ourselves to the character of the particular way in which the transition is achieved; and, the locus of that sort of rationality is clearly subjective rationality as it is about maintaining coherence. The third objection, on the other hand, raises a host of interesting and unexpected issues, which I will discuss in the next section.

4. Wide-Scopism Can Account for Thick Subjective Rationality

There being the thin (or propositional) sense of a rational transition undermines the Reasoning Argument *qua* an argument against bare-bones wide-scopism, the original wide-scooper position. Bare-bones wide-scopism goes unscathed, and this is because the (thin/propositional) sense of a rational transition it takes for granted is

not the (thick/attitudinal) sense of a rational transition the Reasoning Argument rests on, which means that the argument owes whatever apparent force it might have to equivocating on 'rational.' Bare-bones wide-scopism is an account of *thin* subjective rationality, and pointing at its expectable failure to account for *thick* subjective rationality cuts no ice against it.

The objection I wish to consider now acknowledges that the Reasoning Argument fails as an argument against bare-bones wide-scopism, but it goes on to claim that the argument points towards the need to account for thick subjective rationality, which bare-bones wide-scopism is not fit to meet. And, the Reasoning Argument shows, the objection goes, that what one might call *embellished* narrow-scopism (that is, the sort of narrow-scopism that aims to account for thick subjective rationality) is to be preferred over what one might call *embellished* wide-scopism (that is, the sort of wide-scopism that aims to account for thick subjective rationality). The following requirements, which I have introduced in Section 2, are embellished requirements:

(WS-NR) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her either to form the intention to X in a reasoning-based way or to drop the belief that she ought to X in a reasoning-based way.

(WS-CNR) If a subject believes that she ought not to X but intends to X , then rationality requires her either to drop the belief that she ought not to X in a reasoning-based way or to drop the intention to X in a reasoning-based way.

(NS-NR) If a subject believes that she ought to X but does not intend to X , then rationality requires her to form the intention to X in a reasoning-based way.

(NS-CNR) If a subject believes that she ought not to X but intends to X , then rationality requires her to drop the intention to X in a reasoning-based way.

Despite its failure as an argument against bare-bones wide-scopism, the Reasoning Argument shows, the objection goes, that embellished wide scope requirements, WS-NR and WS-CNR, collapse into embellished narrow scope requirements, NS-NR and NS-CNR, respectively.

The wide-scooper might be tempted to reply to this objection by simply turning a blind eye to the need effectively emphasized by Kolodny to have embellished versions of bare-bones requirements.¹⁵ I think this temptation should be resisted. I take Kolodny to have persuasively demonstrated that there is such a thing as the thick (or attitudinal) sense of subjective rationality (as well as the thin (or propositional) sense of subjective rationality); and sticking with the thin (or propositional) sense of subjective rationality, which is taken for granted by bare-

¹⁵ This is, so far as I can see, the line taken by Way (2011, see especially 237-238).

bones wide-scopism, does not make the need for an account of the thick (or attitudinal) sense of subjectively rationality disappear.

So, how does the Reasoning Argument fare as an argument against *embellished* wide-scopism? My answer is “badly.” Neither WS-NR collapses into NS-NR, nor WS-NCR into NS-NCR. Contra what the Reasoning Argument aims to establish, it is possible to drop the belief that one ought to X in a reasoning-based way in the case of a conflict-state WS-NR is purported to govern, and it is possible to drop the belief that one ought not to X in a reasoning-based way in the case of a conflict-state WS-NCR is purported to govern. After defending these claims, I will show that the source of Kolodny’s mistake lies in a faulty assumption about the starting point of reasoning in the relevant cases, which taints his formulation of the Reasoning Test.

Let us consider the following akratic scenario, purported to be governed by WS-NR. Suppose that I believe that I ought to quit smoking, but I don’t have the intention to quit smoking. Then, I reflect on my attitudes (perhaps after an epistemology lecture on subjective rationality) and come to realize the incoherence between my ought-belief and lacking the relevant intention. It seems clear that when I recognize that I am in a conflict-state like this, I can reason (*sotte voce*, as it were) as follows:

I believe that I ought to quit smoking, but I do not intend to quit smoking. This is not good because I aspire to be rational and rationality demands coherence. So, I must make my attitudes cohere with one another. Well, it seems that there are two different ways to proceed then. One is dropping my belief, and the other is forming the intention. And, I hereby decide upon doing the former.

