Introduction

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Over the last three decades, practical philosophy has increasingly looked at, and become dependent upon, the concept of *normative reasons* for actions, and action-related propositional attitudes. The concept gradually came into prominence in a series of classic treatments in the late seventies and early eighties and has since then become the focal point and organizing concept for a vast array of work in both ethics and the philosophy of mind and action. The core of the concept is a simple one: normative reasons are facts that *count in favor* of some action or attitude; they are the facts that determine whether or not an agent *ought* to do something, or adopt some attitude. As such, normative reasons are often thought to be the most fundamental concept relevant to understanding *rationality*, which, on this view, is the capacity to recognize and respond to reasons in appropriate ways. The link to rationality means that normative reasons not only determine what ought to be done; at least sometimes, they also play the role of explaining why an agent in fact acted or thought as she did.

Even if there is broad agreement among philosophers on these fundamental features of reasons, a detailed understanding of reasons is still subject to controversy. What kinds of facts can act as reasons? Are they restricted to representational states such as beliefs or desires, or can non-mental states of affairs act as reasons as well? Do reasons for action somehow depend on the value of taking that action, or can value itself be explained in terms of reasons? Are there different kinds of reasons, and how are these reasons then related? Can different reasons be weighed against each other? How do reasons enter into reasoning about what one ought to do? What is the logical form of reasons statements? What is the relationship between normative and explanatory reasons? These are all issues on which philosophers disagree. Nevertheless, there is some general agreement that many problems in practical philosophy are fruitfully addressed by asking what

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there is reason to do, desire, or intend, and the enormous interest that the above issues have generated is testament to this fact.[1]

Traditionally, in theoretical philosophy, epistemologists have looked to the concept of *epistemic justification* as their central normative notion, and to *warrant* as a crucial subsidiary one. Important debates on whether justification depends on properties that are internal or external to the epistemic agent, what role justified belief plays in knowledge, and whether justification is context-sensitive, have, amongst many others, taken centre stage in epistemology. Although the concerns of epistemologists are somewhat different from those of practical philosophers, at least superficially, the notion of epistemic justification seems to be closely related to that of normative reasons. Epistemic justification is supposed to speak in favor of adopting the relevant belief, and, at least sometimes, the epistemic justification a person has for a given belief explains why that belief was adopted. The similarity is also reflected by the fact that epistemologists sometimes speak of the *justification* and the *reasons* a person has for her belief interchangeably. Nevertheless, debates over epistemic justification and normative reasons have largely been conducted in isolation from each other.

This raises at least two important questions. First, it raises the question of how we are to understand reasons for beliefs, where "reasons" is understood in the normative sense known from practical philosophy. Questions of this sort already have some pedigree in the philosophical debate. For example, many philosophers have been interested in whether there could be "practical" reasons for belief, in the sense of reasons for belief that are not related to the truth of the belief, but instead to some practical advantage, which the belief would accrue to its holder. However, theorizing over normative reasons for belief hasn't yet reached the sophistication of the parallel debate over normative reasons for action, and many important issues remain largely untouched. For example, in what sense does evidence "speak in favor" of adopting a given belief? Are reasons for belief somehow value-based, even if they are truth-related or "epistemic"? Is there some general theory of reasons, which is common to both reasons for action and reasons for belief? If not, what does this show about the unity of normativity and rationality? How do reasons for belief motivate the relevant beliefs? Would it be coherent to deny the existence of normative reasons for belief? These are some of the questions taken up by the chapters in the first part of the volume.

[1] For a recent volume of papers devoted to the subject of normative reasons for *action*, see Sobel and Wall (2009).

The second important question raised by the above considerations is what lessons there are to be learned in regard to the traditional issues in epistemology concerning the epistemic justification of beliefs, by looking to the (at least superficially) related concept of normative reasons. Might there be something important to be learned about the conditions under which one is justified in holding a belief, by looking to theories of what it means to have a normative reason for some action or attitude? It remains a very real possibility, of course, that there is a deep reason why debates over epistemic justification and normative reasons so far have been conducted independently of each other. Perhaps the two notions really *are* too different to be usefully compared; perhaps the superficial similarity between the two concepts is nothing more than exactly that: superficial. The best way to test this is to see whether considerations concerning the one concept can in fact help elucidate the other. The chapters in the second part of the volume do exactly that, and the result, we think, is very helpful indeed.

