The Bootstrapping Objection

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ABSTRACT: If our mental attitudes were reasons, we could bootstrap anything into rationality simply by acquiring these mental attitudes. This, it has been argued, shows that mental attitudes cannot be reasons. In this paper, I focus on John Broome's development of the bootstrapping objection. I distinguish various versions of this objection and I argue that the bootstrapping objection to mind-based accounts of reasons fails in all its versions.

KEYWORDS: Bratman – Broome – intention – reasons – reasoning.

Before I explain the setting in which the discussion to follow will take place, I would like to start with a simple story. Its morale is something, I hope, we all agree upon. Its relevance will become apparent later on.

Suppose I believe that I am a better than average philosopher. I admit that I hardly get any invitations to conferences and it is also true that when I submit an abstract I often get a message telling me that, unfortunately, many high-quality submissions had to be rejected. I have some publications. They are, by no means, in top-journals; and even if it's only the *North Yorkshire Philosophical Gazette* I had to revise my article several times – no idea why. And so the evidence is mounting. I don't hold a conspiracy theory according to which my failures are unproblematically compatible or would even support my high opinion of myself. I do regard these things as evidence against my positive view of my abilities but I manage to put them

aside. I do believe that I am better than average – actually, when considering the work of some of my colleagues, quite a bit better. This belief of mine – I am better than average – gives rise to other beliefs, for example to the belief that my luck will change.

If you assess the normative status of this latter belief – my luck will change – it won't help that I can provide the following argument for it: 'Better than average philosophers will, by the end of their career, have a better than average publication record. In order to have such a record my luck will have to change. And it will, as I am a better than average philosopher.' The corner stone of this argument – my being a better than average philosopher – is, to say the least, unsupported. The evidence points in a different direction: I really should know better. We understand how this can happen. It is easier to delude yourself than to face uncomfortable facts. The positive view I have of myself, I said, is not justified. This, in turn, affects the normative status of my optimistic outlook. It is unreasonable to expect a positive change because the view on which this expectation is based is unreasonable. So this is the claim, I hope, we all agree upon: If you put irrationality in, you will not get rationality out, even with the best of arguments.

1. Background

The bootstrapping objection arises in debates about the foundations of normative thought. Let me explain. Many people are convinced that one ought not to drink poison. They think the fact that something is poisonous is a reason not to drink it and, if there are no reasons to the contrary, this reason alone can explain why one ought not to drink it. In this way, we introduce world-based reasons and world-based oughts. The fact that some liquid is poisonous is a reason not to drink it and this fact explains why, if nothing else needs to be considered, one ought not to drink it, all things considered.

You like anyone else do not know everything. What if you believe – on the basis of good reasons – that the stuff you intend to drink is not poisonous? You think it is completely harmless. It looks like wine; it smells like wine; it tastes like wine. If this is what you think, then it would be irrational for you not to drink it. In this way, we introduce mind-based rules of rationality. These rules tell us how to move in a rational way from one

mental state to another. In the case at hand, they tell you to move from your belief that the liquid is harmless and tasty to the intention and – if nothing interferes – to the action of drinking it. It is a natural thought that rationality is normative. If, all things considered, it is rational to do something, then, all things considered, you ought to do it.

Wait a moment. If the facts determine that you ought not to drink the liquid and if your mental states determine that you ought to drink it, then it would be the case that you ought to drink it and that you ought not to drink it. This cannot be right.[1]

I distinguish between three kinds of reactions to this problem. According to the first reaction, what I said cannot be right, can be right after all.

(1) The problem we are facing is one of normative inconsistency. If we allow for both world-based and mind-based reasons and oughts, they may pull us in opposite directions. Accepting that normativity cannot that easily collapse into inconsistency, we try to show that the inconsistency is only apparent. It would be only apparent if the opposing recommendations – one ought to drink the liquid and one ought not to drink it, relied on different sense of 'ought'. Ewing (1947) thought that in one (subjective) sense of 'ought' you ought to drink the liquid, yet in another (objective) sense of 'ought' you ought not to drink it. This move, in my view, would deny one of the presuppositions of practical thinking. The question that characterizes practical deliberation is 'What should I do?' It is not about what I should do in this sense or in that sense. Such qualified questions – should I, just

