

Rationality versus normativity

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1. Introduction

Philosophers often fail to respect the distinction between rationality and normativity. Here is just one example from a crucial moment in the history of modern moral philosophy. In arguing that there are no external reasons, Bernard Williams says:

There are of course many things that a speaker may say to one who is not disposed to φ when the speaker thinks that he should be, as that he is inconsiderate, or cruel, or selfish, or imprudent . . . But one who makes a great deal out of putting the criticism in the form of an external reason statement seems concerned to say that what is particularly wrong with the agent is that he is *irrational*.¹

But a speaker who puts the criticism in the form of an external reason statement says that the agent has a reason to be disposed to φ . This is a normative statement. It does not impugn the agent's rationality at all.

The distinction between rationality and normativity has not been clearly drawn in philosophy. This paper begins to draw it. I first need to clarify the terms. The words 'rationality' and 'normativity' are caught in the complex tangle of words and meanings that derives from the Latin roots 'ratio' and 'norma'. They are surrounded by a lot of ambiguity. In order to say exactly what this paper is about, I first need to specify what I mean by these words. 'Rationality' and 'normativity' are the names of properties, which are ascribed to things using the adjectives 'rational' and 'normative'. I need to identify the two properties I mean to refer to. Doing so occupies the next three sections of this paper.

Having identified them, I shall go on to examine the substantive question of the relation between them. Since this paper is only a start, I shall concentrate on denying the extreme claim that the properties of rationality and normativity are the same. Though extreme, this claim is implicit in the widespread view that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons. This view does not merely identify rationality with normativity; it implies that rationality is reducible to normativity. It is part of the 'reasons first' movement, which claims a foundational place for reasons in both normativity and rationality. It needs to be refuted.

2. The meaning of 'normative'

First, what do I mean by 'normative'? I mean: involving ought or a reason. I think this is the word's usual meaning in philosophy; it certainly is in moral philosophy. 'Normativity' in the title of this paper is in effect just standing in for 'ought' and 'reasons'. The subject of this paper is the relationship between rationality on the one hand and ought and reasons on the other.

Some philosophers give 'normative' the different meaning of involving correctness. What is the difference? Any rule and any intention sets up a standard of correctness. Complying with the rule or satisfying the intention is correct according to the rule or intention. So rules and intentions are normative in the sense of involving correctness. Furthermore, a person may be guided in her acts or thoughts by the standard of correctness. This is what happens when you follow a rule or fulfil an intention. For example, a man may follow the rule of wearing a tie on weekdays. Each weekday morning, guided by the rule, he may carefully and deliberately tie his tie. But it need not be the case that he ought to do this, or has a reason to do it. Nor need he even believe he ought to or has a reason to. He may have been brought up to do it, and never have given any thought to the rule. This rule is normative in the sense of involving correctness, but it is not normative in my sense.

Since ‘normative’ and ‘normativity’ are purely technical terms, I am free to use them as I wish, so long as I define my meaning. I stick to their usual meaning in philosophy, but I find it convenient to extend this meaning a bit for the sake of making the term ‘normative’ more formally parallel to ‘rational’. We do not usually apply the adjective ‘normative’ to a person, but I shall. I shall treat normativity as a property that a person may possess, like rationality. I shall say that a person is normative if she does whatever she ought to do, believes whatever she ought to believe, wants whatever she ought to want, and so on. That is to say: if she *Fs* whenever she ought to *F*, where any verb phrase can be substituted for ‘*F*’. To continue the parallel, I shall also speak of ‘requirements of normativity’ in parallel with requirements of rationality: when a person ought to *F*, I shall say that normativity requires her to *F*.

My definition allows normativity to be a matter of degree. A person is normative to the extent that she *Fs* whenever she ought to *F*. Degrees of normativity will be partially ordered. For example, if you are subject to the same requirements of normativity in two possible states of affairs, and in one of them you satisfy all the requirements you satisfy in the other and at least one more, then you are more normative in the first state than in the second. I would not expect degrees of normativity to be completely ordered.

Some philosophers are uncomfortable with my innovative use of ‘normative’. It is a convenient piece of terminology, but I could have chosen another. For example, I could have chosen ‘reason-respondingness’ or better ‘ought-respondingness’ as alternative names for the property I refer to. The term is not important.

3. Meanings of ‘reason’

Next, what do I mean by ‘rational’? Answering this question is a much longer task. Unlike ‘normative’, ‘rational’ is a term of common English. Philosophers are entitled to commandeer English words for technical purposes, just as the science of mechanics commandeered ‘force’. However, doing so is risky because unwary readers may assume the word retains its common meaning. I therefore intend to use ‘rational’ with its common meaning. Moreover, I think this is what philosophers of rationality generally intend; they generally aim to analyse rationality as we ordinarily understand it.

The common meaning of ‘rational’ is complex. This section and the next are given over to clarifying it. The adjective ‘rational’ is cognate to the noun ‘reason’. These words share the same Latin root ‘ratio’. But this is not enough to tell us the meaning of ‘rational’, because ‘reason’ is a very ambiguous word. We need first to identify the sense of ‘reason’ that ‘rational’ is cognate to. I shall approach this task historically.

The word ‘reason’ entered English from French along with the Norman invasion of England in 1066. After that invasion, nothing was written in English for more than a century. The version of English that subsequently arose is known as ‘Middle English’. One of the first books written in Middle English was the *Ancrene Riwle*, whose earliest manuscript dates from about 1225. It contains all the earliest occurrences of the word ‘reason’ (spelt ‘reisun’) in English.² Even in the *Ancrene Riwle*, ‘reason’ was ambiguous. It appears with various different senses, all of which survive today.

