Expressivism and Convention-Relativism about Epistemic Discourse

Allan Hazlett

Forthcoming in A. Fairweather and O. Flanagan (eds.), *Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue* (Cambridge University Press).

Consider the claim that openmindedness is an epistemic virtue, the claim that true belief is epistemically valuable, and the claim that one epistemically ought to cleave to one's evidence. These are examples of what I'll call "epistemic discourse." Here I'll propose and defend a view called "convention-relativism about epistemic discourse." In particular, I'll argue that convention-relativism is superior to its main rival, expressivism about epistemic discourse. Expressivism and convention-relativism both jibe with anti-realism about epistemic normativity, which is motivated by appeal to philosophical naturalism (§1). Convention-relativism says that epistemic discourse describes how things stands relative to a conventional set of "epistemic" values; such discourse is akin to criticism relative to the conventional rules of a club (§2). I defend convention-relativism by appeal to a "reverse open question argument," which says, *pace* expressivism, that epistemic discourse leaves normative questions open (§3).

My three examples of epistemic discourse (above) represent three species of **epistemic discourse**: (i) attributions of the property of being an epistemic virtue, or "epistemic virtue attributions," for short, (ii) attributions of the property of having epistemic value, or "epistemic value attributions," for short, and (iii) attributions of epistemic obligation.[1] Epistemic virtue attributions and epistemic value attributions are species of **epistemic evaluation**; epistemic obligation attributions can be understood as non-evaluative.

Epistemic discourse seems normative. I'll appeal to a more precise criterion of the normativity of discourse, below (§3.1), but the following will suffice to motivate the idea that epistemic discourse seems normative. To say that openmindedness is an epistemic virtue seems to be to say that openmindedness really is a virtue, i.e. that it is good or desirable or admirable to be openminded; to say that true belief is epistemically valuable seems to be to say that true belief really is valuable, i.e. that true belief is good or worthy of pursuit or approbation; to say that one epistemically ought to cleave to one's evidence seems to be to say that one really ought to cleave to one's evidence, i.e. that one would (or at least could) deserve blame or censure or sanction for not so cleaving. As Christine Korsgaard (1996) puts it, "[c]oncepts 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 be." (p. 9) Epistemic discourse seems normative in (at least something like) the same way.

1 Naturalism and anti-realism about epistemic discourse

---

[1] I have left attributions of knowledge off the list, as they raise some complex issues that are orthogonal to our main topic. First, some knowledge attributions do not even appear to be normative. Second, the thesis of "pragmatic encroachment" threatens the idea that knowledge attributions are a species of *epistemic* discourse. I have also left attributions of epistemic reasons off the list. It seems to me that either (i) epistemic reasons entail epistemic obligations, in which case what I say about epistemic obligation attributions can be said about epistemic reasons attributions, or (ii) epistemic reasons derive from epistemic values, in which case what I say about epistemic value attributions can be said about epistemic reasons attributions.

Engaging in epistemic discourse also seems to commit one to the existence of epistemic virtue, epistemic value, and epistemic obligations. Do these things really exist? This is the question of realism and anti-realism about **epistemic normativity**. There are a number of ways to articulate the realism/anti-realism distinction (alternatively: a number of realism/anti-realism distinctions); here we shall understand realism about *x* as a thesis about the explanatory connection between *x* and the appropriateness of a certain species of discourse. We shall understand realism about epistemic normativity as follows:

> **Realism about epistemic normativity:** The appropriateness of epistemic discourse is explained by the existence of epistemic virtue, epistemic value, and epistemic obligations.

The negation of realism about epistemic normativity is **anti-realism about epistemic normativity**.

Realism and anti-realism are metaphysical views, about the explanatory relationship (if there is one) between epistemic value (for example) and the appropriateness of epistemic value attributions. If you think that there is no such thing as epistemic value, then you are an anti-realist of the most straightforward kind. But if you think that epistemic value exists *because* it is appropriate for us to engage in the attribution of epistemic value, perhaps because you think that *what it is* for something to be valuable is for people to consistently value it (e.g. Williams 2002, p. 91-2), then you are also an anti-realist, although of a less straightforward kind. Distinct from this metaphysical question are related questions about the semantics and pragmatics of epistemic discourse. The realist is in a position to give a descriptivist account of the semantics of epistemic discourse, which jibes with her view about the explanatory relationship between (again, for example) epistemic value and the appropriateness of attributions of epistemic value. The appropriateness of uttering "True belief is epistemically valuable," when it is appropriate, will be explained, in part, by the fact that the sentence is true, and the truth of the sentence will be explained by the fact that true belief is epistemically valuable. The anti-realist will need to offer an alternative account.

Although our focus will be on epistemic *discourse*, a semantics for epistemic discourse will naturally apply, mutatis mutandis, to its analogue in *thought*. If we can explain (again, for example) what sentences of the form <*x* is epistemically valuable> mean, i.e. if we can give an account of the content of such sentences, then we should be in a position to explain the content of people's thoughts when they think that something is epistemically valuable.

The basic argument for anti-realism about epistemic discourse (cf. Hazlett 2013, Part II) appeals to philosophical naturalism, and is based on three premises:

1. Given philosophical naturalism, we have pro tanto reason to avoid positing categorical normativity (cf. Kelly 2003, pp. 614-18; see also Papineau 1999, pp. 17-18, Drier 2001, pp. 29-30, Owens 2003, pp. 283-4, Steglich-Petersen 2006, p. 500).
2. Teleological accounts of epistemic normativity, on which epistemic normativity is a species of (naturalistically kosher) instrumental normativity, fail (Kelly 2003, Owens 2003, Grimm 2008, 2009).
3. Epistemic normativity is either categorical or instrumental.

Given these three premises, and some natural assumptions (including that the naturalist's pro tanto reason to avoid positing categorical normativity isn't trumped in this case),

anti-realism can be defended. Premise (1) speaks against realist accounts of epistemic normativity that explain the existence of epistemic value or epistemic reasons by appeal to the normativity of belief (Wedgwood 2002, Shah 2003, Shah and Velleman 2005, Boghossian 2003, 2005, Lynch 2009a, 2009b). (The normativity in question is called "categorical" because it applies regardless of the desires or intentions of the believer.) Premise (2) rules out realist versions of the familiar epistemological idea that the existence of epistemic value or epistemic reasons can be understood by appeal to a "truth goal" (Foley 1987, 1993, Goldman 1999, Sosa 2003, 2007, 2009, Steglich-Petersen 2006, 2009, 2011, Greco 2010). Premise (3) says that these are the only realist games in town. The anti-realist concludes that realism is false. There is obviously much to be said about this argument, but here I will assume anti-realism about epistemic normativity, since this is common ground between me (§2.2) and my expressivist interlocutors (§2.1)

2 Articulating convention-relativism

In recent years, anti-realists about epistemic normativity have defended expressivist accounts of epistemic discourse (Gibbard 1990, 2003, pp. 227-9, Chrisman 2007, Field 2009, Kappel 2010), on which epistemic discourse is understood as expressive of non-cognitive attitudes of endorsement, acceptance, approval, or valuation. Their critics have been realists about epistemic normativity (Cuneo 2007, Lynch 2009a, 2009b, Shah 2010). I will articulate and defend an alternative to both expressivism about epistemic discourse and realism about epistemic normativity. My proposed view is consistent with anti-realism about epistemic normativity, but maintains that epistemic discourse is not (always) expressive of non-cognitive attitudes (cf. Fumerton 2001, Sosa 2007). In this section I'll describe expressivism about epistemic discourse (§2.1) and then articulate my proposed alternative, "convention-relativism about epistemic discourse" (§2.2).

