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Normative Judgment and Rational Requirements: A Reply to Ridge

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Abstract

Michael Ridge defends Capacity Judgment Internalism (CJI): *simply qua their particular character and content*, first person normative judgments are necessarily capable of motivating without the help of any independent desire. I examine and rebut Ridge's two arguments for CJI. First, he rejects as incoherent the possibility of anormativists: agents whose first person normative judgments are not capable of motivating them. I argue that anormativists can exist and be intelligible as agents even if normative judgments do not move them. Second, he argues for CJI from Rational Judgment Internalism (RJI), which rationally requires to intend to do as one judges that one ought to do. In order for RJI to apply and for violations of RJI to be blameable, we need to suppose that making the judgment that I ought to F already ensures that I am able to intend to F, and CJI is the view of normative judgment which guarantees that. I argue that Ridge's argument relies on an unlikely picture of normative requirements and in any case makes RJI an odd requirement. I conclude by showing how externalism can accommodate RJI.

1. Introduction

In his *Impassioned Belief* (2014), Michael Ridge argues for what he calls Capacity Judgment Internalism, which he formulates thus:

simply qua their particular character and content, first person normative judgments are necessarily capable of motivating without the help of any independent desire. Call this

doctrine “Capacity Judgment Internalism,” or “CJI” for short. CJI is a necessary truth about the nature of normative judgment. (51)¹

The sort of normative judgment to which CJI applies is first-personal and all things considered. It is a judgment to the effect that one ought to do something oneself, where all or at least enough of the relevant reasons speak strongly in favour of doing it (48). The relevant reasons might be moral as well as prudential or of other kinds. In this sense CJI is different from familiar forms of internalism about moral judgment, whereby first-personal *moral* judgment necessarily motivates, at least to some extent (without the help of any independent desire). The focus of CJI is all things considered generic ought judgment, where the ought need not be moral. For this reason, some counterexamples to moral judgment internalism do not apply to CJI. The so-called amoralist, who seems to judge that e.g. he morally ought to keep a promise but is not in the least motivated to do it, is perfectly conceivable for CJI, since his judgment is not an all things considered generic ought judgment. Perhaps he thinks that though all moral reasons speak in favour of his keeping the promise, it is not the case that he all things considered ought to do it. Maybe there are strong prudential reasons that speak against keeping the promise, or maybe the moral reasons are not weighty enough for him to arrive at an overall normative judgment.

There is a second important difference from traditional internalism as well. CJI only requires that first-personal normative judgments be *capable* of motivating, as opposed to actually motivating the subject. Thus, even if our amoralist were to make the normative judgment that all things considered he ought to keep the promise, his failure to be motivated accordingly is compatible with CJI, as long as his judgment still has the capacity to motivate him. The

¹ All page-only references are to Ridge 2014.

proper counterexample to CJI must rather present us with a case of a genuine all things considered normative judgment that is not even capable of motivating the subject. Ridge calls such a subject the “anormativist” (56-57).

In what follows I examine and rebut Ridge’s two arguments for CJI: the rejection of the possibility of anormativism (sec. 2), and an argument from the rational requirement to intend to do as one judges that one ought to do (sec. 3). I will conclude with a few remarks about the nature of this requirement and about verdicts of *akrasia* (sec. 4).

2. Ridge’s first argument for CJI

Is the anormativist a coherent counterexample to CJI? Not so for Ridge:

we are left with a character who is supposed to be deeply indifferent to, and indeed utterly incapable of being moved by, considerations which by his lights do provide perfectly good reasons for action. This is not obviously coherent. (57)

While Ridge does not place much weight on this argument, it does follow from CJI that the anormativist cannot exist. So any rejection of CJI would entail that anormativism is possible and coherent. I believe two considerations are necessary to establish this possibility.