Usually in that book, ‘reason’ means explanation. It still has this meaning today, for example in the sentence ‘The reason the climate is changing is humanity’s burning of fossil fuel’. An example from the *Ancrene Riwle* is:

All strength comes from humility. And Solomon gives the reason why: where humility is, there is wisdom.³

Most often in the *Ancrene Riwle*, ‘reason’ refers to the special sort of explanation of a

person's action that we nowadays call a 'motivating reason'. For example:

This, now, is the reason of the joining: why Isaiah joins hope and silence, and couples both together.⁴

Just once the *Ancrene Riwe* uses 'reason' to refer unequivocally to a normative reason, in this sentence:

The third reason for fleeing the world is the gaining of heaven.⁵

A closer representation of the original grammar is:

The third reason of the world's flight is the gaining of heaven.

If the grammar is not enough to convince you that the author is referring to a normative reason as opposed to a motivating one, the context should be. The author has previously promised to enumerate reasons why one ought to flee the world:

Now hear reasons why one ought to flee the world: eight reasons at the least.⁶

A reason why one ought to *F* is a normative reason to *F*.

'Reason' in the *Ancrene Riwe* is a count noun. English also has a mass noun 'reason' with a normative meaning, but it did not appear till some centuries later. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists no clear examples before this one from 1582:

Yet there is reason to think, that they knew what they did as well as he.⁷

Elsewhere in the *Ancrene Riwe*, 'reason' occurs once in the quite different sense that refers to a property of a person, specifically the faculty of reason. Since this is a mental property, I call this the 'mental sense' of 'reason' to contrast it with the normative sense. The original text is:

Wummon is the reisun – thet is, wittes skile – hwen hit unstrengthen.⁸

This needs some exegesis. The author has just recounted a parable from the Bible. He is saying that the woman in the parable represents the faculty of reason. Perhaps because the word 'reason' had only recently acquired the mental sense, he glosses it using an older English term for the faculty of reason. The older term is: 'wittes skile', or 'wit's skill' in modern spelling.

Since this earliest use of 'reason' in the mental sense is obscure, here is a clearer one from Shakespeare:

The will of man is by his reason sway'd.⁹

Here is David Hume contradicting Shakespeare:

Reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will.¹⁰

Another example from Hume is:

'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of my finger.¹¹

This last remark has horrified some philosophers. It has been called 'silly' by Allen Wood¹² and 'grotesque' by Michael Smith.¹³ These authors understand Hume to mean (this is Wood's paraphrase):

I can have no reason not to prefer the destruction of the world to the scratching of my finger.

But Hume did not mean that. He was using 'reason' in the mental sense, not in the normative sense that appears in Wood's paraphrase.

4. The meaning of 'rational'

So, from the birth of Middle English, 'reason' has had at least three senses: the explanatory sense, which includes motivating reasons as a prominent case, the normative sense and the mental sense. The adjective 'rational' appeared two centuries later. It is first recorded by the

Oxford English Dictionary in 1398. From its beginning it was cognate to ‘reason’ in the mental sense, and in that sense only. At first it meant ‘having the faculty of reason’. It had this meaning and no other for about two hundred years. The *OED* shows that for all that time it was applied as a predicate only of people, creatures, souls, minds and so on – all things that could possess the faculty of reason.

The noun ‘rationality’ appeared in 1628 as the name of the property that is ascribed by means of the adjective ‘rational’. Since this property is just reason in the mental sense, ‘rationality’ and ‘reason’ in this sense were originally synonymous.

However, the meaning of ‘rational’ has subsequently broadened. ‘Reason’ in the mental sense refers only to a faculty. ‘Rationality’ today refers to the same faculty and also to the property of being in a particular state of mind – roughly, a state of mind that could have arisen from the exercise of the faculty of reason. The term ‘structural rationality’ is sometimes used by philosophers today for the rationality of states. These days, we would not count a person as fully rational if she had the faculty of reason but not structural rationality. For instance, a person is not fully rational if she does not intend means to her ends, even if she has the ability to ensure that she does intend means to her ends. Ability – faculty – is not enough for rationality; we expect results. Moreover, a person’s rationality might improve even without her exercising an ability. She might come to intend an act that she believes is a necessary means to an end she intends, not by doing anything at all, but as a result of some subpersonal process within her. She is then more rational than she was before, even though she has not exercised her rational ability.

From 1598 onwards, the *OED* records ‘rational’ used as a predicate of things that do not have minds. These days we apply this predicate to acts, beliefs, city plans, and many other things without minds. These are derivative uses of ‘rational’. They derive from the original, mental sense, which applies to people. The nature of the derivation varies with the object ‘rational’ is applied to, and it may be rather indefinite. For example, a person’s act is rational if, were she to do it, she would be no less rational than if she were not to do it. A city plan is rational if it exhibits the sort of organization that is characteristic of a rational mind. And so on.

In its primary use, ‘rationality’ still denotes a property of a person. In this paper I stick to its primary use. In this use it retains one central feature even in its broadened sense that includes structural rationality. As a property of a person, rationality is specifically a mental property. Moreover, it depends on the person’s other mental properties: rationality supervenes on the mind, as Ralph Wedgwood puts it.¹⁴ If a person would have the same mental properties apart from rationality in either of two possible situations, she would be equally rational in either.

For example, when a person intends to drink a glass of liquid, she is equally rational in the case when the liquid is petrol as she is in the case when it is gin, so long as the difference is not registered in any mental property of hers.¹⁵ For another example, if you fail to take a means to an end that you intend, this is not necessarily a failure of rationality if it is caused by some non-mental obstruction. It could be that, if you had had all the mental properties you do have, but the obstruction had not existed, you would have taken the means to your end. There would then have been no failure in your rationality, so supervenience implies there is no failure in the actual case either.

