

Grounding the Domains of Reasons

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Abstract: A good account of normative reasons should not only explain what makes practical and epistemic reasons a unified kind of thing, but also why practical and epistemic reasons are substantively different kinds of reasons that underlie importantly different categories of normative assessment and exhibit different weighing behaviors. I argue that a disjunctive account of normative reasons according to which practical and epistemic reasons have very different grounds (what I call the Different Source View) can do both of these jobs, unlike some prominent, unified alternative accounts. And the viability of this view has significant implications for metanormative theorizing: it implies that the answer to certain metanormative questions may differ between the practical and epistemic domains.

1. Introduction

The same normative terms and properties can be found within both ethics and epistemology: there are both practical and epistemic reasons and values, an act or attitude may be what one practically ought to do or what one epistemically ought to do, and an agent may be practically or epistemically rational. This observation has led many philosophers to recast metaethical questions as *metanormative* ones: questions about the semantics, metaphysics, and epistemology of normativity, more broadly, including both the practical and epistemic domains. And this seems to presuppose that what we should be after in metaethics is an answer to these metanormative questions that is equally plausible with respect to both domains of normativity. Indeed, some explicitly argue that a metaethical theory is only as good as its epistemic counterpart. For example, Cuneo (2007) argues that because an anti-realist view is implausible with respect to epistemic normativity, ethical anti-realism must be false too.

This line of thought is especially prevalent in the literature on normative reasons. Many metaethicists think that a good account of normative reasons should be equally plausible with respect to both practical and epistemic reasons.¹ But, as I explain in §2, while there are important similarities between epistemic and practical reasons, which suggest that they are a unified kind of thing, epistemic and practical reasons also seem to be substantively different kinds of reasons that underlie different categories of assessment – namely, practical and theoretical rationality. Moreover, epistemic reasons are interdependent in ways that practical reasons are not, and consequently, epistemic reasons weigh against

¹ Broome (2004), Kearns & Star (2008), (2009), Parfit (2011), Scanlon (2014), Schroeder (2007), Street (2009), and Thomson (2008).

one another differently than practical reasons do. So, a good account of normative reasons should not only explain what practical and epistemic reasons have in common, but it should also explain what makes them substantively different kinds of normative reasons that have these different weighing behaviors.

In §3 and §4, I consider two prominent views of normative reasons that offer a unified metaphysical account of practical and epistemic reasons. I argue that, while these views may offer some explanation for the similarities between practical and epistemic reasons, they fail to explain their differences. Then, in §5 I argue that a more disjunctive metaphysical account of normative reasons, according to which epistemic and practical reasons have very different *grounds* (i.e. metaphysical explanations), can do both of these jobs. Showing that this is a viable view is important because it has significant upshots for metanormative inquiry: it implies that the answers to certain metanormative questions may differ between the practical and epistemic domains.

2. The Desiderata

Practical reasons are facts like the following that *count in favor of* (or against) doing some action or having some attitude:

- (1_p) The fact that Pam is in the emergency room is a reason for Jim to leave the office.
- (2_p) The fact that Dwight is in a bad mood is a reason for Jim to leave the office.
- (3_p) The fact that it's Michael's birthday is a reason for Jim to stay at the office.

As these examples illustrate, practical reasons include both moral and prudential reasons, and they have different weights or strengths, which weigh against one another and determine what one ought to do. For example, while the reasons in (1_p) and (2_p) are both reasons for Jim to leave the office, the reason in (1_p) is much stronger than the reason in (2_p), and the reasons in (1_p) and (2_p) collectively outweigh the reason in (3_p). So, assuming there are no other reasons in play, (1_p)-(3_p) make it the case that Jim ought to leave.

And while (1_p)-(3_p) are true regardless of whether Jim is aware of it, the reasons in (1_p)-(3_p) are facts that Jim could be aware of and would then be reasons that Jim *has* in the sense that they would

matter to whether it is rational for Jim to leave the office.² The reasons in (1_P)-(3_P) are also considerations that Jim may leave or stay in the office *for*. And if Jim were to leave the office for the reasons in (1_P) and (2_P), Jim himself would be justified or rational in doing so. Practical reasons thus not only determine the normative status of a particular action (or attitude), but they also determine the normative status of the agent in performing that action (or having that attitude).

But there are also epistemic reasons, which have similar features and play the same roles in determining the normative statuses of agents and their attitudes:

- (1_E) The fact that it's Kevin's birthday is a reason for Pam to believe that there will be cake in the break room.
- (2_E) The fact that the party planning committee is on strike is a reason for Pam to believe that there will not be cake in the break room.
- (3_E) The fact that it's Michael's birthday is a reason for Pam to believe that there will be cake in the break room.

These facts, too, *count in favor of* (or against) having some attitude with a certain weight or strength, and they weigh against one another and determine what one *epistemically* ought to do. For example, the reason in (2_E) seems to outweigh the reason in (1_E) for believing that there will be cake in the break room. But since Michael is a narcissistic boss, who would be sure to bring cake for his own birthday no matter what, the reason in (3_E) outweighs the reason in (2_E). So, assuming no other reasons are in play, (1_E)-(3_E) make it the case that Pam epistemically ought to believe that there will be cake.

