

KNOWLEDGE, JUSTIFICATION, AND THE NORMATIVITY OF EPISTEMOLOGY

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Abstract: Epistemology is sometimes said to be a normative discipline, but what this characterization means is often left unclear. This paper distinguishes two kinds of normativity and thereby provides a new way of understanding attributions of normativity. Associated with this distinction are two kinds of epistemological reflection. These are shown to be parallel to two kinds of ethical reflection. In the light of what emerges in showing these points, the paper clarifies the requirements for naturalizing epistemology, the place normativity might have, given certain kinds of naturalization, and the sense in which knowledge and justification may be viewed as normative.

An important question about epistemology is whether the notions of knowledge and justification are normative. A related question is whether, if they are, their normativity is epistemic. The terms ‘normativity’ and ‘epistemic’ are relative newcomers to philosophy; and, unlike many that figure importantly in the field, they have no everyday uses. Lacking such uses does not automatically indicate that they have no clear meaning, but it tends to indicate that intuitions about the concepts expressed by the terms are less clear, and more subject to differences in judgment, than intuitions evoked by terms in common use such as—to take philosophically important cases—‘believe’, ‘know’, ‘good’, ‘property’, and even ‘cause’. One might think that we can gain clarity by considering the long-standing use of ‘norm’ and related terms in social-scientific parlance. This is doubtful. As commonly understood, especially in the social sciences, a norm is simply a prevailing pattern and represents what is usual. What pertains to norms in this statistical sense need not be normative in the sense—if there is just one sense—important in philosophy.

The term ‘normative’ has a longer history in philosophical parlance than does ‘normativity’, and in clarifying the associated concept we can be guided by the usage of the former as well as by discussions explicitly focusing on normativity as the intended referent of the abstract noun, which I take to express (in most of its uses) the property of being normative. My aim here is, first, to clarify the terms ‘normativity’ and ‘epistemic’ and, second, in that light, to pursue the question in what sense epistemology

is a normative discipline. This question is related to another important one: whether epistemology can be naturalized. It is commonly thought that naturalizing a field or subfield requires showing that it deals with natural as opposed to normative properties, but whether that is so depends on what constitutes a normative property—a central question for this paper. In pursuing these questions, I will distinguish two kinds of normativity whose differences have not in general been noted. The distinction applies to normativity in the domain of action as well as in that of cognition, but my focus in exploring normativity will be chiefly on knowledge and justification as centrally important in epistemology.¹ These are by no means the only important concepts in the field, but they are representative.

1 Epistemology and Ethics

Ethics is as clearly normative a discipline as there is, and it has much in common with epistemology, including a central concern with justification, reasons, virtue, and other normative concepts that are also important in epistemology. Given the long-established contrast between normative ethics and metaethics, it may help us in understanding the normative elements in epistemology to begin with a comparison between ethics and epistemology as philosophical fields. That contrast is considerably older than the use of ‘normative’ in epistemology. Normative ethics has been widely conceived as concerned with what kinds of acts are right or wrong (a deontic question) and with what has intrinsic as opposed to instrumental value (an axiological question). By contrast, metaethics has been taken to encompass the epistemology, semantics, and ontology of both moral terms and also of such axiological terms as ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘virtue’, ‘vice’, and ‘evil’. It has been held that metaethical claims should be normatively neutral, but what that means is unclear, and at least on some broad notions of normativity (including one cited below) it is mistaken.

What is the counterpart distinction in epistemology, which is not usually conceived in terms of normative and “metaepistemological” dimensions? Normative epistemology would be concerned with (among other things) standards for deciding what we do or do not know, or are or are not justified in believing. I omit consideration of rationality and other notions important in epistemology, since we have quite enough to consider with knowledge and justification as our main focus. Much of what emerges concerning justification, however, will apply to rationality, which I take to be, for beliefs at least, grounded on the same kinds of bases as justification.²

¹I have, however, explored normativity in the realm of practical reason in Audi (2012, 169–193).

²A further point is that rationality may be a property of persons, whereas persons may not be said to be justified simpliciter, but are justified only with respect to, e.g., beliefs or actions.

What should we call reflection concerned with the analysis, especially the conceptual, semantic, and ontological analysis, of the concepts of knowledge, justification, and related concepts? The term ‘metaepistemology’ is not quite right if expressions of the form of ‘meta-*D*’, where *D* is a discipline, as is usual, concern its nature and status. A better term would be ‘analytical epistemology’ or, perhaps, ‘conceptual epistemology’, which does not have the misleading implication that the inquiry must belong to “analytic philosophy.” In fact, on the moral philosophy side, ‘analytic ethics’ has sometimes been used in place of the older ‘metaethics’.

In any case, the two enterprises, analytical and normative epistemology, though distinguishable, are related. A standard of appraisal applicable to both is the requirement of coherence between an analysis of a concept and sound intuitions about its application. This need to observe coherence constraints raises a problem of priority. Do we first find instances and work toward an analysis, or do we first frame an analysis and test it in relation to cases? This is of course the problem of the criterion. It need not be solved here, but I take it as uncontroversial that, wherever we begin, we must achieve a kind of reflective equilibrium between our applications of a concept in practice any analysis we propose for the concept.

