

# Facts and meaning

---

## *How a rich ontology facilitates the understanding of normativity*

Jaap Hage\*

University of Maastricht

e-mail: jaap.hage@maastrichtuniversity.nl

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to give an account of the world and the facts in it that makes room for normativity as element of the world, under the recognition that norms must function as yardsticks by means of which the world can be evaluated. The key element in this account is the adoption of a 'rich' ontology that allows facts to be mind-dependent, and more in particular to have facts with inherent meaning. The first step of the argument is to distinguish between three kinds of facts, from which two kinds are somehow mind-dependent. The crucial step of the argument that facts can have meaning is that some facts have this meaning inherently: they could not be the same facts without having this meaning. Language makes the existence of these facts possible by having special words, such as "duty", "beautiful", and "cowardice" to denote them. In this way language contributes to the creation of a rich ontology which not only allows meaningless 'brute' facts (if it even allows these), but also facts with inherent meaning.

Building on the insight that facts can have inherent meaning, a theory of reasons for acting is developed. The argument starts with an account of what is a reason for a particular person to do something (a personal reason). Then it tackles the question to what extent such personal reasons must be rational and more in particular whether personal reasons can be based on false beliefs. The account of personal reasons is expanded to cover facts that count as reasons within a social group, and reasons based on rules. Then the argument returns more explicitly to normativity again, by discussing should- and ought-facts. These facts are arguably elements of the world, but can nevertheless also function as a yardstick against which behaviour can be measured.

The paper is concluded with some very brief observations on the assumption that reality must be mind-independent.

keywords: contingent meaning, fact, inherent meaning, normativity, ought, personal reasons, rationality, reasons for action, rule-based reasons, should, social reasons

## 1. THE PROBLEMATICS OF NORMATIVITY

The phenomenon of normativity is hard to understand. On the one hand it is connected to behaviour and the motivation to act. If a person believes that she ought to do something, this should normally have some impact on her behaviour. If there were no connection between what

---

\* The author thanks Gustavo Arosemena and Stefano Bertea for useful comments on a draft version of this paper.

people ought to do and what they actually do, the phenomenon of “ought to do” would make no sense.

On the other hand normativity is a yardstick against which actual behaviour can be measured and evaluated on its ‘rightness’. In this role, normativity should be clearly distinguishable from actual behaviour. Normative judgements such as “It is not allowed to steal” or “Jane is under an obligation towards John to pay him €100” are not descriptions of any states of affairs, at least so it seems at first sight. They are certainly not descriptions of the facts that nobody steals, or that Jane pays John €100. But neither are they descriptions of complex dispositional facts such as the fact that Jane could be forced by legal officials to pay John €100 if she does not make the payment spontaneously.

This combination of factuality, the relation between normativity and the motivation to act in a particular way, and functioning as a standard to evaluate and to guide behaviour is in the eyes of many troublesome because of the presupposed ‘gap’ between is and ought. We find this, for instance, back in discussions about the normativity of law, where there seems to be some tension between the idea that law exists as a matter of (social) fact and the idea that law provides its subjects with ‘real’ - and not merely legal - reasons to act.<sup>1</sup> And yet, it would be strange if normativity were to be detached from facts, if the norms and (other) standards by means of which facts can be evaluated would not have a place in the world of facts. Somehow there should be room for normativity inside the world, but in a way that does not obstruct the role of norms and standards as measures for facts and acts.

The purpose of this paper is to give an account of the world and the facts in it that makes room for normativity as element of the world, under the recognition that norms must function as yardsticks by means of which the world can be evaluated. The key element in this account is the adoption of a ‘rich’ ontology that allows facts to be mind-dependent, and more in particular the existence facts with inherent meaning. In section 2 the first step of the argument is taken by distinguishing between three kinds of facts, two of which are somehow mind-dependent. Section 3 contains the crucial step of the argument. It argues that facts can have meaning, and even that some facts have this meaning inherently: they could not be the same facts without having this meaning. Language facilitates the existence of these facts by having special words, such as “duty”, “beautiful”, and “cowardice” to denote them. In this way it contributes to the existence of a rich ontology which not only allows meaningless ‘brute’ facts, but also facts with inherent meaning.

The sections 4-7 build on the insight that facts can have inherent meaning by developing a theory of reasons for acting. The argument starts in section 4 with an account of what is a reason for a particular person to do something (a personal reason). Section 5 tackles the question to what extent such personal reasons must be rational and more in particular whether personal reasons can be based on false beliefs. Section 6 extends the account of personal reasons to cover facts that count as reasons within a social group, and section 7 extends the account even further with a discussion of reasons based on rules.

In section 8 the argument returns more explicitly to normativity again, by discussing should- and ought-facts. In section 9 it is argued why these facts can function as yardsticks against which behaviour can be measured. The paper is concluded in section 10.

---

<sup>1</sup> A discussion of this theme can be found in Stefano Bertea, *The Normative Claim of Law*, Oxford: Hart 2009.

## 2. THREE KINDS OF FACTS

According to a simple metaphor knowledge consists of a mental picture of the facts in an independently existing world.<sup>2</sup> No serious philosopher would – I think – accept this metaphor as an accurate rendering of our knowledge of the world, but still it represents how we experience the world around us. According to this experience, we humans are endowed with five senses, and through these senses we obtain information about the world as it actually is. Sometimes our senses may deceive us, but that is relatively exceptional. Most of the times they give us a picture (again a metaphor) of the world as it actually exists, and this picture only mirrors the world and does not influence it. Although it does not take much reflection to ‘see’ that the metaphor is inadequate, the metaphor still holds us in its grasp because it reflects our experience of the world.

One consequence of the influence of this metaphor of knowledge as mirroring a mind-independent world is that it is difficult to accept that the world and the facts and things in it may be tinged with mental influences.<sup>3</sup> And yet, it is easy to recognise mind-dependent facts. Inspired by a distinction proposed by Leiter<sup>4</sup> between different kinds of objectivity, it is possible to distinguish theoretically between at least three kinds of facts.

The first category consists of facts of which it is assumed that they are completely mind-independent. These facts would in the eyes of many include that the highest mountain on Earth is Mount Everest, that computers were invented after 1700 AD, that there are Higgs particles, and that the amount of solar systems in the universe equals some as yet unknown number. We will call these facts “objective facts”. Whether such “objective facts” really exist will be discussed very briefly in section 3.4.

