

(*This is a penultimate draft of a paper forthcoming in *Philosophical Quarterly*. Please cite the published version)

What Is Structural Rationality?

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Abstract: The normativity of so-called “coherence” or “structural” requirements of rationality has been hotly debated in recent years. However, relatively little has been said about the *nature* of structural rationality, or what *makes* a set of attitudes structurally irrational, if structural rationality is not ultimately a matter of responding correctly to reasons. This paper develops a novel account of incoherence (or structural irrationality), critically examining Alex Worsnip’s recent account. It first argues that Worsnip’s account both over-generates and under-generates incoherent patterns of attitudes, and then proposes an alternative that both avoids these problems and captures a crucial insight behind Worsnip’s account. According to this account, a set of attitudes is incoherent just in case having all of the attitudes in that set is incompatible with reacting to a question in a way that one is, in virtue of having the attitudes, committed to.

Keywords: Rationality, Reasons, Coherence, Normativity, Commitment

An increasingly influential distinction in recent work on rationality is the distinction between *structural* rationality and *substantive* rationality. When one asks what substantive rationality is, one is likely to be told what it *consists in*: being substantively rational consists in responding correctly to *reasons* one possesses, avoiding what one’s reasons forbid and doing what one’s reasons require, thereby having attitudes that are justified or reasonable. Details vary, but all accounts of substantive rationality are united in offering an *analysis* of it in terms of reasons.¹

The situation is somewhat different when one asks what structural rationality *is*, on the assumption that structural rationality is not just a byproduct of substantive rationality, but rather a distinctive or independent dimension of rational assessment.² One is not likely to be told what structural rationality consists in, but only what it is *about*: it is about one’s attitudes being *coherent* or avoiding local conflicts among one’s attitudes.³ Then one is likely to be given a list of incoherent combinations of attitudes that it is intuitively irrational for one

¹ Kiesewetter (2017), Lord (2018), Fogal & Worsnip (2021).

² For example, Kolodny (2007, 2008), Kiesewetter (2017), Lord (2018), Lasonen-Aarnio (2021) argue that structural rationality can be explained in terms of substantive rationality.

³ The expression ‘structural rationality’ dates back to Scanlon (2007), although he does not define it explicitly. See Fogal (2020), Lee (2021), Fogal & Worsnip (2021), and Worsnip (2021) for the (rough) identification of structural rationality with coherence. See also Pryor (2018).

to have, such as having contradictory beliefs or intentions, failing to intend what one believes to be a means implied by one's end, failing to intend to do what one believes one ought to do. 'The combinations of attitudes on this list and the like', one might be told, 'are the ones that structural rationality requires you to avoid'. That, however, is not to be given a unifying account of *what it is* for a combination of attitudes to be (in)coherent, or what ties all of the different combinations on the list together. John Broome (2013: 150), for instance, confesses his inability to find a general account of structural rationality, and makes do with identifying the requirements "one-by-one", finding himself "forced" to appeal only to intuitions.

Alex Worsnip (2018a, 2021) has recently offered an account of what it is for a set of attitudes to be incoherent (or structurally irrational) which, if adequate, would remedy this unfortunate situation. On his account, for a combination of attitudes to be incoherent is for it to be constitutive of (at least some of) the attitudes in the combination that any agent who has this combination of attitudes is disposed, under the conditions in which the relevant attitudes are fully *transparent* to them, to give up at least one of the attitudes. Crucial to this account is the idea that incoherence, unlike garden-variety failures to do what one ought (or has reason) to do, is *puzzling*: there is interpretative pressure against ascribing agents all of the attitudes that make up an incoherent combination, at least under certain conditions.

This paper has two aims. The first is to argue that Worsnip's account is unsuccessful because it both *under-generates* and *over-generates* incoherent patterns of attitudes. The second is to develop a novel account of incoherence, which retains the crucial insight behind Worsnip's account but avoids the problems that Worsnip's account confronts. According to my alternative account, a set of attitudes *S* is incoherent if and only if having all of the attitudes in *S* is incompatible with reacting to a question in a way that one is committed to in virtue of having the (positive) attitudes in *S*.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 1 clarifies some desiderata to be satisfied by any account of structural rationality and explains why some initially tempting accounts are unsatisfactory. Section 2 introduces Worsnip's account as an alternative candidate and argues that it both over-generates and under-generates incoherent combinations of attitudes. Section 3 defends my alternative account of incoherence.

1. Structural rationality: What it is not

Central to the literature on structural rationality is the idea that there are combinations or patterns of attitudes (broadly construed to include the lack of an attitude) that it is *always* irrational for you to have, regardless of your circumstances. The orthodox view has it that, for each such combination, there is a rational requirement telling you not to have it.⁴ Here is a list of some widely discussed examples: {believing that *p*, believing that not-*p*}; {believing that *p*, believing that if *p* then *q*, not believing that *q*}; {intending that *p*, intending that not-*p*}; {intending to *A*, believing that *B*-ing is a means implied by *A*-ing, not intending *B*}⁵; {believing that you all-things-considered ought to *A*, not intending to *A*}; {believing that there isn't sufficient evidence that *p*, believing that *p*}. To have such a combination of attitudes is to be in an internally *conflicted* state of mind, which explains why structural (ir)rationality is standardly characterized as (*in*)*coherence*. Finally, the incoherence involved in having such a combination of attitudes is a property not of your mental state *taken as a whole* but rather of the specific combination in question, which explains why the corresponding structural requirements are called *local* (as opposed to *global*) requirements.⁶

This gives us some standards of adequacy to which an account of structural rationality should aspire. First, it should not be *overly demanding*: if there is a possible scenario in which you have a combination of attitudes, but your attitudes make perfect sense, an account of structural rationality should not entail that it is incoherent. Second, it should not be *overly lenient*: if a combination of attitudes does not make good sense, an account of structural rationality should rule that it is incoherent. It should, for example, classify the paradigmatic examples listed above as incoherent (or if it fails to account for a particular case, offer a compelling reason to think that it merits separate treatment).⁷ Furthermore, the above list is by no means exhaustive. Presumably, there are incoherent patterns of *credal states* or

⁴ There remains a debate about the logical form of such requirements, that is, whether they are wide-scope requirements (Broome 2007, 2013; Brunero 2010; Way 2011; Shpall 2013) or narrow-scope requirements (Kolodny 2005, 2007; Schroeder 2009; Lord 2014), but there is broad agreement that they are strict requirements. Fogal (2020) is a notable exception in rejecting this requirement-based approach and adopting what he calls the *pressure-based* account of structural rationality.