Moral philosophers have generally considered it wise to observe the distinction between normative ethics (which I take to include applied ethics) and analytic ethics (“metaethics”). Why have epistemologists not more prominently distinguished analytical from normative epistemology (which is not to suggest that they would not recognize doing this as desirable)?³ One factor may be that moral philosophy has historically been concerned to help in the guidance of everyday life at both individual and institutional levels, whereas epistemology has been concerned with understanding a body of concepts in ways that are broadly theoretical (or more theoretical)—much as is understanding moral and axiological concepts. Guidance in ascriptions of knowledge and justification in actual cases, for instance, is not usually an aim of epistemologists (though it is not inappropriate to the work that some of them do). Another factor is that epistemology has no traditional division between the two kinds of enterprise: scarcely any significant epistemologist has failed to address both kinds of question, though of course analytical work done before the twentieth century rarely focused on words in the self-conscious way implicit in naming them with quotation marks.

There are doubtless other factors that distinguish the two disciplines. Here I simply suggest that epistemologists keep in mind the distinction between analytical epistemology—which is philosophical and purely theoretical—and normative epistemology, which is neither purely theoretical

³One exception is [Alston \(1989\)](#). He long ago noted that epistemologists have not generally made a distinction parallel to the normative-metaethical one common in ethics.

nor purely philosophical. This is particularly difficult because what philosophers most commonly think of as epistemology is chiefly what I am calling analytical epistemology. Moreover, philosophical competence is required for such inquiry but not necessarily for what I call normative epistemology. If the question is whether we know the past, philosophers can, as usual, do much to clarify the question; but in answering specific historical questions, they may be no better than other educated people in dealing with whether we have knowledge of one or another apparent historical fact. Indeed, apart from the question whether there is philosophical knowledge, the question whether, in a given field of inquiry, there is genuine knowledge (or, for that matter, justification) is typically best answered by people specially competent, in that field. It often turns out, however, that even experts in a non-philosophical area disagree because of conceptual differences or unclarity in the terms of their debate. Here philosophers can bring their own expertise to bear. For instance, whether one finds an instance of knowledge in, say, the historiographic domain, largely depends on what criteria of knowledge one is using. Here experience shows that, even among non-philosophers, skepticism can influence conceptualization and, with it, choice of criteria. Skepticism, in many of its forms, is much in need of philosophical exploration, and what philosophy reveals about it may influence the conduct of other disciplines.

2 The Normative and the Epistemic

It should be uncontroversial that normativity is the property of being normative. It will in any case help to consider what sorts of things can be normative. There are many: reasons are an immensely important kind of thing that can be normative, as opposed to, say, merely explanatory or merely motivating (they can of course be at once motivating, normative and explanatory); but properties, propositions, and attitudes can also be normative, including the propositional attitudes, both cognitive and conative. So can language and certainly linguistic acts, such as evaluations. Normativity, then, is a property which belongs to so many kinds of things that presenting a unified account of it is a major philosophical challenge. Paradigms of its ascription are normative propositions to the effect that something ought to be done or that something has intrinsic, as opposed to instrumental, value. There are indeed many kinds of value: not just moral but aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual value. (Spiritual value includes but is not limited to religious phenomena.) There are also different kinds of relations expressed by 'ought'. That the clouds ought to disperse by noon is something one might say on a meteorological basis; it is neither deontic nor, in any obvious way, normative. It is equivalent to an ascription of empirical probability. But what of the claim that a film ought to have been cut? Does this invoke aesthetic normativity, or might it be a financial analyst's appraisal of why the film made little profit? It might be either, depending

on the context of appraisal. The ‘ought’ in ‘People ought to thank God for the return of the lost plane’ is more difficult to assess. *Fittingness* is implied; and, perhaps even apart from the possibility of religious normativity, that notion, at least as invoked here, is normative.

Despite the difficulty of characterizing the normative precisely, I take the concepts of justification and rationality to be paradigms of normative notions. Both are pluralistic, and both notions occur across all the categories and domains just noted. There is, for instance, justification (and rationality) of belief, of action, and of attitudes; and there is moral justification, prudential justification, and aesthetic justification. Both the notions of justification and that of rationality are positive in the sense that what they apply to is either praiseworthy or at least defensible. Consider justification. What is justified is both supported by what justifies it and either merits praise or at least does not merit a certain kind of criticism. As this implies, citing the justifier tends to rebut or at least blunt criticism of the kind (say epistemic) to which that justifier (say sensory experience) is relevant. Similarly, if with less force, what makes a belief or other element rational is positive and renders a certain kind of criticism inappropriate.

On the negative side, there is also an area of wide agreement. One thing that many philosophers are inclined to say of normative properties (and the corresponding terms and concepts) is that they are not *descriptive*. Descriptive properties of the most familiar sorts are observable. In more complex cases, the term is used for properties that, whether observable or not, are (a) causal, (b) of a kind appropriate to being subjects of scientific investigation, and (c) capable of figuring directly in prediction and explanation of events. This threefold claim is controversial, however, and I will rest no main contention on it.⁴ It should be stressed, however, that the descriptive need not be identified with the “factual.” Moral realists take moral claims to be capable of truth, hence of being factual, though they do not treat them as descriptive in the sense in question.