Moreover, (1_E)-(3_E) are also true regardless of whether Pam is aware of any of these reasons. But the epistemic reasons in (1_E)-(3_E) are facts that Pam could become aware of, in which case they would be reasons that Pam *has* in the sense that they determine what belief is epistemically justified or rational for Pam to have about whether there will be cake. And these reasons are also considerations that Pam may hold some belief *for*: she may believe that there will be cake in the break room for the reasons in (1_E) and (3_E), in which case Pam herself would be epistemically justified or rational in doing so. Epistemic reasons thus also determine the normative status of one's beliefs and the normative status of the agent in having

² It's controversial whether *having* a reason (in the sense relevant to rationality) amounts to there being a reason and one's *possessing* this reason in some way (e.g. by being aware of it). For discussion, see Schroeder (2008) and Lord (2010). Nothing I say here bears on this debate, though.

that belief. Practical and epistemic reasons thus have important similarities that make them seem like a unified kind of thing: normative reasons.

But practical and epistemic reasons also seem importantly different. The reasons in (1_E)-(3_E) seem distinctly *epistemic*, whereas the reasons in (1_P)-(3_P) seem distinctly *practical*. This is not simply a difference between certain kinds of facts, since the very same fact can be both a practical reason and an epistemic reason (e.g. (3_P) and (3_E)). And the relevant sense in which practical and epistemic reasons are different in kind is not the trivial sense in which, for example, health reasons and career reasons are “different kinds of reasons”. That is, practical and epistemic reasons seem like non-arbitrary domains of normative reasons that underlie significant categories of normative assessment – that of theoretical and practical rationality. So, when we talk of what one *epistemically* ought to do or what one *practically* ought to do, we carve normativity at its joints more so than we do when we talk of, for example, what one ought to do health-wise or what one ought to do career-wise. The latter sort of talk just restricts the contextually relevant domain of reasons to some arbitrary subset of normative reasons, whereas the former sort of talk seems to restrict the contextually relevant reasons to privileged domains of normative reasons. So, a good account of normative reasons should not just explain what practical and epistemic reasons have in common, but it should also explain what makes them substantively different kinds of reasons.

I admit this second desideratum is somewhat controversial. It’s denied by *eliminativists* about epistemic normativity who claim that there really are no distinctly epistemic normative reasons, and that all reasons like (1_E)-(3_E) above are really just practical reasons.³ But I’m going to set this view aside and simply assume what I take to be an attractive picture of epistemic reasons: that they are genuine normative reasons, but nonetheless importantly distinct from practical reasons such that they give rise to a different flavor of ‘ought’s and rationality (so to speak). So, the best way to understand my project here is as a conditional one: to specify what account of normative reasons we should adopt, if we want to vindicate this picture.

Less controversially, though, I take a good account of normative reasons to be one that also explains two important differences between how practical and epistemic reasons behave. First, epistemic reasons are interdependent in ways that practical reasons are not: epistemic reasons in favor of believing *p* are necessarily epistemic reasons against believing not-*p*, and epistemic reasons in favor of believing not-*p* are necessarily epistemic reasons against believing *p*. For example, the fact that it’s Kevin’s birthday is a reason to believe there will be cake and a reason against believing there will not be cake. And the fact

³ This view is defended by Gluer & Wikforss (2013), Papineau (2013), and Rinard (2017).

that the party planning committee is on strike is a reason for believing that there will not be cake and a reason against believing that there will be cake.⁴

But practical reasons are not necessarily interdependent in this way. First, practical reasons in favor of doing some action ϕ are not necessarily practical reasons against not- ϕ ing. For example, suppose Pam likes chocolate cake and both Michael and Kevin's birthday cakes are chocolate, but Pam can only have one slice. The fact that Michael's birthday cake is chocolate is a reason for Pam to have a slice of Michael's cake. But it's not a reason against having a slice of Kevin's chocolate birthday cake instead.

And practical reasons in favor of having some attitude A toward some object o are not necessarily reasons against having A toward not-o. For example, suppose (counter-fictionally) that Pam is equally good friends with Jim and Dwight, and both are being considered for the position of Assistant Regional Manager. If Jim were to get the promotion, it would make him happy, but since Dwight is Jim's rival, Jim's happiness would thereby make Dwight equally unhappy. The fact that being promoted would make Jim happy is presumably a reason for Pam to desire that Jim gets the job. But the fact that being promoted would make Jim happy is not a reason *against* desiring that Jim doesn't get the job. Rather, since Jim's happiness would make Dwight equally unhappy, and Dwight is an equally good friend of Pam's, the fact that being promoted would make Jim happy is a reason for Pam to desire that Jim does not get the job.

I am not claiming here that practical reasons are *never* interdependent. I'm only claiming that practical reasons are *not necessarily* interdependent: whether a practical reason for ϕ ing is also a practical reason against not- ϕ ing depends on the circumstances. Whereas it seems that all epistemic reasons for believing p are necessarily reasons against believing not-p and vice versa.

The interdependency of epistemic reasons for belief does not seem to be explained simply by the nature of belief. This is because, *if* there were practical reasons for belief, they would behave like other practical reasons. For example, suppose that Jim promises to pay Pam \$100 if she believes that Jim will get the job and Dwight promises to pay Pam \$100 if she believes that Jim won't get the job. If there are practical reasons for belief, the fact that Jim will pay Pam \$100 is a practical reason for her to believe that Jim will get the job, but it's not a reason against believing that Jim won't get the job. (To be clear, though, I'm not assuming that there *are* practical reasons for belief. I intend my desiderata to be neutral about the objects of practical and epistemic reasons.)