2.1 Expressivism about epistemic discourse

The leading idea behind **expressivism about epistemic discourse** is that epistemic discourse is essentially (though not necessarily exclusively) expressive of certain non-cognitive attitudes of endorsement, acceptance, approval, or valuation.[2] Allan Gibbard (1990) defends and elaborates the view that "to call something rational is not … to attribute a property to it," but rather "to express a state of mind." (p. 9) In particular, "to think something rational is to accept norms that permit it." (p. 46) The relevant non-cognitive attitude here is accepting a norm. Gibbard's account applies equally to actions, feelings, and beliefs, so to think a belief is rational is (among other things) to accept norms that permit it, and to say that a belief is rational is (among other things) to express such acceptance. Gibbard (2003, pp. 227-9) has also argued that to think that S knows that p is to plan to rely on S's judgment about whether p, and thus to say that S knows that p is to express such planning. The relevant non-cognitive attitude in this case is planning. "Coherence and agreement on the plain facts doesn't guarantee agreement on whether" someone knows, for whether we attribute knowledge to someone will depend on our plans; the concept of knowledge is thus "plan-laden." (p. 228) Along similar lines, Matthew Chrisman (2007) articulates a "norm-expressivist" account of knowledge attributions, on which the attribution of knowledge to S expresses a complex state of

---

[2] We should avoid, if we can, any attempt to define the "cognitive" and the "non-cognitive." Empirical beliefs are paradigm cognitive attitudes; desires are paradigm non-cognitive attitudes.

mind consisting of both (i) the belief that S is entitled by norms *e* to her true belief that p *and* (ii) the acceptance of those norms (p. 241).

This is compatible with a plurality of semantic accounts of epistemic discourse. It is compatible with the view, defended by early expressivists, that the sentences involved in epistemic discourse are not "truth apt." But contemporary expressivists reject this view, in favor of the view that the relevant utterances are "truth apt" (Chrisman 2007, p. 237, Field 2009, p. 267). They propose an account on which utterances of such sentences express both beliefs (and so are often true) and non-cognitive attitudes; for example, see Chrisman's (i) and (ii), above.[3] As Hartry Field (2009, pp. 262-4, pp. 272-8) argues, an expressivist account of epistemic discourse could be articulated by appeal to John MacFarlane's (2005a, 2005b) notion of "assessment sensitivity," with differences in assessor's accepted epistemic norms making for differences in relative truth, such that the proposition that openmindedness is an epistemic virtue might be true as assessed relative to my preferred epistemic norms, but not true as assessed relative to your preferred epistemic norms. Finally, the "truth aptness" of epistemic evaluation could be secured by embracing a "quasi-realist" approach to truth (Gibbard 2003, pp. 18-20, pp. 180-4).

There are also various ways for the expressivist to explain the existence of disagreement in epistemic discourse. On Chrisman's (2007) view, for example, to attribute knowledge to S is to express your belief in the proposition that S is entitled by norms *e* to her true belief that p, so disagreement about whether someone knows something might just come down to old-fashioned cognitive disagreement about the truth of that proposition. However, this isn't the end of the story:

> [T]he norm-expressivist can also recognize that different utterances can express the acceptance of opposing or concurring norms. Thus … two [normative] claims can express genuine opposition or agreement even if they do not express logically contradictory or identical propositions. (p. 239)

We may agree that norms *e* entitle someone to believe that p, but since I accept, and you do not accept, those norms, we disagree about whether she ought to believe that p. Alternatively, if we follow Field (2009) in articulating expressivism in terms of assessment sensitivity, then you and I might disagree about the proposition that S ought to believe that p – since this proposition is true, relative to the norms that I accept, but not true, relative the norms that you accept.

Expressivism jibes with (although it does not entail) anti-realism about epistemic normativity (§1). Gibbard (1990) writes that his "analysis is not directly of what it is for something to *be* rational, but of what it is for someone to *judge* that something is rational," (p. 8, cf. p. 46) and that on his view "apparent normative facts" are "no real facts at all; instead there [are] facts of what we are doing when we make normative judgments." (p. 23)[4] This is why the expressivist can be said to "change the question" from that of the nature of goodness and of the definition of 'good', to the question of "what *states of mind* ethical statements express." (2003, p. 6) This is why Gibbard can "weasel" (2003, p. 182) about the existence of normative properties, facts, and truths:

---

[3] N.b. that the belief and non-cognitive attitude expressed need not be understood as distinct mental states; they could be understood as aspects of one complex mental state (cf. Chrisman 2007).

[4] Although compare his "quasi-realism" (2003, pp. 18-20, pp. 180-4).

because his account of normative thought and talk is free of commitment to the existence of normative properties, facts, and truths. As Chrisman (forthcoming) explains, expressivism about epistemic discourse is a "metaepistemological" view about "what it means to claim that a belief is justified, rational, known, etc.," rather than a "normative epistemological" view about what it is for a belief to be justified, rational, known, etc. This is all good news, from the perspective of anti-realism.

How should the expressivist explain the appropriateness of epistemic discourse, in a way that is consistent with philosophical naturalism (cf. §1)? Gibbard (1990) suggests an evolutionary account: "Humanity evolved in groups," (p. 24) he writes; "we are, in effect, designed for social life," and "[o]ur normative capacities are part of the design." (p. 26) The crucial idea here is that of "the need for complex coordination" (ibid.) among human beings. But natural history might only take us so far: it might explain why we engage in epistemic discourse, without explaining why epistemic discourse is appropriate. Some naturalists might want to stop there. But we can, if we are comfortable, go further, by adopting a social-functional account of the value of epistemic discourse (Craig 1990, Williams 2002, Dogramaci forthcoming). "Knowledge attributions," Chrisman (2007) writes, "could be seen as playing a crucial role in keeping track of who can be trusted about which kinds of information." (p. 242-3) For these (and other) reasons, "treating a belief as a known belief is beneficial in the right sort of circumstances," (Kappel 2010, p. 184) and in connection with this we might "debate norms by debating whether they are likely to lead to desirable results – in particular, truth-oriented results of various sorts." (Field 2009, p. 278) But we must be careful here: the anti-realist about epistemic normativity can say that epistemic discourse is good because engaging in this practice is beneficial or useful or socially desirable; but she must be careful not to appeal to the *epistemic* value of true belief, for example, in her account of the appropriateness of epistemic evaluation. The anti-realist can say that not adopting these policies would lead to "things that we … dislike" (Field 2009, p. 256); she can't say that not adopting these policies would be epistemically bad in virtue of the epistemic value of truth (cf. p. 260).[5]

2.2   Convention-relativism about epistemic discourse

That's expressivism about epistemic discourse (§2.1). But there's an (anti-realist) alternative to expressivism.[6] Consider Ernie Sosa's (2007) idea of an "insulated critical domain," which is "a set of interrelated entities evaluable through correspondingly interrelated values." (p. 73) Sosa asks us to:

> Consider the world of coffee – of its production, elaboration, and consumption. One central value organizes the critical assessment

[5] Consider also an inferentialist semantics for epistemic discourse (Chrisman 2011), which appeals to "the distinctively practical kinds of inferential relations in which … normative [epistemic] concepts are caught up." (p. 123) On such a view, for example, we might say that <S knows that p> has the following "practical implications": "I shall act as if p is true" and "I shall stop enquiring as to whether p." (Ibid.) This jibes with a social-functional vindication of epistemic evaluation, on which there are "good pragmatic reasons to explain why it is better to use concepts embodying these inferential roles rather than some other concepts," thus establishing "our unconditional right to use [these] concepts." (p. 128)

[6] And surely more than one. Error theory about epistemic discourse has attracted a few detractors (Cuneo 2007, Chapter 4, Lynch 2009a, p. 232) but no explicit defenders (although Olson 2011 offers a critique of the detractors).

