

The Requirements of Rationality

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Abstract:

Requirements of rationality have been the focus of much recent discussion. I present what I take to be our intuitive conception of the role of rational requirements in reasoning. This picture is not, however, consistent with many of the recent approaches to rational requirements in the literature including those of Michael Bratman, John Broome and Niko Kolodny. I show that arguments made about rational requirements—in particular about their normativity—often assume that this picture is flawed. However, I argue, we have not been given good reasons for rejecting this picture of rational requirements. Indeed, many of the puzzles about rational requirements taken up by others turn out not to really be puzzles once we realize that this alternative picture is available. Thus, in the end, even though I do not present extensive direct argument for my picture of rational requirements, I try to provide compelling indirect support.

The Requirements of Rationality

Requirements of rationality, like the following, have recently been the focus of much discussion:

- (1) Rationality requires of S that, if S intends that e and believes that e will not be so unless S intends that m , then S intends that m .
- (2) Rationality requires of S that S not both believe p and believe not- p .¹

How many requirements there are and how precisely to state them is a matter of controversy, but I will focus on a different kind of controversy, namely, how to conceive of such requirements in general.² I will start by sketching a picture of their general nature and role that I find compelling and attractive. My picture is not, however, consistent with many of the recent approaches to rational requirements in the literature.³ As I will try to show, the arguments that are often made about rational requirements assume, mostly implicitly, that my picture is flawed. These arguments do not, however, or so I will claim, actually give us reason to reject my picture of rational requirements. Indeed, many of the puzzles about rational requirements taken up by others turn out not to really be puzzles once we realize that this alternative picture

¹ Cf. John Broome, "Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?" *Philosophical Issues* 15, no. 1 (2005): 322.

² As we shall see, how we conceive of these requirements will have important consequences for any attempts to answer questions about how many requirements there are and how they should be stated.

³ In the rest of the paper I will continue to call the proposed picture of rational requirements "my picture"; however, I think this picture is at least implicit in John Broome's earlier work even though, as we shall see, his more recent work on rational requirements does not quite fit it. There are many others, no doubt, who share this picture implicitly.

is available. Thus, by the end, even though I will not have presented a direct argument for my picture of rational requirements, I hope to have provided at least some compelling indirect support.

1. The Role of Rational Requirements

The slogan is easy: an agent *S* reasons from one set of attitudes to another by reasoning with principles of rationality. However, it will take a bit of work to spell out the full picture. Start by noting that to reason with a principle of rationality does not require *believing* that a norm, *N*, is a norm *S* ought to follow or that *N* is the norm rationality requires *S* to follow. Indeed, such beliefs by themselves could never be sufficient for reasoning since *S* would always need to be reasoning *with* some other principle in order to reason *from*—in order to use in her reasoning—any such belief.⁴

Nonetheless, when the agent reasons with a principle the agent is committed to *N*'s being the norm that one ought to follow in such situations. In other words, the agent is committed to

⁴ One could take Lewis Carroll's story of Achilles and the Tortoise as showing this (Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles", *Mind* 104 (1995)). Cf. Jerry A. Fodor, *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press published in cooperation with the British Psychological Society, 1987), 22-23.

Here is how H. A. Prichard puts what I take to be a similar point: "[I]t is worth pointing out that it may well be questioned whether in any case whatever in which we do come to have a thought by way of inference, the thoughts which we must already have in order to draw the conclusion do *by themselves* explain our coming to have the thought. For to come to have the thought, besides having to have the thoughts which are to be its premises, we must, as we say, draw the conclusion from them; and this drawing the inference, i.e. this activity of inferring, implies the prior existence in us of something" else (H. A. Prichard, "Duty and Interest", in *Moral Writings*, ed. Jim MacAdam (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), 47).

its being a rational requirement that the agent *N*. This commitment, at least when it concerns the most basic principles of an agent's reasoning, is not, however, embodied in a belief or in any other attitude governed by these basic principles for the reasons given above.

It is helpful, I think, to see some cases that I do not intend to classify as instances where the agent is reasoning with a principle. The agent could fail to be reasoning at all. Many associations would be an example: the smell of cut grass reminds me of playing badminton on the lawn in childhood. In some cases there could be a disposition underlying such associations that we could represent by a norm. Perhaps: Recall a common kind of event from before the age of sixteen in which the qualia being experienced now were a distinctive feature! However, even if it were true that the agent had such a disposition, this norm would not be part of a principle that the agent was reasoning with. This is because, unlike paradigmatic reasoning, the agent is not involved in drawing the inference by using a principle of reasoning. Since the agent is not reasoning, the agent is not committed to this norm as being rationally required, even if the agent does not mind such associations regularly occurring.⁵

Contrast this to the case where I tend to form the belief that dolphins are intelligent and caring because I hear reports of dolphins pushing drowning sailors ashore. Let us assume that such an inference is a mistake, an instance of the base-rate fallacy. I should be concerned about the number of drowning sailors that were pushed the other way, or pulled under, because, for obvious reasons, we would tend not to hear of these stories. Let us further imagine that I come to see that drawing such an inference would be a mistake.

Now there is a range of possible reactions to the realization that something has gone wrong that I think is illuminating. At one extreme, I might grant that I had indeed drawn the inference and admit, perhaps with some embarrassment, that this was a mistake. I thought I could apply

⁵ Thus, in one sense, merely following a rule will not be sufficient. There are complex issues that the rule-following literature raises that I will be setting aside for the purposes of this paper.

the norm, if you believe that *A* engages in purposive behaviour to save a human, then believe that *A* is caring and intelligent, in this case when in fact I should not have.⁶ It is precisely because *I* was committed to this norm being the right one for this instance, that I take *myself* to have made a mistake and feel embarrassed. At the other extreme, I may actually be surprised: “You know, you’re right! That is why I think dolphins are caring! It’s all those drowning sailor stories I’ve heard.” In such a case, it would, I believe, be odd for me to say that I made a mistake in reasoning. Something like reasoning was going on in me, but I was not reasoning and I was not committed to the relevant norms that we could take my dispositions to believe as embodying. I was not reasoning with any such principles. Of course there may still be something wrong with my beliefs. I have a belief which perhaps was, and certainly now is, unjustified. But this is a mistake with which, so to speak, I find myself, not a mistake *I* made. As I said, there is a range here, a range similar to the one in actions involving bodily behaviour: from careful deliberate movement to absent-minded scratching of the head.⁷

⁶ There are, of course, many variations on this norm that might be more appropriate in a description of some particular agent in such a situation. Indeed, there may be vagueness in many cases—more on this in a moment.

⁷ When are we willing to talk of unconscious reasoning? The puzzles here are related to, if not the same as, the puzzles involved in action brought about by unconscious motives. To think of such activities as reasoning or action requires thinking of the unconscious as involving something very much like an agent. This is why talk of dispositions or mechanisms, even very sophisticated ones, that operate without the direction of the agent when they generate mental states or stretches of behavior does not immediately tempt us to adopt the language of unconscious reasoning. Certainly some very, in one sense, sophisticated processing of trajectories is going on when a wicketkeeper manages to dive to his left and catch a ball which is traveling at more than 90 miles per hour and was just deflected off the edge of a bat a tiny fraction of second ago. But we are not inclined to call this processing reasoning. It is when we

What we cannot conceive of are cases where I am reasoning, but I am not committed to the principles I am reasoning with, where I do not take the norms as requirements of rationality. There are cases where we follow norms that we are not committed to. I may avoid stepping on cracks as I walk down the street or decide to imagine a sequence of polygons with increasing numbers of sides. But these are not cases of reasoning. There may be reasoning involved in figuring out how to follow these norms and in that reasoning I will be committed to the principles I am reasoning with. I can acquire some attitude, perhaps, by popping the requisite pill, bump on the head, or neurological rewiring, but then I have not reasoned to this attitude and so again have not reasoned with principles and so am not committed to them.⁸

Some clarificatory comments: I have been implicitly using a distinction between norms, principles, and the requirements of rationality. Norms are intended here to be the kinds of things that can be expressed without remainder by imperatives: Do not both believe p and not- p !⁹ Now in the picture I have presented above, when an agent is reasoning, the agent is committed to the norm being a rational requirement. Of course, this could be a mistake. The norm could in fact not be a rational requirement. Thus, unlike (1), the following is false:

- (3) Rationality requires of S that, if S desires that e and believes that e will not be so unless S intends that m , then S intends that m .

see the unconscious as being motivated to repress certain thoughts, as figuring out which thoughts to replace them with, as finding symbolic means of satisfying desires without revealing them to consciousness and so on—in other words when we, for whatever reason, are tempted by a more Freudian story with all its trapping of agency—that we are tempted to talk of unconscious reasoning. Again there is a range here.

⁸ Cf. the comments on the nature of doxastic deliberation in Nishi Shah and David Velleman, "Doxastic Deliberation", *The Philosophical Review* 114 (2005): 497-534.

⁹ I am not suggesting that this usage is standard.

To distinguish between the requirements of rationality and what the agent takes them to be, I have used talk of principles. Thus to say that an agent is reasoning with a principle is to say that the agent is committed to the relevant norm being a rational requirement. But to say this is not to claim that it is in fact a rational requirement.¹⁰

There are other locutions used to express the kind of picture I am drawing. Many of these are associated with Kantian approaches to reason and reasoning. Thus one can talk of deliberation requiring principles “by the light of which it is conducted” and “by which I determine” how the deliberation proceeds.¹¹ Unfortunately standard locutions used for these purposes, such as acting or reasoning “according” to a principle fail to capture the kind of commitment I have been emphasizing. At least in one perfectly normal sense of the words involved, one can act or reason in accordance with a principle merely by its being the case that one’s actions or reasonings happen to match those required by the principle.¹² The consequence is that one can reason in accordance with a principle without reasoning with the

¹⁰ Cf.: “Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act *in accordance with the representation* of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a *will*” (Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), AK 4:412).

¹¹ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 65. Cf. H. J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971); originally published 1948, 218-19. Gibbard draws a distinction between merely being in the grip of a norm and accepting it (Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 60-61)).

¹² Cf. Reginster, *Affirmation*, 278 n. 6.

principle: the role of the agent in directing the reasoning by using the principle or the agent's commitment to the principle are left out.¹³

The agent draws inferences by reasoning with principles. Reasoning with a principle does not mean that the agent in fact always succeeds in drawing the inference that the agent is, according to the principle, supposed to draw. As should now be clear, “reasoning with” here is a term of art, though one that I think picks out a concept implicit in our talk of agents and reasoning. A full elucidation of what it is for an agent to reason with a principle will have to await another occasion, and so will any answer to the question whether we can give reductions of these notions in other terms, in particular in other non-normative terms.

The requirements of rationality pick out the norms with which an agent ought to reason. These requirements are normative. Saying precisely what this comes to is not easy, but a few comments will point us in the relevant direction. For one, it is fine to use the normative language of ‘ought’, ‘should’, ‘reasons’ to state these rational requirements. There is something wrong with me if I do not live up to a rational requirement.