The second category of facts consists of facts in social reality. These facts exist because they are recognised or accepted as existing by sufficiently many and sufficiently relevant members of some social group. The precise conditions of existence of these facts are still object of discussion<sup>5</sup>, but typical examples from the Netherlands are that sunny weather is good weather, that there is nothing wrong with gay marriages, and that legislation is a source of law. These facts will be called “intersubjective facts”. It is clear that these intersubjective facts are *not* mind-independent, although they do not depend for their existence on the mind of one single individual.

The third category of facts are the rule- or reason-based facts. Many facts are the result of the application of some rule. Examples of these rule-based facts would be that in chess the person who has check-mated his opponent’s king has won the game, that nobody can chair the hockey club for more than two subsequent periods (if there is a rule to that effect), that  $3+5$  equals 8, and that in the European Union, the Member States are in general not allowed to subsidise national industries. These same facts might just as well be called “reason-based facts”, since rules attach the presence of these facts to the existence of other facts, which are therefore the reasons

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the title of Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1980.

<sup>3</sup> And yet, it is even an assumption of phenomenologically inspired sociology that its knowledge object is the reality as it is experienced by human beings. See for instance the methodological introduction (chapter 1) of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Leiter, “Law and Objectivity”, in Jules Coleman and Scott Shapiro (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jurisprudence and Philosophy of Law*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, 969-989.

<sup>5</sup> John R. Searle, *Making the social world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010, chapter 3.

why the reason-based facts exist. For instance, the reason why Emily won the game of chess is that she check-mated Ronald's king.

As the examples of intersubjective facts and of rule- and reason-based facts illustrate, there are more facts than those that exist 'outside' in a mind-independent fashion. However, there is an even more profound reason why facts are mind-dependent, a reason that also applies to "objective facts". This reason has to do with the relation between facts and language.

### 3 FACTS AND LANGUAGE

As Strawson has pointed out, facts depend on language.<sup>6</sup> A fact is always "the fact that ...", where the dots stand for a phrase expressed in some language. It is for instance a fact that "it is not raining here and now". Facts also depend on the world, because it is the world, not language, that determines which facts exist, whether it rains here and now. A language determines which facts can be expressed, the world determines which of the expressible facts actually obtain.<sup>7</sup>

#### 3.1 The world as the set of all facts

It is possible to go one step further by defining, as Wittgenstein did, the world as the set of all facts.<sup>8</sup> Since these facts are language-dependent, such a definition would make the world language-dependent too. And since language is mind-dependent, the whole world would be mind-dependent; not merely some parts of the world such as intersubjective and rule-based facts, but all facts, including the 'objective' ones.

At first sight such a definition of the world may seem strange and undesirable. At least part of the world, the objective facts, should exist independent of what we believe about them and of which words we use. It should certainly not be possible to make the mountains disappear merely by removing the word "mountain" from our dictionaries!

However, on closer inspection the language-dependence of the world is not so strange as it might seem. For sure, we should not be able to remove mountains from the world by deleting the word "mountain" from our dictionaries. But the reason why that should be impossible is that mountains still play a role in our lives; they still have a meaning for us in the sense of "meaning" that will be explained later. It is much less problematic to remove phenomena from the world which have become meaningless as separate phenomena anyway. For instance, who would find it difficult to live in a world without *affuage* (the right to cut wood in a forest for a family fire) or without *agonyclites* (members of a sect that stand rather than kneel while praying)?<sup>9</sup> Of course, in some sense the phenomena do not depend for their existence on the existence of special words that denote them. If the word "affuage" would not exist it would still be possible that there were a right to cut wood in a forest for a family fire. But this right could not exist as a separate category; it would be a special case of a permission to do something and nothing more. With the existence of a word for it, this permission becomes a special kind of right. As a *separate* phenomenon, *affuage* can only exist if the word for it exists, and the same holds for an *agonyclite*.

---

<sup>6</sup> P.F. Strawson, "Truth", in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume, 1950. Also in P.F. Strawson, *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, London: Methuen 1971, 190-213.

<sup>7</sup> There are no facts that cannot be expressed in language, but one might argue that there are potential facts which become actual as soon as language has gained the power to express them.

<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp 1984 (1st edition 1921/2), thesis 1.1.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://phrontistery.info/clw1.html> (last consulted on October 4, 2013).

This point can be seen clearer if the meaning of facts is taken into account.

### 3.2 The meaning of facts

Our lives abound with meaningful things, events, and facts. Think, for instance, of meaningful photographs, wedding ceremonies, and results of soccer matches. And yet, the attention that philosophers devote to meaning has mainly focused on the meanings of symbols and more in particular the meaning of linguistic symbols such as words and sentences.<sup>10</sup>

What, then, is the meaning of these meaningful things, events, and facts? For an important category of cases, in particular for the meaning of linguistic entities and other symbols, their meaning is defined by rules and conventions. However, there are in general no rules that attach meaning to photographs, wedding ceremonies, and results of soccer matches. The meanings of these 'things', to the extent that they have meaning, tends to be limited to one or more specific persons. Therefore, this meaning will be called "personal meaning". What, then, is personal meaning? I will be apodictically brief here: the personal meaning of a thing is the disposition of the awareness of this thing etc. to evoke mental states such as beliefs, motivation, feelings, etc. These 'things' include facts and events, but not symbols, including words and sentences, which have the later to be defined social or rule-based meaning. This theory of meaning is basically an associational theory.<sup>11</sup>

This circumscription of meaning requires some explanation and the first step in providing this explanation is to point out that the circumscription is only suited for the meaning which something has for a particular person. A photograph has a special meaning for Peter if he tends to have certain associations with seeing the photograph, such as memories, or feelings of love or disgust. It may even motivate Peter to call the person who is on the photograph. Another example would be that the fact that her host is yawning is a sign for Heloise (has for Heloise the meaning) that she should leave. It has this meaning if this fact, and other facts like it, motivate her to leave.

Many questions can be raised in this connection, for instance about the frequency and dispositional nature of the associations, the precise nature of the meaning, and the private nature of the meaning. Here I will only focus on the private nature. Since mental associations are necessarily associations in the mind of a single person, the meaning of things such as photographs, at least the meaning which is at stake here, is a private affair in the sense that it evokes mental associations in this specific person.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Telling in this connection is the entry "Theories of meaning" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. See Jeff Speaks, "Theories of Meaning", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/meaning/>>. This entry distinguishes broadly between two kinds of theories of meaning, both of which deal with linguistic meaning.

<sup>11</sup> It was inspired by Stevenson's account of "emotive meaning". See C.L. Stevenson *Ethics and Language*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1944, chapters II and III.

