

ON THE GROUNDS OF NORMATIVITY

by

STEPHANIE LEARY

A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Philosophy

written under the direction of

Ruth Chang and Andy Egan

and approved by

---

---

---

---

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2016

# ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

On the Grounds of Normativity

By STEPHANIE LEARY

Dissertation Directors:  
Ruth Chang and Andy Egan

The central question that underlies this dissertation is what role does *grounding* (or metaphysical explanation) play in metanormative inquiry? In the first part of the dissertation, I argue that *normative non-naturalism* – the view that normative facts are entirely of their own kind and that countenancing such facts is incompatible with a purely scientific worldview – is compatible with the claim that all the normative facts are fully grounded in the natural facts. Not only does this show that normative non-naturalists can explain all the metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative, but it also shows that, contrary to what many metaphysicians and metaethicists claim, the naturalism versus non-naturalism debate in metaethics is not about grounding. But in the rest of the dissertation, I argue that the best explanation of the differences between normative reasons in the practical and epistemic domains is that what grounds (or metaphysically explains) some fact's being a normative reason is very different between the two domains. This suggests, then, that grounding has an important role to play elsewhere in our metanormative theorizing – namely, in explaining the difference between practical and epistemic normativity.

## Acknowledgment

I am especially thankful to my dissertation co-chairs, Ruth Chang and Andy Egan, for their extensive and incredibly valuable comments and support while writing this dissertation. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Jonathan Schaffer and Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, for their thoughtful feedback, as well as the following individuals who helped me shape my ideas in this dissertation: Tobias Wilsch, Gideon Rosen, Tristram McPherson, Selim Berker, Susanna Rinard, David Plunkett, Kurt Sylvan, Daniel Fogal, Pamela Robinson, William Fleisher, Lisa Miracchi, Megan Feeney, David Anton Johnson, Ernie Sosa, Peter van Elswyk, Ronald Planer, Michael Hicks, Bob Beddor, Martin Lin, and Ben Bronner. I am also indebted to the participants of the First Southern Normativity Conference at Kent University, the 2015 Chapel Hill Metaethics Workshop, the 2015 Speculative Ethics Forum at St. John's University, the 2016 Dartmouth Ethics and Practical Reason Workshop, the 2016 Language and Metaphysics of Normativity Conference at Uppsala University, and the Rutgers Value Theory Reading Group for their helpful commentary, as well as audiences at Indiana University (Bloomington), Harvard University, and the University of Massachusetts (Amherst). The first chapter, "Non-naturalism and Normative Necessities", is forthcoming in Oxford Studies in Meataethics Volume 12.

## Table of Contents

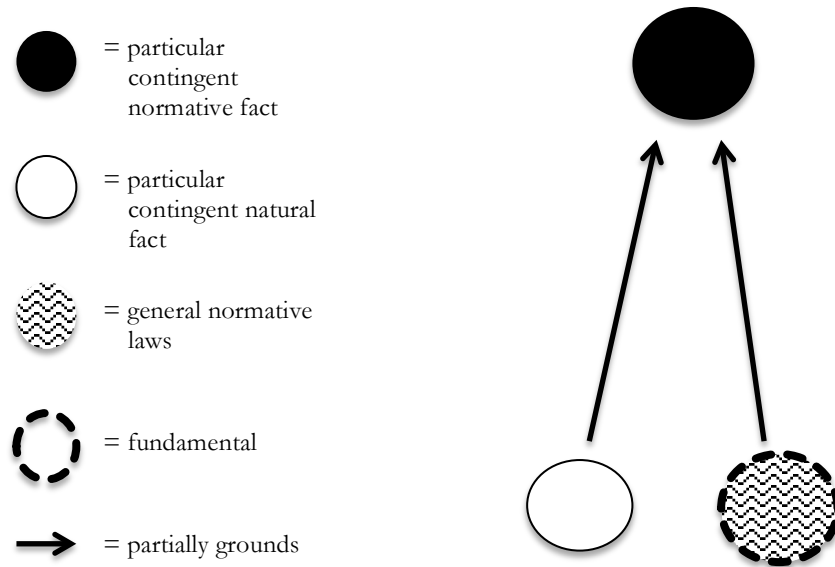
ii.	Abstract of the Dissertation
iii.	Acknowledgments
iv.	Table of Contents
vi.	List of Illustrations
1	Introduction
5	Chapter 1: Non-naturalism and Normative Necessities
7	1.1 Non-naturalism and the Supervenience Objection
14	1.2 Fundamentalist Non-naturalism
19	1.3 Grounded Non-naturalism
28	1.4 Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism
39	1.5 Conclusion
41	Chapter 2: In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief
43	2.1 The Standards of Correctness Strategy
48	2.2 The Motivational Strategy
50	2.3 Motivating Reasons
54	2.4 Rejecting the Motivational Strategy
54	2.4.1 A case study
58	2.4.2 Denying Motivational Difference
61	2.4.3 Explaining transparency
63	2.5 Conclusion
64	Chapter 3: Grounding the Domains of Reasons
65	3.1 Desiderata for an Account of Practical and Epistemic Reasons
74	3.2 Unificationist Views

75	3.2.1 Same fundamental relation, different objects
80	3.2.2 Same non-fundamental relation, different specific grounds
86	3.3 The Different Source View
94	3.4 Conclusion
97	Bibliography

## List of illustrations

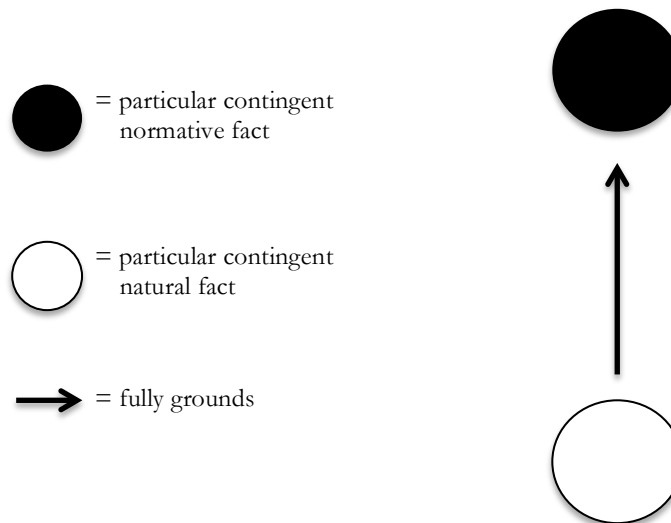
Chapter 1, pp. 17:

Diagram 1: Fundamentalist Non-naturalism



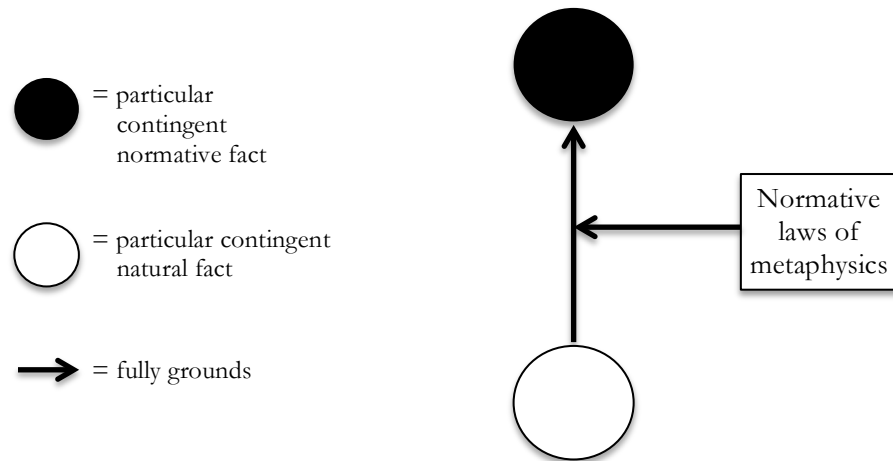
Chapter 1, pp. 21:

Diagram 2: Grounded Non-naturalism



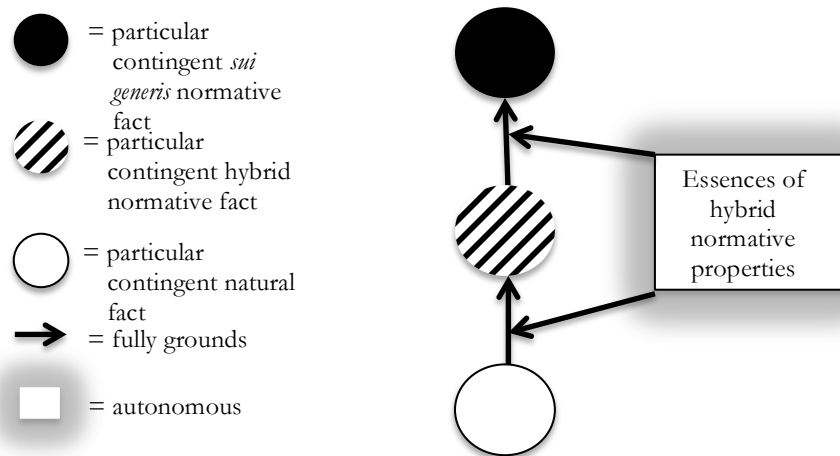
Chapter 1, pp. 23:

Diagram 3: Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism



Chapter 1, pp. 34:

Diagram 4: Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism



## Introduction

Metaphysics is currently undergoing a sea change, and dragging metaethics in its wake. Fine ((2001), (2012)), Rosen (2010), and Schaffer (2009) have popularized the idea that there is a non-causal determination relation that underwrites metaphysical explanations – the *grounding* relation – and that this relation is crucial to understanding many first-order metaphysical debates. In particular, they take grounding to be central to the debate between physicalists and non-physicalists in the philosophy of mind and between naturalists and non-naturalists in metaethics. And metaethicists are beginning to follow suit: while most metaethicists used to claim that the naturalism versus non-naturalism debate is about whether normative properties are *identical* to the sorts of properties that are investigated by the natural sciences, many now specify the debate as being about whether all normative facts are fully *grounded* in scientific facts.

The first part of this dissertation suggests, however, that this is a mistake. In Chapter 1, “Non-naturalism and Normative Necessities”, I show that the sort of classical non-naturalist view endorsed by Moore (1903) and his followers (e.g. Enoch (2011), Parfit (2011), Scanlon (2014), and Shafer-Landau (2003)) is compatible with the claim that all normative facts are fully grounded in natural facts. First, I argue that the core pre-theoretical commitments of classical non-naturalism are (i) that normative properties are of their own kind (*sui generis*) and (ii) that countenancing normative properties is incompatible with a purely scientific view of reality. I then show that these pre-theoretical claims can be captured by a view about the *essences* of normative properties (what I call *Essentialist Non-naturalism*): that the essences of some normative properties are not fully specifiable in natural terms and do not specify any naturalistic sufficient conditions for their instantiation. Finally, I argue



that this view is not only compatible with the claim that all normative facts are fully grounded in natural facts, but can even explain *why* this is so, given the sort of essentialist metaphysics advocated by Fine ((1994a), (1994b), (2012)).

While my explicit aim in Chapter 1 is to use this argument in order to show that non-naturalists can explain why the normative supervenes on the natural, my argument also shows that the dispute between naturalists and non-naturalists is not about grounding. After all, if there is a view about normative properties that captures the pre-theoretical commitments of non-naturalism, but is compatible with the claim that all normative facts are fully grounded in natural facts (i.e. Essentialist Non-naturalism), then the central dispute between naturalists and non-naturalists is not about whether the normative is fully grounded in the natural. So, while some classical non-naturalists do insist that some normative facts are not fully grounded in natural facts (e.g. Enoch (2011), Parfit (2011), and Scanlon (2014)), my argument shows that one need not make this strong claim in order to have a genuinely non-naturalist view.

The rest of my dissertation, however, suggests that grounding may have an important role to play elsewhere in our metanormative theorizing: namely, in explaining the difference between practical and epistemic normativity. As many metaethicists and epistemologists point out, the same normative properties are 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 rational or epistemically rational in doing some action or having some attitude. But ethics and epistemology nonetheless seem to involve importantly different kinds of normativity. Practical and epistemic reasons seem to be substantively different kinds of normative reasons that weigh against one another in different ways; consequently, what one

practically-ought to do and practical rationality seems to be importantly different from what one epistemically-ought to do and epistemic rationality. So, a good metanormative theory should not only explain what practical and epistemic normativity have in common, but also explain their differences.

One explanation for the difference between these two domains of normativity (most explicitly offered by Parfit (2011)) is that they involve different *objects* of assessment: that epistemic reasons, values, ‘ought’s and rationality, are simply the reasons, values, ‘ought’s, and rationality of *belief*, whereas practical reasons, values, ‘ought’s, and rationality are that of other attitudes like desires, intentions, and so forth.

But I reject this explanation because it assumes that there are no practical reasons for belief – a view that I call *alethism*. In Chapter 2, “In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief”, I argue that we should reject alethism because alethists fail to offer a good account of what the relevant difference is between action and belief that explains why the benefits of doing some act generate a normative reason to do that act, but the benefits of believing some proposition do *not* generate a normative reason to believe that proposition. Without such an account, I argue, we should accept that there are practical reasons for belief. My argument thus suggests that epistemic and practical reasons are not individuated by what they are reasons *for*, and more generally, that epistemic and practical normativity do not involve different objects of assessment.

In Chapter 3, “Grounding the Domains of Reasons”, I argue, even further, that the view that practical and epistemic reasons are individuated by what they are reasons for (what I call the *Different Objects View*) also fails to explain why practical and epistemic reasons are substantively different kinds of reasons that weigh against one another in different ways. In contrast, I argue, a view according to which practical and epistemic reasons have very

different *grounds* (what I call the *Different Source View*) can explain why practical and epistemic reasons are substantively different kinds of reasons that exhibit different weighing behaviors. But this view, I argue, is compatible with taking both practical and epistemic reasons to be facts that stand in the very same, unified normative relation, and can thereby also explain what practical and epistemic reasons have in common that makes them both normative reasons. More generally, then, the Different Source View suggests that, while the very same normative properties are found in both ethics and epistemology, practical and epistemic normativity may nonetheless be substantively different kinds of normativity because what grounds those normative properties varies between the two domains.

So, while every chapter in this dissertation is presented as a stand-alone paper, there is a common thread that runs through them and weaves them together to tell a larger story. That thread is the question of what role grounding plays in metanormative inquiry. And the larger story that these papers tell is that grounding *is* a useful bit of ideology that has an important role to play in our metanormative theorizing – but it’s *not* the role that most metaphysicians take it to be.

## Chapter 1

### Non-naturalism and Normative Necessities

One of the most common complaints raised against non-naturalist views about the normative is that, unlike their naturalist rivals, non-naturalists cannot provide a metaphysical explanation for why normative properties supervene on natural properties. That is, while most naturalists and non-naturalists agree that there cannot be a normative difference between two entities (e.g. states of affairs, actions, people, and so on) without there being a natural difference between them, naturalists have a ready explanation for this, whereas non-naturalists do not. After all, according to naturalists, normative properties *are* natural properties, and so, the normative supervenes on the natural simply because everything supervenes on itself. But according to non-naturalists, the normative is distinct and significantly different in kind from the natural. And many meta-ethicists argue that the non-naturalist is thereby committed to claiming that there is no metaphysical explanation for the supervenience of the normative on the natural, which is a significant cost of the view (e.g. Blackburn (1971), Dreier ((1992), (MS)), Horgan (1993), Mackie (1977), and McPherson (2012)). This is the so-called *supervenience objection* against non-naturalism.

Most non-naturalists respond to the supervenience objection not by attempting to offer a metaphysical explanation for why the normative supervenes on the natural, but instead by arguing that one need not offer such an explanation in the first place. For example, Parfit (2011) seems to think that he need not offer a metaphysical explanation of supervenience because, on his non-naturalist view, normative properties do not exist in a robust metaphysical sense; and Kramer (2009) and Stratton-Lake & Hooker (2006) argue, respectively, that the supervenience of the normative on the natural can be given a conceptual or ethical explanation, rather than a metaphysical one. More radically, in order to

preserve their non-naturalist commitments, Fine (2002) and Rosen (MS) deny that the normative metaphysically supervenes on the natural in the first place.

These responses to the supervenience objection suggest that many non-naturalists agree with their naturalist opponents that non-naturalism is incompatible with any metaphysical explanation for why the normative supervenes on the natural. They only disagree insofar as they deny that this is a problematic feature of their view. In this paper, however, I show that non-naturalists can offer a metaphysical explanation for supervenience by adopting the sort of *essentialist* metaphysics developed by Fine (1994), Rosen (2010), and Dasgupta (2014). Specifically, I argue that non-naturalists may claim that there are certain *hybrid* normative properties whose essences determine both naturalistic sufficient conditions for their instantiation and sufficient conditions for the instantiation of other *sui generis* normative properties, and that this explains why the normative is determined by, and supervenes on, the natural.

Before offering my positive proposal, though, I first argue (in §2 and §3) that two alternative metaphysical explanations for supervenience fail. According to the first, the normative supervenes on the natural because there are general normative laws, which state that if something has certain natural properties, then it has a certain normative property, and these normative laws together with the contingent natural facts determine the contingent normative facts. Whereas according to the second explanation, the normative supervenes on the natural because the contingent normative facts are fully determined by the natural facts alone. I argue that the first explanation for supervenience fails to respond to a more general worry that motivates the supervenience objection, and the second explanation fails to yield a metaphysical picture of the normative that is clearly non-naturalist. Seeing the problems with these alternative explanations is instructive and helps motivate my positive proposal (in §4)

because the essentialist explanation for supervenience I offer succeeds where these others fail.

Before discussing these explanations for supervenience, though, I first need to specify what exactly the explanatory demand posed by the supervenience objection amounts to and what the core commitments of non-naturalism are. So, in the following section, I do just that.

## 1. Non-naturalism and the Supervenience Objection

The non-naturalist view that I am concerned with here is the sort of view defended by Moore (1903) and his followers.<sup>1</sup> Specifying what this view amounts to, though, is a notoriously difficult task. This is because, even within their own camps, both naturalists and non-naturalists alike characterize the view in different ways. Many describe non-naturalism as the view that normative properties are not *identical* to the sort of descriptive properties and facts that are investigated by the natural and social sciences (e.g. Jackson (2000), Parfit (2011), Shafer-Landau (2003)). But, more recently, some characterize non-naturalism as the view that normative properties and facts are not fully *grounded* in such scientific facts (e.g. Chang (2013), Dunaway (forthcoming), Enoch (2011), Scanlon (2014), Schroeder (2007)). So, in order to avoid this taxonomical controversy, I will simply identify two pre-theoretical claims that seem to be the core commitments of non-naturalism and assume that a non-naturalist view is any metaphysical view about the normative that captures those claims.

The first pre-theoretical claim that seems to be a core commitment of non-naturalism is that normative properties are *of their own kind*. When naturalists insist that

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, I thus use the term ‘non-naturalism’ to refer to the Moorean non-naturalist view, rather than the broader category of non-naturalist views that also includes *supernaturalist non-naturalist* views like the Divine Command Theory.

normative properties are *natural* properties, they are claiming that normative properties are of the same kind as paradigmatic scientific properties; and when non-naturalists claim that normative properties are *non-natural*, they are asserting that normative properties are distinct and significantly different in kind from paradigmatic scientific properties. But Moore and his followers claim, even further, that normative properties are *sui generis*: that they are different in kind from not just scientific properties, but also from supernatural properties and any other kinds of properties there may be. For example, Shafer-Landau states:

It appears that moral values are something very different in kind from anything else that we are familiar with. Faced with this appearance, we have three basic choices. We could take it at face value, and introduce into our ontology a *sui generis* category of values. Or we could seek to discredit the appearances...we might retain a belief in the evaluative realm, but eliminate the mystery by denying its distinctness. On this line – that of *ethical naturalism* – moral facts are a species of scientific facts... I am in the first camp. I think that moral facts are different in kind from any other.<sup>2</sup>

Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (2014) also insist that normative truths are “irreducibly normative”, which suggests that they, like Moore and Shafer-Landau, take the normative to be something that is entirely of its own kind.