What about mental externalism? I believe the Taj Mahal is made of marble. Suppose that, elsewhere in the universe, there is a Twin Earth that has all the same intrinsic physical properties as Earth. On Twin Earth lives a person called ‘John Broome’. His intrinsic physical

properties, including the intrinsic properties of his brain, are the same as mine. He has a belief that he would express with the words ‘The Taj Mahal is made of marble’. His belief is about the Twin Taj Mahal, whereas mine is about the actual Taj Mahal. His belief is therefore not the same as mine; it has a different content and beliefs are individuated by their contents. At least, that is the implication of externalism about mental content. I take each of a person’s beliefs to be a mental property of hers. So Twin John’s mind does not have all the same mental properties as mine has. If externalism is true, our mental properties do not supervene on our intrinsic physical properties, therefore.

For an analogy, think of the magnetic field of a particular magnet. The field belongs to the magnet, but other ferrous objects in the neighbourhood influence the field. The field’s direction and strength at a particular point therefore do not supervene on intrinsic physical properties of the magnet. However, they are intrinsic properties of the magnet’s field; indeed the field simply consists of the set of directions and strengths at all points. The analogy is this: a person corresponds to a magnet; the person’s mind corresponds to the magnet’s field; a belief corresponds to the direction and strength of the field at a point. A person’s belief supervenes on the intrinsic properties of her mind, but it does not supervene on her intrinsic physical properties

If externalism is correct, the principle that rationality supervenes on the mind does not imply that Twin John and I are exactly as rational as each other, since our minds have different properties. Nevertheless, we surely are exactly as rational as each other, so presumably there is some stronger principle that does have this implication. Presumably it would be a principle that rationality supervenes on internal properties of the mind, defined in some way or other. But I do not know any such principle, and I do not assert that one exists. At any rate, externalism is no threat to the principle I do assert, that a person’s rationality supervenes on her mental properties apart from rationality itself. It simply suggests there is also a stronger principle.

Substantive rationality

Some philosophers use ‘rational’ differently. They treat it as an adjective corresponding to ‘reason’ in the normative rather than the mental sense. For example, Niko Kolodny and John Brunero say:

‘What would it be rational for an agent to do or intend?’ could mean:

1. By doing or intending what would the agent make her responses (i.e., her attitudes and actions) cohere with one another? . . .
2. What does the agent have reason, or ought she, to do or intend?¹⁶

Definition 1 is supposed to pick out structural rationality. As it happens, the mention of actions prevents it from doing so, since a person’s actions – apart from her mental actions – do not supervene on her mind. For example, suppose you intend to meet your obligations and believe that in order to do so you must return the book you borrowed from your friend. You intend to return the book. You put it in the mail to her, but the mail fails, so you do not return the book. You do not do as you intend; your actions do not cohere with your intentions. However, suppose you never find out about the failure, so your mind has all the properties it would have had had you returned the book. It may therefore be coherent. You may be structurally rational even though your action does not cohere with your intentions. So definition 1 is not accurate, but it is plainly meant as a definition of structural rationality.

Definition 2 also is inaccurate. Suppose you have reason to intend something but stronger reason not to intend it. Kolodny and Brunero do not mean to suggest that it would be rational

in any sense for you to intend it. They must have meant to say ‘conclusive reason’. I assume that is their meaning.

In any case, in definition 2 ‘reason’ has its normative sense. The definition associates rationality with reason in this sense, so it gives ‘rational’ a normative meaning. This meaning could be etymologically justified. If you want an adjective cognate to ‘reason’ in the normative sense, ‘rational’ could serve. (An alternative is ‘reasonable’.) However, so far as I can tell, this use of ‘rational’ is not historically justified. ‘Rational’ has never had this normative meaning in common English: it has always been cognate to ‘reason’ in the mental sense, and never in the normative sense.

It is not easy to be sure, since the extensions of the mental and normative senses coincide to a large degree. When an agent ought to do or intend something, it is usually rational in both senses for her to do or intend it. That is, she would usually be no less rational in both senses if she did or intended it than if she did not. This is because an agent normally has correct beliefs about what she ought to do or intend.

But we can separate the senses by taking a case where the agent ought to do or intend something, but believes she ought not to. Suppose there is nothing irrational about her false belief; it is supported by good – though misleading – evidence. Presented with a case like this, would ordinary English speakers use ‘rational’ in Kolodny and Brunero’s second, normative sense? In this sense it would be rational for the agent to do or intend what she rationally believes she ought not to do or intend. Would any ordinary English speaker say that? Since mistaken normative beliefs are rare outside philosophers’ examples, I cannot provide textual evidence. But I very much doubt that any ordinary English speaker would say it. Indeed, I would be surprised to find a philosopher saying it. I think it is a well-embedded conceptual feature of rationality, treated as a property of a person, that it is a mental property. I think this example makes that clear.

The normative sense of ‘rational’ is recent;¹⁷ for many centuries at least, ‘rational’ had only the mental sense. So far as I can tell, the normative sense is an invention of philosophers. I mentioned in section 3 the risks of commandeering a common English word as a technical term. We do not need this sense of ‘rational’ in philosophy; we would do better to use a genuine technical term such as ‘normative’ in the way I suggested in section 2. The new sense of ‘rational’ simply leads to confusion. Most philosophers who write about rationality intend to write about it as it is commonly understood. That is my intention. Given all this, we should eschew the normative sense of ‘rational’, and I do.

I use ‘rational’ as cognate to ‘reason’ in the mental sense only, and I claim this is its correct usage when predicated of a person. But it does not matter whether or not I am right about this. Even if ‘rational’ may also be correctly used as a predicate of a person in a different sense, I use it in the specifically mental sense. This paper is about rationality as a mental property of a person.