<sup>12</sup> The private nature of meaning in the sense that the meaning consists in mental dispositions of the person for whom the meaning exists should not be confused with the idea of an incommunicable private language as discussed by Wittgenstein. Cf. Stewart Candlish and George Wrisley, "Private Language", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/private-language/>>. There is no fundamental reasons why the associations caused by something in the mind of person A could not be communicated to person B. Thanks go to Stefano Bertera for pointing out this possible confusion to me, and to Gustavo Arosemena for explaining why Wittgenstein's private language argument is not relevant in the present context.

Not all meaning is personal. The national flag of a country may carry a special meaning for the nationals of that country. This “social meaning” exists if – I will be very brief again – the flag has personal meaning for most of the nationals, and if most of the nationals are aware that the flag has this meaning for most nationals and consider it as right that this is the case.<sup>13</sup> Another example would be that the fact that the weather forecast predicts rain means for the inhabitants of Belgium that either they should stay at home, or- depending on the temperature - carry an umbrella or wear a rain coat.

The boundary between social meaning on the one hand, and “conventional” or “rule-based meaning” on the other hand is fluid. On the European continent the awareness of an oncoming car will motivate car drivers to keep to the right. The ringing of a bell during the break of a theatre play is a sign for the attendants of the play to return to their seats and will create the expectation that the second part of the play will start soon. In both cases there exists a convention or rule which attaches a particular meaning to an event and the participants in a social practice (car driving; visiting a play) tend to know this meaning and will normally have the appropriate associations (beliefs, expectations) or motivation.

There is an important difference, however, between rule-based and social meaning. Social meaning can only exist if most members of a social group have the required associations, while rule-based meaning usually only leads to associations in those persons who have internalised the rule. For instance, a red traffic light for pedestrians means for all pedestrians that they should stop, but it only causes the appropriate motivation to stop in those pedestrians who have internalised the rule. This motivation may even be absent in pedestrians who know the rule and know that they should stop. Internalisation of the rule is not the same thing as knowing that the rule exists.

However, also in the case of rule-based meaning there exists a link with motivation. Only existing rules can provide facts with meaning. There are two ways in which a rule can exist. One way is that the rule is broadly accepted in a social group, which means that most members of the group have internalised the rule. Then we speak of social meaning. The other way is that the rule belongs to a system of rules – such as a legal system – which is as a whole broadly accepted by a social group. In that case most members of the group should at least accept the rules that define which rules belong to the system.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3 Contingent and inherent meaning

Many things and facts have meaning, and often it is possible to ‘re-describe’ these facts and things to make that meaning explicit. For instance, the social meaning of a piece of textile with a

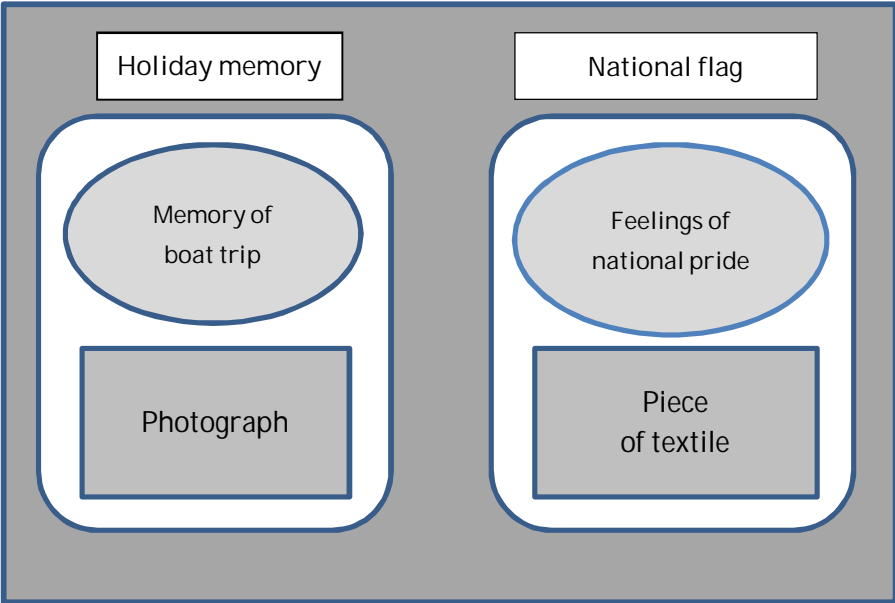
---

<sup>13</sup> The parallels with theories of convention such as Lewis’ (cf. Michael Rescorla, “Convention”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/convention/>>) but also Hart’s theory of social rules (Herbert L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1961, 55-60) are obvious.

<sup>14</sup> In this connection it is important that there may be a division of labour within the group, which makes that the recognition of rules by the group is left to a subset of the group. An example would be the Hartian “officials” who accept the rule of recognition that defines the sources of law. (*The Concept of Law*, 113-117) Another example would be the division of linguistic labour which makes that only ‘experts’ need to know the real nature of gold and in that way determine what the word “gold” stands for (Hilary Putnam, “The meaning of ‘meaning’”, in K. Gunderson (ed.), *Language, Mind and Knowledge*, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science vii. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1975, also in *Mind Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975, 215-271.

particular print can be indicated by re-describing this piece of textile as the national flag. The personal meaning of a photograph can be indicated by re-describing the photograph as a holiday memory. The rule-based (and also social) meaning of the fact that somebody carried a silver candle home can be indicated by re-describing this fact as the fact that a theft was committed. All three cases have in common that something – a fact or a thing, including an event – *counts as* something else, and that this something else inherently has a particular meaning.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the existence of a special vocabulary to re-describe the fact or event is often inspired by the wish to have means to easily express the presence of this meaning.

If something is re-described in order to make its meaning explicit, the fact or thing under its new description has inherently (part of) the meaning that the original fact or thing only had contingently. It is a contingent matter that a piece of textile with a print has a special meaning (e.g. of national pride) for most nationals of a state, but it is necessarily the case that a national flag has this meaning.<sup>16</sup> If a flag would not have this meaning, it would not be the national flag. That a particular photograph, e.g. of a boat trip, has meaning for somebody may be a contingent matter, but that a holiday memory has this meaning is necessarily the case, because otherwise it would not have been a holiday memory. That carrying home a silver candle (under 'suitable' circumstances) has meaning in the sense of having legal consequences may be a coincidence (dependent on the law that happens to exist, which must consider taking somebody else's property away as a crime), but that theft has this meaning is no such coincidence anymore, since without these consequences<sup>17</sup> it would not have been theft.



