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A counterfactual account of diachronic structural rationality

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ABSTRACT

Philosophers who take rationality to consist in the satisfaction of rational requirements typically favour rational requirements that govern mental attitudes at a time rather than across times. One such account has been developed by Broome in *Rationality through reasoning*. He claims that diachronic functional properties of intentions such as settling on courses of actions and resolving conflicts are emergent properties that can be explained with reference to synchronic rational pressures. This is why he defends only a minimal diachronic requirement which characterises forgetting as irrational. In this paper, I show that Broome's diachronically minimalist account lacks the resources to explain how a rational agent may resolve incommensurable choices by an act of will. I argue that one can solve this problem by either specifying a mode of diachronic deliberation or by introducing a genuinely diachronic requirement that governs the rational stability of an intention via a diachronic counterfactual condition concerning rational reconsideration. My proposal is similar in spirit to Gauthier's account in his seminal paper 'Assure and threaten'. It improves on his work by being both more general and explanatorily richer in its application with regard to diachronic phenomena such as transformative choices and acts of will.

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1. Introduction

Goetz comes to terms with the problem: he resolves by an act of will what he cannot resolve by moral argument [...]. The existentialist hero is the man who does not fail to act upon his ideals, and does not rationalize away his dirty hands.¹

In his paper, 'Values and the heart's command', Bas van Fraassen considers the possibility of moral conflicts and incommensurable choices and

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¹See Van Fraassen (1973, 11).

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concludes, partly by appealing to cases such as Goetz's, that both are inevitable.² Regarding situations in which a calculation of value is not possible, he argues that only an individual's 'act of will' can resolve the predicament. In this paper, I provide a rational explanation of the essentially diachronic nature of such an act of will. In the course of doing this, I discuss rationally stable intentions and consider the more general question of the unity of a person across time. If successful, the resulting theory will illuminate the role of intentions in both intra- and inter-personal coordination. It will also explain Van Fraassen's insight that, when confronted with hard choices, individuals should rationally aspire to be existentialist heroes.³

When philosophers refer to the stability of intentions, they often mean that an agent, who has carefully considered what to do, retains their intention by disposition or choice. However, regardless of how the agent retains their intention, it should not be immutable. We are often unable to foresee future events or predict how our own preferences might shift. For this reason, the particular degree of stability that is assumed to be rational has been a matter of contentious debate.

Philosophers and economists have typically framed this debate in terms of rationality and rational requirements. They argue that the arbitrary dropping of intentions violates a rational requirement. One approach toward understanding rational requirements is to think of them as encoding coherent patterns of mental states or as specifying what patterns count as incoherent. Understood this way an intention is rationally stable if the agent does not hold incoherent mental attitudes over time. One of the most comprehensive coherentist accounts of rationality has been developed by Broome (2013), who argues in support of a minimalist theory regarding the cross-temporal persistence of intentions. In this paper, I explore a novel, counterfactual requirement that can

²I want to thank participants at the conference on "Morality and Rationality Revisited" in Leeds and members of several research groups in Vienna for their invaluable feedback. I also want to thank Franziska Popraw, Niklas Kirchner, Jay Jian, Carlos Nunez, Grace Patterson, Matthew Racher, Niels de Haan, Leo Townsend, Jens Gilllesen, Herlinda Pauer-Studer, John Broome, Michael Bratman for written comments.

³When I am talking about Goetz being an "existentialist hero" I do not want to thereby make a claim about Sartre's Existentialism, since the metaphysical framework within which I will be working seems to be incompatible with Sartre's idea that intentions need not respond to an antecedent realm of normative facts. Something similar might be said about my suggestion that one's prior self might sometimes have rational authority over the acting self. That said, my interest in Goetz's case is not about the possibility of choice in light of scepticism about moral facts, but rather in the possibility of a choice that is under-determined by reasons (see section 2.1 for how I understand under-determination by reasons) and here Sartre's notion of self-commitment and the importance of action through an act of will in the face of a dilemma in "Existentialism is a Humanism" are a fruitful idea. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

augment Broome's minimalistic theory. Building on the work of David Gauthier on diachronic deliberation, I show that there is also a similar proposal available to Broome within a broadly cognitivist theory of rationality that focuses only on rational reconsideration. The central idea is roughly the following: One should reconsider an intention to X in light of new information if and only if this information would have made a difference to the overall normative assessment of the situation at the time one was originally deliberating about whether to X.

This paper aims to provide an analysis of how extending a necessarily incomplete previous practical standpoint (the perspective one takes in answering the question of what one ought to do), by way of the counterfactual requirement given above, can elucidate the extent and the degree to which intentions are rationally required to be stable.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section (1) I give a short overview of Broome's framework and motivate the idea that we need a rational diachronic requirement by providing a set of desiderata that specify what is to be explained in any account of diachronic coherence. The constraints on a diachronic account of rationality that emerge from this discussion are then applied in section (2) to Broome's account of rationally stable intentions. I argue that Broome's account fails to satisfy these conditions and is inadequate with regard to Van Fraassen's suggestion that rational agents should resolve dilemmas through an act of will. Finally, in section (3), I consider a potential response one could bring forward to defend Broome's account, reject it and consider whether adding Ferrero and Gauthier's account of diachronic rationality could resolve the issues. I show that they can't, develop my own account and apply it to cases of temptation, transformative experiences and incommensurable choices.

2. Intentional stability as extending deliberation

Intentions, such as Ann's intention to go to South Korea over the summer, play important cross-temporal roles and functions. Intentions help individuals to *coordinate* their actions and plans intra- and interpersonally: If Ann informs her colleague Bob of her intention to go to South Korea, then he can, on the basis of this, take a vacation around the same time, so that he will not be the only one in the office. Intentions allow us to make cost-effective use of our deliberative resources by *settling* on some alternative: Having formed the intention to go to South Korea, Ann will stop considering the alternative of taking a hiking trip in Sweden. Finally, intentions help individuals overcome temptations and

anticipated shifts in judgment. Say, for example, that Ann has spent her last two summers working, and knows that, as the summer approaches, she will find plenty of reasons to not take a vacation. However, Ann also knows that she would eventually regret this decision, and so Ann *resolves* to take the vacation nevertheless.⁴

However, focusing solely on the role of coordinating, settling and resolving can obscure the deeper sense in which these functions are connected to and a consequence of the way an intention is usually brought into existence. An intention with a larger impact, such as Ann's intention to go to South Korea, is typically not simply the result of some subconscious process, at the end of which she suddenly realizes that she intends to go to South Korea. Rather, such decisions are preceded by more or less careful deliberation. The basic intuition that the requirement I develop in this paper will flesh out is that an agent who better anticipates relevant dangers and temporally contingent facts in deliberation is under greater rational pressure in sticking to her decision than an agent who does not anticipate correctly the future circumstances that may affect their intention or who does not deliberate at all. Consequently, deliberation plays an important role in enabling intentions to fulfil their characteristic functions of intentions. It is thus worth giving a short account of what I mean by 'deliberation'.

What marks a process as practical deliberation, I assume, is the activity of determining the answer to the question of what one ought to do. Ideally, such a process results in a belief that one ought to X. But it can also happen that deliberation does not result in any belief about what one ought to do, e.g. when there is not enough time.

