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A HYBRID ACCOUNT OF STRUCTURAL RATIONALITY**

Abstract

In this paper, I will present and defend a hybrid account of structural rationality, simultaneously accommodating what two rival accounts, wide-scopism and narrow-scopism, get right. Wide-scopism holds that moving from an incoherent state to a coherent state is always a structurally rational thing to do. Narrow-scopism holds that there are cases in which the particular way in which coherence is achieved matters to structural rationality. The hybrid account I offer here holds that these two claims are compatible and true.

Keywords: coherence, structural rationality, akrasia, wide scope, narrow scope, rational requirements

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I believe that I ought to quit smoking; however, I don't intend to quit smoking. I suffer from a well-known variety of *akrasia*, where my belief regarding what I ought to do does not cohere with the absence of the corresponding intention. It is widely believed that being incoherent in a way exemplified, for instance, by akratic combinations of attitudes means being irrational: I am irrational insofar as I believe that I ought to quit smoking while lacking the intention to do so. So, in order for me to be fully rational, I need to resolve this incoherence. A natural thought is that there are two equally good – or, as it is sometimes put, "symmetrical" – ways of achieving this: either adopt the intention to quit smoking, or drop the belief that I ought to quit smoking. If I come to adopt the intention to quit smoking while keeping the belief, or if I drop the belief while continuing to lack the intention, I am no longer akratic and maintain coherence among my

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attitudes. It is a short step from here to conclude that rationality requires me to resolve my akratic state in one way *or* another, but it does not discriminate between the different ways in which I might avoid irrationality.

We need to be careful about the sort of rationality that is applied here. The sort of irrationality that I exemplify when I am akratic does not have anything to do with the reasons I might have for the particular attitudes in virtue of which I am akratic. One can correctly judge that I am being irrational solely on the basis of the particular attitudes I have, without having any pieces of information about the reasons I might have for those attitudes. The irrationality exemplified by akrasia concerns the fact that the relevant *combination* of attitudes is incoherent, and the coherence of a given combination of attitudes is independent of the reasons one might have for the particular attitudes that are the constituents of that combination.[1] In this paper, I will adopt the now standard terminology and call the sort of rationality that concerns achieving coherence *structural* rationality – the contrast here being with *substantive* rationality, which is roughly a matter of being supported by reasons.[2]

A major debate between wide-scopers and narrow-scopers about the nature of structural rationality 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 structural rationality always takes the following form: rationality requires one (to Y, if one Xs).[3] 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, structurally speaking, to either abandon the belief in question or form the relevant intention. Narrow-scopers, on the

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[1]Apart from akrasia, there are other examples of irrationality that stem from incoherence. One is, for instance, *means-end incoherence* (intending to X, believing that Y is necessary for X, but not intending to Y); another is, to use Huemer's (2011) term, *meta-incoherence* (believing that *p* while also believing that it is irrational to believe that *p*). For the purposes of this paper, nothing much hangs on some otherwise potentially significant differences between these distinct examples of incoherence; so, for simplicity's sake, I will take akrasia as my working example of the sort of irrationality in question.

[2]Lee (2021: 6564) notes: "To my knowledge, Scanlon (1998, 2007) was the first to introduce the distinction between structural and substantive rationality." Henceforth, I will always mean structural rationality by "rationality" (similarly for its cognates) unless otherwise mentioned.

[3]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).

other hand, hold that the "rationality requires" operator sometimes takes narrow scope over the consequent of the relevant conditional, and that a requirement of structural rationality sometimes takes the following form: if one Xs, then rationality requires one to Y.[4] 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, structurally speaking, to form the relevant intention: abandoning the belief is *not* the correct structural response to the incoherent combination of attitudes I happen to have, despite the fact that I end up with a *coherent* state by abandoning the belief. In a nutshell, the difference between these two positions might be put thus: Wide-scopers endorse but narrow-scopers reject the "short step" I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this paper – that is, the move from there being two different ways of resolving a conflict to it being the case that these ways are equally good from the perspective of structural rationality.