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[1] The distinction between facts and attitudes and the corresponding distinction between world-based and mind-based reasons is more complex than I made it out to be. This has to do with the fact that some facts (or parts of the world) consist in people having certain attitudes. This complicates the application of the distinction. Suppose I believe that everyone here hates me. Should I leave town or should I seek psychological help? Both answers find their place (though on different grounds) in a world-based as well as in a mind-based normative framework. Let's start with the world-based framework. The fact that everyone around here hates me is a good reason to leave town. The fact that I believe so – taking my believing in this case as a fact about the world – is a world-based reason to seek help. Within a mind-based framework, my believing that everyone hates me is a reason to leave town, whereas my belief that I have this belief (plus other beliefs about paranoia) are reasons to seek help. I will put this complication aside as it won't play a role in my discussion. Others have tried to draw the same distinction in similar ways. Prichard (1932, 18) describes the issue as follows: 'If a man has an obligation, i.e., a duty, to do some action, does the obligation depend on certain characteristics of the situation, or on certain characteristics of his thought about the situation?'

considering this or that aspect, do it? – can be steps towards answering what seems to be the real question of practical deliberation, which uses 'should' unambiguously.

The two remaining reactions agree on the ideal of normative consistency as well as on the threat posed to this ideal if we accepted both world-based and mind-based reasons. They differ in their views about which of these two accounts of normativity ought to be abandoned. (2a) According to Kolodny (2005), there is no mind-based normativity; all normativity is world-based. Means-end reasoning, consistency and other apparent mind-based principles of rationality are just that – they appear to tell us what we ought to do. Their appearance is only veridical if they are underwritten by world-based reasons. But if they are, such world-based reasons do all the work. (2b) Like Kolodny, John Broome accepts world-based normativity, e.g. a liquid's being poisonous is a reason not to drink it. Traditional principles of rationality, for Broome, are neither world-based nor mind-based. They are wide-scope requirements. Thus, Broome and Kolodny differ as Broome accepts a conception of rationality that goes beyond the domain of world-based reasons. Broome's wide-scope move is supposed to alleviate the worry about normative inconsistency. However, having allowed world-based reasons, Broome thinks that the normativity of wide-scope requirements of rationality would need to be anchored in such reasons. As this is no easy task, Broome remains agnostic about the normativity of principles of rationality.

There is a third option, namely (3) to think of all normativity as mind-based. I find this third option independently attractive. However, here I will not pursue the project of discussing its merits. I will be engaged in more limited project. The Bootstrapping Objection is an argument against the idea of mind-based reasons. The basic idea is the following. Reasons, if mind-based, would be too easy to come by. If thinking that a liquid tastes nice was a reason to drink it, and the liquid's taste was the only relevant consideration, all one needed was this thought in order to render drinking the liquid rational. This is taken to be implausible. The bootstrapping objection has been applied in the theoretical as well as in the practical case. Neither beliefs nor intentions are reasons. In what follows I will discuss John Broome's development of this objection.[2]

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[2]   'Bootstrapping', in the sense in which it is relevant here, has been introduced into the philosophical debate by Michael Bratman. In Bratman (1981), he regards bootstrap-

2. Bootstrapping 1: Against attitudinal reasons. Why beliefs are not reasons. You cannot, by means of your beliefs, bootstrap a new reason into existence, to add to your evidence.

John Broome writes:

First, there are no attitudinal reasons. Attitudes are not reasons in the way I have described. Here is why. Take R3: If you believe p and you believe if p then q, your two beliefs are together a reason for you to believe q. For 'p' substitute 'Carbon dioxide is poisonous' and for 'q' 'Emissions of carbon dioxide are harmful'. There are various pieces of evidence for the proposition q, and others against it. Each of these pieces of evidence constitutes a *pro tanto* reason either for or against believing q. Just for the sake of argument, let us assume that the evidence falls short of being conclusive, so, by a small margin, these evidential reasons do not require you to believe emissions of carbon dioxide are harmful. Now suppose there is no evidence for the proposition p, that carbon dioxide is poisonous, but nevertheless you believe it. Suppose you also believe that if p then q – that, if carbon dioxide is poisonous, emissions of it are harmful. According to R3, these beliefs of yours constitute a reason to believe q. Since the evidential reasons fall short of requiring you to believe q, we may assume this attitudinal reason tips the balance. Therefore all your reasons together require you to believe emissions of carbon dioxide are harmful. That is not credible. Your evidential reasons do not require you to believe emissions of carbon dioxide are harmful, and it is not credible that your beliefs could add to these reasons. You cannot, by means of your beliefs, bootstrap a new reason into existence, to add to the evidence. (Broome 2009, 91)

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ping as a problem for the view that intentions are reasons. For him it is a problem that needs to be contained – not a problem that would refute the idea that intentions are reasons. In epistemology we find discussions of a related problem under 'bootstrapping' or 'the easy knowledge problem' (see Weisberg 2012 for a general overview of the debate). Note that in epistemology the issue concerns the problematic character of self-supporting reasoning – your given and not further justified starting point is validated by reasoning that presupposes the legitimacy of the starting point – whereas we are dealing here with an issue regarding the nature of reasons. As Broome (2013) has not been published at the time of writing this article, I will occasionally refer to the manuscript Broome (2009). None of the quoted passages has been changed. Much of the relevant material can also be found in Broome (2001) and in Broome (2007).