When deliberation does result in a belief, the kind of 'ought' that is believed must be normative and unqualified.⁵ When such an ought features in statements of the form 'N ought to X', I refer to it, in deference to Broome, as a *deontic fact* Broome (2013, 49). By 'normative', I mean that it provides one with reasons about what one ought to do Broome (2013, 10). By 'unqualified', I mean an ought that is all-things-considered in contrast to a qualified ought, which only applies to a specific domain such as morality, prudence, etiquette, fashion etc.. Concerning qualified oughts, it can happen that one '[..]ought morally to do one thing, and ought rationally to do something else, and ought prudentially to do

⁴These functions and roles are identified and discussed in Tenenbaum (2018).

⁵Broome argues that his central ought, which features in Enkrasia (The rational requirement that if one believes that one ought to X, then one intends to X) must be normative, all things considered, prospective and owned (2013, Chapter 2-3).

some third thing' Broome (2013, 25). These oughts are not necessarily normative. They do not count as deontic facts in my sense. So, when I say that an agent in deliberating comes to believe a deontic fact or equivalently forms a deontic belief, I take it that this ought is an all-things-considered ought.

Finally, as stated above, deliberation is the process of working out what one ought to do. In doing so the agent tries to determine the facts that explain why she ought to believe a deontic fact. Facts that explain deontic facts are reasons Broome (2013, Chapter 4). Partial explanations that count in favour of a deontic fact, I call, as is common in the literature, *pro tanto reasons*. An explanation that includes all *pro tanto* reasons in favour of a deontic fact, I call a *pro toto reason*. Let us now go back and consider how deliberation relates to the stability of intentions.

Suppose deliberation results in a deontic belief about a future action, and the agent in question, on the basis of this belief, forms a decision, which results in an intention. Because deliberation takes time and consumes mental capacities, no agent can deliberate constantly and check whether the deontic belief that gave rise to the intention is still explained and supported by how things are turning out.⁶ These considerations suggest a pragmatic kind of rational stability, but one that I will not pursue here.⁷ Rather I want to focus on the structural diachronic dimension of intentions that arise from deontic facts. Here is how Luca Ferrero understands structural rationality.

Claims of structural rationality concern the relations among the psychological attitudes, as governed by the norms constitutive of the attitudes' functional roles and their attributability to a single and unified subject.⁸

Thus, we want our rational requirement to capture the diachronic relations between intentions and other mental states such as beliefs in deontic facts that give rise to the functional roles of an intention (coordinating, resolving and settling practical issues for an agent). Since deontic facts, as I have stated above, are owned by the agent, they are automatically attributable to the agent as a single subject. This gives rise to the following constraint.

⁶This deliberative division of labour approach motivates Ferrero's treatment of diachronic rationality (2010).

⁷One prominent account of this kind of rational stability that appeals to the pragmatic benefits of general dispositions regarding stable intentions has been proposed by Bratman (1987) and developed further by Richard Holton (2009).

⁸See Ferrero (2014, 312).

Structural constraint: A diachronic rational requirement must identify those mental patterns that are necessary for the functional roles of intentions, including settling and resolving practical matters.

Any requirement that meets this constraint will thus also be able to explain how an act of will can resolve a dilemma such as the one faced by Goetz. Suppose it is the kind of deliberation that gave rise to the intention that anchors or explains why you rationally ought to stick to the intention. I have no direct argument for this claim. In this paper, I only show that currently available requirements that are reducible to synchronic requirements cannot explain the functional roles of intentions. If this is so then any rational requirement must be concerned with the history of the intention, its intentional structure, which includes the kind of deliberation that gave rise to the intention. Given this working hypothesis of the importance of deliberation for the rational stability of an intention the requirement must meet the following constraint.⁹

Diachronic constraint: The diachronic rational requirement should not be reducible to purely synchronic constraints.

Of course, whenever any agent deliberates, she does so in light of an incomplete background of information, within an epistemically opaque environment, on the basis of changing preferences and desires. Thus, things might turn out in such a way that the facts appealed to in past deliberation no longer count as a pro toto reason for the intention to which they gave rise. When this happens, the agent should reconsider her intention and verify that it is still justified in light of what she now believes. Therefore, any diachronic requirement must be sensitive to information that might disrupt the rational transmission of the pro toto reasons from a decision to the corresponding action. A final constraint on any such requirement, then, is that intentions that are overly rigid in the face of relevant new input should be deemed irrational, as should intentions that are dropped for insufficient reasons.

Reconsideration constraint: One should reconsider if and only if one has the right kind of reasons for reconsideration.

In section (2) I will elaborate on the kind of diachronic mental patterns that should be considered irrational because they violate this last

⁹Both the second and third constraint are stated implicitly in Bratman (2012) and explicitly in Ferrero (2012 "diachronic constraints of practical rationality," *philosophical issues* 22: 144–164.). I briefly consider, in section 3.1 and footnote 26, two synchronic accounts of rationality that do not satisfy the diachronic constraint.

condition. Indeed, the central aim of this paper is to spell out what is meant by the *right* kind of reasons. It is important to note that this last constraint makes no direct claim about intention, but rather about reconsideration. In contrast to passively dropping an intention, reconsideration is a conscious activity. However, more needs to be said about why it is reconsideration and not some other activity that justifies dropping an intention.

2.1. Reconsideration

An agent *N* reconsiders whether to *X* whenever she opens the question of whether or not to *X* anew. *N* opens the question of whether to *X* anew if she has previously intended to *X*, whenever the following two conditions are satisfied. Of these conditions each is necessary and both are together sufficient for a process to count as reconsideration.¹⁰

R1: *N* allows options that were up to now incompatible with *X*ing to become admissible.

R2: *N* deliberates whether to *X* or some other option incompatible with *X*.

These conditions can be fulfilled – or can fail to be fulfilled – in either a reflective or a non-reflective way. Reflective (non-)reconsideration refers to the formation of a belief that one ought or ought not to reconsider and the consequent acting on such a deontic belief. Although reflective (non-)reconsideration is important, the most prevalent form of (non-)reconsideration is *non-reflective*.

Unlike reflective (non-)reconsideration, non-reflective (non-)reconsideration is not based on prior deliberation. One simply begins the process of opening up the question of whether or not to *X* anew or refrains from it without thinking of the costs or benefits of reconsideration in the current situation. Accordingly, non-reflective (non-)reconsideration is shaped by an agent's habits, skills and dispositions with regard to reconsideration.

R1 can also help us characterize dispositions involved in non-reconsideration. Suppose that Ann intends to go to Korea and *R1* is not the case, thus she deems alternative options like booking a flight to Mexico as inadmissible in her deliberation and will automatically be disposed to filter them out. If, on the other hand, an intention is reconsidered,

¹⁰These features of reconsideration appear in a similar form in Bratman (1987, 62).

the relevant disposition that makes R1 and R2 true will typically be triggered or accompanied by feelings of surprise, doubt, guilt, regret or uneasiness.

Importantly, feelings of guilt or surprise must somehow be connected to reasons or evidence for reconsideration, since all of these emotions can also be irrational. Apart from featuring in the reconsideration constraint (discussed above), the notion of reasons for reconsideration plays an important role in my later proposal, so it is worth examining this notion in further detail.

2.2. Reasons for reconsideration

I take S to be a pro tanto reason for reconsideration if S indicates to N that there is a problem posed for her intention to X.^{11,12} The following presents an incomplete list of features that indicate to the agent that there might be a problem for her intention.

A *judgment shift* might transpire as a result of *unexpected changes* in circumstances. Suppose Ann wants to study computer science, but does poorly on the first exams and has to work much harder than she had previously thought. If she wanted to study computer science because she thought this would be the easiest way for her to get a bachelor's degree, then we might expect that her judgment has shifted and think of this shift as a problem for her intention to become a computer scientist.