Rational requirements apply only to reasoning. That might seem obvious; however, I think the significance of this claim is often not appreciated. Where we are not, or cannot be,

¹³ Is what Gibbard calls “internalizing” a norm sufficient for reasoning with the relevant principle? (Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 68-71) I suspect that it is not, though I will not fully address the question here. What I should emphasize is that reasoning with a principle in my sense involves some of the further commitments Gibbard highlights in explaining the distinction he wants to draw between internalizing a norm and “accepting” a norm; however, I am not committing myself to any particular account of the kind of mental process, and involved states, that embodies what it is for an agent to reason with a principle. *A fortiori* I am not committing myself to a central role for non-cognitive states.

reasoning, there the requirements do not apply. This does not make them any less normative; in this rational requirements are just like most normative claims.¹⁴

Intuitively, claims such as (1) and (2) are self-standing normative claims, i.e., they do not hold in virtue of some other normative claims. Our everyday methodology for figuring out which of these normative claims are true is the usual one, familiar from other normative domains, of reflective equilibrium.¹⁵ An example from morality may help. Consider Broome's argument in his *Weighing Goods* for his "principle of personal good": "(a) Two alternatives are equally good if they are equally good for each person. And (b) if one alternative is at least as good as another for everyone and definitely better for someone, it is better".¹⁶ As is usual in reflective equilibrium arguments, he appeals initially to "the intuitive attractiveness of the principle".¹⁷ He then considers counterexamples meant to generate intuitions in tension with the principle: What, for example, of a world of sinners who all become better off while remaining sinners? Since they do not deserve the better life, is not the change bad, "even though everyone benefits from it"? Again, as is common in such reflective equilibrium arguments, he presents a re-description of the counterexample meant to make the relevant intuition go away: what really matters is whether there are non-sinners who are not doing as well as the sinners and are therefore suffering an injustice. He thus attempts to get us to share his sense that "the

¹⁴ Cf. Von Wright on the "condition of application of the norm" (G. H. Von Wright, *Norm and Action: A Logical Enquiry* (New York: Humanities, 1963), 73-74).

¹⁵ Though given its deployment here, it is perhaps worth noting that it was, arguably, first explicitly articulated as a method for figuring out rules of both deductive and inductive inference (Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 4th ed. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 63-64).

¹⁶ John Broome, *Weighing Goods: Equality, Uncertainty, and Time* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 165.

¹⁷ Broome, *Weighing Goods: Equality, Uncertainty, and Time*, 168.

intuitive appeal of the principle is greater than the intuitive appeal of the examples".¹⁸ What is important to note about such reflective equilibrium arguments is that they assume the legitimacy of such appeals to intuition as long as care is taken to conjure up and consider competing intuitions. Once our intuitions have reached equilibrium after reflection, we take ourselves to have justified the relevant moral claim. This just is our way of justifying moral claims whether we are professional moral philosophers or laypersons; it is indeed hard to know how we could proceed otherwise.¹⁹

¹⁸ Broome, *Weighing Goods: Equality, Uncertainty, and Time*, 168.

¹⁹ This is not to deny that there are sharp disagreements about which intuitions to place more weight on, but the hard-nosed consequentialist who wants us to ignore our moral intuitions about torturing captives on the suspicion that they might have information about impending terrorist attacks, still appeals to moral intuitions: think of how bad it would be for all those innocent people to die, she says. What the consequentialist should not say is that he or she has found a way to do without our moral intuitions and that therefore her position has a better grounding (cf. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 105). Neither can she dismiss our appeal to intuitions just because they are intuitions since that will be her only way, in the end, to defend her position. This will be relevant later since, as I shall suggest, certain "consequentialist" intuitions about the requirements of rationality play a role in the views of some who criticize the picture I am sketching here.

I should also note a different source of potential dissent: perhaps some hope that certain kinds of transcendental arguments for moral claims will not involve any appeal to our moral intuitions under reflection. I can do no more here than express my skepticism about the prospects of finding such arguments and note that, from what I can tell, most contemporary Kantians do not hold out such hopes.

The same holds true for rational requirements. A discussion about whether to accept (1) might start with the intuitive appeal of the following requirement:

- (4) Rationality requires of *S* that, if *S* intends that *e* and if *S* believes that *m* is a necessary means to *e*, then *S* intends that *m*.

We then consider counterexamples. Here is one Broome considers in a discussion of this rational requirement:

Suppose you intend to fly to Venice tomorrow and believe a necessary means of your doing so is that you wake at 0600 tomorrow. But you know you are woken at 0600 every morning by the braying of your neighbour's donkey. You do not need to intend to wake at 0600, because you believe it will happen anyway, without your intending it.

Intuitively, if I do not need to intend, then I am not rationally required to intend. It thus turns out that (4) is counterintuitive. Shifting to (1) allows us to avoid this example and, one argues, achieve reflective equilibrium. Intuitively, I thus claim, rational requirements, like the claims of morality, receive their justifications in the familiar way, through the process of achieving reflective equilibrium.

To say that this way is familiar is not to deny that we may ultimately need a metaethical account to fully justify the claim that the everyday methods of reflective equilibrium actually allow us to figure out which normative claims are true.²⁰ Standard issue metaethical accounts, whether cognitivist or non-cognitivist, have traditionally provided an account of the meaning of moral terms and, if needed, an ontology of moral properties or facts designed so that our use of reflective equilibrium turns out to be epistemologically acceptable. Error theories are obviously an exception; a metaethical error theory grants that reflective equilibrium may apparently succeed by its own lights in justifying some particular set of moral claims, but insists that reflective equilibrium can never bring us to warranted beliefs about the moral facts given the

²⁰ This leaves open the possibility of a quietist metaethical position that denies that any further story is in fact needed.

very nature of these facts or given that there are no moral facts.²¹ Such arguments begin from a theory of truth conditions for the relevant claims and then argue that either the truth-conditions are incoherent in some way or that the ontology required for them to be fulfilled would be, to use Mackie's phrase, too "queer".²² Full justification thus perhaps requires showing that error theories are false and this in turn will presumably require defending non-error-theoretic metaethics for both moral claims and rational requirements. For the purposes of this paper, except for a brief return to this issue at the end, I will ignore the possibility of a metaethical error theory. I do this not because of some misplaced complacency; I take the task of providing a metaethics for rational requirements to be a central philosophical task that needs far more attention than it has so far received. Rather I ignore the threat of an error theory in this paper because the worries raised in the recent literature about rational requirements—the worries that I will argue my picture of rational requirements dissipates—are not based on metaethical considerations, on considerations having to do with the semantics of statements of rational requirements and resulting concerns about the epistemology of reflective equilibrium and the ontology required for the truth of such claims.

For my purposes in this paper, then, the crucial point will be to see that, at least as far as reflective equilibrium is concerned, the rational requirement, say, not to believe contradictions is as intuitive as, say, the claim that one ought to take care of one's friends—no asymmetry in

²¹ In other contexts one would need to be more precise about what exactly the error theory under consideration is claiming. For most error theories the claim will be that all positive, atomic sentences in the discourse will be systematically and uniformly false. This allows, perhaps, that a sentence like "It is not the case that murder is wrong" can be true. See Alexander Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 110-11 and 294 n. 2.

²² See, for a more careful discussion, Nadeem J. Z. Hussain, "The Return of Moral Fictionalism", *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004).

intuitiveness, after reflection, between rational requirements and many another normative claims from other domains.

Finishing the sketch of my picture requires mentioning a couple of additional, crucial points. First, the set of attitudes that an agent has at any particular time will, in realistic cases, be complex. More than one rational requirement can apply to any particular local attitude without their being in conflict. Being rational is a matter of “maximiz[ing] compliance with local requirements simply by complying with each of them”.²³ What is rational will be the move, so to speak, that satisfies all the norms that apply. Second, one of the central things an agent does in reasoning is to assess considerations to determine whether they are reasons and then to weigh reasons in order to determine what is the case and what to do.²⁴ There may be normative truths—normative considerations—of many different kinds but the notion of a reason, this line of thought may suggest, is in some sense the most basic normative notion since, after all, the scale of weighing reasons is the common scale on which the vast profusion of the considerations we face needs ultimately to be placed. One might then conclude that all normative truths must be reducible to claims about our reasons.²⁵ My picture resists this line of thought by focussing on the distinctive role that rational requirements play in reasoning and deliberation. Rational requirements are not considerations that turn up in reasoning as reasons to be weighed against other reasons. Rather rational requirements are what govern the processes of deliberation, the processes of weighing reasons. They are, to continue the metaphor above, the mechanisms of the scale itself, not the weights that go on the scale. No reason then to expect the normative notions involved in claims about rational requirements to

²³ Niko Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" *Mind* 114, no. 455 (2005): 516 n. 8.

²⁴ This is to simplify; in a full account one has to take account of purported, more complicated relations between reasons like those of overriding, silencing, and so on.

²⁵ This issue gets taken up in detail by the “buck-passing” literature. For reasons of space, I will try to proceed without directly engaging this literature on this occasion.

be reducible to other normative notions in particular to claims involving only the notion of a reason. Even if we were to think that rational requirements can, in some sense, provide us reasons, we should not be surprised if this kind of reason is quite unique and not at all like the kind of considerations that normally turn up on the scales of reasoning.

At the heart of my picture, then, are three claims. First, rational requirements form a distinctive realm of normative claims in part because rational requirements play, or ought to play, a distinctive role in reasoning. Second, we have no special reason to doubt the truth of the rational requirements we find intuitive after reflection. The method of reflective equilibrium, a method we rely on when it comes to other normative claims, leads us to these requirements too. Third, if we do want to raise sceptical concerns about these requirements, then we need to shift to a metaethical discussion of the nature of these purported normative truths and the appropriateness of using reflective equilibrium to access them. My goal in this paper is to provide an indirect defence of my picture of rational requirements but it is also to bring into focus the central importance of this metaethical investigation, an investigation that seems to be basically ignored by many of the participants in current discussions about rational requirements.

It is the claim of a unique realm of normative truths that is explicitly and implicitly denied in much of the recent literature. I intend to show that we have not in fact been given much reason to deny either the uniqueness or the normativity and that the pictures that deny these generate problems that could be avoided by adopting my picture.

2. Prudential reduction

Perhaps the most common reason for thinking that rational requirements do not form a distinctive class of normative claims is the intuition that such claims must be reducible to

claims about prudential reasons.²⁶ Consider (1). This, so the argument goes, can be translated as follows:

- (5) There is a prudential reason for *S* to intend that *m*, if *S* intends that *e* and believes that *e* will not be so unless *S* intends that *m*.

This reason could be, for example, that in general intending the means to your ends is non-morally, prudentially good for you. Statements of rational requirements would then be statements about non-moral, prudential reasons.

However, the translation claim is implausible. Intuitively, it is sometimes better for one not to live up to the requirements of rationality; consider the case where my intention that *e* is the intention that I smoke a cigarette. Perhaps even more cases come to mind when we consider requirements of rationality on belief. The argument against the translation claim is just the usual updated, and slightly revised, version of Moore's open-question argument. If (1) and (5) were equivalent, then competent speakers should, after reflecting on the translation, "find it natural to guide their evaluative judgments by the analysis".²⁷ However, many speakers, even

²⁶ The points raised below against a prudential reduction apply also to related accounts that are not officially reductions to the prudential, for example, Bratman's suggestion that we appeal to how rational requirements on intentions help an agent effectively promote the values and concerns that constitute the "agent's practical standpoint" (Michael E. Bratman, "Intention, Belief, Practical, Theoretical" (forthcoming in *Spheres of Reason*, ed. by Jens Timmer, John Skorupski, and Simon Robertson, 2005), 14). Here the fundamental normative claim that forms the reduction basis will be some claim to the effect that these concerns ought to be effectively promoted rather than claims about the agent's good. The versions of the arguments below generated by substituting in this different fundamental normative claim are, I believe, just as effective.

