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For *The Future of Normativity* (OUP) Kirchin (ed.)

## Introduction: Normativity's Present and Future

In an article published in *Analysis* in 2010 Stephen Finlay begins, “Although only a recently introduced term of art, philosophical enquiry under the rubric of ‘normativity’ has quickly become a major industry. A date-range search of the *Philosopher's Index* for titles with the word returns zero results before 1980, three results for the ‘80s, 76 results for the ‘90s and (to date) 218 results for the 2000s.”<sup>1</sup>

His observation was true then and is true now, indeed it is more pertinent than ever. A more recent search uncovers XXXX entries with the word ‘normativity’ in titles of philosophical books and articles for the 2010s and up to the present.<sup>2</sup> It seems that nearly every field in modern analytic philosophy is riddled with normativity: logic and philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, metaphysics and epistemology, ethics, politics, law, aesthetics, and so on, with figures from the history of philosophy also viewed through the normative lens. Modern writers are writing not just on the normative aspects of art or mind or logic, but a whole body of work has developed that focuses on the idea of normativity itself. Furthermore, various aspects of our lives identified as being normative are explicitly labelled as such, with the label helping to frame our understanding of the topic or question. It seems that one nowadays simply cannot begin to understand or comprehend many areas or problems that philosophers are concerned with without understanding these areas’ normative natures. Or, in other words, not only is the phenomenon of normativity supposedly central to much of our lives, philosophers draw attention to that fact by use of this label and have, arguably, elevated the aspect of normativity above others.

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<sup>1</sup> Finlay (2010), p. 331. In an associated footnote, Finlay notes that “[t]he term first appears in legal scholarship; the first occurrence in the *OED* dates from 1935 (an older variant, ‘normativeness’, is documented from 1914). Occurrences of its immediate root, ‘normative’, are documented from 1852.”

<sup>2</sup> XXXXX. To be completed nearer the time of publication.

All of this use creates some questions and concerns right from the start. Is normativity a genuinely distinct phenomenon that philosophers have recently picked out or is it a familiar idea or set of phenomena with a new label? Relatedly, do the term and idea draw together a set of familiar aspects and issues and, if so, is it useful to make the connections in this way or do we confuse and obfuscate more than we gain in using such a general term? All in all, are people making a genuine intellectual advance in their conceptual practices, one that may stick around for a good while, or is it just a passing fad, one that may be useful for a time and whose passing comes about precisely because we realize its shortcomings? In brief, we can ask whether ‘normativity’ has a future as a label and as a philosophically fundamental, organizing idea.<sup>3</sup>

There is another way, of course, to think about the future of normativity, one that is more positive. Assume that philosophers really are uncovering something new, rich and important, be it a new phenomenon, or a new way of understanding familiar phenomena, perhaps by drawing together interesting connections. Alternatively, assume that what is happening is not anything new as such, but is instead something just as valuable: a focus of attention that the various phenomena, and the relations between them, deserve.

I think it is fair to say that the general idea of normativity – of working out what we should do and think, what is valuable and how we should act in relation to norms and standards – is a very old concern, one which finds expression across many if not all cultures at different times. What we have right now in analytic philosophy is a particular expression and form of such questions with an intense focus of a certain kind. This focus is likely still valuable, but some of the questions just posed still press. What are we trying to achieve in having our conversations? What might the future questions and topics be as this set of intellectual concerns evolve?

In this introduction I raise several questions about the nature and concept of normativity and about how philosophers are currently using the idea, laying out some philosophical paths along the way. Some ideas will be familiar to writers who have been working on normativity, but I hope what I say will be interesting all the same. (Indeed, I try to keep the familiar as brief as I can or indicate debates in footnotes.) I do not pretend *at all* that what I say is comprehensive; with so much having happened any summary such as this will necessarily be partial. These ideas, selective as they are, will occupy us in §1. The questions are as follows.

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<sup>3</sup> This is different from asking whether the phenomenon of normativity has a future, assuming that such a phenomenon exists. That is an interesting metaphysical question, but not quite the thing I am interested in.

(a) What *is* normativity - both the substantial matter of the world and the idea which is supposed to be being picked out - and with what is it properly contrasted? (b) Is there one, or more than one, fundamental, specific normative notion? (c) How real can we assume normativity to be, and how does asking this familiar, standard question engage with our questions about the importance of the label 'normativity'? (d) Finally, to what extent can we speak of a unity of normativity across domains and areas of life with which philosophers are concerned? All these questions prompt further questions. I mention some, but I will try to keep them at bay so at least we can map four topics relatively cleanly. In §2 I return to some of the general questions I have just raised, and indicate what future research into normativity may and should look like. This will also act as a summary of §1. In §3 I summarize the papers collected in this volume, connecting them with the issues I raise.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Normativity: Some Issues and Questions

### *The Normative and the Nonnormative*

(a) In essence, what is normativity? Second, with what is it to be properly compared and contrasted? There are different ways of raising and answering these questions, particularly the first. Here are some quotations, written recently by a variety of philosophers, each of whom has their own views and projects to advance. First, Christine Korsgaard:

....[E]thical standards are *normative*. They do not merely *describe* a way in which we in fact regulate our conduct. They make *claims* on us; they command, oblige, recommend, or guide. Or at least, when we invoke them, we make claims on one another. When I say that an action is right I am saying that you ought to *do* it; when I say that something is good I am recommending it as worthy of your choice. The same is true of other concepts for which we seek philosophical foundations. Concepts like knowledge, beauty, and meaning, as well as virtue and justice, all have a normative dimension, for they tell us what to think, what to like, what to say, what to do, and what to

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth saying that there are some excellent collections and handbooks that have recently been published on normativity. Chang and Sylvan (2020), McHugh, Way and Whiting (2018) and Star (2018) come to mind but there are plenty.

be. And it is the force of these normative claims – the right of these concepts to give laws to us – that we want to understand.<sup>5</sup>

Here's Joseph Raz:

The normativity of all that is normative consists in the way it is, or provides, or is otherwise related to reasons.<sup>6</sup>

Here are Conor McHugh, Jonathan Way and Daniel Whiting:

What should I do? What should I think? Traditionally, ethicists tackle the first question, whilst epistemologists tackle the second. This division of labour corresponds to a distinction theorists draw between practical and epistemic normativity, where normativity is a matter of what one should or may do or think, what one has reason or justification to do or think, what is right or wrong to do or think, and so on, not simply of what one in fact does or thinks.<sup>7</sup>

Here's John Skorupski:

What then is normativity? I use the word 'normative' in the broad way that draws a distinction between normative and descriptive. The normative includes ought and should, good and bad, as well as various 'thick' normative concepts...<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, here's Philip Stratton-Lake:

Most of us have an intuitive grasp of the distinction between normative and nonnormative concepts. Concepts such as wrong, ought, duty, good, and bad will seem to most people to be normative, whereas concepts such as

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<sup>5</sup> Korsgaard (1996), pp. 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Raz (2000), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> McHugh, Way and Whiting (2018), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Skorupski (2010), p. 1.

square, red, alive, sister, and tall are not. I have included evaluative concepts (good and bad) as well as deontic ones in my list of normative concepts. Some philosophers would limit the normative to the deontic, but that to me seems overly restrictive. Concepts like good, desirable, admirable seem to have more in common with right and ought than they do with square and alive, and what they have in common with these deontic concepts is that they are normative.<sup>9</sup>

Some of these quotations explicitly reference the world of the normative as being active. It is about action and about choosing what to do, and choosing what to be, where words such as ‘do’ and ‘action’ are given the broadest sense: what to make and break, what to think and say.<sup>10</sup> It is about commands and prescriptions, and recommendations and suggestions that together help to shape our actions and justify them. Such commands and suggestions have a certain authority to them, although how much and of what character is open to discussion. This is common in philosophical writing about normativity. We also get more specific versions of this idea across different domains: moral action, epistemic duties, aesthetic reasons. Across all writing about normativity, including these quotations, we see a range of normative notions being listed and employed, chiefly: reasons; oughts, musts and shoulds; deontic notions such as permissibility and obligation; values; standards, norms and rules; and the notions of fit and fittingness.<sup>11</sup>

We will return to these quotations. For now let us return to basics to try to answer the question of what normativity (or ‘the normative’) and its contrary are.

There is the stuff of the world, everything that there is. There are tables and chairs, clouds and clocks, emotions and intentions, people and plants, and particles and planets. There are also more complex parts of the world. The clock on the table, the joy at seeing a picture of the Earth from space, and countries. We might also introduce philosophically interesting things such as facts, such as the fact that the clock is on the table, or the fact that many domesticated

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<sup>9</sup> Stratton-Lake (2018), p. 275.

<sup>10</sup> When I mention ‘action’ I have this broad understanding in mind.