In the remaining part of the introduction, we provide summaries of the individual chapters of the volume, highlighting along the way how the chapters speak to the two organizing questions of the volume.

PART I: NORMATIVE REASONS FOR BELIEF

As mentioned, the chapters in the first part of the volume are all devoted to understanding reasons for beliefs, where "reasons" is understood in the normative sense known from practical philosophy. In the first chapter, "How to be a teleologist about epistemic reasons," Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen considers the possibility of explaining the normative source of reasons for belief in terms of the value of the beliefs that they support. According to the popular teleological conception of normative reasons, reasons are value-based in the sense that whether someone has reason to φ depends on the value of the result of φ-ing, or the intrinsic value of φ-ing itself. Many have been attracted to similar accounts of *epistemic* reasons, according to which epistemic reasons depend on the value of the beliefs that they support, but it has proven difficult to make such an account plausible. The central problem is that the epistemic properties in virtue of which epistemic reasons obtain aren't always valuable. Hitherto, most defenses of the teleological account of epistemic reasons have focused on ways in which epistemic properties, despite appearances, might be seen as valuable in a sufficiently general sense to ground the teleological account. Instead of this, Steglich-Petersen pursues the alternative strategy of developing a teleological account of epistemic reasons, which is compatible with the

seeming fact that epistemic properties aren't always valuable. To this end, Steglich-Petersen distinguishes between reasons to believe that particular propositions are true, i.e. epistemic reasons, and reasons to pursue the aim of forming beliefs about those propositions in the first place. Once we realize the difference between these two kinds of reasons, epistemic reasons can be understood as instrumental reasons to pursue the aims, which the second kind of reasons support. A result of this is that epistemic reasons can be understood as value-based, without epistemic properties being valuable in all contexts.

Andrew Reisner's chapter, "Is there reason to be theoretically rational?," explores the relation between reasons for belief and rationality. During the last decade, it has become increasingly fashionable to believe that rationality strongly supervenes on the mental, whereas normative reasons depend on non-mental facts (for the most part). Reisner explores this claim for the particular case of the rationality of belief. The chapter first gives a brief history of how the current view about the distinction between rationality and reasons came to be held. Reisner argues that the distinction is essentially well motivated and that there is a conceptual distinction between a belief's, or collection of beliefs', being rational and there being reason to have that belief or collection of beliefs. Nonetheless, there remains the question of whether its being rational to hold a collection of beliefs in some way entails that there is a reason to hold that collection of beliefs. Reisner argues that its being rational to hold a collection of beliefs does provide a very strong reason to hold that collection of beliefs, at least for rational requirements of a certain kind (those that are wide-scope consistency requirements). Ordinary evidential reasons for belief, it is argued, give us wide-scope reasons not to hold collections of inconsistent beliefs, and these beliefs are forbidden by the requirements of theoretical rationality.

In the section's third chapter, "Epistemic motivation: towards a metaethics of belief," Veli Mitova takes the first steps towards a more systematic extension of traditional metaethical concerns to the ethics of belief. As pointed out by Mitova, three fundamental debates largely define contemporary metaethics. The first is between internalists and externalists about moral motivation. While internalists think that there is a necessary connection between making a moral reasons judgment and being motivated to act in accordance with it, and that such a connection is necessary if we are to explain the manner in which moral reasons can guide and explain actions, externalists deny any such necessary connection. The second main debate is that between Humeans and anti-Humeans about motivation. The issue here is whether desires, or some desire-like states, as the Humeans

hold, are necessary in order to explain the motivation of actions, or, as the anti-Humeans hold, a cognitive state such as a belief can suffice for motivating action on its own. The last main debate concerns the truth-aptness of moral judgments. Cognitivists claim that moral judgments can be true or false, and that to make a moral judgment entails having a belief with that content. Non-cognitivists deny this, and hold instead that such judgments should be understood as the expression of some non-cognitive attitude. The aim of Mitova's chapter is to transpose, in a systematic way, these debates to the ethics of belief. Her guiding observation is that the three debates are interdependent. In particular, commitment to anti-Humeanism and internalism about moral motivation seems to entail a commitment to moral cognitivism. This forms the starting point for Mitova's argument. She first provides a novel argument for a form of anti-Humeanism and internalism about the way in which normative reasons judgments motivate beliefs, and then relies on these arguments to establish a form of cognitivism about such judgments.