The claim that normative properties are of their own kind is a bit mysterious, though, because it's not clear what kind-talk for properties amounts to.<sup>3</sup> And one might think that in order to understand what non-naturalism amounts to, we need to make this claim more precise. But there may be multiple, equally good ways of specifying this claim in more precise metaphysical terms, and I do not want to take a stand on this issue here. So, instead of clarifying this pre-theoretical claim, I simply assume that a non-naturalist view must be a metaphysical view of the normative that captures this pre-theoretical claim in

---

<sup>2</sup> Shafer-Landau (2003) p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> One might think that two properties are of the same kind just in case they share a second-order property. But any two properties share a second-order property: e.g. all properties share the property *being a property*. So, in claiming that normative properties are of their own kind, non-naturalists cannot mean that normative and non-normative properties don't share any second-order properties.

some way, while remaining neutral about whether this uniquely identifies a particular metaphysical view.

The second pre-theoretical claim that I take to be a core commitment of non-naturalism is that countenancing normative properties and facts is incompatible with a purely scientific worldview. Since non-naturalists claim that normative properties are distinct and significantly different in kind from scientific properties, non-naturalists thereby take science to provide an incomplete account of reality.<sup>4</sup>

This second pre-theoretical claim is also a bit vague, though, since it's not clear what compatibility with a purely scientific worldview amounts to. Enoch (2011) and Scanlon (2014) explicitly point out that the existence of non-natural normative properties is at least logically consistent with our best scientific theories, since our best scientific theories do not claim that there are no non-natural properties, nor do they contain an “and-that’s-all-there-is clause”. So, the non-naturalist does not take countenancing normative properties and facts to be incompatible with a purely scientific worldview in the sense that it is logically inconsistent with our best scientific theories.

But there are other ways of specifying what this claim amounts to. For example, one might take a purely scientific worldview to require not just logical consistency with our best scientific theories, but also the methodological commitment to not countenance any ontology or ideology that is not involved in those theories. One might thus interpret the non-naturalist's claim that countenancing normative properties is incompatible with a purely scientific worldview as the claim that countenancing normative properties requires a further

---

<sup>4</sup> When I use the term ‘reality’ here, I mean to refer to everything that exists in any sense of ‘exist’. Parfit (2011) claims that science does provide a complete account of reality, since reality comprises only those things that exist in an “ontological sense”, and on Parfit's non-naturalist view, normative properties only exist in a “non-ontological sense”. But Parfit would nonetheless presumably agree with the claim that science does not provide a complete account of reality, when using ‘reality’ in this broader sense, which includes everything that exists in any sense.



ontological or ideological commitment beyond that of our best scientific theories. But, again, this may not be the only way to capture this second pre-theoretical claim, and I do not want to take a stand on this issue here. So, again, I simply assume that a non-naturalist view must capture this second pre-theoretical claim in some way, and I remain neutral about whether this uniquely identifies a particular metaphysical view.

In sum, then, I take classical non-naturalism to endorse the following two pre-theoretical claims:

- (i) Normative properties and facts are *of their own kind*: they are different in kind from scientific properties and any other kind of properties.
- (ii) Countenancing normative properties and facts is incompatible with a purely scientific worldview.

Even understanding non-naturalism in these broad strokes allows us to see why the supervenience of the normative on the natural presents a problem for non-naturalists. If there cannot be a normative difference between two entities (e.g. an action, state of affairs, or an individual) without there being some natural difference between them, then for any  $x$  that has some normative property  $F$ , there is *some* natural property  $G$  (perhaps a very complex conjunctive property) that  $x$  has such that any  $y$  in any metaphysically possible world that is  $G$  is also  $F$ . So, where  $A$  is the family of normative properties,  $B$  is the family of natural properties, and  $\Box_M$  is metaphysical necessity, the following seems to hold:

$$\text{Strong Supervenience } (\forall F \text{ in } A)(\forall x)[Fx \rightarrow (\exists G \text{ in } B)(Gx \ \& \ \Box_M(\forall y)(Gy \rightarrow Fy))]$$
<sup>5</sup>

Strong Supervenience states that, for example, if Vince is a virtuous person, then there is some natural property  $G$  that Vince has such that anyone in any metaphysically possible

---

<sup>5</sup> cf. Dreier (1992), (MS).

world who has property G is a virtuous person.<sup>6</sup> Strong Supervenience thus states that there are metaphysically necessary connections between normative and natural properties. And since non-naturalists take normative properties to be distinct and very different in kind from natural properties, non-naturalists must admit, given Strong Supervenience, that there are metaphysically necessary connections between distinct and very different kinds of properties.

This puts some pressure on non-naturalists to give a metaphysical explanation for why there are metaphysically necessary connections between normative and natural properties. This is because metaphysically necessary connections between seemingly quite different kinds of properties typically do have metaphysical explanations.<sup>7</sup> For example, consider the properties of *being colored* and *being spatially located*. Although these seem like quite different kinds of properties, it is nonetheless metaphysically necessary that, if x is colored, then x is spatially located. And this metaphysical necessity has an obvious metaphysical explanation: in order for something to be colored, it must reflect or emit light, and in order for something to reflect or emit light, it must occupy some volume in space. Or consider the seemingly quite different properties of *being an elephant* and *being identical to oneself*. Although these are very different properties, it is nonetheless metaphysically necessary that if x is an elephant, x is identical to itself. But this, too, has an explanation: it's metaphysically necessary that if x is an elephant, x is identical to itself because everything is necessarily identical to itself, and any conditional with a metaphysically necessary consequent is itself metaphysically necessary. The fact that necessary connections like these have an explanation suggests that

---

<sup>6</sup> This does not imply that *being virtuous* is necessarily coextensive with G. For example, Vera may be a virtuous person even though she lacks G. But Strong Supervenience requires that there is some other natural property G\* that Vera has such that anyone who has G\* is virtuous.

<sup>7</sup> From now on, I will use the terms 'necessity' and 'explanation' to refer to metaphysical necessity and metaphysical explanation. I assume here (contra Kramer (2009) and Stratton-Lake & Hooker (2006)) that in order to explain the metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative, the non-naturalist must give a metaphysical explanation, rather than a conceptual or ethical explanation. I do not have room to defend this assumption here, but see McPherson (2012) and Dreier (MS).

there is probably some metaphysical explanation for why there are necessary connections between the normative and the natural.

Moreover, naturalists have a ready explanation for why there are metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative: it is because normative properties just are natural properties. This puts additional pressure on the non-naturalist to offer an alternative explanation for these necessities. For, if non-naturalists cannot offer any explanation for why there are metaphysically necessary connections between the normative and the natural, but naturalists can, then this seems like a reason to prefer naturalism over non-naturalism.

And one might think that non-naturalists cannot, in principle, offer an explanation for why there are necessary connections between natural and normative properties. This is because any explanation for why there are metaphysical necessities involving the natural and the normative must posit some fairly intimate metaphysical connection between the natural and the normative. But positing such a connection seems to be in tension with the non-naturalist's claim that the normative is entirely distinct and deeply different in kind from the natural. There is thus some reason to think that the very commitments of non-naturalism force non-naturalists to regard the metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative as simply brute.

This way of stating the supervenience objection is more modest than the way it is typically formulated. Most take the supervenience objection to rely on some version of Hume's dictum that either prohibits brute necessary connections between distinct entities altogether or states that a commitment to such brute necessities is at least a significant cost of a view.<sup>8</sup> But the way that I have formulated the supervenience objection above does not

---

<sup>8</sup> McPherson (2012) proposes the latter formulation of the Humean thesis.

rely on any version of Hume's dictum. It simply assumes that, since many metaphysical necessities between seemingly different kinds of properties have an explanation, explaining such necessities is a virtue of a theory. And so, if some theory does not explain such necessities, but its rival does, then this is a reason to prefer the rival theory.

Formulating the objection in this more modest way makes it less controversial and more challenging. After all, it's not clear that there is a strong theory-neutral argument for banning brute metaphysical necessities between distinct entities, or even for thinking that a view's being committed to brute metaphysical necessities is always a significant theoretical cost.<sup>9</sup> It is more clear that having explanations for the types of things that typically do have an explanation is a virtue of a theory. Even someone who denies the above Humean principles should nonetheless accept this general principle about theory choice. Formulating the supervenience objection in this modest way thus makes it harder for non-naturalists to dismiss the supervenience objection simply by denying these Humean principles.

Now that we have a better understanding of what non-naturalism and the supervenience objection amount to, we may turn to the prominent non-naturalist explanations for Strong Supervenience that have been offered in the literature thus far. But there are two main points from this section to keep in mind while moving forward. First, since the supervenience objection is motivated by a more general worry about explaining metaphysical necessities between the natural and the normative, the challenge for the non-naturalist is not just to explain Strong Supervenience, but to explain the metaphysically necessary connections between normative and natural properties, more generally. And second, the challenge is for the non-naturalist to offer a metaphysical explanation for these metaphysical necessities while clearly maintaining her pre-theoretical commitments that

---

<sup>9</sup> See Wilson (2010) for a discussion of why we should be skeptical of Hume's dictum.

normative properties are *of their own kind* and incompatible with a purely scientific worldview. I emphasize these two points here because, in §2 and §3, I argue that the two main ways that non-naturalists have attempted to explain supervenience thus far fail to meet at least one of these challenges.

## 2. Fundamentalist Non-naturalism

The first non-naturalist explanation for supervenience is defended by Enoch (2011) and Scanlon (2014). Enoch (2011) explains why the normative supervenes on the natural by making an analogy with drinking eligibility and age. What it is to be eligible to drink, Enoch claims, is not simply for one to be above a certain age, but drinking eligibility supervenes on age (within a jurisdiction) because the law (within that jurisdiction) states that only people above a certain age can drink. Similarly, Enoch claims that normative properties supervene on natural properties even though they are not reducible to natural properties because there are *normative laws* that specify that if something has certain natural properties, then it has certain normative properties. For example, if act utilitarianism is true, then it is a normative law that an act is right if and only if it maximizes happiness. And Enoch insists that these normative laws are brute: there is no explanation for why the normative laws are what they are.

Similarly, Scanlon (2014) distinguishes between *mixed* and *pure* normative facts. Mixed normative facts, like the fact that giving to Oxfam is morally right, are contingent normative facts that vary, depending on certain non-normative facts (e.g. that Oxfam distributes money in certain ways). But pure normative facts, Scanlon claims, are not contingent and do not depend at all on any non-normative facts: e.g. the fact that, if doing A would relieve suffering, then the fact that doing A would relieve suffering is a reason to do

A. Scanlon then notes that it is the *mixed* normative facts that supervene on the natural facts, and that they do so because the mixed normative facts are determined by the contingent non-normative facts together with the non-contingent, pure normative facts.

In order to better understand Enoch and Scanlon's explanation for Strong Supervenience and how it differs from the other two explanations that I discuss later on, I suggest that we understand Enoch and Scanlon's view in terms of *grounding*. Many contemporary metaphysicians (e.g. Bennett (2011), Dasgupta (2014), DeRosset (2013), Fine (2012), Rosen (2010), and Schaffer (2009)) introduce the notion of grounding into their metaphysical theorizing precisely in order to make sense of what metaphysical explanations like these amount to. According to these grounding enthusiasts, when we offer metaphysical explanations by saying that some fact *y* obtains *because of* or *in virtue of* some other fact *x*, where we do not mean that *y* is *caused* by *x*, we are implicitly taking there to be a non-causal kind of determination relation between *x* and *y*.

For example, one might say that the man exiting the transporter is Spock *because* he is psychologically continuous with Spock, where one doesn't mean that the man's being psychologically continuous with Spock *causes* the man exiting the transporter to be Spock, but rather, that the fact that the transported man is psychologically continuous with Spock *makes it the case* or *determines* (non-causally) that the man is Spock. Similarly, one might take Goliath the statue to be distinct from Lump1 the lump of clay, but nonetheless claim that Goliath's bellybutton has a certain shape *S because* a particular region of Lump1 has a dent that is S-shaped. In saying this, one means not that Lump1's dent *causes* Goliath to have an S-shaped bellybutton, but that the dent *makes it the case* or *determines* that Goliath's bellybutton is S-shaped. The notion of grounding is intended to capture this non-causal determination relation.

Characterizing grounding in more detail is hard to do without stepping into controversial terrain.<sup>10</sup> But the idea that there is a non-causal determination relation that underwrites non-causal metaphysical explanations like those above is intuitive enough for our purposes. I will thus use the notion of grounding here to explicate the different potential metaphysical explanations for supervenience, while remaining as neutral as possible about these debates.<sup>11</sup> Because it is important for understanding these explanations, however, I do assume here that grounding involves metaphysical necessitation: if *x* grounds *y*, then in any metaphysically possible world where *x* obtains, then *y* obtains. But this does not suggest that, if *x* grounds *y*, then in every metaphysically possible world where *y* obtains, *x* obtains. This is because a fact may have multiple possible grounds. For example, the fact that a particular truck is red may be grounded in the fact that it is crimson, but the truck could have been red in virtue of being scarlet or cherry red instead. The fact that *x* grounds *y* thus does not imply that *x* *necessarily* grounds *y*.

It's also important for our purposes to distinguish between *full* and *partial* grounding. If *x* *fully* grounds *y*, then *x*'s being the case by itself determines, and thus fully explains, *y*'s being the case: for example, the fact that the truck is crimson fully grounds the fact that the truck is red. But if *x* only *partially* grounds *y*, then *x*'s being the case together with some other fact(s) determines *y*'s being the case, and so, *x* only partially explains *y*. For example, the fact that the truck is red partially grounds the fact that the truck is a red Chevy (together with the fact that the truck is a Chevy).

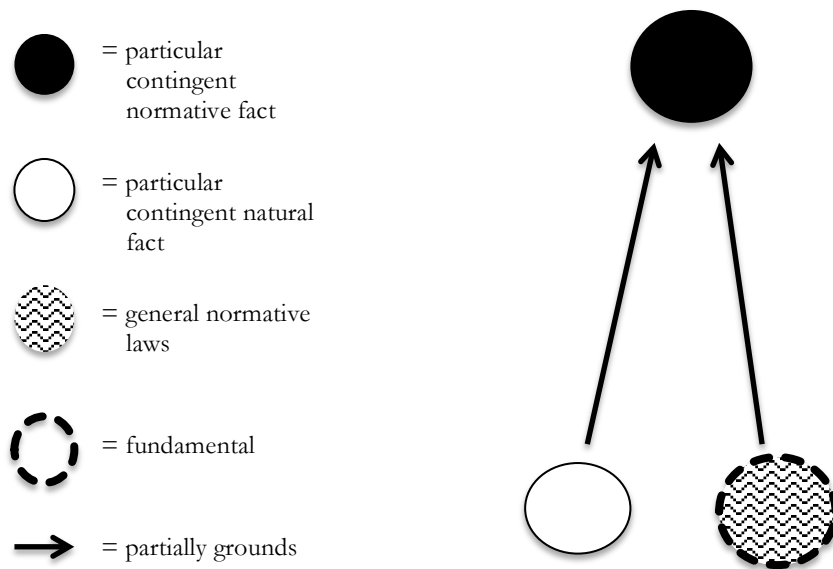
---

<sup>10</sup> For every formal feature that is traditionally used to characterize the grounding relation (e.g. transitivity, irreflexivity, asymmetry, and necessitation), there are some metaphysicians who deny that grounding has that feature.

<sup>11</sup> For ease of exposition, though, I assume here that grounding is a relation that holds between facts. This is controversial: some grounding enthusiasts argue that grounding is best understood as a relation that holds between entities of any ontological category (e.g. Schaffer (2009)), and some argue that grounding is best understood as a sentential operator on facts (e.g. Fine (2001)), rather than a relation between facts (e.g. Rosen (2010)). Everything I say here, however, could be rephrased to accommodate these alternative views.

With grounding in our theoretical toolbox, we may now offer a more precise formulation of Enoch and Scanlon's explanation for supervenience. Both Enoch and Scanlon claim that all particular contingent normative facts (e.g. the fact that a particular act A is right, the fact that a particular person P is virtuous, and so on) are partially grounded in the particular contingent natural facts (e.g. the fact that A maximizes happiness, the fact that P is functioning well, and so on) and partially grounded in general normative laws (e.g. if an act maximizes happiness, then it is right, or if a person is functioning well, then that person is virtuous, and so on). Moreover, Enoch and Scanlon both insist that these general normative laws are *fundamental*: they are not grounded in any further facts. Enoch and Scanlon thus offer the following metaphysical picture of the normative, which I call *Fundamentalist Non-naturalism*.

Diagram 1: Fundamentalist Non-naturalism



Importantly, Fundamentalist Non-naturalism explains Strong Supervenience only if the fundamental normative laws are metaphysically necessary. If there are some metaphysically possible worlds where the normative laws are different from the normative



laws of our world, then there would be two metaphysically possible worlds that are different in their normative respects, but identical in their natural respects, which would violate Strong Supervenience. Indeed, Enoch (2011) recognizes this and insists that the fundamental normative laws are metaphysically necessary.<sup>12</sup>

But recall that the general worry that motivates the supervenience objection is that the non-naturalist owes an explanation for the metaphysically necessary connections between natural and normative properties. Fundamentalist Non-naturalism does not explain these metaphysically necessary connections. It simply states that there are some — the normative laws. Fundamentalist Non-naturalism thus does not respond to the general worry that motivates the supervenience objection. (To be clear, the problem with Enoch and Scanlon's response to the supervenience objection is not that they take the normative laws to be fundamental. The problem is that they offer no explanation for why these fundamental normative laws are *metaphysically necessary*.)

Enoch admits that this explanation for supervenience ultimately posits some unexplained metaphysical necessities involving the normative and the natural, and thus still incurs some theoretical cost. But he understates the problem here. His view doesn't just face *some* theoretical cost. It faces the *very same* theoretical cost that he began with. That is, Enoch's response to the supervenience objection does not saddle him with a new explanatory burden. It fails to address the original explanatory burden.

One might think, however, that claiming that the relevant metaphysical necessities that involve natural and normative properties are fundamental provides a way for the

---

<sup>12</sup> Scanlon (2014), on the other hand, holds the Finean (2002) view that, in addition to metaphysical and nomological necessity, there is a distinctly normative kind of necessity with which the fundamental normative laws hold. But if normative necessity and metaphysical necessity are distinct, the claim that the normative laws are *normatively necessary* does not explain why there are metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative, and why the normative *metaphysically* supervenes on the natural. Scanlon's claim that the normative laws are normatively necessary thus fails to explain Strong Supervenience.

Fundamentalist Non-naturalist to avoid the original explanatory demand. After all, it seems plausible that the most basic principles of logic and mathematics are both fundamental and metaphysically necessary, and that there is no explanation to be offered for why the fundamental mathematical and logical facts are metaphysically necessary. The Fundamentalist Non-naturalist may thus argue that, by claiming that the necessary normative principles are fundamental, she likens them to fundamental mathematical and logical principles and thereby relieves herself of any pressure to explain why the general normative principles are metaphysically necessary in the first place.

But recall that the relevant explanatory burden for non-naturalists arises because they are committed to metaphysical necessities *between very different properties*. Fundamental mathematical and logical principles do not involve very different properties: the fundamental logical principles like  $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$  involve only variables and logical constants, and fundamental mathematical principles involve only variables and mathematical operators. So, even if fundamental mathematical and logical truths are metaphysically necessary, and brutally so, this does not show that the non-naturalist need not give any explanation for why the fundamental normative principles are metaphysically necessary.

Fundamentalist Non-naturalism thus fails as a response to the supervenience objection because, although it does explain Strong Supervenience, it does not explain the metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative more generally.

### 3. Grounded Non-naturalism

The second prominent explanation for Strong Supervenience is offered by Shafer-Landau (2003), and may also have been endorsed by Moore (1942). Shafer-Landau takes

himself to be a non-naturalist, but he nonetheless insists that the normative is fully grounded in the natural facts alone. He claims,

A pencil's length or weight at a time is fixed and constituted by a particular molecular composition, though the same length or weight may, at other times, be realized differently... So, too, the admirability of an action or motive may be realized by different sets of descriptive facts, but on any given occasion, the moral features are fixed by the descriptive ones that compose them at that time.<sup>13</sup>

Here Shafer-Landau states that certain contingent natural facts necessitate certain contingent normative facts (e.g. that act A is admirable), but that those same normative facts could be necessitated by different natural facts. This is entailed by the claim that the contingent natural facts fully ground the contingent normative facts. So, while Shafer-Landau does not explicitly talk of grounding, it seems reasonable to interpret him as stating that the contingent normative facts are fully grounded in the natural facts.

