

SYMPOSIUM: JOHN BROOME ON  
REASONS AND RATIONALITY

## Vindicating the Normativity of Rationality\*

*Nicholas Southwood*

Sometimes, talk of “rationality” is simply shorthand for “the requirements of practical and theoretical reason.” Thus, we might say that carrying malaria tablets in the Congo is “the rational thing to do,” that anyone with the benefit of exposure to modern science is “rationally required to believe that humans evolved from apes,” that opting to visit the dentist after a hiatus of ten years is “the only rational decision,” and so on. In each case, we mean to say that these are the things that we have *most reason* to do, believe, and intend, whether or not our doing so squares well with other psychological attitudes we happen to have. We would not withdraw the judgments if we became aware that the individuals to whom they applied happened to have other psychological attitudes that fell foul of them—say, beliefs about the appropriateness of traveling without medicines in Africa, or beliefs that entailed that humans evolved from spotted quolls, or intentions that would be better served by giving all dentists a wide berth.<sup>1</sup>

But the word “rationality” is also used by a number of philosophers in a quite different way, to pick out a concept that is tied much more

\* Previous versions of this essay were presented at the Australasian Association of Philosophy conference at the University of New England in July 2007 and at the conference “Reasons, Reasoning and Rationality: Themes from the Work of John Broome,” at the Australian National University in August 2007. I am grateful to audiences on those occasions and to many other friends and colleagues for their valuable input. I would particularly like to thank John Broome and Daniel Friedrich for insightful comments on a previous version of the essay and, more generally, for many fascinating discussions about the issues with which the essay engages. Research for the article was carried out under ARC Discovery Grant DP0663060.

1. This is what Niko Kolodny calls “objective rationality” (“Why Be Rational?” *Mind* 114 [2005]: 509–63, 510).

*Ethics* 119 (October 2008): 9–30

© 2008 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 0014-1704/2008/11901-0003\$10.00

closely to the particular psychological attitudes that we happen to have.<sup>2</sup> Suppose that Rupert believes that John will do more than Kevin to prevent climate change if elected as prime minister and also believes that the candidate who will do more to prevent climate change will be the better prime minister, but has, as yet, no view about which candidate will be the better prime minister. Under these circumstances, we might say of Rupert that “he is rationally required to believe that John will be the better prime minister if he has the aforementioned beliefs.” Or again, suppose that Bruce has formed the intention to apply for a philosophy job and knows that doing so requires spending the day finalizing his application but has not yet decided how he is going to spend his day. We might say of Bruce that “he is rationally required to decide to spend the day finalizing his application if he has the aforementioned intention and belief.” These are not judgments involving requirements of practical and theoretical reason. We may be of the view that the evidence Rupert has at his disposal unequivocally supports his believing that Kevin will be the better prime minister and that Bruce would do much better to decide to spend the day at the beach concentrating on his far more promising surfing career. Rather, they are judgments involving distinctive kinds of requirements—what we might think of as something like requirements of internal coherence among our psychological attitudes.<sup>3</sup> “Rationality” in the sense that I am interested in here, then, is simply the label for the complete set of requirements of this kind.

There are a number of fascinating issues that arise concerning rationality in this sense. Many of the issues that have received the most attention concern the substance of rationality. Which requirements are valid?<sup>4</sup> How, precisely, are they to be formulated?<sup>5</sup> Just as we can

2. See John Broome, “Normative Requirements,” *Ratio* 12 (1999): 398–412, and “Reasons,” in *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, ed. Jay Wallace, Michael Smith, Samuel Scheffler, and Philip Pettit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28–55; Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?”; T. M. Scanlon, “Structural Irrationality,” in *Common Minds: Themes from the Philosophy of Philip Pettit*, ed. Geoffrey Brennan, Robert E. Goodin, Frank Jackson, and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 84–103.

3. To say that rational requirements are requirements of internal coherence is not necessarily to say that they are merely requirements for internal coherence. The latter implies a certain view about the logical form of rational requirements on which I intend to remain neutral here. See n. 5 below.

4. Candidates include (i) the requirement not to believe that p if you believe that not-p (*belief consistency*), (ii) the requirement to believe that q if you believe that p and that if p then q (*belief closure*), (iii) the requirement to intend to Y if you intend to X and believe that your Xing requires that you Y (*instrumental rationality*), (iv) the requirement not to intend to X if you intend not to X (*intention coherence*), and (v) the requirement to intend to X if you believe you ought to X (*enkrasia*).

5. One important issue of formulation that has recently received a lot of attention

ask questions about the substance or content of moral requirements—whether there is a moral requirement to keep our promises, give money to charity, and so on—so too we can ask questions about the substance or content of rational requirements.

The issue that I want to focus on here, by contrast, concerns the normativity of rationality.<sup>6</sup> There is at least one way in which rationality is normative, namely, that it is constituted by requirements. Rationality requires things of one, and we can violate these requirements: for example, by failing to believe that John will be the better prime minister despite believing that he will do more than Kevin to prevent climate change if elected and that the candidate who will do more to prevent climate change will be the better prime minister. This is a way that rationality is normative that, say, the history of the printing press, the content of a Woolworths supermarket, and Bach's Brandenburg Concertos aren't.

However, the normativity of rationality does not seem to consist merely in the fact that it is constituted by requirements. English grammar is also constituted by requirements. But rational requirements and local grammatical requirements do not seem to be remotely normatively on par. Local grammatical requirements are merely constitutive rules or conventions that do not possess any kind of intrinsic normative status. In violating a local grammatical requirement, we are guilty of nothing more than a conventional breach. Rational requirements, by contrast, seem to be normative in a deeper sense. If we fail to comply with them, it seems that we've necessarily gone wrong in some deeper way. This can be seen, first, by the locutions that we use to pick out rational requirements. We often speak of what is rationally required of us as what we "ought" to believe and intend and of those who violate rational

---

concerns how to understand the logical form of rational requirements. As Broome has pointed out, there are two importantly different ways that rational requirements might be formulated. Take what Broome calls "enkrasia": the requirement to intend to X if you believe you ought to X. According to what Broome calls the "narrow scope" interpretation of enkrasia, the requirement is conditional in the sense of requiring one to intend to X conditional on believing that you ought to X. In other words, it is to be interpreted as follows: if you believe that you ought to X, then you are rationally required to intend to X. By contrast, according to what Broome calls the "wide scope" interpretation, the requirement is a conditional, since it ranges over the whole conditional proposition. So, the correct interpretation of enkrasia is this: you are rationally required (if you believe you ought to X, to intend to X). I shall remain neutral here about whether rational requirements have narrow or wide scope.