²⁷ This locution is from Miller, *Contemporary Metaethics*, 19. He in turn is drawing on Thomas Baldwin, *G.E. Moore* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

on reflection, would, I think it is clear, continue to say things of the form, “Yes, x is rationally required of me, but I do not think it would be good for me to live up to this requirement” without our being inclined to think that they are not competent speakers.²⁸

It is important to see that some of the attractions of such a project of providing a prudential reduction are illusory. I suspect that there are three beliefs that explain why such a project is appealing: (i) that at bottom the explanation for why we think there are rational requirements, or why these requirements have any grip on us, must be that following them has led in general to flourishing, (ii) that the only plausible justification we have for such requirements is a prudential one, and (iii) providing justifications for, and metaethical accounts of, prudential claims is relatively straightforward. To start with, even if (i) and (ii) were true, we would not have good reason for expecting a prudential reduction. The explanatory claim is compatible with statements of rational requirements being both false and non-reducible; indeed, we can well imagine the usual stories to the effect that their success in helping us flourish is a function of our not conceiving of them as prudential rules of thumb that are thus violable whenever prudence seems to point in a different direction.²⁹ Concerns with justification certainly show why the prudential reduction might be attractive, but they give us reason to expect a reduction only if we assume that rational requirements are justified and that they must be true in order to be justified. Again for familiar reasons, we might think that though they are literally false, they might still make sense for us.³⁰ More importantly, as far as

²⁸ Cf. Broome, "Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?" 332-33.

²⁹ For a recent version of such a story, see Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Using such stories to give a positive argument for meta-ethical error-theory or fictionalism is, however, not easy (see Hussain, "Moral Fictionalism").

³⁰ The issues here are complicated. Much depends on the nature of the attitude that we are to have towards these requirements. I return to that below. For a discussion of the possibilities of practices involving literally false normative claims, see, again, Hussain, "Moral Fictionalism".

justification or metaethics are concerned, prudential claims have no obvious advantage. Here too our everyday methodology is that of reflective equilibrium and here too it is not obvious whether we have a metaethics that vindicates that everyday methodology.

A brief analogy might help. I am sure there are those who think that at bottom the explanation for apparently deontological moral requirements must be that societies that accept such requirements tend to flourish. No doubt this is often accompanied by the prejudice that the only plausible justification for such deontological requirements must in the end be a consequentialist one. However, one can be attracted to these thoughts and still think that the deontic statements must be irreducible (and therefore, perhaps, literally construed, false) precisely in order to play their fundamentally consequentialist role. On the other hand, rule utilitarianism can be seen as the insistence that such purported deontological claims are in fact reducible to consequentialist terms. The difficulties of preventing rule utilitarianism from collapsing into an act utilitarianism that violates our deontic intuitions should then stand as a warning for attempts to reduce rational requirements. Finally, providing a metaethical account of consequentialist moral claims is no easier than providing one of deontic claims.

3. Rational Requirements as “Reminders”

Niko Kolodny has recently argued for a form of psychologistic reductionism that also denies that rational requirements are distinctive and normative. He defends the view that rational requirements are “reminders” to the agent of what the agent already conceives of as reasons where these reasons are not simply, of course, just the rational requirements themselves. To see the kind of rational requirement statement for which the “reminder” view works best, we must begin by noting that many rational requirements have the following form:

- (6) Rationality requires of *S* that, if *S* has *Attitude One*, then *S* has *Attitude Two*.

Thus, for example, John Broome suggests that where q follows from p , if you believe p , you are required to believe q .³¹ Kolodny's strategy is to focus on cases where *Attitude One* is about *Attitude Two*. In particular where it is a normative judgment about the reasons in favour of, or against, *Attitude Two*. He calls these the "core requirements":

C+: Rationality requires one to have A , if one believes that one has conclusive reason to have A .

C-: Rationality requires one not to have A , if one believes that one lacks sufficient reason to have A .

Here *Attitude One* is the belief that I have conclusive reason, or lack sufficient reason, to have *Attitude Two*. Take C+. Now imagine someone who has *Attitude One*, but does not have *Attitude Two*. Imagine that I say to this person, "You are irrational". According to the "reminder" theory what I am doing is "simply pointing out that he satisfies the antecedent of the" core requirement C+.³² By saying, "You are irrational", I am just reminding you that you have *Attitude One*. The agent does already think he has conclusive reason to have *Attitude Two*, so when we say that he is irrational for not having *Attitude Two*—for Kolodny, in other words, when we point out that he *does already* think he has conclusive reason to have *Attitude Two*—then he feels—is prompted into feeling—the normative force of his *own* normative judgment that he has conclusive reason to have *Attitude Two*.

The goal of the strategy is thus to explain the apparent normativity of the requirements of rationality by appealing to the normative content of attitudes that the subject of the requirements has. This normative content can in turn be expressed just with the normative concept of a reason. Thus we have an explanation of the apparent normativity of rational

³¹ John Broome, "Normative Requirements", in *Normativity*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 85-86.

³² Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 557.

requirements in terms of the concept of a reason; rational requirements thus do not require a new primitive “ought”—a new kind of normativity—beyond the normativity of reasons.

There are three basic problems with this strategy. First, as Kolodny readily admits, it is hard to see how to extend this strategy to other kinds of rational requirements. Second, the strategy does not succeed in doing without rational requirements. To see this, recall that *S* can have different attitudes (different *Attitudes One*) towards the proposition that *S* has conclusive reason to have *Attitude Two*. I, for example, wish that I had conclusive reason to believe that I will get tenure. In such a case, of course, there is no rational requirement for me to believe that I will get tenure, indeed, there is a rational requirement for me, if it is *only* the case that I wish this, that I *not* believe it. What explains the difference in the rational requirements that apply to me is the difference in the kind of *Attitude One* that I have. However, the only way to explicate this difference, for all we have been told by Kolodny, is to say that beliefs are the kind of attitude such that when *S* has a belief, then, such and such rational requirements apply and when *S* has a wish, then, such and such rational requirements apply (for example, I suspect that one is rationally required, if one believes that *P*, not to wish that *P*). One has not shown that rational requirements are “only apparently normative, and the normativity that [they] appear to have is that of reasons” till one has shown how one can explain the difference between beliefs, wishes, and so on without using unreduced talk of rational requirements.³³

Third, any such “reminder” theory is a form of psychologistic reductionism—a reduction of apparently normative claims to claims of descriptive psychology, claims about what mental states a person has. Kolodny is quite explicit that on his account when we tell someone that they ought to have some attitude, we “are making [a] descriptive, psychological claim”.³⁴ I am

³³ Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” 509. Of course one can try to give a reductive account of beliefs. I address this possibility, and the possibility of noncognitivist accounts of beliefs, later in this paper.

³⁴ Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” 557.

reminding you that you have certain attitudes. These attitudes may have normative content, but I am not asserting this normative content.

Psychologistic reductions of normative laws of thought have a long, but, one has to say, undistinguished history. Indeed, we can see many of the great moments of the history of modern philosophy—Kant, the neo-Kantians including Frege, Husserl and phenomenology—as all turning centrally on the realization that such psychologistic reductions do not work. The problems are the standard ones regularly discussed in metaethics and elsewhere. It will perhaps help to have a feel for these problems in general prior to looking at the details of Koldony’s view.

Take Allan Gibbard’s presentation of the problems with reductionist accounts of rationality on his way towards defending his own noncognitivist account in his book *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*. The reductionist, as Gibbard plausibly interprets him, is someone who makes a claim about the very meaning of the word ‘rational’.³⁵ Gibbard focuses, as is usual, on examples of disagreements over what is involved in being rational. He considers the possibility that “Ramsey’s axioms, or some similar set of axioms, be taken as giving the very meaning of the term ‘rational’”.³⁶ He then introduces standard examples that show that there is controversy about whether or not to accept the “sure-thing principle”. Here’s how he sums up the discussion:

³⁵ Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 11. Gibbard is here talking about “analyses”; however, as I discussed earlier in the case of reduction to prudential claims, I suspect that we can generate plausible open-question arguments even when the semantic claim is not a claim of conceptual analysis. Open-question arguments then may not be knock down arguments but they still point to a theoretical cost and force us to focus on what advantages the reductive theory is really buying us.

³⁶ Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 11.

What is at issue between those who accept the principle and those who reject it? Those who reject it cannot mean by ‘rational’ what axioms like Ramsey’s say. They know the principle is one of the axioms and they think rational choice violates it. Do its opponents and its proponents simply mean different things by ‘rational’? Then there is no real dispute. There seems in fact to be a dispute of substance: The two sides differ on whether to pay more in the one case or in the other.³⁷

What look like substantial controversies about what is rational look as though they must either not really be disputes because the participants mean something different by their terms or one of the disputants is suffering some kind of linguistic or logical confusion. In many cases, though, neither option seems plausible.³⁸ Of course, as Gibbard grants:

No such counterexample will be airtight. ... Is the thinker really free of all linguistic and logical confusion? The point though, is this: An opinion seems intelligible; we seem to understand what the person is claiming. There is pressure, then, to interpret the opinion as intelligible—or at least to explain the appearance of intelligibility.³⁹

I would add that the question for us will be one of costs and benefits. If there are indeed strong reasons to look for a reduction of rational requirements, then we will be more willing to accept such a theoretical cost. However, the presence of such a theoretical cost should force us to carefully assess whether we need the purported reduction.

Returning to the case of the “reminder” theory, it will take a bit of extra work to bring out the above kind of problem in part because, though Kolodny does think that “[a]ll rational requirements must either be derived from the core requirements, or be valid, when they are, only by approximating them”—and how interesting the position is surely turns on whether this

³⁷ Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 16-17.

³⁸ Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 11.

³⁹ Gibbard, *Wise Choices*, 12.

is true—he nonetheless grants also that he has not actually defended this claim.⁴⁰ The core requirements themselves may prove more resistant to some worries about reductionism because, unlike some of the other rational requirements, they come close, one could plausibly think, to being conceptual truths. This is relevant because, as we have seen, the relative plausibility of the reductionists claims will turn on what he has to say about certain kinds of disagreements. The reductionist has to commit himself on two fronts: he has to commit himself to certain normative claims rather than others and to the claim that the relevant normative properties just are descriptive properties. The two commitments are connected since instantiations of the descriptive properties will already stand in certain systematic relations to each other and so a reduction of normative properties to these descriptive properties requires committing oneself to the claim that normative properties stand in certain corresponding determinate relations to each other. However, the degree to which the claims about the relations between normative properties can be seen as conceptual relations, the less problematic will at least this part of the reduction be—indeed, this is precisely the appeal of the so-called “Canberra Plan”—since it will be hard to imagine someone disagreeing without betraying conceptual confusion.

Thus, since the core requirements can come across as conceptual truths, the commitment to them will be relatively unproblematic for the reductionist. However, I will still try to show how Gibbard’s worries apply even in this case. I then turn to the remaining rational requirements and, finally, to the reduction of judgements about rational requirements to descriptive judgements.