I do not find this example transparent. I am asked to imagine that I believe that carbon dioxide is poisonous. Although I am convinced that emitting poisonous gases is harmful, I see myself collecting evidence for and against the harmfulness of carbon dioxide and I find the evidence inconclusive. Do I have to imagine myself as being irrational? I will come back to Broome's example later on. For the moment I will use my own example which, I hope, avoids the problem I have with Broome's example.

Suppose my evidence is such that I am not required to believe that team A will win the next game by a big margin. There is evidence for it and against it. Suppose I believe that their next opponent, team B, is lacking in confidence. I also believe that against opponents who lack in confidence, team A will win with a big margin. Do I, as I believe that their next opponent lacks in confidence, have an additional reason to believe that team A will win with a big margin?

This example seems to fit Broome's argumentative purposes. He would point out the following. 'Your evidential reasons, you said, do not require you to believe that team A will win with a big margin and it is not credible that your beliefs, for example your belief that team B lacks in confidence, could add to these reasons. You cannot, by means of your beliefs, bootstrap a new reason into existence, to add to the evidence.'

The crucial question is the following: What do we mean by evidence?

(a) Evidence for S is what S knows to be true.

Suppose that in my example, though I think that team B has low confidence, I do not know this. Given that only knowledge is evidence, I cannot add to the evidence simply by adding this belief.

(b) Evidence for S is all the facts S is aware of.

Suppose it is a fact that team B has low confidence and that I believe s. Then this belief of mine is part of my evidence. On this conception of evidence, I can add a new reason to the evidence simply by believing it, as long as it is true.

(c) Evidence for S is all S's beliefs which are such that the objective probability of the conclusion given what S believes is higher than otherwise.

The fact that B has low confidence raises the objective probability of a big win by team A. Again, you add to the evidence simply by believing something (as long as what you believe does indeed raise the conclusion's probability).

(d) Evidence for S is all those of S's beliefs which raise the value of the agent's probability function for the conclusion.

Again, under this conception of evidence, simply believing that B has low confidence will add to your reason.

Only one of these conceptions of evidence, namely evidence is what one knows, supports Broome's argument. However, on this conception of evidence we do not need any argument that would show us that we cannot add to our evidence by simply believing something. Simply believing, i.e. believing without knowing, cannot add to the evidence if we assume, via our understanding of evidence, that simple believing is not part of the evidence and does not add to it. If only known facts are, by assumption, evidence, then beliefs which do not amount to knowledge do not add to our evidence. There is no need here to refer to 'implausible bootstrapping'. Broome's objection is accurate but, I think, question-begging.

If we allow for beliefs as reasons, then by coming to believe that team B has low confidence, I have acquired a view which, given my other beliefs, is relevant to whether team A will win with a big margin. I will feel pressure to adjust my target belief. In this sense, captured by alternatives (c) and (d), I have added to my evidence simply by believing something.

3. Bootstrapping 2: If beliefs were reasons, any belief you have gives you a reason to have it. That cannot be so; it would be absurd bootstrapping.

Broome continues:

I can reinforce the example. R3 entails that, if you believe p and you believe that if p then p, these beliefs constitute a reason for you to believe p. That cannot be so. We can take it for granted that you believe the tautology that, if p then p. Given that, R3 entails that believing a proposition gives you a reason to believe it. Any belief you have gives you a reason to have it. That cannot be so; it would be absurd bootstrapping.

I have argued that Bootstrapping 1 is question-begging. This move is not available in this case. Whatever your conception of evidence, believing p should not be a reason for itself. This is a problem for a proponent of mind-based reasons, as only for him or her will what we need reasons for and what is a reason belong to the same category; thus only for him or her does this problem arise. For Broome, reasons are explanations of normative facts. He is right that pointing out that one does believe p would on no account be (by itself) a successful explanation of why one ought to believe p.