6. This issue has also recently begun to receive a fair bit of critical attention. See John Broome, "Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?" *Philosophical Issues* 15 (2005): 321–37, and "Is Rationality Normative?" *Disputatio* 23 (2007): 161–78; Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?"; Scanlon, "Structural Irrationality"; Nadeem Hussain, "The Requirements of Rationality" (unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 2007), available at [http://www.stanford.edu/~hussain/StanfordPersonal/Online\\_Papers\\_files/HussainRequirementsv24.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/~hussain/StanfordPersonal/Online_Papers_files/HussainRequirementsv24.pdf).

requirements as “unreasonable.” It can also be seen to be manifest in the phenomenology associated with rational requirements. From a first-personal perspective, there is a kind of normative pressure that we feel to believe or intend as we are rationally required and an associated phenomenology of normative failure insofar as we fail to do so. Similarly, from a third-personal perspective, there is a related (although importantly different) pressure to hold others to account in respect of the rational requirements to which they are subject, and to regard those who violate them as appropriate objects of criticism.

Recently, however, a number of philosophers have expressed skepticism about the thesis that rationality is really normative in the deeper sense. One such philosopher is John Broome. In his earlier work, Broome readily conceded the thesis.<sup>7</sup> But in his most recent work, he has begun to harbor certain skeptical doubts.<sup>8</sup> The main source of these doubts is that he is now skeptical that there exists any compelling *vindicating explanation* of the apparent normativity of rationality. At the end of a paper in which he has tried to find such a vindicating explanation, he writes: “I can find no grounds for thinking that rationality is normative.”<sup>9</sup> Of course, this does not show that the thesis that rationality is normative is false. Indeed, Broome himself admits that, despite his doubts, he is still tempted to believe that it may be true.<sup>10</sup> But if no vindicating explanation should be forthcoming, it is hard to see how one could continue to uphold it.<sup>11</sup>

I think *Broome’s Challenge*, as I shall call it, is an important one. The first thing to do is to get clear on just what Broome’s Challenge amounts to. It seems to me that there is considerable confusion within the literature on this score, to which Broome himself is not wholly immune, that has stood in the way of a proper evaluation of the question of whether we can answer it. Having settled on a more adequate characterization of Broome’s Challenge, I shall then consider various ways we might go about meeting it. To anticipate: I shall conjecture that our best prospects for doing so appear to lie with a conception of rationality as consisting of the demands of our particular first-personal standpoint.

7. Broome, “Normative Requirements.”

8. Broome, “Does Rationality Give Us Reasons?” and “Is Rationality Normative?”

9. Broome, “Is Rationality Normative?” 178.

10. *Ibid.*, 165, 177.

11. There are three main kinds of skeptical strategies that have been deployed within the literature: (i) trying to show that the apparent normativity of rationality cannot be vindicated, (ii) trying to show that the apparent normativity of rationality can be explained away, and (iii) trying to show that the thesis that rationality is normative results in a kind of objectionable bootstrapping. All three strategies are pursued by Kolodny in “Why Be Rational?” I shall focus here only on i.

## I. FORMULATING BROOME'S CHALLENGE

## A. The "Why Be Rational?" Challenge

What would be necessary in order to meet Broome's Challenge? What would be necessary in order to present a compelling vindication of the apparent normativity of rationality in the face of skeptical doubt? Here is one intuitive and commonsensical answer: it would have to show that, for any agent and rational requirement, the agent has an independent reason to obey the requirement. In other words, it would have to come up with an independent and universal justification for rational compliance. As we might say, it must offer an answer, of universal application, to the question "Why be rational?"

Broome himself sometimes seems to favor understanding his challenge in this way. He writes: "If rationality is indeed normative, that seems likely to be because of what we can achieve by being rational. . . . [Rational requirements] might be normative because satisfying them is a way of achieving some of the things we ought to achieve. . . . There are some *F*s such that we ought to *F*. Rationality seems plausibly a good means of coming to *F* in many instances when we ought to *F*—of achieving much of what we ought to achieve. Perhaps this explains why we have a reason to satisfy rational requirements."<sup>12</sup>

This way of understanding Broome's Challenge is also present in an influential recent paper by Niko Kolodny, entitled, as it happens, "Why Be Rational?" According to Kolodny, a satisfactory "answer to the question, 'Why ought I to X?' must offer a substantive reason for X-ing, e.g., that X-ing would prevent suffering, or advance the frontiers of knowledge."<sup>13</sup> So, a satisfactory vindication of the normativity of rationality would have to show that any agent in any circumstance has an independent reason to obey any rational requirement.<sup>14</sup>

Such an approach may seem hard to escape. First, it is commonly believed that the mark of the normative is that normative claims are or involve claims about reasons.<sup>15</sup> It makes sense, in light of this assumption, that vindicating the normativity of rationality should involve trying to identify reasons for being rational. Second, the canonical mode of defending normative claims that are in doubt is, of course, precisely to adduce independent reasons for complying with them. Suppose, for

12. Broome, "Is Rationality Normative?" 171–72.

13. Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 545–46.

14. This is somewhat obscured by the fact that Kolodny sometimes uses the phrase "the normativity of rationality" when he really means the *apparent* normativity of rationality. See Sec. II.C.