<sup>11</sup> In this piece I skate over many debates. For example, to what extent are reasons part of the deontic family? See Berker (forthcoming), §7, on this. What is a reason anyway? For a flavour see Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (1998) who think of reasons as being irreducible to anything else, but think we can give further elucidation of them as considerations in favour, or similar; Kearns and Star (2009), who identify reasons as evidence and Whiting (2018) who identifies reasons as evidence of right-makers; and Dutant and Littlejohn (forthcoming) who suggest reasons might be identified with right-makers.

dogs are bigger than many domesticated cats, or the fact that the cat is not on the mat. As well as all these things that are, in a (very) general sense, parts of the world or ways in which the world is or could be, we also often talk about ways in which the world should or ought to be.<sup>12</sup>

Broad talk of what is and could be, and of how it should and ought to be, may seem as if it gets us closer to the normative, but we should take care. Consider some examples involving the weather.

(1) It is now raining in the garden.

(2) Given what the weather is doing north of here, it could clear up in a while.

(3) Given what the weather is doing north of here, it ought to clear up in a while.

(1) is a simple report of what is happening. I imagine here that (2) is a prediction of what might happen, but it could equally be voiced as a hope. (3) uses the word ‘ought’, normally seen as centrally part of the normative, but this word is not being used in a normative way in this sentence, at least if we assume it reflects a common-or-garden situation and expression.<sup>13</sup> (3) is still a prediction of what could or will happen, and assumes or expresses some causal, mechanistic explanation.

We hear such explanations using ‘should’, or ‘ought’, or ‘must’ all the time. For example:

(4) Given how the clock works, it should chime in two minutes.

(5) Given everything about how the universe runs, the sun must rise tomorrow.

These are not normative matters. (4) and (5) are predictions about how things will unfold from how things are now. We are going from one ‘is’ to another ‘is’. All that sentences (3), (4) and (5) do is report these matters and by linking them imply some form of causal explanation, which may or may not bring in matters of probability.

We often speak differently. We might say:

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<sup>12</sup> Recall that (c) will return us to the question of whether and in what way normativity is also a proper part of the world.

<sup>13</sup> The same is true if the sentence had had “...it should clear up...” or “...it must clear up...”.

(6) The reason the clock did not chime was because the mechanism was broken.

and

(7) The reason it was cold in the morning was because of the cloudless sky last night.

Talk of reason or reasons in (6) and (7) is an attempt to get at the same general idea, namely claiming there is some causal explanation as we move from one state of affairs to another or to explain how a state of affairs came about.

Similarly, we can talk of how humans might act and how they might be motivated. We might say:

(8) She took the umbrella because she thought it was going to rain.

and

(9) He told her it was noon because he looked at the clock and that is what was indicated.

There are motivations for people thinking and acting the way they do, as McHugh *et al* mention. Sometimes there may be some connection with causal matters, as our thoughts or instincts mix with our biology. Perhaps:

(10) Choosing not to shake her wet umbrella first, she raced to the fridge as soon as she got in because she hadn't eaten since noon.

But in (8) and (9) there is, as in many contexts, the possibility of judgement and decision-making. We wish to explain the actions by means of seeing how people are motivated. We often ascribe 'reason-language' in such cases.<sup>14</sup> Saying, for example:

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<sup>14</sup> In some cases the effect of habits is significant. Habits are philosophically interesting, being semi-mechanical, oft-repeated actions, which arise and are sustained in many contexts for a host of reasons (and often for good reasons), but which can be broken and not followed on some occasions. The actions represented by (6) and (7) often arise out of habit or other learned

(11) The reason she took the umbrella was because she thought it was going to rain.

Through all these examples thus far we have, speaking broadly and crudely, a large area of causal, mechanistic explanation. We have cases where humans are not involved and some where they are, and when they are we have sometimes referenced motivations and the point of view of the person involved. Sometimes people might naturally and legitimately use terms such as ‘reason’, ‘ought’, ‘should’ and ‘must’ in such cases. But this area is not the normative, and none of the above examples or uses of such terms are normative, at least as commonly understood. We are still in the area of what (in fact) is the case or what will be the case, whether or not it involves humans and their motivations. This is (part of) the area which can be described variously as the descriptive, the positive, the factual, or the nonnormative.<sup>15</sup> For simplicity, I refer to the ‘nonnormative’ in what follows.

The normative is different. However, as the small selection of quotations above indicate, what normativity is, what its defining qualities are, and what is properly included can all be debated. Philosophers should spend time thinking about these matters and consider how narrow or broad a conception of normativity they wish to favour or at least work with.

For example, we can begin with what Korsgaard says and extrapolate. The essence of the normative for her is to make claims on us, to “command, oblige, recommend, or guide”.<sup>16</sup> All of the above numbered statements were, in their different ways, stating what is the case and sometimes stating why in fact things are as they are or stating how we expect they are likely to unfold. Normative statements and the world of the normative, at least as suggested by the quotation from Korsgaard and others, tells us what we should or ought to do and think, and how we and the world ought to be, all with a certain force. We are at some bedrock here and language gets tricky. So whenever we are picking out supposed normative statements or terms,

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action. For a spirited defence of both the centrality of habits and of ‘anti-intellectualism’ relating to the philosophy of action, see Pollard (2008).

<sup>15</sup> I think about these labels in my Kirchin (ms).

<sup>16</sup> In the *Prologue* to Korsgaard (1996), Korsgaard offers a grand, historic sweep of normative thinking in the West. ‘Value’ is mentioned a good deal in these pages, but is characterized as related to choice, action and decision, in keeping with the rest of the book. As I read her, values function as standards by which we are measured and measure others. She begins, “It is the most striking fact about human life that we have values. We think of ways that things could be better, more perfect, and so of course different, than they are; and of ways we ourselves could be better, more perfect, and so of course different, than we are”, p. 1.

such as ‘how the world ought to be’ we do not mean it in the explanatory, causal, mechanistic sense above, such as in (3). We mean it in statements such as:

(12) There ought to be less poverty in the world.

(13) We should go to the shops.

(14) We must rise early tomorrow.

How to understand each of these particular cases? One way is to say that each introduces or imagines a possible state of affairs that is judged to be valuable in some fashion (less poverty, us being at the shops, getting up early tomorrow; each might be considered to be good and beneficial, and each could be accorded specific value in particular circumstances, such as being kind or courageous) and states that we ought or that we have ‘a reason’, or ‘reason’, or ‘most reason’ to bring such a state of affairs about. In each case there is not just an ‘is’ or a possible ‘is’; we have something making a claim on us (and others), and if it is the strongest claim, we should aim to achieve it. The claims upon us are normative matters, they carry a certain authority, and that is what Korsgaard wishes us to try to understand.

Of course, normative statements need not be only forward-looking, where that means either bringing about a new state of affairs or discovering something which already exists. We might be in the realm of justifying an action that occurred or is occurring, or justifying a belief that someone had or has, such as in:

(15) It was the Captain’s duty to go down with their ship.

and

(16) Of course it’s right to believe it’s noon!

I have yet to mention standards, norms or rules, but this is where the quotation from Korsgaard starts. It is a fact that certain standards exist in a community, a fact that certain norms govern a society, and a fact that certain rules cover or constitute sports and games. The existence of such standards, norms and rules is a nonnormative matter. Also, how closely they are adhered to by people is also a nonnormative matter of fact, one that might be contested of

course. People thinking they are subject to the claims made by (supposed) standards and norms is, I think, also a nonnormative matter; it may well be a matter of psychology or sociology. What *does* seem to be a normative matter is standards and norms (themselves) claiming or, less metaphorically, having legitimacy and authority for how we should act and think, and how we and the world should be.<sup>17</sup> There is something special about norms, standards and rules and the claims they make upon us.

So far this is all fairly standard in the literature, but there are differences amongst our quotations.<sup>18</sup> Korsgaard focuses on deontic terms, such as ‘oblige’ and ‘command’. Some of our other writers mention the deontic, with reference to ‘ought’ and ‘should’, whilst others mention ‘reasons’ and ‘justification’. These notions are in the same *general* vicinity, united by a focus on action and choice, and our being able to justify to others some action or the holding of a belief, all from a sense that we are answerable for some of our actions and choices in some way. However, this sketch of what unites these notions may not be specific enough for how we wish to characterize normativity. Should we be focusing on individual considerations and reasons to act, or should we be focusing first and foremost on overall, ‘all-

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<sup>17</sup> Skorupski (2010) p. 49 raises an important point. Perhaps the following is a rule or norm: ‘You should not park here’. That can be reinterpreted as ‘It is illegal to park here’. Such a reading can be interpreted as a nonnormative statement of fact about what the law is, particularly if one adopts a positivist view of law. Alternatively, the original statement could be a (normative) recommendation, and perhaps one that conforms to some norms. For example, perhaps it is not illegal to park somewhere but ill-advised because of the difficulty of rejoining traffic or because the car may be a target for thieves. Similar comments can be made about rules and games. Statements such as ‘Don’t move your piece there’ and ‘Don’t tackle like that’ can get similar treatments: (nonnormative) reports of the existing rules and laws of a game or (normative) recommendations as to what to do next. So, my (15) in the main text could be interpreted as expressing a statement of fact, “Many people accept that the Captain had such a duty...” or as a normative expression that justified the Captain’s action. Related to this discussion and these examples is the important distinction between ‘formal’ normativity (roughly, this is what the rule in this domain says) and ‘robust’ or ‘authoritative’ normativity (roughly, the fact that this rule or standard says we should act in such a way gives us a reason in general, beyond this domain, to so act). People may disagree about whether there is such a distinction, how sharp it is, how it is to be captured, and which examples fit where (law or some laws are difficult to classify for some people, for example). See McPherson (2018) for a discussion of the overall authority of norms.