First, Ridge might have been supposing that the anormativist, unlike the amoralist, is not a coherent possibility *for agency*, because the anormativist’s actions would never be guided by his normative judgments, whereas the amoralist “is still capable of caring about those considerations which he takes to be *genuinely* normative” (57), such as the ruthless pursuit of

his own welfare. However, if this is the reason why the anormativist is thought to be impossible, it depends on a questionable view of agency: acting for reasons is essentially a matter of acting on the basis of one's normative judgments. This view can be resisted. It seems that one can still act for reasons in being guided by desires, where desires may include what one may call a non-doxastic apprehension of reasons.² For instance, the immediate allure of a tasty meal at my favourite restaurant might motivate me, regardless of any contrary judgment to the effect that 'all things considered I ought to do something else'. In acting both *against* an opposing normative judgment and *without* a supporting normative judgment, the anormativist would still be acting for a reason. It seems that only an overly intellectualized account of acting for a reason would demand in each case a normative judgment on the agent's part.

Ridge might reply that, even if acting for reasons is not always a matter of being motivated by normative judgments, it does still demand that at least sometimes we are motivated by them—or at least that we are capable of being so motivated. Nobody can be an anormativist all the time. However—and this is the second consideration—rejecting CJI does not require the possibility of global anormativism. All it requires is the possibility that a certain genuine normative judgment is never capable of motivating the subject. For example, we might imagine someone who believes that (e.g.) God's commandments are always decisive—wherever they apply, he judges that he all things considered ought to follow God's commandments—and yet is systematically unmoved by this judgment. It would seem plausible to hold that this all things considered normative judgment is not capable of motivating him, and so we have a counterexample to CJI.

² See the 'guise of the good' theory of desire defended e.g. in Oddie 2005 and Tenenbaum 2007.

Ridge may reply in two ways. First, he may insist that being systematically unmoved by a certain normative judgment does not imply that its capacity to motivate does not exist—the capacity might simply be blocked by some recurring but contingent psychological factor. While I agree that a capacity to motivate may remain systematically unexpressed, I believe that the burden lies on Ridge to specify in greater detail when a capacity to motivate is present and when not, since this is after all the key concept in his CJI. Pending that, all one can say is that if in a sufficiently wide range of nearby possible worlds the subject is not motivated, to any extent, by his normative judgment, then we have little reason to think that that judgment has the capacity to motivate him (compare: if in a sufficiently wide range of circumstances you do not tell red from green objects, then one is justified in thinking you lack the capacity to tell red from green objects).³

Second, Ridge may reply that, as long as *other* normative judgments are capable of motivating the subject (and presumably do motivate him often enough), this is no counterexample to CJI. What CJI deems necessary is the *subject's* being able to be motivated by normative judgments, rather than any motivating power had by any particular normative judgment at any particular time. This reply, however, would violate the letter of CJI, which after all ascribes the motivational capacity to normative judgments and their 'particular character and content', and not to the agent.

3. Ridge's second argument for CJI

Ridge's second argument is based on what he calls

³ Thanks to a reviewer for inviting me to elaborate on this.

Rational Judgment Internalism (RJI): Necessarily, if an agent otherwise wholeheartedly makes the normative judgment that, all things considered, he must F in C, but does not intend to F in C, then he is thereby less than fully practically rational. (58)⁴

RJI is a version of what in another context John Broome calls the requirement of ‘enkrasia’—since to violate such a requirement would be a case of akrasia: failing to intend to do as one judges that one all things considered ought to do.⁵ RJI prescribes a norm or ideal of rationality, and as such an agent who fails to meet RJI is to that extent criticizable as less than fully practically rational. But for any such criticism to be fair or reasonable, it must be possible, for the agent judging that she ought to F in C, to intend to F in C. Ridge glosses this point as follows:

Plausibly, making the judgment yet not intending accordingly is sufficient, absent some excuse, for blaming the agent. Insofar as we think this, though, to be reasonable we must implicitly also assume that the normative judgment guarantees at least a *capacity* to be motivated accordingly. (58)

In this passage Ridge is making two claims:

- (1) *The Sufficiency Claim*: our blame towards the agent flouting RJI is always appropriate upon *simply* knowing that he makes the relevant judgment but does not intend accordingly—at least, absent ‘excuses’, i.e. (as I understand it) absent circumstances

⁴ To refer to action verbs I use the more convenient ‘F’ in lieu of the Greek ‘Φ’.