15. See Joseph Raz, *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67; T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), chap. 1.

example, that we tell our ten-year-old, who has begun to exhibit prevaricating tendencies, that children are required to tell the truth to their parents. If he were to raise a skeptical eyebrow, we would typically try to give an account of the reasons which support being truthful: reasons of autonomy, dignity, reciprocity, and so on. Third, as I noted above, rationality purports to be universally normative. To be subject to a rational requirement is ostensibly to be subject to a kind of normative demand that applies in each and every case. This is part of what makes rational requirements ostensibly normatively different from other kinds of requirements. Take the English grammatical requirement to use the accusative “me” rather than the nominative “I” in sentences like “John asked Daniel and me to go sailing with him.” One may have a reason to comply with this requirement. It may be, for example, that violating the requirement will cause untold suffering to one’s elderly grandmother, a notorious grammatical pedant, who happens to be within earshot. However, it is easy to construct scenarios where no such reason-giving consideration holds, despite the fact that the requirement still applies. By contrast, to violate a rational requirement ostensibly *entails* that one has gone wrong in some way.

*B. Can the “Why Be Rational?” Challenge Be Met?*

The problem is that it is far from obvious that Broome’s Challenge, thus construed, can be met. Kolodny puts the worry with admirable directness: “If there were reasons to comply with rational requirements, what would they be? We can contrive situations, of course, in which people have . . . reasons for avoiding irrationality. Caligula might threaten you with a life of torment unless you conform to [some rational requirement R]. . . . In this case, you would have a conclusive reason, of a familiar kind, to comply. The normativity of rationality, however, cannot be explained by reasons of this kind. Rationality is normative for any believer or intender, no matter what his circumstances.”<sup>16</sup>

In order to make the worry more vivid, it is worth very briefly surveying some of the ways that one might try to meet the “Why be rational?” challenge. The most straightforward would be to try to tell some story to the effect that obeying rational requirements will be personally advantageous and hence that we have reasons of a prudential kind to be rational. This kind of proposal obviously fails the universality requirement. There are plenty of cases where obeying rational requirements would be prudentially disastrous—say, where we have false beliefs

16. Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” 542–43.

about what is in our interests, or false beliefs about how best to realize our intentions.<sup>17</sup>

This naturally suggests a second proposal, namely, that even if it is not true that we have prudential reasons to obey rational requirements in each and every case, perhaps we have prudential reasons to dispose ourselves to obey rational requirements. Although such a disposition will sometimes have the consequence that we fail to do what is prudentially best, in the long run it may still be the prudentially best strategy available. This proposal appears to be subject to a dilemma. Either the disposition to be rational is a disposition that makes it possible to fail to conform with rational requirements or it is a disposition that makes sure failures impossible. If it is a disposition of the first kind, then even if we have prudential reasons to dispose ourselves in this way, it does not follow that we have prudential reasons to obey rational requirements in each and every case. So, the proposal fails to satisfy the universality requirement. If it is a disposition of the second kind, then it is highly doubtful that we have prudential reasons to dispose ourselves in this way. On the contrary, it seems clear that we should prefer a disposition that would allow at least some deviations from rationality.<sup>18</sup>

A third, rather different proposal that Kolodny mentions is that our reasons to be rational arise from the intrinsically “valuable status” we have as “believers and agents”—the basic idea being that failing to obey a rational requirement involves somehow undermining or failing to respect this valuable status.<sup>19</sup> Kolodny makes short work of this proposal. On the one hand, if the claim is meant to be that violating a rational requirement will undermine our valuable status as believers and agents, then it is a massive exaggeration to say the least. As Kolodny astutely observes: “It rarely threatens one’s survival as a believer or agent to violate a rational requirement in any particular case.”<sup>20</sup> One’s status as a believer and agent is surely not so precarious. On the other hand, if the claim is meant to be that violating a rational requirement involves failing to respect our valuable status as believers and agents, then, even if we are willing to assume that this is capable of grounding a reason not to violate rational requirements, it is a reason that “seems rather precious and unreal. When was the last time that a reason to express your status as a rational being weighed with you?”<sup>21</sup>

17. See Broome, “Is Rationality Normative?” 172; Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” 543; Hussain, “The Requirements of Rationality,” 13–16.

18. Of course, this already concedes that we are able to dispose ourselves in a way that makes it impossible to fail to conform with rational requirements, which is questionable to say the least.

19. Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” 544–47.

20. *Ibid.*, 544.

21. *Ibid.*, 545.

A fourth proposal, which neither Broome nor Kolodny discusses, involves understanding one's reasons to be rational as reasons concerning the making and honoring of certain kinds of commitments.<sup>22</sup> There are a variety of reasons that attach to the making and honoring of commitments. Take promissory commitments, for example. It is generally accepted that we have reasons—indeed obligations—both to honor promises that we have already made (by keeping them) and to make promises only if we have certain attitudes concerning them—for example, that we intend to keep them and to do what is necessary to keep them, that we believe that we will be able to keep them (and perhaps even that we will keep them), and so on. It might be argued that certain mental states also involve making analogous kinds of commitments that we have reasons to honor, and that this is what accounts for our having reasons to obey rational requirements. One problem for this proposal concerns its scope. It is most plausible in the case of intentions that are consciously and voluntarily formed. But it is far from obvious how to extend it to unconsciously and involuntarily formed intentions, to beliefs in general, to normative beliefs, and perhaps to other attitudes too, as it is far from obvious that there is any analogous notion of commitment that is involved in these other attitudes. Another problem is that it is not clear that the analogy with promissory commitments really holds. The propensity of promises to give us reasons seems to be importantly bound up with the fact that promises are public and external institutions that involve important modifications in our relations with others, whereas intentions and beliefs are private and internal and do not necessarily involve others at all.

In short, the prospects for answering the “Why be rational?” challenge appear dim. At the end of his essay “Is Rationality Normative?” Broome writes: “After all this, I have been unable to show . . . that, necessarily, when rationality requires you to *F*, there is a reason for you to *F*. Often when rationality requires you to *F*, you have a reason to *F*, but I cannot guarantee this is necessarily so.”<sup>23</sup> This might be thought to suggest that Broome's Challenge cannot be met, that the normativity of rationality cannot be vindicated. As it is, I think that would be too quick. For the “Why be rational?” challenge constitutes an illegitimate version of Broome's challenge; it rests on a mistake, as I shall now argue.