Suppose that having reasoned thus, my ensuing decision to drop the belief in question leads to my dropping it. Call this *the akratic case*.¹⁶

It seems evident that, in this case, I have done something that is deemed impossible by the Reasoning Argument: I have dropped the belief that I ought to

¹⁶ It might be objected that the akratic case describes an impossible scenario because belief is involuntary and therefore one cannot simply decide upon dropping a belief. There are three things I want to say in reply. Firstly, it is highly controversial that belief is involuntary, and this way of countering the akratic case makes it hostage to a controversial claim. Secondly, the objection rests on a *non-sequitur*: even if belief is involuntary and I cannot voluntarily drop a belief, I can still decide upon doing it, for instance, as a result of reasoning. Thirdly, what really matters to the plausibility of the case is not whether I voluntarily drop my belief but whether I can come to decide upon dropping my belief as a result of reasoning. And, once I decide upon dropping my belief through reasoning, that decision of mine can certainly lead to my dropping that belief, whether that way of dropping the belief counts as genuinely voluntary or not. Under such circumstances, it is plausible to say that I have dropped my belief in a reasoning-based way.

quit smoking in a reasoning-based way. And, if I can drop this belief in a reasoning-based way, as this case illustrates, then WS-NR does not collapse into NS-NR, contrary to what the Reasoning Argument attempts to show. A general lesson is that cases of akratic incoherence do not favor embellished narrow-scopism over embellished wide-scopism.

Let us now consider the following ‘converse’-akratic scenario, purported to be governed by WS-NCR. Suppose that I believe that I ought not to smoke but suppose also that I intend to smoke. Then, I reflect on my attitudes and come to realize the incoherence between my ought-not-belief and the relevant intention. It seems clear that when I recognize that I am in a conflict-state like this, I can reason as follows:

I believe that I ought not to smoke, but I intend to smoke. This is not good because I aspire to be rational and rationality demands coherence. So, I must make my attitudes cohere with one another. Well, it seems that there are two different ways to proceed then. One is dropping my belief, and the other is dropping the intention. And, I hereby decide upon doing the former.

Suppose that having reasoned thus, my ensuing decision to drop the belief in question leads to my dropping it. Call this *the converse-akratic case*.

It seems evident that, in this converse-akratic case, I have done something that is deemed impossible by the Reasoning Argument: I have dropped the belief that I ought not to smoke in a reasoning-based way. And, if I can drop this belief in a reasoning-based way, as this case illustrates, then WS-CNR does not collapse into NS-CNR, contrary to what the Reasoning Argument attempts to show. A general lesson is that cases of converse-akratic incoherence do not favor embellished narrow-scopism over embellished wide-scopism.

It is worth noting that the akratic and converse-akratic cases just described respect the two conditions Kolodny holds a process must meet in order for it to be a process of reasoning. In these cases, I move from the incoherence between my attitudes to a certain way of resolving that incoherence. Since coherence is a matter of contents of attitudes, the starting points in these cases of the mental processes are contents of my attitudes and hence Kolodny’s condition that all reasoning is content-processing is not violated. Furthermore, since the move from the incoherence between a set of attitudes to dropping one of those attitudes is clearly not upstream,¹⁷ Kolodny’s other condition that upstream content-processing is not reasoning is not violated either.

¹⁷ In the converse-akratic case, for instance, I clearly do *not* come to drop my belief that I ought not to smoke solely on the basis of recognizing that I intend to smoke. That would be progressing upstream in Kolodny’s sense of the term since it would be a move from my attitude (my

What exactly is wrong, then, with the Reasoning Argument? In both the akratic and the converse-akratic cases, I have reasoned from (the recognition of) the incoherence between my attitudes to dropping one of those conflicting attitudes, my ought-belief and my ought-not-belief, respectively. However, the Reasoning Argument assumes that the reasoning should have started from *somewhere else* if I am to be considered as having dropped the beliefs at hand in a reasoning-based way: in the akratic case, it should have started from the content of my lacking the relevant intention; and, in the converse-akratic case, it should have started from the content of my having the relevant intention. And, since, in the former case, there is no content to reason from and since, in the latter case, the move from the content of my having the relevant intention to dropping the ought-not-belief is downstream (and reasoning cannot be downstream), the Reasoning Argument concludes that one cannot come to drop those beliefs in a reasoning-based way. However, this is, I contend, unnecessarily restrictive: even if we assume, for instance, that I cannot reason, in the akratic case, from the content of my lacking the relevant intention to dropping the ought-belief or, in the converse-akratic case, from the content of my relevant intention to dropping the ought-not-belief, that by itself does not show that I cannot drop these two beliefs in a reasoning-based way. This is because I can reason from somewhere else (for instance, as both cases illustrate, from the incoherence between my belief and lacking the intention) to dropping these beliefs.