The second, related, difference between practical and epistemic reasons is that they exhibit different balancing behaviors. When there are equally strong epistemic reasons for believing p and for

⁴ Thanks to Selim Berker for pointing this out to me.

believing not- p , one (epistemically) ought to suspend belief with respect to whether p .⁵ For example, if the fact that it's Kevin's birthday is an equally strong reason to believe that there will be cake as the fact that the party planning committee is on strike is a reason to believe there won't be, and there are no other reasons in play, then Pam (epistemically) ought to suspend belief about this. When referring to this phenomenon, I will say that epistemic reasons for belief *balance toward suspension*.⁶

Practical reasons, on the other hand, balance differently. When there are equally strong practical reasons to desire p as there are to desire not- p , it seems that one ought to do both, if possible. For example, if Jim's happiness would cause Dwight to be equally unhappy, and Pam is equally good friends with both of them, then the fact that being promoted would make Jim happy is an equally strong reason for Pam to desire that Jim gets the job as it is for her to desire that Jim does not get the job. But it seems that what Pam ought to do is desire that Jim gets the job (for Jim's sake) *and* desire that Jim does not get the job (for Dwight's sake), rather than have neither of these desires. After all, she would not be a good friend to both of them unless she has both of these desires.⁷

When the practical reasons for doing some action ϕ are equally strong as the practical reasons for not- ϕ -ing, though, one ought to do *either* ϕ or not- ϕ . For example, if the fact that Dwight is in a bad mood is an equally strong reason to leave the office as the fact that it's Michael's birthday is a reason to stay (and there are no other reasons in play), then Jim is permitted to either leave or stay. This difference between how practical reasons for action and practical reasons for attitudes balance out, though, is explained simply by the fact that the relevant alternatives in the case of action are not copossible, whereas the relevant alternatives in the case of attitudes are. Jim is permitted to either leave or stay at the office, rather than required to do both simply because Jim cannot do both. But Pam ought to both desire that Jim gets the promotion and desire that he doesn't because she has sufficient reasons for each desire and she can desire both.

Importantly, the interdependency of epistemic reasons for belief seems to explain why they balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not. Because epistemic reasons for believing p are necessarily reasons against believing not- p and vice versa, when there are equally strong epistemic reasons for believing p as there are for believing not- p , there are also equally strong epistemic reasons *against*

⁵ Berker (forthcoming), Dancy (2004: 95), Feldman (2000: 680-1).

⁶ I'm only making a claim about epistemic reasons *for belief* here. One might think that there are epistemic reasons for action and other attitudes, and that such reasons balance differently. My desiderata is neutral about this, but I revisit the issue in §4.

⁷ Likewise, if there are practical reasons for belief, they also do not balance toward suspension. In the case where Jim will give Pam \$100 if she believes that he will be promoted and Dwight will give her \$100 if she believes that Jim won't be promoted, then Pam ought to both believe both, so that she will get \$200. Berker (forthcoming) makes this point as well.

believing p and *against* believing not- p . These reasons thereby cancel each other out, making it such that there is neither sufficient reason to believe p nor sufficient reason to believe not- p , and thus that one ought to do neither and instead suspend judgment with respect to p . On the other hand, when there are equally strong practical reasons to desire p as there are to desire not- p , for example, this does not entail that there are also equally strong reasons against desiring p and against desiring not- p . In such cases, then, one has sufficient reason to desire p *and* sufficient reason to desire not- p , and so, one should do both. Any account of normative reasons that explains why epistemic reasons for belief are necessarily interdependent, while practical reasons are not, will also thereby explain why epistemic reasons for belief balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not.

So, in sum, a good account of normative reasons should explain (a) what practical and epistemic reasons have in common that makes them both normative reasons, but also (b) what makes them substantively different and (c) why they have different weighing behaviors. In §3 and §4, I argue that two prominent metaphysical views about normative reasons, which offer a unified treatment of practical and epistemic reasons, can explain (a), but fail to explain both (b) and (c). I then argue in §5 that a more disjunctive metaphysical account can explain all three desiderata.

But first, one clarification: practical and epistemic reasons are just ordinary facts, like the fact that Dwight is in a bad mood or the fact that it's Kevin's birthday, that bear a normative relation to an action or attitude.⁸ But a metaphysical account of practical and epistemic reasons is not an account of these ordinary facts, but an account of the normative relations that such facts bear: it's an account of what those relations are and what grounds that a particular fact bears those relations.

3. The Different Objects View

According to the first view, practical and epistemic reasons bear the very same normative relation – let's call it the *reason relation* – but they bear this relation to different objects. Namely, epistemic reasons bear this relation to *doxastic* attitudes (i.e. beliefs, credences, suspending judgment, etc.), whereas practical reasons bear this relation to actions and non-doxastic attitudes like desires, intentions, etc. Let's call this the *Different Objects View*.