> distinctive of that domain. I mean the value of liquid coffee that is delicious and aromatic. Think of the assessment of coffee beans, fields, coffee machines, baristas, ways of making liquid coffee, plantations, harvests, etc. What organizes all such evaluation, the value at the center of it all, from which the other relevant values are derivative, is the value of good coffee, of liquid coffee that is delicious and aromatic. (Ibid.)

Various things – cups of coffee, fields of coffee beans, methods of making coffee – can be evaluated relative to the central organizing value of delicious and aromatic liquid coffee. And, as Sosa argues, we might understand epistemology as a critical domain of this kind, organized around the central organizing value of true belief (ibid.). To say that x is epistemically good, or good from the epistemic point of view, on Sosa's view, is to say that x does well vis-à-vis the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic, namely, true belief, just as to say that x is good from the perspective of the world of coffee is to say that x does well vis-à-vis the central organizing value of the critical domain of the world of coffee, namely, delicious and aromatic liquid coffee.

So far this is consistent with expressivism about epistemic discourse: we could understand an utterance of $<x$ is epistemically valuable$>$ (for example) as expressing both (i) the belief that x does well vis-à-vis the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic and (ii) endorsement, acceptance, approval, or valuation of that central organizing value (viz. true belief). However, Sosa rejects such an account, since critical evaluation does not require the recognition of any "domain-transcendent value":

> [S]omeone knowledgeable about guns and their use for hunting, for military ends, and so on, may undergo a conversion that makes the use of guns abhorrent. The good shot is thus drained of any real value that he can discern. Nevertheless, his critical judgment within that domain may outstrip anyone else's, whether gun lover or not. Critical domains can be viewed as thus *insulated*. (pp. 73-4)

The critic of guns can describe the Smith and Wesson .44 Magnum as "an excellent gun," without expressing her endorsement, acceptance, approval, or valuation of the central organizing value of the world of guns – namely, as Harry Callahan articulates it, that of blowing people's heads clean off. Gun evaluation does not necessarily express any non-cognitive attitude towards the central organizing value of the world of guns. Likewise, for Sosa, epistemic evaluation does not necessarily express any non-cognitive attitudes towards the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic. The central organizing value, relative to which evaluation within a critical domain operates, is not necessarily something that the evaluator values.

What then makes true belief the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic? What explains the fact that true belief is the central organizing value of this domain? On Sosa's view, not the value of true belief:

> Our present worry abstracts from such Platonic issues of epistemic normativity. Truth may or may not be intrinsically valuable absolutely, who knows? Our worry requires only that we consider truth the *epistemically fundamental* value. (Sosa 2007, p. 72)

But if it is not the value of true belief that explains its status, as the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic, what explain its status?

"Convention-relativism about epistemic discourse" (more on which below) says: convention. What makes one thing, rather than another, the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic is a matter of what we mean by "epistemic." Because "epistemic" is a term of art, employed by academic theorists rather than ordinary speakers (contrast "moral" and "aesthetic"), the relevant conventions supervene on the historical and contemporary practices of the relevant theorists – the ones who use the term "epistemic."[7] True belief, on Sosa's view, is *the* central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic. The conventionalist need not make this assumption. The conventionalist should define "epistemic" so as to capture, as best as possible, the use of this term by the relevant theorists. Given this criterion of adequacy, we should adopt a broader conception of the epistemic: the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic is "cognitive contact with reality" (Zagzebski 1996, p. 167) or **accuracy** (Grimm and Ahlstrom forthcoming). True belief is a paradigm species of this, but the present formulation leaves open other possible species of cognitive contact with reality, such as understanding (Zagzebski 2001, Grimm and Ahlstrom forthcoming), "carving nature at the joints" (Sider 2009, 2011, Treanor forthcoming, Hazlett unpublished), having fitting or appropriate emotions (Nussbaum 2001, Price 2006), perceptual acquaintance with the intrinsic properties of external things (Johnston 1996), or knowledge of intrinsic properties (Langton 1998, Lewis 2008).[8] But nothing here will ride on the assumption of accuracy as the central organizing value of the epistemic.

Although Sosa suggests the individuation of critical domains in terms of "values," we could just as easily describe a critical domain by articulating a set of rules (e.g. principles of evidence), where following the rules is understood as the central organizing "value" of that domain. And we need not understand critical domains as defined by *one* central organizing value; a critical domain might be defined by a plurality of central organizing values. Finally, although Sosa speaks of *evaluation* relative to a central organizing value, nothing stands in the way of speaking of normative discourse more broadly, including "ought" claims: we can say that, from the perspective of the world of coffee, one ought not use a sock as a filter; and we can say that, from the epistemic perspective, one ought to cleave to one's evidence.

According to **convention-relativism about epistemic discourse**, then, the utterance of the sentences involved in epistemic discourse express beliefs about how things stand relative to the central organizing value (or values) of the critical domain of the epistemic, and, moreover, the utterance of such sentences does not necessarily express non-cognitive attitudes (towards the central organizing value (or values) of the critical domain of the epistemic). Such expression is no part of the conventional meaning of the relevant sentences, although this doesn't mean that epistemic discourse dosen't, in some

---

[7] The *Oxford English Dictionary*, noting that it is a philosophical term, defines "epistemic" as follows: "Of or relating to knowledge or degree of acceptance." The three listed uses are from academic philosophy: from a book on logic, from an issue of *Mind*, and from a book on Mill. The earliest use listed is from 1922. Compare "moral" (not marked as philosophical, first listed use 1387) and "aesthetic" (non-philosophical meanings given, first listed use 1764).

[8] A further wrinkle will be required to distinguish the epistemic from the moral or ethical (Hazlett 2012, 2013,): we shall have to individuate critical domains in terms of what they take to have final and *intrinsic* value. Accuracy is taken, from the epistemic point of view, to have final and intrinsic value; this is compatible with the idea that accuracy has final *constitutive* value (Zagzebski 2004, Greco 2010, Baril 2010), from the moral or ethical point of view.

cases, express non-cognitive attitudes (§3.2); it only means that such expression isn't built into the meaning of the sentences uttered in epistemic discourse. This distinguishes convention-relativism from expressivism about epistemic discourse (§2.1). On Chrisman's (2007) view, to say that S knows that p is to express the belief that S is entitled by norms e to her true belief that p (p. 241), and on Field's (2009) view, to evaluate something positively in epistemic evaluation is to think or say that that it does well vis-à-vis some set of norms (pp. 258-61). But expressivists will insist that this does not yet capture the essence of epistemic discourse: we must add that epistemic evaluation and epistemic reasons attribution express non-cognitive attitudes as well. For Chrisman, to say that S knows that p is also to express acceptance of the relevant norms (op. cit.), and for Field, in epistemic evaluation, the set of norms in question must be preferences that the speaker has or policies that she endorses (op. cit., p. 274). What distinguishes convention-relativism from expressivism is that the conventionalist rejects the view that a non-cognitive attitude is necessarily expressed in epistemic discourse.

This also distinguishes convention-relativism from what Paul Boghossian (2006) calls "epistemic relativism" (pp. 84-5, see also Kalderon 2009), on which judgments of justification commit one to accepting a particular "epistemic system." On convention-relativism, epistemic discourse involves no such commitment.