Conflicting intentions can indicate that there are reasons for reconsideration. Ann might intend incompatible things. She might intend to go travelling for a year and conditionally intend to go to start a master in computer science on the improbable assumption that she is accepted at Stanford. If she is indeed accepted, she finds herself with intentions that cannot be satisfied concurrently.

Finally, if one properly reconsiders a big decision like continuing a masters degree in computer science, then both R1 and R2 will take time, so proper reconsideration requires having *enough time*.

¹¹In contrast to a problem being posed to one's plan to X (because, e.g., it may be difficult to choose the correct means to some end).

¹²S indicates to N that B; If, because of S, N would have reasons to believe that B, and B is a pro tanto reason that there is a problem for the intention. The following types of reasons for reconsideration have been discussed by Bratman (1987, 67) and Richard Holton (2004, 526, 2009) who extends Bratman's pragmatic approach by introducing rules of thumb in order to limit the reasons that can rationally be alluded to in judging the rationality of reconsideration. These rules of thumb are versions of the salient features listed below. Unlike my account, Holton does not give an account of when these reasons are decisive for reconsideration.

As I have previously noted, these different features do not necessarily entail that one should reconsider. For that we need a further story, which I provide in section 3.4, that tells us how these features or pro tanto reasons connect to the pro toto reason that gave rise to the intention.

Reconsideration, although frequently prompted by subconscious processes such as dispositions or habits, is itself a conscious and active process. This is so for two reasons. First, R2 concerns deliberation, which is an active process in itself. Second, if reconsideration were not active, it would lead to a particular kind of irrationality or incoherence among one's mental attitudes across time. This kind of incoherence is captured by the minimal proposal put forward by Broome (2013).

3. Persistence of Intention

Broome's rational requirement 'Persistence of Intention' is supposed to capture the intuition that '[p]eople generally do what they decide to do' and this fact is a matter of the rational progression of an intention over time. Broome writes (2013, 178).

Persistence of Intention [Pol]: If t_0 is earlier than t_1 , rationality requires of N that, if N intends at t_0 to F, and no cancelling event occurs between t_0 and t_1 , then either N intends at t_1 to F, or N reconsiders at t_1 whether to F.

The term 'cancelling event' in Pol refers to (1) acts of *reconsidering* whether or not to F,¹³ (2) coming to believe that the intention has been *fulfilled* or (3) the belief that fulfilment is *impossible*.¹⁴

Pol is a conditional, wide scope, rational requirement. It states that an agent's intentions are diachronically rational, and thus diachronically coherent, if either the antecedent is false (the agent did not intend to F or a cancelling event has occurred) or the consequent is true (the agent is still intending to F or has started the process of reconsideration). This means that when the antecedent is false, because a cancelling event has occurred, then the agent is not irrational if she drops her intention.

Pol labels an agent as diachronically irrational or incoherent, if she previously intended to F, but dropped her intention without the occurrence

¹³Broome actually uses the term consideration instead of reconsideration. I don't think that anything important hangs on this and in what follows, I will be sticking to the term reconsideration.

¹⁴For reconsideration to be a cancelling event, (Broome 2013, 179) only demands that in the process of reconsidering one opens the question of whether or not to F anew. This, he claims, is sufficient to immediately drop the intention. I take it to mean that reconsideration consists in merely allowing incompatible alternatives to be admissible, which means it can be sufficiently described by condition R1.

of a cancelling event. The upshot of Broome's requirement, therefore, is that a rational agent must consciously abandon her prior resolve by reconsidering her intention. If she fails to do that she is guilty of a kind of *forgetting*, which Broome (2013, 177) labels as irrational.

With this analysis in mind, it is easy to see that Broome's requirement partially satisfies the diachronic constraint. Pol connects the formation of the intention (though not the kind of formation), a past mental state, with its execution, a current intention (in action). The antecedent is exclusively constituted by events in the past and therefore unalterable. As a consequence, the agent can only satisfy Pol by fulfilling the consequent. This means that any incoherence will be an incoherence between two distinct temporal states. What Pol cannot explain is how the kind of process that gives rise to the intention might have an impact on the rational progression of the intention, nor can it explain the kind of events that might function as sufficient reasons for reconsideration. This means that the reconsideration constraint is not met.

Finally, I want to show that Pol also fails in not allowing Van Fraassen's existentialist hero to resolve his dilemma by an act of will. This is so because a Broomean agent's intentions will fail to display the settling, coordination and resolve functions that are required by the structural constraint. If this is correct, then Pol by itself does not provide a satisfying story of 'the rationality of doing as you decide' see Broome (2013, 181–183).

3.1. Brute shuffling and the existentialist hero

The overall argument rests on two premises. First, moral dilemmas or incommensurable choices are an actual possibility and cannot simply be defined away.¹⁵ Second, if moral dilemmas are a possibility, an 'act of will' is the best solution and should be a sufficient way to resolve them.

Regarding the first premise: I know of no decisive argument in favour of it other than appealing to plausible cases, such as the following,¹⁶ presented by Van Fraassen (1973, 10).¹⁷

Sartre [...] considers Christian morality in connection with a case of a French student who, at the start of the German occupation, must choose between joining the Free French and seeing his aged mother through the coming ordeal.

¹⁵Instead of incommensurability, we could also follow Chang (2002) and say that these choices are "on a par".

¹⁶See Van Fraassen (1973, 10) and Sartre (1975) for the original case.

¹⁷See also Setiya (2017) for arguments why incommensurable choices abound in everyday life.

Before addressing the second premise, let us briefly consider how Sartre's famous case of the French student, who I will call Paula, might be depicted within the broad Broomeian framework that I have adopted in this paper.

The most natural way to understand the situation, I believe, is as a case of incommensurability. Broome takes two options F and G to be incommensurable iff there are reasons for you that count in favour of F and reasons for you that count in favour of G, and neither set of reasons outweighs the other, since there is no common unit of measurement see Broome (2013, 53,61). Applied to Paula's case, this would mean that her love for her mother, her mother's old age and the Christian ideal to care for one's parents are reasons for Paula to stay at home, while her love for her country and her political ideals together are a reason she ought to fight the German forces. It is neither true that she ought to, all things considered, care for her mother, nor that she ought to, all things considered, join the resistance. However, Paula believes that she ought to either join the resistance or care for her mother.

It might be equally plausible to suppose that Paula believes that she ought to stay home, all things considered, while she also believes that she ought to join the Free French, all things considered. This might indeed be the more natural way to understand the situation Paula faces, but as it is in conflict with one of Broome's assumptions (that all-things-considered normative oughts cannot conflict), I will assume the reading that Paula faces a choice between two incommensurable options. The argument that I discuss below could easily be adapted to a situation of conflicting oughts.

The second premise of the argument is that an act of will is the best way to resolve such a dilemma. An act of will is a decision resulting in an intention. For an act of will to resolve a dilemma, it has to break the tie and settle the question of whether to F or G. In what follows, I aim to show that for a perfectly rational agent, in the Broomeian sense, an act of will is not sufficient to resolve the dilemma she faces. To see this, consider Paula's case.