Parfit (2011) endorses this view while also suggesting that the reason relation is a primitive, fundamental normative relation. But the Different Objects View is also compatible with other views about the reason relation. For example, one might think that epistemic and practical reasons are

⁸ One might take “facts” here to be states of affairs (e.g. Dancy (2000)) or true propositions (e.g. Schroeder (2007)), and one might also take the relata of these relations to include a circumstance and a time (e.g. Scanlon (2014)).

differentiated by their objects, while also holding that what it is for a fact to bear the reason relation to some object ϕ is for it to indicate that ϕ ing is correct, given the constitutive standards of correctness for objects of ϕ 's kind (Thomson (2008)). Or, one may endorse the Different Objects View while holding that what grounds the fact that R is a normative reason for S to ϕ is that R explains why S's ϕ ing would promote some value v (e.g. Maguire (2016)).

Regardless of what one claims about the reason relation itself, the Different Objects View makes two substantive claims about the objects of epistemic and practical reasons: first, that there cannot be practical reasons for doxastic attitudes, and second, that there cannot be epistemic reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes. So, defending the Different Objects View requires insisting that alleged practical reasons for belief are really practical reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes, and that alleged epistemic reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes are really practical reasons. For example, defenders of the Different Objects View must insist that, if Jim will pay Pam \$100 to believe that he'll be promoted, this is not a practical reason for Pam to *believe* that Jim will be promoted, but is instead a practical reason for Pam to *desire* or to *cause* herself to have that belief.⁹ And defenders of the Different Objects View must also insist that, if one's evidence is equally split between p and not- p , one may have a practical reason to gather (and desire) more evidence, but not an epistemic one.

I set aside the issue of whether these substantive claims are plausible here, since my main aim is to determine whether the Different Objects View can explain the desiderata outlined in §2. With respect to the first desideratum, the Different Objects View looks promising: on this view, practical and epistemic reasons are both facts that bear the very same normative relation – the reason relation. This explains why they are a unified kind of thing that play the same roles in determining the normative statuses of agents and their acts and attitudes.

But whether this view can explain the weights of practical and epistemic reasons depends on what supplemental view one holds about the reason relation. If the reason relation is fundamental, then it is presumably also fundamental that it admits of degrees. And while the relative weights of particular, contingent practical and epistemic reasons (e.g. the fact that it's Michael's birthday and the fact that Dwight is in a bad mood) might be explainable in terms of more general, necessary principles about the relative weights of general types of reasons (e.g. that reasons to support one's colleagues are weightier than reasons to avoid minor annoyances), these more general principles would presumably be

⁹ Parfit (2011) argues precisely that. See Leary (2016) for criticisms of this view.

fundamental, on this view. So, Parfit's (2011) version of the Different Objects View ultimately cannot offer a full explanation for why practical and epistemic reasons have the weights that they do.

But other versions of the Different Objects View that take facts about reasons to be fully grounded in further facts – specifically, further facts that admit of degrees – can fare better here. For example, if what grounds the fact that R is a normative reason for S to ϕ is that R explains why S's ϕ ing would promote some value v, then presumably we can explain R's weight in terms of the degree to which v would be promoted and the degree to which R plays an explanatory role in this.

With respect to the remaining desiderata, however, the Different Objects View does a poor job. First, consider whether this view captures the picture of practical and epistemic reasons as substantively different kinds of reasons that underlie significant categories of normative assessment. According to the Different Objects View, epistemic reasons are simply reasons for doxastic attitudes, whereas practical reasons are reasons for everything else. But doxastic attitudes are just one category of a myriad of attitudes for which there are normative reasons. And it's unclear what is so special about doxastic attitudes that makes distinguishing between reasons for them and reasons for everything else a more natural way of carving up normativity than, for example, distinguishing between reasons for conative attitudes and reasons for everything else. So, the Different Objects View seems to imply that the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons is a fairly arbitrary one.

Moreover, the mere fact that practical and epistemic reasons bear the reason relation to different objects does not seem to explain their different weighing behaviors. One might argue that reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes do not balance toward suspension simply because doxastic attitudes are the only sorts of attitudes for which suspension is an available alternative. There is simply no third alternative to doing some action ϕ and not- ϕ ing. And while one may neither desire p nor desire not-p, and one may neither intend p nor intend not-p, lacking these attitudes is not analogous to suspension of belief. This is because, as Friedman (2013) points out, to suspend belief with respect to p is not simply to lack the belief that p and lack the belief that not-p, it is to have a distinct attitude toward p – e.g. taking a neutral stance with respect to p. One might thus think that the Different Objects View does explain why epistemic reasons balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not.

But there are other non-doxastic attitudes for which there is something analogous to suspension of belief, and for which there are practical reasons that do not balance toward suspension. For example, consider approval: one may suspend approval of some object o, where this does not amount to lacking the attitudes of approval and disapproval of o, but taking a neutral stance towards o. And practical reasons for approval do not balance toward suspension. For example, if Jim and Dwight are both equally qualified

and deserving of the promotion, Pam should both approve of Jim getting the promotion and approve of Dwight getting the promotion. So, the mere fact that belief is the sort of attitude that has a suspension alternative does not explain why epistemic reasons balance toward suspension, while practical reasons don't.

So, while the Different Objects View may provide an explanation of what epistemic and practical reasons have in common, it fails to explain what makes epistemic and practical reasons substantively different kinds of reasons that have different weighing behaviors.