22. Something like this view appears to have been endorsed by Michael H. Robins, *Promising, Intending and Moral Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). It is also hinted at in Bruno Verbeek, “Rational Self-Commitment,” in *Rationality and Commitment*, ed. Fabienne Peter and Hans Bernhard Schmid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

23. Broome, “Is Rationality Normative?” 177.

*C. Does the “Why Be Rational?” Challenge Rest on a Mistake?*

In order to elucidate the mistake on which the “Why be rational?” challenge rests, I want to wind back the philosophical clock to the year 1912. This was the year in which H. A. Prichard published a highly influential article concerning a certain skeptical challenge to morality.<sup>24</sup> The skeptical challenge was, of course, the famous “Why be moral?” challenge—a challenge that has dogged moral philosophy at least since Glaucon raised it against Socrates. Roughly, the challenge amounts to challenging the “moralist” to come up with an independent and universal justification for moral compliance. Unless the moralist can answer the challenge, it has been feared that acting morally will be relegated to the status of a mere superstition or fetish, without any claim to our allegiance. The problem is that Glaucon seems to be winning. Despite centuries of inspired activity, there is still no particularly persuasive answer to the skeptic’s question “Why be moral?” We can apparently always come up with possible situations where the agent would do better to violate a moral requirement. This appears to spell doom for the normativity of morality.

Prichard’s point was that this is a catastrophic mistake. The problem is not that we, the defenders of morality against the Glaucons of this world, are unable to meet the “Why be moral?” challenge, but with the “Why be moral?” challenge itself. The “Why be moral?” challenge—or, as Prichard rather more dramatically put it, “moral philosophy” in its entirety—“rests on a mistake.” The mistake is thinking that, in order to answer the moral skeptic, it is necessary to give an independent justification for moral compliance—that it is necessary to appeal to a source of reasons that is external to morality. But this is not necessary. For moral requirements are themselves sources of reasons. They bring with them all the reasons you need. To be morally required to perform an act is in part to have a reason—a reason of morality, if you like—to perform that act. The normativity of morality is not to be found outside morality but within it. Morality is its own justification.

To appreciate Prichard’s point, consider any moral requirement to which you take yourself to be subject—say, your being morally required to keep a promise that you’ve made to your great-aunt to take her shopping. To take yourself to be subject to this requirement is already to take yourself to have a reason to take your great-aunt shopping. You might comfort yourself by searching for other reasons, such as the fact that you’ll feel better afterward, or that your new girlfriend will like you for it, or that your great-aunt tells funny anecdotes about when she was

24. H. A. Prichard, “Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?” *Mind* 21 (1912): 21–37.

a nurse in the Second World War. But no such extra reason is needed. The mistake of Glaucon (and, if Prichard is to be believed, virtually every moral philosopher ever since) is to fail to appreciate this point and to think that, in order to vindicate the normativity of morality, we must find some extra reason to be moral. We don't.

I believe that in understanding Broome's Challenge in terms of the "Why be rational?" challenge, Broome and Kolodny are guilty of making the same kind of mistake in the case of rational requirements that Prichard accused Glaucon and company of making in the case of moral requirements.<sup>25</sup> That is, they are looking for a justification for rational compliance outside of rationality, a source of normativity that is external to rationality. Their failure to find such a justification is exactly what we should expect. But it is also irrelevant to the issue of whether rationality is normative. For the normativity of rationality is a matter of reasons that are internal to rationality, not reasons that are external to it. It is a matter, if you like, of reasons *of* rationality, not independent reasons to *obey* rationality. Rather than giving us any reason to conclude that rationality isn't normative, the failure to locate an independent justification for obeying rational requirements should do nothing whatsoever to undermine our belief in the normativity of rationality.

#### *D. Beyond the "Why Be Rational?" Challenge*

I have suggested that the "Why be rational?" version of Broome's Challenge constitutes an illegitimate demand. However, it might be thought that the lesson to be drawn from our Prichard-inspired argument is that a similar fate awaits any version of Broome's Challenge. The thesis that rationality is normative, properly construed, might be thought to be, as it were, self-vindicating. To ask for a vindication of the normativity of rationality will therefore invariably be premised on a demand that is guilty of misunderstanding the true content of the thesis. There is, in effect, nothing further to be said in support of the thesis. This is an extremely unsatisfying place to have arrived at. It is worth noting that Prichard himself seemed to think that there was nothing further to be said in support of the thesis that *morality* is normative, which may account for the tone of gloomy resignation with which his article concludes.

As it is, I think this is not right. There is a way to try to advance the debate without demanding an independent justification for rational compliance and thus changing the subject, on the one hand, and without simply thumping the table and insisting that if you deny the thesis that rationality is normative then you have misunderstood the thesis,

25. Since writing the current essay, I have learned that Nadeem Hussain has independently made a suggestion much along the same lines in his excellent unpublished essay "The Requirements of Rationality."

on the other. The approach that I have in mind is modeled on the approach that has been pursued independently, and in slightly different ways, by a number of moral philosophers who have taken seriously Prichard's argument. This is to conceive of the demand to vindicate the normativity of morality as the demand to come up with a philosophical theory of morality—a theory of what moral requirements are—that does something to *explain* the normativity or reason-giving force of moral requirements—a theory that can explain how and why moral requirements are the kinds of things that are, by their very nature, normative.<sup>26</sup>

I propose that we should think of Broome's Challenge in much the same way, as the request for a philosophical theory of rationality that can do something to explain the normativity of rational requirements by saying what rational requirements are—that can explain how and why they are the kinds of things that are, by their very nature, normative. In the remainder of this article, I shall consider various ways in which this might be done.

## II. ANSWERING BROOME'S CHALLENGE: TOWARD A NORMATIVE THEORY OF RATIONALITY

What might a theory of rationality that is capable of meeting Broome's Challenge, properly formulated, look like? I shall assume that it must conceive of rational requirements as certain distinctive sorts of normative claims.<sup>27</sup> But what sorts of normative claims? I shall consider three different theories of rationality that have recently been proposed, in part to explicate the normativity of rationality. I shall suggest reasons to think they fail, but instructively, in ways that are naturally suggestive of a fourth theory that just might be capable of meeting Broome's Challenge.