Take C-. Imagine that John believes that he lacks sufficient reason to have the intention to go wear his blue corduroys today. Nonetheless he intends to. Is he irrational? We can imagine how two philosophers might end up disagreeing about the answer to this question. After all, though he may have sufficient reason to wear clothes today, he does not choose between blue

⁴⁰ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 524 and 59-60.

corduroys and grey slacks, he just picks. He does not take himself to have any reason to go one way rather than another—indeed, that’s precisely the kind of precious, dandified thinking he systematically avoids. One might then conclude that, though he does believe that he lacks sufficient reason, he is rational. After all, surely rationality cannot demand that I always have sufficient reason for my intentions. My reasons may constrain which intentions I can rationally form but often intentions result from picking rather than choosing on the basis of reasons. Thus we should reject C-.

Consider another example that is no doubt odder but perhaps more realistic and interesting. Many of a philosopher of my acquaintance—whose names will remain anonymous for soon to be obvious reasons—has, after a couple of minutes of conversation, claimed to both believe that he or she lacks sufficient reason to intend to have a child but nonetheless intends to have a child.⁴¹ Furthermore, and crucially, such philosophers are reluctant to grant that they are irrational. They thus seem to be, implicitly at least, denying C-.

However, we can also imagine various responses. Return to the case of the corduroys. First, an opponent might well insist that if John believes he has sufficient reason to wear pants, then *ipso facto* he believes that he has sufficient reason to have the intention to wear the blue corduroys. Thus he is not irrational. Thus C- does not violate our intuitions and the example gives us no reason to give it up. Second, an opponent might argue that if he believes he has sufficient reason to wear pants then, given that belief, he ought to believe that he has sufficient reason to wear the corduroys (and, presumably, he ought to believe that he has sufficient reason to wear the slacks). That he does not believe this, so the opponent claims, is intuitively irrational. Thus we see that if he were fully rational, it would make sense for him to have the intention. Our apparent intuition that it is rational for him to have the intention despite not

⁴¹ The problem occurs because many philosophers, perhaps unlike others, are not willing, at least under pressure, to regard self-interested considerations as reasons for intending to have a child.

having the belief that he has sufficient reason is just a reflection of this fact. Thus again C- does not really violate our intuitions and we should accept it. Third, the opponent might try to deny that he can make sense of the example. C- acts as a constraint on our ascriptions of intentions and beliefs. Thus, to the degree that we are willing to ascribe to the agent in the example the intention to wear the corduroys, we are disinclined to ascribe to the agent the belief that he lacks sufficient reason to have the intention to wear the corduroys. The example cannot really be imagined and so is not counterevidence to C-.

In the case of having children, an opponent might insist that our philosophers are not really being sincere. What they think is that there must be some reason, but that they just cannot come up with a reason right now. They are convinced that they do, in some sense, “have” one and that is why they do not regard themselves as irrational. Their insincere admission is just intended to buy some time. Thus these philosophers do not really reject C-.

Prima facie this is surely a bit odd since much deliberation and reflection presumably went into such a momentous decision and so, if having sufficient reason was indeed regarded by the philosopher in question as necessary for rationality in such a case, then surely the lack of such reasons would have been noted and would have created pressure not to form the intention. If it makes sense to buy time now, then surely the time should have been bought some time ago. I report—and this is of course merely anecdotal evidence—that the reflection and deliberation in question often takes up the question of having a reason to have children only tangentially.⁴² Most of the reflection and deliberation is a matter of means-end reasoning and concerns about how carrying out this intention might effect one’s career etc.—in other words does the conflict with other intentions, or the reasons for conflicting intentions, provide sufficient reason not to form the intention.

This brings us to Kolodny’s own solution to such cases. He claims:

⁴² Note that this is not one of those cases where we think one could fail to have reasons to do X, but still have reason to intend to do X.

In such cases, one also believes that one does not need any reason to *X*. Thus, even if one believes that one does not have a reason to *X*, one still believes that, trivially, one has *sufficient* reason to *X*.⁴³

Again, anecdotally, I can report that in the having-a-child case, even if my philosophers do have the belief that one does not need any reason to have children, they do not seem to be very aware of the belief.

My point here, though, is not to reject any of these proposals since my aim here is not to argue that C- is false. The point to be made is more delicate. C- is used in the reminder theory as a starting point for a reduction, a reduction of such claims of rationality to descriptive psychological claims. This reduction is then going to be used to claim that there is no special “ought” of rationality present in C-. If this is right, then the descriptive reduction has to give the full semantics of C-. Now, someone who says, “I grant that I believe that I lack sufficient reason to intend to have children and I intend to have children, but am I irrational?” is supposed to be saying to herself: “I grant that I believe that I lack sufficient reason to intend to have children ... but do I believe that I lack sufficient reason to intend to have children?”⁴⁴ To use Moore’s language, this is a question that should not be “open”. The point is not that those who deny C- are right, but rather that it is implausible to think that those who deny C- are simply conceptually confused. It is implausible to think that the debate about whether, for example, we should understand my examples as involving denials of C-, as cases where sufficient reason to wear clothes means that one has sufficient reason to wear the blue corduroys, as cases where really the agent has to find some reason in favour of blue corduroys over slacks (at pain of becoming Buridan’s ass perhaps), or, finally, as cases where the agent actually believes that one does not need any reason, is not really a substantive one about the

⁴³ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 527.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 557.

reasons in play, but rather one that is settled, even if the participants do not realize it, by the semantics of C-.

Now consider an example involving belief. I regularly find myself in discussions about whether to believe in God with Muslim Pakistani friends who are highly educated scientists, engineers, doctors, and entrepreneurs and who speak English fluently having often grown up bilingual. They grant that they lack sufficient reason to believe that God exists; nonetheless, they do believe that God exists. Would they grant that they are irrational? This is a trickier question. In my experience most of them deny that they are irrational. If they do grant that they are irrational, then they seem in effect to be using the word “irrational” with scare quotes, so to speak, in order to distance themselves from the normative commitments involved in a straightforward use of the term. One is tempted to express their attitude as follows: “You can stipulate what ‘irrationality’ comes to so that it just is a matter of having attitudes when one has sufficient reason for them, but in that case there is some broader sense of what it makes sense to think that is actually more important, and according to that broader sense of what it makes sense to think, it does make sense to believe that God exists even when one lacks sufficient reason. There is nothing wrong with being ‘irrational’ in your stipulated sense”. The belief in God is something that one is given by God not something one reasons to. Prudential reasons wouldn’t be good reasons either. This seems to me to still be a case of someone disputing whether C- really is one of the most fundamental normative requirements governing our reasoning. When we called certain requirements rational requirements, we intended to identify the most fundamental normative requirements governing our reasoning, not just one set of norms among others, say, like the norms of etiquette of a particular culture.

Thus I suggest that even for the core requirements, and this is the best case for Kolodny, the open-question style worries have some bite. The matter only gets worse when we shift to other apparent rational requirements. Take for example the list of rational requirements that

Kolodny takes as good candidates for the “reminder theory” and as a source of objections to Broome’s position:⁴⁵

- B+: Rationality requires one to believe that p , if one believes that there is conclusive evidence that p .
- I+: Rationality requires one to intend to X , if one believes that there is conclusive reason to X .
- B-: Rationality requires one not to believe that p , if one believes that there is not sufficient evidence that p .
- I-: Rationality requires one not to intend to X , if one believes that one lacks sufficient reason to X .⁴⁶

He grants two things: first that these “rational requirements must either be derived from the core requirements [C+ and C-], or be valid, when they are, only by approximating them”.⁴⁷ He also grants that some might find counterexamples to these requirements compelling. His hope is that the counterexamples, or the ones at least that Kolodny agrees are compelling, will convince us to see C+ and C- as the real requirements in play. The issues here again are the same. To the degree that someone does not find these rational requirements compelling, does not find the reduction of these rational requirements to C+ and C- compelling, or does not find the reduction of all other plausible rational requirements to C+ or C- compelling, to that degree we will have to take this person to be making a conceptual mistake as opposed to disagreeing with us about what is rational and what is not. It is a conceptual mistake that survives having the reductions pointed out to one. Recall again that Kolodny has to be making a reductive claim here because the final reduction to psychological claims has to explain away any apparent presence of a special kind of “ought” or normativity.

⁴⁵ See §4.2 below.

⁴⁶ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 521.

⁴⁷ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 524.

All of this should remind us that the attitudes we eventually have to take into account are surely not just those of intention and belief but also desire, the emotions, and harder to classify attitudes like loving someone. Do my desires need to obey “transitivity” in order to count as rational, i.e., can I desire *a* more than *b*, *b* more than *c*, but *c* more than *a*? Ought I to have to have sufficient reason to love someone? Again, the point is not to suggest that there are not answers to these questions, nor that one should not have a lively debate about the matter. The point rather is that a reductionist commits himself to claiming that in all these cases, the person who gets it wrong makes a conceptual mistake and that is what seems as implausible here as it has seemed to many in the ethical case.

One last, but very important, point about the reduction of other rational requirements to C+ and C-: the problem is that the “reminder” approach requires that all rational requirements involve “normative ascent”.⁴⁸ In other words, it only makes sense to claim that an agent has failed to live up to a rational requirement if the agent has the relevant thought with *normative* content. It cannot make sense to “remind” me of a normative thought unless it makes sense to think of me as having it. This would be fine if, intuitively, rational requirements applied to an agent only when an agent had normative thoughts, but many a plausible rational requirement is not like that. Take (1) or (2). In neither case do we have to ascribe a thought with normative content to the agent and, *a fortiori*, we do not have to ascribe to the agent a thought involving the notions of “sufficient reason” and “conclusive reason” as required by C+ and C-. The “reminder” theory requires “normative ascent” where, at first glance, there was not any normative ascent. I take this as in itself a count against the “reminder” theory though of course a cost of the theory that might be compensated by other advantages. The cost though is a serious one. Children do not have a grasp of the notion of sufficient reason or conclusive

⁴⁸ The use of “normative ascent” is borrowed from John Broome, “Practical Reasoning”, in *Reason and Nature: Essays in the Theory of Rationality*, ed. Jose Bermúdez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

reason and yet we do want to claim that children can be irrational whereas the “reminder” theory requires as a prerequisite for judgements of irrationality to apply to an agent a grasp by that agent of the concept of sufficient reason. One might object that rationality requires being a believer and that this in turn requires some ability to assess reasons. However, this ability, whatever it is, is not sufficient to count as grasping the concepts of “conclusive reason” and “sufficient reason”. Think for a moment of what you would normally—that is outside of the context of defending the “reminder” theory—take as sufficient evidence to ascribe to a 4-year old the thought, “I have sufficient reason to believe that teacher will be nice to me tomorrow but not conclusive reason to believe that”.

This brings us finally to the descriptive reduction. Recall that it is the descriptive reduction that basically generates the rest of the problems. It is because the “reminder” theory has to tie itself down to a particular psychological reduction base that it has to commit itself on the reductions between normative claims. The situation is analogous to the reductive naturalist realist that provides a reduction of the normative to the descriptive by providing a reduction of, for example, non-moral good to some descriptive properties and then provides a reduction of other normative claims in terms of non-moral good. In order for this to be a reduction those definitional claims need to be conceptual claims—or semantic claims in some sense.⁴⁹ Let us recall the fundamental descriptivist reduction. When I say, “You are irrational”, I am just reminding you that you have *Attitude One*, an attitude whose content is a normative claim in favour of *Attitude Two*.