4. The Different Desire View

Another prominent view of normative reasons is a desire-based theory of normative reasons, according to which both epistemic and practical reasons are facts that bear the very same reason relation in virtue of some fact about the agent's desires, and that what distinguishes practical reasons from epistemic ones is the relevant desire that grounds them. While this view has its origins in James (1896) and Foley (1987), I'll use Schroeder's (2007) more recent view to illustrate: according to Schroeder, what grounds that R is a normative reason for S to ϕ is the fact that R is part of what explains that ϕ ing promotes the satisfaction of S's desire for some object o. Given this account, the desire-based theorist might then claim that whether R is a practical or an epistemic reason depends on which sort of desire is involved in the grounds of R's being a normative reason. For example, she might claim that, if R is part of what explains why ϕ ing promotes the satisfaction of S's desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to some proposition p, then R is an epistemic reason,¹⁰ whereas if R is part of what explains why ϕ ing promotes the satisfaction of any of S's other desires, then R is a practical reason. I call this the *Different Desire View*.

Unlike the Different Objects View, the Different Desire View allows that there can be both practical and epistemic reasons for actions, doxastic attitudes, and non-doxastic attitudes. If believing p would make one happier, the Different Desire View implies that this is a practical reason for one to believe p, given that one desires to be happy. And if gathering more evidence about whether p would

¹⁰ I assume that the most plausible desire that can ground all epistemic reasons is a two-pronged desire to believe the truth *and* avoid error for reasons originating in James (1896): if our epistemic goals included only believing the truth, this would imply that we epistemically ought to believe every proposition, but if our epistemic goals included only avoiding believing falsehoods, this would imply that we epistemically ought to believe nothing. I also assume that this desire must be relativized to a particular proposition for reasons originating in Fumerton (2001): if epistemic reasons were generated by a general desire to believe the truth and avoid error, then the fact that believing some known falsehood will cause one to have many more true beliefs would be an epistemic reason to believe it.

help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid error, then the Different Desire View implies that one has an epistemic reason to gather (and desire) more evidence.

Whether the Different Desire View can provide an extensionally adequate account of epistemic and practical reasons is a controversial question that has received lots of attention in the literature.¹¹ I will not discuss these issues here, though, and again simply focus on whether the Different Desire View explains our desiderata.

The Different Desire View offers the same explanation as the Different Objects View regarding what epistemic and practical reasons have in common that makes them both normative reasons: they are both facts that bear the very same reason relation. And the Different Desire View also has the resources to explain the weights of practical and epistemic reasons: presumably, their weights depend on the strength of the relevant desire that grounds them and the degree to which one's doing the relevant act or having the relevant attitude would satisfy that desire (given those reasons).¹²

Unlike the Different Objects View, though, the Different Desire View also explains why epistemic reasons for belief are interdependent, while practical reasons are not. Suppose R is an epistemic reason for S to ϕ in virtue of the fact that R is part of what explains that S 's ϕ ing will help satisfy S 's desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to p . Importantly, this desire is a unique sort of desire for which considerations that explain why believing p would promote the satisfaction of that desire also necessarily explain why *not* believing $\text{not-}p$ would promote the satisfaction of that desire (and vice versa). After all, if R explains why believing p would help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid error regarding p , this must be because R indicates that p is true. And if R indicates that p is true, R also necessarily indicates that $\text{not-}p$ is false. So, R also necessarily explains why *not* believing $\text{not-}p$ would help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid error regarding p . Conversely, if R explains why believing $\text{not-}p$ would help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to p , this must be because R indicates that $\text{not-}p$ is true and that p is false, and thus also necessarily explains why *not* believing p would help satisfy that particular desire.

But not all desires are like this. Suppose that Pam wants her friends to be happy, that she's equally good friends with Jim and Dwight, and that who she wants to be Assistant Regional Manager will have a direct effect on who Michael chooses to promote. On Schroeder's view, the fact that Jim's being

¹¹ For discussion of the view's adequacy with respect to practical reasons, see Schroeder (2007). For discussion of the view's adequacy with respect to epistemic reasons, see Berker (2013), Foley (1987), Fumerton (2001), Kelly (2003), Leite (2007), and Rinard (2015).

¹² Schroeder (2007) rejects this account of the weights of reasons and argues that a better account is available to a desire-based theory of normative reasons.

promoted would make him happy is a reason for Pam to desire that Jim gets the job because it's part of what explains why Pam's desiring that Jim gets the job would help satisfy her desire for her friends to be happy. But the fact that Jim's being promoted would make him happy does not explain why Pam's *not* desiring that Jim doesn't get promoted would help satisfy her desire that her friends be happy. To the contrary, Pam's desiring that Jim doesn't get promoted would actually help satisfy her desire that her friends be happy to the very same extent as desiring that Jim does get promoted.

According to the Different Desire View, then, epistemic reasons for believing *p* are necessarily interdependent because the grounds of epistemic reasons involve a specific two-pronged desire – the desire to believe the truth and avoid error – for which considerations that explain why believing *p* would help satisfy that desire also necessarily explain why *not* believing *not-p* would help satisfy that same desire. But the grounds of practical reasons involve other desires that aren't like this, and this is why practical reasons need not be interdependent in the same way. And since, as I argued in §2, the interdependency of epistemic reasons for belief explains why they balance toward suspension, the Different Desire View thereby also explains why epistemic reasons for belief balance differently.