Suppose that, in the morning, at t_0 , Paula intends to join the resistance. At t_1 , in the evening, rationality requires her to intend to join the resistance or to reconsider whether to join the resistance.¹⁸ Suppose further

¹⁸Here we only consider the consequent of Pol. The intuitive reason is, as I argued in section 2, that one cannot be required to do something that is necessarily true. This intuition is captured by a detachment rule that (Broome 2013, Chapter 7) accepts as part of the logic of rational requirements, called necessary detachment. It states that the consequent of a conditional requirement can be detached if the

that, due to a strong feeling of regret over leaving her mother behind, a disposition that is fine-tuned to alert her when she is about to act against something she deeply values, leads her non-reflectively to reconsider her intention. This means that, at t_1 , she reconsiders, abandons her intention to join the resistance and forms the intention to care for her mother, since she still believes that she either ought to join the resistance or care for her mother. However, the next morning, at t_2 , she similarly feels like she is not living up to her political ideals, and a similar disposition leads her, at t_3 , to yet again reconsider her intention to care for her mother. If we suppose that the circumstances haven't changed in any relevant way and both options remain open to her, then we might imagine Paula being caught in this kind of brute shuffling behaviour until she is no longer able to fulfil either of the two options. This seems to be incoherent and irrational.

In summary, if it is possible for a rational agent to face incommensurable choices, and if a rational agent ought to be capable of breaking the tie between two incommensurable choices by an act of will, and Paula is a conceivable example of a rational agent who is unable to do so, then there should be a set of rational requirements that are violated by her 'act of will' not functioning as it should. If we are not able to point to any requirement in Broome's theory, then either we must assume that his account is incorrect or that there is a rational requirement, not specified by him, that ensures that an agent will be capable of an act of will. I suggest that we have good reasons to believe the latter, though we will first have to check whether Broome's theory does indeed lack the resources for an act of will to be sufficient to resolve Paula's moral dilemma.

3.2. Broome's response and bootstrapping

Broome might deny that Paula, in constantly shuffling her intentions, is rational by the lights of his account. That is, he might claim that she is not satisfying all the rational requirements that apply to her. Specifically, Paula is irrational in not believing that she ought to not constantly reconsider her intention. To see this, suppose that at some point, t_i , after having already abandoned the intention to join the resistance and care for her

antecedent is necessarily true. Given that all truth functional parts of the antecedent are concerned with the past and have already been fulfilled (Paula has already formed her intention and no canceling event so far has occurred) and given the unalterability of the past, necessary detachment allows us to detach the consequent.

mother i times, Paula realizes that the costs of constantly deliberating are an explanation for the deontic fact that she ought not to reconsider her intention yet again. Forming the corresponding ought belief and intention not to reconsider, she reflectively refrains from reconsidering her intention. This seems to be an easy way out of her quandary, since sticking to her intention on the basis of the ought belief that ‘nothing relevantly changes and she ought not to reconsider’, seems to be in accordance with my reconsideration constraint.

As reasonable as this may seem there is an obvious problem associated with it. New information might come up that would undermine the pro toto reason for joining the Free French. For t_1 to t_i we were supposing that Paula was facing an incommensurable choice; neither set of reasons outweighed the other. But we might imagine that at some point, t_k , shortly after t_i , the state of her mother’s health strongly deteriorates, such that the overall balance of reasons shifts, so that if Paula were to reconsider now, she would come to the conclusion that she ought to, all things considered, care for her mother. In this situation, forming an intention to not reconsider amounts to problematic bootstrapping.

Of course, Broome could insist that the intention not to reconsider might also be reconsidered and subsequently dropped. But this does not solve the problem of when it is rational to reconsider, and instead shifts the justification to another level.

As a response Broome might propose that, instead of the intention ‘not to reconsider’, Paula, if rational, could deliberate about whether she should reconsider and in turn form a conditional ought belief and intention ‘not to reconsider, unless some new and relevant information comes up’. For this solution to work, Broome would either need to give a dynamic account of reconsideration-relevant new information or he would need to assume that pro toto reasons for reconsideration must be complete in the sense that Paula would need to spell out what new information would make reconsideration rational in this specific case. The latter approach is not an option, since epistemic opacity and the limited resources for deliberation do not allow the agent to list all the possible relevant and irrelevant information from the start, which means that the pro toto reason will never be complete in listing all the relevant factors that would make it so that she ought to reconsider.

In response to this, Broome might switch to the first strategy and argue that there is nothing that prevents the agent from forming ought beliefs about reasons for or against reconsideration as they arise. Moreover, in forming such beliefs, Broome might even grant

that the original *pro toto* reason that gave rise to the intention should be memorized and taken as the starting point of what information is relevant for reconsideration of the relevant intention. For such a proposal to work, he would need to further spell out how the original *pro-toto* reasons that gave rise to the intention relate to new information, which his current account does not do. Such a dynamic account would seem to satisfy the diachronicity constraint and part of the reconsideration constraint. It would indeed go some way in explaining the diachronic rationality of Paula's act of will, although it would not cover non-reflective non-reconsideration. Instead it would be along the lines of accounts developed by Bratman (2018) and by David Gauthier (1994). I will discuss their accounts in section 3.2, but I do want to note some problems with these types of accounts already at this point. Constantly gathering information to determine whether or not one ought to reconsider is both costly and does not quite ensure that an intention settles an issue. Leaving it as an open question whether Paula should reconsider whether she should join the resistance or stay with her mother means that it also remains an open question whether she should have the intention in the first place. Reasons regarding reconsideration often overlap with reasons regarding the intention itself. So the stability of intentions cannot fully be explained by reference to certain modes of deliberation. We often have several concurrent intentions concerning life projects that frame our thoughts and actions and whose stability we do not constantly determine by deliberation. Being constantly on the lookout how they might be threatened by new information undermines their role in guiding our planning and reasoning and makes it more likely for them to lack the relevant stability.¹⁹

I conclude that Broome's theory, without an account of how new information must be related to the reasons that gave rise to the current intentions, does not have the resources to label Paula's brute shuffling as irrational. Consequently, it must label it as rational, since there is no rational requirement to point at that is violated. As I have argued in the last section, the best way to deal with this is to add a rational requirement that ensures that an act of will, in a moral dilemma situation, is sufficient to resolve and avert circumstances of brute shuffling.

¹⁹Broome could also appeal to his instrumental requirement and say that non-reconsideration is a necessary means for the fulfilment of the intention, thereby taking a similar strategy as discussed in Tenenbaum (2018). The problem with this line of argument is that pretty much the same worries, that I have raised in this section, would apply, so I will not pursue this strategy here.

4. Counterfactual diachronic accounts of rationality

In this last section I will consider two different rational requirements that have been proposed by Ferrero and Gauthier.²⁰ I will reject both of them and finally offer my own account that is not only able to label brute shuffling as irrational, but also satisfies the structural, diachronic and reconsideration constraint, which I have laid out in section 1.

4.1. Ferrero's diachronic account

Ferrero (2010) has offered a counterfactual account that shares some commonalities with my later proposal, but fails in a crucial way. He takes the stability of intentions to consist in 'protected decision-based reasons', which are issued by decisions. Their purpose is to filter out new information that does not justify reconsideration, protecting the agent from unnecessary reconsideration and thereby supporting the stability of intentions.

Ferrero argues that one should act on a decision-based reason or stick to an intention because of a decision-based reason if the decision was rational to begin with and stays this way (2010, 7–10). It stays this way if the agent's current decision would converge on the same conclusion.

More precisely, let t_0 and t_1 be times such that at t_0 N has formed an intention to F and that intention has persisted until and including t_1 and N believes at t_1 that S obtains, then

Counterfactual decisions-based stability: Rationality requires of N that (N reconsiders whether to F at t_1 iff were N to deliberate now, then N would not come to the same decision as before.)