⁵ It has been argued that this (and the next) combination of attitudes is, strictly speaking, not structurally irrational. You might, for example, believe that *B*-ing is not up to you, or believe that you will *B* regardless of whether you intend now to *B* or not, in which case you do not seem rationally defective despite having this combination of attitudes. Attempts have been made, most notably by Broome (2013) and Brunero (2020), to characterize means-end incoherence more precisely. I shall treat the rough characterization given here as a stand-in for an accurate one, whatever it turns out to be.

⁶ For the notion of locality, see Kolodny (2005), Brunero (2010) and Way (2011).

⁷ Reisner (2013), for example, argues that the requirement of *non-akrasia* might not be a requirement of rationality but rather what he calls an *agential* requirement.

preferences.⁸ And beliefs might not only conflict with other beliefs, but also with *interrogative attitudes, suspension of belief, and emotions*.⁹ An adequate account of structural rationality must be sufficiently general to unify such cases.

1.1. *Not just consistency (or closure)*

We are in a position to see that any view of structural rationality which identifies it with *logical consistency* between one's attitudes is likely to be inadequate.¹⁰ For such a view seems to be incapable of covering many of the paradigmatic cases and satisfying the second desideratum. First, it is unclear how it can account for cases involving the *lack* of an attitude. When someone is incoherent on account of failing to believe that *q* despite believing that *p* and believing that if *p* then *q*, for example, there might not be any logical inconsistency within the set of beliefs they hold. Second, even if such cases can be covered by incorporating the view that structural rationality requires your beliefs to be closed under logical entailments, there remain cases that are not accounted for. For example, the intuitive incoherence of the failure to intend what you believe you ought to do (practical akrasia) or believing that *p* and believing that there is not sufficient evidence that *p* (epistemic akrasia) cannot be a failure of deductive closure or consistency.

1.2. *Not coherence in a broad sense*

One might alternatively rely on notions of coherence that have been prominent in some areas of philosophy, such as epistemology and ethics. But Marc-Kevin Daoust (2023: 179-80) gives us reason to be skeptical about such an approach: the concept of coherence at which the literature on structural rationality is targeted tends to be considerably *weaker* than the prominent notions of coherence. For example, if I believe that punching a baby is wrong, believe that kicking a puppy is wrong, but lack any belief which offers a unifying explanation (such as the belief that it is wrong to inflict gratuitous suffering on sentient beings), my belief-set is probably defective by the standards of Rawlsian reflective equilibrium or the coherentist

⁸ Broome (2013: 175) considers a Bayesian requirement. See Worsnip (2018a, 2021) for a discussion of cyclical preferences.

⁹ See Friedman (2019) for the (alleged) conflict between belief and interrogative attitudes. See Rosa (2022) for a detailed discussion of the relationship between belief and suspension.

¹⁰ Reisner (2013) gives an impression that he espouses this view.

theories of epistemic justification. But it is doubtful that this belief-set would be deemed structurally irrational by ordinary folks or any existing views of structural rationality.

More generally, the notions of coherence that have been prominent in epistemology and ethics concern the coherence of a total system of beliefs, defined partly by *explanatory* or *inferential connections* between its elements. This means that the normative standards they generate are *global*, rather than local. Hence, one cannot invoke such broader notions of coherence to account for the narrower kind of coherence that structural rationality is about, on pain of changing the subject.

1.3. *Not just a byproduct of substantive rationality*

There are attempts to explain (away) structural rationality in terms of substantive rationality, that is, responsiveness to reasons (Kolodny 2008, Kieseewetter 2017, Lord 2018). On such *disjunctivist* accounts, you have a structurally irrational combination of attitudes if and only if it is *guaranteed* that at least one of the attitudes involved fails to be responsive to reasons.¹¹ For example, if you believe that *p* and believe that not-*p* simultaneously, either your epistemic reasons decisively count against believing that *p* or against believing that not-*p* (or both). Either way, there is at least one belief that fails to respond correctly to reasons. If adequate, such accounts would establish that structural rationality is only derivative of substantive rationality, in the sense that you come out as structurally rational if you respond to reasons correctly and there is nothing more to structural irrationality than the failure to respond to reasons.

Formidable objections have been levelled against the disjunctivist accounts, however. First, there might be cases in which substantive and structural rationality make *conflicting demands*, such as when your total evidence indicates both (i) that there isn't sufficient evidence that *p* and (ii) that *p*.¹² Secondly, and less controversially, there might well be so-called *mere permissibility* cases, cases where you have an incoherent combination of attitudes without your reasons decisively telling against any particular attitude. For example, you might intend to check your email, believe that you can only do so by turning on your laptop, but fail

¹¹ Kieseewetter (2017) proposes this as an account of *irrationality* as such, which includes substantive irrationality. Thus, he would take the guaranteed failure to respond to reasons only as a *necessary* condition for structural irrationality.

¹² See Lasonen-Aarnio (2014) and Worsnip (2018b) for defenses of this possibility.

to intend to turn on your laptop and thereby end up being means-end incoherent, when your reasons permit you to check your email *and* also permit you not to. Or you might prefer apples to bananas, prefer bananas to cherries, but prefer cherries to apples and thereby have a cyclical set of preferences, when each of these preferences is *permitted* but not required by your reasons.¹³ Finally, the disjunctivist accounts falter on the third desideratum. Suppose that you have the following combination of belief and intention: {believing that you ought to torture a baby just for fun, intending to torture a baby}. Assuming plausibly that there is no possible world in your reasons permit the belief, you are *guaranteed* to fail to respond to your reasons, but it is implausible that you are incoherent.¹⁴ It should be noted that proponents of the disjunctivist account do have responses to some of these objections, which I cannot do full justice to here. For the sake of this paper, however, I will assume that such objections give us reason to search for alternative accounts.¹⁵

2. Worsnip's account and its problems

This section introduces Worsnip's account of incoherence as an alternative and argues that it fails to cover all of the intuitively incoherent patterns of attitudes and that it misclassifies some intuitively coherent patterns as incoherent.

2.1. Worsnip's account: Incoherence and unintelligibility

Let us first consider:

Worsnip's account: A set of attitudinal mental states is jointly incoherent iff it is (partially) constitutive of (at least some of) the states in the set that any agent who

¹³ See Way (2013, 2018) for the first case and Worsnip (2021) for the second. Kiesewetter (2017) and Lord (2018) each has a response to the first one, but see Brunero (2020) for some forceful objections to their responses.

¹⁴ See Worsnip (2018c) for a similar objection to Kiesewetter's account.