Shafer-Landau takes his view to be inspired by Moore, who makes similar claims:

I should never have thought of suggesting that goodness was 'non-natural,' unless I had supposed that it was 'derivative' in the sense that, whenever a thing is good (in the sense in question) its goodness (in Mr. Broad's words) 'depends on the presence of certain non-ethical characteristics' possessed by the thing in question: I have always supposed that it did so 'depend,' in the sense that, if a thing is good (in my sense), then that it is so *follows* from the fact that it possesses certain natural properties, which are such that from the fact that it is good it does *not follow* conversely that it has those properties.<sup>14</sup>

Moore is claiming here that there is an asymmetric entailment-like relation that holds between a thing's natural features and its normative ones. But, presumably, Moore does not mean that a thing's being good is caused by its having certain natural features, nor does he mean that a thing's being good logically follows from its having certain natural features (since he claims that it is always an open question whether something is good, given that it has certain natural features). Moore is thus best interpreted as claiming that a thing's having certain natural properties non-causally determines that it has certain normative properties. And Moore does not claim here that it follows from the fact that a thing has certain natural properties *together with some other facts* that it has certain normative properties. So, it seems that

---

<sup>13</sup> Shafer-Landau (2003) p. 76-77.

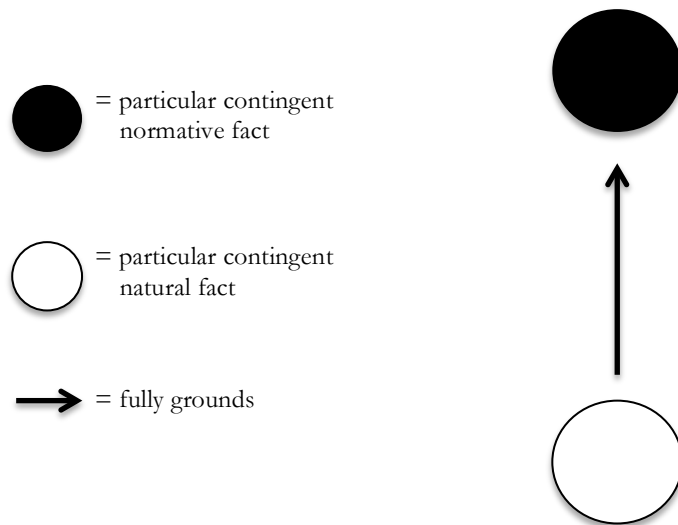
<sup>14</sup> Moore (1942) p. 588.

Moore, too, took contingent normative facts, like the fact that *x* is good, to be fully grounded in the contingent natural facts.

The claim that all contingent normative facts are fully grounded in the contingent natural facts suffices to explain Strong Supervenience. If for every normative property *F* and any *x*, the fact that *x* is *F* is fully grounded in some natural fact, then in every metaphysically possible world where *x* is *F*, there is some natural property *G* such that the fact that *x* is *G* grounds the fact that *x* is *F*. And since grounding involves necessitation, if the fact that *x* is *G* grounds the fact that *x* is *F*, then in every metaphysically possible world where *x* is *G*, *x* is *F*. So, if all normative facts are fully grounded in natural facts, then for any normative property *F*, if something is *F*, that thing has some natural property *G* such that, in every metaphysically possible world where something is *G*, then it is *F* (i.e. Strong Supervenience).

This explanation for supervenience offers the following metaphysical picture of the normative, which I call *Grounded Non-naturalism*.

Diagram 2: Grounded Non-naturalism



Whereas the Fundamentalist Non-naturalist takes all particular contingent normative facts to be partially grounded in the particular contingent natural facts and partially grounded in

general normative laws, the Grounded Non-naturalist takes all particular contingent normative facts to be *fully grounded* in the particular contingent natural facts.<sup>15</sup>

Like Fundamentalist Non-naturalism, however, Grounded Non-naturalism does not seem to respond to the general worry behind the supervenience objection. After all, the Grounded Non-naturalist claims that, whenever some normative fact obtains, there is some particular natural fact that grounds it, and thus metaphysically necessitates it. But without some explanation for why certain natural facts ground certain normative facts, even though normative properties are significantly different in kind from natural properties, Grounded Non-naturalism seems to merely assume, rather than explain, these metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative.

But the Grounded Non-naturalist may turn to the grounding literature for an explanation for why certain natural facts ground certain normative facts.<sup>16</sup> For example, Wilsch (2015) argues that grounding facts about specific objects and properties (e.g. the fact that my firing C-fibers grounds my being in pain) are explained by general laws about which properties give rise to which other properties (e.g. it is a law that if x has firing C-fibers, then x is in pain), just as specific causal facts (e.g. the fact that the ball's hitting the window caused the window to break) are explained by general laws about which events cause which other events (e.g. laws about fragility and force).<sup>17</sup> This view is a metaphysical analogue of a

---

<sup>15</sup> How the general normative facts are grounded on this view is a bit unclear. The Grounded Non-naturalist might say that the general normative facts are grounded like most universal generalizations — by their instances. But this does not seem plausible because general normative facts seem true independently of whether there are any actual instances of those general normative facts: e.g. even if there were no instances of happiness-maximization, it could still be true that all acts that maximize happiness are right.

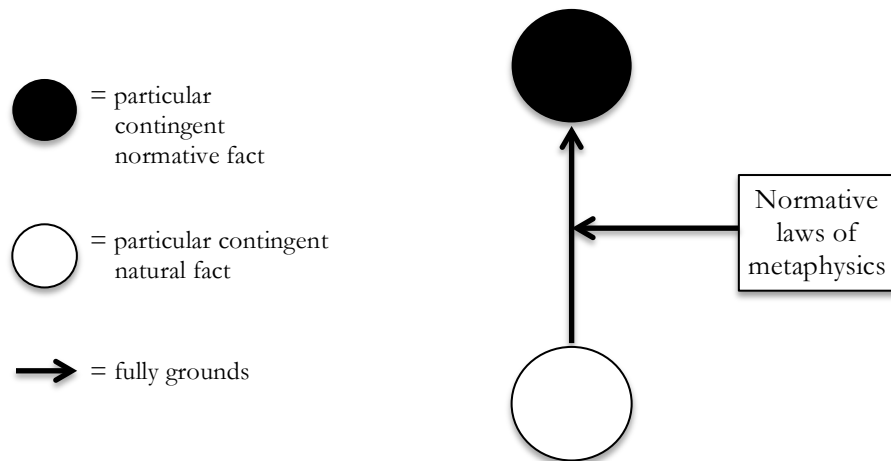
<sup>16</sup> Bennett (2011), DeRossett (2013), Dasgupta (2014), Fine (2012), Rosen (2010), and Wilsch (2015) all discuss what grounds the grounding facts.

<sup>17</sup> This oversimplifies Wilsch's view. He takes the metaphysical laws to be more general than this and to involve various *construction relations* such as composition, realization, set-formation, etc. For example, on his view, what explains the fact that my having firing C-fibers grounds that I am in pain (if physicalism is true) is (i) that it's a law that under circumstances C, *having firing C-fibers* realizes the property *being in pain*, and (ii) that it's a law that if x has F and F realizes G, then x also has G.

conception of the laws of nature according to which the laws of nature do not themselves cause particular events, together with earlier events, but rather, the laws of nature *underlie* the causal relations between particular events at different times. Similarly, on Wilsch's view, there are *metaphysical laws* that underlie the grounding relations between particular facts at different levels of fundamentality.

The Grounded Non-naturalist may thus adopt this view and claim that the particular grounding facts involving natural and normative properties are all explained by metaphysical laws. For example, the Grounded Non-naturalist may claim that the fact that I am having a painful experience grounds the fact that I am experiencing something bad because it is a metaphysical law that if x is painful, then x is bad. This view, which I call *Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism*, offers the following metaphysical picture of the normative:

Diagram 3: Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism



Like Fundamentalist Non-naturalism, this view takes there to be general normative laws that ultimately explain the particular normative facts. But according to Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism, the normative laws do not themselves ground the particular normative facts

directly (with the contingent natural facts). Instead, the normative laws underlie the grounding relations between particular contingent natural and normative facts.

One might worry that, like Fundamentalist Non-naturalism, the Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist has no explanation for why the normative laws are metaphysically necessary, and thus still has not addressed the general worry that motivates the supervenience objection. But Wilsch (2015) suggests an explanation for why any metaphysical law is metaphysically necessary. Namely, Wilsch suggests that the laws of metaphysics determine the metaphysical possibilities in the same way that the laws of nature determine the nomological possibilities. That is, the metaphysically possible worlds are simply the set of logically possible worlds in which the laws of metaphysics hold, just as the nomologically possible worlds are the set of logically possible worlds in which the laws of nature hold. So, if *L* is a metaphysical law, and the metaphysically possible worlds are those worlds in which the laws of metaphysics hold, then in every metaphysically possible world, *L* holds. And since the metaphysical necessities are those facts that obtain in every metaphysically possible world, *L* is metaphysically necessary. The Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist thus has a ready explanation for why the normative laws are metaphysically necessary.<sup>18</sup>

By adopting Wilsch's view of the grounding facts and metaphysical possibility, then, the Grounded Non-naturalist can explain not just Strong Supervenience, but all the metaphysical necessities involving the natural and the normative: on this view, the metaphysically necessary connections between normative and natural properties are

---

<sup>18</sup> Enoch and Scanlon could claim something similar in order to explain why their fundamental normative principles are metaphysically necessary: that those principles are fundamental laws of metaphysics, and thus necessary simply because the metaphysically possible worlds are the logically possible worlds where the laws of metaphysics hold. But Enoch and Scanlon's explanation for supervenience would then face another problem that I soon bring up for Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism (see fn 19).

ultimately explained by the laws of metaphysics, which themselves are metaphysically necessary because they are precisely what determine the metaphysical possibilities.

But Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism faces a new problem. Namely, it is unclear whether this metaphysical picture provides a genuinely non-naturalist view of the normative. This is because the view implies that normative properties metaphysically relate to paradigmatic scientific properties in exactly the same way as certain derivative natural properties do. For example, consider the derivative natural property *being a mammal or a rock*: this is not a paradigmatic scientific property. But *being a mammal or a rock* is nonetheless a natural property — it's *of the same kind* as paradigmatic scientific properties. And facts about what things have this property are grounded in paradigmatic scientific facts: e.g. the fact that Ellie the elephant is a mammal or a rock is grounded in the fact that Ellie is a mammal. Moreover, according to the background metaphysics that Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism relies upon, what explains why the fact that Ellie's being a mammal grounds that Ellie is a mammal or a rock is the fact that it is a metaphysical law that if  $x$  is  $F$ , then  $x$  is  $F$  or  $G$ , for any  $G$ .

According to Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism, then, the normative facts relate to paradigmatic scientific facts in exactly the same way that mammal-or-rock-facts do: both the particular contingent normative facts and the particular contingent mammal-or-rock-facts are numerically distinct from, but fully grounded in paradigmatic scientific facts, and facts about which scientific facts ground which normative or mammal-or-rock facts are grounded in the metaphysical laws. But then it's not clear why normative properties are nonetheless significantly different in kind from paradigmatic scientific properties and why countenancing them is incompatible with a scientific worldview. After all, *being a mammal or a rock* is obviously *not* significantly different in kind from scientific properties and countenancing this



property is obviously compatible with a scientific worldview. Without some explanation for why normative properties are non-natural, but *being a mammal or a rock* is natural, then, it's not clear that this is a genuinely non-naturalist view.

In other words, in order to maintain that normative properties are *sui generis*, the non-naturalist must be able to point to some way in which all derivative natural properties and facts relate to the paradigmatic scientific properties and facts, which is a way that normative properties and facts do *not* relate to the scientific properties and facts. But it's not clear that there is anything for the Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist to point to.<sup>19</sup>

The Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist might claim as Bader (forthcoming) does, that just as the laws of nature are a distinct set of laws from the metaphysical laws, which underlie *causal relations* between events, the normative laws are a distinct set of laws that underlie *normative grounding relations* between particular facts (where normative grounding is distinct from metaphysical grounding). The Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist may then claim that what makes the normative *sui generis*, while derivative natural properties like *being a mammal or a rock* are not, is that, unlike derivative natural facts like mammal-or-rock facts, the normative facts are governed by a distinct set of laws, so that they are only normatively grounded (and not metaphysically grounded) in the scientific facts.

But by claiming that the normative laws are distinct from the metaphysical laws, and that the normative facts are thus only normatively grounded in the natural facts, the Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist undermines her response to the supervenience objection. If the

---

<sup>19</sup> Similarly, if Enoch and Scanlon claim that the fundamental normative principles are metaphysical laws, it's not clear how they can maintain their non-naturalist commitments, since the metaphysical structure of the normative facts is exactly the same as that of certain derivative natural facts. For example, consider facts about tables. If metaphysical laws are fundamental and ground the contingent derivative facts together with the contingent fundamental facts, then table-facts are grounded in the same way as the normative facts: e.g. the fact that there is a table is grounded in the fact that there are particles arranged table-wise and the fundamental metaphysical law that if there are particles arranged table-wise, then there is a table. So, it's not clear on this view why tables are the same kind of stuff as paradigmatic scientific stuff and are compatible with a scientific worldview, while normative properties are not.

normative laws are distinct from the metaphysical laws and govern a distinct kind of grounding relation, then the question of why the normative laws are *metaphysically necessary* reopens. In fact, the claim that the normative laws are distinct from the metaphysical laws just as the laws of nature are seems to suggest that the normative laws are *not* metaphysically necessary, just as the laws of nature are not metaphysically necessary. So, the above attempt to secure that the normative is *sui generis* on the Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist picture not only undermines this view's explanation for Strong Supervenience, but seems to even deny Strong Supervenience altogether.

Grounded Non-naturalists thus face a dilemma. In order to fully respond to the supervenience objection, they must appeal to some general view about what grounds the grounding facts that discharges (rather than shifts) the burden of explaining the metaphysically necessary connections between natural and normative properties. But appealing to a general view about what grounds the grounding facts makes the metaphysical structure of the normative facts mirror that of certain derivative natural facts and thereby threatens her non-naturalist commitments that the normative is *sui generis* and incompatible with a scientific worldview.

In the following section, however, I argue that, by adopting the ideology of *essence*, the Grounded Non-naturalist can provide a metaphysical picture of the normative that explains all the metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative, while also clearly capturing the pre-theoretical commitments of non-naturalism. So, I show that Grounded Non-naturalists can ultimately find their way out of this dilemma, if they adopt my essentialist proposal.

#### 4. Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism

I have argued that the metaphysical explanations for supervenience considered thus far either fail to respond to the general worry that motivates the supervenience objection or fail to provide a metaphysical view of the normative that clearly respects the core commitments of non-naturalism. In this section, however, I argue that an alternative version of Grounded Non-naturalism that adopts an *essentialist* view about what explains the grounding facts can succeed where the others fail. That is, instead of claiming that the grounding facts are explained by metaphysical laws, one might hold (as Dasgupta (2014), Fine (2012), and Rosen (2010) suggest) that the grounding facts are explained by facts about the *essences* of the properties involved. And I argue that, by adopting this view, the non-naturalist can offer an explanation for Strong Supervenience that both explains all the metaphysically necessary connections between the natural and the normative, and also clearly captures her non-naturalist commitments.

In what follows, I first briefly explain Fine's (1994a/b) account of essence and the essentialist view of grounding in more detail, and then I explain how the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical commitments can be captured in terms of essence. Next, I argue that this non-naturalist view is compatible with an essentialist explanation for why the normative is grounded in, and thus supervenes on, the natural. Finally, I defend this explanation against McPherson's (2012) charge that it simply shifts the non-naturalist's explanatory burden.

Fine (1994b) takes the essence of an object or property to be the set of propositions that are directly definitive of that object or property, which thereby describe the very nature of that object or property.<sup>20</sup> For example, it's directly definitive of *being a bachelor* that, if x is a

---

<sup>20</sup> I am oversimplifying Fine's view here. Fine (1994b) distinguishes between many different senses of essence. In this paper, I am exclusively concerned with what Fine calls *constitutive immediate* essence.

bachelor, then  $x$  is unmarried. So, the proposition *if  $x$  is a bachelor, then  $x$  is unmarried* is part of the essence of *being a bachelor*. Or, if it is directly definitive of you that you originated from a particular ovum and sperm pair OS, then the proposition *you originated from OS* is part of your essence. For the essence of  $F$  to *involve*  $G$  is thus simply for  $G$  to be a constituent of some proposition that is directly definitive of  $F$ . For example, the essence of *being a bachelor* involves *being unmarried* and your essence may involve *OS*.

Moreover, Fine (1994a) takes essences to determine the metaphysical possibilities, and thereby explain metaphysical necessities. According to Fine, the metaphysical possibilities are the logical possibilities that are compatible with the essences of all things. The metaphysically necessary truths, then, are those truths that follow from the essences of things. For example, the fact that it's part of the essence of *being a bachelor* that if  $x$  is a bachelor, then  $x$  is unmarried, explains why it's metaphysically necessary that all bachelors are unmarried; and the fact that it's part of your essence that you originated from OS explains why any metaphysically possible world where you exist is a world in which you originated from OS.

Dasgupta (2014), Fine (2012), and Rosen (2010) suggest, moreover, that essences explain grounding facts.<sup>21</sup> To illustrate, suppose event  $e$  is a particular rock show, played by a few different classic rock bands. The fact that  $e$  is a rock show is presumably grounded in the fact that  $e$  consists of people acting in a certain way  $W$  (e.g. playing guitars, bass, and drums in a classic rock sort of way before an audience, and so on). According to an essentialist view of grounding, what explains this grounding fact is that it is part of the

---

<sup>21</sup> I gloss over some differences between Dasgupta, Fine, and Rosen's views here. Whereas Dasgupta takes essences to explain particular grounding facts, Fine and Rosen claim, instead, that essences explain general patterns amongst the grounding facts. Moreover, whereas Dasgupta and Rosen take the kind of explanatory relation that holds between essences and grounding connections to be the grounding relation, Fine takes it to be a distinct explanatory relation that is unique to essence explanations. But these differences amongst their views do not matter for my purposes. So, I simply describe the essentialist view along the lines of Dasgupta (2014) in what follows.

essence of being a rock show that an event is a rock show if it consists of people acting in way  $W$ . But since there are many different ways to rock (e.g. punk rock, celtic rock, shoegazer rock), there are many different ways of playing different instruments that suffice for a rock show – let's call these ways of acting  $W_1, W_2 \dots$ . So, the fact that  $e_1$  is a rock show is grounded in the fact that  $e_1$  consists of people acting in way  $W_1$  and the fact that  $e_2$  is a rock show is grounded in the fact that  $e_2$  consists of people acting in way  $W_2$ , and so on. On the essentialist view, all of these grounding facts are explained by the essence of being a rock show: they are explained by the fact that it is part of the essence of being a rock show that an event is a rock show if it consists of people acting in way  $W_1$ , or if it consists of people acting in way  $W_2$ , and so on.

Dasgupta (2014) argues, moreover, that essences are *autonomous* in the sense that they are neither grounded nor fundamental, but simply not the sorts of things that can, in principle, have a metaphysical explanation. It seems like the question of why, for example, *originating from OS* is involved in your essence is akin to asking why  $H_2O$  and water are identical. The answer in both cases seems to be that that's just what *being you* and *water* are, and the request for any further explanation seems inapt. This suggests that facts about essence, like facts about numerical identity, are just not the sorts of facts that can, in principle, have a metaphysical explanation. On the essentialist view, then, it seems plausible to take essences to be facts that impose grounding structure on the world, but are not themselves the sorts of facts that can, in principle, have grounds.

Given the ideology of essence, we may interpret classical non-naturalism as follows:

*Essentialist Non-naturalism*: the essences of some normative properties

- (i) cannot be specified entirely in non-normative terms and
- (ii) do not specify any non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation.

That is, a non-naturalist may presumably admit that it's part of the essence of *being right*, for example, that if x is right, then x is an action. Non-naturalism is thus compatible with the claim that the essences of *sui generis* normative properties involve some natural properties, and even that they specify some naturalistic necessary conditions for their instantiation. And the non-naturalist may also admit, for example, that it's part of the essence of *being right* that if x produces the most good, then x is right. The non-naturalist may thus admit that the essences of *sui generis* normative properties specify *normative* sufficient conditions for their instantiation. But the non-naturalist must insist that the essences of some normative properties involve something irreducibly normative, which cannot be specified in non-normative terms, and that their essences do not specify naturalistic or any non-normative sufficient conditions whatsoever for their instantiation.

Essentialist Non-naturalism seems sufficient to capture the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical claims. First, if the essences of some normative properties involve something that cannot be specified in any non-normative terms whatsoever and they do not specify non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation, then the very nature of those properties involves something entirely unlike any other kind of properties. So, this view seems to capture the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical claim that normative properties are of their own kind. Second, if the essences of some normative properties cannot be specified entirely in non-normative terms, including natural terms, then there is something about the nature of reality that ultimately cannot be described by science. Essentialist Non-naturalism thus seems to imply that countenancing normative properties is incompatible with a scientific worldview in this sense.