According to this condition new information breaks the rational transmission over time with regard to an intention if the agent would not reach the same conclusion were she to deliberate and decide now. Ferrero's account does not satisfy the diachronic constraint, since his counterfactual condition targets the possible deliberation of the current agent and not the agent who originally intended the action.²¹ Second, instead of

²⁰ I will focus on a recent interpretation of Gauthier's account by Bratman (2018; The Interplay of Intention and Reason).

²¹ Ferrero's actual condition is slightly more complex in demanding that N, to reconsider, must be in deliberative circumstances that are at least as good her former deliberating self (2010, 9–10). This does add a certain diachronic dimension to the requirement. I nevertheless chose not to mention it, since it is not relevant to the objection I develop against his account. Also, since it is not clear what being in the same or better deliberative position means, other than having new information, it is not clear whether this condition is enough to solve problematic cases where the practical

making the counterfactual condition about the deontic facts or the normative assessment, Ferrero requires an intention to be stable only if the agent would arrive at the same *decision*.²² It is quite obvious that such an account cannot guide the agent in cases where the reasons under-determine the decision situation, as in cases of incommensurability. In these cases we might decide differently, whenever we deliberate again.

Ferrero believes that he can solve this problem by some kind of ‘bare selection’ (2010, 18), a selection between choices that is completely synchronic and that does influence future choices or future rational conduct. The problem is that for bare selection to get off the ground, the selection of one choice over another, in a case of incommensurability, must transform the decision situation. This might happen via snowball effects, e.g. if Paula invested money by buying a gun to fight the Germans, but it need not and the more impactful the choice is, the less likely it is that the mere act of choosing transforms the choice that our existentialist hero faces. This means that the spectre of brute shuffling still hangs over Paula’s head if we were to add Ferrero’s condition to Broome’s set of requirements. Tying the rationality of reconsideration to the resulting decision after a process of deliberation would allow Paula to constantly shuffle between the two choices, since the reasons of the case alone are not sufficient by themselves to determine how she should decide. Ferrero’s account therefore cannot explain how an act of will can be sufficient to resolve a moral dilemma.

4.2. Gauthier’s deliberative account of cross-temporal counterfactual comparison

Both Gauthier and, more recently, Bratman have proposed to understand the stability of intentions by way of a mode of diachronic deliberation.²³ The intuition that the requirement that fleshes out this diachronic deliberation is supposed to capture is that rational stability is a question of caring

standpoint shifts as happens in cases of temptation, assurance or threats—cases that seem problematic for his account.

²²Amending his counterfactual condition to be about reaching the same solution with regard to current deontic facts if one were to reconsider is a solution that is in the spirit of Gillesen (2018). It runs into the problem that these deontic facts would change in temptation cases, which I discuss in section 3.3. Without an independent account about the goodness of deliberative circumstances, these synchronic accounts would label giving in to temptation as rational, since the agent, were she to deliberate once her judgment changes, would rationally reach a different conclusion and thus be rational in dropping her intention. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this possibility.

²³See Gauthier (1994, 1997, 1998) and Bratman (2018, Chapter 8), who shows how we can understand Gauthier’s account via diachronic self-governance.

about diachronic self-governance.²⁴ Diachronic self-governance can be understood as being guided by one's attitudes, such as beliefs about deontic facts, not just at a time but across time. Gauthier's idea is that we shouldn't care about such diachronic self-governance no matter what.²⁵ Rather we should only care about it if we see our intentions as being *confirmed* by how things are working out. 'A course of action is confirmed at a given time, if at that time the agent may reasonable expect to do better continuing it than she would have expected to do had she not adopted it.' see David Gauthier (1998, 49). Similarly, a course of action is disconfirmed if the agent would have rather not formed the intention in the first place, given how things have worked out because of it. Gauthier captures the idea that an agent, because she cares about being guided by previous deliberative choices that turn out to be successful, sticks to the corresponding intention by a cross-temporal counterfactual comparison between the current intending self and the past deliberating self in the following way see David Gauthier (1994, 707 and 717).

Let t_0 and t_1 be times such that at t_0 N has formed an intention to F based on relevant deliberation and that intention has persisted until and including t_1 and N believes at t_1 that S obtains, then

Counterfactual deliberation-based stability: Rationality requires of N that (N retains her intention to F at t_1 iff following through with her plan to F at t_1 would have been regarded by her, at t_0 , as a life that goes better than her best alternative strategy that would have been available to her at t_0 .)

The first thing to note is that his account does not directly talk about reconsideration, but about retaining an intention based on a certain kind of deliberation. Gauthier takes the result of this deliberation to determine whether to act according to the intention or whether to drop it right away, while Broome's Pol requirement, as well as Ferrero's account, only demands that the agent opens the question anew. Furthermore, his account links the rational persistence of an intention to a counterfactual comparison between two expectations regarding courses of actions.^{26,27}

²⁴Here I follow Bratman's recent interpretation of Gauthier's requirement.

²⁵Accounts that prioritize the deliberating agent over the intending agent are known as resolute choice accounts. See McClennen (1990) who has shaped the terminology of resolute choice as a concept of rational stability, where, once you have judged that some action is best at the time of deliberation and nothing unexpected happens, then you are rationally required to follow through with you intention.

²⁶Bratman (2018, 172–174) calls this comparison a cross-temporal counterfactual comparison, since at t_0 , the agent compares how things have actually played out at t_1 with his expectation at t_0 of how things would have alternatively played out had he not formed the intention in the first place.

²⁷Bratman (2018, 181–182) qualifies Gauthier's account by restricting it to intentions where the benefits of self-governance associated with sticking to the requirement and following through with one's

We can think of this comparison as a counterfactual preference relation or betterness relation over choices of actions regarding a life that goes well at the time of the formation of the intention. It is a betterness relation over the expected outcome, at t_0 , of the best way of acting on that intention, updated with how things have actually turned out with regard to that intention at t_1 , such that this outcome must be at least as good as the expected outcome, at t_0 , that is associated with the best way of not having formed any intention at all see Mintoff (1997, 616).

In discussing Broome's account, I argued that he potentially does have tools to resolve the problem of incommensurable actions via ought beliefs regarding reconsideration of that intention. What was lacking was a systematic way to filter out reasons that would be relevant for reconsidering that intention. Gauthier's account seems to offer him the resources to close this lacuna by saying that the relevant reasons for reconsiderations are those that, had they been expected, would have made the intention less attractive with regard to how well one's life goes compared to the best available alternative.

Does Gauthier's account meet the three constraints that I have set up? He does meet the diachronic constraint which said that a rational explanation regarding the stability of intentions must refer to the process that gave rise to the intention. His requirement does that, since it specifies a counterfactual comparison between two different expectations during deliberation when the intention was formed.

It does not meet the reconsideration constraint by specifying which information are rationally relevant to dropping the intention. Bratman might argue that this is a plus, since a rational requirement for non-reconsideration amounts to the agent putting on a 'kind of blinder' and it is going to be psychologically difficult to be aware of one's other options without reconsidering them.²⁸ For this reason he believes that we need further deliberative resources, such as the end of diachronic self-governance, so that a prior intention has rational significance even in moments when one reconsiders. The problem is that in cases of incommensurability, adding a further reason to one of the ends will, by the nature of the case, not be enough to make them comparable, which means that the Bratmanian strategy does not seem to be an option in the case of Paula.

intentions are not trumped by the pragmatic costs of following through, such as in toxin puzzle cases discussed by Kavka (1983).