¹⁵ Rosa (2022) offers a disjunctivist account of (doxastic) coherence in terms of *knowability*. While this is an elaborate and ingenious view to which I cannot do full justice here, it is unclear whether this approach could be successfully extended to account for cases involving *non-doxastic* attitudes. Both Fink (forthcoming) and Fullhart & Martinez (forthcoming) explain incoherence in terms of the impossibility of *joint success* (Fink) or *joint satisfaction* (Fullhart & Martinez) of the attitudes. Again, I cannot afford to do discuss such accounts in detail here, despite their theoretical elegance and significance. I could only note that I have doubts about whether such accounts successfully handle cases involving *absences* of attitudes (such as means-end incoherence, modus ponens irrationality, and akrasia), given that the *absence* of an attitude does not have any success (or satisfaction) conditions. I would like to restrict my focus on Worsnip's account, since it is the account that I am trying to improve on and therefore needs to be engaged with in full detail.

holds this set of states has a disposition, when conditions of full transparency are met, to revise at least one of the states.¹⁶ (Worsnip 2021: 133)

Some clarifications are in order. First, for an agent to satisfy “conditions of full transparency” (‘CFT’ henceforth) with respect to a mental state is for the agent to be consciously and explicitly aware that they have the mental state without self-deception, fragmentation, or any failure of self-knowledge. Second, for the disposition to revise one of the attitudes under CFT be *constitutive* of some of the mental states in the incoherent set is for it to be part of *what it is* to have that mental state that one is so disposed. Third, the disposition in question is *defeasible*: it can fail to manifest itself due to, say, some other mental state or condition that the agent is in, which means that it is *possible* for someone to sustain an incoherent combination of attitudes under CFT.

The key observation, which motivates Worsnip’s account and has been keenly made by Daniel Dennett (1971) and Donald Davidson (2004), is a close connection between *incoherence* and *unintelligibility*: “there is something not just irrational, but hard to make sense of about utterly clear-eyed, transparent incoherence” (Worsnip 2021: 129). To illustrate, consider a pair of contradictory intentions. If I explicitly told you that I intend to go out today and that I also intend not to go out today, then the natural reaction on your part would be to think that I am not being serious or that I am confused about what ‘intention’ really means: there is interpretive pressure against attributing the (alleged) contradictory intentions to me. The best putative examples of agents who hold this incoherent pair of intentions involve at least one of the attitudes being not fully transparent or conscious to the agents, such as when they form each intention at a distance and never become consciously aware of both intentions. For example, suppose that I see in the morning that there is no milk left in the fridge and on that basis come to intend to go out, but later in the day start to binge-watch Netflix and form the intention not to go out, forgetting about the first intention. If you knew this, you would not find it difficult to ascribe me the contradictory intentions. Worsnip (2021: 129-31) identifies the same pattern in some other paradigmatic cases, such as means-end

¹⁶ Although I will stick to the usage of ‘a set of attitudes’ for convenience’s sake, it should be kept in mind that it is the attitudes that make up the set that are (jointly) incoherent, not the set itself.

incoherence, cyclical preferences, believing what you believe is not supported by your evidence, and hoping what you believe to be impossible.

There are *conditions* under which it is difficult to attribute an incoherent combination of attitudes to agents. This, I take it, is a genuine insight that sheds light on the distinctive feature of structural irrationality and is captured by Worsnip's account: those conditions just are, on his account, the conditions of full transparency.¹⁷ It also has significant advantages over the other accounts on the table: it handles the cases that beset the consistency account (practical and epistemic akrasia), as well as the cases afflicting the disjunctivist accounts (means-end incoherence, cyclical preferences).

2.2. *The problem of under-generation*

Unfortunately, Worsnip's account faces problems of its own. I will begin with some ways in which Worsnip's account is problematically *under-demanding*. In particular, it seems to be ill-suited to cover the cases of *inconsistency*.

While logical *consistency* is not all there is to structural rationality, it is nonetheless a central feature of both ordinary and philosophical conceptions of coherence. But consistency seems to spell trouble for Worsnip's account. Let us begin with the view that (structural) rationality requires that all of your beliefs be logically consistent. Worsnip (2021: 302-3) explicitly accepts this view, arguing that the well-known *preface paradox* (due to Makinson 1965) reveals a potential tension between structural and substantive rationality: the former forbids the set of beliefs an agent holds in such a case, but the latter might require or permit it. But it is unclear how Worsnip's account can deliver the verdict that the preface-paradoxical set of beliefs is incoherent. For it seems that an agent in the preface case need not be disposed, *even under CFT*, to give up any of their beliefs. By hypothesis, each claim in the book is highly probable given the agent's total evidence and the agent is under no illusion about this, and so there is no particular belief that they can single out as problematic. In light of this, it is highly plausible to think that there can be *some* agents who would *not at all* be disposed to revise any of their beliefs, reasoning along the following lines: "I clearly see that not all of my beliefs can be true, but I just can't figure out which one should go. Every claim in the book

¹⁷ Lee (2022) offers some other examples of this kind and an alternative explanation of the unintelligibility, which is that it is *impossible* to hold incoherent combinations of attitudes when they are fully occurrent or activated. As will be obvious, this view is not likely to work as an account of structural rationality *as such*.

is highly probable. What should I do, then? Cherry-pick some beliefs and give them up? Suspend judgement about *all* of them? Neither seems sensible. So, I'll just live with them until I come across a good reason to give up a particular one!"¹⁸

It might be replied that the agents have at least *some* disposition to revise one of the beliefs they hold, in that they are ready to give up one of the beliefs as soon as they recognize, under CFT, strong evidence not to hold it (*as such* evidence). The problem with this reply is that it is committed to viewing a *single* empirical belief as incoherent. Consider, for example, my belief that it is raining outside. It is plausible that, *in virtue of this attitude's being a belief*, I am ready to drop it upon seeing what I recognize (under CFT) as strong evidence that it is sunny. For it is constitutive of belief that it is sensitive to what the agent takes to be evidence. So, if the preface-paradoxical belief set were to count as incoherent on account of the agent's readiness to revise one of their beliefs, the singleton set whose member is the belief that it is raining outside would also count as incoherent, which is an unpalatable result.