⁵ See Broome 2013. Ridge prefers the ‘must’ locution. Nothing here hangs on this choice, so I will keep using ‘ought’.

which make the agent an inappropriate target of blame, although they do not cancel the applicability of RJI to him;

(2) *The Guarantee Claim*: if (1) is true, then there must be something *in merely making the relevant judgment* which ensures that the agent can be blamed if he fails to meet RJI, or which at least ensures that RJI applies to him (when excuses defeat blame).

But since the agent can be blamed only if in the relevant sense he is able to meet RJI, then something in merely making the relevant judgment must ensure that he is able to meet RJI.

Now, CJI is ideally placed for explaining what this ‘something’ is: on CJI making the normative judgment entails the capacity to be motivated accordingly, and an agent who has the capacity to be so motivated is an agent who is able to meet RJI, and who can in turn be criticized for not meeting RJI.⁶ In other words, CJI is the view about all things considered normative judgment that guarantees that making such a judgment is sufficient (absent excuses) for blaming the agent who fails to intend accordingly.

We can put Ridge’s argument in the form of a *modus tollens*:

1. If CJI is false (normative judgment does not necessarily have the capacity to motivate), then it would not be reasonable to blame agents upon simply knowing that they fail to intend in accordance with the normative judgement they make.
2. But (absent excuses) it is reasonable to blame agents upon simply knowing that they fail to intend in accordance with the normative judgement they make.
3. Therefore CJI is true.

⁶ As noted above, for Ridge strictly speaking such capacity belongs to the judgment and not to the agent, but I won’t pursue this issue here.

This is a genuinely novel argument in favour of CJI, one that holds the promise to break the stalemate between internalism and externalism created by conflicting intuitions about amoralists and, one would add, about anormativists too (that is probably why Ridge seems to place more emphasis on this second argument than on the first). However, it seems to me that premise 2 is highly dubious, once we see what it entails.

I take it that for Ridge any given verdict of irrationality (and associated blame, if applicable) is exhaustively explained by the combined fact that the agent made the relevant normative judgment and did not intend accordingly. What is crucial to Ridge's argument is that, at least in these cases, we would not need to mention a *further* fact: that the agent was *able* to intend accordingly. This fact about the agent's ability is supposed to be already 'packed into' the combined fact, and in particular, into the fact that the agent made the relevant normative judgment. As said above, simply making the normative judgment ensures that the agent is able to intend accordingly.

However this is a questionable move, for the following reason. This is not how typically 'ought'-facts and in general normative requirements (such as the requirement to follow RJI) imply 'can'-facts. Consider now a moral requirement. I make a promise (at t1) to meet you at t2, and at t2 I fail to keep the promise. Am I to blame just upon knowing that I made a promise and didn't keep it? It seems that one *extra* thing to know about me is whether at t2 I am able to keep the promise. We cannot read off this extra fact simply from the fact that I promised, even if the promise was sincere (perhaps, in promising, I *thought* I would be able to keep it, but then the world turned against me). Also, surely we do not want to say that a certain act did not count as promising (at t1) if (at t2) it is not the case that the promise can be

kept. This example points to a general lesson, which we can put in the helpful terminology of favourers and enablers (Dancy 2004). Wherever there is a normative requirement, different features play different roles in explaining or ‘structuring’ that requirement. The fact that I made the promise favours my keeping it. The fact that I am able to keep the promise enables the former fact to favour my keeping it: if I were not able to keep it, the fact that I made the promise would not favour keeping it. If the favourer is enabled to do its favouring job, then we have a normative requirement (or at least a *pro tanto* reason) to keep the promise. Once this division of explanatory labour is on the table, it is highly unlikely that one and the same fact can both favour a certain action and enable *itself* to do the favouring. It is not downright impossible: for example, it may be true that, after a period of forced immobility, the mere fact that I can move my leg is a reason to move it (the possibility to finally use my leg favours the action) and also works as an enabler, since after all I only have a reason to move my leg if it is true that I can move it. But as the promise example shows, favourers and enablers do not normally overlap, nor can one read off enablers from favourers.

So what is suspect in premise 2 of Ridge’s argument is the peculiar structure that he assigns to RJI. What favours my intention to F—my making the judgment that I ought to F—would have to include within itself what enables it to favour the intention—the fact that, in simply making the judgment, I am thereby made able to intend accordingly. In short, Ridge needs to conflate favourers and enablers for his argument to work, and this contrasts with the way normative requirements are typically structured.