Much ink has been spilled on the virtues and vices of each of these two positions, and the debate has been fierce and packed with insightful arguments. However, there is something unsettling, already implicit in the foregoing remarks, about the entire debate: it is hard to see *why* there is a debate in the first place about the scope of structural rationality requirements. This is because it is unclear how narrow-scopers can possibly hope to be providing an adequate account of these requirements *if* we adopt the widespread conception of structural rationality as the sort of rationality that simply concerns achieving coherence among one's attitudes.[5] A platitude that I have observed above is that if a subject has

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[4]For a defense of narrow-scopism, see, for instance, (Bedke 2009), (Kolodny 2005, 2007), (Lord 2014), (Schroeder 2004, 2009).

[5]Kolodny (2005: 530), arguably the most prominent narrow-scoper, writes: "Subjective rationality ['subjective rationality' is Kolodny's term for structural rationality] is, roughly speaking, a matter of maintaining consistency [or coherence] among one's attitudes." Taken by itself and absent further qualifications, this passage suggests that Kolodny appears to adopt the thesis that structural rationality is all about simply maintaining coherence among one's attitudes. However, this suggestion is misleading because there are other passages in Kolodny's writings that point towards a rejection of that very thesis. For instance, Kolodny (2007: 2) puts the requirement that wide-scopers think apply to akrasia as follows: "Necessarily, rationality requires you *to avoid or exit, in whatever way you like*, the following state: that you believe at *t* you ought to *X* but you do not intend at *t* to *X*." The "in whatever way you like" part is the part that Kolodny argues should be rejected, which amounts to a defense of the view that structural rationality can*not* be thought of as the sort of rationality that simply concerns achieving coherence. As I claim below, the unclarity about the nature of structural rationality has played a major role in shaping the debate between narrow-scopers and wide-scopers.

two conflicting attitudes, then she can maintain coherence by revising one or the other of those conflicting attitudes. If structural rationality simply concerns maintaining coherence among one's attitudes, then it follows that if a subject has two conflicting attitudes then she can maintain structural rationality by revising one or the other of these conflicting attitudes. This is just what wide-scopism says. So, wide-scopism – the thesis that all structural rationality requirements are symmetrical – straightforwardly follows from the assumption that structural rationality simply concerns maintaining coherence among one's attitudes. If I violate a requirement of structural rationality by having an incoherent combination of attitudes X and not-Y, then it trivially follows that there *is* a requirement of structural rationality that I violate that takes the form "don't (X and not-Y)." Therefore, there appears to be no argumentative slack that narrow-scopers can exploit in an attempt to defend the position that, in the case of some pairs of conflicting attitudes, revising a particular member of that pair is *structurally superior* to revising the other. Given this, it is understandable why some wide-scopers think that wide-scopism is "uncontestable" (Darwall 1983: 15), and rejecting it rests on "a confusion" (Broome 1999: 410).

I believe the reasoning just given against narrow-scopism is decisive, and the only way for narrow-scopers to stop being conceived as a "naive foil"[6] is by arguing that structural rationality is *not* always a matter of *simply* achieving coherence. In other words, narrow-scopism can only be a candidate for a plausible account of structural rationality if there are cases in which there is *more* to structural rationality than simply attaining coherence among one's attitudes (or cases in which, as I shall sometimes put it, the way in which coherence is achieved matters to structural rationality). In a given conflict, a narrow-scoper can claim that one method of resolution is structurally superior to another only if they assume that, in that particular case, structural rationality is not just about achieving coherence, but about achieving it in a particular way.

However, this move by the narrow-scoper creates a problem for wide-scopism – the other party of the debate. Wide-scopism is, as I have maintained above, tailor-made for the thesis that structural rationality is always about simply maintaining coherence among one's attitudes; however, if there is more to structural rationality than simply maintaining coherence among one's attitudes – as must be the case if narrow-scopism is not a non-starter – then wide-scopism, being

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[6]Lord (2014: 463), a proponent of narrow-scopism, observes: "At least in the debate since Broome (1999), the narrow-scoper is *almost always* considered the naive foil" (emphasis original).

designed to be oblivious to the "more" part is automatically disqualified to be an adequate account of structural rationality. Wide-scopism combines the idea that coherence can be maintained by revising one or the other of a given pair of conflicting attitudes with the thesis that structural rationality is all about simply maintaining coherence, thus delivering the result that all structural rationality requirements are symmetrical. If there is more to structural rationality than maintaining coherence, then wide-scopism is not in a position to account for that "extra" part.