Convention-relativism is a **metaepistemological** view about epistemic discourse. Issues of metaepistemology are orthogonal to issues in first-order **normative epistemology**, e.g. about the nature of epistemic justification or the status of various character traits as epistemic virtues. Consider, for another example, what Roger White (2007) calls "epistemic subjectivism": the view that "what I (epistemically) ought to believe depends on which epistemic rules I happen to adopt." (p. 117) Convention-relativism is orthogonal to this.

My formulation of convention-relativism is intentionally vague in referring to beliefs "about how things stand relative to" some value or values. (Above we spoke of "doing well vis-à-vis" some value.) This is compatible with a plurality of more specific ways of spelling out the content of the beliefs expressed in the various species of epistemic discourse. For example, you might opt for an **individualistic teleological account** of attributions of epistemic virtue, on which <x is an epistemic virtue> is true iff having x tends to promote one's share of accuracy. This might be adopted for other species of epistemic discourse, e.g. attributions of epistemic obligation: <S ought to believe that p> is true iff believing that p will promote S's share of accuracy. These formulations are rough and surely would need refinement. And there are myriad alternatives to these, even given the assumption that accuracy is the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic. For example, we might adopt a **social teleological account** on which e.g. <x is an epistemic virtue> is true iff having x tends to promote people's shares, in general, of accuracy. Or we might adopt an **intentional account** on which e.g. <x is an epistemic virtue> is true iff having x essentially requires desiring accuracy. If we drop our assumption that accuracy is the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic, even more options are available. Suppose that central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic is the following "evidentialist rule": "It is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence." We could then adopt a **rule-following account** on which e.g. <S ought to believe that p> is true iff S's believing that p is an instance of following the evidentialist rule.

We can compare epistemic discourse, on convention-relativist, with another case of normative discourse relative to a set of conventions: criticism relative to the rules of a

club. Suppose that Plantation Club rules strictly forbid the eating of peas with a spoon. The prohibition of eating peas with a spoon makes it possible to criticize people's behavior, relative to that rule. The sentence "It's wrong to eat peas with a spoon, relative to the rules of the Plantation Club" is true iff eating peas with a spoon is forbidden by the rules of the Plantation Club. The truth of this sentence is determined entirely by the conventional rules of the Plantation Club. The conventionalist says the same, mutatis mutandis, about epistemic discourse. The truth of the sentence "True belief is epistemically valuable," for example, is determined entirely by the conventional meaning of "epistemic." Saying that true belief is epistemically valuable, on the conventionalist view, is in this respect akin to saying that it's wrong to eat peas with a spoon, relative to the rules of the Plantation Club.

For this reason, convention-relativism about epistemic discourse jibes with anti-realism about epistemic normativity (§1). Critical domains are "insulated" and free from commitment to the "real" existence of the relevant values. To say that true belief is epistemically valuable is not to say anything about the worth of the central organizing value of the critical domain of the epistemic, just as to say that it's wrong to eat peas with a spoon, relative to the rules of the Plantation Club, is not to say anything about the worth of the Plantation Club's rule against eating peas with a spoon. However, convention-relativism about epistemic discourse is consistent with, and can explain, the fact that epistemic normativity is **inescapable**, in Philippa Foot's (1972) sense: both morality and etiquette "are inescapable in that behavior does not cease to offend against either morality or etiquette because the agent is indifferent to their purposes and to the disapproval he will incur by flouting them." (p. 311) Just as someone's eating peas with a spoon violates the rules of Plantation Club, regardless of her interests or desires, so someone can violate her "epistemic obligations" (for example), regardless of her interests or desires.[9]

As well, convention-relativism can explain the existence of disagreement in epistemic discourse. We might disagree, for example, about whether some character trait really does promote one's share of accuracy. Convention-relativism is not equivalent to a form of *speaker* relativism on which to say that some belief is epistemically justified is to say that it does well relative to the *speaker's* standards or values (or relative to what the *speaker* takes the central epistemic value(s) to be). Such a view would have trouble making sense of disagreement in epistemic discourse (cf. Chrisman 2007, p. 234). Convention-relativism posits an absolute, non-speaker-relative meaning of "epistemic," thus allowing for the possibility of disagreement. (This makes for another difference between convention-relativism and Boghossian's "epistemic relativism.") As well, it might be unclear what the rules of the Plantation Club are; we might disagree about that. Likewise, it might be unclear what the central organizing value or values of the critical domain of the epistemic are, and we might disagree about that – about the meaning of "epistemic." It might also be unclear how the central organizing values of a critical domain are to be weighted, and we might disagree about that. Finally, we might debate whether the rules of the Plantation Club ought to be changed, or whether we ought to adopt a new set of rules. Likewise for the meaning of "epistemic." But once we have established what the rules of the Plantation Club are, there is no further question of whether those are "really" the rules of the Plantation Club. Likewise, once we have established what the central organizing value (or values) of the critical domain of the epistemic are, there is no further question of whether those are "really" the epistemic values.

---

[9] This is the reason that teleological accounts of epistemic normativity fail (§1).

The comparison to club rules may suggest that epistemic discourse is capricious or arbitrary, and thus might suggest that epistemic discourse is somehow groundless and unjustified. But the comparison shouldn't put us off: the Plantation Club might have good reasons for adopting the rules that it does, including rules that may, in some important sense, be arbitrary. The conventionalist, in other words, is in no worse a position than any other anti-realist about epistemic normativity, when it comes to explaining the appropriateness of epistemic discourse (cf. §2.1). Alternatively, she might offer something more modest. Consider, again, the rules of the Plantation Club. Why follow these rules? One might appeal to the benefits of membership and to the fact that following these rules is necessary to remain a member. But one might also simply say that these are the rules that we members of the Plantation Club choose to follow. Why not eat peas with a spoon? Because it disgusts us, or offends us, or pains us, to see peas eaten with a spoon – or because we simply don't like it. The same might explain the appropriateness of epistemic evaluation, as Fred Dretske (2000) argues:

> The only *fault* with fallacious reasoning, the only thing *wrong* or *bad* about mistaken judgments, is that, generally speaking, we don't like them. […] This … leaves the normativity of false belief and fallacious reasoning in the same place as the normativity of foul weather and bad table manners – in the attitudes, purposes, and beliefs of the people who make judgments about the weather and table behavior. (p. 248)

So much for the articulation of convention-relativism about epistemic discourse. Why adopt the view?

3   In defense of convention-relativism

In this section I present an argument for convention-relativism (§3.1), offer an account of the apparent normativity of epistemic discourse (§3.2), and discuss two objections to my argument (§3.3 and §3.4).