In order to assess Broome's claim that accepting beliefs as reasons commits one to accepting self-support, I look at Bayesianism for guidance. How does the Bayesian understand the notion of a reason? The starting point of a Bayesian analysis is the following. The thing that is a reason makes what it is a reason for more likely. Evidence E is a reason for hypothesis H if the probability of H given E is higher than the absolute probability of H. If there is smoke, the probability that there is fire increases: $\text{Prob}(F/S) > \text{Prob}(F)$. For any agent whose probability function contains this inequality, smoke and fire are related. The former is a reason for the latter within the agent's epistemic system.[3]

How does this fact – smoke is a reason for thinking that there is fire – influence the agent's belief that there is a fire? It depends. If the agent has no idea that there is smoke, then the fact that he regards smoke as evidence for fire, will not have any effect on the agent's belief-system. If, however, the agent notices smoke, then, by the Rule of Strict Conditionalization, the new probability of there being a fire will increase to the point at which the old conditional probability, of there being a fire given that there is smoke, has put it. Conditional probabilities tells us what, for a particular agent, is a reason for what. This fact will only influence the agent, if evidence becomes available, for example by an agent's noticing that something that is evidence for something else has actually occurred. We can conceptualize this difference between regarding something as a reason and being influenced by it in different ways. For example, we could say that smoke *is* a rea-

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[3] I said that the idea that evidence for H raises the conditional probability of H is the starting point of a Bayesian analysis. Suppose you believe that some event E has happened because you've been there when it happened, you've seen it happening. Is the fact that someone tells you that it happened for you a reason to believe it? It does not raise your probability in its happening, though it would raise it had you not been there. The fact that you already are in possession of stronger evidence should not mean that weaker evidence is no evidence at all.

son for this agent to believe that there is fire but that this agent only *has* a reason to believe that there is fire if he notices smoke.[4]

> (a) For this agent, smoke *is* a reason to believe that there is fire. It is a reason the agent *has*, if he believes that there is smoke. Then, having this reason, the probability of fire increases for him.

A different, equally legitimate way to conceptualize the difference is the following:

> (b) For this agent, given his conditional probabilities, smoke *would be* a reason to believe that there is fire. It becomes or *is* a reason when the agent notices smoke.

Alternatively, we can claim that

> (c) *noticing smoke* is a reason to believe that there is fire.

This reason weakens when we move from noticing smoke to weaker forms of epistemic access. Believing that there is smoke and even weaker notions captured by the degree of belief in there being smoke would be reasons for believing that there is fire. Jeffrey has generalized Strict Conditionalization. Applied to our example Jeffrey Conditionalization gives us the following formula:

> *Jeffrey Conditionalization*:
> $\text{Prob}_{new}(F) = \text{Prob}_{old}(F/S).\text{Prob}_{new}(S) + \text{Prob}_{old}(F/\text{not-}S).\text{Prob}_{new}(\text{not-}S)$

According to Jeffrey, any chance of degrees of belief can have an epistemic impact. We are interested in cases in which the degree of belief that there is smoke increases.

> (d) *Acquiring the belief that S* (in any degree) or increasing one's confidence in S is a reason to believe F if and only if the new probability

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[4]   Note that although I rely on the basic Bayesian idea of connecting reasons with increases in probability, I depart from orthodox Bayesianism by explaining different reason concepts via differences in epistemic access conditions. I have argued that this is necessary to capture the difference between 'reasons' that influence and those that do not influence an agent's epistemic system.

of F (as determined by the appropriate probabilities via Jeffrey Conditionalization) is higher than the old one.

The alternatives (a) – (d) are different ways to conceptualize a Bayesian concept of a reason. With this in hand we can now turn to Broome's example. You acquire the belief that p to some degree – it need not be one. What happens when we conditionalize? Using Jeffrey Conditionalization on the formula

$$\text{Prob}_{new}(p)=\text{Prob}(p/p).\text{Prob}_{new}(p)+\text{Prob}(p/not\text{-}p).\text{Prob}_{new}(p)$$

the conditional probabilities are 1 and 0 respectively so that we get the result (which is undoubtedly correct) that the new belief in p is exactly the same as the new belief in p: $\text{Prob}_{new}(p)=\text{Prob}_{new}(p)$. Is coming to believe that p a reason to believe p? Acquiring any new degree of belief in p will never raise the probability of p. Thus, on the Bayesian understanding of what it is to be a reason, self-support is impossible.

