

Review of Alex Worsnip, *Fitting Things Together: Coherence and the Demands of Structural Rationality* (Oxford University Press, 2021)

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Structural rationality is a matter of coherence among one's mental attitudes and is associated with requirements such as that your intentions are in line with the means to your ends (means-end coherence) and that you take the attitudes that are supported by your evidence (inter-level coherence). Some have argued that a coherence vision of rationality leaves us with something of a normative void: it can be hard to say why it is that rationality, in this sense of meeting various constraints of consistency, actually matters. In part because of these doubts, support for a vision of rationality as reasons-responsiveness has emerged in recent years.

Dualism about rationality is the view that structural and substantive rationality are both genuine forms of rationality, with neither notion being more fundamental than the other, and thus neither deserving the designation of rationality simpliciter. Alex Worsnip, in his book *Fitting Things Together*, defends dualism and argues for the significance of structural rationality; he aims to vindicate the view that this form of rationality constitutes a normatively significant, unified phenomenon. Structural rationality, on Worsnip's view, is genuine and autonomous, and is thus not reducible to substantive rationality.

The developments and arguments in this book are important not only for those working squarely in the philosophy of rationality, but also to those contributors from epistemology and ethics who hold a stake in these debates (and, as Worsnip nicely explains in Chapter 9, there are many implications for several other areas throughout philosophy and in social science). After providing an overview of the main themes, I shall comment on some select issues of likely interest to readers of this *Journal*.

In the first part of the book, Worsnip pursues his initial defense of dualism which involves his account of substantive rationality, along with sustained argumentation against attempts to reduce either structural and substantive rationality, and against eliminativism about either. Substantive rationality involves correctly responding to evidence-relative reasons. These reasons can be understood as being somewhere between fact-relative (or fully objective) and belief-relative (or fully subjective) reasons. Roughly, you have evidence-relative reason that there is gin and tonic in your glass, rather than petrol, so long as your evidence justifies your belief. You have an evidence-relative reason that there is gin and tonic in your glass when the liquid has been cleverly disguised, but not when what is before you is obviously petrol (the fact-relative and belief-relative notions of reasons do not allow us to distinguish between these two situations).

The theory of structural rationality is developed in the second part of the book. In Chapter 5, Worsnip observes that something is puzzling about instances of incoherence and argues that “it is hard to make sense of agents who stably sustain incoherent states while being fully and reflectively aware of those states” (p. 132) and, further, that under conditions of transparency about one’s attitudinal states, there would be a disposition to revise them. These ideas have significant implications for how we should understand questions surrounding the (im)possibility of incoherence, and the way deliberation ought to proceed.

In Chapter 6, Worsnip builds some of the more formal elements of the theory of structural rationality, by defending a wide-scope interpretation of structural requirements, which apply synchronically and generate prohibitions against incoherent sets of attitudes. The wide-scope interpretation of requirements is then supplemented, in Chapter 7, using premier tools from the semantics of natural language modality, in particular by demonstrating productive results when rational requirements are understood as sensitive to modal base and ordering source parameters. The way this is done also makes for an excellent resource for those interested in using these tools to model requirements and permissions in other parts of ethics and epistemology.

One foundational problem in the philosophy of rationality, pursued in Chapter 8, concerns whether structural rationality is normative. Worsnip is careful to understand the central question of the normativity of rationality in terms of what makes rationality non-derivatively significant. He is also careful to distinguish between questions of whether substantive rationality is normative and whether structural rationality is normative, with the former seeming trivially true (insofar as reasons-responsiveness is already understood to be something normative) and the latter seeming more substantial. Facts about coherence are normative not in the sense that they provide reasons for particular attitudes; rather, the idea is that deliberation is structured in such a way that there are reasons to treat incoherent combinations of attitudes as off-limits (p. 256). Such an account of the normativity of structural rationality would promise to dispel doubts that coherence requirements are superfluous in that there are no additional reasons to structure deliberation over and above reasons for holding particular attitudes.

It is also important to state that this understanding of the normativity of structural rationality works according to a new understanding of what role coherence-based reasons are meant to serve in our mental lives: if we appreciate the holistic character of deliberation, considering a range of attitudes together rather than particular attitudes in isolation, we can see that there are reasons to structure deliberation by avoiding incoherent combinations of attitudes and directing focus to coherent combinations. This opens up a new space to think of the normative constraints on deliberation.

It does seem controversial, however, whether the appeal to structural norms of rationality is uniquely required to account for how we deliberate in this way. An alternative might be that substantive rationality could instead provide the explanation needed. Worsnip argues that even if one were to rule out combinations of attitudes on substantive grounds, ipso facto satisfying structural rationality, there would be something defective qua deliberation. This is because one “shouldn’t have to rule out the incoherent combinations on substantive grounds; their very incoherence should be enough to treat them as off-limits” (p. 269). But is incoherence something we can simply, and very immediately, ‘see’ and rule out, without (at least tacitly) considering why a combination of attitudes might be incoherent?

One potential explanation of why it is that a combination of attitudes ought to be treated as off-limits might be because it is recognized that accepting their conjunction is not supported by substantive rationality. Another way of putting this is that we might quibble about how Worsnip thinks of deliberation itself. We might grant that deliberation proceeds holistically; however, we might think that ruling out combinations of attitudes is not as automatic as it appears. Nevertheless, the progress made here on questions of how deliberation actually proceeds, together with the range of tools drawn from the distinct notions of rationality, will serve as a productive basis for further inquiry.

Another interesting component of Worsnip’s dualist view concerns moral reasons. On this view, such reasons are to be associated with substantive rationality and not structural rationality. Worsnip also posits that the reason people think that immorality does not yield irrationality is because they have the structural notion of rationality in mind (p. 47). He argues, in Chapter 9, that this difference may also allow us to uncover an equivocation in Philippa Foot’s famous argument regarding the categoricity of moral requirements. Foot appears to hold that violations of moral requirements do not amount to charges of irrationality. If, however, moral requirements were categorical in a strong sense, unlike the norms of etiquette, applying to all yet lacking in involving reasons, then it would be irrational to violate them. Thus, Worsnip spells out Foot’s main argument as follows (p. 283):

- (1) If moral requirements were (strong) categorical imperatives, then it would be necessarily irrational to violate them.
- (2) It isn’t necessarily irrational to violate moral requirements.
- (C) Therefore, moral requirements are not (strong) categorical imperatives.

Worsnip argues that the notion of rationality evoked in premise (1) is substantive rather than structural rationality because violations of strong categorical imperatives would involve failure to respond to reasons; premise (2) instead involves structural rationality as Foot does not appear to argue that violations of moral requirements do not involve substantive rationality. However, it might not be obvious that immorality does not involve structural rationality in addition to

substantive rationality, perhaps making those who violate strong categorical imperatives liable to two charges of irrationality. It is worth wondering whether such an interpretive possibility could also be in the spirit of how Worsnip thinks of the relationship between morality and rationality, vindicating a felt sense that violating morality at least sometimes involves structural incoherence, while still yielding a way to uncover an equivocation in Foot's argument.

This book is full of engaging, vigorous argumentation across the board, especially the robust defense of dualism about rationality, the vindication of the role of structural rationality, and the various intriguing implications for adjacent debates. Even if some readers do not fully accept dualism in Worsnip's sense, I am positive that they will feel persuaded that distinguishing between the two forms of rationality has wide-ranging significance. There is no doubt that engagement with this work will be beneficial for many philosophical audiences.

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