3.1   The reverse open question argument

You might think that epistemic discourse not only appears normative, as I said above, but *is* normative. As Hartry Field (2009) argues:

> In an evaluative claim … one doesn't intend to be making a claim about a specific norm … [A] claim about what is *justified according to a specific norm* would be straightforwardly factual, with no evaluative force. (It would encourage the Moore-like response "Sure that's justified *according to that norm*; but is it justified?") (pp. 251-2; cf. Gibbard 2003, p. 33, and Blackburn 1998, pp. 69-70)

And you might go on to argue that convention-relativism entails that epistemic discourse is *not* normative. Convention-relativism (§2.2) seems to treat epistemic discourse as involving the utterance of "straightforwardly factual" sentences[10] about how things stand relative to a conventional value (or set of values). To say that it's wrong to eat peas with a spoon, relative to the rules of the Plantation Club, isn't to say that it really is wrong to

---

[10] That is to say, it treats epistemic discourse as involving the utterance of sentences that are "straightforwardly factual" according to the correct semantic account of them, the truth of which account may not be straightforward.

eat peas with a spoon, and, for the convention-relativist, to say that true belief is epistemically valuable (for example) isn't to say that true belief really is valuable.[11]

Field (op. cit.) suggests that the claim that x is justified according to a specific norm is *not* normative if it invites – allows the coherent articulation of – the question of whether x really is justified. There is a **normative question** – whether x really is justified – associated with the would-be normative claim – that x is justified according to a specific norm – such that the claim is a genuine **normative claim** only if it does not allow the coherent articulation of the corresponding normative question. We can adapt this criterion of normativity (for claims) to our three species of epistemic discourse:

i. The claim that x is a epistemic virtue is normative only if it does not allow the coherent articulation of the question of whether x really is a virtue.
ii. The claim that x is epistemically valuable is normative only if it does not allow the coherent articulation of the question of whether x really is valuable.
iii. The claim that S epistemically ought to believe that p is normative only if it does not allow the coherent articulation of the question of whether S really ought to believe that p.

And let's assume that epistemic discourse is **normative** only if these three types of claims are normative. We now must consider two questions: First, does convention-relativism imply that epistemic discourse is not normative? And, second, is epistemic discourse normative?

As I have suggested, it seems that the answer to the first question is Yes. It is perfectly coherent to say that it is wrong to eat peas with a spoon, relative to the rules of the Plantation Club, and go on to ask whether it really is wrong. If epistemic discourse is akin to criticism relative to the rules of the Plantation Club, then epistemic discourse is not normative.

What about the second question? Is epistemic discourse normative? I think not (cf. Fumerton 2001). The reason is that instances of our three species of epistemic discourse *do* allow the coherent articulation of the corresponding normative question – epistemic discourse leaves the relevant normative questions open. For example: we can grant that openmindedness is an *epistemic* virtue, and still coherently ask whether openmindedness really is a virtue; we can grant that true belief is *epistemically* valuable, and still coherently ask whether true belief really is valuable; and we can grant that one *epistemically* ought to cleave to one's evidence, and still coherently ask whether one really ought to cleave to one's evidence.

There are two kinds of situations in which these questions can coherently be asked. The first kind of situation is one in which we question the value of accuracy in general. Consider Gary, who is an "anti-epistemologist" (cf. Railton 1997, pp. 54-59): he is completely indifferent to accuracy – he does not care about true belief, knowledge, understanding, etc. He admits that accuracy is what epistemologists treat as a central organizing value. But he is completely indifferent to accuracy. He admits that openmindedness is an epistemic virtue, that true belief is epistemically valuable, and that one epistemically ought to cleave to one's evidence. But he still wonders: is openmindedness really a virtue? Is true belief really valuable? Is it really the case that

---

[11] Convention-relativism has this in common with the view suggested by Mike Ridge (2011) on which epistemic evaluation involves attributive uses of "good" and cognate expressions.

one ought to cleave to one's evidence? (Alternatively, we might appeal to the fact that I can ask whether epistemic rules or norms are legitimate rules or norms, whether they are rules or norms that are worthy of my allegiance, whether I ought to conform my conduct to these rules or norms, or not, etc.)[12]

The second kind of situation is one in which we question the value of accuracy in particular cases. Imagine that it is true that the number of grains of sand on the beach at Coney Island is even. Assuming that you find the question of the evenness of the number of grains of sand on the beach at Coney Island utterly uninteresting, you might wonder whether believing this true proposition would have any value, even though you concede that it would have some *epistemic* value, in virtue of being an instance of accuracy. Situations of this kind can also arise when believing as you epistemically ought would be disvaluable. Imagine that Andy has acquired strong, undefeated evidence that he will lose his upcoming tennis match with Roger Federer. He epistemically ought to believe that he will lose, but believing this seems disvaluable, given the fact that Andy needs confidence and self-belief to even stand a chance against Federer. It is coherent to wonder whether it is really the case that Andy ought, even pro tanto, to believe this proposition.

The upshot of all this is that sometimes accuracy seems, or seems like it may very well be, worthless. In such situations, it becomes coherent to ask the relevant normative question, even having conceded the corresponding claim of epistemic discourse. Therefore, epistemic discourse is not normative. Call this the **reverse open question argument**.

Is it coherent to see accuracy as worthless? For our purposes we need only show that it is coherent to ask whether accuracy is valuable. But this question can coherently be asked, by asking: Should I really care about accuracy? Is this really worthy of my pursuit? Is it, in other words, really good?

Compare Gibbard's (1990) critique of the "irrationalist," who thinks that in many cases the rational thing is not what is to be done. But "[t]he irrationalist cannot be what he thinks himself to be, for whatever he endorses he thereby thinks rational." (pp. 48-9) Given this, "what is rational to believe settles what to believe." (p. 49) But this is not true of *epistemic* rationality: the question of what to believe is left open by a conclusion about the requirements of *epistemic* rationality. And this is because we can refrain from endorsing *epistemic* value (or *epistemic* rules or norms). We might put our point this way: we can coherently question the normative force of *epistemic* value (or of *epistemic* rules or norms).[13] "Epistemically good" and "epistemically ought" are different from words like "good" and "ought," *sans* qualification. There is an obvious sense in which it is incoherent to ask whether the good really is good, or whether one really ought to do what one ought to do. This provides at least one sense in which good-talk and ought-talk is normative. But this doesn't apply, mutatis mutandis, to epistemic discourse. Words like "good" and "ought" have normative and non-normative uses. Consider the *good assassin* (cf. Sosa 2007, Ridge 2011): I can grant that someone is a good assassin, while coherently questioning whether she is good. To say that someone is a good

---

[12] N.b. that the argument here assumes that epistemic normativity is inescapable (§3.1).

[13] What about moral normativity? Can we coherently question the normative force of moral value, or of moral rules or norms? I leave this question open, but I think there is an important difference between "epistemic" and "moral": the former is a piece of philosophical jargon, while the latter is part of ordinary language (cf. §2.2).

assassin is just to say that she is a dispassionate and effective killer; we can coherently question the value of being a dispassionate and effective killer. Consider *legal obligation*: I can grant that Φing is required by law, while coherently questioning whether I ought to Φ. To say that something is legally obligatory is just to say that it is what the statues require; we can legitimacy challenge those requirements.[14]

3.2   Explaining the apparent normativity of epistemic discourse

Gibbard (1990) argues that there is a "special element that makes normative thought and language normative," namely, the fact that such thought and language "involves a kind of endorsement – and endorsement that any descriptivistic analysis treats inadequately." (p. 33; cf. Blackburn 1998, pp. 69-70) I have just argued that epistemic discourse is not normative (§3.1), but I said about that it appears normative. What explains the appearance? On my view, epistemic discourse sometimes, but not always involves endorsement – it sometimes, but not always, involves the expression of non-cognitive attitudes. That it does explains why epistemic discourse seems normative: we mistake a common feature of epistemic discourse for an essential property. The convention-relativist account is therefore incomplete until I can explain how, and in what way, epistemic discourse sometimes involves the expression of non-cognitive attitudes.

On my view, the expression of non-cognitive attitudes in epistemic discourse is down to pragmatic features of some uses of the sentences involved in epistemic discourse. This contrasts with the expressivist view (§2.1) that such expression is down to semantic features of those sentences, i.e. their conventional meanings. For the expressivist, the normativity of epistemic discourse it is down to (semantic) facts about the conventional meaning of the relevant *sentences*; on my view it is down to (pragmatic) facts about some *uses* of those sentences. Utterances are normative, on my view, not in virtue of the meaning of the words or sentences uttered, as on expressivism, but in virtue of pragmatic facts about the use of those words or sentences.