There's a complication here, though, which arises because the Different Desire View allows that there are epistemic reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes: it seems that these epistemic reasons are not necessarily interdependent and do not balance toward suspension. For example, suppose I can go to one of two nearby libraries A and B that would provide me with equally good evidence about whether *p*, which is some matter that I want to know about, but for which I lack any evidence. The Different Desire View allows that I thereby have an epistemic reason to go to library A and an equally strong epistemic reason to go to library B. But neither of these epistemic reasons is a reason against the alternative: my reason to go to library A is not a reason to *not* go to library B, and vice versa. Moreover, assuming these are the only reasons in play, what I ought to do, on balance, is either go to library A or go to library B.¹³ (There are also presumably epistemic reasons for me to *desire* to go to each library in this case, and these reasons also seem to behave like practical reasons for desire.)

So, once we allow that practical and epistemic reasons can have the same objects, the weighing behavior to be explained gets a bit more complicated: what now needs explaining is why epistemic reasons for *belief* are necessarily interdependent and balance toward suspension, while epistemic reasons for action and other attitudes, as well as practical reasons (for anything), are not necessarily interdependent and balance out differently.

¹³ Berker (forthcoming) offers this example to illustrate that epistemic reasons for action would balance out like practical reasons.

But the Different Desire View can explain this more complicated behavior. According to the Different Desire View, what makes the fact that library A contains information about whether p an epistemic reason for me to go to library A is that it explains why my going to library A will help satisfy my desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to p . But the fact that library A contains information about whether p does *not* explain why my *not* going to library B will help satisfy that desire. On the contrary, my going to library B would help satisfy that desire just as much as going to library A. So, the fact that library A contains information about whether p is *not* an epistemic reason against me going to library B. The Different Desire View thus entails that epistemic reasons for action are not necessarily interdependent, which thereby explains why they balance differently. (And a similar explanation can be given for epistemic reasons for desire.)

What this shows, though, is that what explains why epistemic reasons for belief are necessarily interdependent, on the Different Desire View, is not just that the particular desire that grounds epistemic reasons is a unique two-pronged desire, but it's this fact together with the fact that belief is special in that believing p and believing $\text{not-}p$ cannot simultaneously help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to p . On the other hand, two incompatible actions or two contradictory desires may both simultaneously help satisfy that desire.

Where the Different Desire View falls short, though, is in explaining why practical and epistemic reasons are substantively different kinds of normative reasons that give rise to important categories of normative assessment. On this view, the only difference between epistemic and practical reasons is that epistemic reasons are grounded in a particular desire – the desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to some proposition. But this is just one very specific desire out of an incredibly diverse array of desires that agents may have. So, if this is all the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons amounts to, it seems like a very arbitrary one. After all, what makes the desire to believe the truth and avoid error more special than, for example, one's career-related desires or one's health-related desires, so that distinguishing between epistemic reasons and practical reasons is especially joint-carving?

One might think that the fact that this desire gives rise to necessarily interdependent reasons is what makes it special. But there are other, similarly two-pronged, desires that also give rise to necessarily interdependent reasons. For example, suppose Dwight desires to do everything that helps him grow more beets and to avoid doing anything that won't help him grow more beets. Any consideration R that explains why ϕ ing (e.g. planting more beet seeds) would help satisfy this desire of Dwight's would also thereby explain why *not* ϕ ing (e.g. not watching television instead) would help satisfy this desire. The Different Desire View implies that the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons is just as

arbitrary as distinguishing between reasons that are grounded in this desire about beets and reasons that are grounded in other desires.

Of course, someone who endorses a desire-based theory of normative reasons may simply reject this desideratum and insist that the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons (and between epistemic and practical normativity, more generally) is not substantive. Indeed, Schroeder (2007) seems to accept that on his view there will just be many different demarcations of normative reasons, and none of them is privileged. This amounts to an eliminativist view about epistemic normativity, according to which epistemic reasons, ‘ought’s, and rationality *just are* practical reasons, ‘ought’s, and rationality.

Again, I won’t argue here that this view is unacceptable. But I do hope to show in the following section that we need not accept it. There’s an alternative view of practical and epistemic reasons that can explain the similarities and differences between epistemic and practical reasons, while also vindicating the idea that epistemic and practical reasons are substantively different kinds of reasons that give rise to importantly different domains of normativity.

5. The Different Source View

According to the view I have in mind, epistemic and practical reasons bear the same reason relation to the same objects, but what makes practical reasons and epistemic reasons different kinds of normative reasons is that they have very different kinds of grounds. That is, on this view, what grounds that some fact R bears the reason relation may be one of two quite different kinds of facts, and which kind of fact grounds that R bears the reason relation determines whether R is a practical or an epistemic reason. I call this the *Different Source View*.

The Different Source View is a very general view about practical and epistemic reasons that is not committed to any particular account of what grounds practical and epistemic reasons. But I take this general view to be initially plausible because, presumably, what grounds that R is an epistemic reason has something to do with truth, while this is not so for practical reasons.

Of course, it’s controversial whether all epistemic reasons are *evidential* – i.e. reasons that bear on the truth of the relevant proposition. Schroeder (2012) argues that in certain cases where more evidence is soon forthcoming about whether p, even though this fact doesn’t bear on whether p is true or false, it’s still an epistemic reason to withhold belief regarding p. Similarly, one might think that the fact that you lack any evidence regarding p is an epistemic reason to suspend belief regarding p (and to gather evidence regarding p); but the fact that you lack evidence regarding p also doesn’t bear on the truth of p.