<sup>15</sup> I prefer the term “meaning” here over Searle’s term “status” (cf. John R Searle, *The construction of social reality*, New York: The Free Press 1995, 44,) because the word “status” has a ring of being official, while the meaning that I have in mind can be something very personal, as illustrated by the example of the photograph that has to some particular person (but not necessarily to others) the meaning of a holiday memory.

<sup>16</sup> For ease of exposition the possibility is ignored that the meaning of the flag is assigned by a rule and not necessarily shared by a majority of the nationals.

<sup>17</sup> The precise consequences are in this connection not important, but it is crucial for the existence of the phenomenon ‘theft’ that there are *some* legal consequences.



Interesting in this connection is that the facts as re-described sometimes given an indication what underlies their inherent meaning, but sometimes are merely indications of the meaning without indicating what gives them this meaning. If something is correctly described as a national flag, this makes not only clear that this flag has a special meaning for the nationals, but also that the bearer of this meaning is a piece of textile with some form of representation of the national colours or symbol. However, if something is described as a holiday memory, the meaning is clear, but what the carrier of this meaning is remains unspecified. Theft has in this respect more in common with a national flag than with a holiday memory. Later (in section 8) we will see that should- and ought-facts are merely indicators of behaviour guiding meaning, without specifying the carrier of this meaning.

### 3.4 Occam's razor

We see that some words have as their main function to specify the presence of meaning, without the need to indicate what is the carrier of this meaning, while other words make clear at the same time what carries the meaning and which meaning is carried. Both the words "affuage" and "agonyclite" belong to the latter category. They have sufficient 'descriptive meaning'<sup>18</sup> to make clear to which categories of brute facts they apply, but their function is to specify the meanings that wood cutting rights and people who pray standing had in the societies that made use of these now obsolete words.

Both categories of words have in common that they open up the possibility to have more facts than were originally available. Without the word "flag" there would still have been pieces of textile to which people attached a special meaning, but there would not have been flags, items that have this meaning inherently connected to their nature. And neither would there have been thieves next to persons to take silver candles home, break cars open, pick your wallet, etc. In fact, without the word "theft" and the meaning it expresses, it would be hard to see all these different cases of theft as being in some sense the same kind of thing. This is not to say that only the existence of the word "theft" makes it possible to see all these things as being 'essentially' the same; that would be too much honour for language. And yet the availability of the word "theft" makes it easier to recognise the similarity of all the different ways in which theft can be committed.

According to Occam's razor, we should not multiply kinds of entities without necessity.<sup>19</sup> And possibly at first sight, we could do without words that are especially coined to express the presence of meaning, and kinds of objects that are, at least in part, characterised by their meanings. However, if we deleted all these words from our language, how many nouns, verbs and predicates would be left? Are words not generally invented to stand for things that are in some way meaningful to language users? If 'ordinary' words, such as "sea", "cow", "mountain", "woman", and "spear" already stand for things with meaning, it is clear that languages as we know them cannot do without words that express inherent meanings. The world in which we live is full of meaningful entities and that is reflected in the vocabulary by means of which we describe it. The point of this section is that the relation between word and language is not one way, that the descriptive words of a language do not only describe pre-existing things and facts with contingent meanings, but that a rich ontology that goes together with a rich language that allows for the expression of meaning, makes it possible for the world to contain things and facts with inherent

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. R.M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1963, chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter Forrest, "Razor arguments", in Robin Le Poidevin, Peter Simons, Andrew McGonigal and Ross P. Cameron (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, London: Routledge 2009, 246-255.



meanings. In this sense, all of the world, including the 'objective' facts, is language and mind-dependent.

#### 4 PERSONAL REASONS FOR ACTING (GUIDING REASONS FOR A PERSON)

Reasons are facts<sup>20</sup> with inherent meaning. Depending on the kind of mental occurrences the awareness of these facts tend to cause, they are different kinds of reasons. Explanatory reasons, for instance, tend to cause understanding of the phenomena that they explain, epistemic reasons tend to create approval to beliefs people hold, constitutive reasons make that people tend to classify things also as other things, and reasons for acting (behaviour guiding reasons) tend to cause the motivation to act. At least, personal reasons for acting certainly have that latter disposition, while social and rule-based reasons for acting may have that disposition only to a lesser extent.

In this section and the following ones, I will use the above analysis of facts and their contingent and inherent meanings to give an analysis of reasons for acting in terms of a disposition to motivate behaviour. Moreover, building upon this analysis I will argue that the existence of duties and obligations is purely a matter of fact, just as it is a plain fact if somebody should or ought to do something. In this way I will give an account of normativity that gives it a firm place in the world of facts and things.

There are many kinds of reasons for acting. A well-known distinction is between behaviour guiding (justificatory) reasons, motivating reasons, and explanatory reasons.<sup>21</sup> But here I will focus on the distinction between personal, social and rule-based reasons, a subdivision of reasons which not coincidentally runs parallel with the distinction between personal, social and rule-based meaning. Personal behaviour guiding reasons are facts the awareness of which tends to cause a motivation to act (or to refrain from acting). Provisionally such a guiding reason may be defined as follows:

A fact F is a guiding reason for person P to  $\varphi$  if the awareness of facts like F (facts which belong to the same category as F) tend to motivate P to  $\varphi$ .

For example, the fact that the door is open is a guiding reason for Peter to close the door if the awareness of an open door tends to motivate O to close that door. Notice that what is falsely believed is not a fact and therefore cannot be a guiding reason. False beliefs may cause a motivation to act. For instance, if Gerald falsely believes that it is raining he may be motivated to carry an umbrella. But he does not have a reason to do so; he only believes that he has such a reason and that causes his motivation.

The provisional definition given above is too broad, because only those facts can be reasons for a person (personal reasons) of which the person in question knows that he is motivated by the awareness thereof.<sup>22</sup> Assume, for example, that Peter does not know that seeing an open door

---

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, London: Hutchinson 1975, 17; Maria Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons. An Essay in the Philosophy of Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons*, 33-36.

<sup>22</sup> Notice that this additional clause only holds for personal reasons, not for social reasons and a fortiori not for rule-based reasons. A legal duty is a reason for any legal subject, whether she is aware of it or not.

motivates him to close the door. Even if he were asked about it, he would deny the connection, or at least not be aware of it. Then the fact that a door is open is not a reason for Peter to close the door. To take this into account, the provisional definition must be narrowed down:

A fact  $F$  is a guiding reason for person  $P$  to  $\varphi$  if:

- a. the awareness of facts like  $F$  tends to motivate  $P$  to  $\varphi$ , and
- b.  $P$  knows that he is thus motivated.