²⁸Although Bratman (2018, 155) makes this argument with regard to temptation, it can easily be extended to the case of incommensurable choices.

Finally, although it might provide a satisfying explanation of the constitutive functions of intentions in cases such as assurances and threats, it misses the mark for incommensurable choices.²⁹ Imagine that Paula chooses to stay home with her mother. The next morning, at t_1 , she compares her choice to not having formed the intention to stay with her mother at all. There are two potential courses of action to compare this with: 'inaction', where she neither intends to care for her mother nor to join the Free French and 'joining the Free French'. It is clear that if we compare her choice of caring for her mother to inaction, then Gauthier's requirement would tell us that Paula should retain her intention. If we, however, compare it to the latter option, then since the choice is incommensurable, no betterness relation obtains. In deliberating Paula could not say that caring for her mother is a life that would go better, than if she were to join the Free French, because it is that comparison that is not available to her in the first place. The same goes for 'equally well', since that would also imply that both courses were actually comparable, which by assumption they are not.

Despite these shortcomings, Gauthier's view, I believe, gets two things right. It takes seriously the deliberating agent and the incompleteness of her standpoint. An agent often times can't be sure of how things will turn out, but must make a decision based on what she believes at the time of deliberation. It also does justice to the intuition that she might be more or less good at deliberating, by putting her under greater rational pressure if she correctly anticipates how things will turn out and under less pressure if she makes a mistake about her future self or her future circumstances.

4.3. A cross-temporal counterfactual requirement for structurally stable reconsideration

In this last part of the paper, I want to show how we can augment Gauthier's account so that it satisfies the structural and the reconsideration constraint.

Let me, based on Gauthier's insight, introduce the idea of counterfactually relevant information to the belief of a deontic fact that one has previously arrived at in deliberation. First, not just any information is counterfactually relevant information, rather it is a subset of the types

²⁹David Gauthier (1994, 716,719) shows how his requirement allows an agent to rationally maintain sincere assurances, while also being rational in reconsidering whether to follow through on failed apocalyptic threats. Similar arguments are available for the requirement I later propose.

of information or events that I discussed in section 1.2. It is information regarding a change in judgement, the possibility of an unexpected event or of a conflict with her other intentions and commitments that the agent could have, during deliberation at t_0 , anticipated or failed to anticipate.

The second component of counterfactually relevant information regarding the belief of a deontic fact draws from Gauthier's idea of a cross-temporal counterfactual comparison. Instead of comparing how good one's life goes given the adoption of the intention with how good one's life would have been, had one not intended to F, one compares the original result of one's deliberation with the counterfactual result of one's deliberation had one known what one knows now. The latter deontic fact is thereby transformed and becomes more 'present'.

We can think of a new piece of information S as being normatively *irrelevant*, by thinking that it can be incorporated in the normative story in a way that would have coherently extended the practical standpoint of the agent (the perspective one takes in deliberating about whether to F) with regard to the deontic fact(s) that gave rise to the intention to F at that time. A past standpoint that can be extended in this way is counterfactually stable. Counterfactual, because whether S would have meshed with the explanation for the deontic belief at t_0 is, from the current perspective, a counterfactual question. S is counterfactually relevant to an intention to F if adding S to the past practical standpoint would have led the agent to come to believe a different deontic fact, than the one that gave rise to the intention.

Let me now present a first version of the counterfactual requirement that captures this idea of a counterfactually stable standpoint.

Let t_0 and t_1 be times such that at t_0 N has formed an intention to F and that intention has persisted until and including t_1 and N believes at t_1 that S obtains, then

Counterfactual Stability [CS]: Rationality requires of N that (N reconsiders whether to F at t_1 iff (N takes S to be a pro tanto reason to reconsider the intention to F at t_1 , and if at t_0 had N expected S to obtain, then, in deliberating, N would have come to the belief that she faced different intention-relevant deontic facts than the ones that the intention to F was supposed to satisfy)).

It is worth unpacking this with some care. First, it is easy to see that all the relevant truth functional elements of this requirement are concerned with mental states. Thus, it is compatible with the coherentist's supposition that rationality supervenes on the mind.

Secondly, the whole CS requirement is only instantiated if an intention to F is formed in the first place and persists until the current moment t_1 . This process is governed by Pol, so if, between t_0 and t_1 , N fulfils the intention to F, then this is a cancelling event and N can rationally drop the intention so that CS no longer applies. If, on the other hand, no cancelling event occurs and the agent satisfies Pol by retaining her intention until t_1 , then rationality requires that

N reconsiders whether to F at t_1

if the right side of the biconditional is satisfied. If the right side of the biconditional is not satisfied, say because N does not take S to be a pro tanto reason to reconsider, then rationality requires that N does not reconsider whether to F. It is important to note that I also intend CS to apply to non-reflective (non)-reconsideration. This means that in reconsidering her intention based on a disposition or a habit, N does not need to be consciously aware of the truth of the biconditional. That said, she can also satisfy the requirement by forming a belief that she ought to reconsider, where such a belief satisfies the right side of the CS-biconditional. For the right side of the conditional to be true, both conjuncts have to be true. So it must be the case that:

N takes S to be a pro tanto reason to reconsider the intention to F at t_1

So S has to be an indication to N that a judgment shift has taken place, things are not as N had expected them to be, etc. But these reasons for reconsideration have to be normatively relevant. They have to undermine the deontic belief that the decision to F was supposed to satisfy. S has to be counterfactually relevant. This is only the case, if the second conjunct is also true:

If at t_0 had N expected S to obtain, then, in deliberating, N would have come to the belief that she faced different intention-relevant deontic facts than the ones that the intention to F was supposed to satisfy.

The counterfactual is true in all instances in which adding the belief 'that S will obtain' to the things that N believed and expected at t_0 , would have resulted in her forming different beliefs regarding the deontic facts concerning F. Put differently, it is true in all instances in which, had she expected that S, then this would have made a difference with regard to the conclusion of the deliberative process, where this difference in conclusion would be relevant to F. If this is the case, then we can say that the practical standpoint at t_0 is not counterfactually stable with regard to S being the case.

If *S* is irrelevant to the practical standpoint, then the counterfactual is false. This is the case if adding the belief that *S* will obtain would not have changed the result of the deliberative process. This happens when the agent has already anticipated ‘that *S*’ in her deliberative process or, after adding *S* to her practical standpoint, at t_0 , would have taken it to be outweighed or defeated by other pro tanto reasons. Consider in this context cases of temptation that have received an extensive treatment in the literature on diachronic rationality.

Consider Sam, who is meeting up with his friends tonight for dinner and decides in the morning, at t_0 , to drink only one glass of wine, because he has to prepare a class for tomorrow, at t_2 , and because he knows that normally, once, at t_1 , he had his first glass, his preference and his judgment will shift to have a second and third. He also knows that this judgement shift will be temporary and that he will later, at t_2 , regret having had a second and third glass. A number of philosophers have claimed that it is rational for Sam not to reconsider his intention to only drink one glass, at t_1 , while it is also rational for him to drop his intention if he were to reconsider.³⁰ The way CS treats these cases is in line with these intuitions, with two slight divergences.