Reified rationality

But we do need to recognize a further meaning of ‘rationality’ in which it is not the name of a property at all. We sometimes reify the property of rationality, treating it as a thing rather than a property. We do the same for morality. Morality is the property a person possesses when she is moral, but sometimes we treat it as something that stands outside a person and makes prescriptions to her. Similarly we sometimes treat rationality as something that stands outside a person and makes prescriptions to her. The reified meaning of ‘rationality’ is well established in common English. It has its source in ‘rationality’s meaning as a property of a

person, but it goes beyond that meaning.

In philosophy, reification is most apparent in the expression ‘rationality requires’. The word ‘requires’ has different functions. It may be used to specify a necessary condition for possessing a property. That is its function in ‘Cleanliness requires soap’: having soap is a necessary condition for being clean. But in ‘The law requires you to vote’ ‘requires’ specifies a prescription: the law prescribes that you vote. ‘Rationality requires you to intend means to your end’ might be interpreted in either of these ways. It might mean simply that intending means to your end is a necessary condition for your having the property of rationality. With this meaning, rationality is not reified. Or it might mean that rationality prescribes that you intend means to your end. With this interpretation, rationality is reified. It is treated as a thing like law.

I claim that the expression ‘rationality requires’ is most naturally understood in the reified sense.¹⁸ I think we would not naturally say that rationality requires you to be alive. Being alive is a necessary condition for possessing the property of rationality, so unreified rationality does indeed require you to be alive. On the other hand, rationality does not prescribe that you are alive, so reified rationality does not require you to be alive. We naturally take ‘rationality requires’ this second way. What rationality requires in this more natural sense is a subset of the necessary conditions for being rational. I call this the set of ‘requirements of rationality’ or ‘rational requirements’.

Nevertheless, satisfying requirements of rationality is sufficient for possessing the property of rationality: if you satisfy all the requirements of rationality you are fully rational. Moreover, the degree to which you satisfy requirements of rationality is the degree to which you have the property of rationality. These degrees are partially ordered. For example, if in one possible situation you satisfy all the requirements of rationality that you satisfy in another, and you also satisfy at least one more, you are more rational in the first situation than in the second.

5. The identity claim

I have described what I mean by ‘normativity’ and by ‘rationality’. Now I come to the substantive question of the connection between these properties. Most of the rest of this paper is devoted to the popular view that is expressed by the formula ‘rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons’. A part of this view is that the property of rationality is identical to the property of responding correctly to reasons. But the words ‘consists in’ go further than ‘is’; they claim more than identity. They imply that rationality can be reduced to reasons, which they imply are metaphysically more fundamental. The formula that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons is part of the ‘reasons first’ movement, which tries to reduce rationality and all of normativity to reasons. I aim to refute the reductive claim by means of refuting the identity claim, which is weaker.

What is the property of responding correctly to reasons? I take it to be doing whatever your reasons require you to do, believing whatever your reasons require you to believe, and so on – in short, *F*ing whenever your reasons require you to *F*. This is not the same as *F*ing whenever you have a reason to *F*. When you have a reason to *F*, you may have a stronger reason not to *F*, and in that case *F*ing is plainly not responding correctly to reasons. When your reasons require you to *F*, another way of putting it is that you ought to *F*. So responding correctly to reasons is *F*ing whenever you ought to *F*. This is just the property of normativity as I defined it in section 2. So the claim I aim to refute is that the property of rationality is the same as the property of normativity. I shall sometimes call it ‘the property-identity claim’ and sometimes

just ‘the identity claim’.

Responding correctly to reasons might be understood as a narrower property than *Fing* whenever you ought to *F*. It might be understood as *Fing* whenever you ought to *F* because of the reasons that make it the case that you ought to *F*. Adopting this narrower interpretation would not affect the conclusions of this paper, but would add to its complexity. So I have decided to stick to the simpler interpretation.

The property-identity claim is implied by the different claim that what rationality requires of you is necessarily the same as what normativity requires of you, which is to say what you ought. I call this ‘the requirement-identity claim’. To check this implication, suppose the requirement-identity claim is true. Suppose also that you are rational. Then you satisfy all the requirements of rationality you are under. Since these requirements are the same as the requirements of normativity, you satisfy all the requirements of normativity you are under, which means you are normative. So, necessarily, if you are rational you are normative. The same argument in reverse shows that, necessarily, if you are normative you are rational. The properties of being rational and being normative necessarily have the same extension. According to a standard criterion for identity of properties, this means they are the same property.¹⁹

Normativity and rationality are both properties that have degrees. Does the requirement-identity claim imply that, when you are less than fully rational and less than fully normative, your degree of rationality is the same as your degree of normativity? To put this more accurately: does the requirement-identity claim imply that the partial ordering of degrees of normativity exactly matches the partial ordering of degrees of rationality. It does not. To derive this conclusion from the requirement-identity claim, we would have to make some further assumptions. Though these assumptions would be very plausible, I shall not make them because my argument in this paper does not touch on degrees of normativity or rationality.

The property-identity claim as I mean it is the claim that the property of being fully normative and the property of being fully rational are the same. This is implied by the requirement-identity claim. I shall argue that the property-identity claim is false. This implies that the requirement-identity claim is also false.

My argument against the property-identity claim is that rationality supervenes on the mind but normativity does not. If your mental properties (apart from rationality) are the same in one possible state as they are in another, you are equally rational in the two states, but you may not be equally normative. Rationality and normativity therefore cannot be the same. I call this ‘the quick objection’ to the identity claim.²⁰

There are only two ways to oppose the quick objection. One is by asserting that normativity supervenes on the mind. The other is by denying that rationality supervenes on the mind. Neither of these responses is sufficient to prove the identity claim, but refuting both is sufficient to refute the identity claim. The next two sections aim to refute both in turn.