Think of the conditional probability as a measure of the strength by which one proposition supports another. Each proposition supports itself perfectly. There is no loss in strength of support when one moves along the entailment relation. The concept of a reason and the related concept of justification, however, demand more. What I take to be a reason needs to be able to increase my belief in what it is a reason for. This, as we have shown, is impossible on the Bayesian view. Broome is wrong to think that the acceptance of mind-based reasons would commit one to accepting implausible forms of self-justification.

Above I have given alternative conceptualization of reason concepts in a probabilistic framework. According to (a) and (b), we would have to say that p is or would be a reason to believe that p, though it is not a reason an agent can have because it cannot increase an agent's confidence in p. According to (c), we would say that noticing that p can never be a reason for believing that p as it cannot increase its own probability. The same holds for (d). The alternatives (a) – (d) all try to capture the same epistemic situation (with weakening epistemic accessibility restrictions). The question whether it is the smoke or the noticing of the smoke or a belief change regarding the presence of smoke is a reason is just a question regarding the convenience of the adoption of one of these conceptual frameworks. If (a) – (d) do not yield normative differences, it does not matter whether we talk in world-based terms (when we say that smoke is a reason) or in mind-

based terms (when we focus on belief changes regarding smoke) about reasonable changes in beliefs.

If we demand of reasons an effect on an agent's beliefs, in particular on those beliefs that are supported by the reason, then we realize that, in the probabilistic framework adopted, access to p will not increase an agent's confidence in itself. Thus, contrary to Broome, we may accept mind-based reasons without having to accept implausible cases of self-justification.

4. Bootstrapping 3: Intentions are not reasons – The Metaphysical Reading

Holton explains the Bootstrapping Objection as follows:

> Forming an intention to do something surely cannot give one a reason to do it that one would not otherwise have. If it did, we could give ourselves a reason to do something just by intending to do it; and that cannot be right. (Holton 2004, 513)

Note that we can do things which exactly have the feature that, according to the Bootstrapping Objection, would be implausible. We can do things like promising which is such that it provides us with reasons simply by having done it. Compare how implausible an analogous bootstrapping objection would sound when applied to promising:

> Promising to do something surely cannot give one a reason to do it that one would not otherwise have. If it did, we could give ourselves a reason to do something just by promising to do it; and that cannot be right.

If we can simply do things that provide us with reasons, it does seem but a small step to regard mental attitudes as reason. Having formed a plan, or having developed in interest, would then signal a change in one's normative landscape. Had I never become interested in philosophy, for example, my reasons for reading philosophical books would have been minimal. The Bootstrapping Objection needs more motivation in order to have argumentative force.

In Broome (2001), Broome explains the Bootstrapping Objection as follows: 'The objection is that you cannot bootstrap a reason into existence from nowhere, just by forming an intention.' The bootstrapping objection

to the idea that intentions are reasons is presented as an application of the general metaphysical claim that something cannot come from nothing. 'You cannot bootstrap a reason into existence from nowhere.' A proponent of mind-based normativity, however, does not create reasons out of nothing.

To see why not, we should distinguish between two things: First, there are, what we might call 'reason facts', i.e. facts about what is a reason for what. The fact that a liquid is poisonous is a reason against drinking it. The fact that it would make him understand something important is a reason for explaining it to him. You do not create reason facts; you do not create facts about what is a reason for what. What one can create, however, are, secondly, the things which, according to the reason facts, are reasons. Whatever I do, I create many things. Some of these things are reasons for me and for others to do or not to do certain things. Most people agree that promising to F is a reason to F. One does not create this reason-fact that promising is a reason, but one can create promises. The promise has not been created out of nothing. If desires or intentions are reasons, then by coming to want something a reason has come into existence. There is nothing metaphysically puzzling about this. As we are able to create things, we are able to create facts which are reasons. This does not entail that we create facts regarding what is a reason for what.

When a defender of mind-based normativity talks of mental states as reasons, Broome accepts analogous wide-scope requirements. According to the mind-based account, one creates a reason by forming an intention, whereas Broome thinks that there is a requirement with the content that, if one intends, one does it. These views would merge if one could detach the consequent of the conditional obligation. Broome (2009, 130) endorses necessary detachment. 'Nec' stands for necessity, 'O' for obligation: if Nec(a) and O(if a, the b), then O(b). He applies this rule to promises:

> Let us suppose this is a requirement of morality: Morality requires of you that, if you have promised to *F*, you *F*. Now supposed you have promised to *F*. That is a fact you can do nothing about; you cannot change the past. Let us treat it as necessary. Then Necessary Detachment allows us to conclude that morality require of you that you *F*. In general, we can derive from the above principle that 'If you have promised to *F*, morality requires you to *F*'. I find this a satisfactory explanation of a feature of promising that has puzzled some philosophers. How

are you in a position, merely by saying something, to impose a moral requirement on yourself? The answer is that you are automatically and constantly under the conditional requirement that, if you have promised to *F*, you *F*. You do not bring this requirement on yourself; it is an inescapable requirement of morality. Then, when you make a promise to *F*, it simply follows that you are required by morality to *F*. Nothing surprising happens: a conclusion follows. (Broome 2009, 130)

You do not create reason-facts; they are independent of your powers. You do create facts which, according to reason-facts, are reasons. This is not a mysterious power. You are 'constantly under a conditional requirement': when you promise you make it the case that this requirement applies to you. Why should we not hold the same view about intentions? You are always under a conditional requirement and in intending you make it applicable to you. Any rule of detachment will make the wide-scope view, given the content of the requirements, which relate mental states, normatively equivalent to the narrow-scope view, according to which normativity is mind-based. My aim in this section was not to establish the mind-based view. My aim was to show that the mind-based view should not be rejected on metaphysical grounds. Creation *ex nihilo* is neither here nor there.

Rawls famously objected to utilitarianism that it would violate the separateness of persons. This is, of course, not a metaphysical objection. Utilitarianism does not deny that I am different from the person next to me and that I am, in this sense, a separate person. Utilitarianism violates the separateness of persons because it treats the good and bad things that befall different people as if we were all one person, society. This view is normatively implausible. It tells us that we can sacrifice the one if thereby many smaller goods come to the many. The same, I think, applies to the bootstrapping objection. It does not strengthen the bootstrapping objection if it is dressed up in metaphysical clothing.[5] The real force of the bootstrapping objection must be that the idea it tries to reject, namely that beliefs, intentions, or

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[5]   It seems to me that the attraction of metaphysical formulations of the Bootstrapping Objection is their rhetorical force. Here is an example: 'Broome draws from Michael Bratman a powerful point [...] which he calls the bootstrapping objection... why should a rational man worry whether he has any reason to psi if he has only to conceive an intention to fi, to which psi-ing is a means, and a reason to fi will spring into existence like Athene from the head of Zeus?' Price (2008, 79).

desires are reasons, has implausible normative implications. It is to this interpretation that I turn next.

5. Bootstrapping 3 – The normative reading: First Version

Broome writes:

> The view that intentions are reasons is implausible. If you have no reason to do something, it is implausible that you can give yourself a reason just by forming the intention of doing it. How could you create a reason for yourself out of nothing? Suppose, say, that you have no reason either for or against doing some act, and you happen to decide to do it. Now you intend to do it. So now, if intentions are reasons, you have a reason to do it. Since you have no contrary reason not to do it, the balance of reasons is in favour of your doing it. You now actually ought to do it, therefore. But this is implausible. It is implausible that just deciding to do something can make it the case that you ought to do it, when previously that was not the case. (Broome 2001, 98)

Suppose I can either go to the left or go to the right and, suppose, I have no reason to prefer going one way to going the other way. I have to make a decision. Whatever I decide will explain why I did what I ended up doing. Does such a decision make it rational to go one way rather than another? What else could make it rational? Any hesitation in saying 'You have decided to turn left, so turn left' stems from the possibility of reconsideration. At some point, however, reconsideration itself will look irrational.

Here is another example (see Verbeek 2007): When you can bestow a benefit on either one of two equally deserving persons but not on both, it is fair to hold an equal-chance lottery. You have to decide whom to benefit depending on the outcome of the chance event: if heads comes up the first person gets it, if tails, the second person will benefit. There is no reason to prefer this assignment of benefits to outcomes of the coin toss to the opposite one. Once you have made this decision, however, and the coin has come up heads you have a very strong reason to provide the benefit in accordance with your antecedent assignment. This reason is created by nothing but your decision and, antecedently, you had no reason to prefer one alternative over the other. We would need a more detailed example in order to assess the idea that allowing intentions to be reasons would have im-

plausible normative consequences. Thinking about cases in which one has no reason to do this or that looks like appealing to cases of indifference in which simply forming the intention will create a reason to go one way rather than the other.