<sup>18</sup> Other points and distinctions are relevant here, such as the debate between so-called ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ reasons and what this means for normativity. When people act or believe can we talk meaningful about them having (normative) reason or a reason to act from their point of view alone, and whether or not they are correct, or does ascription of (normative) reason only make sense based on what the features of the situation themselves are, irrespective of perspective and information available? For more on this see, for example, Fogal and Worsnip (2021) section 2.1 and Sepielli (2018).

things-considered' obligations? Also, can normativity treat as equals both obligations and suggestions – the demanding and the recommending - united as they both are on guiding and demanding action and decision, or do we privilege one over the other in our account of the normative?

What of values? They are mentioned by Korsgaard but have normative worth because, and seemingly only because, they have some element of 'choice-worthiness': we choose to perform good actions and refrain from doing bad ones.<sup>19</sup> But this may well not exhaust let alone primarily or correctly characterize the evaluative. The essence of the evaluative is arguably to capture some aspect of a thing or a person (or whatever), where that aspect is essentially positive or negative and thus the thing or person is then seen (partly) positively or negatively.<sup>20</sup> The valuable nature of the thing, this aspect, may generate or help to generate reasons to act and think, of course. Perhaps we recommend a book to a friend because we think it is good or that the plot is fiendishly fun. We protect some institutions because we think they are just. But arguably the fact that the valuable aspects of something generate reasons and justify choices neither exhausts the interest and character of the evaluative nor, think at least some philosophers, does it exhaust the normative nature of values.

These examples raise general questions. We have some interesting choices here concerning what to include within the domain of the normative and why, and how that affects how we see each normative notion. We have already seen the suggestion of a narrow view of the normative revolving around basic ideas about what we ought to do: action, choice, decision, reasons and the like. Its contrary, the nonnormative, focuses on things existing only, and on changes taking us from one thing occurring to another thing occurring, with explanations of such changes confined to causal, mechanistic matters. For many commentators this does capture what the normative is about. However, a different view of the normative, yet one that is still narrow, would see the normative characterized fundamentally in other, basic terms, such as a focus on the world being either positive or negative, pro or con. The value of something – such as a book or an institution – might immediately occasion action and claims, so we might

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<sup>19</sup> With apologies for the ugly term.

<sup>20</sup> In my (2017), especially ch. 6, I cast doubt on this formulation. Whilst thick features, concepts and terms can obviously indicate some positive or negative nature of the thing or person in question, this does not exhaust how we should think of such concepts and terms and the value they embody. Perhaps, for example, something or someone can be classed as elegant and on some occasions this not involve any positive or negative evaluation – the evaluation can simply be that it is 'elegant' – and that still be an evaluative judgement. This idea is controversial. One need not agree with it to go along with what I write in the main text.

act or believe because something was a positive way or a negative way. But it need not occasion or immediately occasion such action or claims. Parts of the world could be classed as being simply positive or negative, and that would be their fundamental, normative characteristic. All other normative notions would have their normativity explained with reference to being pro or con. (Reasons are often seen as considerations *in favour*. Perhaps the positive nature of reasons is what makes them what they are.) The nonnormative contrary to this second narrow view would be similarly seen, but as its opposite: the nonnormative might be classed as having a ‘neutral nature’, neutral between being positive and negative, or even having the sort of nature that was not in the business of being positive or negative in the first place. For some this view might be enticing; others might accept this view, but as an expression of the evaluative not as an expression of the normative.

We could adopt an alternative to both narrow examples by working with and arguing for a broader notion of the normative. This would include many or all of the candidate normative notions I listed earlier as all being ‘normative’, even if there are then further analyses on which it turns out that some notions are more fundamental than others. We include all these notions in the normative since we assume a broader notion of that idea itself. Indeed, that is the fundamental thought powering such a broader conception: we include many normative notions not simply because we think it is a good thing to do, we do so because we think the normative itself is multi-faceted and/or complex. To run with the examples just given, perhaps we say that neither the world being seen in positive or negative terms, nor the claims made upon us, are more normatively basic ideas than one another. Both are equally significant in trying to capture what the normative and normative thinking are, and both are equally important when elucidating the normative nature of normative notions.<sup>21</sup>

More general questions and issues then arise, such as why we might adopt either a broad or narrow view, and what the consequences are of doing so. One obvious motivation for the adoption of any view concerns how we think individual normative notions are related to one another and what arguments can be mustered for different views. Also, whatever conception of the normative is adopted - broad, narrow or something else – we may still wish to note

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<sup>21</sup> I am deliberately situating my introductory narrative amongst current writing of the normative. However, at this point it is worth highlighting the connection between the grand twentieth century debate of the priority between the right and the good, which found expression in various ways. This debate was explicitly concerned with establishing whether deontic or evaluative notions – or more specifically ‘right’ and ‘good’ - had priority in order to form the best normative ethical theory. Many current writers find inspiration in the ideas found in this debate in discussing what normativity is itself and how different notions are connected.

distinctions between notions. We have different families of notions: the evaluative, those relating to the status of decisions (such as ought and should), the deontic, the aretaic family of virtue terms, and so on. Is it more useful to put these all together under the one heading of ‘the normative’, or better to foreground the differences, and reserve ‘the normative’ for a narrowly defined family of notions? These two questions also connect with an important, different question, raised earlier. How should we generally characterize normativity’s contrary?

A narrow view of the normative offers the chance to create a sharp, clear, clean, simple view. (See, for example, Raz’s statement above.) Such a view then enables, likely by default, a clear, clean and simple view of its nonnormative contrary: “The normative is *this*, and therefore the nonnormative is *that*.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps it could be said that the nonnormative is everything that has ‘nothing to do with’ what ought to be done or believed, or what one has reason to do or believe, or similar, whilst giving a specific sense of that ‘nothing to do with’, and giving a detailed sense of causal explanations. Instead, the nonnormative is just to do with how things are or will be.<sup>23</sup> However, things are not so simple. The nonnormative should not be a default afterthought. Saying that a book is good or that a dress is elegant or that a deliberator is dull-witted, is to talk in evaluative terms about things. It is arguably also to make a claim about how these things and people *are*. Are values then on the nonnormative side of things, but yet also on the normative side insofar as they enable and/or are derived from reasons and choices? Things are getting messy quite quickly. If we wish to have any sort of meaningful, dividing line between the normative and nonnormative, it may be easier to assume that values are on the normative side of things. Perhaps Stratton-Lake is right that *in some way* evaluative concepts have more in common with deontic concepts than they do with concepts such as square and alive. Perhaps we might also say the same for other candidate normative notions.

There is obviously more to say here; that italicized ‘in some way’ may well disguise devilish detail. I end this sub-section with this point. Much of the work on the normative in the past few years has focused on the normative itself without a similar level of focus on its contrary. We may find that what is classed as normative itself is highly affected by what we see as its proper contrary, and vice versa. Similarly, in order to make progress on what the normative and its contrary are, we need to consider whether we want a broad or a narrow view of both. No matter which conception of the normative we adopt, we then need to think about

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<sup>22</sup> To be really pedantic, I imagine that we do not have two conceptions that are *possibly* related to one another. They *have* to be related to one another. The ‘therefore’ is important.

<sup>23</sup>The phrase ‘nothing to do with’ will have to be specified further,

the relations between our normative notions: are they all ‘normative’, or do we wish to see strict and highly significant divisions between the (narrowly) normative, the evaluative, the deontic, and so on? And if we do that, where does the ‘nonnormative’ fit in? Which range of labels is it helpful to use and prioritise? How will such labels help us to understand further examples statements such as the ones from above? Focus on the nonnormative and the overall conception of what normativity is are topics that deserve far more attention than they have recently received. How we organise our classifications and view our conceptual labels is indicative of, or should be indicative of, deeper thinking and commitment.

### *The Search for X*

(b) Our previous topic moves us gently into a question that has attracted intense attention in recent work, namely the question of what the single, fundamental normative notion is. (Further, we might ask, is there one?) Indeed, it was hard to keep this question at bay in (a) as the two topics are strongly connected, at least in my mind. Here I offer a little more detail.