The foregoing remarks strongly suggest that the *real* debate between narrow-scopers and wide-scopers is about what structural rationality is about. The disagreement about the logical scope of structural rationality requirements is merely a manifestation of a more fundamental debate about an adequate conception of structural rationality. When narrow-scopers claim that some structural rationality requirements take a narrow scope, they might be plausibly taken as claiming, at one remove, that structural rationality is not always a matter of simply achieving coherence. When wide-scopers claim that all structural rationality requirements take a wide scope, they might be plausibly taken as claiming, at one remove, that structural rationality is always a matter of simply achieving coherence. The upshot is this: narrow-scopers and wide-scopers advance rival conceptions of structural rationality rather than offering alternative accounts of the logical scope of the requirements imposed on the same concept of structural rationality.

In what follows, I will address what I have identified as the "meat" of the ongoing debate: is structural rationality all about simply maintaining coherence? I will argue that the answer to this question is no: narrow-scopers are right to insist that there are cases in which the way in which coherence is achieved matters to whether one is structurally rational. However, as I will also argue, narrow-scopers are wrong to insist that this entails a wholesale rejection of wide-scopism. In order to see why, we need to distinguish the definitive *claim* of wide-scopism from what I call its fundamental *insight*. The definitive claim of wide-scopism is that all structural rationality requirements are wide scope (or symmetrical), while the fundamental insight of wide-scopism is that achieving coherence is always a rational thing to do. I will argue that – contra what narrow-scopers assume – rejecting the definitive claim of wide-scopism does not require rejecting its fundamental insight, and holding that some structural rationality requirements are narrow scope (or asymmetrical), as narrow-scopers do, is consistent with

holding that achieving coherence is always a structurally rational thing to do, as wide-scopers do.

Let me begin with what wide-scopism gets right, *viz.* its fundamental insight. Coherence is, structurally speaking, better than incoherence, and coherence can be achieved by revising one or the other of the conflicting attitudes. Using Stephen Darwall's apt expression, I take these two claims as "uncontestable." A crucial point is that from these two claims it straightforwardly follows that we need an account of structural rationality that acknowledges that moving from an incoherent state to a coherent one – no matter how that is achieved (that is, irrespective of whether it is achieved by revising one or the other of the conflicting attitudes) – is *always* a structurally rational progress. This is then what I take to be the fundamental insight of wide-scopism: if a given subject has a pair of conflicting attitudes at a certain time and she attains coherence at a later time (that is, she revises one or the other of those conflicting attitudes), then she has made structurally rational progress. Entailed by what I take to be uncontestable claims, I also take the fundamental insight of wide-scopism to be uncontestable.

This means that narrow-scopers are wrong when they claim that there are some cases in which some incoherence is eliminated but *no* rational progress is thereby made. Mark Schroeder, a proponent of narrow-scopism, asks us to consider the case of Freddie, who is keen on dancing and believes that he can only dance by going to a party, but he does not go:

> If [Freddie] then changes his mind about whether there will be dancing at the party, then he puts himself in a better position. He no longer has this kind of inconsistency between his aims, beliefs, and actions. So he takes himself from a worse position to a better. But despite the fact that this kind of move makes him more rational at a time, it is not a rationally permissible move. (Schroeder 2004: 347)

However, this is at least a *very* odd thing to say. Surely, a move that makes one "more rational at a time" (or a move that takes one "from a worse position to a better") must as such be a rationally permissible move. The point to be emphasized is that denying that moving from an incoherent to a coherent state is always structurally rational progress is a bullet that is too deadly to bite. Biting this bullet requires denying either that coherence is, structurally speaking, better than incoherence, or that coherence can be achieved by revising one or the other of the conflicting attitudes; evidently, both these options are desperate moves. So, we need an account of structural rationality that accommodates the fundamental

(and uncontestable) insight of wide-scopism, *viz.* achieving coherence is always a structurally rational thing to do.