What is probably not controversial is that things possess normative properties in virtue of possessing other properties—those constituting the base of the former properties—that seem descriptive in the sense sketched. This leaves open whether normative properties are themselves ultimately descriptive. But the consequentiality (“in virtue of”) relation is not only common ground between non-naturalists and (cognitivist) naturalists; it is also a basis for anchoring moral judgments in intersubjectively accessible facts. Whether the relation is a priori, as rationalists commonly take it to be in normative cases, or empirical, as empiricists consider it to be in all cases, is a matter of continuing disagreement.

⁴Moore (1903) is plausibly thought to have held this. It might be denied by, e.g., Boyd (1988), Sturgeon (1985), and Brink (1989), “Cornell Realists” who, even if they might grant that normative *concepts* are not natural, hold that normative properties are.

3 Two Kinds of Normativity

It is essential for understanding normativity that we distinguish *normativity in content*—which could also be called normativity in constitution—from *normativity in upshot*. Consider the concept of pain. Taken generically, the notion is psychological: pain is (as a matter of conceptual truth) a psychological phenomenon with behavioral as well as introspective aspects. Yet instances of pain—of the property of being pained—also cry out for a palliative response: a creature’s being in pain makes such a response fitting and often fully justifies it. It is also an a priori truth that pain has this property. On this second count—providing, a priori, a reason for action, such as a response that, like cooling a burned hand, is fitting and, often, fully justified—pain is normative in upshot.⁵ The reason-giving power of pain gives it great normative significance—enough to make it quite appropriate to speak of normativity in upshot as a kind of normativity. But, in content, the concept of pain is not deontic or axiological or normative in any other contentual respect, and its normativity is not basic. The concept is psychological and descriptive; but because the fact that some being is in pain provides—and arguably a priori entails—that there is a reason (however slight) to do something that would eliminate it, it bears an important relation to the normative “proper”—what is normative in constitution. Pain has a normative upshot, though not a normative nature.⁶

One response to this distinction is to say that pain (for instance) is normative in upshot *because* it is normative in content. It is true that if a normative attribution—say that something is intrinsically bad—is true, then, connected with it, there *is* a reason for action. But being intrinsically bad is—as a matter of conceptual truth—not a brute property; and if one did not have a sense of why something is such, one would not understand why being intrinsically bad entails there being a reason for action. By contrast, pain directly provides a reason for action; and someone’s being in pain *explains* why palliative action is called for. The statement ‘Jan is in pain, but that implies no reason for anyone to do anything to relieve it’ is at

⁵The apriority of the reason-giving relation is controversial, I have defended it in detail, e.g. in Audi (2004). As characterized here, the normative in upshot can also be normative in content, but I use the term only for what is not normative in content.

⁶There are of course other conceptions of normativity. Wedgwood holds that intentional phenomena are normative; e.g., “(i) It is essential to *beliefs* that they are causally regulated by standards of rational or justified belief, and (ii) the ultimate purpose or point of conforming to those standards is not just to have rational or justified beliefs for their own sake but to ensure that one believes the proposition in question if and only if that proposition is true” (2007, 154). This apparently yields an extremely broad notion of normativity—one we might call *essential teleological appraisability*. Stones lack it, but pain apparently does not: it might be “regulated” by standards of rational behavior (since it tends to signal potential danger and lead to avoiding it) and might have the (evolutionary?) purpose of self-preservation. It is not obvious that pain must be normative, on the conception in question. There are also serious questions about whether belief is *causally* regulated in the relevant way and about how purpose figures in such regulation. For Wedgwood’s defense of the view, see esp. pp. 155-73.

best conceptually puzzling. Related to this, an attribution of obligation or intrinsic value is an exercise of a normative concept and, more specifically, cannot be adequately understood apart from having a concept of a reason and a related concept of the appropriateness of criticism for denying there being one; whereas attribution of a property normative in upshot does not meet this condition. One could attribute pain fully comprehendingly without having—and certainly without exercising—the concept of a reason or any equivalent. It is only when one *also* has such a concept that, say, attributing pain and denying that there is any reason for action is deviant. For here one is using both concepts; and one’s denying the relation between them can be attributed not to the content normativity of the former but to a failure to see an a priori connection between the former and the latter. This connection is indeed important for understanding the normative content of the latter. Imagine that someone sincerely denied that pain provides any reason for action. This would be strong evidence of a lack of full understanding of the concept of a reason for action.

Given the wide range of things that can be intrinsically good or bad—commonly taken to include people, seascapes, artworks, elegant proofs—one might wonder whether anything at all, say a rock, can be normative in upshot. I have not implied this, and of course the history of philosophy has many attempts to show, as hedonists attempt to, that there is a limited range of things of intrinsic value, or at least of the basic kind. It will already be apparent that I have presupposed that normativity in upshot entails that there is an a priori connection between the possession of the property in question, such as pain, and its normative upshot, here a reason to palliate. Being a rock does not a priori entail any reason for action, though *in* an appropriate context—say one in which we are pledged to save rocks from being pulverized to make a desired powder—a normative consequence may be derived. This, however, shows only that what is normative in upshot, such as promising, can endow anything with what might be called *derivative normative importance*.