Some people think there is a fundamental normative notion, capturing and expressing the essence of the normative itself. In current parlance this is an ‘X-first’ position, with ‘X’ standing for a particular normative notion. We see a flavour of this in some of our excerpts. See also this from T. M. Scanlon:

[Reasons are] the only fundamental elements of the normative domain, other normative notions such as good and ought being analyzable in terms of reasons.<sup>24</sup>

This is a clear statement of a ‘reasons-first’ position.<sup>25</sup> Other such positions are possible, such as ‘values-first’, ‘ought-first’, and ‘fittingness-first’.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Scanlon (2014), p. 2. Raz’s view is as stated in the main text, but then it is worth noting that he thinks reasons have their importance because of their relation to value. Reasons are at the heart of normativity, but we have reasons only because things are valuable, with an assumption that values (in total) are not part of normativity. See Heuer (2004) for a discussion of this, including a comparison of the views of Raz and Scanlon.

<sup>25</sup> See also Parfit (2011) and Schroeder (2021).

<sup>26</sup> Examples of ‘value-first’ positions include Finlay (2001) and (2006), Moore (1903) and Maguire (2016); see also Wedgwood (ms). John Broome has advocated an ‘ought-first’ approach, see Broome (2013) and (2022). Examples of ‘fittingness-first’ positions include Chappell (2012), and McHugh and Way (2016). Wodak (2020) offers sceptical reflection on the whole issue of X-first.

A number of commitments are or may be part of such a position. The key commitment must be that:

(A) X, a normative notion, is the (single) fundamental normative notion amongst all other candidate normative notions.

Linking back to our discussion in (a), some writers also think and emphasize this:

(B) Normativity as a whole can be cast, understood, illuminated, elucidated (etc.) by X or some significant aspect of X.

I leave aside presentation or dissection of any particular arguments for such positions in this introduction. What we do need to understand are the general contours of such a position. First, what is meant by a ‘single, fundamental normative notion’? I mean and others may mean that notion which all other candidate normative notions can be analysed in terms of, or at least that notion which can analyse the normative aspect of those other notions. We might add ‘by which is meant *reductively* analysed’. Such phrases and words can take us down a different philosophical rabbit hole, trying to answer what ‘analysis’ or ‘reductive analysis’ amount to. A working idea for our purposes is: of all the candidate normative notions, such as those I have listed, just one can be used to explain in whole the essential nature, or (better) the essential normative nature, of all the other candidate normative notions without itself being treated in the same way. Sometimes the ‘reduction’ therefore is meant as a type of replacement. If we really needed to, we could get by with just the one notion - the fundamental one - but for convenience’s sake we use several. In short, there is just the one normative notion that sits at the bottom as some final root, ready to be used to explain and understand all the others.

This can be contrasted with a different, general idea. Perhaps we can explain, understand, capture, illuminate (and so on) each candidate normative notion, or their normativity, in terms of other ones. But what we are trying to do, and *at most all we can do*, is highlight some aspects of each notion through using other notions, and this applies to each and every notion. That is, when we try to understand all normative notions, what we are essentially doing is engaging in a process of mutual interdefinition, one where no single notion sits more fundamentally on its own behind or below the others. So we do not reductively analyse values in terms of reasons, or reasons in terms of oughts, or anything in terms of

fittingness. Instead and at most we understand each of these notions and any others in related terms, through comparing and contrasting them.

This is a little abstract, in part because the candidate normative notions we might have in mind are quite abstract. Let us take the ‘reasons-first’ position, since I have worked with it above and it is probably the most popular such position currently. We saw earlier that ‘reasons-firsters’ think the normative significance of value can be analysed in terms of reason. Values are normative only in so far as they influence what choices we may have and take, by providing reasons to act or think. The normative nature of the dress’s elegance is explained by - in fact simply *is* in some way to be further detailed - the reason it gives for us to wear or not wear it. The just nature of the institution is normative only insofar as it gives us reason to uphold and preserve the institution. And so on. Similarly, reasons-firsters think the idea of ‘ought’ (and/or should, and/or must) can be analysed as and expressed in terms of (something such as) ‘the balance of reasons in favour of acting or thinking in a certain way’. And so on.

Aside from any arguments in favour of any particular X-first position, what argument might be marshalled in favour of the X-first programme in general? One main way of supporting the programme is to say that if it is adopted, we can therefore capture in simple, straightforward terms the essence of the normative. (Hence my (B) above.) This is of prime importance. If we do that, we get at least two main results. First, we get a clear sense of what the normative and nonnormative are, offering a clearly delineated background against which so many other debates and discussions can take place. Second, we understand exactly how the normative is at work across many different domains and areas of our lives, such as the ethical, the epistemic, the logical and so on. So, whilst much of the X-first debate is framed in terms of specific debates revolving around a handful of notions being reductively analysed in terms of one single notion, we can view the broad aim, implicit as it often is, as being an attempt to find the notion that is the key to understanding normativity as a whole. Once we show that a particular X is the single, foundational normative notion, we will have unlocked the key to understanding normativity in general. This would have enormous explanatory power and give us much understanding of our world or at least of how we conceptualise our world.

How might an X-first programme be resisted? Of course, one strategy is to consider any particular argument for any particular X-first claim and show it to be unjustified or false.<sup>27</sup> But two different, more general strategies present themselves.

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<sup>27</sup> Again, in this piece I am deliberately shying away from details of these arguments and discussions. However it is worth noting that there are many such discussions. One of the main ones, illustrative of the wider discussions in and about normativity, is the so-called ‘buck-

First, we could reflect on both the points in the previous paragraph and other, earlier ideas. For a start it should be noted that if we think there is a single, foundational normative notion in terms of which all other notions are to be (reductively) analysed, we need to voice explicitly our acknowledgement that it has the implications set out above: that we are trying to capture something key about all of normativity across all domains and which elucidates the (very) nature of normativity as contrasted with the nonnormative. We might then query whether all of normativity and all the supposed normative aspects of our lives can be united within and illuminated by one notion. To turn to our previous example, it seems that in order to make out that reasons are ‘first’ we need to assume that what normativity is essentially about is choice (or competition, or similar).<sup>28</sup> A focus on the individual conceptual building blocks by which we reach our decisions – reasons, considerations - is justified by such a conception of the normative and is in turn justified by it. But that is by no means all that is at work when we are trying to justify what we do, of how we value and think. This view assumes a very tight circle of justification. It might be a virtuous circle, of course, of two powerful and correct views of the normative in general and of some particular notion. However, it might be viciously circular if we have no independent support or reason for why we should adopt the one or the other, and also if we struggle to explain all the other relevant phenomena. Any different X-first strategy may face a similar challenge, of course. This is also not, it must be said, the end

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passing’ account of value, which in turn has led to the ‘wrong kind of reasons’ (WKR) problem. Starting with the proposal in Scanlon (1998) that claiming of some action or situation that it is good does not add anything additional to one’s judgement since goodness is just a summation of other features, and that instead the justification stems from the reasons one has to act – goodness ‘passes the buck’ - a whole literature has built up examining whether goodness can be reduced to reasons. To be brief, this turns on what sorts of value of what sort of thing (the situation that calls forth possible actions, the outcome, the acting itself, say) we are considering as things that can be analysed in terms of what sort of reasons. Some targets and paired analyses seem intuitively correct, some are debatable. To take a famous example from Crisp (2000), the fact that an evil demon will kill you unless you desire to drink some mud may be a fact that makes *your desiring* the mud good, but it is not also a fact that makes *some cup of mud* good. So this sort of goodness in this case at least may be resistant to analysis in terms of reasons for action of at least some sort. This and other examples should give us pause as we try to think about the relation between reasons and value, and as we try to consider whether some notion can be analysed, or reductively analysed, in terms of some other notion. (There is more to be said about Crisp’s case, and other, complicated examples that are part of the WKR discussion. What exactly are writers trying to analyse in terms of what, and which sort of examples and counterexamples are worrying?) Howard (2019) offers a brief summary of this discussion and the relationship between reasons, values and fittingness.

<sup>28</sup> The same is true of ‘ought’ as well, but instead of a focus on the individual building blocks of choice as I mention in the main text, with ‘ought’ the focus is on the overall conclusion and decision, or (more strictly) the normative status of such decisions.

of the matter. Perhaps some independent justification can be given. But this diagnosis is a challenge that needs to be met all the same.

We should also tease out the links between what is being discussed here in this first strategy and the topic of (a). There is the possibility of different ideas about how the two are exactly connected. So, imagine we adopt a ‘reasons-first’ view and a narrow view of the normative with reasons as the central normative notion. We then must decide whether values (secondary as they are) are still best classed as normative notions or best classed as primarily evaluative notions that in some interesting way are not normative (but may well equally not be *nonnormative*), arguing for a significant divide between the (narrowly) normative and the evaluative. Other questions that arise will prompt detailed positions, and it is also likely that the same range of structural options are available to any X-first position. What is suggestive is that there could be a natural affinity between any form of X-first position and a narrow or narrower view of the normative: a narrow conception of what the normative is might fit nicely with a view that all normative notions can be analyzed in terms of just one notion. That offers the clean, clear, straightforward, simple view I mentioned above. On the other hand, a broad conception of the normative, where many notions are included and where it is seen as helpful to class them all as normative can possibly, and perhaps easily, be combined with an X-first position. Perhaps we can mark the differences between reasons, obligations and the like from, say, values, but the latter are still seen as essentially linked to choice and decision and are therefore part of the broad normative family. Perhaps the short quotation from Korsgaard above is a helpful indication of a starting idea.

