# DAVIDSON ON EPISTEMIC NORMS

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*Summary*

   *Davidson's philosophy can, in an important sense, be characterised as a form of normativism, the view that the mind has essential normative properties. But what is exactly the form of normativism that Davidson defends? In the first place, the norms of the mental, which are the norms of rationality in interpretation, do not have any normative force: they do not have any power of prescribing us how we ought to act or to believe. In the second place they lack specificity: they do not allow us to make the distinctions that we need. I try to suggest a stronger and more fine grained conception of epistemic norms.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION: NORMS EPISTEMIC AND OTHERS

   *Prima facie* at least, there are, in addition to practical norms, about how we ought to act, *epistemic norms*, in the sense of correctness conditions for our beliefs such as the following: a belief is correct if and only if it true, one ought to believe only what is based on appropriate evidence or justification, one ought to believe what follows from one's beliefs, a belief is rational if it is coherent with certain logical principles, and so on and so forth. There are disputes about how many such norms there are and about the proper formulation of these principles (do they have to contain "oughts" and explicit prescriptions or do they involve only permissions?) and about their connections to other notions, such as the notion of *value* (is believing correctly a matter of believing what one *ought* to believe, or a matter of what is *good* to believe?) or the notion of *reason* (some philosophers claim that they are irreducible to other principles, others

claim that they are reducible to the more fundamental notion of reason). These are, again *prima facie*, distinct from practical norms, norms about the way we should act or about what we ought to do, just as practical reasons for doing things are not the same as reasons for believing things. Philosophers disagree about the relationship between epistemic norms and practical norms, epistemic and practical reasons. Pragmatists, for instance, want to say that the latter can override the former, perhaps that one can reduce the former to the latter. Some philosophers just deny that there are any such norms – they deny, for instance, that there are general conditions under which a belief is correct, or that there is something, truth, to which our beliefs should "aim at". Other philosophers accept their existence but want to reduce these norms to other properties, such as values, or interests, and claim to have naturalistic analysis of them.

In one sense, to specify what the epistemic norms are is to specify in what sense beliefs are justified, at least in the sense in which stating that a belief respects a certain norm appropriate to it  is a way of justifying the belief[1]. And in so far as knowledge is justified true belief, a theory of epistemic norms  belongs to a theory of knowledge or to epistemology. But we can also understand the task of analysing the nature of epistemic norms as a more general kind of inquiry, which would tell what kind of norms a correct theory of knowledge should satisfy. In this sense, for instance, the choice between a theory according to which knowledge should be defined as a form of internalist justification and a theory according to which knowledge should be defined in an externalist way as reliability is a choice between two distinct conceptions of epistemic norms. Or the question whether an epistemology should depend upon a foundationalist or a coherentist conception of justification is matter of confronting two kinds of epistemic norms. We can call

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[1]  Although to say that a belief is justified, or that there are reasons for holding it is not the say thing as saying that it obeys certain norms. See Engel to appear.

this more general kind of inquiry not epistemology proper, but *meta-epistemology*. Meta-epistemology would be to epistemology what meta-ethics is to ethics.

In this respect we can raise for epistemic norms some questions which are comparable to those that meta-ethicists raise about moral norms, and in particular the following.

a) *Their nature*. What are the norms ? how to specify them ? as statements about reasons? as rules?  As commitments ? as permissions ? as prescriptions and imperatives?  imperatives of what sort? Hypothetical ? categorical ? ( see in particular Skorupski 1990, Broome 2000, Millar 2005)

b) *Their regulation*. How are they applied to particular cases? How are they followed, or, to use a generic term to designate their conditions of application, how do they *regulate* our beliefs and our epistemic practices? (see in particular Velleman 2000, Shah 2003)

c) *Their hierarchy*. What justifies them? Which ones are more basic, which ones are derived? For instance is truth more basic than justification or coherence for beliefs?

d) *Their ontology*. Are they genuine properties of our beliefs? Are they essential to the nature of our beliefs? Are they real (the object of cognitive attitudes) or only the product of our psychological attitudes (in the non cognitivist sense)? How to place them within the natural and causal order? (Blackburn 1998, Jackson 1998)

In this article, I would like to explain how Davidson deals with such questions about epistemic norms[2]. I shall first describe Davidson's views about mental norms and his form of normativism, the view that norms are in some sense essential to the mind[3], and explain why these norms are, in a sense, no norms at all, but idealised principles of interpretation. I shall raise some difficulties for Davidson's version of normativism, and try to suggest a better version.