The distinction between the two kinds of normativity bears on a recently prominent use of normative terms like ‘moral’. Traits like cruelty and brutality have been called morally *thick*. They are, arguably, moral not in content but only in upshot: they are like pain not only in being descriptive and causal but also in the sense that no exercise of moral or even normative judgment need be made to explain what they are or even to know the a priori, conceptually essential, criteria for their possession. To know that someone is cruel, we need to know only the “descriptive” fact that the person characteristically aims at causing pain in others for its own sake (hence non-instrumentally). Knowing this, unlike knowing that a belief is unjustified or an act (morally) wrong, is possible for someone who has no grasp of normative concepts at all; and while knowing that someone is in pain or, on the negative side, is cruel, gives us reason for a normative

judgment about the person, we can know someone is in pain or is cruel without depending on a normative judgment.⁷

Does the same point hold for kindness, which seems the opposite of cruelty? Kindness appears to be a similar: a strong and stable disposition to reduce the pain and enhance the pleasure of others. (This leaves open that some cases of kindness involve the exercise of normative concepts on the part of the kind person.) But it is different with courage, which is normative (though not moral). To explain what courage is we must appeal to a *proper* balance between, say, steadfastness and avoidance, and to know that someone has courage we need to know that the person achieves a certain proper balance between undertaking and avoiding certain challenges. The kind of balance in question is apparently not characterizable purely descriptively—at least on the assumption that such normative concepts as intrinsic goodness are not reducible to such descriptive ones as optimizing the proportion of pleasure to pain in some determinate population. Courage might be explicated in terms of a *suitable* contribution to preserving what is good, but the relevant notion of the good seems irreducibly normative. (If it is not, then what we consider normative must be explicated in terms of the relevant reducing notions and the normative will be a subcategory of the descriptive.)

4 Normative Epistemology

Bearing in mind what sort of property normativity is, we might now ask why normative epistemology, which is concerned with the range of our knowledge and justification, should be considered normative. Suppose we could agree that ‘epistemic’ in a wide use means roughly ‘concerned with knowledge or justification’. It is true that the term ‘epistemology’ is often defined as equivalent to ‘the theory of knowledge’, but at most a few who so characterize it would regard it as not concerned as well with justification and indeed with the rationality and irrationality of beliefs as well as with their justification.

Given these points, we might say that the claim that someone knows a specific proposition—call it *p*—is an *epistemic claim*, since it employs the concept of knowledge, and distinguish that from an *epistemological claim*, such as the thesis that knowing entails being justified. What of the claim that someone is justified in believing a specific proposition? Many would

⁷Granted, ‘cruel’ is vague owing to the indefiniteness of the degree to which the relevant desire is present. But this kind of vagueness also characterizes many non-normative terms; we need not in general decide, e.g., how much nasty behavior is *permissible* in order to determine whether someone is cruel. It is true, however, that if someone were neurally manipulated so as to want to cause others pain for its own sake, we would normally regard the desire as excusable and the cruelty as in a way artificial. Does this imply that the concept of cruelty “contains” the normative concept of inexcusability or a normative notion of naturalness? I do not see that it does.

also call this epistemic. I prefer the term ‘justificational’—as distinct from ‘justificatory’, which implies that the referent actually justifies something. In any case, since the notion of being justified is apparently normative, the claim that someone is justified in believing *p* (some proposition) is plausibly considered normative.

Is the notion of knowledge also normative? This is controversial. If its correct analysis is naturalistic, the answer is apparently negative—unless all this means is that it is normative in upshot and knowledge is good in itself. Part of the point of giving a naturalistic analysis, I take it, is to avoid countenancing any irreducibly normative concepts. Suppose, however, that the concept of knowledge does not admit of a naturalistic analysis but the *property* (or relation) of knowing is natural. How might this be? Consider the concept of murder, whose content is such that its correct application entails that the act in question is wrong in a normative sense (even if excusable). Murder is by its very nature wrongful killing or at least killing that is *wrong* unless *justified* by extraordinary factors. The property of murdering, however, might still be that of (say) non-self-defensively, non-politically killing a person; and that is arguably not a normative property.⁸ To be more explicit, this might hold provided that a concept having normative content can express a property—the property things falling under the concept must thereby have—that is natural. The concept of murder seems to illustrate this. It is true that murderous action is *prima facie* wrong, but this is something one can see from understanding what the deed is, which is apparently possible in descriptive naturalistic terms, and connecting that kind of deed with wrongness, whereas understanding the *concept* of murder at all requires seeing its *prima facie* wrongness. If this is all so, then the claim that someone knows that *p* might be best considered in a similar way: as non-normative or, perhaps better, conceptually normative and ontically either non-normative or normative only in upshot. Parallel points hold for justification.

Do these points imply that we cannot distinguish analytical epistemology from normative epistemology if naturalistic analyses are possible for the concepts of knowledge and justification? I do not think so, though it is true that then the propositions asserted in normative epistemology, say that we are justified in believing there is an external world, would not be distinguished from those in analytical epistemology in terms of normative content, as opposed to conceptual status. (This assertion about our relation to the world would not be a conceptual truth, as would a truth of analytical epistemology.) We can still, however, distinguish the analytical enterprise of conceptual analysis from the application of the concepts under analysis to phenomena in our experience. The same seems to me to hold for

⁸What of killing someone who is about to murder someone else—preventively killing? Is this murder? Perhaps not, and but the vagueness of the term does not prevent its illustrating the possibility of a normative concept’s expressing a non-normative property.

ethics. Reduction of normative concepts to naturalistic ones or even, less ambitiously, just of normative properties to natural properties, leaves room for distinguishing different kinds of intellectual activity. The analytical and theoretical activities, such as those of analytical epistemology, would be those demanding philosophical competence; the identification of instances of concepts such as knowledge and justification—or the discountenancing of claimed instances—would belong to normative inquiry and would normally require only a grasp of the relevant concepts and ordinary discernment as opposed to specialized competence.