Moreover, as I will argue below, Essentialist Non-naturalism is compatible with an essentialist explanation for why all particular contingent normative facts are fully grounded

in, and thus supervene on, the particular contingent natural facts. Since the Essentialist Non-naturalist claims that the essences of some normative properties do not specify any non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation, she cannot take the metaphysical explanation for all particular contingent normative facts to have the exact same structure as the metaphysical explanation for facts about rock shows. That is, the Essentialist Non-naturalist cannot claim that the essences of the grounded properties — the *sui generis* normative properties — explain why the normative facts are grounded in the natural facts. But she may claim, instead, that the essence of the grounding properties explains why the normative is grounded in the natural.

Fine (2012) and Dasgupta (2014) both assume that, if the fact that *a* is *F* grounds the fact that *a* is *G*, this grounding fact is explained by the essence of *G* — the *grounded* property. This seems plausible for certain canonical examples of grounding facts. For example, the fact that Socrates exists grounds the fact that the singleton set {Socrates} exists not because it's part of the essence of *Socrates* that, if Socrates exists, {Socrates} exists, but because it's part of the essence of {Socrates} that {Socrates} exists if and only if Socrates exists. Similarly, the fact that the ball is red grounds the fact that the ball is red or green not because it's part of the essence of *redness* that something is red or green, if it is red, but because it's part of the essence of *disjunction* that something is red or green, if it is red.

But some canonical examples of grounding facts suggest that grounding facts may be explained, instead, by the essences of the *grounding* properties, rather than the *grounded* properties. For example, the fact that the ball is red grounds the fact that the ball is colored, and the fact that the ball is 2 kg grounds the fact that the ball has mass. It seems plausible that what it is for something to be red involves *being colored*, and that what it is for something

to be 2 kg involves *having mass*, rather than the other way around. So, it seems plausible that the essence of *redness* and *being 2 kg* are what explain, respectively, these two grounding facts.

The Essentialist Non-naturalist might thus attempt to explain why all particular contingent normative facts are grounded in and supervene on the particular contingent natural facts by claiming that the essences of certain *natural* properties specify sufficient conditions for the instantiation of *sui generis* normative properties. Indeed, Wedgwood ((1999), (2007)) presents a view along these lines: he claims that the essences of certain *mental* properties involve normative properties, and that this explains why the normative supervenes on the natural. But, as Rosen (MS) points out, this does not actually explain why normative properties supervene on natural, non-normative properties. This is because, within an essentialist framework, we should adopt the following recursive definition for *non-natural normative properties*:

For any property F:

- (i) If the essence of F cannot be specified entirely in non-normative terms and does not specify non-normative sufficient conditions for its instantiation, then F is a (*sui generis*) non-natural normative property.
- (ii) If the essence of F involves a non-natural normative property N, then F is a non-natural normative property.

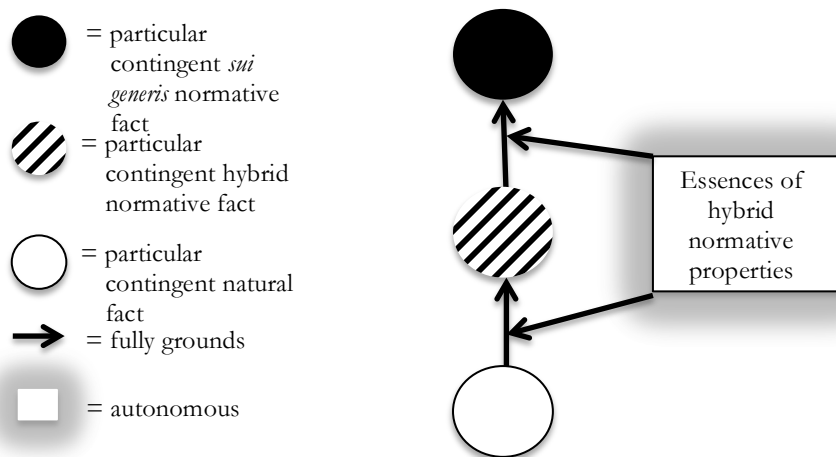
Wedgwood's claim that certain mental properties involve non-natural normative properties in their essence thus implies that mental properties are non-natural normative properties. So, his view explains why non-natural normative properties supervene on *other* non-natural normative properties. But it fails to explain why non-natural normative properties supervene on natural non-normative properties.



My proposal, however, is for the Essentialist Non-naturalist to claim, instead, that there are *hybrid properties* whose essences involve both natural non-normative properties and *sui generis* normative properties. For example, one might claim, along Wedgwoodian lines, that the essences of certain *mental* properties involve both physical and non-natural normative properties: that it is part of the essence of *being in pain* that (1) if one's C-fibers are firing, then one is in pain, and (2) that if x is a painful experience, x is bad. Since the Essentialist Non-naturalist takes *badness* to be a *sui generis* non-natural normative property, (2) implies that *being in pain* is a non-natural normative property (given the above definition); but so long as the essence of *being in a C-fibers-firing-state* does not involve *being in pain* or any other non-natural properties, *being in a C-fibers-firing-state* is a natural non-normative property. Now, the Essentialist Non-naturalist may claim that (1) explains why pain-facts are grounded in C-fiber-firing facts, and (2) explains why badness-facts are grounded in pain-facts. This view thus does explain why non-natural normative facts (e.g. badness-facts) are ultimately grounded in, and thus supervene on, natural non-normative facts (e.g. C-fiber-firing facts).

More generally, the explanation for supervenience that I am proposing, which I call *Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism*, has the following structure:

Diagram 4: Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism



The Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist takes some normative properties (e.g. *being right*, *being good*, *being a reason*) to be *sui generis* in the sense mentioned earlier: their essences cannot be specified entirely in non-normative terms and do not specify any non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation. She also takes some normative properties to be not *sui generis*, but *hybrid* in the sense that their essences specify naturalistic sufficient conditions for their own instantiation and sufficient conditions for the *sui generis* normative properties. The Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist then claims that the essences of the hybrid normative properties thereby explain (1) why all particular contingent normative facts involving *sui generis* normative properties are fully grounded in particular contingent normative facts involving hybrid normative properties, and (2) why all particular contingent hybrid normative facts are fully grounded in particular contingent natural facts. The hybrid properties thus act as a double-sided tape that sticks the *sui generis* normative facts onto the natural facts.<sup>22</sup>

The Wedgwoodian view described earlier is just one variation of this general sort of explanation for supervenience. Instead of taking the hybrid normative properties to be mental properties, one might take them to be so-called “thick” normative properties like *being courageous*, *being a promise*, *being a friend*, and so on. For example, one might claim that it’s part of the essence of *being a promise* that if certain natural conditions C obtain, then A promised B to do x, and that it’s also part of the essence of *being a promise* that if A promised B to do x, then A has a reason to do x (and so on for other thick normative properties).<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist might take *being a reason* to be the single hybrid normative property: that the essence of *being a reason* specifies all the naturalistic

---

<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Tobias Wilsch for suggesting this metaphor.

<sup>23</sup> This view requires that thick normative properties are more fundamental than thin normative properties like *being a reason*, *being good*, and so on.

sufficient conditions for R's being a reason for someone to do A and sufficient conditions for the *sui generis* normative properties.

All of these variations of Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism respond to the supervenience objection in the same way. Like Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism, Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism explains Strong Supervenience by claiming that all the normative facts are fully grounded in the natural facts, but it explains why certain normative facts are grounded in certain natural facts by appealing to essences rather than metaphysical laws. And essences are plausibly autonomous in the sense that they are not the sorts of things that can, in principle, have a metaphysical explanation. So, the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist has no burden to explain why the essences of the hybrid normative properties involve the natural and non-natural normative properties that they do. Moreover, like the metaphysical laws, the *metaphysical necessity* of essential truths can be explained simply by the nature of metaphysical possibility. Since the metaphysical possibilities are the logical possibilities that are compatible with the essences of all things, any essential truth is true in every metaphysically possible world, and thus metaphysically necessary. The Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist thus seems to explain all metaphysical necessities involving the natural and the normative.

Moreover, as we have already seen, Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism captures the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical commitments. The reason why the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist succeeds here, where the Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist failed, is that the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist has more fine-grained theoretical tools at her disposal — the notion of essence — in order to make distinctions between properties that have similar grounding structures. Although the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist, like the Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalist, claims that normative facts are ultimately grounded in

paradigmatic scientific facts just like derivative natural facts are, the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist has the resources to explain why some normative properties are nonetheless *sui generis* and incompatible with a scientific worldview, whereas derivative natural properties like *being a mammal or a rock* are not: it is because the essences of those normative properties cannot be fully specified in terms of scientific properties (or any other non-normative properties whatsoever), whereas the nature of derivative natural properties *can* be fully characterized in terms of scientific properties.

While this particular explanation for Strong Supervenience has not been developed in the literature thus far, McPherson (2012) anticipates a similar essentialist response to the supervenience objection. He considers whether the non-naturalist can explain why the normative supervenes on the natural by claiming that some normative properties are conjunctive properties that essentially involve both natural and irreducibly normative properties. For example, he considers a view according to which *being a reason* is the conjunctive property *playing justifying role R and being realized by B*, where B is some natural property. But McPherson argues that, while this explains why *being a reason* supervenes on B, in order for this view to explain why all normative properties (including *playing justifying role R*) supervene on natural properties, it must implicitly assume that *playing justifying role R* and B are necessarily coinstantiated. So, it assumes that nothing can have the property of *playing justifying role R and being not-B*, and that nothing can have the property of *being B and not playing justifying role R*. But McPherson claims that the non-naturalist has no explanation for why *playing justifying role R* is necessarily coinstantiated with B. More generally, then, McPherson claims that the essentialist view that takes some normative properties to be conjunctive properties that involve both natural and *sui generis* normative properties to posit a brute metaphysically necessary connection between the natural and normative *conjuncts*.

But the essentialist explanation for supervenience that I have offered here differs in important ways from the essentialist explanation that McPherson considers. Namely, on my proposal, the hybrid normative properties are *not* conjunctive properties. And unlike the conjunctive property view, which suggests that the conjunctive normative facts (e.g. the reason facts) are grounded in their normative and natural conjuncts (e.g. the fact that x plays justifying role R and the fact that x is B), on the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist's view, the hybrid normative facts are fully grounded by the natural facts, and fully *ground* the *sui generis* normative facts. So, if the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist claims that *being a reason* is the sole hybrid property whose essence involves (1) that if x is a reason, x plays justifying role R and (2) that if x is a reason, x is B, her view is that the justifying-role-R facts are grounded in the reason facts, which are grounded in the B facts. Unlike the conjunctive property view, then, this view explains why it's metaphysically necessary that if x is B, then x plays justifying role R. It thus explains why nothing can have the property of *being B and not playing justifying role R*.

Moreover, the background metaphysical framework that the Essentially Grounded Non-naturalist relies upon also explains why, according to the above view, it's metaphysically necessary that if x plays justifying role R, then x is B. On the essentialist framework, no grounding facts are fundamental: all grounding facts are themselves grounded in essences. And so, no derivative property F can be instantiated by something unless that thing has some more fundamental property G and there is an essential connection between *being F* and *being G*. This explains why, for example, nothing can have the property *playing justifying role R* unless it has some more fundamental property whose essence involves *playing justifying role R*. And if *being a reason* is the only hybrid property that involves *playing justifying role R*, and it also involves B, then this explains why it's metaphysically necessary that if something has the

property of *playing justifying role R*, then it is B. So, this view explains why nothing can have the property of *playing justifying role R and being not-B*.

More generally, then, Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism, unlike the conjunctive property view that McPherson considers, does explain the metaphysically necessary connections between the *sui generis* normative properties and natural properties that are constituents of the hybrid normative properties. First, Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism explains why it's metaphysically necessary that if x has certain natural properties, it has certain *sui generis* normative properties. And the background metaphysics that this view relies on also explains why the *sui generis* normative facts are *necessarily* grounded by hybrid facts, and thus why it's metaphysically necessary that if something has some *sui generis* normative property F, then it has some natural property G that is involved in the essence of the hybrid property that involves F. So, by adopting the particular essentialist response to the supervenience problem that I have offered here, the non-naturalist can avoid McPherson's charge of smuggling in some unexplained metaphysically necessary connections between natural and normative properties.

## 5. Conclusion

The essentialist response to the supervenience objection that I have offered here thus succeeds where others fail. Unlike Fundamentalist Non-naturalism, Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism has the resources to explain not just Strong Supervenience, but *all* the metaphysically necessary connections between natural and normative properties, and unlike Lawfully Grounded Non-naturalism, it also clearly captures the non-naturalist's core pre-theoretical commitments. Essentially Grounded Non-naturalism thus shows that,

contrary to popular opinion, the fact that the normative supervenes on the natural is not a reason to prefer naturalism over non-naturalism.

## Chapter 2

### In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief

Suppose that, if Joseph were to exercise regularly, it would make him a happier person. Intuitively, Joseph thereby has a *normative reason* to exercise: the fact that Joseph's exercising would make him happier genuinely *counts in favor* of him doing so. Now suppose that, if Mary were to believe that God exists, it would make her a happier person. Does Mary thereby have a normative reason to believe that God exists?

Many meta-ethicists and epistemologists alike say “no” (e.g. Clifford (1879), Kelly (2002), Parfit (2011), Shah (2006), Thomson (2008) and Whiting (2014)) because they insist that the only normative reasons there are for or against believing any proposition are *epistemic* ones – i.e. reasons that are in some way relevant to getting at the truth and avoiding error. Let's call this view *alethism*.<sup>24</sup> But others (e.g. James (1896), Markovits (2014), Pascal (1670), Reisner (2009), Rinard (2015)) claim that the answer is “yes”. They insist that, while practical considerations like the fact that believing in God would make one happier are obviously in no way connected to the goal of getting at the truth and avoiding error, such considerations nonetheless *count in favor* of believing certain propositions. Let's call this view *pragmatism*.<sup>25</sup>

Given the similarities between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's, the alethist assumes the dialectical burden in this debate. After all, the very same benefit would be conferred by Joseph's exercising and Mary's believing that God exists. But the alethist insists that, while this benefit does generate a normative reason for Joseph to exercise, it does not generate a normative reason for Mary to believe that God exists. The alethist thus owes an

---

<sup>24</sup> The alethist camp includes, but is not limited to, *evidentialists*: those who claim that all normative reasons for believing *p* are considerations that bear on the truth of *p*. An alethist may deny evidentialism, since there may be some epistemic reasons for or against believing *p* that do not bear on the truth of *p* (e.g. see Schroeder (2012)).

<sup>25</sup> A third position that I set aside here is *nihilism*: that practical considerations are not normative reasons for belief because there are no normative reasons for belief at all – not even epistemic ones.



account of what the relevant difference is between *action* and *belief*, which thereby explains the normative difference between these two cases. Without such an account, we should assume that there is no such difference, and thereby accept pragmatism as the default view.

My central aim in this paper is to defend pragmatism by showing that the two popular alethist strategies for discharging this explanatory burden fail. According to the first strategy, the relevant difference between action and belief that explains the normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's is simply that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, but not for action. And according to the second strategy, the relevant difference between action and belief is that, while the fact that one's doing some act would be beneficial can be a *motivating* reason *for which* one performs that act, the fact that believing some proposition would be beneficial cannot be a motivating reason for which one believes that proposition. I argue, however, that the first strategy fails because it simply shifts the alethist's explanatory burden, and that the second strategy fails because practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief. I take this to show that the alethist has not discharged her dialectical burden, and that we should thereby accept pragmatism.

My argument is entirely neutral, however, with respect to what particular sort of pragmatist position we should adopt. One could hold a very modest pragmatist position according to which practical reasons and epistemic reasons are not even comparable, so that there is what one *ought-epistemically* to believe and what one *ought-practically* to believe, but there is no such thing as what one ought *all things considered* to believe, where this all-things-considered-'ought' takes into account both practical and epistemic reasons for belief. But one could also hold a more extreme pragmatist view that practical and epistemic reasons are comparable, and that practical reasons *always* outweigh epistemic ones. Or one could hold

some intermediate view. My argument only defends the existential claim that there are practical reasons for belief, though, and does not bear at all on how robust of a pragmatist position we should adopt.

## 1. The Standards of Correctness Strategy

The first alethist strategy for explaining the normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's begins with a quite common claim (e.g. Thomson (2008), Velleman (2000), and Wedgwood (2002)) that truth is the *constitutive standard of correctness* for belief: that it's part of what belief is, that a belief is correct if and only if it is true. An obvious difference between action and belief, then, is that a belief, but not an act, is constitutively correct if and only if it is true.

Some alethists (e.g. Thomson (2008)) take this obvious difference to explain the normative difference between action and belief. Since truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, then the only considerations that bear on whether believing a proposition is constitutively correct are those considerations that bear on whether the proposition is true. And since practical considerations do not bear on whether a proposition is true, they do not bear on whether believing a proposition is constitutively correct. Some alethists take this to explain why practical considerations cannot be normative reasons for belief, even though they can be normative reasons for action. Let's call this the *standards of correctness strategy*.

This strategy relies on the assumption that all normative reasons for having some attitude A must bear on whether it would be constitutively correct to have A. This is what licenses the alethist's inference from the claim that practical considerations do not bear on

whether it would be constitutively correct to believe  $p$  to the conclusion that such considerations cannot constitute normative reasons for belief.

This alethist strategy thus assumes that there are no so-called *wrong-kind* reasons: genuine normative reasons for having some attitude that do not bear on whether it is constitutively correct to have that attitude. That is, the practical reasons literature abounds with intuitive examples of considerations that seem to count in favor of having some attitude, but which do not bear on whether having that attitude would be constitutively correct. For example, suppose that admiring your mother would increase your inheritance. This seems to count in favor of admiring your mother. But, presumably, admiring some object  $O$  is correct, given the kind of attitude admiration is, if and only if  $O$  is really admirable. So, since the fact that admiring your mother would increase your inheritance does not bear on whether your mother is admirable, this fact does not bear on whether it is constitutively correct to admire your mother. While some take considerations like these to be genuine normative reasons nonetheless, others insist that the only genuine normative reasons there are for or against having an attitude are so-called *right-kind* reasons – i.e. considerations that bear on whether it is constitutively correct to have an attitude.<sup>26</sup>

Importantly, though, the pragmatist presumably admits that practical considerations do not bear on whether some belief would be constitutively correct (since they do not bear on whether the belief is true), but insists that such considerations are genuine normative reasons nonetheless. So, whether or not all normative reasons for having an attitude must bear on whether it would be constitutively correct to have that attitude is precisely what is at

---

<sup>26</sup> For example, Hieronymi (2005), Markovits (2014), Olson (2004) take there to be an important difference between right-kind and wrong-kind reasons, but claim that both kinds are genuine normative reasons, whereas Parfit (2011) and Skorupski (2012) claim that only right kind reasons are really normative reasons. See Rabinowicz & Rasmussen (2004) and Schroeder (2010) for further discussion of the right-kind vs. wrong-kind reason distinction.

stake in the pragmatism vs. alethism debate. The alethist who adopts the standards of correctness strategy thus cannot simply *assume* that there are no wrong-kind reasons, or else she begs the question.

The alethist might argue, though, that denying that there are wrong-kind reasons provides a better explanation of the normative facts. After all, denying that there are wrong-kind reasons is compatible with claiming that in cases where it would be beneficial to believe that God exists or admire one's mother, for example, one has normative reasons to *want* and to *cause* oneself to have those attitudes. The view that there are only right-kind reasons can thus capture our intuitions that there are normative reasons in these cases, while also providing a unified account of normative reasons: all normative reasons for having an attitude are considerations that bear on whether it would be constitutively correct to have that attitude.

But the view that there are only right-kind normative reasons is actually not the more unified view of normative reasons overall. This is because not all normative reasons for performing a kind of *action* bear on the constitutive correctness of that kind of action. For example, it's part of what it is to do a triple Salchow that a triple Salchow is correct iff the figure skater takes off from the back inside edge of her foot, spins three times in the air in the direction of her takeoff foot, and lands on the outside edge of the opposite foot. But most normative reasons for doing a triple Salchow do not bear on the constitutive correctness of one's triple Salchow – e.g. the fact that it's fun or that it will earn one a gold medal.