6. Bootstrapping 3 – The Normative Reading: Second Version

Broome illustrates the bootstrapping objection with the following example:[6] Should you go to Paris? Suppose you have decided; you intend to go. Broome writes:

> If the balance of antecedent reasons was in favour of your going to Paris, you ought to go there. You have made the right decision and you ought to carry it out. If the balance of antecedent reasons was against your going to Paris, you ought not to go there. You have made the wrong decision and you ought not to carry it out. Your intention itself does not count one whit in favour of going to Paris. It makes no difference to what you should do. What you should do depends only on your antecedent reasons. Suppose there is a slight balance of antecedent reasons against going, but you made a mistake in your calculations and wrongly decided to go. A short time later, having invested nothing in the decision, you discover your mistake. Should you change your mind? If intentions were reasons, there would automatically be a reason not to, and if the balance of antecedent reasons would be slight enough, you should stick to your decision. But actually you should change your mind. Since you have invested nothing in your wrong decision you should change it. (Broome 2001, 99)

One could dispute Broome's conclusion if one added to his example. Broome's example presupposes a thesis about the priority of action over intention. According to this thesis, the reasons for an action determine the reasons for the corresponding intention. If your reasons favour going to Paris, you ought to go and nothing more need or can be said about the reasons for intending to go. When we think about reasons for and against

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[6]   This example structurally mirrors Bratman's case about meeting Susan or meeting Kathy from Bratman (1981), which in Bratman (1987) was changed to the Mondale example about what to do in a political debate.

going to Paris, we can summarize their effect in a judgment of the form that going is better for you than not going. Intending to go might have autonomous effects. Intending to go to Paris might be good for you, independently of the value of going there. Even if you will not enjoy Paris much, you might like to be the kind of person who can honestly say 'See you in Paris!' or 'Well, can't make it tonight, I'm off to Paris.'[7]

Broome, I said, presupposes a contentious priority view. However, the truth of the thesis, when applied to the case at hand, might just be built into the example – and this is, I admit, a natural way of reading it. Broome argues that it would lead to normative implausible consequences if we assumed that intentions are reasons. We would, he says, have to accept that we ought to carry out our irrational plans and this, I agree, does not sound right.

On a more general level, we might want to say something in its favor. Some states do not lose their normal reason-giving force, simply because they are the result of our own irrationality. Suppose you decided to make yourself very thirsty by not drinking anything for a whole day. There was no further point to it; it was simply a silly idea. Nevertheless being thirsty retains its normal reason-giving force. If you are thirsty, you should drink.

Thirst as well as other states of deprivation, are, however, a special case. In general, irrational states are normatively significant in the sense of being 'bad', i.e. one should abandon these states, one should try to get out of them. They are not normatively significant in the sense of reasons. The normal role of a belief as a reason is to support other beliefs; it is not to be eliminated. The normal normative role of an intention is to be fulfilled by our agency. This makes thirst special, because being eliminated (what is the common feature of bad mental states) is, in this case, its normal normative role. An irrational intention, however, should not be eliminated by being fulfilled – one should simply stop intending as one does. Thus I ac-

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[7]   Intentions, plans, commitments can have autonomous benefits, i.e. benefits which do not arise from benefits of what is intended. It is good for us to be able to form plans and commitments. For example, they allow us to overcome temptations. The acceptance of what I have called attitude-related reasons for intentions (see Piller 2006), becomes relevant for what we ought to do if we accept the priority of intention view. One should do what one should intend to do. What one should intend to so is determined by 'reasons for actions', i.e. by the benefits of what it is that we intend to do, and by the autonomous reasons for intending to do it.

cept the following lesson from Broome's example: Irrational intentions do not make doing what one intends to do rational.[8]

Let me come back to the beginning of my discussion. I complained about Broome's first example. If your evidence does not decide whether emissions of carbon dioxide are harmful, how can you simply believe that it is poisonous? That, I said, would be irrational. Now we have come to a point in unraveling the bootstrapping objection at which this irrationality has become the central feature of the objection. Irrationality does not generate rationality. Even if one's reasoning process is impeccable, if one starts from something silly one will end up with something equally silly. Someone's belief that France is still a monarchy is not well supported by his belief that he is the King of France.

Silly premise beliefs (or silly intentions) don't make it the case that we ought to have the respective conclusion beliefs (or that we ought to do what we intend to). What does this show about whether mental states can be reasons? Broome thinks it shows that beliefs and intentions cannot be reasons. We have to replace attitudinal reasons with wide-scope rational requirements. To make this view immune to the problem of normative inconsistency, the normativity of rational requirements is put in doubt. I offer a different reaction. We could keep the category of attitudinal reasons as long as we restrict these reasons to attitudes which are not normatively objectionable, i.e. we simply exclude irrational premise beliefs and irrational intentions from being reasons.