But even these non-evidential epistemic reasons seem to be reasons because they are in some way connected to truth. For example, one might think that the fact that more evidence is soon forthcoming with respect to p and the fact that one lacks evidence regarding p are reasons to suspend belief with respect to p because they indicate that suspending belief regarding p shows commitment to, or respect for, the truth.¹⁴ So, what grounds that R is a normative reason for S to ϕ , when R is an epistemic reason, is presumably that R stands in some truth-involving relation to ϕ – though, it’s difficult to specify what exactly that truth-involving relation is (and there might even be multiple relations).

On the other hand, while it’s highly controversial what grounds that R is a practical reason for S to ϕ , it seems quite clear that it does not have anything to do with R ’s standing in any kind of truth-involving relation to ϕ . What metaphysically explains why Pam’s being in the emergency room and Dwight’s being in a bad mood are reasons for Jim to leave the office has nothing to do with truth. So, it seems plausible that practical and epistemic reasons have very different grounds, even before we have any precise account of what the grounds of practical and epistemic reasons are.

On the Different Source View, then, one could endorse the following two views:

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| <i>Humean View_P</i> | For practical reasons, the fact that R is a normative reason for S to ϕ is grounded in the fact that R explains why S ’s ϕ ing would promote the satisfaction of S ’s desire for some object o . |
| <i>Truth-Commitment View_E</i> | For epistemic reasons, the fact that R is a normative reason for S to ϕ with respect to p (where ϕ ing may be believing, desiring, gathering evidence, etc.) is grounded in the fact that R indicates that S ’s ϕ ing with respect to p will show commitment to believing the truth with respect to p . ¹⁵ |

¹⁴ This is inspired by Hurka (2001) and Sylvan (2013). Hurka argues that showing respect or commitment to some final value V may itself be derivatively valuable, even though showing respect or commitment to V does not promote V , and is thus not instrumentally valuable. Similarly, Sylvan argues that, while epistemic justification may not always promote believing the truth, and may thus fail to be instrumentally valuable, its value may nonetheless be derivative of the value of truth because it shows respect or commitment to the truth. I am not making any claims about the value of justification or the relation between values and reasons, but instead a similar point about reasons: that some epistemic reasons may be reasons not because they promote having true beliefs, but because they show respect or commitment to the truth.

¹⁵ This view is different from a desire-based view of epistemic reasons in two crucial ways. First, on this view, epistemic reasons do not depend on the agent’s actually having any desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to whether p , and thus does not face the sorts of counterexamples provided by Kelly (2003). Second, the Truth-Commitment View does not claim that all epistemic reasons to ϕ with respect to p are reasons because they promote believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to p . The Truth-Commitment View is thus not a teleological view of epistemic reasons, and thus avoids Berker’s (2013) criticisms.

Alternatively, one may accept a value-based account of practical reasons, on which the fact that R is a practical reason for S to ϕ is grounded in the fact that R explains why S's ϕ ing would promote some value v (Maguire (2016)), together with an evidentialist account of epistemic reasons, on which the fact that R is an epistemic reason to believe p is grounded in the fact that R increases the probability that p is true. But in order for that combination to be a genuine Different Source View, one must deny that truth is a *value* and that it's the promotion of this value that makes R an epistemic reason, so that the way that epistemic reasons are grounded is not just a specific instance of the way in which practical reasons are grounded. This is because what the Different Source View rules out is any view that takes practical and epistemic reasons to have the same kinds of grounds.

To illustrate the Different Source View's explanatory payoffs, I'll focus on the version of the view above that endorses the Humean View_P and the Truth-Commitment View_E. First, on this view (like the Different Objects View and the Different Desire View), what practical and epistemic reasons have in common is that they bear the very same reason relation. One might worry, however, that this view also implies that the reason relation is a mere disjunction – the relation of *explaining why ϕ ing would help satisfy someone's desires or indicating that ϕ ing would show commitment to the truth*. But disjunctive properties and relations do not typically make for much objective similarity or feature in explanations. For example, the property of *being an elephant or a refrigerator* is not the sort of property that features in explanations, and two things may share this property without having any important similarities. So, if the reason relation is a mere disjunction, this wouldn't explain why practical and epistemic reasons share important similarities and explain higher-order normative facts.

It's important to distinguish, though, between *what some property is* and what *grounds* that something has that property. It doesn't follow from the claim that a property F has multiple, different possible grounds that F is a disjunctive property. For example, a creature may have the property of *being in pain* in virtue of being in a particular grey-matter-brain-state or in virtue of being in some particular silicon-brain state, even though *being in pain* is a unified property that makes for objective similarities and features in causal explanations. So, the claim that some fact may bear the reason relation in virtue of multiple, very different kinds of facts is compatible with taking the reason relation itself to be a unified, non-disjunctive relation that makes for similarity.¹⁶

In fact, the Different Source View can explain the important similarity between practical and epistemic reasons: their weights. For example, given the Humean View_P, R's weight may be determined

¹⁶ Indeed, the Different Source View is compatible with adopting an analysis of the reason relation itself along the lines of Broome (2004) or Kearns & Star (2008), (2009).

by the strength of the grounding desire and the extent to which one's ϕ ing would promote the satisfaction of that desire; and on the Truth-Commitment View_E, R's weight may be determined by the extent to which R indicates that ϕ ing with respect to p shows commitment to believing the truth regarding p. More generally, so long as one takes the grounds of practical and epistemic reasons to both be facts that admit of degrees, one may thereby explain why practical and epistemic reasons both have weights, even though they have very different grounds.

