

Beliefs own metaethics? A case against epistemic normativity

Epistemology is widely seen as a *normative* discipline like ethics. Just like moral facts, epistemic facts – i.e. facts about our beliefs' epistemic justification, rationality, reasonableness, correctness, warrant, and the like – are standardly viewed as *normative* facts. Yet, whereas many philosophers have rejected the existence of moral facts, few have raised similar doubts about the existence of epistemic facts.

In recent years however, several metaethicists and epistemologists have rejected this Janus-faced or *dual* stance towards the existence of moral and epistemic facts. As recent developments in metaethics and normativity theory have made clear, metaethical objections to moral realism really are *metanormative* objections that target the existence of normative facts more generally. But since epistemic facts are also normative facts, the argument goes, *epistemic realism* is equally threatened by metaethical objections.

In this dissertation, I argue that this rejection of the dual stance fails because *epistemology is not robustly normative*. Although epistemic facts and claims imply *norms*, they do not imply *genuine* or *robust* normativity since epistemic norms lack necessary or categorical normative authority. Unlike morality – and just like etiquette, games, or the law – there is not automatically a normative reason to conform to epistemic norms. Therefore, even if metaethical objections target all normative facts, it does not follow that they also target epistemic facts. I offer a two-part *abductive* argument for that conclusion.

First, I argue that epistemic facts and claims lack five commonly cited marks of normativity, i.e. five features that merely norm-implicating facts and claims lack, but which are commonly associated with robust normativity. These features are (i) a necessary connection with *value*, (ii) a necessary connection with *desire*, (iii) a necessary *autonomy* from non-normative facts, (iv) a necessary connection with *motivation*, and (v) a necessary connection with *control*. That is, I argue that it is not necessarily *good* to conform to epistemic norms, that conforming to epistemic norms does not necessarily promote one's *desires*, that epistemic claims are not necessarily *autonomous* from non-normative claims, that epistemic judgments are not necessarily *motivating*, and that epistemic claims do not necessarily imply 'can' or *control*.

Then, in part II, I argue that the *best explanation* of the conclusions of part I is that epistemic facts and claims are merely norm-implicating and not robustly normative. That is, the best explanation of the fact that epistemic facts and claims do not bear the five commonly cited marks of normativity is simply that *epistemology is not genuinely normative the first place*. First, I clarify both this explanation and the rival explanation that proponents of Epistemic Normativity must give. I argue that given what I argue in part I, proponents of Epistemic Normativity can only explain part I via what I call *Normative Pluralism* (epistemology does not bear the marks of normativity because there is a plurality of kinds of normativity and the epistemic kind of normativity lacks these five features). Then, I evaluate these two explanations according to commonly invoked explanatory virtues or criteria. I argue that compared to Normative Pluralism, my hypothesis (i) postulates the existence of fewer kinds of entities, (ii) postulates fewer individual entities, (iii) is no less elegant or straightforward, (iv) raises fewer additional (difficult) explanatory questions, (v) posits no more primitive explanatory notions, (vi) explains just as many phenomena, (vii) is more illuminating, (viii) is more coherent with widely accepted theories, (ix) is no less intrinsically plausible, and (x) has fewer ad hoc elements.

Since my hypothesis best explains the relevant data, I conclude that, in all likelihood, epistemology is not robustly normative. Epistemic facts and claims are best seen not as genuinely normative, but rather as merely norm-implicating.