Would this be an ad hoc defense of attitudinal reasons? I don't think it would because the principle that irrationality does not generate rationality is independently plausible. Consider the probabilistic view of epistemic rea-

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[8]   Bratman (1981) disagrees. He actually accepts that an irrationally formed intention can make it rational to do what one intends to do. Even irrational intentions can tip the balance of reasons. We end up with a case in which it is rational to take the means to an intended end that one should not intend. Bratman concludes, 'The slogan that rationality in intention and action just is rationality relative to the totality of relevant considerations, is a dogma that cases of bootstrap rationality force us to reject' (Bratman 1981, 265). If Bratman is right, this would open up a different line of resisting Broome's Bootstrapping Objection – Broome would not have found a case in which accepting intentions as reasons would have implausible normative implications. However, I will not take this line. On this matter, I agree with Broome: an irrational intention will not render rational what absent the intention would be irrational. This strikes me as true as long as autonomous benefits of having intentions are being excluded.

sons explained earlier. We have learnt that it is not enough that the conditional probability of the conclusion C is higher given the premise P than it would otherwise be. We have already met one other condition in the discussion of self-justification. There have to be circumstances in which an increase in my belief of P increases my belief in C. Believing P never increases (by itself) its own probability. Now we meet another condition. Only things that are themselves not normatively objectionable can do the work of reasons which is to show us what one ought to do or ought to believe. Compare the force of reasons to the illuminating effect a source of light has on the objects of its surroundings. In order to illuminate an object the object (a) has to be in a proper place where it can be reached by the light. (This is the conditional probability or the standing-in-the-being-a-reason-for relation.) Furthermore, (b) if there is black tape around the light source, it won't illuminate either: normative force can be undermined. It is working alright internally, and it would emit light if it were not for the black tape. Furthermore, the light source has to be in normal working order. If it is internally broken, it will not emit any light. This is the condition I emphasize here. The conclusion belief is in the right place. The premise stands in the being-a-reason-for relation to the conclusion belief but it is not a reason. Being broken, it does not emit any light.

I said that the silly premise belief is not a reason for the conclusion belief although it would have been a reason had it been normatively okay. No assumption has been made about what it means to be normatively acceptable. Acceptance of the irrationality-in/no-rationality-out principle is independent of the question whether normative acceptability should be understood in mind-based or in world-based terms. Thus our discussion of the bootstrapping objection has not brought to light an argument against a mind-based account of normativity. This was the point of the story with which I started. In this example my belief that I am a better than average philosopher is irrational on the basis of all the other things I believe. If everyone agrees that irrationality does not generate rationality and if, as I have tried to show, the bootstrapping objection boils down to this very claim, it cannot dislodge any view about the nature of reasons.[9]

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[9]   One might want to object to the idea that intentions are reasons on different grounds. If intentions would be reasons, in addition to the reason there are for what one intends, we end up double-counting. This worry, however, affects mind-based views in the same way as it affects world-based views. If we counted the goodness of an

There is another bootstrapping worry which has a different and more limited target. It does not object to mind-based normativity as such. It rather objects to a specific mind-based principle. Kolodny presents this worry as follows:

> Suppose I believe that I have conclusive reason to have some attitude. In some sense, I ought to have that attitude; it would be irrational of me not to have it. Now suppose that 'ought' here means 'have reason'. Then we get the bootstrapping result that if I believe that I have conclusive reason to have some attitude, then I in fact have reason to have it. This is absurd. (Kolodny 2005, 512)

This worry affects a principle which assigns the following role to normative beliefs: If you are convinced that you ought to do something, then you ought to do it. If this principle holds, believing that one ought to do something makes it true that one ought to do it. Accepting such a principle comes at the price of rejecting our fallibility in normative matters. This is, I agree, a high price. Only revisionism about the content of our obligations – they would have to be determined by the same features as our beliefs about our obligations – could render such an infallibility principle palatable. Nevertheless beliefs about what one ought to do have to play a central role in a normative theory. Having concluded one's deliberation, one has to be committed to doing what one has thus concluded. Otherwise, one would not have concluded one's deliberation. I have argued that the perception that the bootstrapping objection would refute any mind-based account of normativity is mistaken. However the question how a mind-based account explains the normative role of normative beliefs will here remain unanswered.[10]

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option as well as the things that make it good, we encounter the same danger of double-counting. In both cases, we can attribute normative force to goodness or to the intention, as long as we ensure that double-counting will be avoided.

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