A second, general strategy against the X-first programme considers all the various notions I have listed and queries whether it is possible to reduce them all to one notion if these notions have different functions in our thoughts and different characteristics. We have already thought about functions and roles. Reasons seem to be necessary as we form decisions, whereas oughts and shoulds are the statues of the final decisions that we reach. Values seem to classify objects, actions and people in some positive and negative way. Fit is a relation that speaks to whether or not two or more things are appropriate for each other or are supposed to and do go together. Standards and norms stand as things that people are expected to adhere to. And so on. Similarly, when thinking about the characteristics of notions or structures of normative families, we can note some fundamental differences. For example, we might ask if notions have clear polar, paired opposites (such as good and bad) or whether there is less clarity amongst competing notions (it is not obvious if the opposite of required is permitted or forbidden, or both). Some notions seem obviously gradable (such as good and bad again),

others less so (it is debatable whether we can speak and think properly of one thing being more right or more wrong than another, even if we accept that the benefit or harm of options do come in degrees). And so on.<sup>29</sup> The general thought arises: why think that any one notion can be the single foundational normative notion if all these significant normative notions function in such different ways? Why not just accept that we have many notions and normative families that are equally foundational and significant to normativity? This seems a promising idea. However, at least two challenges arise for such a strategy. First, if we think that various families of notions are united in some fashion, what does this tell us about the nonnormative and how it should be conceived? (Again, we are returned to questions in (a).) Second, even if we make the case for many notions being of normative significance and no one notion being the single foundational notion, might we still want to say that some are more significant than others? If so, how do we approach and decide that question? One methodological answer may simply be to work through various examples and go back and forth between these and our more general, abstract thinking in order to reach some reflective equilibrium that at least gives us a sense of what the normative is in general and how various notions sit within it, even if the details of our view may still evolve.

There is of course, no reason to suppose that these two strategies against X-first positions are mutually exclusive. Whilst the X-first programme has attracted a lot of attention and seen a great deal of energy, asking the related question of why we would wish to adopt such a position is not only a philosophically good question to raise, but questioning this whole programme will itself raise interesting issues.

### *Beyond 'Metaethics'?*

(c) Is normativity real? How does it fit into the world? These and other questions have been the subject of intense discussion within metaethics, as most readers will know. Such discussions stretch back centuries, although discussions have been vibrant during the twentieth century and particularly in the past fifty years. There are some standard broad positions and questions, which I will list.<sup>30</sup> But we should also ask how a focus on 'normativity' as an organizing idea has influenced matters and how it can continue to affect things.

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<sup>29</sup> Berker (forthcoming) is good on this strategy and these individual notions. See also Hurka (forthcoming) and Thomson (2008).

<sup>30</sup> See Fisher (2014), Kirchin (2012) and van Roojen (2015) for more detailed introductory discussions of these and other issues in metaethics.

First, there is a broad family of realist positions. In short, realists about the normative say that normativity is real: it exists and any full and true account of the universe would mention it. Similarly, some will say that whatever normative notions we have, these notions really are picking out things that exist. There really are reasons and values, norms and standards (or whatever notion one thinks is the ultimate foundation of normativity), and these are picked out by our everyday terms and ideas. Such really existing things might be called ‘properties’, ‘relations’ and ‘features’. (For brevity, I use the last.) From here we get a splintering into different realist tribes, across a few distinctions, which again will be familiar to readers of this volume. One important distinction within normative realism stems from the question ‘Do normative features exist independently of any human mind?’. We will have some realists arguing that normative features are mind-independent, others arguing for a form of mind-dependence, with both positions themselves containing divisions. Another key distinction, one which cuts across our first, stems from the question ‘How does normativity fit into our material, physical world?’ From here we get different versions of naturalism, nonnaturalism and supernaturalism: some realists see the normative as continuous with or part of the natural, material, physical world in some way, whilst others might think it part of the world in a general sense, but not continuous in this way. Perhaps normative features are dependent on the workings of God or gods, or perhaps they exist *sui generis*. Familiar issues arise here in these debates between realists. Can a naturalized version of the normative still capture all we want to say about the normative? How exactly does the normative conceived as *sui generis* relate to, or supervene on, the natural, material world? How do these two worlds, or two sets of concerns – the natural and the normative - fit together? After all, we have only the one world.

A broad alternative to realism is found in anti- or nonrealist positions. First there are forms of error theory and fictionalism. Supporters of such positions broadly agree with realists about the following: most people believe that when they are talking and thinking normatively, they are talking and thinking about normative features that exist in some fashion. The disagreement concerns whether people who believe in normative features are correct. Whilst realists think that people are correct to believe that normative features exist, even if across our whole range of individual judgements some are true and others are false, error theorists and fictionalists think that people are wrong to think there are such things as normative features in the first place. They think that people are systematically in error: normative judgements are just not the sort of judgements that could ever be true or false because they refer to a conceptually confused ontology. Another main camp is the family of noncognitivist positions. These have traditionally stepped away from whatever ontological commitments realists might

have, but try to save normative thought and discourse as a meaningful, non-erroneous activity. Perhaps when we speak and think in normative ways it seems as if we are attempting to pick out real features, but in fact something else is going on, something perfectly routine and understandable. Perhaps we are expressing emotions, offering demands, or the like.

In recent times we have seen some interesting developments. For example, some people explicitly working with reasons and normativity have argued for versions of the positions above. For example, both Skorupski and Derek Parfit have offered realist or realist-like positions which try to situate reasons in the world with less ontological cost than other realist positions.<sup>31</sup> However, perhaps such stances would have come about, or versions reenergised existing ideas, whether or not ‘normativity’ as a label had loomed so large in recent years. Having raised the question of how normativity fits into the world, we can echo the main theme of this introduction. Has a shift to ‘normativity’ brought anything new to the philosophical party?<sup>32</sup>

Metaethics, as the label suggests, was often focused just on moral or ethical features and whether such things exist, how we might know about them, and how we talk ethically. A significant development across the past generation has been an interest in applying and developing the metaethical positions above, but seen through a normative lens, and expanding our frame to ‘metanormativity’. That is, with an overt shift to talk of normativity there has been a lot of interest in exploring issues of authority, action, decision and value in many other domains and areas of life. For example, there has been intense discussion about the connections between ethics and epistemology. What sort of epistemic values are there and how do epistemic reasons work? Might using the language of reasons to frame so many familiar epistemological concerns unlock standard epistemological debates?<sup>33</sup> In particular, can we be a realist or an error theorist in one domain without being so in another?<sup>34</sup> Similarly, aesthetics has seen an interest recently in whether there can be aesthetic reasons, and discussions about the nature of motivation and obligation within our artistic practices, both in terms of judges

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<sup>31</sup> Skorupski (2010) and Parfit (2011), especially Vol. II, Part Six and Vol. III. For commentary on these two positions, see Olson (2018).

<sup>32</sup> The next few paragraphs offer broad reflections on philosophical trends. As such, it can often be difficult to give precise and specific references.

<sup>33</sup> This is the main question of Schroeder (2021).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Cuneo (2007).

and critics, and in terms of artistic creators.<sup>35</sup> Similar comments can be made about other areas of philosophy and reappraisals of historical figures.

My reflection on this is that the shift to normativity or metanormativity has been beneficial. It has sometimes enabled us to raise questions and discuss issues that would not have been possible otherwise, such as that connection between ethics and epistemology. However, I think of equal benefit is that frequent use of ‘normativity’ enables a framing of issues such that it is natural to raise certain questions, questions which seem obvious once they are voiced. I think a focus on artistic creativity is an excellent example of this. Whereas previously aesthetic discourse was dominated by discussion of whether aesthetic properties exist, we now have an equally important focus on the reasons facing creators and whether aesthetic obligations exist. We have shifted from an exclusive focus on aesthetic judgement to an equal focus on aesthetic creation. A second, welcome consequence is that thinking through notions such as justifications, motivations and authority across a range of domains should give us a better understanding of these notions themselves. Does the ‘obligation’ in ‘aesthetic obligation’ make sense? What does this tell us about obligations, as well as suggestions?

However, if this broad idea is true - and I think it is so broad that it is difficult to provide specific references for it – it returns us to issues above. ‘Normativity’ as a conceptual label can be helpful in encouraging us to say that questions about reasons, permissions, obligations, values and norms are questions that can be asked in the same way or in slightly different ways in many sub-fields of philosophy and about many aspects of our lives. Yet, the benefit we get from such a broad inclusion, of using a label to cover many questions and issues across a range of areas, may lead to an equally weighty danger, namely a lack of specificity and focus when it comes to understanding exactly what normativity is and how it may apply or find expression. In other words, it returns us to the concerns of (a).

