

## Grounding the Domains of Reasons

Stephanie Leary  
(Draft: June 23, 2016)

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>1</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>1</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 important 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>2</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>3</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>4</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>5</sup> Practical reasons thus seem to not only determine the normative status of a

---

<sup>2</sup> One might think that practical reasons can also undercut or cancel each other, but this is more controversial.

<sup>3</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>4</sup> It's controversial whether having a reason (in the sense that is relevant to the 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>5</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*.

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 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>6</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>6</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>7</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>7</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>8</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 chocolate birthday cake instead. 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>9</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. This is because, while it's controversial whether there are practical reasons for belief, it

---

<sup>8</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>9</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.

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>10</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 desire/believe not- $p$ , this does not entail that there are also equally strong reasons against

---

<sup>10</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 compossible, whereas the relevant alternatives in the case of attitudes are compossible. 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.

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>11</sup>

So, an account of normative reasons that explains why epistemic reasons are interdependent, while practical reasons are not, it can 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.

## 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

---

<sup>11</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).

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>12</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

---

<sup>12</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.

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 the fact that those facts bear 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.

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>13</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>14</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 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>15</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

---

<sup>13</sup> For example, Thomson (2008) seems to hold such a view.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, as I argue in Leary (forthcoming) there are other reasons for rejecting this claim that have to do with supervenience.

<sup>15</sup> As I argue in Leary (MS), though, I do not think Parfit's argument is successful.

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>16</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 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

---

<sup>16</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.

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>17</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 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>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</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.

<sup>18</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

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>19</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 organization that would fund your scientific research, eventually causing you to form many other true beliefs about the world.<sup>20</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

---

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>19</sup> Whether such a view provides an adequate intensional account of *practical* reasons is also controversial. See Schroeder (2007) for a thorough discussion of potential counterexamples and his responses.

<sup>20</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.

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>21</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>22</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 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>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</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>22</sup> For a response to Kelly's (2003) counterexamples, see Leite (2007) and Rinard (2015).

<sup>23</sup> This is, however, not the sort of account of the weights of reasons that Schroeder (2007) adopts.

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).

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 (assuming that Pam is equally good friends with Jim and Dwight, and that 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  $\text{not-}p$  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  $\text{not-}\psi$ 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 important 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 this desire is just one out of a diverse array of desires that an agent may have. So, if this is all the distinction between epistemic and practical reasons amounts to, it seems to be an arbitrary one. That is, 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 withhold 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>24</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>25</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 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

---

<sup>24</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>25</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.



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 quite common 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>26</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:

*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>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Kearns & Star (2009) explicitly distinguish between epistemic and practical reasons for belief in this way.

<sup>27</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

- 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>28</sup>

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.

---

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>28</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.

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>29</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 practical and epistemic reasons to both be facts that admit of *degrees*, one may thereby explain why practical and epistemic reasons both have weights, even though they have very different grounds.<sup>30</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 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

---

<sup>29</sup> Manne (2016) defends this sort of account of the weights of practical reasons.

<sup>30</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.

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 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 R may explain why S's  $\phi$ ing would help satisfy A's desire for o, while *not* explaining why S's *not*  $\phi$ ing would help satisfy A's desire for o. For example, 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 chocolate craving, but the fact that Michael's cake is chocolate is not part of what explains why her having a slice of Kevin's chocolate cake would help satisfy her chocolate craving. And 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. After all, if Pam is an equally good friend of Dwight's, and Jim's happiness would make Dwight equally *un*happy, then Pam's not desiring that Jim does not get the job would actually inhibit the satisfaction of her desire that her friends be happy. 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. That is, 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>31</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-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.

---

<sup>31</sup> Some take this to be the central question of the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate. Regardless of whether or not this is the central question that naturalists and non-naturalists are interested in, however, it nonetheless seems like a substantive question that one might be interested in.



## References

- Berker, Selim (2013) "Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions" *Philosophical Review* 122: pp. 337–393.
- (MS) "A Combinatorial Argument against Practical Reasons for Belief"
- Broome, John (2004) "Reasons," in Jay Wallace, Michael Smith, Samuel Scheffler, and Philip Pettit (eds.) *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*. Oxford University Press.
- Cuneo, Terrance (2007) *The Normative Web*. Oxford 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.) pp. 49-60.
- 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, 1956.
- Kearns & Star (2008) "Reasons: Explanations or Evidence?" *Ethics*, Vol. 119:1, pp. 31-56
- (2009) "Reasons as Evidence" in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics Vol 4*, pp. 215-242.
- Kelly, Tom (2003) "Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66:3, pp. 612-640.
- Leary, Stephanie (forthcoming) "Non-naturalism and Normative Necessities" *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 12.
- (MS) "In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief"
- 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*, 75:2, pp. 456-464.
- Lord, Errol (2010) "Having Reasons and the Factoring Account", *Philosophical Studies* 149:3, pp. 283-296.
- Manne, Kate (2016) "Democratizing Humeanism", *Weighing Reasons* (Errol Lord and Barry Maguire eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parfit, Derek (2011) *On What Matters*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reisner, Andrew (2008) "Weighing Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons for Belief", *Philosophical Studies* 138:1, pp. 17-27.
- Rinard, Susanna (2015) "Against the New Evidentialists", *Philosophical Issues* 25: pp. 208-223.
- 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.
- Schroeder, Mark (2007) *Slaves of the Passions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2008) "Having Reasons", *Philosophical Studies* 139: pp. 57-71.
- (2012) "The Ubiquity of State-Given Reasons", *Ethics* 122: pp. 457-488.
- Street, Sharon (2009) "Evolution and the Normativity of Epistemic Reasons", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39: pp. 213-248.
- Sylvan, Kurt (2013) "Truth Monism without Teleology" *Thought* 1: pp. 161-169.
- Thomson, Judith Jarvis (2008) *Normativity*, Chicago: Open Court.