This in itself might not be too worrying for Worsnip, as one might doubt that there are blanket consistency requirements on belief. Broome (2013: 154-5) argues, for instance, that even if the axioms of arithmetic and the Goldbach conjecture make up a logically inconsistent set of claims, you might believe both the axioms and the conjecture without being irrational. Furthermore, one might think that the lesson to be drawn from the preface paradox precisely is that you can remain fully rational even when you knowingly have an inconsistent set of beliefs.¹⁹ In light of this, Worsnip might deny, without too much cost, that full consistency is a necessary condition for structural rationality and argue that his account can be adequate insofar as it accounts for some weaker requirements enjoining consistency in *smaller* sets of beliefs, which might seem to be harder to sustain under CFT.²⁰

Let us grant for the moment that the lack of full consistency is compatible with (full) structural rationality and ask instead *how much* inconsistency Worsnip's account could cover. His account might plausibly explain the incoherence of flat-out contradictory beliefs. But what

¹⁸ It might be suggested that there could be a felt tension when they realize that their beliefs are mutually inconsistent, which would give them *some* disposition to give up one of the beliefs, albeit a defeasible one. While it is plausible there might be *some* scrupulous agents who would have such a disposition, it is far less plausible that *all* possible agents with the preface-paradoxical set of beliefs would have such a disposition.

¹⁹ See Foley (1993) and Christensen (2004). See Shpall (2016) for what he calls the *calendar paradox*, which raises a structurally analogous problem for the full consistency requirement on intention.

²⁰ This is a move Worsnip considers in responding to the worry about the preface case, though his official view is that a preface-paradoxical set of beliefs *is* incoherent.

about, say, {believing that if p -and- q then r , believing that q -and-not- r , believing that p }, or {believing that not-(if p then not- p), believing that not- p }? Anyone with an experience of teaching elementary logic will be easily convinced that there are people who would, even under CFT, sustain such combinations of beliefs without budging an inch: they might be unaware of the inconsistency between their beliefs, or positively believe that there is no inconsistency between them. Arguably, however, such people can be accused of incoherence. For one thing, many epistemologists will balk at a theory of coherence which tells us that all it takes to be perfectly coherent with respect to one's belief is to avoid having contradictory beliefs. For another, even ordinary discourse seems to recognize the possibility of being incoherent in a way one is not aware of, as well as the rational defectiveness of such a state of mind ("He's being foolish—he's contradicting himself without realizing it"). For example, when inconsistency between one's beliefs is pointed out to one, one normally admits that one *has been* in a rationally defective state, even if the inconsistency had been beyond one's ken. One might reasonably think that an adequate account of (in)coherence should do justice to such aspects of ordinary discourse.

There are two options open to Worsnip, neither of which is attractive. First, he might agree that the above combinations of beliefs are incoherent but insist that all possible agents have at least *some* disposition to revise some of the relevant beliefs under CFT. But it is highly implausible to ascribe them even *some* disposition to revise some of their beliefs, especially when they are unaware of their inconsistency. Second, he might agree that there are people who would not be disposed to revise any of the beliefs in the above combinations but deny that they are incoherent. He might, for example, argue that an inconsistent set of beliefs is genuinely incoherent only if the inconsistency is so *obvious to all possible agents* who hold the beliefs under clear-eyed conditions that they are bound to feel some pressure to revise one of them. But if Worsnip made this move, his account would simply leave all of the *not-so-obviously* inconsistent sets of beliefs untouched and, as a result, would fail to deliver the goods one could reasonably expect from an account of (in)coherence.²¹

²¹ It might not be just consistency requirements on belief that is under threat. Daoust (2022) argues that Worsnip's view faces an analogous problem accommodating some probabilistic requirements on credence. It is now well known that there are a large number of people who, under the circumstances similar to CFT, violate the following rule: assign credence of x in P and a credence of y in $(P\&Q)$ such that x is greater than or equal to y . Such a failure is widely called probabilistically *incoherent*.

2.3. *The problem of overgeneration*

My second objection is that intuitively *coherent* combinations of attitudes turn out to be incoherent on Worsnip's account. Crucial to Worsnip's account is that the disposition one has under CFT to revise some of the incoherent attitudes is *defeasible*. It is this feature of his account that allows it to accommodate some paradigmatically incoherent combinations of attitudes. To see how, consider first (practical) akrasia. It is widely agreed that, unlike in the case of epistemic akrasia, there is no considerable difficulty in conceiving of *clear-eyed* akrasia: it seems that agents *do* fail to intend what they believe they ought to do even when their belief is fully conscious, due to some psychological disturbances.²² For another, consider *dialetheists* who assert that there are true contradictions and, quite self-consciously, profess to believe a proposition and its negation concurrently. If Worsnip's account is to avoid the implication that clear-eyed akrasia is impossible (or that the dialetheists are mistaken about their own beliefs!), but still be compatible with the incoherence of akrasia and contradictory beliefs, the disposition to which he refers must not be a *sure-fire* disposition. Worsnip's solution is that, in the cases of akratic agents and dialetheists, the agents *have* the relevant dispositions, but their manifestation is prevented by some other facts about their mind: (say) idleness, in the case of akrasia; the belief in dialetheism, in the case of dialetheists.

If the relevant dispositions are not fully manifested even under CFT, why think they are present at all? To substantiate his claim, Worsnip refers to the way the dispositions still exert *some* psychological pressure under CFT: when one persists in an akratic state under CFT, one's normative belief "certainly makes [one] feel some pressure" to form or revise one's intention; and even if dialetheists can hold contradictory beliefs, it can be suspected that "this involves a kind of strain, or a sense of fighting oneself" (Worsnip 2021: 130). Indeed, ascribing our akratic agents (or dialetheists) any disposition to revise their attitude would not be highly plausible were such psychological differences absent.

The problem is *not* that this claim is implausible: one might well hold that an akratic agent who is not even *slightly* inclined or pressured to revise their attitudes does not really count as believing that they ought to act in a certain way. The problem is that Worsnip's

²² See Adler (2002) for the impossibility of conscious and transparent epistemic akrasia. See Wallace (2001) for the relevant contrast between epistemic and practical akrasia.

account now *over-generates* incoherent combinations of attitudes. Consider, for example, the following sets of attitudes:

- 1) {desiring to A, believing that B-ing is a means implied by A-ing, not intending to B}²³;
- 2) {fearing X, believing that X is here now, not intending to avoid X};
- 3) {feeling guilty, believing that you can make up for your past wrongdoing (e.g. apologise or make amends) by A-ing now, not intending to A};
- 4) {being curious whether *p*, believing that you can figure out whether *p* by A-ing now, not intending to A}.

None of the above combinations seems to be incoherent. Take (1), for example. If I *intend* to quit smoking, for example, then even if I desire to smoke now and believe that I can only do so by lighting up a cigarette before me, I could remain perfectly rational even if I did not intend to light up the cigarette. One could easily imagine a similar scenario for each of the other combinations to see why it is not always irrational for one to have it.