### *The Unity of Normativity*

(d) It also indicates a fourth issue. To what extent, if at all, can we therefore speak of a *unity* of normativity and a commonality of normative notions across domains with which philosophers are engaged?

What might be meant by ‘unity’? It means either or both of the following: (i) across all and every domain and sphere of life, we have a single, common idea of what ‘normativity’ is

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<sup>35</sup> For commentary, see King (2022). Several contributions to this volume discuss aesthetics, reflecting this strength of interest.

(ethical normativity, epistemic normativity, normativity in logic, etc.); and (ii) that each central normative notion means the same in each such domain (our familiar list of reason, value, etc.). It is obviously desirable for us to try to achieve some form of unity, across both (i) and (ii). For example, we will often have to decide what we need to do, where the emphasis has to be on what we ought to do or what we have most reason to do *overall*. Perhaps ethical, epistemic or aesthetic reasons, norms and values clash with one another, and we have a range of considerations that feel as if they are in tension. Perhaps pursuing a fulfilling artistic career means forsaking my family, or at least significant time with them. Having a unity of normativity and of normative notions is essential here, both to resolve tensions in order to make good and justified decisions as well as to make sense of the situation in the first place by ensuring that what feels to be a tension really is a tension. We need to be comparing like with like.

One way of ensuring that we have a unity of normativity is to compare normative notions across different areas of life, as we indicated in (c), then argue why a particular notion is both definitional of the normative across all domains and why other normative notions must be analysed in terms of it, as we saw in (b). This strategy may be appealing to many, but not all. We might have the concerns already voiced. Perhaps there is no promising candidate notion that can play the single, foundational ‘X’ role because no reductive analysis seems quite right. Perhaps also too many of our notions operate with different senses across different areas of our life. Perhaps some natural languages and cultures do not have any notion within their vocabulary and everyday thought to be the X in any X-first programme.

A different strategy is to start with what normativity might be in general. We can then try to include a variety of normative notions and cement them as normative by capturing their particular role in normative thinking, similar to above when we were thinking about functions and structures of notions and families of notions.<sup>36</sup> That last point is important and contrasts with the previous idea: we do not focus on the nature of one or a small number of normative notions and then try to define normativity and other notions in such terms. We reflect upon the functions of many normative notions by first thinking in a broad sense about the point and purpose of normative thinking and of the normative worldview.

Imagine that we make a starting assumption that, in a broad sense, normativity and normative concepts are concerned with the guidance of action. This might still be

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<sup>36</sup> Thinking explicitly in terms of the unity of normativity and the roles of particular notions is best articulated by Ralph Wedgwood. See Wedgwood (2007) and (2018).

controversial, as we saw, but let us stick with it for this example. ‘Action-guidance’ might refer not just to what we should do, but to what attitude we should take towards things and what we might believe. Having established and accepted this as our starting point, we can then move to a next stage and define candidate notions’ functions or roles in normative thinking and how they relate to each other in the light of this view. We might say that values help to show us what matters as we decide what to do, whilst reasons are the considerations we should have in mind that help to shape what we should do and think. (Think again about that quotation from Korsgaard.) Similarly, we can make the classic initial distinction between (so-called) subjective and objective reasons: between reasons that we think people have and which they act upon as contrasted with the reasons that in fact exist no matter what our perspective. Making this and other distinctions will help us to make progress on the specific ways in which we understand how notions work together to guide action and give our actions legitimacy.

There will no doubt be many details to be worked out as we try to decide on the exact role of various normative notions, and there is debate still to be had about the exact point and nature of normativity overall. That debate, which has appeared throughout this introduction, is still relevant here. Given that we are aiming for a unity of normativity across domains and areas of life, we need to be sure that ethical normativity, legal normativity, logical normativity and the like really do have that same purpose at some general level. But, the hope is that this could be achieved and specific details ironed out.

This strategy has promise but also problems. One issue I have so far side-stepped needs to be voiced here. ‘Notions that help to guide our practical thinking’ is quite a broad description that may include more than the obviously normative. For example, modal notions such as necessity and possibility help to guide our thinking but they are not obviously normative notions; indeed they seem intuitively nonnormative. We also encounter the idea of value again, wondering whether to classify values as wholly normative, normative at all, or normative in so far as they affect choices. More generally, then, we can ask this question: if we are concerned to generate an idea of the unity around a basic idea, such as action-guidance, can we also use that idea to help us to distinguish the normative from the nonnormative, especially given that some (obviously) nonnormative notions may well help our understanding of our basic idea? This problem is not so much a problem with establishing some unity of normativity itself, it is rather that this programme of work brings in other issues we have encountered above, and it is liable to be complicated as we try to work out what is and is not nonnormative. That itself, however, may threaten agreement on what our basic idea of the normative should be first of all.

This question returns us to the question that opened this section. It may be desirable to have a unity of normativity and normative notions, and it seems there is a general, initial sense of what the normative is. After all, I relied on it when outlining my numbered sentences earlier assuming the reader would grasp what was going on and agree (to some extent) with what I was doing. But can we make good on the specifics? Can we get a good enough sense of the normative to include in some sensible, structured way (as loose or as tight as it needs to be) all the relevant normative notions, and which gives us enough of an equally sensible conception of the nonnormative, one that both illuminates different areas of our lives and offers opportunity for future discovery and insight? As should be obvious, this is still open to discussion and resolution.

## **2. What Might Future Thinking Look Like?**

I return to the general questions I raised above concerning how important and useful the label ‘normativity’ is and what future research into normativity may and should look like. In effect this section acts as a short summary of the significant questions of §1 whilst adding other points.

Discussions of the normative, the evaluative and similar matters will continue so long as philosophy continues because notions of action, rules, justification, value and norms are central to both philosophical inquiry and human life. The question I asked is whether the intense focus on normativity itself will continue or whether it will be a passing fad. I do not know the answer to this question, but I do think we can say that if there is a future in meaningful work on normativity itself, then certain issues are likely to have to rise to the fore.

First, do we adopt a narrow or broad conception of the normative? From asking this question, we noted that there are different notions and families of notions: the deontic, the evaluative, the aretaic, for example. Having noted these notions and families, do we adopt a narrow conception of the normative, with some of these notions and families excluded, but where we carve out a broader set of the connected ‘not nonnormative’ family? Or do we adopt a broad conception of the normative, because we think there is more that unites such families than divides them? What is the point of putting these notions together? What unites them and what divides them? Just as important, then, is to think about the nonnormative, about the world of Hume’s ‘is’. Indeed, one last question arises. When offering an initial distinction between the normative and the nonnormative, do we wish to assume and create a sharp, hard and fast distinction between the two, one that seems implied by Hume’s famous division? Or are we

open to there being a different sort of division, one that has room for there being many example cases and example notions that are clearly and unarguably in one camp or the other, but where there may be some vagueness or interesting, perhaps never-resolvable dispute about where some examples are rightly placed? Hilary Putnam's discussion of the fact-value dichotomy comes to mind here, where he argued that an assumed sharp dichotomy could and should give way to a more nuanced distinction that made room for examples that are difficult to classify.<sup>37</sup>

Second, there is more life in the various debates about particular notions being the single, foundational normative notion. But, aside from any individual arguments for any individual notions, is this a promising programme in the first place? Are people pursuing such a programme in part because, as I suggested, an answer will help to reveal the nature of what normativity is? How does any particular X-first stance, or the X-first programme in general, connect with the question of whether we should adopt a broad or narrow view of the normative? And, if people pursue an X-first programme within normativity, how does this mesh, if at all, with material that could be construed as an X-first programme about the nonnormative? I think here of intense debates about facts, events and states of affairs, and similarly of larger, more complicated metaphysical entities such as these and smaller entities, entities that may be referred to with terms such as features, aspects and elements. Does thinking of these as an X in an X-first nonnormative programme reveal something about other nonnormative entities and about the nonnormative itself, parallel to the assumptions that seem commonplace about normativity?

Third, the label of the normative has helped us to ask familiar questions in a new way, and perhaps to attend to aspects of our lives that had not received as much philosophical attention as they deserved. I gave the example of reasons for artistic creation. What other examples lie dormant or at least should become more prominent? What should we say about the value of logical forms? The idea of premises and conclusions surely gives a clear example of how things can and do fit together. But alongside such promise lurk my general questions from above. Do we obscure as much as we illuminate by trying to bring many phenomena under a single, broadbrush heading? Is 'normativity' only a helpful gateway idea into detailed discussions that should themselves be the real focus of philosophical attention? Indeed, as I mentioned in passing, many figures from philosophy's past and from different cultures are often seen through the normative lens. Is this helpful? Are our modern senses of authority or

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<sup>37</sup> Putnam (2002), chs. 1 and 2. See also Kirchin (2017), pp. 138-139.

reason or value really the same as or continuous with the thinking of particular figures or intellectual periods?