It should be noted that the fact that achieving coherence is always a structurally rational thing to do does not entail that structural rationality is always a matter of simply achieving coherence. To put it another way, the fundamental insight of wide-scopism does not by itself entail its definitive claim, *viz.* that all structural rationality requirements are symmetrical. It might well be the case that the particular way in which coherence is achieved sometimes matters to structural rationality, despite the fact that achieving coherence, irrespective of how it is done, is always a structurally rational thing to do. Compare: we can agree that how you win a match (e.g., the exact score of the match) sometimes matters to your reputation, while also agreeing that winning a match – whatever the exact score is – is always the reputationally right thing to do (that is, it always contributes to your reputation). Winning is good, winning spectacularly is better, and when the coach of the winning team tells his players "You did good (by winning), but you could have done better (could have won more spectacularly)," what comes after "but" does not cancel out what comes before it. The point is that there is room for an account of structural rationality that combines the fundamental insight of wide-scopism with the thesis (endorsed by the narrow-scopers) that structural rationality is not always a matter of simply achieving coherence. The thesis that achieving coherence is, structurally speaking, always good does *not* compete with the thesis that some ways of achieving it might be structurally better than others.

Now, I will argue that structural rationality is not always a matter of simply achieving coherence (or, equivalently, that there are conflict cases in which resolving the conflict in a particular way is *structurally* better than resolving it in another way). My argument proceeds in four steps. First, there is such a thing as acting, broadly speaking, in a way that *fits* the character of one's mental attitudes, such as beliefs, intentions, and desires. What it means to act in a way that fits the character of one's mental attitudes can be taken, conveniently for the purposes of this paper, as being captured by the generalizations that constitute "folk psychology." There is a difference, for instance, between fearing that p and hoping that p that can be gleaned from the folk psychological generalizations that are true of those attitudes. If a given subject fears that p, then she is expected to desire that *not-p*, which is what fits the character of the attitude of fearing that p. And, if she hopes that p, then she is expected to be pleased that p upon discovering that p, which is what fits the character of the attitude of hoping that p.

What folk psychological generalizations are purported to capture is what it is to act in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes: if there were no such thing as acting in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes, then there would be no folk psychological generalizations by appeal to which we explain and predict one's attitudes and actions.

Second, a failure to act in a way that the fits the character of one's attitudes might rightly be viewed as a *rational* failure. Attitudes play a central role in making sense of a subject's actions, and if a subject does not act in accordance with the character of the attitudes that we are entitled to attribute to her, then her actions fail to be intelligible for us. Furthermore, an agent's actions are irrational insofar as they are not intelligible. If we know, for instance, that Indiana Jones has ophidiophobia (extreme fear of snakes), then we expect his actions to exhibit signs of fear in the presence of snakes. If he does not act scared when faced with a particular snake but, for instance, acts rather relaxed despite his ophidiophobia, then – other things being equal – we would be at a loss to make his actions intelligible and we can rightly suspect that he must have "lost his mind."[7] Alternatively, consider believing a contradiction, which is a clear example of a failure to act, doxastically speaking, in a way that fits the character of the believing attitude. The natural reaction we have towards someone who sincerely asserts a contradiction is befuddlement: if a subject sincerely asserts both *p* and *not-p*, we are inclined *not* to take those assertions at face value because they are, taken at face value, unintelligible: unintelligibility means irrationality.