In this connection it does not seem necessary that a person is conscious of being conditionally motivated; it suffices if she can recognise the motivation if asked about it.

However, the thus formulated definition is still too broad. Suppose that Peter knows that he is motivated to close doors which he is aware to be open, but that he considers this to be a compulsive reaction which he rather would not have had. Also then, the fact that a door is open is not a reason for Peter to close the door. A fact can only be a reason for a person if this person does *not object* against being motivated by the awareness of this kind of fact.

It may be asked whether this last demand should not be stronger. Shouldn't it be required that a person *agrees* with being motivated by the awareness of a guiding personal reason? Should Peter not agree with his disposition to be motivated by the awareness of an open door? The case seems to be a boundary one, but intuitively I would say that neutral awareness of being motivated suffices for the existence of a guiding reason. It is not necessary that the motivated person agrees with being motivated, if only she does not disagree when she realises to have this disposition.

If these amendments are taken into account, the definition of a guiding reason for a person would become the following:

A fact  $F$  is a reason for a person  $P$  to  $\varphi$ , if and only if:

- a.  $F$  belongs to a type of fact  $T$  such that the awareness of facts of type  $T$  tends to motivate  $P$  to  $\varphi$ ;
- b.  $P$  is aware of this tendency to be thus motivated; and
- c.  $P$  does not disagree with being thus motivated.

## 5 THE DEMANDS OF REASON

One may still ask whether a fact is a real reason for a person  $P$  if the fact's motivating force is brought about by beliefs that, contrary to what  $P$  knows, are false. Then  $P$  may even agree with being motivated by the awareness of such facts, but would not have been motivated if all his beliefs were true. For example, Peter believes, falsely, that open doors cause an unhealthy draught. This belief makes that he is motivated by the awareness of an open door to close the door. However, if he had known that open doors do not cause unhealthy draughts, he would not be motivated, or would have disagreed with the motivation.

This raises the general question to what extent personal reasons for acting depend on the rationality of the reasons.<sup>23</sup> The account above took its starting point in a person's disposition to be motivated and this person's approval (or absence of disapproval) of his own disposition to be motivated. This is basically an account of internal reasons as characterised by Williams<sup>24</sup>, an account that takes its starting point in the agent's "subjective motivational set". The question that needs to be addressed is whether this starting point should be subject to revision on the basis of the demands of reason, or even be completely replaced by these demands if the reasons are to be 'real' reasons.

## 5.1 Reason and motivation

At the beginning of every account of personal reasons for action should be the assumption that a person who is aware that he has a reason to act should at least be disposed to be motivated by this awareness. The resulting motivation may lose out in a battle with other motivations, but normally there should at least be some motivation to do what one knows to have reason to do.

So there should be a positive connection between the reasons a person has for acting and this person's disposition to be motivated. The demand that there must be such a connection seems to rule out the possibility that personal reasons for acting are exclusively based on reason, in a way that does not take this person's subjective motivational set into account.

Assume, by way of hypothesis, that the demands of critical morality are by definition those of reason, and that these demands (of reason) abstract from personal motivation. Then, if a person Peter is not motivated at all to comply with the demands of morality, the reasons identified by critical morality to act in a particular way are not reasons for Peter. The fact that complying with these demands would *ex hypothesi* be rational does not change that. The fact that some kind of behaviour is rational is then not a reason for Peter to perform that behaviour.

It may seem strange that the fact that some kind of action is the rational thing to do does not mean that a person P has a personal reason to perform that kind of action, but this strangeness is the consequence of the assumption that rationality is defined in abstraction from P's motivational set. Either rationality is defined – possibly only indirectly - in terms of a person's motivational set and then there is a connection between what it is rational for a person to do and this person's motivation to act. Or rationality is defined in complete abstraction from this set, and then a person does not need to have reason to act rationally. The assumption made at the beginning of this subsection, that a person who is aware that he has a reason to act should at least be disposed to be motivated by this awareness, makes the Kant-inspired<sup>25</sup> project of defining reasons for action in a way that does not depend on a person's motivation set an impossible one.

---

<sup>23</sup> A misguided disposition to be motivated can be the result of false beliefs, but also of faulty reasoning on the basis of true beliefs. For ease of exposition I will drop the possibility of faulty reasoning on the same heap as reasoning on the basis of false beliefs, although a more detailed account may wish to distinguish the cases.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" in his *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981, 101-113. Originally in Ross Harrison (ed.), *Rational Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980.

<sup>25</sup> I write "Kant-inspired", because the question whether this is really what Kant had in mind does not affect the present argument. Kant is only mentioned to make the reader aware of the (negative) relation of the present argument to Kant's attempt to define morality in a way that abstracts from personal inclinations. At least, this relation is negative on the assumption that moral reasons are reasons for acting. If they merely define what is morally required without demanding from agents that they do what is morally required (cf. Philippa Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives", in her *Virtues*

It is important to notice that the assumption about the relation between reasons for action and a person's motivational set only holds in the strong sense described above for personal reasons, for the reasons which a particular person has for acting. It does not need to hold for social reasons, including those of positive morality, for rule-based reasons, including most legal reasons, or for purely reason-based reasons if there are any.

## 5.2 Reasons and (rational) beliefs about reasons

There are two aspects to a reason. On the one hand a reason is a fact; non-facts cannot be reasons for a person. This might be called the 'objective' aspect of a reason. On the other hand reasons for acting have a special meaning for the person for whom they are reasons. This might be called the 'subjective' aspect of a reason. On both aspects of a reason an agent can err. She may falsely believe that a fact that would be a reason for her, actually obtains. And she may be motivated by the awareness of a fact even though she would not be thus motivated if she would have had better beliefs or would have taken her beliefs better into account.

Concerning the objective aspect of reasons we can be brief: if an agent errs in the sense that she falsely believes that a fact that would be a reason for her obtains, she falsely believes that she has a reason for action. For the presence of a personal reason it does not matter whether the agent is justified in believing that she has this reason. She may justifiably, and still falsely, believe that she has a personal reason for action.

A different question is whether the agent was justified in acting on the reason she falsely believed to be present. It seems that an agent who acted on a reason which she falsely but justifiably believed to obtain may have done the wrong thing, but was still justified in doing it. In this sense, the act itself was possibly not justified (was wrong), but the agent was justified in performing the act.