Consider utterances of <S epistemically ought not believe that p>. On my proposal, utterances of this sentence will sometimes express criticism of S's belief. When they do, this will be a matter of **conversational implicature**. Suppose it is common ground in our conversational context that you and your interlocutors endorse, or value, or are simply interested in accuracy (e.g. true belief), and you sincerely utter <S epistemically ought not believe that p>. On the (mutual) assumption that you are being cooperative, and in particular on the (mutual) assumption that you are trying to make your contribution to our conversation relevant, I can deduce that you intend to express criticism of S's belief – because the claim that S epistemically ought not believe that p is a claim about how S's belief stands relative to accuracy (§2.2). Your utterance therefore expresses criticism of S's belief (cf. Fumerton 2001, p. 57). Compare now two conversations about Andy's belief that he will beat Federer:

---

[14] Consider popular theories of epistemic justification, like reliabilism, evidentialism, and coherentism. We can coherently ask whether reliably-formed beliefs, or evidentially well-founded beliefs, or belief that coheres with a large body of other beliefs, really are justified. These theories of justification leave the corresponding normative question open. You might argue, following Moore's "open question argument," that this reveals the inadequacy of these theories. It seems to me that the opposite conclusion should be drawn: these are perfectly good epistemological theories; what we should conclude is that epistemic discourse isn't normative.

Gamblers: A pair of gamblers are discussing whether to bet against Federer. They are interested in, and only in, the truth about the question of whether Federer will lose. They wonder what tennis experts predict the outcome of the match will be. One notes: "Well, Andy believes that he will win. But he epistemically ought not believe that he'll win. So we shouldn't take his belief into account."

Commentators: A pair of tennis commentators are discussing the underdog's psychology. They assume Federer will win, and are only interested in the phenomenon of confidence and self-belief. One argues: "Sure, Andy epistemically ought not believe that he will win. But that's no mark against a belief in this situation. It's exactly the belief he should have, going into a match like this."

The gambler's utterance of "Andy epistemically ought not believe that he will win" expresses criticism of Andy's belief, but the commentator's utterance expresses no such criticism. Whenever it is common ground that the speakers endorse, or value, or are simply interested in accuracy, utterance of the sentences involved in epistemic discourse can involve expression of criticism. But when that is not common ground, no such criticism will be expressed.

The implication passes the so-called "tests" for conversational implicature. First, it is calculable: the second gambler can figure out that the first gambler's utterance expresses criticism of Andy's belief based on his knowledge of their shared purpose (finding out the truth about the outcome of the match) and tacit understanding of the cooperative principle. Second, it is non-detachable: the gambler could just as easily have criticized Andy's belief by saying that it was formed in an unreliable way or by saying that it goes against the evidence. Third, it is cancellable. That was the upshot of the reverse open question argument (§3.1).

Compare the debate over whether the expressive implications of moral discourse are a matter of conversational implicature. Stephen Finlay (2004, 2005) argues that attributions of moral goodness sometimes, but not always, express non-cognitive attitudes of approval. When they do, it is down to conversational implicature (2004, pp. 217-22, 2005). The all-important "test" of cancellability is passed by appeal to the amoralist, who indifferently attributes moral goodness (2004, p. 209, 2005, p. 15). The view I have proposed is the analogue of Finlay's view, transposed to the epistemic domain. Subjectivists, cognitivist realists, and expressivists about moral discourse, however, will all reject Finlay's account on the grounds that the normativity of moral discourse is down to (semantic) facts about the conventional meaning of the relevant sentences. In this connection, some argue that the expression of non-cognitive attitudes in moral discourse is down to *conventional implicature* (Barker 2000, Copp 2001). The convention-relativist about epistemic discourse can leave these questions about moral discourse open (cf. §3.1).

It is worth pointing out that this account of the expressive implications of epistemic discourse could be applied, mutatis mutandis, to the expressive implications of other species of conventional evaluation, such as evaluation relative to the rules of the Plantation Club (§2.2). Compare two conversations:

Caught in the act: The President of the Plantation Club looms over an offending diner and says, gravely, "Club rules forbid eating peas with a spoon."

Rebellion: Wooster tells the diner: "Club rules forbid eating peas with a
spoon, but damn the rules, do it anyway!"

The President expresses disapproval of the diner's behavior; Wooster expresses no such
disapproval. The President is criticizing the diner, while Wooster is encouraging her.
The difference is down to conversational implicature: I know that the President loathes
violations of the rules of the Plantation Club, and so can deduce that she is trying to
admonish the diner, while Wooster's utterance amounts to an explicit cancellation of any
such implication. All this, despite the fact that "Club rules forbid eating peas with a
spoon" is uncontroversially non-normative.

3.3   Objection: the epistemic as the doxastic

My argument assumes what we can call an **axial conception** of the epistemic, where the
epistemic is characterized in terms of a certain value or values – above (§2.2), I suggested
accuracy. The assumption of such a conception seems needed to advance the reverse
open question argument (§3.1) – it is what allows the coherent articulation, for example,
of the question of whether what one epistemically ought to believe is what one really
ought to believe. This conception jibes with epistemologists' use of such expressions as
"epistemic justification" where this is standardly contrasted with "prudential
justification."[15] On the axial conception, the epistemic essentially contrasts with the
prudential, the moral, and the aesthetic. You might object that this conception of the
epistemic is illegitimate, and offer a **doxastic conception** of the epistemic, where
"epistemic" is understood as synonymous with "doxastic" (meaning "of or concerning
belief"), "intellectual," or "theoretical." This conception jibes with certain uses of
"epistemic" in philosophy, such as "epistemic agency," and with the idea that the
epistemic essentially contrasts with practical. The doxastic conception of the epistemic is
a natural assumption for those realists about epistemic normativity who appeal to the
normativity of belief. For them, epistemic norms and values can be understood as
norms and values that flow from the essential nature of belief. Above I set that view
aside by appeal to philosophical naturalism (§1).[16]

It seems to me that, if we adopt the doxastic conception of the epistemic, then the
reverse open question argument is unsound. Consider the thought (cf. §3.1): "Andy
epistemically ought to believe that p. But is it really the case that he ought to believe that
p?" If "epistemic" means the same as "doxastic," then it seems that there can be no
distinction between what someone epistemically ought to believe and what she ought to
believe. When we are considering what someone ought to *believe*, we are already
considering matters "of or concerning belief," and so the addition of "epistemically"
would be redundant, if "epistemic" means the same as "doxastic." The same, mutatis

---

[15] Characterizing the epistemic in terms of accuracy also has an etymological virtue:
"ἐπιστήμη" is best translated with "knowledge" or "understanding."