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[2] In the past I have already tried to deal with such questions, often in papers to which Davidson himself gave a reply ( Engel 1998, Engel 2000, Davidson 1998, Davidson 2000). It is his strong disagreement with my interpretation of his views about the normativity of the mental  and with my our conception of it which prompts me to try again here. Sadly, he is not here any more to reply, but I hope to have been, at least in the interpretive part of this article, more faithful to his views than he thought  I was before.

[3] This label is used, as far as I know, by Wedgewood 2007 ; Zangwill 2005 talks of "normative essentialism"

## 2. DAVIDSON ON MENTAL NORMS

There is a lot, in Davidson's writings, about the nature of norms of rationality and about normativity in general, both practical and theoretical, but he never addresses the questions a)-d) above directly. In order to understand his approach, we can take our starting point from his essay "Three Varieties of Knowledge" (Davidson 1991). There he distinguishes three sorts of knowledge: knowledge of the world, knowledge of our own minds, knowledge of other minds. Davidson's discussion of norms and normativity occurs mainly in the first and in the third kind of context : knowledge of the world or epistemology, for instance when he discusses empirical content and the coherence theory of knowledge and scepticism (Davidson 1985) , and knowledge of other minds in the context of his theory of interpretation. The distinctiveness of his approach, however, consists in the fact that he does not discuss these issues separately, but within his theory of interpretation. The third and the first sort of knowledge are intrinsically connected, since the conditions of our interpretation of others' beliefs are the general conditions of interpretation of belief as a candidate to knowledge. According to his famous slogan, interpretation is "epistemology seen in the mirror of meaning " (Davidson 1975). It is in the context of interpreting others that the question of the nature of epistemic norms arises. For Davidson, however, there is no point in distinguishing various kinds of norms. There are general norms of rationality which make interpretation possible, which are also "norms of the mental" because having a mind is being susceptible to be interpreted. Davidson thus defends a form of *normativism*, understood as the view that the mind is essentially normative and mental contents cannot be specified without mentioning normative conditions:

"If we are intelligibly to attribute attitudes and beliefs, or usefully to describe motions as behaviour, then we are committed to finding, in the pattern of behaviour, belief, and desire, a large degree or rationality and consistency" (1980: 236-7)

The argument for anomalous monism rests in part upon normativism. One of the main reasons why there are no strict psychological laws and no psychophysical laws is that the norms of rationality that we have to use in interpretation have no « echo » in physical theory (Davidson 1970). Normativism is also the basis for two other central doctrines of Davidson's philosophy, externalism and holism:

"What I think is certain is that holism, externalism, and the normative feature of the mental stand or fall together. …There can be not serious science of the mental. I believe the normative, holistic, and externalist elements in psychological concepts cannot be eliminated without radically changing the subject." (Davidson 1996)

Now, what are exactly the norms of rationality or principles of interpretation which are held to be constitutive of our understanding of the mind? There is, in the first place, *a principle of Coherence*, which prompts the interpreter to discover a degree of logical consistency in the thought and in the actions of the speaker. Here the principles are the principles of logic for belief, and the basic principles of decision theory for actions ( Davidson 1980). In the second place, there is *the Principle of Correspondence*, which prompts the interpreter to take the speaker to be responding to the same features of the world that he (the interpreter) would be responding to under similar circumstances. Both principles can be (and have been) called principles of charity: one principle endows the speaker with a modicum of logic, the other endows him with a degree of what the interpreter takes to be true belief about the world. In this sense successful interpretation necessarily invests the person interpreted with basic rationality. It follows from the nature of correct interpretation that an interpersonal standard of consistency and correspondence

to the facts applies to both the speaker and the speaker's interpreter, to their utterances and to their beliefs (Davidson 1991). As we shall see, these two kinds of principles operate at a very general level, since they do tell us how we can use these principles in particular cases.