Third, the sort of rationality that is lacking when one fails to act, broadly speaking, in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes is *structural* rationality. There are two reasons to think that this is true. First, a failure to act in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes is a rational failure, irrespective of the reasons or evidence one might have for those attitudes. So, this sort of failure is not due to lacking substantive rationality. On the plausible assumption that the distinction between substantive and structural rationality is exhaustive, the sort of failure in question must be due to lacking structural rationality. Second, a failure to act in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes results in incoherence. When Indiana John does not exhibit signs of fear in the presence of a particular snake,

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[7]Surely, if Indiana Jones' actions exhibit less and less signs of fear in the presence of various snakes over the course of time, then we might wish to come to conclude that he no longer has ophidiophobia. However, the present case rests on the possibility that having ophidiophobia is compatible with showing no observable sign of fear in a particular case of encountering a snake.

his ophidiophobia does not cohere with his actions (or inactions). Similarly, when I believe I ought to quit smoking but do not act accordingly (do not, for instance, form an intention to quit smoking), I fail to act in a way that fits the character of my belief, thus resulting in incoherence between that belief and (the absence of) the corresponding intention. Since the sort of rationality that is concerned with incoherence is structural rationality, the sort of rationality that is lacking in the case of failure to act in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes must be structural.

In the previous three steps, I have argued that acting in a way that fits the character of one's attitude is a structurally rational thing to do. If this is so, then the possibility that emerges is that structural rationality is not always a matter of simply achieving coherence: there might be cases in which one achieves coherence but does *not* thereby act in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes. In such cases, if there are any, the way in which coherence is achieved and the way in which it would be achieved if one acted in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes are *not* equally good from the perspective of structural rationality: the latter is structurally better than the former.

Now, we have arrived at the fourth, and final, step in my argument. There *are* conflict cases in which one achieves coherence but does not act in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes. Indeed, cases of akrasia are a prime example. Suppose that at a certain time I come to form a belief that I didn't have before: the belief that I ought to quit smoking. If that is the case, then I am expected to form the corresponding intention at a later time: if I believe at a certain time that I ought to quit smoking, I act in a way that fits the character of my belief *by* forming at a later time the intention to quit smoking.[8] The state I would end up with if I did not to form the intention to quit smoking despite the fact that I have already formed the belief that I ought to do so would be incoherent; also, the question "why have I ended up with an incoherent state?" can be answered by appeal to the fact that I have failed to act in a way that fits the character of my belief.

Let us now consider the converse scenario. Suppose that at a certain time I lack the intention to quit smoking. This by itself does not give rise to any expectation that I don't come to form the belief that I ought to quit smoking at a later time:

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[8]This is what distinguishes, in part, believing that I ought to quit smoking from, say, hoping that I ought to quit smoking. If I come to hope at a certain time that I ought to quit smoking, the character of the attitude that I have does not require me to form the intention to quit smoking at a later time.

if I lack at a certain time the intention to quit smoking, I can come to form at a later time the belief that I ought to quit smoking *without* failing to act in a way that fits the character of my lacking the intention to do so.[9] As in the previous scenario, the state I end up with if I were to come to believe that I ought to quit smoking despite the fact that the intention to do so has been missing is incoherent; however, unlike what happens in the previous scenario, the question "why have I ended up with an incoherent state?" cannot be answered by appeal to the fact that I have failed to act in a way that fits the character of my lacking intention (simply because there is no such fact). The truth that forming the belief that I ought to quit smoking while lacking the intention to do so results in incoherence does not entail that by forming the belief I fail to act in a way that fits the character of my lacking intention.

I can resolve the conflict between believing that I ought to quit smoking and not having the intention to quit smoking by doing one of two things: I can drop the belief, or I can form the intention. Coherence can be achieved by doing either. However, if I form the intention to quit smoking, I thereby act in a way that fits the character of my belief that I ought to quit smoking; however, if I drop the belief that I ought to quit smoking, I don't thereby act in a way that fits the character of my lacking the intention to quit smoking. So, this is a conflict case in which by dropping the belief I can achieve coherence but do not thereby act in a way that fits the character of my lacking the intention to quit smoking. Since by forming the intention I achieve coherence and also act in a way that fits the character of my belief, forming the intention is structurally *better* as a way of achieving coherence than dropping the belief.