Similarly, it's part of what an assertion is that asserting that *p* is correct if and only if *p* is true, but there are many reasons for asserting *p* that do not bear on whether *p* is true,

and thus do not bear on whether asserting  $p$  is constitutively correct.<sup>27</sup> For example, the fact that asserting, “It’s a lovely day outside,” would alleviate an awkward silence is a normative reason to assert that it’s a lovely day outside, and the fact that asserting, “Paulie isn’t home,” will save your brother’s life when the mafia comes knocking is a normative reason to assert that Paulie isn’t home. But neither of these reasons bears on the truth of your assertion, and thus neither reason bears on whether your assertion is constitutively correct.

Denying that there are wrong-kind reasons for attitudes thus actually posits a deep normative difference between action and attitudes: that considerations that do not bear on whether an attitude is constitutively correct cannot be genuine normative reasons for having that attitude, but considerations that do not bear on whether an action is constitutively correct can be normative reasons for doing that act. On the other hand, accepting that there are both right-kind and wrong-kind reasons allows that normative reasons and constitutive standards of correctness come apart for actions and attitudes alike, and thus offers a more unified view of normative reasons overall.

Importantly, then, while the standards of correctness strategy accounts for the normative difference between action and belief, it does so only by positing a further unexplained normative difference between action and attitudes, more generally: that normative reasons for attitudes, but not normative reasons for action, are necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness. So, the standards of correctness strategy merely shifts, rather than discharges, the alethist’s explanatory burden.

One might think, however, that normative reasons for some type of reaction  $T$  are determined by constitutive standards of correctness only if the most fundamental kind of reaction that  $T$  is a type of has a constitutive standard of correctness. The alethist might then

---

<sup>27</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this example.

argue that, while there may be constitutive standards of correctness for certain kinds of actions like triple Salchows and assertions, these are, more fundamentally, *actions* and there is no constitutive standard of correctness for action as a general kind. This would explain why normative reasons for doing triple Salchows or making assertions are not necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness.

But this explanation actually undermines the standards of correctness strategy altogether because it suggests that normative reasons for belief (and other attitudes like intention and desire) are not determined by constitutive standards of correctness either. After all, belief, intention, and desires are, more fundamentally, *attitudes*, and there do not seem to be constitutive standards of correctness for attitudes, as a general kind. So, the above explanation for why normative reasons for action are not necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness implies that normative reasons for attitudes are not necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness either.

Instead, the alethist might argue that normative reasons for attitudes are necessarily tied to constitutive standards of correctness, unlike normative reasons for action, because only considerations that bear on the constitutive correctness of an attitude can *motivate* one to have that type of attitude, while considerations that do not bear on the constitutive correctness of an action can motivate one to perform that action. But this collapses the standards of correctness strategy into the second strategy that alethists use to try to discharge their explanatory burden. So, that is where I will now turn.

## 2. The Motivational Strategy

Another way that some alethists (e.g. Kelly (2002), Parfit (2011), and Shah (2006)) attempt to explain the normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's is by first claiming that normative reasons must be

POSSIBLY MOTIVATING      R is a normative reason for S to  $\phi$  only if R can be  
a *motivating reason* for which someone (with a normal human psychology)  $\phi$ s.

The alethist then claims that the relevant difference between action and belief is a

MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE      Practical considerations can constitute  
motivating reasons for which someone (with a normal human psychology) performs  
an act, but they cannot constitute motivating reasons for which someone (with a  
normal human psychology) believes a proposition.<sup>28</sup>

For example, on this strategy the alethist claims that, while the fact that exercising will make one happier is a reason *for which* someone can exercise, the fact that believing in God would make one happier is not a reason *for which* someone can believe that God exists. Given POSSIBLY MOTIVATING, this explains why the fact that exercising will make Joseph happier is a normative reason for Joseph to exercise, but the fact that believing in God would make Mary happier is not a normative reason for Mary to believe that God exists.

Many meta-ethicists accept POSSIBLY MOTIVATING (e.g. Dancy (2000), Parfit (2011), Scanlon (1998), Shah (2006), and Williams (1979)) because it seems to be part of our

---

<sup>28</sup> I assume that the relevant kind of possibility is a general psychological possibility relativized to a normal human psychology. If the motivational strategy involved a more local psychological possibility that is relativized to the agent's particular psychological features, POSSIBLY MOTIVATING would rule out too many reasons. For example, suppose I have been brainwashed to believe that all scientists are frauds, so that I am psychologically incapable of believing anything on the basis of testimony from scientists. If POSSIBLY MOTIVATING involved a more local psychological possibility, it would imply that the fact that the majority of scientists claim that global warming is being caused by humans is not an epistemic reason for *me* to believe that global warming is being caused by humans. And if the motivational strategy involved a broader sense of psychological possibility that is not relativized to creatures like *us*, then MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE would not be very plausible, since we can at least imagine creatures unlike us whose psychological features are such that they can believe for practical considerations. Reisner (2009) makes similar points.

very concept of a normative reason that they are action and attitude guiding. If it is impossible for anyone with a normal human psychology to perform some act (or have some attitude) *for* some consideration R, then R cannot play the essential guiding role of a normative reason.

And while many meta-ethicists find MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE plausible simply on the basis of introspection (e.g. Markovits (2014), Parfit (2011), Raz (2009), and Whiting (2014)), Shah (2006) has also offered a powerful argument for this claim. First, Shah makes the observation that when consciously deliberating about whether to believe p, we cannot arrive at the belief that p *solely* by recognizing that it would be advantageous to believe p; we must deliberate about whether p. This is what Shah calls the *transparency of belief*, which cries out for explanation. As Shah (2006) argues, one explanation for this psychological phenomenon is that practical considerations simply cannot constitute motivating reasons for belief. After all, if practical considerations cannot motivate us at all to believe p, we obviously cannot come to believe p on the basis of recognizing practical considerations *alone*.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, if practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, transparency is quite mysterious. In fact, the claim that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief seems to be in tension with the very phenomenon of transparency itself. This is because the degree to which one is motivated to  $\phi$  on the basis of some reason R to  $\phi$  often corresponds with how *strong* of a reason one takes R to be. So, if practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, then it seems that one should be able to believe p solely on the basis of some practical consideration R if one takes R to be a sufficiently strong reason to do so. But, for example, even if I believe that the rest

---

<sup>29</sup> Shah (2003), (2006) actually gives a fuller explanation for transparency, which I discuss in §4.3.



of my life will be filled with intense fear unless I believe that I am immortal, and that this is a *decisive* reason to believe that proposition, I still could not believe that I am immortal purely on that basis.

So, the motivational strategy seems more promising. I ultimately argue (in §4), however, that this strategy fails because practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief. Moreover, I argue that my account of how we believe for practical reasons is compatible with an explanation for transparency. But my argument relies upon a particular account of motivating reasons, so I will first explain this account in the following section.

### 3. Motivating Reasons

Let's first distinguish *motivating* reasons from *normative* and *merely explanatory* reasons. While normative reasons are facts that *count in favor* of an agent's  $\phi$ ing, motivating reasons are facts *for which* an agent  $\phi$ s, and merely explanatory reasons are facts that are involved in the explanation of why an agent  $\phi$ ed, but that are not facts for which the agent  $\phi$ ed.<sup>30</sup> To illustrate, consider the following case:

(*Snakes that are Plain*) Samuel has been hypnotized to falsely believe that all snakes without any markings are poisonous. One day, while walking in the woods, Samuel encounters a plain snake, and runs away in fear. In fact, the snake Samuel encountered was actually poisonous, which was evident by the rattle on its tail.

The fact that the snake has a rattle is a normative reason for Samuel to run away – it genuinely *counts in favor* of him doing so. But the fact that the snake has a rattle is not the reason *for which* he runs away – it's not his motivating reason. Rather, the reason for which

---

<sup>30</sup> Smith (1994) and Schroeder (2007) make these distinctions. I assume here that normative, motivating, and explanatory reasons are all facts (that may or may not obtain), along the lines of Dancy (2000). But everything I say here is also compatible with taking them to be propositions (e.g. Schroeder (2007)).

Samuel runs away is that the snake has no markings. And the fact that Samuel was hypnotized is part of the explanation for why he ran away, but it's not a reason *for which* he ran away – i.e. it's a merely explanatory reason for Samuel's running away.

Importantly, then, MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE does not require that non-epistemic considerations cannot be involved in the causal explanation for why people hold certain beliefs. For example, it allows that some people believe that God exists because they were raised in a religious household or because they want God to exist. MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE only requires that facts like these are always merely explanatory reasons (i.e. *mere causes*) of one's belief, rather than motivating reasons (i.e. considerations that an agent's belief is *based on*).

In order to determine whether MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is true, then, we need to know what makes some consideration a motivating reason, rather than a merely explanatory one. While the details may be controversial, I take the following general account of motivating reasons to be on the right track:

R is a motivating reason *for which* S  $\phi$ ed iff:

- (i) S *conceives* of R as a normative reason to  $\phi$  in some way
- (ii) (i) disposes S to  $\phi$ , and
- (iii) (ii) causes S to  $\phi$  (in the right way).<sup>31</sup>

I explain each of these necessary conditions below.

First, motivating reasons obviously must be motivating, and so, in order for R to be a motivating reason for which S  $\phi$ s, R must make S disposed toward  $\phi$ ing. But not all facts that make S disposed to  $\phi$  are motivating reasons. For example, in Snakes that are Plain,

---

<sup>31</sup> On this account, S must conceive of R as a reason to  $\phi$  up until the time at which S  $\phi$ s. So, if S conceived of R as a reason to  $\phi$  at some point in the past, which caused S to be disposed to  $\phi$ , but then S forgets that R is a reason to  $\phi$ , even if S's disposition to  $\phi$  remains and causes S to  $\phi$ , R is not a motivating reason for S's  $\phi$ ing.

Samuel's being hypnotized did dispose him to run away from the plain snake, but this is not a motivating reason for which Samuel ran away. What seems to be missing here is something cognitive: Samuel did not recognize the fact that he was hypnotized as a reason to run away from the plain snake in any way. Likewise for the fact that the snake has a rattle: while Samuel recognizes that the snake has a rattle, he does not recognize it *as a reason* to run away. This case thus illustrates that there is some cognitive component involved in  $\phi$ ing for a reason, in addition to a motivational one.

But it's controversial what exactly this cognitive component amounts to. One might think that one must *believe* that R is a reason to  $\phi$ . This would imply that animals and small children cannot act for reasons, since they don't have beliefs about reasons or even the concept of a reason itself. If one thinks that animals and small children can act for reasons, then, one might think instead that one need only believe R with a certain kind of (*reason-to- $\phi$ -ish*) mode of presentation, or experience R as calling out for  $\phi$ ing. But my argument in §5 does not depend on these details. So, I use the phrase *conceiving of R as a reason* here as a stipulative term that refers to whatever cognitive element is involved in  $\phi$ ing for a reason, and simply claim that in order for R to be a reason for which one  $\phi$ s one must be disposed to  $\phi$  because one conceives of R as a reason to  $\phi$  (i.e. (i) and (ii) above). And I assume here that believing that R is a reason to  $\phi$  is sufficient, but may not be necessary, for conceiving of R as a reason to  $\phi$ .

Finally, in order for R to be a motivating reason for which one  $\phi$ s, one's disposition to  $\phi$  (which results from one's conceiving of R as a reason to  $\phi$ ) must cause one to  $\phi$ . After all, if Joseph believes that the fact that exercising will make him happier is a reason to do so, and he is thereby disposed to exercise, but he is then kidnapped and forced to run laps, the reason for which he exercises is not that exercising will make him happier. This is because,

even though Joseph does believe this is a reason to exercise and he is thereby disposed to exercise, it's not this disposition to exercise that causes him to do so.

But one's disposition to  $\phi$  must cause one to  $\phi$  *in the right way*. To illustrate, consider Davidson's (1973) climber case:

(*Guilty Climber*) You're scaling a cliff while holding the rope that your climbing partner is attached to. You recognize that, if you drop the rope, it will be easier for you to climb to the top and you believe this is *some* reason to drop the rope, and are thereby slightly motivated to do so. But upon noticing your thoughts and motivations, you begin to feel extremely guilty, which causes you to tremble and drop the rope.

In this case, (i) you conceive of the fact that dropping the rope would make it easier for you to climb to the top as a reason to drop the rope, (ii) doing so disposes you to drop the rope, and that disposition caused you to drop the rope. But you do not drop the rope *for* the reason that doing so would make it easier for you to climb to the top. Presumably, this is because there's something deviant about the causal chain in this case: your disposition to drop the rope doesn't cause you to do so *in the right way* (i.e. requirement (iii)).

It's hard to say what *causing in the right way* amounts to, though, and I will not offer a proposal here. But causing in the right way *cannot* amount to *direct* causation. This is because in most cases of motivating reasons, one's disposition to  $\phi$  only indirectly causes one to  $\phi$ . For example, even in the ordinary (non-kidnapping) case in which Joseph exercises for the reason that exercising will make him happier, Joseph's being disposed to exercise does not

directly cause him to exercise: it first causes him to form an intention to exercise, to make a plan about when and how to do so, to put on his shoes, and so forth.<sup>32</sup>

While this account of motivating reasons leaves some questions about motivating reasons unresolved, it nonetheless seems on the right track. And my argument that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief in the following section does not depend on these details.

#### 4. Rejecting the Motivational Strategy

By relying on the account of motivating reasons above, I argue here that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief. First (in §4.1), I argue that the above account allows that some motivating reasons for which one  $\phi$ s cause one to  $\phi$  by causing one to be more responsive to *other* apparent reasons to  $\phi$ . I then argue (in §4.2) that practical considerations can constitute such motivating reasons for belief, and that this suffices to undermine the motivational strategy. Moreover, I argue (in §4.3) that this argument is compatible with a good explanation for transparency.

##### 4.1 *A case study*

The account of motivating reasons that I offered above implies that, if S's conceiving of R as a reason to  $\phi$  causes S to  $\phi$  by causing S to be more responsive to *other* apparent normative reasons for  $\phi$ ing, then R is one of S's motivating reasons for  $\phi$ ing. Consider the following:

---

<sup>32</sup> Rinard (2015) argues that cases like these show that motivating reasons for belief need not directly cause one to have that belief and that this undermines Shah's (2006) argument for alethism. But I take Shah's requirement on normative reasons to be not that normative reasons must be capable of directly *causing* one to have some belief, but that normative reasons must be capable of directly *motivating* one to have some belief. And these cases do not show that normative reasons for  $\phi$ ing need not be capable of directly motivating one to  $\phi$ .

(*Scully*) Scully comes across an old X-file that states that a suspect's tissue sample had non-human DNA. She believes that this is *some* reason to believe that the suspect isn't human, but given her skeptical nature, this by itself does not cause her to raise her credence in that proposition. But at Mulder's behest, she retests the sample tissue and the results suggest that it's 80% likely that the tissue has non-human DNA. Ordinarily, this result would not be enough to convince Scully, but because of the earlier X-file report, she takes the new test result to be sufficient reason to believe that the suspect isn't human, and then does so.

According to the account in §3, the fact that the old X-file states that the tissue sample has non-human DNA is *one* of Scully's motivating reasons for believing that the suspect isn't human. First, Scully conceives of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect isn't human. Second, this disposes her to believe that the suspect isn't human. Conceiving of R as a reason to  $\phi$  disposes one to  $\phi$  just in case it makes one such that, if certain manifestation conditions C obtain, one will  $\phi$ .<sup>33</sup> And Scully's conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect isn't human makes her such that, if it appears to her that there are other epistemic reasons (of a certain strength) for believing that the suspect isn't human, she will do so. The relevant manifestation conditions for Scully's disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human are simply the appearance of other reasons.

Finally, that disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human causes Scully to believe that the suspect isn't human: after she forms that disposition, she performs the new experiment and her recognizing the new test result as a reason (of a certain strength) manifests her disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human. And although this causal

---

<sup>33</sup> This assumes an admittedly naïve account of dispositions. But none of the problems for this account of dispositions bears on anything I say here.

process is indirect, that does not suggest that it is a *deviant* one, since the causal process between Joseph's forming the disposition to exercise and his exercising is equally indirect. So, the old X-file report meets all the above criteria for being a motivating reason.

Indeed, I think this is the right, intuitive verdict. In §4.2, I argue that, practical considerations can be motivating reasons in the same way that the old X-file report motivates Scully's belief that the suspect isn't human. But one might doubt whether the account of motivating reasons I have offered here actually delivers the right verdict about Scully's case. So, let me first further defend this claim.

First, one might reject that being motivated to believe *p* amounts to being *disposed* to believe *p* and insist, instead, that *y* moves one toward believing *p* only if *y* causes one to *raise one's credence in p*. One might then take the fact that Scully's conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect isn't human does not cause her to raise her credence in that proposition to show that Scully is not moved to believe that the suspect isn't human on that basis alone.

Importantly, though, an account of what being moved toward believing *p* amounts to should also provide a good account of what it is to be moved to raise one's credence in *p*. After all, believing *p* plausibly just is raising one's credence in *p* above a certain threshold, and one can have motivating reasons for raising or lowering one's credences at levels below the threshold for belief, just as one can have motivating reasons for believing or not believing *p*. But, obviously, what it is for one to be moved toward raising one's credence in *p* cannot be to raise one's credence in *p*. On the other hand, what it is to be moved toward raising one's credence in *p* may be to be *disposed* to raise one's credence in *p*. So, it's more plausible that what it is to be moved to believe *p* is to be disposed to believe *p*, rather than to raise one's credence in *p*. And since Scully's conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason

to believe that the suspect is not human does by itself *dispose* her to believe that the suspect isn't human (as I argued above), her conceiving of the old report as a reason does by itself *move* her to believe that the suspect isn't human.

Second, one might think that the old X-file report is not one of Scully's motivating reasons because there is something deviant about the way in which Scully's conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect is not human disposes her to believe it: namely, the manifestation conditions for this disposition involve the appearance of *other reasons*.

But consider cases involving small reasons. Suppose I believe that the fact that donating to Oxfam would slightly increase my own happiness for a brief period of time is a small reason to donate to Oxfam, and I am thereby somewhat motivated to do so. And suppose I also believe that the fact that donating to Oxfam would save lives is a decisive reason to do so, which makes me fully motivated to donate. One of my reasons for donating to Oxfam is that it will slightly increase my happiness, but my recognizing this reason only disposes me to donate to Oxfam by making me such that, if it appears to me that there are other reasons (of a certain strength) for donating to Oxfam, I will do so. This case thus illustrates that many motivating reasons only dispose one to  $\phi$  in such a way that the manifestation conditions for one's disposition to  $\phi$  involve the appearance of other reasons to  $\phi$ .<sup>34</sup> So, the way in which Scully's conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason disposes her to believe that the suspect isn't human does not seem to be deviant one.

---

<sup>34</sup> The difference between Scully's case and the Oxfam case is that, in the Oxfam case, my conceiving of the fact that donating to Oxfam would increase my happiness as a reason to donate does not causally influence how strongly I respond to my other reason to donate (that it would save lives). In Scully's case, however, her conceiving of the old X-file report as a reason to believe that the suspect is not human does causally influence how strongly she responds to the other reason to believe that the suspect is not human (the new test result).



## 4.2 Denying Motivational Difference

The above discussion suggests that, in order for the pragmatist to show that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, she may simply show that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for one's belief that  $p$  in the same way that the old X-file report is a motivating reason for Scully's belief that the suspect is not human. That is precisely what I do in this section.

One might worry, though, that the alethist may simply revise the motivational strategy so that it adopts a stronger motivational requirement for normative reasons:

POSSIBLY SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATING       $R$  is a normative reason for  $S$  to  $\phi$   
only if it's possible for  $R$  to be the *sole* motivating reason for which someone (with a  
normal human psychology)  $\phi$ s.

The argument I intend to give would not undermine this version of the motivational strategy.

But POSSIBLY SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATING is not a plausible requirement for normative reasons. First, the fact that the essential role of normative reasons is to guide our actions and attitudes does not suggest that each normative reason for  $\phi$ ing must be capable of being the sole guiding force behind one's  $\phi$ ing. Even if it were a contingent psychological fact that recognizing other-regarding moral considerations as reasons cannot sufficiently motivate us, so that we can only act for such reasons so long as we also recognize and respond to self-regarding prudential reasons for doing that action, this would not seem to imply that other-regarding moral considerations are not genuine normative reasons for us to act in certain ways. Such considerations could nonetheless play a significant role in guiding our deliberation and our behavior.