### A. *The Distinctive Object Account*

What sorts of normative claims should we take rational requirements to be? The most straightforward answer is that rational requirements differ from other normative claims simply in virtue of the kind of object they take. Let us call this "the distinctive object account" of rationality. Broome himself used to endorse a version of the distinctive object account, according to which rational requirements are normative claims that take certain conditional psychological propositions as their ob-

26. See Stephen Darwall, "Autonomist Internalism and the Justification of Morals," *Noûs* 24 (1990): 257–67; Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, chap. 4.

27. I shall therefore set aside expressivist theories of rationality of the kind endorsed by Allan Gibbard in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

jects.<sup>28</sup> I shall focus here on a rather different version that has recently been proposed by Nadeem Hussain. According to Hussain, rational requirements describe “the norms with which an agent ought to *reason*.”<sup>29</sup> Whereas the requirements of practical reasoning tell us how we ought to act and the requirements of theoretical reason tell us how we ought to believe, rational requirements, on Hussain’s picture, tell us how we ought to reason. Reasoning for Hussain is a kind of conscious and purposive psychological transition that is based on principles for the regulation of such transitioning to which we are committed.<sup>30</sup> We can thus psychologically transition and yet fail to reason in a number of ways—for example, by doing so unconsciously or nonpurposively (as when we automatically form a belief in light of the evidence), or by intentionally bringing it about that one has some attitude without this being guided by any principle to which one is committed (as when we make ourselves think of something unpleasant). Reasoning does not require that the principles to which we are committed and on the basis of which we reason are genuine rational requirements, only that we take them to be. Suppose, for example, that I am committed to a principle requiring one to intend to flee when one believes oneself to be in danger and on the basis of this principle consciously and purposively form the intention to flee in the light of some situation that one takes to be dangerous. This may count as reasoning even if I am quite mistaken in taking this to be a valid rational requirement.

Hussain’s version of the distinctive object account might seem to be of exactly the right kind to meet Broome’s Challenge. For it would seem to be capable of rendering transparent how rationality is normative without conceiving of the normativity of rationality in terms of independent reasons to be rational. Rational requirements, as Hussain puts it, “tell us how reasoning ought to proceed. . . . 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 were to fail to find a reason to engage in reasoning, this would not show that these requirements are not normative.”<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, Hussain’s theory is ultimately unsatisfactory. First, Hussain is quite explicit that “rational requirements apply only to rea-

28. Broome, “Normative Requirements.”

29. Hussain, “The Requirements of Rationality,” 7, 46 (emphasis added).

30. *Ibid.*, 2. Hussain does not say exactly what he takes being “committed” to a principle to involve but presumably it is meant to be an amalgam of various psychological attitudes such as taking the principle to be a valid rational requirement, being disposed to transition in accordance with it, being disposed to disapprove of known violations of it, and taking the aforementioned attitudes to be justified.

31. *Ibid.*, 46.

soning.”<sup>32</sup> This is surely false. Rational requirements, as we saw above, are requirements of internal coherence among our psychological attitudes. It may be that a key way of coming to *comply* with such requirements is by reasoning. But the requirements themselves do not apply principally—let alone exclusively—to our reasoning.<sup>33</sup> Consider, for example, the requirement of instrumental rationality to intend to Y if you intend to X and believe your Xing requires your intending to Y. And suppose that you intend to X and believe your Xing requires your intending to Y, yet do not intend to Y. In this case you have surely violated a requirement of rationality that applies to you whether or not you happened to be engaging in any reasoning at the time.<sup>34</sup>

Second, even if we were to grant that rational requirements necessarily have reasoning as their object, it cannot be right that this suffices to distinguish them from other kinds of normative claims. First, not all claims about how we ought to reason are rational requirements. Recall the principle requiring one to intend to flee if one believes oneself to be in danger. There are surely circumstances where one ought to reason on the basis of this false principle. Perhaps it is the only way to save one’s life. But this does not make it a rational requirement. (If it seems too plausible a candidate, then pick a more ludicrous principle to which one is committed, such as the requirement to desire to X if you believe that Xing is naughty.) Second, not all rational requirements are or even entail ought claims involving reasoning. Pick your favorite rational requirement—say, Broome’s “enkrasia”: the requirement (to intend to X, if you believe you ought to X). We can easily imagine cases where we ought not to reason on the basis of enkrasia. For example, we might be told that the world will be destroyed if we do.<sup>35</sup> In short, Hussain is confusing the question of the *kind* of normative claims that rational

32. *Ibid.*, 7.

33. Notice that it is possible to deny Hussain’s claim here and yet hold that it is a necessary condition for something’s counting as a rational requirement that we be able to satisfy it by engaging in reasoning. The latter is, in effect, Kolodny’s “reasoning test” on rational requirements (Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” 520).

34. It might be thought that this implicitly assumes a wide-scope conception of rationality. But that would be a mistake. One might instead hold a narrow-scope conception of rationality and yet still deny that rational requirements apply only to reasoning. A narrow-scope version of the requirement of instrumental rationality is as follows: if you intend to X and believe your Xing requires your intending to Y, then you are rationally required to intend to Y. This requirement applies to you if and when you have the intention of Xing. It does not fail to apply to you if you happen not to be engaging in any reasoning.

35. This echoes Andrew Reisner’s argument against the version of the distinctive object account that Broome used to endorse in Reisner, “Why Rational Requirements Are Not Normative Requirements” (unpublished manuscript, University of McGill, 2006), available at <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/philosophy/RationalRequirementsandNormativeRequirementswebpageversion.pdf>.

requirements are with the question of the kind of *object* that they take. An adequate theory of rationality must be able to answer the former. And trying to do so by answering the latter will not do.<sup>36</sup>

### B. *The Proper Functioning Account*

Let us now consider a very different theory of rationality. According to this second theory, rational requirements describe the proper functioning of certain distinctive systems that constitute the special kind of agency that we possess. Let us call this “the proper functioning account” of rationality. The basic idea is as follows. Our psychological attitudes are to be understood as elements in systems that serve certain functions. Rational requirements describe what is necessary for our attitudes to serve these functions properly.