This completes my argument that structural rationality is not always a matter of simply achieving coherence. It goes without saying that this is compatible with the idea that structural rationality is sometimes a matter of simply achieving coherence. If, in a given conflict case, one way of resolving it is not structurally better than the other (that is, if one way of resolving the conflict fits the character of the attitudes as well as the other), then structural rationality in this conflict case is a matter of simply achieving coherence. I take it that believing a contradiction is a case in which all that is required by structural rationality is simply achieving

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[9]Indeed, this is a familiar type of situation: subjects who lack the intention to X can later come to believe that they ought to X; by coming to form this belief, they don't thereby fail to act in a way that fits the character of their lack of such an intention. There is *no* folk psychological generalization that goes like this: if a given subject lacks the intention to X at a certain time, then she is expected not to form at a later time the belief that she ought to X.

coherence. If I believe that *p* and that *not-p*, then I can achieve coherence either by dropping the belief that *p*, or by dropping the belief that *not-p*; doing the former fits the character of my attitudes as well as the latter. In such a case, both options are equally good from the perspective of structural rationality.

The account I offer of structural rationality allows us to draw a distinction between *partial* and *full* structural rationality, while neither wide-scopism nor narrow-scopism acknowledges such a distinction. On wide-scopism, if a subject is coherent, then she has achieved full structural rationality: there is no possibility of achieving coherence in a less than fully rational way. On narrow-scopism, if a subject achieves coherence but does so by failing to comply with the relevant narrow-scope requirement, then she is not structurally rational at all:[10] there is again no possibility of achieving coherence in a less than fully rational way. On both accounts, one is either fully structurally rational or not structurally rational at all: there is no such thing as partial structural rationality. On my account, however, a subject can achieve merely partial structural rationality without achieving full structural rationality. Merely partial structural rationality is achieved if coherence is achieved in a certain way, while there is an alternative way in which it could be achieved that fits the character of one's attitudes better. Full structural rationality is achieved if coherence is achieved in a certain way and there is no alternative way in which it could be achieved that fits the character of one's attitudes better.

Consider once again the akratic case: I believe that I ought to quit smoking while lacking the intention to do so. In this case, if I come to drop my belief that I ought to quit smoking, I achieve merely partial structural rationality but not full structural rationality. If I come to form the intention to quit smoking, I achieve full structural rationality. There are two different structural rationality requirements that are *simultaneously* in place for me in the akratic case: one is the requirement that I achieve coherence (this corresponds to the wide scope requirement defended by the wide-scopers); the other is that I act in a way that fits the character of my attitudes (this corresponds to the narrow scope requirement defended by the narrow-scopers). If I comply with the latter, I automatically comply with the former, in which case I achieve full structural rationality. However, there are ways of complying with the former that end up with violating the latter:

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[10]As mentioned above, Schroeder qua the narrow-scoper is very clear on this point: in a case in which a narrow-scope requirement is in place, achieving coherence while failing to comply with the narrow-scope requirement is "not a rationally permissible move" (Schroeder 2004: 347).

I can achieve coherence while not acting in a way that fits the character of my attitudes, in which case I achieve merely partial structural rationality.

Let me highlight the main claims for which I have argued above. First, we need an account of structural rationality that appreciates the fundamental insight of wide-scopism, *viz.* that moving from an incoherent state to a coherent one is always structurally rational progress. Second, an account of structural rationality that appreciates the fundamental insight of wide-scopism is not as such incompatible with a rejection of the definitive claim of wide-scopism, *viz.* all structural rationality requirements are symmetrical: such an account does not entail that structural rationality is always a matter of simply achieving coherence. Third, structural rationality is not always a matter of simply achieving coherence: there are conflict cases in which resolving the conflict in a particular way is structurally better than resolving it in another way. More specifically, there are conflict cases in which resolving the conflict in one way fits the character of the relevant attitudes better than resolving it another way, and acting in a way that fits the character of one's attitudes is a structurally rational thing to do.

The resulting account of structural rationality can be properly called *hybrid*. Narrow-scopers insist that there are cases in which the way in which coherence is achieved matters to structural rationality. Wide-scopers hold that achieving coherence – however that is done – is always a structurally rational thing to do. I have argued that these claims are compatible and true.

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