Second, POSSIBLY SUFFICIENTLY MOTIVATING seems false in light of cases involving very small reasons. For example, in the case in which donating to Oxfam would increase my own happiness only very slightly and for a very brief period of time, we can imagine that this benefit is so miniscule that no one with a normal human psychology could ever be fully motivated by such a minor benefit alone to donate money to charity. Nonetheless, the fact that donating would provide this very small benefit seems to be a very small normative reason to donate.

So, since this stronger motivational requirement is not plausible, showing that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief analogous to the way in which the old X-file report is a motivating reason in Scully's case does suffice to undermine the motivational strategy. To that end, consider the following:

(*Mary*) Mary is usually skeptical of other people's testimony and arguments. She didn't give religion much thought growing up, but in college Mary comes to believe that she would be happier if she were to believe that God exists and join a religious community, and that this is a reason to do so. While taking a philosophy class, she reads Aquinas and Anselm's arguments for the existence of God and befriends a student who tells her about his experiences of divine revelation. While this would usually not be enough to convince Mary, given her skeptical nature, because she recognizes the practical benefit of believing in God as a reason to do so, this causes her to be more swayed by those arguments, and she ends up believing that God exists.

Mary's case is structurally identical to Scully's, except that it involves an agent's conceiving of some *practical* consideration as a reason to believe a proposition, which then causes her to believe it by causing her to be more responsive to other *epistemic* reasons to believe it.

First, it is stipulated in Mary's case that she conceives of the fact that believing in God would make her happier as a normative reason to believe that God exists (she outright believes it). I take this stipulation to be unproblematic because, while the alethist insists that the pragmatist is wrong in believing that certain practical considerations are normative reasons for belief, surely the alethist does not think that the pragmatist's thesis is *conceptually confused* (i.e. that one cannot coherently believe it).

Second, Mary's conceiving of the fact that believing in God would make her happier as a reason to believe that God exists does *dispose* her to believe that God exists by making her such that, if it appears to her that there are epistemic reasons for believing that God exists (of a certain strength), she will do so. Finally, this disposition to believe that God exists *causes* her to believe that God exists in the very same (*right*) way as Scully's disposition to believe that the suspect isn't human causes her to believe that the suspect isn't human: Mary comes to recognize other apparent epistemic reasons (of a certain strength) to believe that God exists, which manifests her disposition to believe it. So, according to the account in §4, the fact that believing in God would make Mary happier is a motivating reason for Mary's belief that God exists.

One might worry, however, that this argument over-generates motivating reasons, since there are lots of things that causally influence how responsive we are to certain epistemic reasons, but which are obviously *not* motivating reasons. For example, being hungry may cause you to be more responsive to apparent epistemic reasons to believe that the driver in front of you is a jerk; and the fact that you're falling in love with Jane may cause you to be more responsive to apparent epistemic reasons to believe that she will eventually

return your phone call. But your hunger and your falling in love are merely explanatory reasons, not motivating reasons, for these beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

But my argument does not imply that *anything* that causes one to believe *p* by causing one to be more responsive to epistemic reasons for believing *p* is a motivating reason for one's belief that *p*. According to my account, in order for *R* to be a motivating reason for which *S*  $\phi$ ed, *S* must have  $\phi$ ed because *S* was disposed to  $\phi$  *by conceiving of R as a reason to  $\phi$* . So, the fact that you're hungry is not a motivating reason for your belief that the driver is a jerk because, while the fact that you're hungry may dispose you to believe that the driver in front of you is a jerk, you are not disposed to believe that the driver is a jerk *because you conceive of the fact that you are hungry as a reason to believe that the driver is a jerk*. Likewise, the fact that you're falling in love with Jane may dispose you to believe that Jane will call you back, but not because you conceive of your falling in love with Jane as a reason to do so. So, my argument does not imply that explanatory reasons like these are motivating reasons.

#### 4.3 Explaining transparency

The motivational strategy thus fails because MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is false. But recall (from §2) that what made MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE so plausible was that it explained the transparency of belief: that, during conscious deliberation, we cannot come to believe *p* by recognizing practical considerations *alone*, and must consider whether *p*. Indeed, it seemed that denying MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE was in tension with the very phenomenon of transparency itself.

My argument shows, however, how denying MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is actually compatible with transparency. I have argued that recognizing practical

---

<sup>35</sup> Thanks to Jonathan Schaffer for bringing this objection to my attention.

considerations as reasons to believe *p* can cause one to believe *p* by causing one to respond to *epistemic* reasons to believe *p*. While this shows that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, it does not imply that one can believe a proposition for practical considerations *alone*. But since I have not argued that this is the *only* way that practical considerations can constitute motivating reasons for belief, my argument also does not imply that one's beliefs *cannot* be motivated by practical considerations alone. My argument by itself thus does not explain transparency.

But a similar story as Shah's (2003) may be added to my argument in order to explain transparency. Shah (2003) claims that, because it's part of our concept of *belief* that a belief is correct iff it is true, when we consciously consider the question of whether to believe *p*, our concept of *belief*, and thereby the truth-norm, is explicitly operative while deliberating about this question, and thereby frames our deliberation in such a way that the only considerations that we may take to be relevant to whether to believe *p* are considerations that appear to bear on whether *p* is true.

But this explanation is too strong. It implies that one cannot even consciously believe that certain practical considerations are normative reasons for believing certain propositions, and thus that the pragmatist is not only wrong, but conceptually confused. A more plausible claim is that, when consciously deliberating about whether to believe *p*, our concept of *belief*, and thereby the truth-norm, frames our deliberation so that we must consider *at least some* considerations that bear on whether *p* is true. This suffices to explain transparency, but it also allows that practical considerations may constitute motivating reasons for belief in the way that I have suggested here, even during conscious deliberation.<sup>36</sup>

So, importantly, my argument that MOTIVATIONAL DIFFERENCE is false is not only

---

<sup>36</sup> This leaves open the possibility that we can believe for practical reasons alone in unconscious, non-deliberative contexts, though. I do not take a stand here on whether this is a genuine psychological possibility.

compatible with the phenomenon of transparency, but is also compatible with a good explanation for it.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, both of the popular alethist strategies for explaining the alleged normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's fail. The alethist cannot explain the difference simply by claiming that truth is the constitutive standard of correctness for belief, but not for action. This simply posits a further unexplained normative difference between action and attitudes, more generally: that all normative reasons for attitudes must bear on the constitutive correctness of that attitude, but not all normative reasons for action must bear on the constitutive correctness of that action. Nor can the alethist claim that the normative difference between cases like Joseph's and cases like Mary's is a motivational difference, since practical considerations *can* constitute motivating reasons for belief as well as for action. So, in the absence of any good explanation of the alleged normative difference between these two cases, we should accept that there is no such difference, and thus that there are, indeed, practical reasons for belief.

## Chapter 3

### Grounding the Domains of Reasons

Many metaethicists and epistemologists alike have been recently drawing attention to the fact that 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 rational or epistemically rational in doing some act or having some attitude. This observation has led many philosophers to recast metaethical questions as *metanormative* ones: questions about the semantics of normative terms as used in both practical and epistemic contexts, or the metaphysics and epistemology of normative facts in both the practical and the epistemic domains. These philosophers then seem to assume, moreover, that what we should be after in metaethics is an answer to these metanormative questions that is equally plausible with respect to both the practical and epistemic domains. 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 as well.

This line of thought is especially prevalent in the literature on normative reasons. Many metaethicists seem to think that a good metanormative account of normative reasons should be equally plausible with respect to both practical and epistemic reasons.<sup>37</sup> But, as I argue in §1, although there are important similarities between epistemic and practical reasons, which suggest that they are a unified type of thing (i.e. normative reasons), epistemic and practical reasons nonetheless seem to be importantly different. Practical and

---

<sup>37</sup> Broome (2004), Kearns & Star (2008), (2009), Parfit (2011), Scanlon (2014), Schroeder (2007), Street (2009), and Thomson (2008).

epistemic reasons seem to be substantively different kinds of reasons that underlie importantly 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 one another differently than practical reasons do. So, a good metanormative account of normative reasons should not only explain what makes practical and epistemic reasons both normative reasons, but it should also explain what makes practical and epistemic reasons substantively different kinds of normative reasons that have these different features.

In §2, I then 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. Finally, in §3, I argue that a less unified metaphysical view of normative reasons, according to which epistemic and practical reasons have very different *grounds* (i.e. metaphysical explanations), can both explain what practical and epistemic reasons have in common and explain their differences. And the viability of this view, I argue, has significant implications for our metanormative theorizing: it implies that the answer to certain metanormative questions may differ between the practical and epistemic domains.

## 1. Desiderata for an Account of Practical and Epistemic Reasons

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

- (1<sub>p</sub>) The fact that Pam is hurt in the parking lot is a reason for Jim to leave the office.
- (2<sub>p</sub>) The fact that Dwight is in a bad mood is a reason for Jim to leave the office.
- (3<sub>p</sub>) The fact that it's Michael's birthday is a reason for Jim to stay at the office.



As these examples help 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.<sup>38</sup> For example, while (1<sub>p</sub>) and (2<sub>p</sub>) are both reasons for Jim to leave the office, (1<sub>p</sub>) is a much stronger reason for Jim to leave the office than (2<sub>p</sub>), and (1<sub>p</sub>) and (2<sub>p</sub>) collectively outweigh the reason to stay – (3<sub>p</sub>). Assuming that there are no other reasons in play, then, these reasons make it the case that Jim ought to leave the office.<sup>39</sup>

And while (1<sub>p</sub>)-(3<sub>p</sub>) are true regardless of whether Jim is aware of, or even in a position to know, any of these reasons, the reasons in (1<sub>p</sub>)-(3<sub>p</sub>) are facts that Jim could become aware of, or be in a position to know, 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.<sup>40</sup> The reasons in (1<sub>p</sub>)-(3<sub>p</sub>) are also facts that can *guide* Jim in the sense that they are reasons that Jim may leave or stay in the office *for*. And if Jim were to leave the office *for* the reasons in (1<sub>p</sub>) and (2<sub>p</sub>), Jim himself would then be justified or rational in doing so (to some degree). That is, an agent's being justified in  $\phi$ ing (where  $\phi$ ing is doing some act or having some attitude) seems to require not only that the agent has sufficient normative reasons to  $\phi$ , but also that she  $\phi$ ed *for those reasons*.<sup>41</sup> Practical reasons thus seem to not only determine the normative

---

<sup>38</sup> One might think that practical reasons can also undercut or cancel each other.

<sup>39</sup> The reasons framework has its origins in Ross (1930), but is not committed to Ross's pluralist, non-consequentialist view. That is, the basic Rossian idea that inspires the reasons framework is that one's overall obligations are determined by multiple *contributory* obligations. Ross held that there are several different kinds of contributory obligations, some of which do not have to do with the consequences of an action. But the claim that overall obligations are determined by contributory obligations is also compatible with the claim that there is only one kind of contributory obligation, which is to produce good consequences (i.e. consequentialism). The reasons framework is thus neutral with respect to these first-order ethical debates.

<sup>40</sup> It's controversial whether having a reason (in the sense that is relevant to rationality) simply amounts to there being a reason and one's *possessing* this reason in some way (e.g. by being aware of it, or being in a position to know it). For discussion, see Schroeder (2008) and Lord (2010). But this debate does not matter for our purposes, since the only point I am making here is that rationality is analyzable in terms of normative reasons. Even Schroeder's (2008) alternative account takes rationality to be ultimately analyzable in terms of normative reasons.

<sup>41</sup> I take it that the "moral worth" of an agent's action is a species of this more general kind of assessment of the agent. That is, an agent's  $\phi$ ing has moral worth just in case there are *moral* reasons (which are a kind of practical reasons) for the agent to  $\phi$  and she  $\phi$ s *for those moral reasons*.

status of a particular *action* (or attitude) – i.e. whether performing that action (or having that attitude) is what one ought to do or is what it is rational for one to do – but they also determine the normative status of the *agent* in performing that action (or having that attitude) – i.e. whether the agent is justified or rational in doing that action (or having that attitude).

As many metaethicists and epistemologists alike have pointed out, though, 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<sub>E</sub>) 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<sub>E</sub>) 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<sub>E</sub>) The fact that it's also Michael's birthday is a reason for Pam to believe that there will be cake in the break room.

These reasons, like practical reasons, are facts that *count in favor of* (or against) having some attitude with a certain weight or strength, and these reasons weigh against one another and determine what one (epistemically) ought to do. For example, the reason in (2<sub>E</sub>) seems to outweigh the reason in (1<sub>E</sub>) for believing that there will be cake in the break room; but the reason in (3<sub>E</sub>) outweighs the reason in (2<sub>E</sub>).<sup>42</sup> So, assuming that no other reasons are in play, Pam (epistemically) ought to believe that there will be cake in the break room.

Moreover, (1<sub>E</sub>)-(3<sub>E</sub>) are true regardless of whether Pam is aware of, or in a position to know, any of these reasons. But the epistemic reasons in (1<sub>E</sub>)-(3<sub>E</sub>) are facts that Pam could become aware of, or be in a position to know, in which case they would be reasons that Pam *has* in the sense that they determine how (epistemically) justified or rational believing that

---

<sup>42</sup> Michael is a narcissistic boss, who would be sure to bring cake for his own birthday, if the party planning committee is on strike.

there is cake in the break room would be for Pam. And these reasons could also guide Pam's beliefs: she may believe that there will be cake in the break room *on the basis of* reasons (1<sub>E</sub>) and (3<sub>E</sub>), in which case Pam herself would be (epistemically) *justified* or *rational* in doing so (to some degree). That is, whether an agent herself is justified or rational in her beliefs seems to depend not only on whether the agent believes what it is rational for her to believe, but also believes it *for* the reasons that make it rational for her to believe it.<sup>43</sup> Epistemic reasons, like practical reasons, thus not only determine the normative status of one's *beliefs* – i.e. whether one's belief is what one (epistemically) ought to believe or (epistemically) justified or rational – but are also relevant to the normative status of the *agent* in having that belief – i.e. whether the agent is (epistemically) justified or rational in having that belief.

The fact that practical and epistemic reasons have very similar features and play the same roles in determining the normative statuses of agents and their actions or attitudes within the practical and epistemic domains suggests that they are a unified kind – *normative reasons*. A good metanormative account of practical or epistemic reasons should thus capture what it is that practical and epistemic reasons have in common that makes them both normative reasons.

But practical and epistemic reasons also seem like importantly different kinds of reasons. The reasons in (1<sub>E</sub>)-(3<sub>E</sub>) seem distinctly *epistemic*, whereas the reasons in (1<sub>P</sub>)-(3<sub>P</sub>) seem distinctly *practical*. And the difference between practical and epistemic reasons is not simply a difference between what *facts* are practical and epistemic reasons, since the very same fact can be both a practical reason and an epistemic reason. For example, the fact that it's Michael's birthday is both a practical reason for Jim to stay at the office and an epistemic reason for Pam to believe that there will be cake in the break room.

---

<sup>43</sup> The former is what epistemologists call *propositional justification* whereas the latter is *doxastic justification*.

Indeed, practical and epistemic reasons seem to be different kinds of normative reasons in a much more substantive sense than the sense in which certain subsets of normative reasons – e.g. health reasons or professional reasons – are “different kinds of reasons”. Practical and epistemic reasons seem to be 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 (or whether an agent is epistemically rational or whether she is practically rational), we carve normative reality 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 arbitrarily restricts the contextually relevant domain of reasons to some subset of normative reasons, whereas the former sort of talk seems to restrict the contextually relevant reasons to privileged domains of normative reasons.

A good metanormative account of normative reasons should thus explain what makes epistemic and practical reasons different kinds of reasons in this substantive sense. Such an account should explain, moreover, certain specific differences between practical and epistemic reasons. 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 that there will be cake in the break room and a reason against believing that there will not be cake in the break room. And the fact that the party planning committee is on strike is

a reason for believing that there will not be cake in the break room and a reason against believing that there will be cake in the break room.<sup>44</sup>

But practical reasons are not interdependent in this way. Practical reasons in favor of doing some action  $\phi$  are not necessarily practical reasons against the alternatives to  $\phi$ ing. For example, if Pam likes chocolate cake, the fact that Michael's birthday cake is chocolate is a reason to have a slice of Michael's cake, but it's not a reason against having a slice of Kevin's birthday cake instead, if Kevin's birthday cake is also chocolate. And practical reasons in favor of having some attitude are not necessarily reasons against having the relevant alternatives to that attitude either. 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 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 does not get the job. To the contrary, since Jim's happiness would make Dwight unhappy, and Dwight is also a good friend of Pam's, the fact that being promoted would make Jim happy seems to be a reason for Pam to desire that Jim does not get the job.<sup>45</sup>

This difference between epistemic reasons for belief and practical reasons for desire, moreover, does not seem to be explained simply by the attitudes that they are reasons for.

---

<sup>44</sup> One might think that epistemic reasons against believing  $p$  are also necessarily reasons for believing not- $p$ , (and vice versa). But Schroeder (2012) presents potential counterexamples to this claim: he provides cases in which the fact that more evidence is soon forthcoming regarding whether  $p$  is an epistemic reason against both believing  $p$  and believing not- $p$ . So, whether epistemic reasons for belief are interdependent in this further way is more controversial.

<sup>45</sup> I am not claiming here that practical reasons for  $\phi$ ing are *never* also practical reasons against doing the relevant alternatives to  $\phi$ . I take it that whether a practical reason for  $\phi$ ing is also a practical reason against doing the relevant alternatives to  $\phi$  depends on the particular features of the case and what the relevant alternatives are.

This is because, while it's controversial whether there are practical reasons for belief, it seems that, *if* there were such reasons, they would behave similarly to practical reasons for desire. 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 will not get the job. Assuming that there are practical reasons for belief, the fact that believing that Jim will get the job will make Pam \$100 richer seems like a practical reason for her to believe that Jim will get the job, but it's not a reason *against* believing that Jim will not get the job. So, a good account of normative reasons should explain why epistemic reasons for belief are interdependent, but practical reasons are not.

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

Practical reasons, on the other hand, do not balance toward suspension. For example, 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 (provided that one can do both). 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 in this case it seems that Pam ought to *both* desire that Jim gets the job

and desire that Jim does not get the job. After all, she would not be a good friend to both Jim and Dwight unless she desires that Jim gets the job, for his sake, and desires that Jim doesn't get the job, for Dwight's sake.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, if there are practical reasons for belief, and Jim will give Pam \$100 if she believes that he will be promoted, but Dwight will give her \$100 if she believes that Jim will not be promoted, then Pam has equally strong practical reasons to believe that Jim will get promoted as she does to believe Jim will not be promoted. In this case, too, it seems that Pam ought to *both* believe that Jim will be promoted and believe that he won't be promoted. After all, if she believes both, she'll get \$200, which is more money than she would get if she were to have only one of these beliefs, or suspend.

Importantly, the fact that epistemic reasons balance toward suspension, but practical reasons do not, seems to be explained by the fact that epistemic reasons are interdependent, whereas practical reasons are 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 believing *p* as there are against believing not-*p*. In such cases, then, there is neither sufficient reason to believe *p* nor is there sufficient reason to believe not-*p*, and so, one ought to do neither and suspend belief with respect to *p*. On the other hand, when there are equally strong practical reasons to desire/believe *p* as there are to

---

<sup>46</sup> Thanks to Selim Berker for bringing this to my attention. It's noteworthy, however, that when the practical reasons for doing some *action*  $\phi$  are equally strong as the practical reasons for doing an alternative action  $\psi$  (and no other reasons are in play), one ought to do either  $\phi$  or  $\psi$ . 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. But this difference between how practical reasons balance out with regard to actions and attitudes 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 copossible. That is, when the reasons for leaving the office are equally strong as the reasons for staying, then Jim is permitted to do one or the other, rather than required to do both, because Jim cannot both leave and stay. But when the reasons for desiring that Jim be promoted are equally strong as the reasons for desiring that Jim not get promoted, then Pam ought to have both of these desires because she *can* have both.

desire/believe not-*p*, this does not entail that there are also equally strong reasons against desiring/believing *p* and against desiring/believing not-*p*. In such a case, then, one has sufficient reason to desire/believe *p* and sufficient reason to desire/believe not-*p*, and so, one should do both.<sup>47</sup>

So, an account of normative reasons that explains why epistemic reasons are interdependent, while practical reasons are not, would also thereby explain why epistemic reasons for belief balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not. Of course, it may seem obvious that the explanation for why epistemic reasons are interdependent has something to do with the fact that epistemic reasons have to do with believing the *truth*, and that considerations that are relevant to the truth value of *p* are also necessarily relevant to the truth value of not-*p*. But this only gestures at where the explanation for the interdependence of epistemic reasons lies. A thorough account of normative reasons should provide a more systematic explanation.