Sometimes, however, Davidson is a little bit more specific. It is the case when he talks about the role of the *Principle of total evidence*, which is one of the best candidates for being an epistemic norm for beliefs. The principle of evidence is the relatively uncontroversial principle that belief should be based on appropriate evidence, and that the formation of belief should be regulated by the best total evidence available. Davidson describes it in the context of his analysis of the irrationality of weakness of the will and of self-deception:

"Weakness of the will is analogous to a certain cognitive error, which I shall call *weakness of the warrant*. Weakness of the warrant can occur only when a person has evidence both for and against a hypothesis; the person judges that relative to all the evidence available to him, the hypothesis is more probable than not; yet he does not accept the hypothesis (or the strength of his belief in the hypothesis is less than the strength of his belief in the negation of the hypothesis). The normative principle against which such a person has sinned is what Hempel and Carnap have called *the requirement of total evidence for inductive reasoning*: when we are deciding among a set of mutually exclusive hypotheses, this requirement enjoins us to give credence to the hypothesis most highly supported by all available relevant evidence. Weakness of the warrant obviously has the same logical structure (or, better, illogical structure) as weakness of the will; the former involves an irrational belief in the face of conflicting evidence, the latter an irrational intention (and perhaps also action) in the face of conflicting values." (Davidson 1986)

But although in this case Davidson gives us an account of how this norm is violated and how its violation produces irrational behaviour, most of the time his characterisation of rationality is very general in the sense that he does not give us any theory about the *application* of rational principles. And there is a good reason why it is so. A number of interprets of Davidson (in particular Wiggins 1987, Mc Dowell 1986, Child 1992) have derived form his work the thesis of the *uncodifiability of rationality*, which Child, for instance, describes thus:

"There is no fixed set of rule or principles from which, together with a statement of the circumstances of any particular case, we could deductively derive a complete, detailed specification of what one ought to do or think in that case. Since the norms of rationality are the principles governing the interpretation of a subject's words and attitudes, we could express the same point about the uncodifiability of rationality as a point about interpretation: there is no definite set of rules or principles for arriving at the best interpretation of an agent. When we interpret others, we strive to make sense of them: in doing so we draw on our own conception of rationality to form judgments in each particular case; and we can draw on those resources without limit. So, in describing and applying our conception of rationality, there is no stage at which we can say that the canons of rationality have been exhaustively enumerated, that there is nothing more to add." (Child 1992)

If rationality is uncodifiable, not only there is no privileged set of principles which have to be invoked in any case of individual interpretation, but also there cannot be any theory of how these principles have to be applied to specific cases. It would be absurd, for instance, to try to draw a list of the kinds of norms that we have use in a specific case, or to try to converge on certain norms. It is enough to say that there are certain general principles of rationality:

"The issue is not whether we all agree on exactly what the norms of rationality are; the point is rather that we all have such norms, and that we cannot recognize as thought phenomena that are too far out of the line. Better say: what is too far out of line is not thought. It is only when we can see a creature (or 'object') as largely rational by our own lights that we can intelligibly ascribe thought to it at all, or explain its behaviour by reference to its ends and convictions. Anyone… when he ascribes thoughts to others, necessarily employs his own norms in making the ascriptions. There is no way he can check whether his norms are shared by someone else without first assuming that in large part they are; to the extent that he successfully interprets someone else, he will have discovered his own norms (nearly enough) in that person." (Davidson 1991)

The consequences of such an account of the norms of rationality are twofold. In the first place, as many critics ( e.g. Peacocke 1992 ) have noted, there is a risk of a certain amount of subjectivity in interpretation, in the sense that every interpretation of another's thought and action is irreducibly individual and contextual. In the second place, the uncodifiably of rationality means that the rational norms which are supposed to rule interpretation cannot give rise to any genuine prescription. Thus, the norm of coherence, which enjoins us to be consistent, cannot give rise to

any specific prescription except very general advices such as : "Be consistent", or : "Try to find consistency in another's belief". They do not tell how and why we have to be consistent in a given case. This is why, in particular, Davidson is so insistent in taking the principle of charity as a principle on maximisation of *understanding* rather than as a principle of maximisation of truth or of agreement. A direct consequence of this is that the norms of rationality, according to Davidson, are not *regulative*: they are not prescriptive and they do not give us rules about how to apply them.