6. Normativity does not supervene on the mind

Normativity is the property of *Fing* whenever you ought to *F*. It will supervene on your mind if two conditions are true. The first is that what normativity requires of you – what you ought – supervenes on your mind. To be clear: by this I mean that, for any *F*, whether or not you ought to *F* supervenes on your mind. The second is that, whenever you ought to *F*, your *Fing* supervenes on your mind. To be clear: whether or not you *F* supervenes on your mind. These are not strictly necessary conditions for normativity to supervene on your mind, but if they do

not obtain, normativity could supervene on your mind only by good luck.

I shall examine each condition in turn.

Does whether or not you ought to F supervene on your mind?

The claim that what you ought supervenes on your mind is a sort of subjectivism about ought. It can be supported by any of several openly subjectivist theories. For example, one is the theory that you ought to *F* if and only if *F*ing has the greatest expected value for you out of all the alternatives, where expected values are given by your own credences and your own judgements of value.

Another theory starts from subjectivism about reasons. It claims that all your reasons are states of your mind. For example, reasons might be pairs, each consisting of a desire and a belief. Add to this the claim that your reasons determine what you ought by weighing against each other on the basis of your subjective judgements of weight. The result is a subjectivist theory of ought.

Many philosophers find subjectivism about reasons unattractive. It conflicts with common sense if nothing else. Common sense tells us that facts about the external world can be reasons. For example the fact that heavy clouds are gathering is a reason to expect rain. Benjamin Kiesewetter agrees with common sense in this respect. He thinks that many reasons are facts about the external world. Here is one of his examples.²¹ Suppose you are hunting a murderer, and you see someone disappear behind a tree. That someone disappeared behind the tree, which is a fact about the external world, may be a reason for you to believe that the murderer is hiding behind the tree.

Nevertheless, Kiesewetter argues that what you ought supervenes on your mind.²² So he claims that this sort of subjectivism about ought is consistent with the view that reasons are often facts about the external world.

To support this claim, he says, first, that what you ought depends only on those of your reasons that are *available* to you. A reason is available to you only if it is part of your body of evidence. You may have reasons that are not available to you, but we can ignore those ones because – Kiesewetter assumes – available reasons are the only ones that contribute to determining what your ought.²³ From now on in discussing Kiesewetter, I use ‘reason’ to refer to available reasons only.

The fact that someone disappeared behind the tree is an available reason for you only if it impinges on your mind to the extent of being part of your evidence. This makes it possible for the existence of an available reason to supervene on your mind even though the reason is external.

But it only opens up a possibility; it does not ensure that the existence of an available reason supervenes on your mind. Change the example. Suppose now that you do not actually see someone disappearing behind a tree. It seems to you that you do, but this appearance is illusory. Actually, no one disappears behind the tree. Then you do not have the reason I described for believing the murderer is behind the tree. That reason was the fact that someone disappeared behind the tree, but in the new case there is no such fact. Yet your mind is in exactly the same state in the two versions of the example. So the existence of the reason does not supervene on your mind.

Kiesewetter offers two alternative responses to this problem. The first is a strong sort of externalism about the mind. In the original version of the example, the fact that someone disappeared behind the tree is part of your evidence; in the second version it is not. According to Timothy Williamson’s externalist theory, your evidence is what you know, and your

knowledge is a mental state of yours.²⁴ So you are not in the same mental state in the two cases. Yet I assumed you are; that is how I demonstrated that the existence of your reason does not supervene on your mind. If Williamson is right, my demonstration fails.

So Kieseewetter's view that a reason must be part of your evidence, together with Williamson's externalism about the mind, may be enough to ensure that the existence of a reason supervenes on your mind. They are not yet enough to ensure that what you ought supervenes on your mind. What you ought depends also on what your reasons are reasons for, and how they combine together.

But we might extend Kieseewetter's theory to the extent of claiming that what you ought depends only on your total body of evidence, perhaps together with other features of your mind. Your evidence will include external facts that constitute reasons. If we now add Williamson's externalism about the mind, so that your body of evidence is part of your mind, we shall get the conclusion that what you ought supervenes on your mind.

In this way, Kieseewetter combines a sort of subjectivism about ought with reasons that are facts about the external world. It strikes me as a sort of sleight of hand. The argument extends your mind to include the external facts that are reasons. The fact that someone disappeared behind the tree, when it is a fact, is a feature of your mind. But Williamson's version of externalism about the mind is unappealing. It is not externalism about the content of mental states, which I mentioned in section 4 and which is widely accepted. It is externalism about the existence of a mental state: your knowledge that someone disappeared behind the tree is a mental state of yours, and whether or not you have this mental state depends on whether or not someone disappeared behind the tree. Like subjectivism about reasons, this sort of externalism about the mind offends common sense.

Kieseewetter recognizes that many people do not accept it. So he offers an alternative argument. Go back to the example. In the first version you have a reason to believe the murderer is behind the tree, which is the fact that someone disappeared behind the tree. In the second version, you do not have that reason to believe the murderer is behind the tree, but Kieseewetter claims you do have a different reason to believe it, namely that it seems to you that someone disappeared behind the tree. Kieseewetter claims this second reason is just as strong as the first. He offers us this 'backup view':

If A 's total phenomenal state supports p , and p would – if true – be an available reason for (or against) believing q , then A 's appearances provide an equally strong available reason for (or against) believing q .²⁵

If this is true, the reason you have in the second version of the example (the appearance) is just as strong a reason to believe the murderer is hiding behind the tree as the reason you have in the first version (the fact that someone disappeared behind the tree). Therefore, what your reasons require – what you ought – is the same in the two cases. So even if we drop externalism about the mind and accept that your mind is the same in the two cases, the example is consistent with the supervenience of what you ought on the mind.

The backup view faces at least two difficulties. One is that you have the appearance in the first version of the example as well as in the second. If it is a reason in the second version, it must be just as strong a reason in the first. But in the first version you have a further, external reason, which is the fact. If, as Kieseewetter supposes, your reasons in the second version are just as strong as in the first, this seems to imply that the fact has no weight as a reason. Only the appearance counts for anything, and the external reason counts for nothing. This makes Kieseewetter's appeal to external reasons seem like a sham.