[16] There is a way to make the normativity of belief jibe with philosophical naturalism: by
adopting an anti-realist account of belief attribution (Dennett 1989, Shah and Velleman
2005, p. 510). Naturalism loathes categorical normativity, and the normativity of belief,
we assumed, implies the existence of categorical normativity, wherever belief is to be
found. But if belief is not to be found anywhere, then no categorical normativity is
implied. And an anti-realist account of belief attribution implies that belief is not to be
found anywhere: whether something is to be called a "belief" is not ultimately a factual
matter, but a matter of the attitude one adopts towards it. I have tacitly assumed realism
about belief here.

mutandis, when it comes to the distinction between what is epistemically valuable and what is valuable – or, at least, when it comes to the distinction between a *belief's* being epistemically valuable and that belief's being valuable. The matter is a bit more complex when it comes to the notion of an epistemic virtue. We do, I think, have a notion of an "intellectual virtue" where this means, roughly, a "virtue of the mind." **Intellectual virtues**, in this sense, are to be contrasted with practical virtues: the former are character traits having essentially to do with how one *thinks*; the latter are character traits having essentially to do with how one *acts*. Now it seems to me that this distinction is problematic: paradigm practical virtues involve thought (e.g. the courageous person is aware of the dangers she faces), and paradigm intellectual virtues involve action (e.g. the openminded person will allow other people to have their say in conversation). But we can set that issue aside: the doxastic conception of the epistemic yields a coherent notion of the epistemic virtues as "virtues of the mind." But this is not the same notion of the epistemic virtues that we would get were we to assume an axial conception of the epistemic, e.g. on which the epistemic is characterized in terms of accuracy. That would yield a notion of the **epistemic virtues** as (say) those character traits conducive to accuracy (cf. §2.2). And to assume a priori that "virtues of the mind" are necessarily character traits conducive to cognitive contact with reality is to illegitimately conflate two different conceptions of the epistemic. In any event, we can see that the assumption of the doxastic conception of the epistemic undermines the distinction between an epistemic virtue, i.e. a "virtue of the mind," and a virtue: for a virtue of the mind is ipso facto a virtue. And so the reverse open question argument is unsound, if we adopt the doxastic conception.

There is no disagreement between the doxastic conception of the epistemic and an axial conception – these are just two different sense of "epistemic." But the doxastic conception has some curious consequences. Imagine that Andy believes, against his evidence, that he will beat Federer, providing him with much-needed confidence. Intuitively, there is some sense in which this is a good belief. But it seems that the doxastic conception implies that this belief is therefore *epistemically* good – since we are talking about the goodness of a *belief*. But this is counterintuitive: a belief formed in the face of strong, undefeated contrary evidence is not *epistemically* good, even if it is (say) prudentially good. Beliefs can be good without being *epistemically* good. This suggests that there is a coherent distinction between an epistemically valuable belief and a valuable belief, and between what one epistemically ought to believe and what one ought to believe, and between an epistemic virtue and a virtue. An axial conception of the epistemic can capture these distinctions; it seems to me that the doxastic conception cannot.[17]

3.4   Objection: epistemic discourse and the reactive attitudes

Epistemic discourse (§1) seems sometimes to involve reactive attitudes. Epistemologists sometimes speak of "epistemic praise" and "epistemic blame." The careful reasoner and the honest inquirer sometimes inspire our praise and admiration, while the sloppy reasoner and the wishful thinker sometimes inspire our blame and contempt. If epistemic discourse in akin to evaluation relative to the conventional rules of the Plantation Club (§3.1), how can these reactive attitudes be justified? This is unproblematic when the subject of our reactive attitudes is someone who endorses or values accuracy: we praise her for getting what she wanted, and blame her for failing to

---

[17] My argument here is (especially) controversial. For more on these issues, see Hieronymi 2005, Shah 2006, Reisner 2008, 2009.

get what she wanted. But what about the case in which the subject of our reactive attitudes does not endorse or value accuracy?

As Bernard Williams (1995) notes, an internalist about practical reasons faces a similar challenge. To blame S for Φing seems to require thinking that S had reason to Φ (p. 41). But consider now a man who is a "very hard case": he treats his wife badly, and in response to our criticism ("you ought to be nicer to your wife," "you have a reason to be nicer to her, namely, that she's your wife") he responds with indifference ("Don't you understand? I really do not care"). He has no internal reason to be nicer to his wife, and if all reasons are internal reasons (as the internalist claims), then he has no reason to be nicer to his wife. Blaming him for his cruelty, therefore, seems inappropriate, given our assumption connecting blame and reasons for action. Williams articulates two possible lines of response for the internalist. The first appeals to the idea that blame is a "proleptic mechanism" (p. 44), such that hard cases may have "a motivation to avoid the disapproval of other people," as part of "a general desire to be ethically well related to people they respect." In virtue of this:

> [T]he expression of blame serves to indicate the fact that in virtue of this, they have a reason to avoid those things they did not have enough reason to avoid up to now. (p. 41)

In blaming the hard case:

> Our thought may … be this: if he were to deliberate again and take into consideration all the reasons that might now come more vividly before him, we hope he would come to a different conclusion. (p. 42)

And among his reasons for coming to this different conclusion might be "this very blame and the concerns expressed in it." (Ibid.) The conventionalist about epistemic discourse can say something similar about those cases in which epistemic evaluation involves reactive attitudes. When I blame David for believing that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, I express my hope that he will proceed with more intellectual caution in the future, and aim ideally to bring this about, in part, through David's recognition of my disapprobation. Epistemic blame, I propose, can be understood as a "proleptic mechanism": the expression of disapprobation aimed at epistemically improving the offender, through her recognition of said disapprobation. Epistemic blame could serve this proleptic function even when it comes to an *epistemic* "hard case" – i.e. Gary, the anti-epistemologist (§3.1). Although he is indifferent to accuracy, he might not be indifferent to ethical recognition and approval, and might be brought into the epistemic fold, so to speak, in response to our blame.

But what if the anti-epistemologist is indifferent not only to accuracy, but to ethical recognition and approval as well? What if she lacks "any general disposition to respect the reactions of other others" (p. 43)? In this case, and this is Williams' second line of response, blame is once again problematic for the internalist. But this is as it should be: such people we "regard as hopeless or dangerous characters rather than thinking that blame is appropriate to them." (p. 43) And this applies for "epistemic blame" as well. The sociopathic anti-epistemologist is not a suitable object for the reactive attitudes; she deserves pity, perhaps, but not blame. Nonetheless, if she fails to cleave to the evidence, then she violates her epistemic obligations. The reactive attitudes are not required for

epistemic discourse – this is predicted by convention-relativism, and that convention-relativism predicts this speaks in its favor.[18]

4   Conclusion

I have motivated anti-realism about epistemic normativity by appeal to philosophical naturalism (§1), articulated convention-relativism about epistemic discourse (§2), and defended convention-relativism (§3). The upshot of my argument is that we can concede (for example) that openmindedness is an epistemic virtue, that true belief is epistemically valuable, and that one epistemically ought to cleave to one's evidence, while leaving the following normative questions open:

    i.   Is openmindedness a virtue?
    ii.   Is true belief valuable?[19]
    iii.   Ought one cleave to one's evidence?

These are difficult normative questions. If convention-relativism about epistemic discourse is correct, then we are ill-served by focusing on the "epistemic" analogues of these questions, at least until we have an adequate answer to the question of the value of accuracy.**[20]**

Bibliography

Baril, A. (2010), "A Eudaimonist Approach to the Problem of Significance," *Acta Analytica* 25:2, 215-41.

Barker, S. (2000), "Is Value Content a Component of Conventional Implicature?," *Analysis* 60:3, pp. 268-79.

Blackburn, S. (1998), *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford University Press).

Boghossian, P. (2003), "The Normativity of Content," *Philosophical Issues* 13, pp. 31-45.

----- (2005), "Is Meaning Normative?," in Nimtz and Beckermann (eds.), *Philosophy - Science - Scientific Philosophy* (Mentis), pp. 205-18.

----- (2006), *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford University Press).

Chrisman, M. (2007), "From Epistemic Contextualism to Epistemic Expressivism," *Philosophical Studies* 135, pp. 225-54.