Now recall my dear Muslim friends. If I say to them, “You are irrational”, then, naturally enough, they take me to be making a criticism of them, they take me to be expressing a negative attitude towards their reasoning processes, as a normative claim that they ought to

⁴⁹ For reasons of space, I am not taking up a careful consideration of the full range of possible reduction strategies now available in philosophy. I believe one could run variations of my arguments for each of the different reduction strategies.

change their attitudes, and they immediately, you can rest assured, feel the pressure to respond to what they perceive as a challenge. Now imagine that in the face of the initial heated response, I say, “Calm down, I’m just making a descriptive psychological claim and one that you already agree with. Look, after all, you granted that you don’t have sufficient reason to have A, and that you have A. Don’t worry, my claim that you’re irrational, doesn’t have any normative force for *me*. My saying that doesn’t literally mean that *I* think there is anything wrong with the attitudes you have”. I am sure we can all imagine the look of utter perplexity that would cross their faces. If the conversation were to continue in some intelligible fashion, *per impossible* no doubt, we can imagine them responding as follows: “Yes, we know you know that we think we lack sufficient reason for believing in God, but calling us irrational is saying that there is something wrong with us and that’s what we deny. Don’t pretend that you don’t think there is something wrong with us when you call us irrational”. The problem, of course, is that the suggestion that the speaker is making a normative claim cannot be “cancelled”. However, were the reminder theory true, then it should be cancellable since it isn’t really part of the meaning of the claim.

Kolodny is aware of the issues raised by taking his reductive strategy. In one of his earlier footnotes, he responds briefly as follows:

nonreductionists’ willingness to accept reasons as primitive follows a long history of failed attempts to reduce the ‘ought’ of reasons to something nonnormative. There is no comparable history of attempts to reduce the ‘ought’ of rationality to the ‘ought’ of reasons. Moreover, there are *prima facie* grounds for greater optimism about this latter kind of reduction. A reduction of one ‘ought’ to another ‘ought,’ of one part of the normative to another part, seems more likely to succeed than a reduction of an ‘ought’ to something nonnormative.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 512 n. 4.

This does not assuage the worry being raised at all, though, since the reduction of ‘ought’ to psychological claims is a reduction of the normative to something non-normative unless one argues that psychological claims are normative. It is true that the psychological states being reduced to have content that involves the ‘ought’ of reasons, but that does not mean, without further argument, that claims about those psychological states are normative claims where the normativity is the normativity of the ‘ought’ of reasons.

4. Rational Requirements Must be Reducible

The third line of argument does not start by proposing a reduction rather it argues for a disjunctive claim: either there is some kind of reduction of rational requirements to claims about reasons (reasons, that is, other than just the rational requirement itself) or there are not really any rational requirements. The problem, as Kolodny puts it, is “the difficulty of understanding how one and the same subject is to be governed by these two autonomous ‘ought’s, which sometimes issue incompatible directives”.⁵¹ But when do they issue incompatible directives and to whom? Here’s a purported example of a conflict of directives. Assume that in fact it is not the case that there is sufficient reason for me to believe that *P*. It would seem then to follow that, in at least one sense of the word, I ought not to believe that *P*. However, it turns out, I believe that I have conclusive reason to believe *P*. Given C+, then, it might seem to follow that I am rationally required to believe *P*. This then is the sense in which there might appear to be two conflicting “ought”s. I ought not to believe that *P*, but I am rationally required to—I ought to—believe that *P*.

As Kolodny recognizes of course, Broome provides us with a purported solution to this problem. Rational requirements have “wide scope”. We should read C+ as follows: one is rationally required (if one believes that one has conclusive reason to have *A*, to have *A*). Understood this way, we cannot detach the consequent and so there is no incompatible

⁵¹ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 512.

directive. I can satisfy both directives by giving up the belief that I have conclusive reason to believe that *P*.

Kolodny thinks he has an argument for the claim that some rational requirements must be narrow scope requirements. He may also think that Broome's arguments for "wide scope" do not work. I'll consider first whether he has good objections to Broome's arguments.

4.1 Broome's Reductio

Broome appeals to the highly unintuitive consequences of taking rational requirements as having narrow scope. Start with the narrow scope reading of the following: if one believes that he has conclusive reason to *X*, then he is rationally required to intend to *X*. Suppose that John does believe that he has conclusive reason to kill Jack. Perhaps he believes this because he believes that Jack has been having an affair with his wife. On the narrow scope reading, which allows detachment, it would follow that he is rationally required to intend to kill Jack. However, we might well think this result is absurd. Killing Jack hardly seems rationally required even if Jack is having an affair with John's wife and, of course, for all we have said, this might not even be true. A wide scope reading avoids the absurd result.

What Kolodny says about this argument is a bit hard to interpret, in part because his discussion of this kind of argument occurs in a different dialectical context. Indeed, I think he sets up the dialectic in an unhelpful way precisely because he asks, as the title of his article puts it, "Why Be Rational?" in a way that involves, I believe, the kind of confusions Prichard was warning us about.⁵² Kolodny writes:

If one does find [the above result] absurd, however, then one is either tacitly assuming the claim that we have conclusive reasons to comply with rational requirements, or one is reading 'rationally required' as 'objectively rationally required.' In either case, it follows that I have conclusive reason to intend to *X*. If *X*-ing and intending to *X*, are completely

⁵² More on this in the final section of this paper.

silly, then that implication is absurd. But, again, one cannot assume, at this point, that we have conclusive reasons to comply with rational requirements. And ‘rationally required’ in the present context, means ‘subjectively rationally required,’ not ‘objectively rationally required.’⁵³

Let’s just accept that it would be bad if the argument did rest on the premise that we have conclusive reason to comply with rational requirements (conclusive reason other than just the rational requirement itself, that is). Kolodny has his own dialectical reasons in the context of his paper for not allowing this and I, as we shall see below, will have reasons for not wanting anything to turn on such a premise. However, it is hard to see why someone who finds absurd the idea that John is rationally required to intend to kill Jack needs to be committed to either of the disjuncts mentioned in the first sentence of the above quotation.

Let’s take the disjuncts in turn. I have been claiming that there is no reason to think that the ‘ought’ of rational requirements should be reduced to the ‘ought’ of any other kind of reasons—or to put it more carefully, I’ve been insisting that the rational requirements are a unique form of normative claim; if a requirement provides a conclusive reason, then that reason just is the rational requirement itself. We might think that I have to assume that there indeed *are* rational requirements and that it would indeed be irrational not to comply with them—in other words we might think I have to assume an error theory of rational requirements is false. We might think this is needed in order to think that the conclusion is absurd. It will not be absurd, you might think, to think that John is a wizard if you don’t think there are any wizards at all.⁵⁴ But actually you do not even have to rule out an error theory. I might well think that given the kind of thing wizards are *supposed* to be, it would be a clear mistake if a theory of wizards allowed for chairs to be wizards: if there were wizards, chairs would not be

⁵³ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 518 n. 10.

⁵⁴ A mistake, but not absurd.

the kind of thing that could be a wizard.⁵⁵ A theory of the identity conditions of wizards that allowed for this would be a theory that yielded an absurd result.

It is thus quite unclear why one would think that a commitment to the claim that I have conclusive reasons to comply with rational requirements is needed in order to think of the result as absurd. What about the suggestion that one is otherwise “reading ‘rationally required’ as ‘objectively rationally required’”?⁵⁶ Here we need to remind ourselves how and why Kolodny introduces the distinction between “objective” and “subjective” rationality. The “objective” use of the word “rational” is just the use “in which the phrase ‘the rational thing for one to do’ simply means ... what one has most reason to do”.⁵⁷ Whereas when we are concerned with subjective rationality we are “saying something about the relation between your *attitudes, viewed in abstraction from the reasons for them*”.⁵⁸ Notice something important: as far as the very distinction between subjective and objective is concerned there is no difference between the strength, in whatever sense, or normativity of the two kinds of rationality claims—no such invidious distinction is being drawn here. The word “subjective” might in other contexts suggest otherwise but in this context any such reading is not justified; it has merely to do with differing subject matter of different claims of rationality, not differing strengths of rationality or the presence or absence of normativity. Return to the thought that John’s being rationally required to kill Jack is absurd. Having this thought does not at all require reading “rationally required” as objectively rational required. Indeed, seeing it as absurd very much requires reading “rationally required” as *subjectively* rationally required. It is precisely because we think that normative requirements just on mental states could not make John irrational if he did not

⁵⁵ Chairs *qua* chairs. The possibility of chairs that are really wizards in disguise does not count against my argument.

⁵⁶ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 518 n. 10.

⁵⁷ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 510.

⁵⁸ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 509.

intend to kill Jack that we find the conclusion absurd—remember again that it is not as though because the subject matter is “subjective” the charge of irrationality is somehow lessened. Now this may be because we think that the only kind of normative claims that *could* lead to such a conclusion are claims about what reasons other than rational requirements there actually are for John, but it doesn’t follow from that at all, that in thinking that it is absurd that John is rationally required to intend to kill Jack, I am thinking of rationally required here as “objectively rationally required”.

I suspect that what lies behind Kolodny’s argument is a natural slide from a relatively uncontroversial view that there can be different kinds of grounds for charges of irrationality to the more controversial view that there really are two kinds of rationality or irrationality and that thus the word “rational” really is ambiguous. Others may deny that the word “rational” is ambiguous but have a related view: charges of rationality or irrationality can only be grounded on claims about relations between attitudes and a claim that is grounded on what reasons there actually are for an agent to do something is not a charge of irrationality, but some other charge, perhaps, the charge that that agent is doing the *wrong* action even though he is rational. Let me emphasize though that none of this affects my above response to Kolodny. Let’s accept that there are two kinds of failings possible: failure₁ and failure₂. Now from the example it follows that John fails₁ if he does not intend to kill Jack. My intuition that this is absurd can rest just on the thought that failures₁ just cannot lead to such conclusions. More plausibly, however, it may rest on the intuition that the only kind of failing that there could be in such a case is a failure₂ and, by hypothesis, there isn’t. The only way someone could fail by lacking an intention to kill Jack is if there really is sufficient reason for him to kill Jack. Given this intuition, if my theory of failures₁ leads to a different conclusion, then I will think I should change my account of failures₁, which in this context means accepting the “wide scope” view. None of this requires any equivocation on notions of rationality.

So far, then, we do not have an argument against the wide scope view and so no grounds for thinking that we will get conflicting “ought”s and so no grounds for thinking that we need to reduce one to the other.

4.2 Kolodny's Reasoning Test

Kolodny though presents another argument. He claims that rational requirements must pass something he calls the "Reasoning Test" and, he argues, several rational requirements fail the Reasoning Test if they are construed as wide scope requirements. Consider a rational requirement that bans being in a particular state: the state of having both attitude *A* and attitude *B*. Kolodny defends the following claims:

- (K1) If the requirement is indeed a wide-scope requirement, then there must be two ways of rationally resolving the conflict: one transition which leads to dropping *B* and another transition which leads to dropping *A*.

Otherwise, if, for example, the only way of rationally resolving the conflict is to drop *A*, then the requirement will really be a narrow scope requirement since in order to be rational we have no choice but to drop *A*.