A not unnatural objection here is that if knowledge and justification are, as they certainly seem, epistemic *goods*, then ascriptions of them as such are normative. Even if they are only instrumental goods, ascribing them might be held to be ultimately normative, at least if it is assumed that the existence of instrumental goods—as opposed to mere good means to producing certain results—requires the existence of something intrinsically good.) I have already suggested why I do not think this is sound reasoning. Pleasure and pain are intrinsically good and intrinsically bad (respectively), but ascriptions of them are not normative in content. It is certainly true that reflection concerning pleasure and pain *in relation to* the good and the bad will reveal to someone who has the concepts of all of these that pleasure has the property of being intrinsically good and pain that of being intrinsically bad. But consider pain by itself. Can we not know what it is—and teach a child the correct use of the concept—without bringing in value notions? And can someone not, fully comprehendingly, ascribe pain without ascribing badness? Indeed, some people may reject the claim that pain is intrinsically bad or intrinsically reason-giving, or the like.⁹

These considerations surely support the idea that these hedonic concepts are descriptive in content and normative only in upshot. If they are treated as normative in content, the distinction between the normative and the non-normative will not correspond to the well-established contrast between, on the one hand, the purely descriptive and, on the other hand, what is intrinsically good or bad, or what ought or ought not to be done, in senses self-evidently entailing that there is a reason, pro or con as the case may be, to realize, perform, preserve, honor, and so forth, the thing or act in question.

5 Knowledge and Justification as Presumptively Normative Notions

We have so far not considered the relation between knowledge and justification. If, as is widely thought, justification is a conceptual constituent in

⁹Strong particularists might reject this rather strong claim. See, e.g., Dancy (1993); and for discussion of particularism Hooker and Little (2000). Self-deceptive rejections might also be relevant, but I am speaking only of reflective rejections that represent their proponents in a way self-deceptive claims do not.

knowledge, and if the former is a normative property, then in virtue of those facts we may consider the concept of knowledge (or at least the property of knowing) normative.¹⁰ There is, however, good reason to think that knowledge is possible without justification. This can be argued by appeal to cases, such as that of the *idiot savant*, or by defending a reliabilist account of knowledge on which, roughly speaking, it is appropriately grounded true belief and the appropriate grounding is a matter of the belief's being produced or sustained by a belief-producing process with a suitably large proportion of true beliefs as outputs.¹¹ There is vagueness here, and there can be argument about what resolution of it in a hard case is *justified*; but that possibility alone does not entail normativity. Whether to apply a vague term may be a normative matter, but it does not follow that vague terms always express normative concepts or properties.

Reliabilists about the nature of knowledge have tended to think that justification also admits of analysis in non-normative terms. One may hold this even if one does not take knowledge to entail justification. I do not see that such an analysis will be possible *simply* by starting with one's favored analysis of knowledge, dropping truth from that analysis (as one would have to, since the target concept of justification does not entail truth), and reducing the ratio of truth to falsehood required for capturing minimal cases of justification (since justification does not require as strong grounding as does knowledge). A rough example would be this: a belief is justified if and only if it has grounds such that most beliefs with grounds of that type, and held in circumstances of the kind in question, are true. A major problem here is that justification seems to be an internal concept in a sense entailing that justification for belief requires the person's having a kind of access, by introspection or reflection, to a justificatory ground for *p*.¹² Such internality does not entail that the analysis of justification must appeal to non-naturalistic concepts, but it does raise difficulties for a reliabilist, naturalistic attempt to account for justification.

There is a further problem besetting both the attempt to naturalize the concept of justification and the related effort to show that being justified is a natural property. Justification cannot be understood apart from the kinds of grounds on which it rests. It is not a brute property of the things that have it, and one cannot explicate it apart from the kinds of properties and relations that confer it. Moreover, we may assume the concept of justification (or anyway the concept of justification as expressed in English) must be

¹⁰I am thinking of propositional not doxastic justification, the justifiedness of a belief. But given the relation of the latter to the former there is in general no need to address the latter here. I also omit discussion of the relation of my position to norms of assertion. If these are basically pragmatic, setting them aside needs no special justification, but otherwise I can only say that I doubt a good account of them would be inconsistent with my position.

¹¹A case against the entailment of justification by knowing is made in my (2010, ch. 10).