The subjective aspect of reasons is more complicated. Above we encountered the example of Peter who falsely believes that open doors cause an unhealthy draught. This belief makes that he is motivated by the awareness of an open door to close the door. However, if he had known that open doors do not cause unhealthy draughts, he would not be motivated, or would have disagreed with the motivation.

'Objectively' there is something wrong with Peter's disposition to be motivated, because it is the result of a false belief. However, since we are discussing the subjective aspect of reasons, it is questionable how important the 'objective' wrongness of the disposition is. Should we adopt the demand that all the beliefs which underlay a disposition to be motivated are true, or should this demand be relaxed into, for example, the demand that the motivated person is justified in believing everything that underlays his personal motivational set? Or should not even that demand be made, and should we be satisfied if an agent's personal motivational set coheres with his belief set as it actually is?

Similar complications arise if a person tends not to be motivated, although he would have been motivated if his beliefs had been correct.

To make this more concrete, the questions boil down to the following:

Does Peter have a reason to close the door if the door is open and if:

- a. Peter actually but falsely believes that open doors cause an unhealthy draught and is not justified in believing this and is motivated by this belief to close open doors? (type I)

---

*and Vices*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1978, 157-173), it may well be possible to define moral requirements in abstraction from personal motivational sets.

- b. Peter actually but falsely believes that open doors cause an unhealthy draught and is justified in believing this, and is motivated by this belief to close open doors? (type II)
- c. Peter actually but falsely believes that open doors do not cause an unhealthy draught and is not justified in believing this, and is therefore not motivated to close open doors? (type III)
- d. Peter actually but falsely believes that open doors do not cause an unhealthy draught and is justified in believing this, and is therefore not motivated to close open doors? (type IV)

Whereas a person's false beliefs concerning the 'objective' aspect of reasons apparently lead to false beliefs about the presence of reasons, false beliefs that influence a person's motivational set do not lead to an obvious verdict concerning the question whether this person has a reason for action. In order not to suggest clarity where there is none, the best solution might be to speak of "defective reasons" in the case of facts by which a person tends to be motivated as a consequence of false beliefs that underlay his motivational set. To distinguish between the four possible cases, we might use the specification "Type I defective reason", and so on ... Was the act of a person right if it was right in the light of all available reasons if the reason set contained defective reasons? From an outsiders perspective it was not, but from the perspective of the agent it may have been ...

The question whether an agent was justified in acting on the basis of defective reasons is more easy to answer. If an agent was justified in having the beliefs that caused his wrong motivation set, that is in the case of defective beliefs of the types II and IV, then he was also justified in acting on the defective reasons. If the agent was not justified in having the beliefs that caused his wrong motivation set, that is in the case of defective beliefs of the types I and III, then he was not justified in acting on the defective reasons.

## 6 SOCIAL REASONS<sup>26</sup>

Assume that Diana does not trust weather forecasts. Therefore she is not motivated to believe that it will rain in the afternoon if the morning weather forecast predicts it. Diana is exceptional for the society in which she lives. Almost everybody in her society trusts weather forecasts, especially those which regard the same day. Moreover, almost everybody expects others to trust the weather forecasts too. They would, for example not take seriously the excuse of a person who explained his absence from an open air meeting by his expectation that there would be thunder storms, if the weather forecast was positive.

If the facts are as in this example, the fact that the weather forecast predicted rain for the afternoon is in Diana's society a reason to believe that it will rain in the afternoon, but it is not such a reason for Diana.<sup>27</sup> People may accuse Diana of being irrational, but from Diana's point of view such an accusation does not have to be correct. It may be the case that Diana's lack of trust is embedded in a comprehensive set of beliefs, attitudes etc., held by Diana, which is coherent. It may also be that all the other people are irrational, but that does not have to be the case either. It is very well possible that a person is motivated in a different way than other persons while nei-

<sup>26</sup> This section was adapted from Jaap Hage, "The deontic furniture of the world", in Jerzy Stelmach and Bartosz Brożek (eds.), *The Normativity of Law*, Kraków: Copernicus Press 2011, 73-114, (section 3.3).

<sup>27</sup> The example deals with reasons to believe and is therefore epistemic. However, I do not think that reasons to believe are fundamentally different from other guiding reasons, and therefore this epistemic example can very well fulfil its function.

ther this person nor the others are irrational. In such a situation, what is a guiding reason for one person does not have to be a guiding reason for the group, or – to state it in the terminology which will be used from now on – it does not have to be a *social reason*.

A fact is a *social reason* in group G if and only if

- a. this fact is a personal reason for sufficiently many members of G, and
- b. sufficiently many members of G believe that this fact is a personal reason for sufficiently many members of G,
- c. sufficiently many members of G expect from other members of G that this kind of fact is a personal reason for them.<sup>28</sup>

If a social reason in a group is not a personal reason for some person (from this group), this person may be said not to take the internal point of view towards this reason. For facts of a particular kind to count as social reasons in a group, it is normally necessary that sufficiently many group members take the internal point of view towards these reasons.<sup>29</sup>

If facts of a particular kind are considered to be guiding reasons by most of the group members, it may be said that a social rule exists in this group. For example, if most inhabitants of a municipality consider the fact that it is Sunday as a reason not to participate in sport activities, then in this municipality the social rule exists that one should not participate in sport activities on Sundays. According to the rules of the group, nobody should participate in sport activities on Sundays. The rules define what should (not) be done, even for persons who did not internalise them. These persons might say that according to the rules they should not sport on Sundays, but that they do not care.

A group may have special concepts by means of which the behaviour guiding meaning of certain facts can be made explicit. To elaborate the example of the sport activities on Sundays, it might be the case that the religion to which almost all inhabitants of the municipality adhere forbids sport on Sundays and on a number of other special days. Those days are called “sport free days” within the municipality, and where the fact that it is Sunday may have had the negative motivating meaning contingently, the fact that it is a sport free day has this same meaning inherently.

Another example would be the social rule that soldiers should not flee at the approach of the enemy. The combined facts that one is a soldier and that the enemy approaches contingently has the negative behaviour guiding meaning that one should not flee. To have a word that expresses this kind of meaning, the group might coin the word “cowardice” to evaluate the behaviour of fleeing soldiers. Cowardice inherently has the meaning that soldiers fleeing at the approach of the enemy contingently has. Of course there may be other ways of behaving cowardly, and these other forms of behaviour count as cowardice too. This goes to show that different forms of behaviour share contingently the social meaning which is inherently present in cowardice.