This brings me to a fourth set of points. Is it useful to try to have a unity of normative notions? It may give a clear and simple way of thinking about things, of comparing and contrasting like with like. There are good methodological reasons, therefore for doing so. But does such a striving for unity obscure and mangle more than it helps?

I have not mentioned a fifth set of questions, but it has sat in the background. The idea of the normative is prominent in a number of academic disciplines, in humanities, in social sciences and in sciences. It may be more or less well developed. It may, to some philosophers' minds, not be as precise or justified as much as it could or should be. Within those disciplines, though, the notion of the normative will have developed in the way that has been required for that discipline and set of concerns, even if some evolution may be necessary because it is not precise or capacious enough. In my view it would profit philosophers to consider how the notion of the normative and normative notions such as norms, values and obligations are employed and referred to in our sibling disciplines. The use of such notions, and the examples in which they are shown to have application, will be similar to but different from our common examples, reflecting similar but different ways of thinking. If we want to provide a comprehensive understanding of the normative, we need to be prepared to cast our net wider. After all, perhaps we philosophers focus too much on examples involving individual, single decisions and choice situations, or the value of objects as single items. Perhaps we focus too much on examples of explicit rationality or post-action rationalisation and justification. How might normativity show itself and be expressed in cases where class consciousness is present? What is the nature of normativity in critical race theory and how is the term 'normative' used by writers? If racial and similar thinking does oppress and change us in subtle yet significant ways, how and why can that be classed as a normative matter? Some disciplines routinely call some central, privileged concepts 'normative', reflecting the very idea of a norm or a standard: the norm of 'the family' or of 'criminal behaviour' or of standards in public life. How does this type of use relate to what has been happening in analytic, academic philosophy over the past generation? Similarly, when fellow academics claim that their discipline is riddled with value or when others claim that theirs is value-free, what exactly is going on and how do they understand the notion of value? It might also profit us to think about these and other questions by thinking about the nonnormative again. For example, the notion of 'the positive', employed routinely in some social science disciplines, for example, is supposed to be synonymous with 'the nonnormative'. But 'the positive' has a particular intellectual history, and that may affect

how easily we can view it as a synonym for the nonnormative, as well as the descriptive, the factual and the like.

In asking all of these questions we might call into question something which is often the philosophical *modus operandi*. We are often pulled towards thinking in the abstract and the ideal, to try to generalise across all cases in order to get at the nature of the thing in question. So, whilst it is interesting to tease out the differences between notions such as the descriptive, the factual and the positive, philosophers often implicitly think that we really need to focus on the most general manifestation of these ideas, namely the nonnormative. However, the details of such terms and their history might also reveal a great deal too, just as we might want to say the same for the evaluative, the aretaic, and the deontic. If we want to understand the nature of the normative, we need to be alive to the various notions, terms, ideas and conceptions at work in our sibling subject areas, even if academic philosophy can also bring something to the table.

A sixth group of concerns has also not been raised thus far. I have mentioned metaethics, but talk of normativity also raises the concerns of normative ethics: our familiar group of ethical stances such as consequentialism, deontology and the like. Some philosophers think that normative ethical discussions can and should happen quite separately from anything to do with metaethics, whilst others have been keen to make the links between the two sets of questions and emphasize that they are essentially intertwined. A general question arises: if our concerns shift towards a focus on normativity as indicated above, does that affect how we view or should view the debates within normative ethics? Will we change our view of particular stances or of significant normative ethical concepts? For example, as we think through the issues about the X-first debate, is it so obvious that we understand the exact relationship between reasons and oughts, on the one hand, and deontic concepts such as permissibility and obligation, on the other? Indeed, where exactly do those fundamental normative concepts such as right and wrong fit as we seek to map all these various notions?<sup>38</sup> Whilst it may be difficult to see how these questions and concerns might offer a winning reason to prefer consequentialism over deontology, say, responding to such questions may change the contours of the normative ethical debate in subtle or not so subtle ways. Perhaps certain normative notions emerge as being our prime focus and this then has profound consequences for which normative ethical stances we develop and adopt.

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<sup>38</sup> See Berker (forthcoming) for commentary.

A seventh and last group of questions present themselves. The future of normativity may well resemble the past, and perhaps the recent past. I began my discussion by making some standard moves, with easy to understand examples, as we worked our way through some common ideas in work on normativity: the distinction between normative and the nonnormative, the use of ‘ought’, and so on. Plenty of other ideas can be placed in this area, some of which I mentioned in asides or footnotes: distinguishing between subjective and objective reasons, the place of habits as we act, a distinction between formal normative standards (rules in games, for example) and robust normative standards (ideas and claims that seem to have a more significant authority over our lives), and so on. I am sure these distinctions and ideas, some of them crucial, will still be expressed in various ways and be used to help frame our continuing discussions. Another matter to think about is how such discussions and ideas relate to the preceding six points and topics. Does a discussion of habits, for example, question whether there should be some hard and fast distinction between normative and nonnormative explanation (and justification)? Will we find that the functions and structures of reasons, values and all the rest obstruct our understanding of examples as we try to begin our discussions, or does attention to these differences make such starting moves easier to understand and motivate? Are our standard examples helpful anyway as we reflect on what happens in the normative parts of our lives? Does a sought-for unity of normativity require that each normative domain be structured and function in exactly the same way?

There will, no doubt, be other topics and questions that future work on normativity may bring forth and require. I hope this quick tour gives a flavour of what might happen in the future and where we may need to focus our attention. In addition, the papers of this volume also give an indication of what might be possible.

### **3. The Papers**

Some of our papers take a debate within normativity and continue it in an effort to prompt our thinking to go in a new direction. Other papers attempt to mark new points or introduce different debates on rarely acknowledged ideas. The papers, whilst being necessarily selective, as a set still speak to the vibrancy and diversity of recent work within and about normativity.

We begin the papers with a piece by Stephen Finlay. He begins by voicing a concern about the degradation of normative or metaethical thought: why do the same tropes and ideas keep coming round in philosophy, with little if any progress being made? How might we escape such a depressing and futile cycle? Finlay’s first move is diagnostic: many if not all of

the framing words and ideas that have been used – ought, reason, value, mattering, even ‘normative’ itself - have multiple senses, and none are well-suited to capturing the ‘fugitive thought’ that we all seem to be wanting to discuss. Finlay continues in his paper to detail different senses of ideas and words at work in philosophical discussions about normativity and lays out various broad positions (cognitivism and noncognitivism, subjectivism and objectivism) to show how they lead us through a futile cycle. He places much of the blame at the objectivist’s door and, through his insights into why the cycle keeps coming round, hopes we can escape to a better future.

We then have three contributions that seek to compare different domains and/or see themes across them, and which speak to the question of unity I voiced above. Errol Lord has two overlapping goals as he compares three domains: the epistemic, the aesthetic and the moral. First, he wishes to explore the idea of a companion in virtue strategy: positively vindicating claims about the authority of one domain by comparing it with other domains. (This is in contrast to a companion in guilt strategy, which through comparison is a defensive attempt to ward off scepticism about a domain.) The second goal is to sketch the structures of the three aforementioned domains, taking the epistemic domain as the ‘companion’ domain that helps us to understand others, and in particular the notion of authority as seen in these domains. He seeks to understand from within each domain what normative factors are in play in order to decide what to do or believe. He draws a distinction between verdictive and contributory authority: the authority of factors within a domain that offer a verdict on a matter and the authority of factors that contribute to such verdicts. He then shows this distinction to be at work in all three domains in different ways, and shows how it helps us to see how they are structurally similar.

In his contribution, Daniel Whiting also compares domains, focusing on the epistemic and the ethical (and more generally the practical). He thinks about how the unity of normativity across these domains might unfold and specifically focuses on the notion of modality. Modality is a key idea in epistemology, with the use and talk of modal epistemology being common. Whiting claims this is less the case in the ethical domain and sets about both mapping what ethical modality could be as well as arguing that it should be a more common idea. In focusing more on this idea, we may find more unity across these two normative domains and others, although thought is required to see exactly how we might preserve unity if we focus on modality. In doing so, work on normativity may take an interesting turn in the future.

Comparing ethical and normative domains with the mathematical domain is a popular way of thinking through various ideas. In her paper, Debbie Roberts considers a strategy that

realists about normative entities can employ, namely an ‘indispensability’ strategy. Some think that we should assume the existence of mathematical entities because they are indispensable for scientific thought and practice. Roberts considers this idea and sees how it might apply in the normative domain, arguing positively for its use. In doing so she considers how we might distinguish naturalist from nonnaturalist positions in metanormative theory across different domains as our thinking evolves. Her thoughts link directly with my opening comments about the importance of thinking through in detail different conceptions of the descriptive, the positive and the nonnormative.