Second, an amendment to the example shows that the backup view is false if we accept, as

Kiesewetter does, that the external fact can be a reason. Let us add two assumptions to the example: first, you know that no one is nearby apart from you and perhaps the murderer; second, you have received a fairly reliable report that the murderer was recently seen in a distant city. In the first version of the example, it is a fact that someone disappeared behind the tree, and this fact is supposed to be a reason to believe the murderer is hiding behind the tree. It is nothing less than a conclusive reason. You know that someone disappeared behind the tree and the murderer is the only person it could be, so you definitely ought to believe the murderer is hiding behind the tree. But in the second version, it only appears to you that someone disappeared behind the tree. This appearance is supposed to be a reason to believe the murderer is hiding behind the tree, but you do not have a conclusive reason to believe this. Given the report that the murderer is elsewhere, it is not the case that you ought to believe the murderer is hiding behind the tree. So if both the fact and the appearance can be reasons, the appearance is definitely not as strong a reason as the fact. The conclusion is that, in the first version of the example, you ought to believe the murderer is hiding behind the tree whereas in the second version that is not so. Yet unless we accept externalism, your mind is the same in both cases. So once again, what you ought does not supervene on your mind.

Kiesewetter claims that what you ought supervenes on your mind, even though some reasons are facts in the external world. His argument from the back-up view fails. I conclude that his defence of this claim has to depend on an unappealing sort of externalism about the mind.

This does not mean that I comprehensively reject subjectivism about ought, because there are other subjectivist theories besides Kiesewetter's. At the beginning of this section I mentioned one that does not refer to reasons. I do not have arguments against all of them. So my argument that normativity does not supervene on the mind rests mainly on what is coming next.

Your Fing does not supervene on your mind whenever you ought to F.

Acting on the world outside your mind does not supervene on your mind. For example, raising your arm does not supervene on your mind. You might fail to raise your arm even while your mind has exactly the properties it would have if you raised it. Your nerves might fail to activate your muscles and you might be looking the other way. So if you ever ought to act on the outside world, it will not be true that, whenever you ought to *F*, *Fing* supervenes on your mind.

But often you ought to act on the outside world. For example, it can be the case on some occasion that you ought to insure your house against fire. Suppose you ought and you believe you ought. Suppose you set about insuring your house. You complete an application form and pay a premium to an insurance company in the usual way, without having studied all the fine print carefully. Now take two different cases. In the first, everything proceeds as expected, and your house is insured. In the second case the small print contains a clause that says your house is insured only if its roof is constructed of slate, tiles or metal. Actually your house's roof is constructed of cedar shingles, so the house is not insured. Suppose this fact never comes to your attention because there is no fire. Then your mental properties are exactly the same in both cases. Yet in one case you insure your house as you ought and in the other you do not. You may be normative in one but not in the other. So your normativity does not supervene on your mind.

The only way to argue that, whenever you ought to *F*, your *Fing* supervenes on your mind is to deny that it is ever true that you ought to act on the external world. We would have to

deny that you ought to insure your house, for instance. We might say instead that you ought to bring yourself to believe you have insured your house. Or it might be that you ought to intend to insure your house, or to have some other mental property.

But this is utterly implausible, in the example and in general. It could easily be true that you ought to insure your house. You ought to make sure your car's brakes are in good condition, you ought to be kind to strangers, look both ways before you cross the road, and so on – all acts in the external world. We accept innumerable ordinary normative claims like these. It is quite implausible that all of them are false.²⁶

To summarize this section: the claim that normativity supervenes on your mind depends on two conditions. The first can be defended only on the basis of unappealing philosophical theories. The second is utterly implausible. So we may safely conclude that normativity does not supervene on the mind.

7. Rationality supervenes on the mind

I next respond to two very different ways of arguing that rationality does not supervene on the mind.

Lord's argument

Errol Lord favours the property-identity claim.²⁷ He adopts the first way of opposing the quick objection; he denies that rationality supervenes on the mind. He thinks that rationality consists in responding correctly to the reasons you possess, that you possess a reason just when you are in a position to know it,²⁸ and that being in a position to know a reason, as he understands it, does not supervene on your mind.

Lord uses the example of drinks to illustrate possessing a reason. You intend to drink a glass of liquid, which is either petrol or gin. Lord adds the assumption that, lying on the counter right in front of you, is an authoritative card that specifies which the liquid is. If it is petrol, the fact that it is petrol is a reason not to intend to drink it. The fact that the reason is described on a card right in front of you – and Lord adds some further supporting details – implies that this reason is possessed by you.

However, Lord supposes you do not read the card so that the reason does not impinge on your mind, even though it is possessed by you. Let us suppose the glass of liquid is taken away before you put your intention to drink into effect, so you never find out what is in it. Then your mind has exactly the same properties at all times whether the liquid is petrol or gin, even though in the former case you possess a reason not to intend to drink the liquid, whereas in the latter case you do not.

Lord assumes that, if the liquid is petrol, the reason you possess not to intend to drink it outweighs any opposing reasons you might possess, so responding correctly to the reasons you possess entails not intending to drink the liquid. Since you intend to drink it you are therefore irrational according to his theory of rationality. Why should we accept that? Lord evidently thinks he has supplied enough details to convince us that your failure to read the card is a failure of rationality. For the sake of argument, let us accept it.

It yields the conclusion that rationality does not supervene on the mind only if you would not be equally irrational were the liquid gin and you intended to drink it. But in that case too, you would fail to read the card in front of you. So if your failure is irrational in one case it is irrational in the other. Lord has not presented us with two cases where you are irrational in one and not irrational in the other.