It is important to notice in this connection that on the one hand facts of a particular kind of may count as social reasons within a social group, while a member of this group nevertheless tends not to be motivated by facts of this kind, and that, on the other hand, social guiding reasons and

---

<sup>28</sup> This definition is inspired by similar definitions of existence in social reality, which can be found in, for instance, Tuomela's paper “Shared we-attitudes” in Raimo Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality. The shared point of view*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010, 65-82.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 89-99.



mandatory social rules are still defined in terms of motivation to act on these reasons, be it indirectly.

A direct outflow from this is that an act may be wrong in the light of the standards that prevail within a social group (e.g. wrong according to positive morality), while being right in the light of the standards used by a deviant group member. Abortion without urgent medical reasons in a mainly catholic country may be a case in point. It would be wrong according to positive morality, but an individual may sincerely believe that according to critical morality it may be right in some cases. One question is then whether such an act is 'really' wrong, and perhaps more interesting is the question is whether the first question makes sense if it means to abstract from a particular set of standards.

## 7. RULE-BASED REASONS

Guiding reasons can be based on social rules, and then they are social reasons as discussed above. However, it is also possible that they are based on rules which exist themselves as a matter of rule-based fact. The classic example in this connection is Hart's account of the manner in which a legal system exists. A legal system as a whole is founded in social reality because there are social rules which define this system and which are accepted by the members of a group, or – in case of a division of law-identifying labour – by the designated members of the group (Hart's "officials") . Legal rules exist if they are elements of an actually existing legal system, and a legal system exists if both its founding rules are accepted by the members of a group (Hart's criterion that the Ultimate Rule of Recognition must exist as a social rule<sup>30</sup>) and most of the rules of this system are accepted as giving reasons for action by most of the group members (Kelsen's criterion that a legal system must be by and large effective).<sup>31</sup>

Mandatory legal rules define what are legal reasons for action. They do so mainly by imposing legal duties on particular categories of agents, and by attaching legal obligations to the occurrence of certain events. Let us take a closer look at legal duties at the hand of the rule that car drivers must carry a driver's license. Assume that this is a valid legal rule for the reason that it was created by the Queen in Parliament. The rule imposes on all car drivers the duty to carry a driver's license. In doing so, it makes all facts of the type "P is a car driver" into a legal reason why P is under a duty to carry a driver's license, and thus indirectly into a legal reason for Peter to carry a driver's license.

Given the existence of this rule, the fact that Peter is a car driver has a particular meaning in the law; it is legally relevant, or – to say it differently - it is an operative fact in law. That this fact has this meaning is a contingent matter. The rule might not have existed, and then the fact that Peter is a car driver would not have had this meaning in law. However, the rule does exist, and the fact has this meaning in law, and therefore Peter is under a legal duty to carry a driver's license.

The fact that Peter is under a duty to carry a driver's license has also a particular meaning in the law; it is a reason for Peter to act accordingly. But the fact that Peter is under a duty has its meaning inherently. It could not exist without having the legal meaning it actually has. If the rule that car drivers have the duty to carry a license would not have existed, the legal meaning would of course be absent, but so would the fact that Peter is under a duty. The behaviour guiding

---

<sup>30</sup> Hart, *The Concept of Law*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Kelsen, *Reine Rechtslehre*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vienna: Franz Deuticke 1960, 215-221.

meaning that was contingently and indirectly attached to the fact that Peter is a car driver is inherently and directly attached to the fact that Peter is under a duty to carry a driver's license.

Notice that the facts that Peter is a car driver and that he is under a duty to carry a driver's license are not independent reasons for Peter to carry a license. There is only one direct reason and that is the fact that Peter is under a duty to carry a driver's license. The other fact (that Peter is a car driver) is a direct reason for the presence of the duty for Peter to carry a driver's license, and only indirectly a reason for Peter to carry the license.

Notice also that the fact that Peter is under a duty to carry a driver's license abstracts from the ground of the behaviour guiding meaning. The duty as such does not indicate whence it derives. It may derive from the fact that Peter is a car driver, but it may also derive from the fact that he participates in the traffic on a Sunday, under the assumption that persons who participate in the traffic on a Sunday have the duty to carry their driver's licenses.

For legal obligations the situation is analogous to that for legal duties. We start from the rule that unlawful acts obligate the agent to compensate the damage of those whose legally protected interest were violated by these acts. Let us assume that Peter unlawfully caused a car accident as a consequence of which Geraldine suffered €1000 damage. The rule directly attaches to this event the legal consequence that Peter is under an obligation to pay Geraldine €1000. It has this meaning contingently, since the rule might not have existed. The existence of this obligation is a legal reason for Peter to compensate Geraldine's damage. The obligation has this behaviour guiding meaning inherently. The meaning would have been absent if the rule would not have existed, but then the obligation would not have existed either.

Analogous to the example about the duty to carry a driver's license, the obligation in the present example is the direct reason why Peter should pay Geraldine €1000, and the fact that he unlawfully caused a car accident as a consequence of which Geraldine suffered €1000 damage is the indirect reason. The indirect reason has its behaviour guiding meaning contingently, while the direct reason (the obligation) has this meaning inherently. Moreover, the obligation itself abstracts from the ground on which it rests. From the fact that Peter is under an obligation to pay Geraldine €1000 it cannot be inferred that this obligation was based on a tort, rather than on a contract.

## 8. SHOULD- AND OUGHT-FACTS

Above we have encountered three kinds of meaning, personal, social, and rule-based, and three corresponding kinds of reasons for acting. All three kinds of reasons for action are somehow connected to the motivation to act. The connection is quite direct in the case of personal reasons, since a person who is aware of the presence of a personal reason will by definition tend to be motivated to act accordingly. It is less direct in the case of social reasons, and even more indirect in the case of (other) rule-based reasons. An agent who recognises the presence of a social or rule-based reason for action may still ask whether she should act accordingly, since it is not on beforehand given that she internalised the rule on which the reason is based: the reason does not have to be a reason for her personally.

An agent who is engaged in practical reasoning, for instance wondering whether to close the door, should, if she is fully rational, only be influenced by facts which are personal reasons for her. These facts may also be social or other rule-based reasons, but that does not have to be the case. What this agent should do depends only on the presence and balance of personal reasons. It is personal reasons which define what an agent should do. Every personal reason for an agent

to  $\varphi$  is a reason why the agent should  $\varphi$ . The fact that an agent should  $\varphi$  is the result of the interaction of all this agent's personal reasons for and against  $\varphi$ -ing. As a consequence, a should-fact is not a reason for action itself, but a fact that summarises the rational outcome of the existing personal reasons for action.