We then move to papers that focus on particular normative notions, distinctions, positions and other ideas. In my contribution I think about the nature of normativity but use one particular notion, the notion of fit, in order to do so. The notion of ‘fittingness’ has attracted much attention, with intense work recently drawing on work from the twentieth century. It is clear that people think of fittingness – specifically the notion of responses fitting or being fitting towards certain valuable objects because they are valuable – as a normative notion. But some claim that the everyday notion of fit is not normative, and this seems a routine assumption currently. However, why should we think that the notion of fit at work in examples such as keys fitting into locks or feet fitting into shoes is not a normative matter? I think the notion of fit is a normative notion, or at least that it has good claim to be. Not only do I argue for that, I use this discussion to think about normativity more generally and how the notion of fit might compare with other normative notions.

In my discussion of traditional metaethical concerns, I mentioned in passing the idea of supervenience, and of how we should conceive the normative and the nonnormative (or natural) fitting together. In their contribution, Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett consider the ‘supervenience challenge’ to normative nonnaturalism, namely that such nonnaturalists cannot accommodate supervenience and this seems to be fatal to their position. McPherson and Plunkett focus on a recent response to the challenge by Stephanie Leary. In brief, Leary uses recent work in metaphysics, primarily concerning essences and grounding, to argue that the supervenience of the normative on the nonnormative can be accommodated without threatening nonnaturalism. McPherson and Plunkett argue that Leary’s proposal fails. In doing so they draw broader conclusions that have implications for nonnaturalism and for work about normativity. They argue that we need to understand supervenience better, both to appreciate what this means for our epistemic position as metaphysicians and to aid better formulations of nonnaturalism itself. In making these points they offer a diagnosis of why nonnaturalists are increasingly tempted to reject supervenience of the normative on the nonnormative rather than

attempting to accommodate it. This speaks to a general question: how exactly should we accommodate normativity in a supposed nonnormative world? Arguably this is one of the chief questions that powers debates about and within metaethics and normativity.

We see this question arise in a different form in our next paper. Alongside the discussion of supervenience and traditional metaethics, other positions come into view. Readers will be familiar with reductive views, for example, and specifically those that reduce normativity to human responses. Another prominent view is constructivism which comes in a variety of forms often prompted by discussions of such reductionism and the wish to avoid it. In her contribution Hille Paakkunainen finds existing versions of constructivism wanting. Whilst not ultimately being a constructivist herself (she favours a form of reductivism), she seeks to develop a more plausible constructivist option – non-reductive perspectivalism – which claims that normative facts and properties are (partly) irreducibly normative yet they depend, ontologically, on human responses and our psychology that for the reductionist form a likely reduction base. (As part of the development of this view, she also considers what it is for a view to be a *metanormative* as opposed to a normative constructivist position.) She argues that for this view the normativity of normative facts “exists or has being only within a practical standpoint or perspective partially constituted by the psychological states of the agent(s) whom they bind.” She argues that this view makes better sense of the main intuitions behind constructivism. She also says that outlining and discussing the view helps us to think through and map several options as we seek to characterize metanormative theories, something crucial for future theorizing about the normative. Lastly and perhaps centrally, this view allows us ask the basic questions of how normativity and authority come into being, and of how humans can be subject to authority outside of themselves when the main materials we are working with in our explanation of such authority are human responses themselves. Whatever else happens in future work about normativity, this question will surely express a central concern.

I earlier mentioned the distinction between subjective and objective reasons. We need to understand what we should do from the perspective of the agent who is acting, or considering how to act, and what we should do irrespective of how we and others perceive the situation. This broad discussion is given different labels by different thinkers, and we might also not have a simple binary here. In their joint paper, Julien Dutant and Clayton Littlejohn consider two positions about what we ought to believe and then do: ‘reasonology’ (a position that hopes to explain and justify actions and decisions in terms of objective reasons) and ‘expectabilism’ (a position that is based on degrees of belief and which takes expected desirability as its guide to making decisions). These two positions, or families, mesh or fail to mesh with our intuitions

about examples Dutant and Littlejohn offer. They diagnose the strengths and failings of both positions and argue that in future work those interested in reasons need to take more of an interest in the tools of decision theory, and decision theorists need to consider the importance of reasons more.

Examples are routinely used to illustrate ideas and arguments. Often a certain diet of examples can influence the ideas and arguments too much, and if we have a diet of examples that is too narrow, we will then have an impoverished view of the phenomena we are trying to capture. In their contribution, C. Thi Nguyen and Michael Ridge discuss the idea of play, specifically the idea of playing games and a phenomenon they called ‘striving play’. Through focusing on this phenomenon and several examples, they show that a commonly held principle is highly questionable, namely the principle that people will try to will ends they think are good when they act (or they are otherwise practically irrational), the so called ‘guise of the good’ thesis. In particular Nguyen and Ridge focus on work from Korsgaard and Parfit, showing that we can contrast two ideas: willing ends because we think the ends (themselves) are good in some way and willing ends because the adoption of the end is good in some way. Nguyen and Ridge argue that work on motivation and practical rationality has neglected the second idea, even though it is common enough in play and other activities, and that this has been to the detriment of work about normativity and how we conceive of ourselves as practical agents. In future work we need to expand our set of examples to reveal how we think and act across many spheres of our lives.

*Two/three further paragraphs to be added summarizing two/three more contributions*

Our volume ends with a wide-ranging paper by Michael Smith. Smith takes up the set of questions from above about normative ethics, viewing the discussion through a historic lens across the twentieth century. He highlights opposing general viewpoints within metaethics and then blends and uses this debate to articulate a different type of stance within normative ethics, a stance he calls the ethics of agency. He starts from the debate between G. E. Moore and emotivists such as A. J. Ayer, concluding that philosophers were dissatisfied with emotivism’s explanation of moral discussion and disagreement, in part fuelled by a generation’s experience of the Second World War: is moral exchange simply a matter of ‘goading’ and not ‘guiding’? He then focuses on the different tracks pursued by John Rawls and R. M. Hare in response to this. Rawls developed a moral and political stance which assumed that rational discussion and resolution of moral issues required taking no stand on metaethical issues at all. Hare’s universal

prescriptivism instead shared some metaethical presuppositions with emotivism, and these were essential to his view, but against the emotivists he thought that rational discussion and argument were possible and necessary in normative moral discourse. Also, Hare's view incorporated moral anti-rationalism: moral requirements do not entail normative reasons for action or, in other words, Hare believes, as did the emotivists, that an act can be morally wrong but there be no reason not to do it. Against this background Smith asks what if we reject Rawls' 'method of avoidance' but also accept moral rationalism and think that moral requirements do entail reasons for action? Where do we end up? Smith again introduces a contrast. The neo-Humeanism as found in the work of Bernard Williams assumes that the normativity of reasons – their normative source – stems from how an agent or, better, an ideal agent, would plan and act in certain circumstances. Smith argues that this conception entails a contradiction: such agents are assumed to be able to have any old set of desires but we can also assume that they all must have certain desires related to knowledge-acquisition and desire-realization. We can assume, therefore, that reasoned criticism of agents is possible, and we should also see, thinks Smith, that such criticism traces to the fact that ideal agents realize their desires only within a community of other ideal agents. From all these considerations he develops three main, *pro tanto* general principles based around agency. These principles concern reasons to help, to not interfere, and to act as we want. They will get weighted differently in different circumstances depending on both the situation itself and the more detailed realization of each principle.

Smith is here not concerned with the X-first debate, for example, and he does not give a detailed account of the nonnormative. However, he raises significant questions about the relationship between metaethics and normative ethics, and the assumptions we make within each which allow (or disallow) for various combinations and implications. He also returns us to one of the questions relevant in Finlay's and Paakkunainen's papers, albeit answered in a different key: from where does normative authority stem and what does it look like? As the title suggests, Smith's paper is very much focused on agency and the authority we have to make choices. The normativity stems from people acting in the world of choices, where others are similarly acting and choosing. Smith thinks about how such choices can be seen to be rational and responsive to which sorts of reason, and how our agency fits with a certain ideal agential standard. Viewed in this way, his comprehensive account raises the following general questions. If (a certain view of) agency is seen to be the central focus of our normative thinking, what implications does this have for the normative ethic we adopt and the metaethical stance we defend? In this picture does it (even) make sense to privilege reasons ahead of what we ought to do, or to see the ideal agency standard as normatively basic? In this articulation of

normative authority, what room is there for value and for the notions of fitness and appropriateness?

Thus we return to many of the questions that have arisen in this introduction, questions that arise also in work about the normative across a long period of time. We are trying to capture and understand a multi-faceted, fundamental phenomenon of the human experience – the normative – that guides our actions and thoughts and which justifies who we are and how we live. (Or which expresses the fact that we are so guided and that we need such justifications.) Whilst the world is, in some sense, just there, what is also ‘there’ and fundamentally so is the world of value, of rational choice, and of ways that we aspire to be. Sorting out what the normative is, how it is structured, and how it relates to its assumed contrary is a matter central to philosophy as practiced across various regions through the centuries, and one that certainly has a rich future to come.<sup>39</sup>

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