¹²I have argued for this in a number of places, including ch. 11 of (2010) and some papers referred to there.

associated with a finite—indeed, psychologically manageable—number of types of grounds. For the sake of argument, we might suppose that a person justifiably believes p if and only if the person's belief that p is appropriately based on at least one of the following common—and on my view at least largely constitutive—sources: sensory experience, memory, introspection, understanding, and testimony.¹³ It does not follow that justified belief can be analyzed as belief appropriately based on *either* sensory experience, or memory, or introspection, or understanding, or testimony. The concept of justification is surely not a priori closed in this way. Even if it were, might we conclude that the concept of justified belief is disjunctive? This seems quite doubtful; but if it is true, the status of the property of justification is still open. We have already seen the possibility that a normative concept expresses a non-normative property. Suppose, moreover, that the concept of justification is equivalent to that of the disjunction of the natural, non-normative grounds on which justification is consequential—though this is not entailed by the existence of such a consequentiality relation. We would then have a kind of naturalistic reduction of the concept of justification, and this would seem to present an obstacle to construing the property it expresses as normative.

Perhaps, however, although the concept of justification does not admit of a disjunctive (or other kind of) analysis in non-normative terms, the *property* of justifiedness is a natural property. If, however, it is not the property of being suitably reliably grounded, or perhaps just *sufficiently* reliably grounded, what property is it? The natural answer, given the assumptions we are making about its (at least partly) constitutive grounds, is that it is the disjunctive property of being grounded on sensory experience or being grounded on memory or being grounded on introspection, or being grounded on understanding or being grounded on testimony. But *are* there disjunctive properties, as opposed to disjunctive attributions of properties and perhaps disjunctive concepts?¹⁴ I doubt it, but this is not the place to argue the matter. Even if there are such properties, is this or any similar disjunctive property what one ascribes to someone in saying the person justifiably believes something?

One argument against the disjunctive view of justification ascriptions is that the relation of the disjunctive property in question—if there are such properties—would seem to be the same as that of each disjunct to specific cases of justification where, say, memory or perception is crucial. The relation would be consequentiality. Just as my belief that p may have the property of justification in virtue of a clear memory impression that p or my belief that q may have it in virtue of a clear visual impression that q , my having a justified belief simpliciter, as distinct from, say, a visually justified

¹³Here I leave aside the important point that testimony, though an essential source of knowledge, is not a basic one. My most recent supporting case is in my (Forthcoming).

¹⁴For contrasting views on the possibility of disjunctive properties see Paul Audi (Forthcoming) and van Inwagen (2004).

belief, will be grounded on either a sensory impression or a memory, and so on for the other sources. But plainly if a belief's having the property of being *F* is grounded on its having the property of being *G*, then *F* and *G* are not the same property. This grounding (consequentiality) relation is asymmetrical. Thus, even if justification is *equivalent* to the disjunctive property that is the best candidate for a non-normative equivalent of justification, if it is grounded on that property, it is not identical with it.

It might be replied that having the property of justifiedness is grounded on having one or more of the properties *designated* by the disjunction but not grounded *on (having) the disjunction* of those properties. That would be like (1) having the property of being a sibling of *x* being grounded not on (2) being a brother *or* sister of *x* but (3) either on being a brother of *x* or on being a sister of *x*. But a disjunction of grounds for having a property does not entail its being grounded on the disjunction of those grounds. My sister is a sibling in virtue of having a brother, not in virtue of having a brother or a sister.

These replies are correct; and though they raise doubts about the possibility of disjunctive grounds, they allow joint grounds. My justification for believing *p* can be grounded on *both* my having evidence of my own and my receiving your testimony that *p*. This is a kind of conjunctive grounding—overdetermination by grounds—but it is at least not obviously grounding in a conjunctive property. Similarly, disjunctive grounding does not entail grounding in a disjunctive property, as siblinghood shows. Indeed, one might doubt that being a sibling is grounded in being a brother *or* grounded in being a sister, though it is entailed by either. Arguably, it is grounded in being a child of the same parents.

These conclusions are of course not incompatible with justification's being identical with *some* natural property. But I do not see any reason to accept this claim—or at least, any better reason to accept it than to accept the claim that justification admits of a reliabilist analysis. If this is correct, then normative epistemology can be distinguished from analytical epistemology not only in terms of the difference between analytic inquiries and inquiries and claims regarding specific questions of what is in fact known or justifiedly believed; normative epistemology will be like normative ethics in a concern with the nature and grounds of at least one kind of claim ascribing an apparently irreducible normative property: justification.

6 Epistemological Naturalism Revisited

If the points so far made are correct, does it follow that epistemology cannot be naturalized? There is much controversy about how to characterize naturalism and even about what constitutes a natural property—the kind of property admissible in naturalized philosophical theorizing and in substantive scientific inquiry, especially in explanation and prediction. Here I am simply presupposing that natural properties are both descriptive

and broadly causal. Normative properties are not universally agreed to be non-causal,¹⁵ but there is much plausibility in holding that being obligatory, being intrinsically good, and, to shift to epistemology, being justified are not causal properties. Roughly, instantiating them is not the kind of thing that fits a thing to serve as a term in a causal relation—though a thing’s instantiating a *ground* of them, such as pleasure, pain, or, in the epistemological case, seeing, does imply having causal power. An experience’s being painful can cause an act of avoidance or an expectation of assistance; an event’s being a seeing of an oncoming bike can cause an evasion; and so forth. Being non-causal, however, does not entail lacking explanatory power. An act’s being obligatory, even if obligatoriness is not a causal property, can be explanatory. It can certainly explain such normative facts as that the agent in question has a (normative) reason for performing it. Causal power does not exhaust explanatory power.