Ridge might contest this objection in two ways. First, I have assumed that the structure of the rational requirement RJI can be modelled on the example of a moral requirement to keep a promise, where favourer and enabler are sharply distinguished. Ridge might reply: ‘why

assume that making a normative judgment plays vis-à-vis intending accordingly exactly the same role as making a promise plays vis-à-vis keeping the promise?’ After all, it is not as if the structure of rational requirements such as RJI (and the like, for instance those governing belief or means-end reasoning) is uncontroversial. There is debate, for instance, on whether they are better understood as narrow- or wide-scope requirements. On the narrow-scope view, RJI has this form:

$$p \rightarrow Rq,$$

where p stands for ‘A judges that he ought to F’, R for ‘it is required that’, and q for ‘A intends to F’. On the wide-scope view, RJI looks like this:

$$R(p \rightarrow q),$$

i.e. it is required that, if A judges that he ought to F, then A intends to F.⁷ Part of the difference is that, if read narrow-scope, the requirement is only satisfied by intending to F, whereas the wide-scope requirement may be satisfied either by intending to F or by retracting the normative judgment. The wide-scope view seems better to capture the nature of such requirements as promoting coherence among our attitudes—in this case, by avoiding akrasia—and akrasia can be avoided either by intending to F or by giving up the normative judgment. If we adopt the wide-scope view, Ridge might argue, making the normative judgment cannot be said to simply favour the corresponding intention, because what is favoured is really a state of coherence rather than a determinate attitude. By contrast, once we make a promise, what is favoured is the keeping of the promise, nor can we somehow make

⁷ Broome 1999 and Way 2011 defend a wide-scope view of such requirements.

things right by ‘unmaking’ the promise in the way we can avoid akrasia by retracting our normative judgment. All this suggests that moral requirements may not be the best model to understand RJI.

However, this reply would be a double-edged sword. On the one hand the wide-scope view does something to question the immediate applicability of the favouring/enabling model to RJI. But on the other hand it implies that being able to satisfy RJI (hence being liable to blame) cannot simply be a matter of making the normative judgment. On the wide-scope view, the agent to whom RJI applies must be able to achieve coherence among her mental states: having made the judgment that she ought to F, she must be able to (intend to F or retract the normative judgment). Suppose now that, though having made the judgment, she is unable to intend to F. (This possibility does not beg the question against Ridge, since RJI is now understood as wide-scope, and therefore being rational by RJI’s lights *need not* uniquely consist in forming the intention to F.) In order for the agent to be able to satisfy RJI, only one option is left: she needs to be able to retract the normative judgment. But this ability—following the logic of Ridge’s argument—should be ensured by the very making of the judgment.⁸ And this is far from obvious. It seems that the kind of capacity and opportunity needed for her to be able to retract the judgment can hardly be guaranteed by the mere fact that she made that very judgment.⁹ Indeed, when one is not going to intend to F, the judgment that one ought to F is precisely the problem to solve, the obstacle to one’s coherence, and

⁸ It would be *ad hoc* for Ridge to claim that the normative judgment can enable *only one* of the (now) two possible ways to satisfy RJI. If I count as irrational “upon simply knowing” that I failed to intend accordingly, then surely I also count as irrational “upon simply knowing” that, having failed to intend accordingly, I have also failed to retract the judgment. Ridge’s Sufficiency Claim should hold regardless of whether RJI is narrow- or wide-scope.

⁹ See Wedgwood 2013: 80 and ff. Moreover, if Way (2011) is right, in order to be rational the judgment retraction should be done for the right reasons (and not just because I think I won’t intend to F). This will require capacities that are hardly guaranteed by my making the very judgment.

therefore it cannot *itself* ensure the ability to retract it. So, arguably, adopting a wide-scope view of RJI makes things more complicated for Ridge's argument.