However, each of the above combinations turns out to be incoherent on Worsnip's account. Plausibly, it is partly constitutive of: *desiring to A* that it tends, combined with the belief that *B-ing* is a necessary or otherwise suitable means to *A-ing*, to cause you to intend to *B*; *fearing X* that it tends, upon perceiving *X's* presence, to cause you to intend to stay away from *X*; *guilt* that it tends you to intend to make up for what you have done; *curiosity* that it tends you to intend to do what it takes to figure out the question. None of them would be the kind of attitude that it is without having such a motivational profile. Now, consider how a person with (1) would be disposed under CFT. Plausibly, such a person *would*, under CFT, feel *some pressure* to revise at least one of the attitudes (assuming that the desire in question is of considerable strength): it is doubtful that they *count* as desiring unless they are disposed, at least to some extent, to revise one of their attitudes. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for (2)-(4). But this, as has been shown, is exactly the pattern identified in the cases of akrasia and contradictory beliefs, which *do* count as incoherent on his account.

²³ I said in footnote 6 that a genuinely means-end incoherent combination of attitudes perhaps involves other conditions. If (1) is to be perfectly analogous to genuine means-end incoherence, it would also have to include the same conditions, whatever they turn out to be. Again, I will treat (1) as a shorthand for the fuller version.

The problem can be put in a dilemmatic form. If the relevant disposition is indefeasible, then Worsnip's account has trouble accommodating the possibility of clear-eyed akrasia or dialethism. If the relevant disposition is defeasible, however, Worsnip's account entails that intuitively benign combinations of attitudes are incoherent. One might, in an attempt to steer a middle course, impose a *minimum threshold* on the strength the disposition that needs to be built into the state for them to count as incoherent. Then one might rule out cases where the relevant disposition is so weak as to negligible, consistently with the relevant dispositions being defeasible in general. While this is a possibility, it seems difficult to non-arbitrarily set the standards for measuring the strength of the dispositions in a way that would allow one to rule out the above combinations of attitudes as cases where the relevant dispositions are negligible while ruling in akrasia as a case where the disposition is of sufficient strength. For the motivational potential of desire, fear, guilt, or curiosity, does not seem any weaker than that of normative belief. Nor do such attitudes differ significantly from normative beliefs in the (phenomenological) strength with which they are felt or experienced. The prospects of having a principled set of criteria that would pull the trick thus seem quite dim. I conclude that Worsnip's account is problematic in both directions.

3. What structural rationality is

Still, it would be rash to conclude that no progress has been made towards finding a unifying account of rationality. Far from it: despite the problems for Worsnip's account, it is possible to build on his insight that (in)coherence is tied to (un)intelligibility and construct an account that is extensionally adequate, which is the task of this section.

3.1. The account

The key idea of my view is that the attitudes assessable by the standards of coherence are constituted by *commitments*, in particular, commitments to *act* in a particular way, where 'act' is understood broadly to include *mental* actions. For a commitment to be *constitutive* of an attitude is for it to be the case that it is partly *in virtue of* incorporating the commitment that the attitude is what it is. For example, to believe *p* is partly to be *committed* to acting as if *p* is true, and to intend to *A* is partly to be committed to acting as if you (will) *A* through your own action or agency. Incoherence, on my view, happens when and just when at least one such constitutive commitment must be violated. So, here is a first pass:

My account, first pass: A set of attitudes S is incoherent if and only if it is impossible to fulfil *all* of the commitments constitutive of the (positive) attitudes in S .

This leaves the question of how the impossibility of joint fulfilment is to be explained. If you believe p and also believe not- p , for example, you are committed to acting as if p is true and also to acting as if p is not true. It is still unclear why it is impossible for you to fulfil both commitments. For you might confidently assert that it is not raining (thereby acting as if it is not raining), whilst taking an umbrella with you (thereby acting as if it is raining).

To see where the impossibility lies, therefore, it is crucial to be clear on *what* exactly you are committed to in virtue of having the attitudes. My proposal is that you are committed to *reacting to a question* in a definite way. To get a feel for what such commitments are, let us first take belief for example. It is sometimes held that belief is a *question-settling* attitude.²⁴ This idea can plausibly be spelled out in terms of commitment. You are committed to acting as if p is true in virtue of believing p , and this entails a commitment to unequivocally reacting to the question, 'Is p true?'. For to act as if p is true with regard to this question is to sincerely answer this question in the affirmative: neither refusing to answer it nor answering it in the negative counts as acting as if p is true. So, believing p partly consists in being *committed* to affirming p as true in response to the question of whether it is true.

Disbelieving p (or believing not- p), by contrast, partly consists in being committed to rejecting p as false in response to the same question. Suspension of judgement about p does not *settle* the question in any particular way, but it too involves a characteristic commitment: a commitment to *neutrality*. To be suspended about p is to be committed to neither affirming p as true nor rejecting p as false. Furthermore, a non-binary, *graded* doxastic attitude like *credence* could also be plausibly seen as incorporating a commitment to reacting to a question in a definite way. While a person with a high (say, 0.95) credence in p is not committed to sincerely answering yes to question, 'Is p true?', they are nonetheless committed to reacting in a definite way towards some other questions. For example, they might be committed to

²⁴ See, for example, Hieronymi (2005) and Friedman (2019).

answering yes to the question of whether p is 95% likely to be true, or whether to purchase a ticket that costs less than 95 cents and pays one dollar if p is true (and nothing if false).²⁵

Practical attitudes also accompany commitments. If, as I suggested above, intending to A involves the commitment to acting as if you (will) A through the exercise of your own agency, this entails the commitment to answering sincerely yes to the question of *whether to A*, which one could simply call a *commitment to A-ing*. It is what sets intention to A apart from a mere desire to A . For someone merely desiring to A might still be undecided about whether to A and thereby fall short of being committed to it in the way that a person who intends to A is. Likewise, *preferring A to B* involves being committed to choosing A over B , in response to the question of which option to choose between A and B .

Put simply, my view is that at least one such commitment must be violated in cases of incoherence. This gets us to the following concretization of my account:

My account, specified: A set of attitudes S is incoherent if and only if having all of the attitudes in S is incompatible with reacting to a question in a way that one is, in virtue of having the (positive) attitudes in S , is committed to.

The attitudinal commitments in question could plausibly be understood in terms of the characteristic *functional roles* of the attitudes: one of the functions distinctive of an attitude like belief is to enable you to take a definitive stance towards pressing questions you confront in your cognitive lives. As a creature with limited cognitive resources, it is important for you to make up your mind about such questions, avoiding the need to constantly deliberating about them. The stance you take towards them provides you with a *default* in your further reasoning and action.