In sum, then, a good metanormative account of normative reasons should not only explain what practical and epistemic reasons have in common that makes them both normative reasons, but also why practical and epistemic reasons are nonetheless substantively different kinds of reasons that exhibit different weighing behavior.

---

<sup>47</sup> Because epistemic reasons and practical reasons display different weighing behavior, it's not clear how they can weigh against one another to determine what one ought to do in a wider sense of 'ought' that takes into account both epistemic and practical reasons. One might even think that their different weighing behavior implies that epistemic and practical reasons are not even comparable in the first place, and thus that there simply is no wide sense of 'ought' that takes into account both kinds of reasons. This is a complicated issue, though, which I do not take a stand on here. For discussion of how practical and epistemic reasons might weigh against one another, see Reisner (2008) and Berker (MS).



## 2. Unificationist Views

In this section, I consider two prominent metaphysical views about normative reasons that I call *unificationist* views because they offer an entirely unified metaphysical account of what practical and epistemic reasons are and what grounds them. I argue that, while these views may provide some explanation of what makes practical and epistemic reasons both normative reasons, neither of these views succeeds in explaining what makes practical and epistemic reasons substantively different kinds of normative reasons that have different weighing behavior. I then argue in §3 that a less unified metaphysical view about normative reasons according to which practical and epistemic reasons have very different grounds can succeed where these unificationist views fail.

But before I present these views, two clarifications are in order. First, a point about the dialectic: my aim in this paper is only to show that the non-unificationist view that I propose in §3, unlike some salient alternatives, does a good job of explaining both the similarities and differences between practical and epistemic reasons. My aim is not to show that this is the *only* view that can do both of these jobs, or even that *no* unificationist view can both do both jobs. The views that I consider in this section thus do not exhaust the possibilities of unificationist views. But, as I discuss at the end of this paper, showing that a non-unificationist view is a plausible contender is significant because it has important implications for our metanormative theorizing.

Second, a point about how to understand metaphysical questions about normative reasons: 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, which stand in some normative relation to

an act or an attitude,<sup>48</sup> but when we ask metaphysical questions about practical and epistemic reasons, we're not asking these questions about the facts that *are* reasons. For example, when we ask whether practical and epistemic reasons are natural or non-natural, we're not asking whether the fact that Dwight is in a bad mood or the fact that it's Kevin's birthday is natural or non-natural. And when we ask whether practical and epistemic reasons depend on an agent's evaluative attitudes, we're not asking, for example, whether the fact that Dwight is in a bad mood or the fact that it's Kevin's birthday depends on an agent's evaluative attitudes. Rather, we're asking whether the *normative relations* that those facts bear to an agent's doing some action or having some attitude are natural or non-natural, and whether those facts' bearing those normative relations depends on an agent's evaluative attitudes. So, a metaphysical account of practical and epistemic reasons amounts to an account of what it is for some fact to bear the normative relations that practical and epistemic reasons bear, and what *grounds* (i.e. metaphysically determines and explains) that certain facts bear those relations.

### 2.1 *Same fundamental relation, different objects*

The first unificationist view that I discuss here is inspired by Parfit (2011). Parfit claims that both practical and epistemic reasons are facts that *count in favor of* an agent doing some act or having some attitude, and that what it is for a consideration to *count in favor of* an act or attitude is not explainable, nor consists in any further facts. Moreover, Parfit claims that epistemic reasons are reasons for belief, whereas practical reasons are reasons for doing some act or having some other attitude, such as an intention, desire, and so forth.

---

<sup>48</sup> One might take the relata of these relations to include a circumstance, and a time, as a Scanlon (2014) does. One might also take normative reasons to be propositions, rather than states of affairs. Nothing that I say here hangs on this issue, though.

Although Parfit himself takes his view to be “non-metaphysical”, one could hold a view like Parfit’s in a way that embraces metaphysical commitments. On such a view, practical and epistemic reasons bear the very same normative relation – the *counting in favor of* relation, which I will call the *reason relation*. This reason relation, according to the metaphysically-committed version of Parfit’s view, is *primitive* in the sense that it cannot be given a real definition, and *fundamental* in the sense that there is no metaphysical explanation (or ground) for why some fact bears the reason relation toward some act or attitude. And what makes epistemic reasons and practical reasons distinct kinds of normative reasons, on this view, is that they bear the reason relation to different *objects*: epistemic reasons are facts that bear the reason relation to belief, whereas practical reasons are facts that bear the reason relation to actions and other non-belief attitudes.

I will refer to the latter part of this view – that practical and epistemic reasons bear the reason relation to different objects – as the *Different Objects View*. One may adopt the Different Objects View without claiming that the reason relation is fundamental.<sup>49</sup> But I discuss this Parfitian version of the Different Objects View here because doing so will help show why claiming that the reason relation is *not* fundamental gives one the resources to better explain the similarities and differences between practical and epistemic reasons.<sup>50</sup> Some of my complaints against the Parfitian view, however, do generalize to all versions of the Different Objects View – even those that deny that the reason relation is fundamental.

Indeed, the most obvious worry with any Different Objects View, including Parfit’s, is that it relies on some quite controversial assumptions about the objects of epistemic and practical reasons. First, it assumes that there are no practical reasons for belief. So, in order

---

<sup>49</sup> For example, Thomson (2008) seems to hold such a view.

<sup>50</sup> Of course, as I argued in Chapter 1, there are other reasons for rejecting this claim that have to do with supervenience.

to make this view plausible, one would need to argue (as Parfit (2011) does) that apparent practical reasons for belief are really practical reasons for *wanting* or *causing* oneself to have some belief.<sup>51</sup> Second, the Different Objects View also assumes that there are no epistemic reasons for action or other attitudes besides belief. This is just as controversial, since it seems that one may have epistemic reasons for *gathering more evidence* or for *accepting* p (where acceptance is a less-committal doxastic attitude than belief). So, someone who endorses the Different Objects View must also argue that all apparent epistemic reasons for action and acceptance are really practical reasons.<sup>52</sup>

I set this general worry aside here, though, because the Parfitian view above (and any Different Objects View) still faces significant problems explaining the similarities and differences between practical and epistemic reasons. On this view, what practical and epistemic reasons have in common, which makes them both normative reasons, is that they both bear the reason relation. But since this view takes the reason relation to be fundamental, it does not explain why practical and epistemic reasons both have weights, which add up and determine what one ought to do. If the reason relation is fundamental, then it is presumably also fundamental that the reason relation admits of degrees. And while one who adopts the Parfitian view above might claim that the relative weights of particular, contingent practical and epistemic reasons (e.g. the fact that it's Michael's birthday versus the fact that Dwight is in a bad mood) are explained by more general, necessary principles about the relevant 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 are

---

<sup>51</sup> As I argued in Chapter 2, though, I do not think Parfit's argument is successful.

<sup>52</sup> One might think that, instead, a proponent of the Different Objects View could argue that epistemic reasons are reasons for *doxastic attitudes*, which include belief and acceptance, whereas *practical* reasons are reasons for action and non-doxastic attitudes. This would at least accommodate the intuition that there are genuine epistemic reasons for acceptance. But even if one denies that there are practical reasons for believing p, it seems harder to deny that there are practical reasons for *accepting* p. This alternative version of the Different Objects View thus embraces even more controversial assumptions about the objects of practical reasons.

presumably fundamental on this view. So, on this view, there is no explanation for why certain types of practical and epistemic reasons have the weights that they do.

Moreover, the above Parfitian view, and any Different Objects View, fails to capture the fact that practical and epistemic reasons are *substantively different* kinds of reasons that underlie significant categories of normative assessment. According to the Different Objects View, epistemic reasons are simply reasons for belief, whereas practical reasons are reasons for everything else. But belief is just one of a myriad of attitudes for which there are normative reasons. And it's unclear what is so special about belief that makes distinguishing between reasons for belief and reasons for everything else a more natural way of carving up normative reality than, for example, distinguishing between reasons for desire and reasons for everything else. So, if this is all the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons amounts to, then it seems to be an arbitrary one. According to the Different Objects View, then, talk of what one epistemically-ought to do or whether one is epistemically rational seems to be no more of a significant kind of normative assessment than evaluating the agent with respect to her desires, or her intentions, or her admirations.

Moreover, the mere fact that practical and epistemic reasons bear the reason relation to different objects does not explain why epistemic reasons, unlike practical reasons, are interdependent and balance toward suspension. That is, it's unclear why reasons for *believing* p are necessarily reasons against believing not-p (and vice versa), but reasons for desiring/intending/etc. p are not necessarily reasons against desiring/intending/etc. not-p (and vice versa). And since the interdependence of epistemic reasons is plausibly what explains why epistemic reasons balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not, the Different Objects View cannot explain why epistemic reasons balance toward suspension either.

One might argue, though, that reasons for action and non-belief attitudes do not balance toward suspension simply because belief is the only attitude for which suspension is an available alternative. There is simply no third alternative to doing some action  $\phi$  and doing some alternative that is incompatible with  $\phi$ ing, since even inaction is itself an alternative that is incompatible with  $\phi$ 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. To suspend belief with respect to  $p$  is not simply to lack the belief that  $p$  and lack the belief that not- $p$ , but involves having a distinct attitude toward  $p$  – e.g. taking a neutral stance with respect to  $p$ . One might thus think that the Different Source View does explain why epistemic reasons balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not.

But there seem to be other attitudes for which it is plausible that 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: it seems that 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  $o$ . Or consider acceptance: it seems that one may suspend acceptance about whether  $p$ , just as one may suspend belief about whether  $p$ , where this does not amount to neither accepting  $p$  nor accepting not- $p$ , but instead taking a neutral stance regarding whether  $p$ . And practical reasons for having these attitudes do not seem to balance toward suspension either: for example, if Pam will get \$100 if she accepts that Jim will get promoted and \$100 to accept that Dwight will be promoted, then she ought to accept both. What explains why epistemic reasons balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not, is thus not simply that belief has suspension as a relevant alternative.

So, while the metaphysically committed version of Parfit's view may provide *some* explanation of what epistemic and practical reasons have in common, it does a poor job of explaining what makes epistemic and practical reasons substantively different kinds of reasons that have different weighing behaviors.

## 2.2 *Same non-fundamental relation, different specific grounds*

According to the second unificationist view that I consider here, epistemic and practical reasons bear the very same reason relation, but this reason relation is *not* fundamental. Instead, on this view, all facts about which facts bear the reason relation to which actions and attitudes are grounded in facts about the agent's desires. And whether a particular fact that bears the reason relation is a practical or epistemic reason depends on which desire grounds it. For example, one might claim that epistemic reasons are grounded in the desire *to believe the truth and avoid error*,<sup>53</sup> while practical reasons are grounded in other non-truth-related desires. Let's call this sort of view the *Different Desire View* of practical and epistemic reasons.

While this view is inspired by James (1896) and Foley (1987), we may turn to Schroeder (2007) for a helpful illustration of the view: Schroeder claims that what grounds that R is a normative reason for S to  $\phi$  is the fact that R is part of what explains that  $\phi$ ing promotes the satisfaction of S's desire for some object o. Given Schroeder's view, then, someone who endorses the Different Desire View may 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

---

<sup>53</sup> I assume here that the most plausible desire that can ground all epistemic reasons is a double-pronged desire to believe the truth and avoid error for reasons originating in James (1896). James argues that, if our epistemic goals included only believing the truth, this would imply that we ought to believe every proposition, but if our epistemic goals included only avoiding believing falsehoods, this would imply that we ought to believe no propositions.

a normative reason. If R is part of what explains why  $\phi$ ing promotes the satisfaction of S's desire to believe the truth and avoid error, then R is an *epistemic* reason, whereas if R is part of what explains why  $\phi$ ing promotes the satisfaction of S's non-truth-related desires, then R is a *practical* reason.<sup>54</sup>

This view implies that there are both practical and epistemic reasons for action and belief. For example, if gathering more evidence with respect to whether p would help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid believing falsehoods, then there may be epistemic reasons for one to gather more evidence. And if believing p would help satisfy an agent's non-truth-related desires (e.g. if one desires to live a happier life and believing p would cause one to do so), then presumably there may be practical reasons for one to believe p. The Different Desire View thus implies that practical and epistemic reasons may bear the reason relation to the same objects.

Whether the Different Desire View can provide an intensionally adequate account of epistemic reasons is quite controversial, though.<sup>55</sup> The view faces different potential counterexamples, depending on whether the relevant desire that grounds epistemic reasons is a general desire to believe the truth and avoid error or a desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to a particular proposition. If it's the former, the Different Desire View faces counterexamples that involve epistemic trade-offs between beliefs in different propositions. For example, consider the following case from Fumerton (2001): suppose you're an atheist, but believing in God would help you get a research grant from a religious

---

<sup>54</sup> To be clear, though, Schroeder (2007) himself does not actually endorse the Different Desire View. He claims that both practical and epistemic reasons can be grounded by *any* desire. But this claim renders Schroeder unable to distinguish between practical and epistemic reasons. His view thereby seems to amount to an eliminativist view of epistemic reasons according to which epistemic reasons *just are* practical reasons (along the lines of Rinard (2015)). In contrast, the sort of view that I consider here takes epistemic reasons to be a genuinely different species of normative reasons than practical reasons, but nonetheless takes both kinds of reasons to be grounded in facts about an agent's desires (along the lines of Foley (1987)).

<sup>55</sup> Whether such a view provides an intensionally adequate account of *practical* reasons is also controversial. See Schroeder (2007) for a thorough discussion of potential counterexamples and his responses.



organization that would fund your scientific research, eventually causing you to form many other true beliefs about the world.<sup>56</sup> If the relevant desire that grounds epistemic reasons for belief is a general desire to believe true propositions and avoid believing false ones, then the Different Desire View seems to wrongly imply that the fact that believing in God would help you obtain the research grant is an epistemic reason for you to believe in God.<sup>57</sup>

If, instead, the relevant desire that grounds epistemic reasons is the desire to believe the truth and avoid falsity with respect to a particular proposition, the Different Desire View faces trouble in cases in which the agent either lacks a desire to believe the truth with regard to some proposition, or actively desires to *not* have beliefs at all about certain propositions. For example, as Kelly (2003) argues, you might actively desire to not know how a movie will end so that you will be surprised. But there are nonetheless epistemic reasons for you to believe true propositions regarding the end of the movie, and if you stumble across such reasons, you would be epistemically irrational if you did not believe accordingly.<sup>58</sup>

I set these issues aside here, though, because my main concern is whether the Different Desire View can explain the similarities and differences between practical and epistemic reasons. Like the Parfitian view, the Different Desire View suggests that epistemic and practical reasons are both normative reasons because they are both facts that stand in the very same reason relation. But unlike the Parfitian view, the Different Desire View takes facts about which facts bear the reason relation to which acts and attitudes to have

---

<sup>56</sup> Berker (2013) uses this case as a counterexample to a similar goal-based view of epistemic rationality that does not require that an agent actually *has* any desire to believe the truth and avoid error. That is, according to what Berker calls *veritistic teleological theories* in epistemology, what one epistemically-ought to believe is whatever best fulfills the goal of believing truths and avoiding error. On such theories, an agent need not actually have the desire to believe the truth and avoid error in order to have epistemic reasons. Berker notes that Fumerton's case works equally well as a counterexample to these views.

<sup>57</sup> Foley avoids this counterexample by suggesting that the relevant desire that grounds epistemic reasons is the desire to *now* believe the truth and avoid error. But Berker (2013) shows that similar counterexamples abound for this view as well.

<sup>58</sup> For a response to Kelly's (2003) counterexamples, see Leite (2007) and Rinard (2015).

metaphysical explanations, and can thereby explain the weights of practical and epistemic reasons. Namely, one who adopts the Different Desire View may explain the weights of epistemic and practical reasons by appealing to the strengths of the relevant desires that ground them and the degree to which one's doing the relevant act or having the relevant attitude would satisfy those desires, given those reasons.<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, unlike the Different Objects View, the Different Desire View also seems to explain why epistemic reasons are interdependent, while practical reasons are not. Suppose  $R$  is an epistemic reason for  $S$  to  $\phi$  in virtue of the fact that  $R$  is part of what explains that  $S$ 's  $\phi$ ing will help satisfy  $S$ 's desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to a particular proposition. 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 *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 with respect to  $p$ , this must be because  $R$  indicates that  $p$  is true. And if  $R$  indicates that  $p$  is true,  $R$  also necessarily indicates that *not-p* is false. So,  $R$  also necessarily explains why *not* believing *not-p* would help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid error with respect to  $p$ . And, conversely, if  $R$  explains why believing *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 *not-p* is true and that  $p$  is false, and thus also necessarily explains why not believing  $p$  would help satisfy one's desire to believe the truth and avoid error. This view thus explains why epistemic reasons for believing  $p$  are necessarily epistemic reasons against believing *not-p* (and vice versa).

---

<sup>59</sup> This is not the sort of account of the weights of reasons that Schroeder (2007) adopts, though.

But not all desires are like this. Suppose Pam desires that her friends be happy, and 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 promoted would make him happy is a reason for Pam to desire that Jim gets the job because it is 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 does *not* get the job would help satisfy her desire that her friends be happy. To the contrary, Pam's desiring that Jim does not get the job would actually help satisfy her desire that her friends be happy to the very same extent that her desiring that Jim gets the job would help satisfy this desire (since Pam is equally good friends with Jim and Dwight, and Jim's happiness would cause Dwight to be equally unhappy).

The Different Desire View thus explains why epistemic reasons for believing  $p$  are interdependent, while practical reasons are not. It's because the grounds of epistemic reasons involves a unique sort of 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  $\neg p$  would help satisfy that desire. But the grounds of practical reasons involve other desires for which considerations that explain why  $\phi$ ing would promote the satisfaction of those desires may not also explain why not- $\psi$ ing (where  $\psi$ ing is a relevant alternative to  $\phi$ ing) would promote the satisfaction of those desires. The Different Desire View can thus also explain why epistemic reasons balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not, in the way that I suggested earlier in §1.

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 importantly different categories of normative assessment. According to this view, epistemic

reasons are reasons that obtain in virtue of the desire to believe the truth and avoid error, whereas practical reasons are reasons that obtain in virtue of an agent's non-truth-related desires. But the desire to believe the truth and avoid error is just one very specific desire out of a diverse array of desires that an agent may have. So, if this is what the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons amounts to, it seems to be an arbitrary one. In other words, it's unclear why the desire to believe the truth and avoid error is so special, more so than one's career-related desires or one's health-related desires, such that distinguishing between epistemic reasons and practical reasons is a more natural way of carving up normative reality than distinguishing between professional reasons and non-professional reasons, for example. The Different Desire View thus fails to capture the fact that talk of what one epistemically-ought to do or epistemic rationality is more joint-carving than talk of what one ought to do career-wise or what's rational, given one's career goals.

Importantly, this point generalizes to any view according to which practical and epistemic reasons share a common *general kind of ground*, but are individuated by their *specific grounds*. If the specific ground of epistemic reasons is simply one of many other, equally fundamental specific grounds of normative reasons, distinguishing between epistemic and practical reasons seems to carve normative reasons at their joints no better than other candidate ways of dividing up normative reasons by their specific grounds.

Of course, one may simply bite the bullet here and deny that the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons (or between epistemic and practical kinds of assessment, more generally) carves normative reality at its joints. One may thus insist that it's a mere accident that philosophers have divided up the normative realm into epistemology and ethics, and that there really is no deep difference between practical and epistemic normativity. But one need not bite this bullet. In the following section, I argue that there is

an alternative account of practical and epistemic reasons that can not only explain the similarities and differences between epistemic and practical reasons, but also vindicate the idea that epistemic and practical reasons are substantively different kinds of normative reasons that give rise to importantly different kinds of normative assessment.

### 3. The Different Source View

In this section, I present a less unified view of epistemic and practical reasons and argue that, unlike the unificationist views discussed above, it meets all the desiderata for a good account of normative reasons. According to the view I have in mind, epistemic and practical reasons bear the same non-fundamental 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 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 quite general view about practical and epistemic reasons that is not committed to any particular account of what grounds that some fact R is a practical reason or what grounds that R is an epistemic reason. But even in its general form, it seems quite plausible. This is because, what grounds that R is an epistemic reason seems to have something to do with how R relates to the *truth*, whereas what grounds that R is a practical reason has nothing to do with truth.