In his chapter, "Error theory and reasons for belief," Jonas Olson considers the radical possibility that there simply *are no* reasons for belief and the prospects of an accompanying *error theory* about such reasons. This option has been explored in some detail in the practical domain, motivated mainly by a desire to avoid commitment to "queer" and non-natural normative entities suggested by moral thought. But a parallel position in regard to reasons for belief has often been assumed to be a non-starter. In fact, the perceived implausibility of an error theory about epistemic reasons has been regarded by many as an embarrassment for error theorists in the practical domain. Using a "companion in guilt" strategy, these philosophers have argued that since error theory about epistemic reasons is so implausible, and arguments for error theory in the practical domain seem to entail a commitment to an analogous theory about reasons for belief, we should reject error theory in the practical domain too. In his chapter, Olson considers whether an error theory about reasons for belief would really be so implausible as is often supposed. In particular, Olson discusses what Terence Cuneo (2007) has recently described as three unpalatable results for such a theory, *viz.* that it would be self-defeating or polemically impotent; that it would imply that there can be no arguments for anything; and that it rules out the possibility of epistemic merits and demerits. In his careful discussion, Olson argues that these results either do not follow, or are less unpalatable than Cuneo supposes.

Nishi Shah is more skeptical concerning the possibility of an error theory about reasons for belief. In his chapter, "Can reasons for belief be

debunked?," Shah develops a novel argument against this possibility. Like Cuneo, Shah thinks that an epistemic error theory would be inconsistent or self-undermining. But as opposed to Cuneo's argument, Shah's depends only upon a number of widely accepted assumptions about the nature of belief itself. Shah argues that even the error theorist is committed to the existence of beliefs – after all, the core claim of the epistemic error theorist is that our *judgments* or *beliefs* about epistemic reasons are systematically false, which presupposes that these judgments or beliefs are there to be false in the first place. If statements about epistemic reasons were to be interpreted as mere expressions of conative states, which are neither true nor false, the error theorist's claim would make no sense. But according to the account of belief previously defended by Shah, ascriptions of belief require making normative judgments. In order to ascribe a belief to someone one must judge, at least implicitly, that the mental state one has just classified as a belief is *correct* if and only if the proposition believed is true. If Shah is right, it is simply part of the nature of belief, that beliefs are governed by this norm of correctness. But if the error theorist accepts this, it seems, as Shah argues, that she will also be committed to the truth of at least some true normative judgments about reasons for belief. Hence, the error theory about such reasons fails.

PART II: REASONS AND EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

As mentioned above, the chapters in Part II all explore different ways in which elements from the debate over normative reasons might help eluci- date some more traditional epistemological concerns over the justification of beliefs. In the first chapter of Part II, "Reasons and belief's justification," Clayton Littlejohn begins by observing that there is little to say about the justification of beliefs that cannot be said in terms of reasons. Hence, we must be able to work our way from an account of the demands of reasons to an account of epistemic justification. A prominent view on the former issue is that reasons demand *conformance*: if there is reason for an agent to φ, its demands are met if the agent in fact φs, and otherwise not. A common objection is that conforming is not always rational. For this to be the case, the agent must also *comply* with the reason, i.e. φ for that very reason. But according to Littlejohn, this additional demand should be replaced by a demand that we exercise due care to avoid acting against a reason and failing to conform to its demands. If this is true, important consequences follow for how we should think of epistemic justification. In particular, the traditional view that a person's justification for a belief

supervenes on the evidence available to the agent, and the account of jus-
tification which relies on the assumption that knowledge is the norm for
belief, both seem to be in trouble. If Littlejohn's argument is successful,
it would thus constitute an important example of the importance of the
notion of normative reasons to traditional epistemological concerns.