The commitments constitutive of an attitude have both descriptive and normative dimensions, which is natural given the functional understanding of them.²⁶ To hold that A -ing is a function of X is to hold that X is *supposed to A*, which is both a claim about a *standard* against which a token behavior of X can be evaluated and a claim about how X would behave under *normal* conditions. For example, to say that believing p commits one to affirming p as

²⁵ See Ross (2012: 166) for an analogous view that such mental states commit us to *act* in certain ways, obviating “the need to deliberate whether to act in this way”.

²⁶ This is a generalisation of Bratman’s (1987) idea about the commitments distinctive of intention.

true in response to the question of whether p is true is not just to say that one's belief in p would be faulty *qua* belief if it failed to lead one to do so, but also to say it would *normally* lead one to do so. Similarly, to say that an intention to A commits one to sincerely answering yes to the question of whether to A is to say that one's intention would be faulty *qua* intention if it failed to lead one to do so, as well as saying that it would normally lead one to do so.

The descriptive aspect of attitudinal commitment is what makes my account similar to Worsnip's account in tying incoherence with *unintelligibility*. Suppose that I attend to a question, fully understand what it means, am not subject to such psychological hindrances as exhaustion, compulsion, which means that I am under a perfectly normal condition for my attitudes to operate. Suppose, however, that I respond to the question in a way that violates the commitments characteristic of an attitude. It is a good indication that I do not really have the attitude. This explains why it is *normally* difficult to make sense of an agent who reacts towards a question in a way that is bound to go against a particular commitment but still claims to have all of the attitudes in an incoherent set.

The view that some attitudes are constituted by commitments, as a view of the *nature* of the attitudes, is likely to have a *moderately revisionary* consequence. It might imply, for example, that an attitude that one might be naturally inclined to classify as an intention does not really count as an intention. If I keep smoking due to an irresistible addiction to smoking, it might be natural for you to ascribe me a standing *intention* to smoke, even if I am, as someone who wants to overcome my addiction, not committed to answering the question whether to smoke in the affirmative. My account has to say that my attitude is not really an intention. However, I do not think this is an insurmountable problem, insofar as (i) such cases are sufficiently rare and the features that my account identifies as constitutive of intention are shared by paradigmatic cases, and (ii) suitable *re-descriptions* of such exceptional cases are available. For example, my attitude here might be more appropriately viewed as a strong, predominant *desire* to smoke, which could easily be confused with an intention. Ordinary attributions of mental states might not be sufficiently fine-grained to reflect important truths about their nature, and may sometimes be corrected in light of a philosophical theory.²⁷

²⁷ See Worsnip (2021: 136) for a similar point. See also Helton (2020) for an argument that an *idée fixe* is not a genuine belief, which could be adapted to the case at hand.

3.2. *Explaining the cases*

3.2.1. *Some paradigmatic cases*

Let us begin with the paradigmatic cases to see how my account covers them. Consider first contradictory beliefs and intentions. Assume that believing p involves being *committed* to affirming (or *sincerely assenting* to) the truth of p in response to the question of whether it is true. This makes it impossible to fulfil the commitment involved in believing not- p , which is to affirm not- p as true in response to the same question: one cannot sincerely assent to p as true whilst sincerely assenting to the truth of not- p . This rests on the initially plausible assumption that our concept of negation does not allow *any* proposition and its negation to be both true, and hence anyone competent with the concept cannot sincerely affirm both as true (an assumption to which I shall return in 3.3). Similarly, one cannot fulfil all the commitments involved in contradictory intentions: for any A , a sincere yes in response to the question of whether to A is incompatible with a sincere no, which makes it impossible to fulfil all the commitments involved the intention to A and the intention not to A .

The same pattern is identified in other paradigmatic cases that do not involve purely logical inconsistency. One relatively simple case is {believing p , suspending judgement about p }: since affirming p rules out the option of affirming neither p nor not- p , one cannot jointly fulfil the commitments inherent in each attitude. More interesting is the case of so-called “epistemic akrasia” or “inter-level incoherence”: {believing p , believing that there is not sufficient evidence for p }. My account can explain why it is (*prima facie*) incoherent. Believing p , again, partly consists in sincerely affirming p as true. To believe that there isn’t sufficient evidence for p , however, is partly to think that p ’s being true is unlikely from one’s *perspective*, understood as the totality of one’s knowledge. This is tantamount to acknowledging a non-negligible chance of error. It is then unclear how someone who thinks this can *sincerely* affirm p as true. Assuming that it is not possible to do both, at least one of the commitments must go unfulfilled.²⁸

One might object that it is *possible* for both commitments to be fulfilled. A person might believe that God exists whilst recognizing that they lack sufficient evidence for God’s existence or believe that their friend is innocent in the teeth of what they take to be strong evidence to the contrary. Why could not they, in full sincerity, assent to the truth of a claim

²⁸ See also Worsnip (2018b: 16-17) for a similar point.

while sincerely affirming that they lack sufficient evidence for it?²⁹ My reply, which resonates with my moderately revisionary stance, is that it is more plausible to attribute different commitments to them, given that there is pressure against interpreting someone as sincerely assenting to the truth of a proposition when they also affirm that it is fairly unlikely or that there is a significant chance of error. More importantly, suitable re-descriptions of such abnormal cases could easily be had: they do not really feature belief but a *belief-like state*, such as *faith* or *acceptance*, which involves a different kind of commitment to the truth of its content.³⁰ Faith or acceptance in *p*, like belief in *p*, involves the commitment to acting as if *p* is true, but the commitment in question is *practical* at bottom: it is commitment to *adopting* a policy to use *p* as a premise in decision-making, and to (perhaps deliberately) *ignoring* the possibility that *p* is false. Such commitments, which express one's allegiance to some ideal, goal, or standard, need not go hand in hand with sincere assent to *p*'s truth and could be fulfilled even when one takes oneself to lack sufficient evidence for *p*.

Let us then consider some non-logical, practical cases such as means-end incoherence: {intending to *A*, believing that *B*-ing is a means implied by *A*-ing, not intending to *B*}. In intending to *A*, you are committed to sincerely answering yes to the question of whether to *A*. In having the means-end belief, you are committed to the picture of the world in which the only worlds where you *A* are those in which you also *B*. With this in mind, consider the question of *whether to B*. There are three possible responses: (i) a sincere yes, (ii) a sincere no, or (iii) neither. If you do not intend to *B*, your response is either (ii) or (iii), since (i) implies an intention to *B*. But if your response is (ii) or (iii), then you are bound to violate the commitment in at least one of the antecedent attitudes: the end-intention or the means-end belief. For either you cannot fulfil the intention-constituting commitment to sincerely answering yes in response to the question of whether to *A* (in view of the fact that you cannot *A* without *B*-ing), or you cannot fulfil the belief-constituting commitment to sincerely affirming that *B*-ing is a means implied by *A*-ing. Thus, you cannot fulfil all the commitments involved in both attitudes unless your response is (i). But if you sincerely answer yes to the question of whether to *B*, then you intend to *B*. So, you cannot fulfil those commitments unless you also intend to *B*.