The Reasoning Test Kolodny offers is not the correct test to apply to figure out whether a proposed embellished wide scope requirement collapses into the corresponding embellished narrow scope requirement. The Reasoning Test goes, let us recall, like this:

The Reasoning Test: The process-requirement governing the conflict between X and Y is wide scope only if (i) it is possible to reason from the content of X to dropping Y and (ii) it is possible to reason from the content of Y to dropping X .

Even if (i) or (ii) is false, it might be possible to reason to dropping Y in a reasoning-based way and to dropping X in a reasoning-based way, in which case the process-requirement governing the conflict X and Y can still be wide scope. So, even if we grant Kolodny's observation that reasoning is required for the (thick) subjective rationality of a transition, it does not follow that the starting point of reasoning required for that transition must be the content of one or the other of

intention to smoke) to a reassessment of what attitude I ought to have (dropping my belief about what I ought to do). However, in the converse-akratic case, I come to drop my belief that I ought not to smoke on the basis of recognizing that that belief and my corresponding intention are incoherent. And this is not progressing upstream.

the conflicting attitudes. The Reasoning Test is a *non-sequitur* and can be plausibly rejected by embellished wide-scopism.

The adequately permissive form the reasoning test must take goes rather as follows:

The Proper Reasoning Test: The process-requirement governing the conflict between *X* and *Y* is wide scope only if (i) it is possible to reason (locally)¹⁸ to dropping *Y* and (ii) it is possible to reason (locally) to dropping *X*.

Unlike the Reasoning Test, the Proper Reasoning Test does not place unnecessary constraints on the starting point of the required (local) reasoning process. And, as the akratic and converse-akratic cases show, WS-NR and WS-CNR pass the Proper Reasoning Test and do not thereby collapse into NS-NR and NS-CNR, respectively.

Let me conclude by replying to an objection. Consider the akratic case again, where I decide upon dropping my ought-belief, having recognized that that is one of the two things I can do to resolve the conflict-state I find myself in. According to the objection I wish to consider now, deciding to drop my ought-belief (or, simply, dropping my ought-belief) is not the subjectively rational thing to do, even if it occurs as a result of a reasoning process and I resolve the conflict by proceeding thus. If I have already judged that I ought to quit smoking, as I have done in the akratic case, I am defying this judgment by not forming the intention to quit smoking; and, defying this judgment is subjectively irrational.¹⁹ So, the required reasoning process must result with forming the intention to quit smoking, if resolving the conflict-resolution in the akratic case is to count as subjectively rational – or so the objection goes.

There are two things I want to say in reply to this objection. Firstly, it is true that I defy my judgment that I ought to quit smoking by not forming the intention to quit smoking. However, wide-scopism claims that *this* is subjectively rational: in the akratic case, wide-scopism tells us, defying one's judgment is one of the possible routes that one can take in order to resolve the conflict in a subjectively rational manner. So, simply asserting that defying one's judgment is subjectively

¹⁸ The qualification 'locally' pertains to a distinction Kolodny makes between local (subjective) requirements and global (subjective) requirements. The focus of local requirements is "specific conflicts about one's attitudes" (2005, 516), irrespective of what else is going on in her entire attitudinal system while the focus of global requirements is one's entire attitudinal system. Kolodny argues that requirements of subjective rationality "ought to be local" (2005, 516) – and hence the qualification in my formulation of the Proper Reasoning Test. It is clear that when I reason from the incoherence of a certain set of attitudes to dropping one or the other of those attitudes, my reasoning is local in Kolodny's sense of the term.

¹⁹ See Kolodny (2007, 9).

irrational is question-begging as it hardly amounts to more than flatly asserting that wide-scopism is false. Secondly, (thick) subjective rationality is about maintaining coherence through reasoning that is sensitive to coherence relations; and in the akratic case, I maintain coherence by dropping my ought-belief through reasoning that is sensitive to coherence relations, which means that dropping my ought-belief in that case must be (thickly) subjectively rational. So, the objection that dropping my ought-belief is (thickly) subjectively irrational can only be properly advanced on the basis of an account that tells us what *else* is required for the (thick) subjective rationality of a transition, over and above the fact that it occurs as a result of reasoning that is sensitive to coherence relations. And, the burden clearly falls on the shoulders of the proponents of this objection.²⁰

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²⁰ The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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