Furthermore:

- (K2) A rational resolution of a conflict is one that is explained by the agent's "awareness of what is amiss in the state (*A*, *B*)".⁵⁹

However,

- (K3) The agent's awareness in question must be awareness of the contents of attitudes and not the attitude themselves: "From the standpoint of attitude *A*—which has as its object the *content* of *A*, not *attitude A* itself—the subject is aware of a need to revise his other attitude *B*. In a broad, but recognizable, sense of 'reasoning,' the subject *reasons* from the content of *A* to revising *B*".⁶⁰

Therefore we should adopt the

⁵⁹ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 520.

⁶⁰ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 520.

Reasoning Test: the requirement is wide scope “only if, from a state in which one has conflicting attitudes *A* and *B*, (i) one can reason from the content of *A* to dropping *B* and (ii) one can reason from the content of *B* to dropping *A*”.⁶¹

Finally on the bases of the Reasoning Test, Kolodny argues that for certain rational requirements, there is in fact only one way of rationally proceeding. He considers four purported wide-scope requirements:

- I+WS: Rationality requires one (either not to believe that one has conclusive reason to *X*, or to intend to *X*).
- B+WS: Rationality requires one (either not to believe that one has conclusive evidence that *p*, or to believe that *p*).
- I-WS: Rationality requires one (either not to believe that one lacks sufficient reason to *X*, or not to intend to *X*).
- B-WS: Rationality requires one (either not to believe that there is not sufficient evidence that *p*, or not to believe that *p*).

In the cases of I+WS and B+WS, Kolodny points out that the “*lack* of an attitude has no content” and so one can only reason from believing that one has conclusive reason to *X* (or conclusive evidence that *p*) to intending to *X* (or believing that *p*). Thus there is really only one way of rationally proceeding. In the case of I-WS and B-WS, Kolodny argues that it does not seem rational to reason “upstream” from, say, the intention to *X* to rejecting the belief that one lacks sufficient reason to *X*. There is content but not the kind of content one can reason from. Again there is really only way to rationally proceed. Thus some requirements are narrow scope requirements and so the possibility of conflicting oughts threatens again unless we can reduce one to another.

The problems with this argument start early. I will begin by looking carefully at the discussion surrounding (K1) in order to highlight how Kolodny intends us to interpret this

⁶¹ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 521.

claim and to show the picture of rational requirements that lies behind it. It is this picture that leads, I will suggest, to problems later in the argument. There is, as we shall see, an alternative picture of rational requirements, my picture, that is *prima facie* far more congenial to defenders of wide scope and until we have been show what is wrong with this alternative picture the argument will in effect beg the question.

Consider, for example, one of Broome's proposed wide-scope rational requirements that Kolodny does not discuss: "Rationality requires of *N* that *N* does not both believe *p* and believe not-*p*". Such a requirement, like Broome's other requirements, is intended to be perfectly symmetrical in the sense that, in a situation where *N* both believes *p* and believes not-*p*, the requirement does not favour any particular way of dealing with this conflict. If, *per impossible* no doubt, one had just the belief that *p* and the belief that not-*p*—and no ability to gather more evidence and so on—then rationality would not require or recommend any particular way of leaving this conflict state. This is what someone who is committed to wide-scope requirements of this sort *has* to say. The question is whether there is anything wrong with saying this. But in order to challenge the view we do need to have this part of the view in focus.

Now Kolodny is "inclined to think" that

[i]f rational requirements are normative, deontic, or response guiding, then they call for the subject to *respond* in a certain way. ... Indeed, one feels driven to interpret the claim that one is required not to be in a conflict-state as simply the claim that one is under a very general process-requirement: to avoid or escape that conflict-state in any way one likes.⁶²

Notice that admitting this general process-requirement as being part of the wide-scope rational requirement does not require taking back the claims of symmetry above. It still does not require that the rational requirement itself favour one way of escaping the conflict over another. Kolodny talks of what "one likes" but what we need here is some version of the traditional

⁶² Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 517.

distinction between picking and choosing. To avoid being a Buridan's ass when it comes to my two beliefs, I am to pick one to get rid of. Short of further argument, we have thus been given no reason for thinking that leaving the conflict state by picking is not rational.

Of course such Buridan's ass cases are, at least, rare. Kolodny gives a realistic account of how we usually satisfy rational requirements earlier in his paper where he rejects the suggestion "that local requirements of rationality are only *prima facie* requirements" which form the basis of "all things considered" claims about what will maximize satisfaction of these requirements:

it is obscure what role such 'all things considered' requirements would play. Unless I am under conflicting local requirements, I maximize compliance with local requirements simply by complying with each of them, in which case a requirement to maximize compliance is superfluous.⁶³

Implicit in this picture, is the idea that several requirements can be in play locally without being in conflict. What is rational will be the move that satisfies all of them.

Thus, if we are not to beg the question against the defender of wide-scope, (K1) must allow that rationally resolving the conflict can include picking. Now though we can already see one way in which (K2) is misleading. A rational resolution of a conflict, say dropping state *A*, may be explained by an awareness of what is amiss in the state (*A*, *B*) but only partially: what the awareness will not explain, in Buridan's ass cases, is the fact that state *A* is dropped as opposed to state *B*, or as opposed to dropping both states. And given the discussion above we can see that we have no reason to think that it should. Indeed in the more usual situation in which several requirements are in play, every detail of the rational resolution may well be explained by awareness that rational requirements are being violated; however, the particular rational resolution will be explained by an awareness of what is amiss in the state (*A*, *B*) but

⁶³ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 516 n. 8.

also, say, what is amiss in state (A, C) . The rationality of that move will be explained by an awareness of what is amiss with not satisfying all of the rational requirements in play.⁶⁴

Now Kolodny gives what might look like an argument for the claim that it is *only* the awareness of what is amiss in the state (A, B) that must explain everything. However, what he says does not constitute such an argument. Kolodny gives an example of a resolution of the conflict that is not rational: “one might drop B as a result of an electric shock. Why isn’t this a rational resolution of the conflict? Because, roughly, one’s awareness of what is amiss in the state (A, B) does not explain the transition to $(A, \text{not } B)$.”⁶⁵ But this doesn’t show that the resolution of the conflict wouldn’t be rational if it is explained by something in addition to the awareness that something is amiss in the state (A, B) , namely, another rational requirement. Nor does it show that the kind of picking discussed above would not be rational. Thus (K2), in the form that would be needed for the argument to actually go through, is not sufficiently supported.

As far as I can tell (K3) also involves a fundamentally mistaken picture of reasoning. Given what Kolodny, and many others, mean here by attitude and content, there simply is no such thing as reasoning just from the content of attitudes. This is part of what I emphasized in the initial sketch of my picture of the role of rational requirements. Consider the following piece of content: there is conclusive evidence that p . If that were all that the agent were aware of, then

⁶⁴ This implicitly assumes that there will be some rational requirements that allow for reasoning only in one direction. See the discussion of “downstream” reasoning below. Without such rational requirements an agent will still be able to pick between a local, minimal change in attitude that brings her into conformity with all the relevant rational requirements and large-scale global changes in her attitudes that completely change which rational requirements apply to her. My thanks to Nishi Shah for reminding me of the possibility of such global changes.

⁶⁵ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 520.

there could be no reasoning. There is nothing one can *reason* to from that content. There may well be things that that content logically entails, but reasoning, as Kolodny clearly agrees, is a matter of changing one's *attitudes* and one cannot reason to a change in attitude from the content by itself. To see this, consider how different the reasoning would be depending on the attitude I had towards this content. If I desired that there is conclusive evidence that *p*, then I might be able to reason to acquiring the belief that I so desire, but it certainly would not be rational to reason to acquiring the belief that *p*. Similarly if I imagine that there is conclusive evidence that *p*, then perhaps it is rationally permissible to reason to imagining that *p*, but again it would be a mistake to reason to believing that *p*. And so on. Of course, if I *believe* that there is conclusive evidence that *p*, then I can reason to believing that *p*. Thus awareness just of the content, assuming this is possible, would be no basis from which to reason.

Thus the subject has to be aware of the attitude towards the content. If this awareness was constituted by, say, a belief that one has this attitude towards this content, then, I am willing to grant, various regresses would threaten. However, we have no argument on the table for the claim that this is the only way the relevant awareness has to be fleshed out.⁶⁶ In any case, the alternative of positing that the subject is only aware of the content is simply hopeless. Any plausible account of reasoning has to be one in which the agent is aware not just of contents but of which attitudes she has to which contents. Indeed, an agent will have to be able to be aware of lacking certain attitudes. If I believe there is conclusive evidence that *p* and I only imagine that *p*, then I have to be aware that I only imagine that *p* and that I do not believe that *p*, in order for me to be able to reason to acquiring the belief that *p*. If all I could have was, somehow, a bare awareness that *p* without being aware of which attitudes I did and did not

⁶⁶ Indeed, the thrust of the discussion here, and of my initial sketch of the intuitive role of rational requirements, clearly suggests that any such account of the agent's awareness of which mental states he has would be seriously mistaken.

have towards p , then I would not have the requisite information to figure out that I needed to reason to acquiring the belief that p .

In any case, as long as an agent is aware of which attitudes he does have, then short of some further argument, he is aware of which attitudes he does not have. If I know that the fountain pens I own are a Lamy and a Waterman, then I know that I don't own a Pelikan. Thus, we should not accept (K3). But once we have rejected (K2) and (K3) there is no reason to accept the Reasoning Test or the arguments based on it.⁶⁷

It might be worth while briefly reviewing those arguments now that we have on board the reasons for not accepting either (K2), (K3), or the Reasoning Test. Recall the "There must be content to reason from" argument against I+WS and B+WS. Two points: first, even if the second state is missing, we have no reason, as I argued above, to think that an agent cannot be aware that a state is missing. Second, in any case, the explanation for how I manage to rationally transition from the state of conflict to a non-state of conflict will, in general, not be a matter of appealing just to one rational requirement. And *per impossible* no doubt, if one only had the relevant belief in conclusive reason or conclusive evidence, then it would be rational to just pick either acquiring the second state or dropping this one.

What about the claim that reasoning must be "downstream"? Here one crucial point is to distinguish between the wide-scope of a requirement and its directionality. What we need to avoid to prevent a conflict of "oughts" is "detachability". It was detachability, of course, that wide-scope was meant to prevent. The way Kolodny thinks of the options here, when interpreting

I-: Rationality requires one not to intend to X , if one believes that one lacks
 sufficient reason to X

⁶⁷ That is we have no reason to accept Kolodny's Reasoning Test. The preceding discussion points to ways of reformulating a plausible reasoning test but it would not be one that we could use against wide-scope requirements.

we have to choose between

I-WS: Rationality requires one (either not to believe that one lacks sufficient reason to X , or not to intend to X)⁶⁸

or

I-NS: If one believes that one lacks sufficient reason to X , then rationality requires one not to intend to X .⁶⁹

The problem of course is that I-NS seems to allow detachment. Kolodny's argument in favour of I-NS is that if one found oneself with the intention to X and the belief that one lacks sufficient reason to X , then one could not reason from the intention to an elimination of the belief. As Kolodny puts it, this would "not [be] recognizable as reasoning at all".⁷⁰ I am happy to grant this, but I want to deny that the only way to capture this thought is to interpret I- as I-NS. Something closer to Broome's original formulations, rather than I-WS, is more perspicuous:

I-*: Rationality requires one (if one believes that one lacks sufficient reason to X , not to intend to X)

Broome emphasized originally that it would be a mistake to think that the conditional in I-* could be captured by the material conditional; I-*, as he put it, involves the material conditional "with determination added, from left to right".⁷¹ The debates about the nature of conditionals are complex, but perhaps we can avoid those for now by reminding ourselves of simple examples. The conditional "If it rains, it won't rain heavily" allows me to make certain

⁶⁸ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 528.