²⁹ I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this worry.

³⁰ See Alston (1996) and Howard-Snyder (2013) for the view that faith does not entail belief. See Cohen (1992) for a classic discussion of acceptance.

The case of *cyclical preferences* is also easily accounted for. For there is some question with respect to which you cannot fulfil all the preference-constituting commitments if you, say, preferred *A* to *B*, preferred *B* to *C*, but preferred *C* to *A*: *which option to choose between A, B and C?* If your answer were *A*, the commitment involved in the third preference would be left unfulfilled. Likewise, the commitment involved in the first and the second would be unsatisfied if you chose, respectively, *B* and *C*. Thus, there is a commitment you are bound to violate, regardless of what your reaction is.

Finally, my account can neatly explain the apparent incoherence of *practical akrasia*, {believing that you ought to *A*, not intending to *A*}, which led to complications in Worsnip's account. Important in this context is the fact that the concept of *ought* employed in the belief component of this incoherent set is the concept of so-called *all-things-considered ought*, to be contrasted with *oughts* qualified by standards of some kind. Consider the characteristic function played by normative beliefs about what one all-things-considered ought to do. Such a normative belief, it is often said, functions to settle one's deliberation about *what to do*, in the sense that it is the kind of belief that one aims to reach with a view to deciding what to do in a given situation.³¹ Assuming that commitments constitutive of an attitude derive from the characteristic function of the attitude, you are committed to sincerely answering the question of *whether to A* in the affirmative when you believe that you all-things-considered ought to *A*, just as you are committed to sincerely answering yes to the same question when you intend to *A*. This commitment cannot be fulfilled unless you intend to *A*, for the reasons given in accounting for means-end incoherence. Thus, having an akratic combination of attitudes turns out to be incoherent on my account.

3.2.2. *Problematic cases*

Let us then turn to the cases which spell trouble for Worsnip's account and how my account handles them. I will start with cases that gave rise to the overgeneration problem, since they admit of simpler treatment. Consider again the following, which made mischief for Worsnip's account:

- 1) {desiring to *A*, believing that *B*-ing is a means implied by *A*-ing, not intending to *B*};

³¹ See, for example, Kiesewetter (2017) and Lord (2018).

- 2) {fearing X , believing that X is here now, not intending to avoid X };
- 3) {feeling guilty, believing that you can make up for your past wrongdoing by A -ing, not intending to A };
- 4) {being curious whether p , believing that you can only figure out whether p by A -ing, not intending to A }.

None of the combinations turns out to be incoherent on my account. The main reason is that, in each case, the positive attitudes you have do not *commit* you to taking up the attitude that you lack, although they might surely *dispose* you to have that attitude. If you have the set of attitudes that (1) specifies, for example, no commitment needs to be violated, despite the apparent similarity between (1) and means-end incoherence. For it is not part of merely *desiring* to A that one is *committed* to reacting to the question of whether to A in the way that one is committed to in virtue of having an intention to A . As noted above, one might still be undecided about the question. The same lesson applies to fear, guilt, and curiosity: although it is plausibly constitutive of each attitude that it *disposes* the agent to be motivated in some characteristic ways, it is not constitutive of each that it *commits* the agent to being so motivated. This allows for the possibility of fulfilling all of the commitments involved in the positive attitudes even when you hold the attitudes specified in (2)-(4).

Let us now turn to the problem of inconsistency, which is an instance of the problem of under-generation. Consider first the agents in the preface case. Assuming again that to believe p is partly to be committed to affirming p as true, there is a question with respect to which one is guaranteed to violate at least one of the commitments involved in the preface-paradoxical set of beliefs: *whether all of the claims in the body of the book are true*. If they are committed to sincerely assenting to the truth of *each* of $P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots, P_n$, they are also committed to assenting to the truth of all of the claims in the book, provided that they are aware that $P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots, P_n$ are the all and only claims made in the book. For it is plausible that, for any propositions p and q , one assents to the truth of p and assents to the truth of q if and only if one assents to *p -and- q* . My account then entails that a preface-paradoxical set of beliefs is incoherent.

That this is not an implausible verdict could be seen by comparing our modest preface writers with *dogmatic* preface writers, who believe that each claim in the book is true *and also* believe that the book is completely error-free. While the dogmatic might count as

substantively irrational for ignoring strong inductive evidence that there is an error, there is a salient sense in which the dogmatic does better than the modest: the dogmatic, unlike the modest, need not be incoherent in *any* way. This is what my account entails: the dogmatic, unlike the modest, is not bound to have a belief whose commitment goes unfulfilled. For they affirm each of P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n *and* their conjunction as true.

What about cases where the agent has an inconsistent set of beliefs without recognizing its inconsistency? Take the following combination of beliefs (from 2.1): {believing that if p -and- q then r , believing that q -and-not- r , believing that p }. Someone who exemplifies this combination of beliefs is guaranteed to have a set of beliefs that cannot all be true. Then there is an apparent problem for my account, which aims at classifying such a combination of beliefs as incoherent: insofar as they do not recognize the inconsistency, they can sincerely affirm each of the contents as true.

My response is that there is still a question towards which one is guaranteed to react in a way that violates at least one of the commitments, *insofar as one fully understands* the contents of the relevant beliefs. This is the question of whether their *conjunction* is true. The person with the above combination of beliefs, in response to the question of whether (*if p -and- q then r)-and-(q -and-not- r)-and- p is true, is committed to answering no, provided that they *fully understand* the content of this conjunctive proposition. For if they fully understood the proposition, they could not fail to see that it could not possibly be true. Indeed, the fact that the full understanding of its constituent concepts is sufficient for determining its truth (or falsity) is what distinguishes a logical truth from an empirical or contingent truth.*

So, here is my proposal, refined to reflect this fact:

My account, refined: A set of attitudes S is incoherent if and only if having all of the attitudes in S is incompatible with reacting to a question in a way that one is committed to in virtue of having the (positive) attitudes in S , *assuming that one fully understands the contents of the attitudes*.

To wit, for a set of attitudes to be incoherent is for it to be impossible for anyone who fully understands the content of attitudes to jointly fulfil the commitments constitutive of all the (positive) attitudes in the set.