----- (2011), "From Epistemic Expressivism to Epistemic Infernentialism," in A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard (eds.), *Social Epistemology* (Oxford University Press), pp. 112-28.

---

[18] Cf. Fumerton (2001): there is no "*conceptual* connection between judging of a belief that it is epistemically irrational and criticizing the belief," for we can "imagine societies in which one values a kind of irrationality." (p. 57)

[19] This question is the topic of Hazlett 2013.

[20] Thanks to Matthew Chrisman and Guy Fletcher for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

Copp, D. (2001), "Realist-Expressivism: A Neglected Option for Moral Realism," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18:2, pp. 1-43.

Craig, E. (1990), *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (Oxford University Press).

Cuneo, T. (2007), *The Normative Web* (Oxford University Press).

Dennett, D. (1989), *The Intentional Stance* (MIT Press).

Dogramaci, S. (forthcoming), "Reverse Engineering Epistemic Evaluations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Dretske, F. (2000), "Norms, History, and the Constitution of the Mental," in his *Perception, Knowledge, and Belief* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 242-58.

Drier, J. (2001), "Humean Doubts about Categorical Imperatives," in Millgram, E. (ed.), *Varieties of Practical Reasoning* (MIT Press), pp. 27-47.

Field, H. (2009), "Epistemology without Metaphysics," *Philosophical Studies* 143, pp. 249-90.

Finley, S. (2004), "The Conversational Practicality of Value Judgement," *The Journal of Ethics* 8:3, pp. 205-23.

----- (2005), "Value and Implicature," *Philosopher's Imprint* 5:4.

Foley, R. (1987), *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality* (Harvard University Press).

----- (1993), *Working Without a Net* (Oxford University Press).

Foot, P. (1972), "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives," *Philosophical Review* 81(3), pp. 305-16.

Fumerton, R. (2001), "Epistemic Justification and Normativity," in Steup, M. (ed.), *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility, and Virtue* (Oxford University Press), pp. 49-60.

Gibbard, A. (1990), *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Oxford University Press).

----- (2003), *Thinking How to Live* (Harvard University Press).

Goldman, A. (1999), *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford University Press).

Greco, J. (2010), *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (Oxford University Press).

Grimm, S.R. (2008), "Epistemic Goals and Epistemic Values," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77:3, pp. 725-44.

----- (2009), "Epistemic Normativity," in A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard (eds.), *Epistemic Value* (Oxford University Press), pp. 243-64.

Grimm, S., and Ahlstrom, C. (forthcoming), "Getting It Right," *Philosophical Studies.*

Hazlett, A. (2012), "Non-Moral Evil," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 36 (2012), pp. 18-34.

----- (2013), *A Luxury of the Understanding: On the Value of True Belief* (Oxford University Press).

----- (unpublished), "Limning Structure as an Epistemic Goal."

Hieronymi, P. (2005), "The Wrong Kind of Reason," *Journal of Philosophy* 102:9, pp. 437-57.

Johnston, M. (1996), "Is the External World Invisible?," *Philosophical Issues* 7, pp. 185-98.

Kalderon, M.E. (2009), "Epistemic Relativism," *Philosophical Review* 118:2, pp. 225-40.

Kappel, K. (2010), "Expressivism about Knowledge and the Value of Knowledge," *Acta Analytica* 25, pp. 175-94.

Kelly, T. (2003), "Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66:3, pp. 612-40.

Korsgaard, C.M. (1996), *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press).

Langton, R. (1998), *Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves* (Oxford University Press).

Lewis, D. (2008), "Ramseyan Humility," in Braddon-Mitchell, D., and Nola, R. (eds.), *Conceptual Analysis and Philosophical Naturalism* (MIT Press), pp. 203-21.

Lynch, M.P. (2009a), "The Values of Truth and the Truth of Values," in A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard (eds.), *Epistemic Value* (Oxford University Press), pp. 225-42.

----- (2009b), "Truth, Value, and Epistemic Expressivism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 79:1, pp. 76-97.

MacFarlane, J. (2005a), "Making Sense of Relative Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105:1, pp. 205-23.

----- (2005b), "The Assessment Sensitivity of Knowledge Attributions," *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* 1, pp. 197-233.

Nussbaum, M. (2001), *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge University Press).

Olson, J. (2011), "Error Theory and Reasons for Belief," in A. Reisner and A. Seglich-Petersen (eds.), *Reasons for Belief* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 75-93.

Owens, D. (2003), "Does Belief Have an Aim?," *Philosophical Studies* 115, pp. 283-305.

Papineau, D. (1999), "Normativity and Judgment," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 73, pp. 16-43.

Price, C. (2006), "Fearing Fluffy: The Content of an Emotional Appraisal," in Macdonald, G., and Papineau, D. (eds.) *Teleosemantics* (Oxford University Press), pp. 208-28.

Railton, P. (1997), "On the Hypothetical and Non-Hypothetical in Reasoning about Belief and Action," in G. Cullity and B. Gaut (eds.), *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford University Press), pp. 53-79.

Reisner, A. (2008), "Weighing Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons for Belief," *Philosophical Studies* 138, pp. 17-27.

----- (2009), "The Possibility of Pragmatic Reasons for Belief and the Wrong Kind of Reason Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 145:2, pp. 257-72.

Ridge, M. (2011), "Getting Lost on the Road to Larissa," *Noûs* 47(1), pp. 181-201.

Shah, N. (2003), "How Truth Governs Belief," *Philosophical Review* 112, pp. 447-82.

----- (2006), "A New Argument for Evidentialism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 56, pp. 481-98.

----- (2010), "Can Reasons for Belief be Debunked?," in A. Reisner and A. Seglich-Petersen (eds.), *Reasons for Belief* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 94-107.

Shah, N., and Velleman, J.D. (2005), "Doxastic Deliberation," *Philosophical Review* 114, pp. 497-534.

Sosa, E. (2003), "The Place of Truth in Epistemology," in M. DePaul and L. Zagzebski (eds.), *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford University Press), pp. 155-79.

----- (2007), *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume 1* (Oxford University Press).

----- (2009), "Knowing Full Well: The Normativity of Beliefs as Performances," *Philosophical Studies* 142, pp. 5-15.

Sider, T. (2009), "Ontological Realism," in D. Chalmers, D. Manley, and R. Wasserman (eds.), *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology* (Oxford University Press), pp. 384-423.

----- (2011), *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford University Press).

Steglich-Petersen, A. (2006), "No Norm Needed: On the Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Quarterly* 56, pp. 499-516.

----- (2009), "Weighing the Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Studies* 145:3, pp. 395-405.

----- (2011), "How to be a Teleologist about Epistmeic Reasons," in A. Reisner and A. Steglich-Petersen (eds.), *Reasons for Belief* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 13-33.

Strandberg, C. (2011), "A Dual Aspect Account of Moral Language," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84:1, pp. 87-122.

Treanor, N. (forthcoming), "The Measure of Knowledge," *Noûs*.

Wedgwood, R. (2002), "The Aim of Belief," *Philosophical Perspectives* 16, pp. 265-97.

White, R. (2007), "Epistemic Subjectivism," *Episteme* 4:1, pp. 115-29.

Williams, B. (1995), "Internal Reasons and The Obscurity of Blame," in B. Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press), pp. 35-45.

----- (2002), *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton University Press).

Zagzebski, L. (1996), *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press).

----- (2004), "Epistemic Value and the Primacy of What We Care About," *Philosophical Papers* 33:3, pp. 353-77.