We assumed that Sam believed, at t_0 , that he ought to drink only one glass of wine, where the facts explaining this ought included his expectation, at t_0 , to experience a judgement shift at t_1 , which was the very reason why he intended to drink one glass only in the first place. Similarly, in line with Hinchman and Bratman’s no-regret condition, we could also count his expectation at t_0 , that if he were to reconsider and drop his intention at t_1 , that he would regret this then tomorrow, at t_2 , as another reason for forming the belief that he ought to form the intention to drink only one glass, knowing that this would weaken reasons for not forming the intention in the first place due to an anticipation of a judgement shift.³¹ The reason for this is that although, when, at t_1 , Sam realizes that his judgement has shifted and that this is a pro tanto reason for him to reconsider his intention, this information does not satisfy the second conjunct, which means that it is not counterfactually relevant. This is

³⁰See Bratman, Israel, and Pollack (1988), Hinchman (2015, 113); Richard Holton (2009, 138–139) for proponents of these intuitions.

³¹See Bratman (1999; “Toxin, Temptation, and the Stability of Intention”) Velleman (1996) and Hinchman (2015), who develop an account of diachronic deliberation similar in spirit to Gauthier’s account. It differs in not being concerned with a backward looking perspective, but rather with the perspective of the agent “at plans end” and whether she expects herself to feel regret or no regret at having followed through with her intention. In doing this, as Bratman (2018, 164; “Temptation and the Agent’s Standpoint”) notes, it can also “support the initial formation of that prior intention”.

because the fact that his judgement has shifted had already been anticipated at t_0 , so adding it to the set of beliefs, at t_0 , about how things would turn out does not add anything new to his deliberative premises and so cannot change the intention-relevant deontic facts. If he were to nevertheless reconsider, then CS would label reconsideration as irrational. In this way it is stronger than Hinchman's view who argues that 'The problem [in temptation cases] is not that you're in rational error if you redeliberate but that you're not in rational error when you follow through on an intention that you would have abandoned if you had redeliberated.' see Hinchman (2015, 113). According to CS you are in rational error to deliberate, but you would not be in rational error if you were to, after deliberation, abandon you intention. CS does not make any claim on the kind of deliberation that is rational once you reconsider.

This allows CS to honour the idea of the 'rational priority of present evaluation' see Bratman (2018, 153). Sam's present shift in preferences or even shift in judgment does not affect the deontic facts he would arrive at where he to deliberate now, since by being rational he refrains from reconsidering, from opening the question anew and thus from acting against his present evaluation. Deontic facts that are result of deliberation and are shaped by this change in judgement thus remain, in Holton's words, 'merely potential'.³²

At the same time CS does provide richer resources in cases that diverge from the orthodox temptation case I discussed before. Consider for example the possibility that Sam, during dinner, unexpectedly meets an old friend or, unexpectedly, has the chance to drink a bottle of a rare French Bordeaux that wouldn't normally be available. To see how CS treats cases where the agent didn't entertain the possibility of S or where the agent believed that S was highly unlikely and based her deliberation on the fact that S would surely not obtain, we have to adjust CS in the face of two problems.

4.4. Adjusting CS

The CS requirement, as it stands, still faces two difficulties. Suppose that Paula believed, at t_0 , that she ought to join the Free French, all things considered. Suppose further that she disregards this conviction and akratically chooses to stay home. The problem for the CS requirement is that,

³²This is very much in the spirit of the argument discussed in Richard Holton (2009, 139–140 and 149 ff) on how to rationally avoid acting against your present judgement via rational non-reconsideration.

if this turns out to be a standard case, there will be no new information that would change her assessment. Thus, the right-hand side of the CS biconditional would be false and rationality would require her not to reconsider her intention to stay at home. CS would thereby rationalize retaining the irrational intention, which is an unacceptable case of bootstrapping.

The way out is to restrict CS to cases in which the agent was not akratic in intending what she did with regard to the deontic facts she believed obtained. CS still applies to intentions formed on the basis of beliefs about deontic facts, but does not apply to cases in which intentions are contrary to the deontic facts believed.

The second problem CS faces becomes salient when we consider that an agent can be bad at deliberating, or that she can undergo (and expect to undergo) a transformative experience that is hard to anticipate correctly (Paul 2014).

Consider the biblical figure Saul, who was a dedicated persecutor of early disciples of Jesus until he met Jesus himself, was blinded by him, then healed by another Christian, and converted to Christianity, becoming the apostle Paul. Such a substantial transformation of the practical standpoint challenges CS on two fronts. It calls into question the possibility of genuinely anticipating such a transformative experience and highlights the difficulty of determining whether the past practical standpoint and with it the deontic facts believed, after incorporating the information, would have changed.

Let us look at the first problem. If we took the information that is available at t_1 , after Saul has become the apostle Paul, as of another quality, such that, at t_0 , Saul could not have anticipated what it is like to have the transformative experience of becoming Paul, then, even if he did in fact, at t_0 , ponder that possibility, such information would always present a new input that would have changed his belief regarding the deontic facts at t_0 . The information would be counterfactually relevant and the right-hand side of the biconditional of CS would then be made true and he would have to reconsider the intention in order to be rational. Such a treatment of a transformative experience would support the intuitive idea that one cannot be a good deliberator in certain non-standard cases where the experience that one tries to anticipate, is almost like that of another person.

The case becomes more complex if we allow for the possibility that an agent may correctly anticipate a transformative shift in her standpoint such that she either expects that she will, at the time of action, lack

certain values that are now a central reason for why she believes she ought to do something, or the inverse is the case, namely that her deliberating self lacks values that she expects to later acquire and that are relevant to the ought belief that gave rise to her intention.

To explore these subtleties, let us imagine Ann who tries to determine whether she should travel the world when her child is one year old, by trying to anticipate what it would be like to have a child.³³ Let's assume that she has gathered lots of third-personal information of what it is like for people in a similar social and personal situation as her to have a child. Given this information she believes that she will, at t_1 , when her child is one year old, value staying in the same place, because of her ideals regarding a child's upbringing, even though she does not assign any value to the idea of a stable social and physical environment now. Is it nevertheless possible for her to rationally stick to her intention to travel, intend the means necessary and rely on herself having that intention, even when she expects that her judgement might shift?

There are two cases here. In one case she believes it to be *unlikely* that her practical standpoint at t_1 shifts and threatens to undermine her deontic belief, and in the other case she expects with *certainty* that her practical standpoint will shift in this way. I will need to further adjust CS before I can deal with the former case. The latter case turns on the question of whether – and if so, how – one can coherently include such a shift in one's explanation at t_0 . This requires a separate account of diachronic reasoning which specifies how to contrast, weigh and compare reasons at different times with each other. I haven't given such an account.³⁴ Although my account does put restrictions on the kind of deliberation that is diachronically rational, my aim is to show that once one already has a pro toto reason or a deontic belief regarding an intention to F, at t_0 , and has formed an intention to F, at t_0 , then one must, in learning how things in the world turn out, at points later than t_0 , try to extend this original practical standpoint from t_0 in a coherent way in order to determine whether it is rational to reconsider one's intention. If such an extension is possible with some new information S, because S was already anticipated or can be coherently integrated into the past practical standpoint, then it is irrational to reconsider one's intention. My account

³³This case is discussed in detail by (Paul 2015), who argues that these expectations can't be rational.

³⁴See Bratman (2018, chapter 10-11) and Gauthier's account in section 3.2 for different theories of how to spell out diachronic deliberation.

only tells the agent which narrative to weave and what thread to use (that is until one reconsiders) but not how to do so.