There are different views, of course, about which systems (and which functions) are the important ones. According to David Velleman, one proponent of the proper functioning account, the important system is a cognitive system with the function of representing the way the world is.<sup>37</sup> By contrast, Michael Bratman, another prominent proponent, believes that our intentions belong to a system that is distinct from the cognitive system that has the function of controlling and coordinating action.<sup>38</sup> According to Bratman, the requirements of rationality that involve intentions are to be understood as describing what is necessary in order for them to play these agential functions properly or effectively. Thus, for example, “insofar as one fails to intend means intending which is necessary for intended ends, this planning system will fail to be effective. Further, insofar as one’s intentions are inconsistent with each other and/or with one’s beliefs, this planning system will fail in its coordinating role, a role that is at the heart of the cross-temporal effectiveness of that system. So, in general, conformity to norms of consistency and means-end rationality are—at least for non-divine planning agents with reliable beliefs about the world—conditions for the successful operation of this system of coordinated control.”<sup>39</sup>

36. This objection will apply to any version of the distinctive object account.

37. David Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), and “What Good Is a Will?” in *Action in Context*, ed. Anton Leist and Holger Baumann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 193–215.

38. Michael Bratman, *Intentions, Plans and Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), “Intention, Belief and Instrumental Rationality,” in *Reasons for Action*, ed. David Sobel and Steven Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), manuscript available at <http://www-philosophy.stanford.edu/fss/papers/BratmanIBIR.pdf>, and “Intention, Belief, Practical, Theoretical,” in *Spheres of Reason*, ed. Jens Timmerman, John Skorupski, and Simon Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), manuscript available at <http://www-philosophy.stanford.edu/fss/papers/BratmanIBPT.pdf>.

39. Bratman, “Intention, Belief and Instrumental Rationality,” 5.

The proper functioning account represents an improvement on Hussain's version of the distinctive object account in two respects. First, there is no dubious restriction to the activity of reasoning as regards the application of rational requirements, as there was in Hussain's account. The proper functioning of the systems constitutive of agency will be compromised by certain combinations of psychological attitudes, irrespective of whether the subjects in question are engaged in reasoning. Second, the proper functioning account offers a principled basis for distinguishing rational requirements from other purportedly normative claims, namely, by understanding them as describing what is required for the proper functioning of distinctive agential systems.

Despite this, the proper functioning account also fails to meet Broome's Challenge. The problem is that even if the proper functioning account is capable of explaining a sense in which rational requirements are normative, it just doesn't seem to be the right sense. In particular, it fails to capture the sense in which rational requirements are normative for the agents who recognize them. Scanlon puts the point well when he writes: "It may be true in a functional sense that we 'ought' to have the capacity to reproduce—that we are functionally defective if we lack this capacity. But these norms, and 'oughts', need have no normative force for an agent who recognizes them. . . . [By contrast,] a person who sees that she has been irrational will see this as a defect in a sense that goes beyond the functional sense just described. She will see her attitudes as in need of revision—feel some 'normative pressure' to revise them."<sup>40</sup> The proper functioning account is unable to explain why this should be so.

### *C. The Subjective Reasons Account*

This brings us to a third theory of rationality, a theory that is endorsed by both Scanlon and Kolodny and that might be thought to avoid this problem.<sup>41</sup> According to this theory, rational requirements are claims about the attitudes that we ought or have reason to have or form from our own point of view, as it seems to us. Consider a rational requirement such as the requirement to intend to Y if you intend to X and believe that your Xing requires that you intend to Y. What this implies, according to Scanlon and Kolodny, is that you believe or perceive that you ought (or have reason) to intend to Y if you intend to X and believe that your Xing requires you to intend to Y. Or again, consider the rational requirement to believe that q if you believe that p and that if p then q. This implies that you believe or perceive that you ought (or have reason)

40. Scanlon, "Structural Irrationality," 86–87.

41. Scanlon, "Structural Irrationality"; Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" 557–60.

to believe that *q* if you believe that *p* and that if *p* then *q*. Let us call this “the subjective reasons account.”

It might be wondered where these rationality-constituting normative beliefs or perceptions come from. Scanlon’s answer to this question is that they partially constitute the psychological attitudes such as intention and belief that are at issue in rational requirements. He writes: “I want to argue that the normative content of requirements of rationality . . . lies in the fact that insofar as a subject has beliefs and intentions, it must see these as responsive to its assessment of the reasons for these states; and insofar as it has a certain belief, or intention, it must see this as providing the basis for further reasoning about what to believe and what to do. The relevant norms are thus elements of (‘constitutive of’) certain attitudes, and the relevant normativity is provided by what the agent sees as reasons.”<sup>42</sup>

Consider intentions or decisions. In this case, “the constitutive claim” is just that “deciding involves seeing oneself as making a certain kind of commitment”<sup>43</sup>—more precisely, “a commitment to take the fact that doing some action, *B*, would facilitate one’s doing *A* at *t* as a reason for doing *A*, and to take the fact that doing *B* would be incompatible with one’s doing *A* at *t* as a (normally conclusive) reason against doing *B*.”<sup>44</sup> What about beliefs? According to Scanlon, a belief that *p* involves “giving it the status of something that is to be relied on in further theoretical reasoning by providing reasons for accepting what it entails, and to be relied on as a premise in practical reasoning.”<sup>45</sup> Although there are different ways of spelling out the details, once again the basic idea is that beliefs or perceptions involve some kind of normative content, and this normative content *just is* the content of the requirements that constitute rationality. So, for example, believing that *p* at *t* may involve seeing or believing that one has reason not to believe propositions that conflict with *p*, that one has reason to take the issue of *p* as resolved pending new evidence, and so on.

I believe that there is something crucially right about the subjective reasons account. What it captures is the sense in which demands of rationality are demands from the perspective of those subject to them and, conversely, the sense in which failures of rationality involve failures from our own point of view. Nonetheless, it is obviously incapable of meeting Broome’s Challenge. This is because, in understanding rational requirements in terms of normative perceptions or beliefs, it implicitly concedes that they are not normative. On the subjective reasons account,

42. Scanlon, “Structural Irrationality,” 87–88.

43. *Ibid.*, 94.

44. *Ibid.*, 92–93.