It will already be evident that I have considered two related but significantly different questions: whether the analysis of the concepts of knowledge and justification is possible in non-normative—let us now say *naturalistic*—terms and the question whether the properties of knowledge and justification are natural properties. The first question is one of analytical naturalism; the second is one of ontological naturalism. For knowledge, I have suggested that both kinds of naturalization seem plausible; for justification I have suggested that not even ontological naturalism seems plausible (I am taking it that the analytical version in each case entails the ontological version but not conversely.) I should add that although I have not specifically addressed rationality, I consider it much like justification: an internal concept, but wider than justification and weaker where both apply.

One might at this point speak of *non-reductive* naturalism and argue that nothing said here precludes that kind of naturalization of the property of justification. If this is the view that non-natural properties (apart from supernatural ones, presumably) are consequential on natural ones—both supervenient on them and possessed in virtue of them—I have tentatively endorsed it. It implies that no normative properties—if they are non-natural—are *basic*. But that is compatible with their being distinct in kind from those constituting their grounds. Neither intrinsic goodness nor obligation is plausibly considered basic (roughly, a property possessed brutally, rather than in virtue of its possessor’s having some other property); but this has been commonly accepted by both naturalists and non-naturalists in ethics. Thus, non-reductive naturalism is compatible with a dualism of properties on which normative and natural properties are importantly different in kind. What justifies calling it naturalism—if anything does—is only that it anchors normative properties in natural ones and leaves open that they may be themselves natural.

¹⁵Cornell realists take them to be causal; e.g., Sturgeon (1985). For a critical response to Sturgeon with an alternative explanation of the data, see my (1993).

One may think that since non-reductive naturalism treats normative properties such as justification as under the *control* of natural ones such as visual experience, it gives the important work to natural properties and on that score should be considered a kind of naturalism. But is this true? And, if it is, does it justify the use of ‘non-reductive’ here?

In answer to the first question, surely the work of conceptual analysis and conceptual classification is important. So is that of indicating what range of inferences is valid or invalid. Non-reductive naturalism does not assign all that work to natural properties. It does not provide an analysis of justification (or other uncontroversially normative notions) in terms of natural properties. As to inferences, its implications are mixed. It does (at least on the rationalist assumption that epistemic principles are a priori and necessary), account for the validity of such inferences as that of one’s having *prima facie* justification for believing *p* from the proposition that one is having a visual experience as of *p* or seems to remember that *p*. But does it account for the validity of the inference from ‘He is unjustified in believing *p*’ to ‘He merits some kind of criticism for believing *p*’?¹⁶ This is not to say that *giving* him criticism would be justified; meriting criticism in the relevant sense is equivalent to the normative appropriateness of criticism and entails nothing about what critical *action* toward him might be justified. It is also compatible with full excusability—there might, for instance, have been brain manipulation.

Suppose that a non-reductive naturalist is as naturalistic as possible without claiming reduction of normative concepts or properties to natural ones. The view must still countenance normative concepts if, like non-naturalists, it is to account for the normatively disapprobative character of ‘unjustified’ as entailing that there is some kind of reason for criticism. But, as anti-reductive, it yields no conceptual equivalent of being unjustified, and it provides no independent basis for an inference from being unjustified to meriting criticism. Moreover, even if it can specify all the kinds of grounds a priori identifiable as basic for justification, their mere absence does not clearly entail meriting a reason for criticism. I am assuming, of course, that the non-reductive naturalist does not take the usual grounds of justification to be a priori exhaustive, since then a kind of reductive account of justification would likely be thought possible. So naturalists of this kind cannot take it to be a priori that one is justified in believing *p* *only if* *p* is supported by vision, memory, intuition, and so on for the finite canonical list.

We can now see the answer to the second question, whether the use of ‘non-reductive naturalism’ would be justified if all the conceptual and

¹⁶This point is not clearly true where ‘unjustified’ is taken as equivalent to ‘not justified’; tiny children, e.g., may believe before the notion of being justified in believing applies to them, and arguably they are in no way criticizable for every non-justified belief of theirs. Another question is how to regard the *idiot savant* and certain other special cases exhibiting knowledge without justification. Space does not allow pursuing this issue here.

analytical work could be done in terms of the properties the non-reductive naturalist posits as grounds of justification. Suppose that it is a priori that we are justified in believing p if and only if we have at least one ground on the finite list of natural justification-grounding properties. Isn't this a naturalistic well-groundedness analysis? If it is, we would have a *fully* naturalistic account of what justification is; and on that score, 'non-reductive' would be inapplicable to the account. It appears, however, that the analysis is disjunctive: the naturalistic interpretation of well-groundedness is not, for instance, having good reasons, a right to believe, or conforming to epistemic duty, but a matter of being in one or another evidential state. Granted, from this naturalistic disjunctive analysis it would not immediately follow that the property of justification is natural; but it would be if there are disjunctive properties *and* property identity is entailed by the kind of equivalence an analysis expresses. If there are no disjunctive properties, this would leave open whether the property of justification is natural; the property could be non-natural even if its possession is equivalent to a finite disjunction of natural properties. But if the analysis in question succeeded, then philosophers who accepted it would have little motivation to call themselves *non-reductive* naturalists.