Nevertheless, I do want to make some tentative suggestions regarding Ann and the anticipated change regarding her values of raising a child. On the one hand, it seems to be coherent to incorporate the value of staying in the same place because of her child, into the deliberation concerning whether to travel the world if it is possible for her to correctly anticipate the normative weight connected to this new value. What I believe, on the other hand, to be more problematic, is the inverse case. Suppose, because of the value of raising her child in one place, she no longer values travelling the world at all. In this case it seems that, if she had to include this expectation into the explanation for why she ought to travel the world at t_1 , it seems that her explanation would include incoherent pro tanto reasons. It would include the fact that she values travelling the world and an undermining expectation that in the foreseeable future she will, as a matter of fact, not value travelling the world. If such a deontic explanation is incoherent, maybe because such a deontic belief could not be owned by one unified agent over time,³⁵ then she could not form such a deontic belief in the first place and could not be required to stick to such an intention, once she experiences such a shift. This is different from cases of temptation where the judgement shift is only temporary and there is a kind of practical unity in the background. This is not a very systematic treatment of diachronic deliberation, but it hints at how rich the approach is. In light of these remarks, let us adjust CS accordingly.

Let t_0 and t_1 be times such that at t_0 N has formed an intention to F, where F was not incompatible with the satisfaction of the believed deontic facts at t_0 , and that intention has persisted until and including t_1 and N believes at t_1 that S obtains, then

CS*: Rationality requires of N that (N reconsiders whether to F at t_1 iff (N takes S to be a pro tanto reason to reconsider the intention to F at t_1 , and if at t_0 had N expected S to obtain at t_1 as it in fact would then, in deliberating, N would have come to the belief that she faced different intention-relevant deontic facts than the ones that the intention to F was supposed to satisfy)).

CS* excludes cases of akrasia by restricting its scope to intentions that were not formed akratically. This means that CS* also applies to intentions formed for no reason, since any fact of normative significance at t_1 would constitute a change in the beliefs regarding the intention-relevant

³⁵This might be, because her value to travel the world is volitionally necessary in the sense that Frankfurt (1999; essays 9, 11 and 14) explores.

deontic facts at t_0 . For example, if Ann intends to go and play tennis without deliberating then it would be rational for her to reconsider her intention, once she remembers that she has to prepare a paper for submission or pick up her daughter from school.

CS* also excludes, in some cases, sticking to an intention based on expectations that were incorrect regarding either the quality of the experience or the probabilities of certain events. It does this by demanding that new information must be expected in the 'right' way. What does that amount to?

In Ann's case of travelling the world, that we have previously discussed, where, in deliberation, she assigns only a small probability to the possibility that her practical standpoint will transform because of a change in her ideals, this small probability means that she 'actually' does not expect the transformation to occur. We can now see that such an intention will need to be reconsidered once her standpoint actually changes, since this would mean that she did not in fact expect S to obtain as it in fact would. When deliberating about her plan, she did so on the basis of a probability distribution over the strategies open to her, but as things turn out either one way or the other, her expectations are updated and those updated expectations might no longer support the deontic fact that explained her prior deontic belief.³⁶

Let us recap the argument given so far and see where we stand. I started this paper with a short account of the cross-temporal functions of intentions and how these functions seem to be tied together with regard to the deliberative process that gives rise to the intention. I tried to flesh out this link via three constraints on any account that tries to capture this link. CS*, via the counterfactual condition, provides a criterion for determining when new information is relevant for reconsideration, thereby satisfying the reconsideration constraint. It also explains how thorough deliberation impacts the stability of intentions, thereby satisfying the diachronic constraint. I will now demonstrate how CS* can also explain the constitutive functions of intentions (settling, resolving and coordinating practical matters of an agent) by returning to the predicament of our existentialist hero and show how CS* can correctly pick out diachronically incoherent mental patterns and identify as diachronically coherent patterns that realize the constitutive functions of intentions

³⁶Cases of unexpected temptations, like Sam meeting an old friend who offers to invite him to a good Bordeaux, will be treated similarly. More difficult are cases where the agent didn't consider that a certain pro tanto reason for reconsideration would obtain. For reasons of space I do not consider these cases here.

and thereby allow an agent to resolve an incommensurable choice by an act of will.

4.5. Revisiting the existentialist hero

We are finally in a position to give a more comprehensive rational story of how Paula's decision to join the Free French can resolve her choice between incommensurable options.

Suppose we are at the moment t_3 , where Paula has already once given up her intention to join the Free French, and once given up her intention to care for her mother – both times because she felt that she was not living up to her ideals. Suppose, in order not to be akratic, she deliberates again at t_3 , anticipating the feeling of regret that she has felt in both cases and nevertheless decides to join the Free French. Again, at t_4 , she feels like she is abandoning her mother, but it is a similar feeling she experienced at t_1 , which has now been incorporated into the deliberative process at t_3 . Thus, although the feeling of regret is a *pro tanto* reason to reconsider, adding it to the things she anticipates at t_3 does not make a difference and therefore the counterfactual relevance conjunct is not satisfied. Consequently, the right-hand side of the CS*-biconditional is false. To satisfy the rational requirement, the left side must also be false, which means that Paula must not reconsider. If she were to reconsider nevertheless, and start to shuffle her intention, she would not satisfy CS* and we could label her as irrational, which is exactly what we want. If, on the other hand, she does have a disposition not to reconsider and, because of that, maintains her decision to join the Free French, despite the feeling of regret, then she escapes brute shuffling. What is more, she has clearly resolved the dilemma by an act of will.

Is this solution an existentialist one? According to (Broome 2001, 14) 'Existentialists think our decisions make our values'. Accordingly, a choice would make once incommensurable alternatives commensurable for the agent. But this is not entailed by my account. Instead it explains an act of will by an appeal to a diachronic rational requirement. This requirement spells out a rational pressure on (non)-reconsideration, which on the one hand makes it rational for an agent to reconsider when she feels regret she did not anticipate, and a reason not to reconsider when such regret has already been anticipated. It does not make the progression of her action any easier and indeed sticking to her choice in light of the felt regret might make it seem to her like she has 'dirty hands' as van Fraassen would put it. The problem is that sometimes continuing regret

just cuts to the nature of the hard choice she is, and often times we are, forced to make in the case of some incommensurable life choices.³⁷ What I have tried to show is that in these cases it is rational not to be guided by regret, but to be an existentialist hero.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I presented and explored a novel counterfactual account of the rational persistence of intentions. I argued that such an account must be included in current coherentist theories of rationality, such as Broome's, if they want to capture the settling function of intentions. Cases where an absence of these functions leads to conspicuously irrational behaviour, are incommensurable choices. To avoid irrationality only 'an exercise of the will can settle the conflict, but not a calculation of values' see (Van Fraassen 1973, 8). Such an act of will has to take seriously not only the deontic facts of the situation but also the decision that is made on the basis of them. My account can accommodate both of these aspects, and is hence a fruitful starting point for further explorations concerning stable intentions as being due to practical standpoints that are a counterfactually stable.

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³⁷We might plausibly assume that Paula regrets forgoing one of her two options either way and thus regrets her decision. Yet if we were to take this regret as a rational guide to the stability of the agent's intention, as Bratman (1999; Toxin, Temptation, and the Stability of Intention) and Hinchman (2015) do by formulating a no-regret condition, which says that one is rational in sticking to an intention if one were to regret not acting on it at 'plan's end' and not stick to it if one were to regret having acting on it, then Paula would be forced into the very kind of shuffling that we want to avoid.

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