45. *Ibid.*, 97.

rational requirements are simply descriptive claims about the perceptions or beliefs we have regarding certain kinds of reasons we have. For this reason, the subjective reasons account is better thought of not as a vindicating but as an *undermining* explanation of the normativity of rationality—as an attempt to explain it away. This is precisely the use to which Kolodny puts it: “The (seeming) normative force of the ‘ought’ of rationality derives from a (seeming) reason, the reason that the subject believes he has. . . . On this account, to say that someone ‘ought rationally’ to have some attitude is to say that, as it seems to him, he has reason to have it. And to say that, as it seems to him, he has reason to have it is not to say that, in fact, he has reason to have it.”<sup>46</sup>

The subjective reasons account therefore no more meets Broome’s Challenge than do the distinctive objective and proper functioning accounts.<sup>47</sup> To do that, we would need a theory of rationality that conceives of rational requirements as genuine normative claims, not merely as claims about perceptions or beliefs with normative content.

### III. THE FIRST-PERSONAL AUTHORITY ACCOUNT

I believe that such a theory is naturally suggested by the failure of the subjective reasons account. Like the subjective reasons account, the theory I have in mind conceives of rational requirements as claims about the attitudes we ought to have and form from our own particular point of view. But rather than interpreting these claims as merely involving believed or perceived demands—demands that we take ourselves to have—it interprets them as involving demands of a distinctively first-personal kind.

To appreciate the contrast I have in mind, consider the notion of “goodness from a point of view.” When we say that such and such a state of affairs “is good from someone’s point of view,” one thing that we sometimes mean is that the person in question takes it to be good. So, for example, when we say that “it is good, from Bob’s perspective, that the Australian government has ratified the Kyoto Protocol,” what

46. Kolodny, “Why Be Rational?” 558.

47. I think it is also possible to see that the subject reasons account fails in the task of explaining away the normativity of rationality for reasons presented extremely eloquently by Nadeem Hussain. Hussain writes: “If I say to [my friends], ‘You are irrational’, then, naturally enough, they take me to be making a criticism of them . . . a normative claim that they ought to change their attitudes, and they immediately, you can rest assured, feel the pressure 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. . . .’ I am sure we can imagine the look of utter perplexity that would cross their faces” (Hussain, “The Requirements of Rationality,” 29).

we mean is that Bob believes or perceives it to be good that the Australian government has ratified the Kyoto Protocol. We do not mean that it is in fact good in any respect. Something's being "good from one's point of view" in this sense is just for one to believe or perceive it to be good. And to believe or perceive something to be good does not make it good. Call this "subjective goodness."

But there is another thing that we might mean in saying that a particular state of affairs is "good from one's point of view." It is commonly recognized that each of us has a particular first-personal standpoint, a standpoint constructed out of our particular beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, goals, values, and so on, and relative to which things can go well or badly.<sup>48</sup> Our standpoints describe what matters to us; they are ones in which we are invested. Thus, for example, the state of affairs in which the West Coast Eagles, my much beloved Australian rules football team, win the premiership may be quite terrific relative to my standpoint, although quite dreadful relative to yours. So, when we say that "it would be good, from Nic's perspective, that the West Coast Eagles win the AFL premiership," what we mean is that it would be good relative to Nic's particular standpoint that the West Coast Eagles win the AFL premiership. This does not entail that Nic believes or perceives it to be good that the West Coast Eagles win the AFL premiership. He may have mistaken views about what is important to him.<sup>49</sup> Or he may recognize that the kind of good at issue is essentially relative to his standpoint—that which team wins a game of football is a pretty trivial matter in the grand scheme of things and that his team's winning can hardly be considered good from the perspective of someone whose loyalties lie elsewhere or of someone who is indifferent to which team wins or loses. Nor does it entail that it would be good *for* Nic, in the sense of making him better off. It may be that what is important to him and what is good for him are radically distinct. Rather, it is just to say that the state of affairs in which the West Coast Eagles win the premiership has a certain kind of goodness considered from Nic's particular standpoint, a standpoint in which football—and the fate of a certain team—has a certain importance. Call this "standpoint-relative goodness."

Just as we can distinguish between these two senses of "goodness from a point of view"—subjective goodness and standpoint-relative goodness—so too we can distinguish between two corresponding senses of a "demand from a point of view." A subjective demand is a demand to

48. See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and *Equality and Partiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

49. We do not have infallible access to the content of our first-personal standpoint. So, for example, I might think that a certain kind of activity is important to me, whereas in fact it isn't.

which someone takes herself to be subject. A standpoint-relative demand, by contrast, is a demand relative to the particular first-personal standpoint of the agent who is subject to it. We are subject to a range of familiar standpoint-relative demands. Thus, given my intention to read the complete works of Dostoyevsky, I am subject to a standpoint-relative demand to make decisions that would help me realize this aim in light of my views about how best to do so. Given my views about the moral significance of poverty, I am subject to certain standpoint-relative demands concerning, say, how to decide to spend my income. Given my belief that humans evolved from apes, I am subject to a standpoint-relative demand not to believe that the Book of Genesis is literally true.

But how should we understand the underlying nature of these standpoint-relative demands? In what does their normativity consist?<sup>50</sup> In order to answer these questions, I believe that it is instructive to consider an analogy with friendship. We are familiar with the idea that there are certain demands of friendship. These demands are genuine demands, rather than merely believed or perceived demands. And they are essentially agent-relative demands. The demand to visit my sick friend in the hospital makes no sense detached from the particular friendship in question. What is particularly interesting about these friendship-relative demands, however, is that they also partially *constitute* friendship. Part of what it is to be friends with someone is to be subject to, and indeed minimally committed to, them. If two individuals are not subject to, or minimally committed to, say, the demand to be there for one another when things are tough, then it follows as a matter of logic that they cannot be friends. The demands of friendship are conditions for the very possibility of friendship.

My suggestion is that we think of standpoint-relative demands on the same model. Standpoint-relative demands are presuppositions of even having a first-personal standpoint. Indeed, they partially constitute the standpoints relative to which they are demands. Just as part of what it is to be friends with someone is to be subject to, and indeed minimally committed to, certain friendship-relative demands—to take an interest in one another's projects, to be there for one another when things are not going so well, and so on—so too part of what it is to have a first-personal standpoint is to be subject to, and minimally committed to, certain standpoint-relative demands.