⁶⁹ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 529.

⁷⁰ Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 530.

⁷¹ Broome, "Normative Requirements", 81-82.

inferences, but it doesn't allow me to make inferences based on the following conditional: "If it rains heavily, then it won't rain".⁷²

But doesn't "directionality" just mean that we have narrow scope? I do not think so though it requires some care to see why not. We do not have narrow scope precisely because I-* does not allow detachment. One cannot construct an argument as follows:

- (P1) *S* believes that *S* lacks sufficient reason to *X*.
- (P2) Rationality requires one (if one believes that one lacks sufficient reason to *X*, not to intend to *X*).

Therefore:

- (C) *S* is rationally required not to intend to *X*.

Rationality requires you to make sure that the conditional holds of your reasoning. The norm you are supposed to follow in reasoning is the norm stated by the conditional. But rationally itself does not require you not to intend to *X*.

It might help here to remind ourselves of the various perspectives from which arguments would be made on the bases of premises like (P1) and (P2). Consider the matter from the third-person perspective of someone assessing *S*'s rationality and assessing what mental states *S* ought to have. To keep things simple, consider the case where not only is *S*'s belief false, but in fact there is conclusive reason to *X* and so *S* ought to intend to *X*. The assessor can still think that rationality requires someone in *S*'s situation to get rid of the intention to *X*. Of course, the assessor doesn't think *S* should be in that situation and so doesn't think that *S* ought not to intend to *X*. Wide-scope is precisely what allows the assessor to think these thoughts without contradicting herself.

Is the choice of I-* over I-NS ad hoc? I do not think so. Intuitively, I- is normative and intuitively, in certain cases, we also want to say that it is not the case that the agent ought not

⁷² Stephen Read, *Thinking About Logic: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Logic* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 84.

to intend to *X* because the agent's belief referred to in (P1) is actually false. If we interpreted I- as I-NS, then the assessor would be in the uncomfortable position of saying both that the agent ought to intend to *X* and that the agent ought not to intend to *X*. These remember are precisely the kinds of cases that motivated Broome to introduce the idea of wide-scope in the first place.⁷³ Interpreting I- as I-* is motivated, and so not ad hoc, by two plausible normative intuitions: that there is some sense in which I ought to follow the relevant norm and that there is some sense in which I ought to intend *X*.

What about the perspective of the agent? Is there an inconsistency there? Again, I do not see why there needs to be. The agent just thinks that he lacks sufficient reason to *X* and so gets rid of the intention to *X* because he is following the norm referred to in (P2).

What about the reasoning test, though? Our agent has no way to reason to the belief he ought to have. That may well be true. But the claim that he ought to have the intention is not the claim that he ought now to be able to reason to this intention. It might require the truth of the claim that he could have in some nearby possible world reasoned to the intention but that claim is compatible with the claim that if he now reasons as he ought to reason he will end up not having the intention to *X*.

But if there is only one way of responding by reasoning to what is wrong with me, then does that not mean that I am rationally required to take that way? Well, given the situation I find myself in—with the belief that I lack sufficient reason to *X*—there is only way for me to proceed by reasoning. Rationality requires me to reason in a certain way, but rationality doesn't require me to be in the situation I am in: it does not require me to have the belief that I lack sufficient reason to *X*. That belief is not, so to speak, rationality's responsibility and neither, therefore, is the result that the only way for me to proceed by reasoning is not to have the intention to *X*. Things could have been otherwise without violating the rational requirements and they could still be otherwise.

⁷³ Broome, "Normative Requirements", 85-90.

Thus (K1) can still be true: there are two ways of rationally resolving the conflict. The agent cannot change the belief by reasoning and thus things couldn't be otherwise by reasoning, but it still does not follow that what rationality requires is not to intend to *X*; i.e., that we can detach the conclusion that rationality requires that I not intend to *X*. What rationality requires is a specific process of reasoning in certain circumstances. One can engage in that process of reasoning or one can change the circumstances, though, sometimes, not by reasoning. It does not follow that rationality requires the particular outcome to the process that would result if the circumstances were not changed. This becomes clear when we see that if one were to change the circumstances—again not necessarily by reasoning—one would not be violating the requirement, indeed, one would now make it the case that one was living up to the requirement. Imagine, per impossible, that the belief suddenly goes away. Not because I reason to that conclusion from further upstream. Rather we are to imagine that I just, somehow, forget the content of the belief—I no longer have that belief. Now I would be back in conformity with the requirement, but not by reasoning. This is a way of ending up in accord with the requirement though not a way of coming into accord that I could manage by reasoning. The requirement directs me to reason in certain ways in certain circumstances. But removing those circumstances is one way for me to have the requirement no longer apply to me. But that shows that it does not require the outcome of that process of reasoning tout court.

But now have we merely begged the question? That depends on the question being asked. My argument is that there is an intuitive picture of rational requirements according to which they are normative and we come to see that by the usual techniques of reflective equilibrium. I have thus been assuming that they are normative and seeing whether we run into trouble. I have been arguing that we do not run into trouble and I have been arguing that opting for other pictures runs us into more trouble. Thus the way I have set up the dialectic of this paper is quite different from the way Kolodny sets up his paper as the title of his paper immediately reveals: "Why be Rational?" He looks for a reason to comply with the requirements of rationality. I will argue in the next section that asking this question essentially involves a mistake analogous to the one Prichard warned us about some time ago in regard to the

question “Why be Moral?” My point here is just that if one begins with the intuitive thought that rational requirements are normative, then it makes sense to read I- as I-* and not I-NS and that this interpretation does not lead to any problems. My question was whether there was any reason not to take the requirements as wide-scope, whatever their directionality might be, and I have argued here that we have not yet been given a reason to give up on wide-scope. Thus once we have rejected (K2), (K3), or the Reasoning Test we can see that we can basically accept the claim that reasoning is in general downstream without giving up on wide-scope.

Thus the argument that the four purported wide-scope requirements are really narrow-scope requirements fails to go through and so, once again, the threat of conflicting oughts is eliminated. Thus any pressure from this source for reducing claims about rational requirements to claims about reasons has been removed.

5. Normativity and Reasons

In this final section I’ll consider some more general concerns about the normativity of rational requirements. Most of these concerns, I will argue, are driven by a failure to avail oneself of my more intuitive picture of rational requirements.

As I stated in my initial sketch, rational requirements are normative for reasoning. They tell us how reasoning ought to proceed: reasoning is a matter of taking the moves that satisfy the applicable rational requirements. Given this picture, there is no reason to expect that rational requirements will tell us that we ought to reason. They tell us how we ought to reason but not whether we should reason. Thus if we were to fail to find a reason to engage in reasoning, this would not show that these requirements are not normative. I doubt I have reason to be a surgeon—I’m pretty happy as a philosopher, it would be expensive to retrain me at my age, and so on—but it doesn’t follow that the moral claim one ought to do open-heart surgery only after appropriately anaesthetizing the patient is not true or is not normative. My becoming a surgeon, perhaps for no good reason, would make these normative claims *applicable* to me. However, their normativity does not rest on my having some reason to be a surgeon. Contrast this with an intuitive story of the normativity of the rules of a game like cricket. Here we may

well think that whatever normative authority such rules have over me depends on—comes from—my reasons for playing cricket in the first place.

Furthermore the claim that rational requirements are normative is not simply to appeal to some very minimal notion of normativity where any practice sets up rules, or ideals, that one can fail to obey or live up to. There may be some sense of “good torturer” for a certain practice of torture in which a good torturer is one who manages to cause pain in a way that maximally leaves open the possibilities for causing more pain in the future—doesn’t kill the victim among other things. However, I would not say that the torturer ought to do this. The norms of torture are not normative in the sense intended here despite their being a practice of torture. Thus the claim that rational requirements are normative is meant to have bite and thus it is not the case that rational requirements are obviously true. However, it does not follow that their truth requires that I have a reason to be rational.

Thus showing that rational requirements are normative is not a matter of showing that we have reasons to be rational. Indeed, as I have suggested already, as far as I can see, the way one comes to conclusions about how one ought to reason is by the usual business of reflective equilibrium. We find it intuitive that we ought to reason in certain ways. We look for general principles, we look for counterexamples, and eventually, sometimes, we on reflection find ourselves convinced that we ought to reason in such and such a way. Now we can of course shift levels. As in the case of normative ethics, we can shift to a metaethical level and ask ourselves whether the methodology of reflective equilibrium does indeed give us access to the relevant normative truths. This would then involve figuring out the truth conditions for such claims and figuring out how reflective equilibrium could give us access to such truths.⁷⁴ But this would not be a matter of finding some reason to engage in reasoning or a matter of showing how for any particular rational requirement we have a reason to live up to it (other than the rational requirement itself). There is also no question-begging assumption that claims

⁷⁴ I do not mean to be closing off non-cognitivist or error-theoretic options.

like (1) and (2) are true; for all I have said, the “metaethical” investigation could yield an error theory.

Consider briefly an analogy with perception. My everyday methodology for figuring out whether my car is parked outside of the house involves going and taking a look. A friend, hoping to borrow my car, might come to the conclusion that the car is not outside of the house because he looked in the wrong place. I might say to him, “Are you sure? It’s parking spot C35 and you have to go around the back of the shed to see it.” Now here too we may be able to shift levels. Does this ordinary activity really tell us whether the car is there, a certain kind of philosophical sceptic might ask. Answering that kind of worry would require getting clear on what the truth conditions for claims of the form “My car is in the parking lot” really are. Sense data? Mind-independent thing-in-itself? And then investigating whether the everyday processes of perception can give me access to such facts.

This is important because I think there is a tendency to make the kind of mistake here that Prichard complained about long ago in the case of morality when one asks “Is there really a reason why I should act in the ways in which hitherto I have thought I ought to act?”.⁷⁵ Of course, it may not actually be the case that I ought to ϕ . I can be mistaken about that. However, if I accept that I ought to ϕ , then it does not make sense for me to wonder whether I have a reason to ϕ . If I need to appeal to a reason to ϕ , then that I ought to ϕ just is the needed reason to ϕ . Looking for some other kind of reason, say a self-interested reason to do one’s duty, is looking for the wrong kind of reason. And we should hardly be surprised if we fail to find such a reason. Thus the kind of project Broome takes up in his paper “Does Rationality Give us Reasons?”, a project of finding a reason to obey rational requirements that is something other than just the rational requirement itself, not surprisingly fails to yield a

⁷⁵ H. A. Prichard, "Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?" in *Moral Writings*, ed. Jim MacAdam (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), 7.

positive answer.⁷⁶ But that project does not actually settle the answer to his question. It is no surprise, as I have tried to suggest, that there is no reason other than the rational requirement itself. The real question is whether a claim like (1)—understood here, *pace* Broome, as a normative claim—is true. After reflection, the equilibrium I reach is one on which such a claim is intuitive. Broome points to no considerations to undermine this intuition rather he looks for some reason other than that expressed by this claim itself to show that I ought to obey the claim or that it provides me with a *pro tanto* reason and again it comes as no surprise that that does not yield any positive results. We can raise further sceptical questions, but those require shifting to the metaethical level something Broome simply does not do. But till he has done that he has not really given us any reason to doubt that the requirements of rationality are normative.⁷⁷

Now my appeal above to Prichard is potentially confusing. Isn't Prichard in part defending the view that moral obligations apply to all and that sometimes we fail to see this because we mistakenly ask for a reason to do what I ought to do whereas I seem to be defending the view that rational requirements only apply when one is reasoning? Prichard though does not think that all obligations apply to all as is clear in his discussion of "hypothetical imperatives".⁷⁸ In any case, as we know, natural language quantifiers are inevitably restricted or relativised so

⁷⁶ Broome, "Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?".