Of course, it may be the case that not all epistemic reasons are *evidential* reasons – i.e. reasons that directly bear on the truth of some relevant proposition. For example, Schroeder (2012) argues that in certain cases where more evidence is soon forthcoming about whether

p, the fact that more evidence is soon forthcoming is an epistemic reason to suspend belief regarding whether p. But the fact that more evidence is soon forthcoming regarding whether p does not bear on whether p is true or false. Similarly, one might think that the fact that you lack any evidence regarding whether p is an epistemic reason to suspend belief regarding whether p and to gather evidence regarding whether p. But the fact that you lack evidence regarding whether p does not indicate that p is true or false. So, it may seem that not all epistemic reasons bear on the truth of some relevant proposition.

But even these non-evidential epistemic reasons seem to be reasons because they are in some way connected to believing the truth and avoiding error. 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 whether p are reasons to suspend belief with respect to p because they indicate that suspending belief with respect to p shows *respect* for the truth, or *commitment* to believing the truth and avoiding error.<sup>60</sup> So, what grounds that R is a normative reason for S to  $\phi$ , when R is an epistemic reason, is plausibly that R stands in *some* truth-involving relation to  $\phi$  – even though it may be difficult to specify what exactly that truth-involving relation amounts to in some cases.<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, while it is highly controversial what grounds that R is a *practical* reason for S to  $\phi$ , it seems quite clear that it does not have anything to do with R's standing

---

<sup>60</sup> This suggestion is inspired by Hurka (2001) and Sylvan (2013). Hurka (2001) argues that something can have derivative value that is not instrumental value: e.g. 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. Sylvan (2013) appeals to this argument in order to show that, while epistemic justification may not always *promote* believing the truth and avoiding error, 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 here, but I am suggesting that one could make a similar point about reasons: that some epistemic reasons may be reasons not because they *promote* having true beliefs and avoiding error, but because they show respect or commitment to that goal.

<sup>61</sup> As I allude to here, one need not claim that *all* epistemic reasons bear the reason relation in virtue of their standing in the *very same* truth-involving relation. One might claim, instead, that there are a plurality of truth-involving relations that are possible grounds of epistemic reasons.

in any kind of truth-involving relation to  $\phi$ . For example, what metaphysically explains that the fact that Pam is hurt in the parking lot and the fact that Dwight is in a bad mood are reasons for Jim to leave the office presumably has nothing to do with believing the truth and avoiding error. 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.

Indeed, the Different Source View is a more concrete specification of a natural way of distinguishing between epistemic and practical reasons for belief: that epistemic reasons for belief are reasons for or against believing some proposition *because* they bear on whether  $p$  is true, whereas practical reasons for belief are reasons for or against believing a proposition but *not because* they bear on whether  $p$  is true.<sup>62</sup> The Different Source View simply interprets the ‘because’ here as the *metaphysical* ‘because’ – i.e. as a claim about grounding – and takes this account to be not just an account of the difference between epistemic and practical reasons for *belief*, but an account of the difference between epistemic and practical reasons more generally, regardless of whether they are reasons for belief, action, or other non-belief attitudes. The Different Source View also takes a more neutral stance on what the grounds of epistemic reasons are: it allows, for example, that not all epistemic reasons are reasons because they bear on the truth of some relevant proposition.

In order to see how the Different Source View can explain both what practical and epistemic reasons have in common and their differences, consider a particular version of this view that adopts the following two views about what grounds practical and epistemic reasons, respectively:

---

<sup>62</sup> Kearns & Star (2009) explicitly distinguish between epistemic and practical reasons for belief in this way.

*Democratic Humean View* For practical reasons, the fact that R is a normative reason for S to  $\phi$  is grounded in the fact that R explains why S's  $\phi$ ing would promote the satisfaction of some agent A's desire for some object o.<sup>63</sup>

*Truth-Relational View* For epistemic reasons, the fact that R is a normative reason for S to  $\phi$  with respect to p (where  $\phi$ ing may be believing p/not-p, accepting p/not-p, gathering evidence with respect to whether p, etc.) is grounded in *either*

(i) the fact that R indicates that S's  $\phi$ ing with respect to p will promote believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to p

*or*

(ii) the fact that R indicates that S's  $\phi$ ing with respect to p will show commitment to believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to p.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> This is a crude version of the sort of view that Manne (2016) defends. Her view is similar to Schroeder's view insofar as it takes practical reasons to be grounded in facts about an agent's desires, but on her view, the relevant desires that ground reasons for an agent to  $\phi$  are not necessarily the agent's *own* desires, but may be the desires of other agents as well.

<sup>64</sup> This view is similar to the Different Desire View of epistemic reasons according to which the relevant desire that grounds epistemic reasons is relativized to a particular proposition. But it is different 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. This view thus does not face the sorts of counterexamples provided by Kelly (2003). Second, the Truth-Relational View does not claim that all epistemic reasons to  $\phi$  with respect to p are reasons because they *promote* believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to p. The Truth-Relational View is thus not a *teleological* view of epistemic reasons, and thus does not face the sorts of criticisms offered by Berker (2013). Indeed, the Truth-Relational View is not committed to any view about the connection between reasons and value whatsoever.



I will not defend either of these views here, but simply use them to illustrate how the Different Source View has the resources to meet the desiderata for a good metaphysical account of normative reasons.

Like the unificationist views considered earlier, because the Different Source View takes practical and epistemic reasons to stand in the very same normative relation – the reason relation – the Different Source View thereby explains what practical and epistemic reasons have in common that makes them both normative reasons.

One might worry, however, that the Different Source View implies that the reason relation is *merely disjunctive*: the relation of *explaining why  $\phi$ ing would help satisfy one's desires or indicating that  $\phi$ ing would promote, or show commitment to, believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to  $p$* . But merely disjunctive relations like this do not typically make for much objective similarity or feature in explanations. For example, an elephant and a refrigerator may both have the relation of *having larger ears than a Doberman or being colder than the desert*, but their sharing this disjunctive relation does not make them importantly similar in any way. And the property of *having larger ears than a Doberman or being colder than the desert* is not the sort of property that features in explanations. But as we discussed in §1, practical and epistemic reasons share important similarities and they explain higher order normative facts (e.g. what one ought to do, or what is rational for one to do). So, the reason relation cannot be a merely disjunctive relation.

It's important to distinguish, though, between *what some property is* and what it is *in virtue of which* something has that property – i.e. the grounds of something's having that property. It does not follow from the claim that a property F has multiple, different possible grounds that F is a disjunctive property. For example, something may have the property *being a chair* in virtue of its having metal arranged thus-and-so, or in virtue of its having pieces of

wood arranged here-and-there, and so on, but the property *being a chair* may nonetheless be a single, unified property. And 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 to be a unified, non-disjunctive property that makes for important similarities between epistemic and practical reasons.

Indeed, the Different Source View can explain the important similarity between practical and epistemic reasons: that they both have weights. For example, according to the above version of the Different Source View, the weight of a particular *practical* reason is presumably determined by the strength of the relevant desire that grounds it and the extent to which one's  $\phi$ ing would promote the satisfaction of that desire;<sup>65</sup> and the weight of *epistemic* reasons is presumably determined by the extent to which the reason indicates that  $\phi$ ing with respect to  $p$  will promote (or show commitment to)  $S$ 's believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to  $p$ . More generally, then, so long as one takes the grounds of both practical and epistemic reasons to 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.<sup>66</sup>

Because the Different Source View claims that practical and epistemic reasons have very different grounds, though, it can explain why epistemic and practical reasons are

---

<sup>65</sup> Manne (2016) defends this sort of account of the weights of practical reasons.

<sup>66</sup> Since the Different Source View implies that practical and epistemic reasons get their weights in very different ways, though, one might think that the view thereby implies that practical and epistemic reasons are incomparable in the sense that there is no common unit of measurement by which they may be compared. This is a controversial issue, though, which I do not have room to discuss here.

substantively different kinds of normative reasons. According to the Different Source View, epistemic and practical reasons are different kinds of reasons in the sense that they have very different kinds of metaphysical explanations. The distinction between epistemic and practical reasons thus divides up normative reasons by the *more fundamental facts* that ground them. In contrast, professional and health reasons, for example, plausibly do not have very different kinds of metaphysical explanations, and so, the distinction between professional 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 normative reality at its joints than talk of professional versus health reasons and what one ought to do career-wise versus what one ought to do health-wise.

Moreover, the fact that epistemic and practical reasons have very different grounds can also explain why epistemic reasons are interdependent, while practical reasons are not. If the grounds of epistemic reasons are different than the grounds of practical reasons, this allows that the grounds of R's being an epistemic reason for S to believe p necessitate the grounds of R's being an epistemic reason *against* believing not-p (and vice versa), while the grounds of R's being a practical reason for S to believe p/desire p/ $\phi$  do not necessitate the grounds of R's being a practical reason against believing not-p/desiring not-p/not- $\phi$ ing.

For example, if R indicates that S's believing p will promote, or show commitment to, believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to 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 promote, or show commitment to, believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to p. Conversely, if R indicates that S's believing not-p would promote, or show commitment to, believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to 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 promote, or show commitment to, believing the truth and avoiding error with respect to p. According to the Truth-Relational View above, then, the grounds of R's being an epistemic reason for believing p necessitate the grounds of R's being an epistemic reason against believing not-p, and vice versa.

But, as we saw earlier, R may explain why S's  $\phi$ ing would help satisfy A's desire for o, while *not* explaining why S's *not*  $\psi$ ing (where  $\psi$ ing is a relevant alternative to  $\phi$ ing) would help satisfy A's desire for o. For example, the fact that Jim's being promoted would make him happy may partially explain why Pam's desiring that Jim gets the job would help satisfy her desire for her friends to be happy (assuming that whom Pam wants to be promoted will have an effect on who gets promoted), but the fact that Jim's being promoted would make him happy does not explain why Pam's *not* desiring that Jim does *not* get the job would help satisfy her desire that her friends be happy. And the fact that Michael's birthday cake is chocolate is part of what explains why Pam's having a slice of Michael's cake would help satisfy her desire for chocolate, but the fact that Michael's cake is chocolate does not explain why Pam's *not* having a slice of Kevin's chocolate cake would help satisfy her desire for chocolate. So, according to the Democratic Humean View, the grounds of practical reasons for  $\phi$ ing do not necessitate the grounds of practical reasons against not  $\phi$ ing.

The particular version of the Different Source View offered above thus illustrates how the Different Source View can explain why epistemic reasons are interdependent, but practical reasons are not, and consequently, why epistemic reasons for belief balance toward suspension, while practical reasons do not. This particular version of the view thus illustrates

that the Different Source View can meet all of our desiderata for a good metanormative account of normative reasons.

Importantly, though, my argument that the Different Source View can meet these desiderata does not rely on the viability of the particular version of the view that I have offered above. It is the *structural features* of the Different Source View that yield the above explanations for the similarities and differences between practical and epistemic reasons. It is because the Different Source View takes practical and epistemic reasons to bear the same non-fundamental reason relation that allows for an explanation of what makes practical and epistemic reasons both normative reasons that have weights. And it is 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. These structural features of the Different Source View are thus what make the view a plausible metaphysical account of normative reasons, rather than the details of the particular version of the view that I describe above. My argument above thus does not depend on the plausibility of that particular version of the view.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, I take my arguments here to show that the Different Source View is a more plausible metaphysical view about normative reasons than some prominent unificationist alternatives because it has the resources to explain both the similarities and differences between practical and epistemic reasons. But since I have not considered an exhaustive list of alternative views, this does not show that the Different Source View is the *only* metaphysical view of normative reasons that can do both of these jobs.

Showing that this view is a plausible contender, however, is a significant task because it has important implications for our metanormative theorizing. After all, some metanormative questions are questions about the kinds of facts that ground normative reasons. For example, when one asks whether normative reasons are mind-dependent, one is presumably asking whether facts about what is a normative reason for what are necessarily grounded in facts about the mental states of agents. And 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. Or, one may be interested in whether all facts about normative reasons are grounded in *natural* facts.<sup>67</sup> If the Different Source View is correct, however, the answer to these questions may differ for practical and epistemic reasons. For example, as the particular version of the Different Source View that I offer above illustrates, the Different Source View allows that all practical reasons are grounded in facts about agent's mental states, and are thus mind-dependent, but epistemic reasons are not (or vice versa). Similarly, the Different Source View also allows that all epistemic reasons are grounded in natural facts, but practical reasons are not (or vice versa), or that practical reasons are grounded in facts about values, while epistemic reasons are not (or vice versa).

Consequently, the mere fact that the Different Source View seems like a viable view suggests that we should not assume that the answers to metanormative questions should be unified across the practical and the epistemic domains. My argument thus suggests that we should also be wary of epistemic parity arguments that take the grounds of epistemic reasons to show anything about the grounds of practical reasons (or vice versa). For example, it is too quick to conclude (as Cuneo (2007) does) that practical normativity must be mind-

---

<sup>67</sup> While the Essentialist Non-naturalist View that I offer in Chapter 1 suggests that this grounding question is not the central question of the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate, I nonetheless take this grounding question to be a substantive, interesting question.

independent from the premise that epistemic normativity is mind-independent. So, while my argument only shows that the Different Source View is a plausible contender, rather than the *only* view of normative reasons that can meet the desiderata laid out here, even this weaker claim has quite important implications for our metanormative theorizing.

## Bibliography

- Bader, Ralph. (forthcoming) "The Grounding Argument Against Non-Reductive Moral Realism," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 12.
- Bennett, Karen. (2011) "By Our Bootstraps," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 25: 27-41.
- Berker, Selim. (2013) "Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions," *Philosophical Review*, 122: 337-393.
- (MS) "A Combinatorial Argument against Practical Reasons for Belief".
- Blackburn, Simon. (1971) "Moral Realism," *Morality and Moral Reasoning*, John Casey, ed. London: Methuen.
- Broome, John. (2004) "Reasons," *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, Jay Wallace, Michael Smith, Samuel Scheffler, and Philip Pettit, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chang, Ruth. (2013) "Grounding Practical Normativity: Going Hybrid," *Philosophical Studies*, 164: 163-187.
- Clifford, William Kingdon. (1999) "The Ethics of Belief," *The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays*, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Cuneo, Terrance. (2007) *The Normative Web*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dancy, Jonathan. (2000) *Practical Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dasgupta, Shamik. (2014) "The Possibility of Physicalism," *Journal of Philosophy*, 111: 557-592.
- Davidson, Donald. (1963) "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," *Journal of Philosophy*, 60: 685-700.
- (1973) "Freedom to Act," *Essays on Freedom of Action*, Ted Honderich, ed. New York: Routledge.
- DeRossett, Louis. (2013) "Grounding Explanations," *Philosophers Imprint*, 13: 1-26.
- Dreier, James. (1992) "The Supervenience Argument Against Moral Realism," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 30: 13-38.
- (MS) "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?"
- Dunaway, Billy. (forthcoming) "Expressivism and Normative Metaphysics," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 11.
- Enoch, David. (2011) *Taking Morality Seriously: A Defense of Robust Realism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fine, Kit. (1994a) "Essence and Modality," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 8: 1-16.
- (1994b) "Senses of Essence," *Modality, Morality and Belief. Essays in Honor of Ruth Barcan Marcus*, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Diana Raffman & Nicholas Asher, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2002) "Varieties of Necessity," *Conceivability and Possibility*, Tamar Szabo Gendler & John Hawthorne, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2012) "Guide to Ground," *Metaphysical Grounding*, Fabrice Correia & Benjamin Schnieder, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foley, Richard. (1987) *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality*, Cambridge: Harvard University.
- Fumerton, Richard. (2001) "Epistemic Justification and Normativity," *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility, and Virtue*, Mattias Steup, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hieronymi, Pamela. (2005) "The Wrong Kind of Reason," *Journal of Philosophy*, 102: 437-457.
- Horgan, Terrance. (1993) "From Supervenience to Superdupervenience: Meeting the Demands of a Material World," *Mind*, 102: 555-586.
- Hurka, Thomas. (2001) *Virtue, Vice and Value*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



- James, William. (1896) "The Will to Believe," *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, New York: Dover Publications.
- Kearns, Stephen & Star, Daniel. (2008) "Reasons: Explanations or Evidence?" *Ethics*, 119: 31-56
- (2009) "Reasons as Evidence," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 4: 215-242.
- Kelly, Thomas. (2002) "The Rationality of Belief and Some Other Propositional Attitudes," *Philosophical Studies*, 110: 163-196.
- (2003) "Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66: 612-640.
- Kramer, Matthew. (2009) *Moral Realism as a Moral Doctrine*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Leary, Stephanie (forthcoming) "Non-naturalism and Normative Necessities" *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 12.
- Leite, Adam. (2003) "Epistemic Instrumentalism and Reasons for Belief: A Reply to Tom Kelly's "Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 75: 456-464.
- Lord, Errol. (2010) "Having Reasons and the Factoring Account," *Philosophical Studies*, 149: 283-296.
- Mackie, J.L. (1977) *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Publishing.
- Manne, Kate. (2016) "Democratizing Humeanism," *Weighing Reasons*, Errol Lord and Barry Maguire, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Markovits, Julia. (2014) *Moral Reason*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McPherson, Tristram. (2012) "Ethical Non-naturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 7: 205-234.
- Moore, G.E. (1903) *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1942) "A Reply to My Critics," *The Philosophy of G.E. Moore*, Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed. Chicago: Opencourt.
- Olson, Jonas. (2004) "Buck-Passing and the Wrong Kind of Reason," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 54: 295-300.
- (2009) "The Wrong Kind of Solution to the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem," *Utilitas*, 21: 225-232.
- Parfit, Derek. (2011) *On What Matters*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pascal, Blaise (1670) *Pensées*, translated by W. F. Trotter, London: Dent.
- Rabinowicz, Wlodek & Ronnow-Rasmussen, Toni. (2004) "The Strike of the Demon: Fitting Pro-Attitudes and Value," *Ethics*, 114: 391-423.
- Raz, Joseph. (2009) "Reasons: Practical and Adaptive," *Reasons for Action*, David Sobel & Steven Wall, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reisner, Andrew. (2008) "Weighing Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons for Belief," *Philosophical Studies*, 138: 17-27.
- (2009) "The Possibility of Practical Reasons for Belief and the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem," *Philosophical Studies*, 145: 257-272.
- Rinard, Susanna. (2015) "Against the New Evidentialists," *Philosophical Issues*, 25: 208-223.
- Rosen, Gideon. (2010) "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction," *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, Bob Hale & Aviv Hoffmann, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (MS) "Normative Necessity".
- Ross, William David. (1930) *The Right and the Good*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scanlon, T.M. (2014) *Being Realistic about Reasons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Schaffer, Jonathan. (2009) "On What Grounds What," *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, David Manley, David J. Chalmers & Ryan Wasserman, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schroeder, Mark. (2007) *Slaves of the Passions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2008) "Having Reasons," *Philosophical Studies*, 139: 57-71.
- (2010) "Value and the Right Kind of Reason," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, 5: 25-55.
- (2012) "The Ubiquity of State-Given Reasons," *Ethics*, 122: 457-488.
- Shah, Nishi. (2003) "How Truth Governs Belief," *Philosophical Review*, 112: 447-482.
- (2006) "A New Argument for Evidentialism," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56: 481-498.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. (2003) *Moral Realism: A Defense*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Skorupski, John. (2012) *The Domain of Reasons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stratton-Lake, Phillip & Hooker, Brad. (2006) "Scanlon vs. Moore on Goodness," *Metaethics after Moore*, Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons, eds. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Street, Sharon. (2009) "Evolution and the Normativity of Epistemic Reasons," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 39: 213-248.
- Sylvan, Kurt. (2013) "Truth Monism without Teleology," *Thought*, 1: 161-169.
- Thomson, Judith Jarvis. (2008) *Normativity*, Chicago: Open Court.
- Velleman, David. (2000) "On the Aim of Belief," *The Possibility of Practical Reasons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. (1999) "The Price of Non-reductive Moral Realism," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 2: 199-215.
- (2007) *The Nature of Normativity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2002) "The Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 16: 267-97.
- Whiting, Daniel. (2014) "Reasons for Belief, Reasons for Action, the Aim of Belief, and the Aim of Action," *Epistemic Norms*, Clayton Littlejohn and John Turri, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Bernard. (1979) "Internal and External Reasons," *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilsch, Tobias. (2015) "The Nomological Account of Ground," *Philosophical Studies*, 172: 3293-3312.
- Wilson, Jessica. (2010) "What is Hume's Dictum and Why Believe It?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 80: 595-637.