On the other hand, it's their having such different grounds that explains why epistemic and practical reasons are substantively different kinds of normative reasons. On the Different Source View, distinguishing between epistemic and practical reasons divides up normative reasons by the more fundamental facts that ground them. And, importantly, the more fundamental facts that ground them have a certain kind of unity: epistemic reasons are all grounded in one kind of fact (facts having to do with commitment to the truth), while practical reasons are all grounded in another kind of fact (e.g. facts about desires, or facts about value). In contrast, since career and health reasons do not have very different kinds of grounds, distinguishing between career and health reasons does not divide up normative reasons at this more fundamental level. This explains why talk of epistemic versus practical reasons, or talk of what one epistemically ought to do versus what one practically ought to do, does a better job of carving normativity at its joints than talk of career versus health reasons and what one ought to do career-wise versus what one ought to do health-wise.

The fact that epistemic and practical reasons have very different grounds can, moreover, explain the different weighing behaviors of epistemic and practical reasons. If practical and epistemic reasons have different grounds, this allows that the grounds of R's being a practical reason to ϕ do *not* necessitate the grounds of R's being a practical reason against not- ϕ ing, while the grounds of R's being an epistemic reason for S to believe p do necessitate the grounds of R's being an epistemic reason against believing not-p (and vice versa).

For example, as discussed in §4, the Humean View_P explains why practical reasons aren't interdependent: R may explain why S's ϕ ing would help satisfy A's desire for o, while *not* explaining why S's *not* not- ϕ ing would help satisfy A's desire for o. But the Truth-Commitment View_E explains why epistemic reasons for belief are interdependent. If R indicates that S's believing p will show commitment to believing the truth regarding p, this must be because R indicates that p is true; and if R indicates that p is true, then R also indicates that not-p is false, and thus that *not* believing not-p will show commitment to believing the truth regarding p. Conversely, if R indicates that S's believing not-p would show commitment to believing the truth regarding p, then this must be because R indicates that not-p is true;

and since R thereby also indicates that p is false, R also necessarily indicates that S's *not* believing p would show commitment to believing the truth regarding p. The Humean View_P and the Truth-Commitment View_E taken together thus explain why epistemic reasons for belief are interdependent and thus balance toward suspension, while practical reasons behave differently.

Recall, though, that once we allow that there are also epistemic reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes this desideratum gets more complicated: we need to explain why epistemic reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes behave like practical reasons, rather than epistemic reasons for belief. But the Different Source View can explain this too. For example, the Truth-Commitment View_E offers an explanation that is analogous to that of the Different Desire View: the difference between epistemic reasons for belief and epistemic reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes is explained by the fact that having two contradictory beliefs regarding p cannot simultaneously show commitment to the truth regarding p (since p and not-p cannot both be true), while doing two incompatible actions (e.g. going to library A and going to library B) or having two contradictory non-doxastic attitudes (e.g. desiring to go to library A and desiring to not go to library A) can simultaneously show commitment to the truth regarding p. This shows that, on the Different Source View, it's not the source of epistemic reasons alone that explains why epistemic reasons for belief are necessarily interdependent and balance toward suspension. It's the source of epistemic reasons together with this related fact about belief.

Importantly, while I've used a particular version of the Different Source View to illustrate its explanatory payoffs, it's the general structural features of the Different Source View that allows it to meet all the desiderata. It's because the Different Source View takes practical and epistemic reasons to bear the very same, non-fundamental reason relation that explains what makes them both normative reasons with weights. But it's because the Different Source View takes practical and epistemic reasons to have very different grounds that it allows for an explanation of why practical and epistemic reasons are substantively different kinds of normative reasons that have different weighing behaviors. So, these structural features make the Different Source View plausible as a general theory, even without fully fleshing out its details.

6. Conclusion

I thus take the Different Source View to be a more plausible view of normative reasons than some more unified alternatives, given the desiderata from §2. And the viability of this view has important implications for metanormative inquiry. After all, some metanormative questions are questions about grounding. When one asks whether normative reasons are mind-dependent, one is asking whether facts

about normative reasons are necessarily grounded in facts about the agent's evaluative attitudes; when one asks whether the good is prior to the right, one is asking whether all facts about normative reasons are grounded in facts about value; and when one asks whether normative reasons are natural or non-natural, one may be interested in whether all facts about normative reasons are grounded in natural facts. If the Different Source View is correct, however, the answers to these questions may differ for practical and epistemic reasons. For example, this view allows that all practical reasons are grounded in facts about agent's evaluative attitudes, while epistemic reasons are not, or that practical reasons are grounded in facts about values, while epistemic reasons aren't, or that all epistemic reasons are grounded in natural facts, while practical reasons are not. The viability of the Different Source View thus suggests that we should not assume that such questions deserve a unified answer across the practical and the epistemic domains. So, we should be wary of recasting metaethical questions as metanormative questions in the first place, since doing so seems to presuppose that very assumption.

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