⁷⁷ Cf. Broome, "Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?" 336.

⁷⁸ "Only a hypothetical imperative of the other kind, viz. a problematic imperative, is really hypothetical. But even this is absolutely and not hypothetically binding on those who desire the end. ... It is not that there are two sorts of obligation, the one hypothetical and the other categorical; it is that certain obligations apply to some and others apply to all" (H. A. Prichard, "Kant's *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*", in *Moral Writings*, ed. Jim MacAdam (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), 54).

that they range over a particular domain; it is not as though Prichard thinks carpets have moral obligations. Or consider one of his own examples:

in asserting that a man ought to support his indigent parents, we clearly do not mean that a man ought at *any* time to support his indigent parents. ... the duty exists only when two conditions are satisfied. The first is, of course, that the man has parents who are indigent and willing to receive the means of support; and the second is that he is able to support them.⁷⁹

It is a substantive normative issue to figure out when certain claims about what we ought to do apply. My claim about when rational requirements apply are substantive in this sense, but, as we can now see, they don't run afoul of the Prichard point about asking for reasons that I emphasized above.

There is another confusion lurking in this neighbourhood though. Someone might grant that we do not need to find reasons for reasoning in order for rational requirements to be normative; however, they might insist, rational requirements themselves need to give reasoners a reason to obey them. I think there is a version of this thought that is innocuous—and we'll work our way to it—but, unfortunately, there are versions that are not innocuous. We can bring these more troubling versions into focus by seeing how someone might take such a thought to provide a motivation for a certain kind of reductive project. Rational requirements cannot be normative, so such a person might think, unless we can reduce them to claims about reasons. Normativity, so the thought seems to go, is somehow essentially about the having of reasons. Rational requirements can only be normative if we have a reason to satisfy them. One way, then, to show that they are normative would be to show that claims of rational requirements are themselves claims about what reasons we have and that these claims turn out to be true.

⁷⁹ H. A. Prichard, "Duty and Ignorance of Fact", in *Moral Writings*, ed. Jim MacAdam (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 2002), 86-87.

But why would we accept the claim that rational requirements can only be normative if we have a reason to satisfy them? Consider again the following purported requirement of rationality:

- (2) Rationality requires of S that S not both believe p and believe not- p .

The question here is whether in order for such a claim to be normative, some claim of the following form *has* to be true:

- (7) S has a reason not to both believe p and believe not- p .

It is important to remember that there are lots of normative predicates and the relations between them can be quite complicated. A painting can be beautiful without being courageous. Whether a painting can be beautiful while being immoral is a matter of controversy. I may have a reason to do something even though I morally ought not to do it. However, the motivation for looking for something along the lines of (7) is presumably that claims about reasons are foundational in a certain way. If a painting is beautiful, then, necessarily, that is a reason to buy it or to appreciate it. Or, we might think, it cannot be beautiful unless there is a reason to buy or to appreciate it. If an action is courageous, then that is a reason to do it. If an action is one I morally ought to do, then that is a reason to do it and a reason to feel guilty if I do not.

We can see the pressure towards such a view since, after all, all of the normative claims we have just been considering turn up in deliberation as considerations that often have to be weighed against each other.⁸⁰ Thus, though the painting is beautiful, I may also think that it is good to send money to earthquake relief, and so conclude that I ought not to buy the painting. Thinking of the relevant normative considerations as providing reasons seems indeed required if one has the intuitive picture of deliberation towards action as being a matter of weighing these various considerations against each other. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, talk of reasons can seem basic since, in a sense, the scale of weighing reasons is the common

⁸⁰ Ignoring for now more complicated relations between reasons: overriding, silencing, and so on.

scale on which all these considerations needs to be placed. Or the common currency, if you like, in which the horse-trading of deliberation takes place.

However, as I suggested in my initial sketch of my picture of rational requirements, even if one takes the above line of thought to be a compelling motivation to think that most normative claims are reasons, or require the presence of reasons, this approach is less compelling once we turn to rational requirements precisely because of the very distinctive role that rational requirements play in reasoning and deliberation. Rational requirements are not considerations that turn up in deliberation as reasons to be weighed against other reasons. Rather rational requirements are what *govern* the processes of deliberation, the processes of weighing reasons.⁸¹ They are, to continue the metaphor above, the mechanisms of the scale itself, not the weights that go on the scale. Rational requirements govern the processes of acquiring, and changing, mental states whose contents are, sometimes, normative considerations: either the claim, say, that the painting is beautiful or, in cases of ascent, the claim that the painting's being beautiful is a reason to buy it.

To think that rational requirements *must* turn up as the content of mental states in order to guide reasoning is to open oneself to the usual regresses. Rational requirements are not normally part of the content of what I believe and in that sense I do not reason *from* them, but that does not mean that I am not reasoning *with* them. They are the principles by which I guide my reasoning—they are the norms that I follow in reasoning and deliberation.⁸²

Nonetheless, someone might argue, it is in general true that if you ought to *F*, then that you ought to *F* just is a reason to *F*. This, so the argument continues, is a conceptual truth and

⁸¹ What should govern the process. See section 1 again for what I take to be the additional complexities involves in a full picture of the role of rational requirements.

⁸² See section 1 for more on the regresses that threaten and for an account of the relations between rational requirements, principles and norms.

holds also of claims of the form (2). Perhaps this internalism is claimed to hold for all “oughts”, perhaps it is just claimed to hold for the “ought” of rational requirements.

Does the proponent of the distinctiveness of the “ought” of rational requirements have to deny this internalist claim? I don’t think so. On such an account, the consideration that is a reason is just the rational requirement that you ought to F . This ought can be distinctive even if the internalism holds true. To see this we need only recall the conceivability, or so I claim, of a similar form of internalism for the moral “ought”. Consider the position that takes the moral ought to be a distinctive “ought”, one which differs from, say, the “ought” of prudence. The kind of normativity is different in each case. This thought could be spelled out, or explained, in terms of the kinds of truth conditions the different “ought” claims have, the attitudes it makes sense to take towards violators, or the relative strengths of reasons that the two “oughts” generate: perhaps if one ought morally to p and ought prudentially to not- p , then the moral reason, here the consideration that one morally ought to p , always wins. Now, my aim is not to argue for this picture of moral and prudential “oughts”; however, I think that it is, so to speak, conceivable enough for us to see the conceptual space available for the kind of view which claims that though reasons-internalism holds for the “ought” of rational requirements, there is yet no reason to think they do not form a distinctive normative domain. Thus, even if normativity requires reasons, a claim recall that we have not seen an explicit argument for, there is as of yet no reason to think that rational requirements cannot provide a distinctive domain of reasons.

One could thus accept that one ought not to both believe p and believe not- p without thinking there will be any reason other than this consideration itself for not so believing. Of course, we haven’t actually been given any reason to accept the internalism claim. Rational requirements, I have been suggesting, are intuitively normative. They require certain responses. They require certain combinations of mental states and perhaps require certain transitions between mental states. None of these roles however requires thinking of them as reasons.

Now that we have this further elaboration of my picture of rational requirements on the table, we can also see how certain understandable lines of thought about rational requirements can be avoided. Consider the kind of case Broome mentions in a recent paper. Some philosophers, he says, might want to deny that we should think of rational requirements as telling us what we ought to think:

They think, for example, that if you could prevent a nuclear war by believing a contradiction, then you ought to believe a contradiction. But they nevertheless think that, although you ought to do it, believing a contradiction would still be irrational. ...

The view is that requirements of rationality must be *pro tanto* reasons: necessarily, when rationality requires you to *F*, that is a *pro tanto* reason for you to *F*.⁸³

However, in some cases, such as the nuclear war case, other sources of *pro tanto* reasons, say morality or prudence, produce reasons that outweigh or override the reason constituted by the requirement of rationality and yield the result that you ought not to *F*.⁸⁴ On this view, we have to say that though you normally ought to *F*, this is not always the case. What is always the case is that I have a *pro tanto* reason to *F*.

This is a misleading way of describing the situation though. When I'm reasoning, I ought not to believe contradictions. What happens in the nuclear war case is that I have a conclusive reason not to be reasoning. One way to see this is to note that one cannot reason oneself to believing a contradiction. The nuclear case requires that one do something else instead. What one is supposed to do is not specified in Broome's example but we do know that it won't be reasoning. In such a case it is not that, as Broome puts it, requirements that arise from morality or prudence conflict with rational requirements. Rather, we have reason not to reason and so, if we do not reason, then the requirements of reason do not apply. If I have conclusive reason not to carry out heart surgery—as no doubt I do in almost any case I can imagine—then

⁸³ Broome, "Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?" 324-25.

⁸⁴ Broome, "Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?" 324.

it would be odd to describe that reason—that requirement—as conflicting with the requirement to anaesthetize patients before cracking their chests open. Thus talking in terms of pro tanto reasons that conflict is misdescribing the intuitive structure of the normative reality we are dealing with.

As I have repeatedly emphasized, whether or not we think that such “oughts” are reasons, we can well wonder whether claims like (2) are true and how we would show they are true. And whatever stance one takes on whether such “oughts” are reasons, we will still need a “metaethics” that provides a semantics for such claims, an ontology of what they are about, and an epistemology for how we come to know them. Insisting that the ought of rational requirements is distinctive is not at all to have settled these metaethical questions. Indeed, it still leaves open the possibility that precisely these distinctive ought claims are in fact distinctively false. Thus the commitment to the distinctiveness of the normativity of rational requirement claims is not at all to ignore the possibility of skepticism.

However, just as the inability to give non-moral reasons for living up to the requirements of morality should not in itself make us skeptical of morality, similarly, an inability to use considerations that are not the rational requirements themselves to give us reason to obey rational requirements should not make us skeptical of them. The question is not whether I have some other reason to do what I ought rationally to do, the question is just whether it really is the case that I ought, for example, not believe both that the grass is green and that it is not green. And as long as it is the case that I ought not to so believe, then it seems to add very little to say that the fact that I ought not to do this is a reason for me not to do it.

I might be tempted to say things of the form, “If you have contradictory beliefs, then you will not flourish well in the world”. However, the rational requirement is not contingent on such flourishing. That is not the thing to say to the everyday sceptic. Rather one leads the sceptic through the process of reflective equilibrium getting him or her to consider her intuitions about principles and cases. Again, a certain kind of sceptic might question this process of reflective equilibrium, but then the thing to do is to shift to the metaethical level. A sceptic might succeed at this level in showing us that the entire practice is fundamentally mistaken—that it

is all ideology, all mystification for some nefarious, or pointless, purpose. Such a sceptic though has a long and hard row to hoe, particularly in the case of reason, and I'll wait till he gets to the end of it before I am tempted to change what I think is our natural picture of rational requirements and their role in reasoning.⁸⁵

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