In her chapter, "Perception, generality, and reasons," Hannah Ginsborg
relies in part on the notion of reasons in evaluating a recent trend in
the theory of perception. For a long time, philosophers have debated
whether the representational content of perceptual states is conceptual
or non-conceptual, but recently a new trend has emerged challenging the
assumption that perceptual states are representational *at all*. This idea must
be rejected, they say, if we are to adequately characterize what is distinctive
about perception in contrast to thought and belief. Ginsborg considers the
implication of this view for the idea that perceptual experiences can stand in
rational or reason-giving relations to belief, and argues that the two ideas are
irreconcilable. Denying that perceptual states have representational content
implies denying that perception can play the proper reason-giving role in
regard to belief, at least in the sense traditionally invoked in epistemological
debates over the justification of empirical belief. In making this point,
she relies on the distinction familiar from practical philosophy between
a reason understood as a consideration counting in favor of an action or
attitude (Scanlon 1998), and a reason understood as a belief that stands in a
rationalizing relation to actions or attitudes. Ginsborg argues that while the
non-representational view may be able to explain perceptual reasons in the
first sense, it cannot explain perceptual reasons in the second sense, which
is the more interesting one from an epistemological point of view. Instead,
Ginsborg outlines a version of the representational theory of perception,
which both addresses the worries motivating the non-representational view,
and explains the ways in which perception can rationalize thought and
belief.

Adam Leite's contribution to the volume, "Immediate warrant, epistemic
responsibility, and Moorean dogmatism," also takes up the problem of
accounting for the reasons for belief provided us by our sensory experiences.
According to the hotly debated "Moorean dogmatist" response to external
world skepticism, our sensory experience provides us with *prima facie*
immediate justification, warrant, or reason to believe certain propositions
about the world. This position has a great deal of intuitive appeal and can
easily seem to be exemplified in our ordinary epistemic practice. At the
same time, the strategy endorses forms of reasoning or argumentation that
many people find objectionable. In particular, the dogmatists appear to

hold that an ideal rational agent who considers the question of whether she is being deceived by an evil demon could start from a position which presupposes no beliefs at all about the world, consciously take her current experience as a reason for believing that she has hands and so believe that she has hands on that basis, reason from that belief to the conclusion that she is not being deceived by an evil demon, and thereby form the latter belief in a fully satisfactory way. To many people this line of reasoning seems objectionable, but it has proven difficult to locate the source of dissatisfaction. In his chapter, Leite seeks to locate this dissatisfaction in considerations about epistemic responsibility. To this end, Leite develops a theory of immediate warrant and shows how it can be combined with plausible "inferential internalist" demands arising from considerations of epistemic responsibility. The resulting view endorses immediate perceptual warrant but forbids the sort of reasoning that Moorean dogmatism would allow. A surprising result of this discussion will be that dogmatism alone isn't enough to avoid standard arguments for skepticism about the external world.

Ralph Wedgwood's chapter, "Primitively rational belief-forming practices," seeks to explore the common view that one can only have a reason to do something if there is a sound process of reasoning that takes one from one's current mental states to the performance of the relevant action. Wedgwood suggests that this same view may be applied to belief, and in particular to belief formation. He explores the topic by asking where there are primitively rational belief-forming practices – practices that, if carried out, make it rational for an agent to form the belief resulting from those practices. Wedgwood puts three constraints on these practices: that they are rational practices that result in rational beliefs; that they are not infallible practices (even if they are reliable); and that they are primitive or basic, i.e. they do not require some practice-independent justification for their rationality. The particular putative primitively rational belief-forming practice that he considers is "taking experience at face value," which is the practice of coming to believe p in response to p's being part of one's conscious experience. After developing a more careful account of what it is to take experience at face value, Wedgwood argues that the practice may well be a primitively rational belief-forming practice and that understanding why will help us to understand in general what is required for something to be such a practice. He suggests that the central criterion is that such practices must be, and indeed are, built into our very capacity to possess certain kinds of concepts and to have certain kinds of propositional attitudes, and that they are therefore *a priori* practices.