Now, a clarification on what I mean by ‘understanding’ is needed here. There is a sense in which understanding a propositional content is *factive*: for any subject S and a sentence p , if S understands that p , then p . Understanding in this sense arguably entails *knowledge*, which has the consequence that one can neither understand a logical falsehood nor understand all members of an inconsistent set of beliefs. This would be an unwelcome result for my account, since no subject would be able to satisfy the condition of full understanding with respect to inconsistent beliefs, and so their incoherence would fall outside of my account.³²

There is, however, another sense of ‘understanding a content’ that does not entail knowing the content. You fully understand a content in this weaker sense just in case you grasp its constituent concepts and syntactic structure well enough to *entertain* it. Now, entertaining a content does not entail knowing (or even believing) it, since you can entertain a content without taking it to be true, and you can even entertain a proposition that you reject as false. But there is a recognizable sense in which entertaining a content requires *understanding* it in some way (e.g. a child who lacks the ability to understand the Goldbach conjecture is, on that account, unable to entertain it). It is this sense of ‘understanding’ that my account invokes.

That said, my account can now explain why having an inconsistent set of beliefs is incoherent in general. For any logically inconsistent set of propositions, if you are committed to assenting to the truth of each, you are committed to assenting to the truth of their conjunction. But this is incompatible with sincerely assenting to the truth of its negation, which the full understanding of the conjunction commits you to. Therefore, you cannot fulfil all the commitments involved in an inconsistent set of beliefs.

One might now worry that my account overreaches, referring to Broome’s example of a person who believes both the Peano axioms and the Goldbach conjecture (2.2.1): even if their beliefs turn out to be inconsistent, they do not seem to merit the charge of irrationality; but my account seems to entail that they are structurally irrational, which can be problematic.

My response is that judgements of (in)coherence could be separated from ordinary judgements of irrationality. For example, the principles of coherence could be taken to be specifying the evaluative *ideals* of structural rationality, be they humanly attainable or not. If so, any failure to live up to such an ideal is *rationally defective*. But falling short of such a

³² I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

rational ideal need not entail being *irrational* in the ordinary sense. As Kieseewetter (2017: 25) observes, ordinary accusations of irrationality often express distinctively *personal* kind of criticism that is analogous to blame, the legitimacy of which is sensitive to the agent's cognitive capacities and limitations. On this picture, not every ideal of rationality generates a *full-blown* rational requirement, the violation of which deserves the ordinary charge of irrationality.³³ Once this distinction is made, however, it is not so plausible that Broome's agent is fully coherent, which can be seen if we compare the person with someone who grasps the (supposed) inconsistency between the axioms and the Goldbach conjecture and not believe all of them. It is plausible that the latter does better than the former in terms of coherence, which cannot be the case if the former is fully coherent. Thus, Broome's agent is not fully structurally rational. But this does not mean that they can be aptly criticized as irrational in the ordinary way, since the inconsistency between their beliefs is beyond their ken, which explains Broome's intuition that the charge of irrationality is out of place here.

3.3. *Theoretical flexibility*

My account makes structural rationality out to be dependent on what is constitutive of the relevant attitudes. In explaining some instances of incoherence, I have relied on substantive assumptions about *what it is* to hold the relevant attitudes. But such assumptions are not forced upon us. And if one plugs in a different view of what it is to believe (or intend), it will yield different verdicts about whether a combination of attitudes is incoherent. In this way, my account allows for substantive disagreement over whether a given combination of attitudes is incoherent, as well as shedding light on what such disagreement is *about*.

To illustrate, return to the case of preface-paradoxical set of beliefs. One might well think that there is *nothing* rationally amiss with such a set of beliefs and conclude that it is not incoherent to be in such a state of mind. My account is compatible with this verdict if it is coupled with a *different* assumption about believing. If one gives up the previous assumption in favor of only a weaker constitutive constraint on belief to the effect that to believe *p* is to answer yes to the question of whether *p* is likely true, then a preface-paradoxical belief set could well be coherent.³⁴ More radically, my account *might* rule that even a contradictory

³³ See Smithies (2015) for a similar treatment of the rational requirement to be logically omniscient.

³⁴ This sort of view is found in the literature on weak belief. See Hawthorne *et al.* (2016) and Rothschild (2020).

pair of belief is not incoherent. Consider the case of dialetheists which, along with akrasia, poses a difficulty for Worsnip's account. It might seem that even if they hold a pair of contradictory beliefs (on the basis of their belief in dialetheism), they are not incoherent, or at least not *as incoherent as* those who hold contradictory beliefs without any belief in dialetheism.³⁵ But they do not pose a problem for my account. Suppose first that they are right that there *are* true contradictions. Then dialetheists might be fully structurally rational and holding contradictory beliefs is not incoherent. But this is what my account entails, assuming that the dialetheists are right: for some proposition *Q*, *Q-and-not-Q* is true, and, contrary to the assumption that has been made thus far, one can affirm both *Q* and *not-Q* as true without violating any constitutive commitments of belief. Suppose now that dialetheism is incorrect and there are no true contradictions. Then the dialetheists who hold contradictory beliefs *are* simply incoherent, for the reason that they cannot sincerely assent to the truth of both *Q* and *not-Q*. It is just that they fail to appreciate this and mistakenly think that they are correctly employing the concept of negation in affirming *Q-and-not-Q* as true. This prevents them from being fully structurally rational. But they do not deserve any deep criticism or blame for this. Quite the contrary: they might even be *praiseworthy* for upholding such a radical view with such delicate arguments!

4. Conclusion

On the account proposed in this paper, facts about coherence or structural rationality just are facts about the possibility of fulfilling all the constitutive commitments involved in a set of attitudes. This view offers a unifying explanation of the paradigmatic cases of incoherence, as well as capturing the intimate connection between incoherence and unintelligibility, without running into the problems that Worsnip's account confronts. An idea that is not fully explored in this paper is the idea that the (apparent) normativity of coherence is a species of *functional* normativity, which is premised on the conjecture that attitudinal commitments derive from the functions of the attitudes. Whether (and if so how) this view has significant imports for the normative question about structural rationality is a question for another occasion.³⁶

³⁵ For this point, see Broome (2013: 91), Fogal (2020: 1042-1044) and Lasonen-Aarnio (2021: 458). Note that none of these authors thinks that dialetheism is true: they only think that the mere belief in dialetheism can make having contradictory beliefs coherent (or less incoherent).

³⁶ Many thanks to Moritz Bütetfür, Stefan Mandl, Hichem Naar, Neil Roughley, Lukas Schwengerer, André Waldheuser, and the anonymous referees for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would also

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like to thank Alex Worsnip for relevant discussion. Finally, I am grateful to the audiences at Seoul National University and the 16th KSAP Grad Division Workshop. This work was supported by the New Faculty Startup Fund from Seoul National University.

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