The analogy, however, may strike one as rather strained. The nor-

50. There are a number of answers that will obviously not do. Thus, it will not do to say that they are norms that describe the proper functioning of our agential systems. Such norms fail to capture the distinctively first-personal character of standpoint-relative demands. Nor will it do to say that they are prudential norms, norms that are grounded in what is good for us. What is good for us and what our standpoints require may diverge.

maturity of the demands of friendship has to do with the idea of reciprocal expectations and mutual accountability. It expresses the fact that, as friends, we are entitled to expect certain things of one another. We are accountable to one another, both prospectively and retrospectively. There is a certain kind of legitimate authority, albeit one whose jurisdiction is subject to important limitations, that is invested in the friendship and that as friends we wield over one another. In short, the demands of friendship possess a kind of normativity that is essentially interpersonal or second-personal in Stephen Darwall's sense;<sup>51</sup> they express distinctively second-personal demands and involve a distinctively second-personal authority. In the case of the demands of our first-personal standpoints, by contrast, there does not seem to be any analogous relation relative to which they constitute demands.

I want to claim that in fact there is a kind of analogous relation. What could this possibly be? Well, whereas being friends is a matter of standing in a certain kind of relation to another, one's friend, having a first-personal standpoint is a matter of standing in a certain kind of relation to oneself. Whereas being friends is a matter of being accountable to one another, having a first-personal standpoint is a matter of being accountable to oneself. Whereas there is a distinctively second-personal kind of authority inherent in friendship, there is a distinctively first-personal kind of authority inherent in having a first-personal standpoint. And finally, whereas the normativity of the demands of friendship is essentially second-personal, the normativity of our standpoint-relative demands is essentially first-personal; it is a matter of honoring one's own first-personal authority.

My conjecture, then, is that rational requirements are instances of these first-personal, standpoint-relative demands—instances concerning the attitudes we have and form. Rational requirements are standpoint-relative demands concerning the attitudes we ought to have and form.<sup>52</sup> The normativity of rational requirements is a matter of honoring our first-personal authority. Let us call this “the first-personal authority account of rationality.”

It is worth briefly contrasting the first-personal authority account with the three other accounts we considered above. Consider, first, the distinctive object account. The first-personal authority account shares certain features in common with the distinctive object account. Both accounts regard rational requirements as genuinely normative claims, with a domain of jurisdiction, as it were, that is largely distinctive. None-

51. Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

52. I take this to be neutral in respect to whether rational requirements have wide or narrow scope. See n. 5.

theless, the first-personal authority differs from the distinctive object account in two respects. It differs from Hussain's specific version of the distinctive object account in conceiving of the domain of jurisdiction more broadly, as not limited to reasoning. More important, however, is the kind of normative claims that they take rational requirements to be. Whereas the distinctive object view takes rational requirements to be normative claims with a distinctive object, the first-personal authority account takes them to be distinctive *kinds* of normative claims. Their special normativity consists in the distinctive kinds of demands that they involve, namely, essentially demands that express our first-personal authority.

What about the proper functioning account? Here, too, there is important overlap. Like the proper functioning account, the first-personal authority account regards rational requirements as structural presuppositions of the particular kind of agency we possess—in particular, structural presuppositions of what it is to possess a first-personal standpoint. Where the first-personal authority account differs from the proper functioning account is in respect of how it conceives of the normativity of rational requirements. The normativity of rational requirements is not a matter of their describing the proper functioning of our agential systems. Rather, it is a matter of their expressing the demands of the first-personal standpoints which they partially constitute. Whereas for proponents of the proper functioning account, being rational is a matter of our psychological systems working correctly to fulfill the functions which they presuppose as constitutive aims, according to the first-personal authority account, being rational is a matter of honoring one's first-personal authority.

What of the subjective reasons account? As I have noted, it is here that the similarity with the first-personal authority account is most pronounced. Indeed, I regard the first-personal authority account as a kind of improved modification of the subjective reasons account. Both accounts regard rational requirements as claims about the attitudes we ought to have and form “from our own point of view.” The difference concerns the interpretation of what this comes to. According to the subjective reasons account, this is interpreted in terms of the notion of subjective demands, whereas according to the first-personal authority account, it is interpreted in terms of the idea of standpoint-relative demands. Unlike subjective demands, standpoint-relative demands are genuine demands rather than merely believed or perceived demands.<sup>53</sup>

53. One question that might be thought to arise for the first-personal authority account concerns the relation between the perspective-relative demands of rationality and other kinds of demands, in particular how to weigh them up if they conflict. It may be thought that it will be hard to escape some kind of normative incommensurability. This is a fascinating issue that I cannot hope to address properly here. But let me just note

Indeed, they do not even entail believed or perceived demands. And they are essentially agent-relative demands; they make no sense detached from the particular first-personal standpoints from which they issue and in which the relevant attitudes are embedded as constituent parts.

Does the first-personal authority account succeed in meeting Broome's Challenge? I think it might. It offers an account of what rational requirements are that does something to explain how they could be the kinds of things that are, by their very nature, normative. It characterizes the normativity of rationality in terms of the idea of first-personal authority, an idea on which we have some independent grip. I suspect this is about as explanatory a theory of rationality as we should expect to find.

Indeed, I think it is worth noting something else that the first-personal authority account does. Not only does it explain how rationality is normative, it also does something to explain rationality's *distinctive* normativity. The normativity of rational requirements seems quite different in kind from the normativity of other kinds of requirements such as moral requirements. The first-personal authority account explains how. Rational requirements are expressions of our first-personal authority. If morality is a matter of what we owe to others, rationality is a matter of what we owe to ourselves.

---

that, even if the first-personal authority account did generate normative incommensurability, it is not obvious to me that this would be such a serious problem. There are a number of other instances where normative incommensurability seems to be something that we must live with. Consider, for example, cases where we epistemically ought to believe propositions that we prudentially ought not to believe. To ask what we "really ought" to believe in such contexts seems simply wrongheaded.