What if the details are such that, in the petrol case, you know something you do not know

in the gin case? For example, suppose you know the card contains information that is vital for your health. In the gin case, you do not know this because it is not true. Could this mean you are irrational in one case and not the other, even though your mind is the same in both cases?

No. If Williamson is right that knowledge is a mental state,²⁹ you have different mental properties in the two cases; your mind is not the same in the two cases. If Williamson is wrong, your mind may indeed have the same properties in the two cases. If it does, then in the gin case you believe the card contains information that is vital for your health, just as you do in the petrol case. Given that your failure to read the card is irrational in the petrol case, it is irrational in the gin case too.

Despite what he intends, Lord's example only makes it clearer that rationality supervenes on the mind. As I said in section 4, it is a well-embedded conceptual feature of rationality as we ordinarily understand it that it is a mental property.

A Kantian argument

There is a quite different way of denying that rationality supervenes on the mind. It is Kantian in nature, but I do not claim that it represents Kant's own view. I shall approach it indirectly, by a detour through a puzzle about morality.

A Kantian view is that morality supervenes on the mind. The view is that to be moral you require only a good mind – specifically, a good will. If, by bad luck, your good will does not achieve good consequences for the world, you are no less moral for that.

Even if morality supervenes on the mind, it does not follow that normativity does. Morality is only a part of normativity. My examples were about prudence rather than morality, and there is no suggestion that prudence supervenes on the mind. So the conclusions I drew from the examples are not affected. The point I want to make is different. Applied to morality, the Kantian view seems plausible, and it raises a puzzle.

It seems plausible that your possession of the property of morality does indeed supervene on your mind. If you intend to act well but bad luck intervenes and prevents you from achieving a good result, it seems plausible that your failure does not count against your morality. You cannot be blamed, so you cannot be any less moral. In general, you cannot be less moral in one state than in another if your mind is no different. Yet on the other hand, it is implausible that everything morality requires of you – in other words, everything you morally ought – supervenes on your mind. For example, morality requires you not to cause unnecessary suffering, and whether or not you cause unnecessary suffering does not supervene on your mind. Morality is surely aimed at the world, not at improving your own mind. So it seems that morality supervenes on the mind but that what morality requires does not. How can these claims be reconciled? That is the puzzle.

A solution is to recognize that the reification of morality in our conceptual scheme has progressed a long way. In the first instance, 'morality' is the name of a property that people possess. Plausibly, this property supervenes on the mind. If we construe 'morality requires' on the model of 'cleanliness requires', what is morally required of you is whatever is a necessary condition for possessing the property of morality, and nothing more. If morality supervenes on the mind, what is morally required in this sense also supervenes on the mind.

But actually we reify morality and treat it as an external entity that makes prescriptions to us. I shall use the capitalized word 'Morality' for the name of this reified entity. Then 'Morality requires' should be construed on the model of 'the law requires' rather than 'cleanliness requires'. It means much the same as 'Morality prescribes'. Reified Morality does not require of you everything that is a necessary condition for possessing the property of

morality. For example, a necessary condition for being moral is to be alive, but Morality does not require you to be alive. Morality does not prescribe being alive.

We would not naturally say that morality requires you to be alive. This shows that in the expression ‘morality requires’, ‘morality’ most naturally refers to reified Morality rather than unreified morality.

One consequence of reification is the one I have just described, that Morality does not require everything that is a necessary condition for being moral. But our reification of Morality goes further than that. Reified Morality also requires some things of you that are not necessary conditions for being moral. It requires some acts and omissions in the external world. For instance, Morality requires you to make sure your car’s brakes are in good condition, and it requires you to refrain from murder. This is part of our common-sense understanding of Morality, and Kantians would not deny it. Being kind to strangers and refraining from murder do not supervene on your mind. Since we are making the Kantian assumption that the property of morality supervenes on the mind, it follows that they are not part of the property of morality. So on the Kantian view, reified Morality in some ways goes beyond morality as a personal property. This solves the puzzle: morality supervenes on the mind but what Morality requires does not.

Morality is not particularly a subject for this paper. Its relevance is that it could provide a model for the reification of rationality. We do indeed reify rationality, as I said in section 2. Let capitalized ‘Rationality’ be the name of the reified entity. Another name for it is ‘Reason’. If Rationality is reified to the same degree as Morality, the requirements of Rationality need not supervene on the mind any more than the requirements of Morality do, even though the property of rationality does supervene on the mind.

This makes it possible for Rationality to require acts or omissions in the external world. To take one example, Rationality might require you to act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.³⁰ I earlier argued that rationality cannot be identical to normativity because rationality supervenes on the mind whereas normativity does not. But the argument does not apply to reified Rationality if it does not supervene on the mind. It could even turn out that Rationality and normativity are identical. It could turn out that what you ought to do is nothing other than what Rationality requires of you.

There would be a lot more work to do before this Kantian claim could be established. First, it needs to be explained why the requirements of Rationality do not supervene on the mind. It is plausible that the requirements of Morality do not, because Morality is concerned with the world rather than your mind. The same cannot be said of Rationality, however reified, because it is much more concerned with your mind. It is strange to claim that Rationality may require something that is not a necessary condition for being rational. Second, it needs to be explained why Rationality encompasses the whole of normativity. Even if it is granted that Rationality does not supervene on the mind, that is far short of the conclusion that it constitutes all of normativity.

Those are two big jobs to do. But if they could be done, it would mean there is a concept of Rationality in which it is identical to a concept of normativity.