One further point in this section may add perspective. I have not characterized naturalism as entailing *empiricism*. Most naturalists tend toward empiricism, in the broad sense of the view that all knowledge is either empirical or, if a priori, then of analytic propositions. But one can certainly hold that the only entities and the only properties that exist are natural and allow that some relations between them are synthetic a priori. Consider the relation between visually experiencing a printed white surface before me and being justified in believing there is one. This relation need not be empirical even if the property of justification is natural. The nature of the properties figuring in epistemology is a metaphysical question; the nature of our knowledge of relations among those properties is an epistemological question. A theory can be metaphysically naturalistic even if its epistemology is rationalistic. In this paper my interest is largely in the ontology of analytical epistemology, and the most plausible positions in that domain are, I believe, neutral toward empiricism.

7 The Value Problem

My position in this paper bears on how the value problem, which centers on the value of knowledge and justified belief, should be conceived. Suppose that the property of knowing is (in content) normative. It does not follow either that knowledge is better, intrinsically or even instrumentally, than merely justified true belief. But, as we have seen, knowledge may well be intrinsically good (hence good in itself) even if the property is not normative (in content). Pleasure can be (and arguably is) intrinsically good even though the notion of pleasure is not normative. Now consider

justification. Suppose the property of justification is normative. It does not immediately follow that justification is better than mere true belief; but it seems obvious in any case that justification is a good thing, and presumably a non-instrumentally good thing—though that is perhaps arguable. So far as I can see, it is best to consider both of our questions about value—that of intrinsic value and that of instrumental value—to belong to normative epistemology.

Does the value problem, however, concern epistemic normativity? If ‘epistemic’ is understood to concern both knowledge and justification, then, strictly speaking, inquiry into such normativity should be inquiry into the normative character or lack thereof of knowledge and justification, at both the conceptual level and that of properties. This has been my concern, and I have taken our question to be about concepts and properties central in epistemology—hence to call for an inquiry in analytical epistemology. If, however, the value problem concerns not conceptual matters but the actual value of knowledge, of justified belief, and of mere true belief, then I do not see it as analytical epistemology, though pursuing it easily leads into that and is assisted by it. One could perhaps call it an exploration in *epistemological axiology*, but I think it clearer to consider it an inquiry into the axiology of the epistemic.¹⁷

The very idea that there is both normative and analytical epistemology will evoke for some philosophers the question whether epistemology should be considered a normative discipline. Here again the analogy with ethics as a discipline is relevant. Ethics is a normative discipline if any discipline is. This is in part because it encompasses normative ethics, which explores—and, on most views, arguably seeks—sound standards of conduct: those we *ought* morally to realize. But it is also in part because the main focus of metaethics is questions about the nature and status of those standards and of the concepts of value and obligation. Compare epistemology. What I call normative epistemology explores standards of justification, ways of achieving knowledge, and a host of matters related to these—matters concerning what we *ought* to believe, where the ‘ought’ involves the kinds of critical norms emphasized by virtue epistemologists and epistemic deontologists alike, as well as epistemologists in neither of these categories. In analytical epistemology, knowledge and justification are a central focus in much the way the good and the obligatory are in metaethics. Justification, at least, seems as clearly normative as those two notions. With all this in mind, it seems eminently reasonable to view the discipline of epistemology as normative. It should now be clear, however, that this does not imply that *all* its questions are normative in the paradigmatic (or most clearly paradigmatic) sense: questions whether something has intrinsic value or

¹⁷For a valuable survey of the value problem, see Greco (2011). My own view on the problem is briefly expressed in (2010, ch. 11).

ought (or ought not) to be the case. On that narrow view, even ethics would not qualify as a normative discipline.

8 Conclusion

Epistemology, like ethics, has a purely philosophical, analytical dimension and a normative dimension. Both dimensions are important. But at least some results in the former do not entail, as opposed to helping us find, results in the latter. Indicating what knowledge and justification are, conceptually, does not tell us what propositional attitudes actually instantiate knowledge or justified belief. This is one reason why it does not satisfy the skeptic. We can (on my view) rebut, even if we cannot refute, skeptical arguments on analytical grounds, i.e., show that skeptical arguments are not sound. But showing the skeptic that there is knowledge or justified belief—which refutation, as falsification of a skeptical thesis, requires—is a different, though related matter, and it represents a labor that I would consider a task in normative epistemology. Ascertaining the value of knowledge and justification relative to merely true belief is a still further problem, though not one that requires rebutting skepticism. I have suggested that analytic epistemology can help us in determining such value; but that determination is a problem for normative epistemology, specifically, the axiology of epistemology. Regarding the overall conception of normativity in epistemology, much depends on how far epistemological naturalization can go. I have expressed optimism regarding the naturalization of knowledge and pessimism regarding the naturalization of justification. Even if full naturalization of epistemology should succeed, however, the discipline would be normative at least conceived pre-reductively, in terms of essentially focusing on the common-sense concepts of justification, rationality, and related ones—indeed, of knowledge as well if these are partly constitutive of it. I doubt, however, that justification and its close relatives are fully naturalizable. Justification does have roots in the causal descriptive properties on which it is consequential; but the whole cannot be built from those properties, nor can its constitution be validly inferred from that of its roots.

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