In Mark Schroeder's chapter, "What does it take to 'have' a reason?," questions about beliefs derived from perception also take a central role, but in this case to raise broader questions about the role evidence plays in inferential justification: in our having reasons for beliefs that we have arrived at by inference. The aim of the chapter is to consider, and then reject, a series of arguments that suggest that the bar for having reasons for beliefs arrived at inferentially is high. Schroeder argues that beliefs inferred from perceptual experiences would be ruled out by accounts that require a high bar for inferentially arrived at beliefs. Accepting such accounts would either rule out the possibility that perception can play an appropriate role in giving us reasons for our beliefs (serving as evidence for those beliefs), or that we need two accounts of justification for inferential beliefs: a low bar account for perceptually grounded beliefs and a higher bar account for other cases. Schroeder argues that we should retain a unified account with a lower bar. If correct, his view appears to have far-reaching consequences, as it offers up resources for resisting both coherentist and radical externalist views about justification within epistemology.

In "Knowledge and reasons for belief," Alan Millar poses a puzzle of a general form for epistemologists: how can we get so much from so little? The exemplar of this puzzle is testimony: it is commonly thought that we can gain knowledge through testimony, even when we have not reasoned carefully about the testifier's epistemological *bona fides*. A central feature of this puzzle is that we are inclined to believe that this ability to gain knowledge suggests an ability to gain justified belief, even without particular commitments concerning whether knowledge can be analyzed in terms of justified belief. Famous challenges to gaining justification on such a minimal basis abound, and it is Millar's project to develop a sketch of how one might show that under suitable circumstances, one might indeed be able to be justified in believing something on apparently less than ideally robust bases. In building the account, the notion of a recognitional ability is developed. That we have the capacity to recognize the way things are under suitable circumstances allows us to accord experience an explanatory role in our acquisition of knowledge and the possession of reasons for belief. Millar reverses the traditional order of explanation by suggesting that experiences are not themselves reasons for believing that things are as the experiences take them to be. Instead, it is what we know about our environment and our perceptual ability to access it that provides the justification for perceptual knowledge. The order of explanation can be reversed by understanding what kind of reasons we get from certain kinds of thin epistemic bases, such as testimony or indicator phenomena in

general: that is, they are reasons that are given in terms of understanding how they derive from our knowledge of the environment and our capacities for accessing that environment. Millar's chapter concludes that we gain important understanding about our knowledge of the world in traditionally problematic cases like those that arise for perceptual knowledge, if we take a knowledge-first approach. This leads to the development of a particular category of knowledge: detached standing knowledge. In such cases, justification does not serve as a basis for knowledge, but rather we can explain why we are justified in believing something because of what we know. Millar links the availability of reasons for belief to an understanding of how we have come to know what we know.

In the final chapter of the volume, "What is the swamping problem?," Duncan Pritchard returns us to another problem in traditional epistemology. If the only valuable feature of a belief is that it is true, then what non-instrumental value do other normative epistemological concepts such as *justified belief*, *rational belief*, and *knowledge* have? Put another way, we can understand the swamping problem as being, or at least implying, a thesis about reasons for belief: our central way of evaluating belief is in terms of whether there are reasons pointing toward a belief's being true. The swamping problem is normally thought to apply only to certain kinds of epistemological views. Pritchard argues that the problem is not constrained to a narrow range of positions, and he gives a more precise account of the swamping problem in terms of three claims: a general thesis about value, a more specific thesis about epistemic value, and the (putative) correctness of a popular thesis in epistemology, called "T-monism" by Pritchard. It is argued that each of these claims is independently plausible, but that they are collectively inconsistent. Having set things out in this way, the options available to epistemologists for solving the swamping problem are discussed. It is conjectured that, from amongst the available options, the most promising way of resolving the swamping problem will require us to adopt a type of value pluralism which casts into doubt the central role that knowledge has played in traditional epistemology.