But this concept of Rationality would be very distant from rationality, the property that is possessed by people. Take a new example. Suppose Rationality requires you to act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law. I take this to mean that Rationality requires of you that you do not perform any act unless it conforms to some maxim that you can will to become a universal law. This

requirement does not supervene on your mind. For example, suppose you give money to an honest-looking person who is soliciting contributions on the street. You believe this act conforms to the maxim ‘Give money to charity’, which you can will to become a universal law. Now distinguish two cases. In the first, the person is indeed collecting for charity, so your act conforms to your maxim and does not violate the requirement of Rationality. In the second case, the person is collecting for a terrorist organization, and giving money to a terrorist organization does not conform to any maxim that you can will to become a universal law. In this second case you do violate the requirement of Rationality. Yet your mind might have all the same properties in both cases. You might never find out that in the second case you contribute to a terrorist organization; you might go to your grave believing you gave to charity. You are plainly equally rational in the two cases because your rationality supervenes on your mind. The cases differ in what reified Rationality requires of you, but your unreified rationality is the same in both.

So the Kantian project of reification does nothing to bring unreified rationality closer to normativity. It remains a mistake to identify these very different properties.

8. Conclusion

I conclude that the property-identity claim is false. It is false that rationality is responding correctly to reasons. *A fortiori*, it is false that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons. This reductive claim fails.

The Kantian argument in section 7 does not aim to support a reductive claim about rationality. Indeed, it tends in the opposite direction towards supporting the view that normativity is reducible to a sort of reified Rationality. Since this sort of reified Rationality is far removed from the property of rationality, the failure of the property-identity claim tells us little about this Kantian reduction.

Kiesewetter and Lord support the claim that rationality consists in responding correctly to reasons. There are other, more or less similar reductive claims about rationality. For example, Derek Parfit says that rationality consists in responding correctly, not just to reasons, but also to apparent reasons.³¹ Moreover, Parfit does not interpret responding correctly to reasons as *F*ing whenever your reasons require you to *F*, but as *F*ing or trying to *F* whenever you reasons require you to *F*.³² Still, his view is an attempt to reduce the property of rationality to reasons. I think this reductive enterprise is mistaken, but my argument in this paper is not a comprehensive answer to it. In this paper, I have argued only against the identity claim itself. My argument has been only a ‘quick objection’ as I call it.³³ It succeeds against the identity claim, but other reductive claims call for less quick objections, which I have presented in my book *Rationality Through Reasoning*.³⁴

I recognize there are some tight connections between rationality and normativity. For one thing, rationality may be a source of normativity: if rationality requires you to *F*, that may be a reason for you to *F*. Furthermore, rationality requires you to intend to *F* whenever you believe you ought to *F*. I call this requirement of rationality ‘enkrasia’.³⁵ It requires you to respond to your normative beliefs in a particular way. It differs from the identity claim because it is only one of many requirements of rationality; another is the requirement to intend whatever you believe is a means implied by an end you intend, and there are many others. Still, it does constitute a tight connection between rationality and normativity.

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Notes

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1. ‘Internal and external reasons’, p. 110. Original italics.
2. One exception is an occurrence of ‘reason’ in *The Martyrdom of Sancte Katerine* from about the same date. There it has a sense that is now obsolete.
3. I use *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle*. This passage is on p. 125, folio 75. My translations are based on <http://www.bsswebsite.me.uk/History/AncreneRiwle/AncreneRiwle.html>.

4. p. 34, folio 19.
5. p. 73, folio 43. My paper ‘The first normative ‘reason’’ explains how this normative meaning came to be used.
6. p. 72, folio 42.
7. Robert Parsons, *A Defence*, p. 27.
8. p. 121, folio 73.
9. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, act 2 scene 2.
10. Hume, *Treatise*, bk 2, part 3, sect 3.
11. Hume, *Treatise*, bk 2, part 3, sect 3.
12. Wood, ‘Kant on practical reason’, p. 65.
13. Smith, ‘Humean rationality’, p. 76.
14. Wedgwood, ‘Internalism explained’.
15. This famous example comes from Bernard Williams’s ‘Internal and external reasons’.
16. ‘Instrumental rationality’.
17. The term ‘substantive rationality’ apparently originated with Max Weber. See Kalberg, ‘Max Weber’s types of rationality’.
18. My evidence is contained in my *Rationality Through Reasoning*, pp. 119–26. Here I give just one example.
19. See Orilia and Swoyer, ‘Properties’.
20. See my *Rationality Through Reasoning*, chapter 5.
21. *The Normativity of Rationality*, p. 167 ff.
22. This argument appears in *The Normativity of Rationality*, chapter 7.
23. See *The Normativity of Rationality*, chapter 8. I take it that a fact is not a reason at all unless it contributes to determining what you ought – see the definition of a reason in my *Rationality Through Reasoning*, chapter 4.
24. Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, chapter 1.
25. *The Normativity of Rationality*, p. 173.
26. Kurt Sylvan has pointed out to me that this is precisely what H. A. Prichard claims in ‘Duty and ignorance of fact’. Even with Jonathan Dancy’s help I have not been able to extract a credible argument from Prichard’s text. Jesse Hambly has pointed out to me that in *What We Owe to Each Other*, p. 21, T. M. Scanlon says ‘Judgement sensitive attitudes constitute the class of things for which reasons in the standard normative sense can sensibly be asked or offered’. This seems to deny that there can be reasons for acting in the external world. However, Scanlon immediately goes on to discuss reasons for action, without denying there are such things. Furthermore, he discusses reasons for action through the rest of the book. I think he means to say in the brief discussion on p. 21 that a reason for *Fing*, where *Fing* is an action, is *also* a reason for intending to *F*.
27. ‘What you’re rationally required to do’.
28. See also his ‘Having reasons’.
29. *Knowledge and Its Limits*, chapter 1.
30. This is H. J. Paton’s translation of the Kant’s categorical imperative *The Moral Law*, p. 88.
31. *On What Matters*, p. 111.
32. *On What Matters*, p. 22.
33. Originally in my *Rationality Through Reasoning*, section 5.2.
34. Chapters 5 and 6.
35. See my *Rationality Through Reasoning*, section 9.5.