Secondly, Ridge might reject the analogy between RJI and the requirement to keep promises, by drawing a line between the ability to form an intention and the ability to perform a promised action. Having the latter ability is partly a matter of the external world cooperating with me (I might have an unforeseeable accident on my way to our agreed meeting), whereas having the former ability may be thought to be a mostly internal, psychological matter. Ridge would thus be justified in assuming that normative judgments 'bring along' an ability to form corresponding intentions (or else they are not genuine normative judgments), in a way that promising normally should not be assumed to bring along the ability to keep the promise.¹⁰

However, a distinction between internal and external abilities cannot do the work required by Ridge's argument. What Ridge needs is not simply a requirement which otherwise rational agents are usually in a position to meet without the cooperation of the external world. His claim is rather that judging that one ought to F *ensures* that one is able to intend to F. RJI, as glossed by Ridge, would be *a requirement that can never fail to apply because of the subject's inability to meet it*. Otherwise said, there is no possible world where I make the relevant normative judgment and I am unable to intend accordingly. (It is telling that the only qualification Ridge includes are 'excuses': once you make the relevant judgment, you may still be excused for not intending to F, but an excuse *does not* cancel a requirement or overturn a verdict of irrationality. An excuse only shelters you from blame.) The mere fact that the relevant ability is internal or psychological cannot guarantee *that much*, although it may mean that RJI is not as vulnerable as requirements to perform actions. In other words, it

¹⁰ I thank a referee for suggesting this response.

seems that Ridge needs *first* to defend the special modal status of RJI (and perhaps of all rational requirements as a category), and only afterwards can he make claims about what sort of abilities are needed in order to support such modally special requirements.

Moreover, it is not as if abilities that are internal or psychological must for that reason come as one package, as they would need to do on Ridge's account. The question whether my ability to form the right intention stands and falls with my ability to make normative judgments cannot be answered positively just by noting that both are 'internal' capacities.

4. Where does this leave us?

If we reject premise 2 of Ridge's argument, we remove the central motivation for CJI. But what to make of RJI? If what said above is on the right track, RJI must be understood in a non-Ridgean way: whether a given agent judging that she ought to F is *able* to intend to F must remain an open question rather than a question closed a priori by an internalist theory of normative judgment. Compare, once more, promises: how implausible it is to hold that the question whether I am able at t2 to keep the promise I made at t1 can be solved once and for all by a theory of what it is to make a promise. Since the agent might not be able to intend to F even after her judging that she ought to F, we would want our theory of normative judgment to keep that possibility open. Ridge seems to believe that we need to close off that possibility:

If, however, a normative judgment of the relevant kind were not necessarily capable of motivating an agent to act accordingly, then the agent might simply be incapable of rationally acting in accordance with his judgment. (58)

But (absent a special story about rational requirements) it is not clear why being at least occasionally incapable of rationally acting in accordance with one's judgment should be a problem. Perhaps Ridge is worried that, unless CJI is true, we could have a world where people make normative judgments but *nobody* is even *capable* of avoiding akrasia. And that might seem weird. But opponents of CJI—say, externalists—need not find anything weird with that possibility: it is simply a world, presumably very distant from ours, where requirements of enkrasia do not apply, because people's normative judgments happen to not line up with their motivation in a way that makes them capable of intending accordingly. We are back, it seems, to the stalemate over conflicting intuitions that Ridge wanted to avoid.

For the externalist, the question of whether a normative judgment motivates remains open, and so does the question of whether the person can intend accordingly. But, Ridge might finally reply, don't we still want to blame the akratic *simply* on the basis of her judgment/intention mismatch, without having to scrutinize her specific motivational abilities? Well, yes and no. On the one hand, externalism can grant this by ascribing (to most people at least) a motivation to avoid akrasia (after all, there seem to be real harms in being internally conflicted). Such a motivation would make them at least disposed to act in accordance with normative judgment, and would justify our expectation that they do so. On the other hand, it does seem hasty (and somewhat insensitive to individuals' circumstances) *automatically* to assume that, just because you made a certain judgment, you must now or later be able to follow through on it, and to therefore proceed with blaming you if you do not follow through. For one last time, compare the case with promises: even as a receiver of your promise, I should grant that it might not be entirely in your power to be able to keep the promise. Given that it makes no a priori assumption about what normative judgment motivationally involves,

externalism is well placed to recommend ‘double-checking’ before blaming someone for their akrasia.

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