Apart from reasoning about what she should do, an agent may also reason about what she ought to do. These two are not the same.<sup>32</sup> Ought-facts are the result of all ought-reasons, and ought-reasons may include personal reasons, but will often be social reasons or other rule-based reasons. The meaning of ought-facts includes an element of 'second-personality'<sup>33</sup>, the idea that other persons, but possibly also the agent herself, can claim the behaviour which the agent ought to perform from the agent. Typical examples of ought-reasons are moral and legal reasons. Just like a should-fact, an ought-fact is not an additional reason for action, but it summarises the rational outcome of the existing ought-reasons for action.

Although should- and ought-judgments and the should- and ought-facts which they express may not exhaust the space of normativity, they cover a sufficiently wide range of this space to justify the conclusion that insight into the nature of these judgments and facts provides us with insight into the nature of normativity. If the above argument cuts ice, the insight that we have gained is that normativity is a layer of meaning that is imposed on relatively brute facts<sup>34</sup> in the shape of new facts with inherent meaning, and that this meaning can in last instance be defined in terms of dispositions to have certain associations. This "in last instance" is an important clause, because important categories of meaning are based on social or rule-based rules. Then the distance from the meaning to dispositions to have certain associations can be quite big. But even when the distance is big, the relation is still present and it is this relation which makes it possible to assign normativity its place in the world of 'ordinary' facts.

## 9.     NORMATIVITY AS YARDSTICK

The argument until now has focused on the question how the sphere of normativity can be embedded in the world of facts. This still leaves the question open how normativity can function as a yardstick for the evaluation of facts and acts.

In case somebody *ought* to do something on the basis of social or rule-based rules, the question is relatively easy to answer. The presence of an ought-fact, if somebody ought to do something, provides this person with guidance for his acts, and acts that have already been performed can be evaluated as right or wrong for the reasons that they were or were not in accordance with what the agent ought to do. That it is relatively easy in case of social or rule-based rules is because in that case the 'distance' between what a person ought to do and what he is motivated to do is relatively big. There is no guarantee at all that an agent will be motivated to do what he morally or legally ought to do, and the difference between "is" and "ought" is quite obvious.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> I have argued that they are not the same in *The Deontic Furniture of the World*. There I also pointed out that my assignment of meaning to the words "should" and "ought" is to some extent stipulative.

<sup>33</sup> See Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint. Morality, Respect and Accountability*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1996, chapter 1.

<sup>34</sup> If my argument above is correct, there are no purely brute facts, because even the most ordinary facts are expressed by means of words that derive their usefulness from the meanings of the facts that they are used to describe. To state it in a slogan: "Everything has meaning".

<sup>35</sup> It is obvious in the sense that there is a difference between what an agent ought to do and what he actually does. It is not obvious in the sense that what an agent ought to do is obviously not an "is". In

More complicated is the relation between what an agent *should* do and what he actually does. If Peter should close the door and in fact does not do so, something went 'wrong'. But what exactly? Let us assume that Peter merely should have closed the door and that he was not under a duty or an obligation to do so. That he should close the door means that there was a fact the awareness of which normally would have motivated Peter to close the door. If Peter actually does not close the door, he may not have been aware of the fact. In that case he did not know that he should close the door. But still he did something 'wrong', be it unknowingly and perhaps also blamelessly. So the should-fact still functions as a yardstick here; it is a standard for the agent's actual behaviour, although possibly not for the agent as a rational person.

If Peter was aware of the fact which made that he should close the door and still did not close the door, there are two main possibilities. The first is that Peter was not at all motivated by this awareness. Then there are again two possibilities. The first is that there were in the present case exceptional circumstances which made that Peter did not attach the meaning to the fact which he normally would have attached to it. For example, Peter was in a room without windows, so the open door could not cause a draught. Then the open door did not even constitute a reason for Peter and there was nothing 'wrong' in what he did. It was not the case that he should close the door and the issue of the should being a yardstick does not play.

The second possibility is that somehow the motivating mechanism that 'translates' Peter's awareness of an open door into the motivation to close the door did not work. Peter may have been distracted, or perhaps his will was weak. In these cases we can charge Peter with irrational behaviour, and the should-fact (Peter really should have closed the door) does function as a yardstick against which Peter's behaviour can be evaluated. In this case it is even possible to evaluate Peter as a rational agent.

The second main possibility is that Peter was motivated by his awareness of the open door, but that this motivation had to give in against the stronger motivation not to close the door. Perhaps it was very hot and Peter was willing to take the risk of an unhealthy draft in order to cool down a little. If Peter balanced these reasons wrongly, he still should have closed the door and his behaviour was still wrong: the should-fact functions as a yardstick. If Peter balanced the reasons correctly, he should not have closed the door. His actual behaviour was conform what he should do and the should-fact can function as a yardstick, this time leading to a positive judgement with regard to Peter's behaviour.

The general conclusion to be drawn from these cases is that should-facts also function as yardsticks against which a person's behaviour can be measured. The result is a judgement of the rationality of this behaviour. There is no automatic translation from such a judgement to a judgement about the rationality of the agent. It is possible that an agent was not irrational, even though his behaviour was, for instance if the agent was justified in entertaining the false belief that there was no reason why he should act in a particular way.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to give an account of the world and the facts in it that makes room for normativity as element of the world, under the recognition that norms must function as yardsticks by means of which the world can be evaluated. Has this purpose been achieved? If the

---

order to obtain clarity about that issue, we need a good definition that delineates "is" from what is not an "is". Such a definition is presently lacking, or at least the present author has never encountered one.

argument that was presented in the previous sections is more or less sound, I think that it has been achieved. By adopting a 'rich' ontology that allows facts with inherent meaning, including inherent behaviour guiding meaning, the possibility was opened for the existence of normative facts, should- and ought-facts. In this way, normativity was given a place in the world of facts. Moreover, it turned out that it can still function as a yardstick for behaviour.

Admittedly the creation of this possibility for normativity to reside in the world of facts has gone at a cost, namely the cost of abandoning a world of completely mind-independent facts. Whether this is a big cost is doubtful. The idea that the real world is mind-independent has always been more of a methodical starting point for a kind of science than a testable, let alone provable thesis about the nature of reality. This idea excludes not only the sphere of normativity, but also all of social reality from the 'real world'. As a methodical starting point for a particular kind of science, e.g. physics or chemistry, this may be a fruitful and therefore justified approach, but as an ontological theory about the 'true' nature of reality it has little to speak for it. Therefore the cost of abandoning a world of completely mind-independent facts does not outweigh the advantage of having a naturalist account of normativity.