In this sense, as Timothy Schroeder (2003) has well pointed out, the norms of rationality are not *normative*. Schroeder distinguishes usefully between two notions of norms[4]:

 (a) as categorisation or classification schemes , in the sense of general idealised principles of description

( b) as force makers, that is as prescriptions or governance principles giving us aims to follow.

For a norm to be genuinely "normative", it has to be capable not only of resting upon general principles in the sense of (a), but also of having a certain force to *move* us to something or to think something. Another condition of a genuine norm, emphasised in particular by Railton (1997) is that it should also give us the appropriate freedom *not to follow* it. Norms, at least for actions, are such that, even when they are imperative in the categorical sense, a subject can have the possibility of not following it. Even the moral *ought* or the categorical imperative in the Kantian sense cannot be a norm unless the subject can have the capacity of disobeying it. In other words, a norm which we have no other choice but to follow is not a norm at all. Such a "norm" may state a necessity, but if it is a law, it merely describes what there is, and does not prescribe where there ought to be. The laws of logic, for instance, in Davidson's sense, are not such that we

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[4] For a similar distinction see also my article Engel 1992, where I distinguish three senses of normativity : as idealised principles, as prescriptions, and as evaluative principles or values.

could have the possibility of not to follow them. The norms of rationality in the sense of general framework principles that any rational agent has to follow are not normative in this sense. They are descriptions of an idealised competence, but they do not tell us how to exercise this competence. And a theory of mind, such as Davidson's, based on normative principles of this sort , is not normative at all. For a theory of mind to be normative in the genuine, it is necessary that it make use of (a) a categorisation scheme for which there is some force-maker, and (b) the fact that the scheme has a force-maker. As Schroeder says, Davidson's theory of mind, although it invokes normative principles in sense (a) is not normative in the sense (b). The norms of rationality, to use Schroeder's phrase, do not have any "normative oomph".

To see in what sense Davidson's conception of normativity is only committed to the first sense (a) of norm as a categorisation scheme and not the second (b) as a force maker, it is useful to consider the analogy that he draws between the process of interpretation and the act of measuring length or other quantities:

"We may think of an interpreter who aims to understand a speaker as matching up sentences of his own with the utterances and states of mind of the speaker. The totality of evidence available to the interpreter determines no unique theory of truth for a given speaker, not just because actually available evidence is finite while the theory has an infinity of testable consequences, but because all possible evidence cannot limit acceptable theories to one. Given the richness of the structure represented by the set of one's own sentences, and the nature of the connections between the members of this set and the world, we should not be surprised if there are many ways of assigning our own sentences to the sentences and thoughts of someone else that capture everything of significance….

….The situation is analogous to the measurement of weight or temperature by assigning numbers to objects. Even supposing there are no errors of measurement, and that all possible observations have been made, an assignment of numbers to objects that correctly registers their weights is not unique: given one such assignment, another can be produced by multiplying all the numbers by any positive constant. In the case of ordinary temperature (not absolute temperature), any correct assignment of numbers can be converted to another by a linear transformation. Because there are many different but equally acceptable ways of interpreting an agent we may say, if we please, that interpretation or translation is indeterminate, or that there is no fact of the matter as to what someone means by his or her words. In the same vein, we could speak of the indeterminacy of weight or temperature. But we normally accentuate the positive by being clear about what is invariant from one assignment of numbers to another, for it is what is invariant that is empirically

significant. The invariant *is* the fact of the matter. We can afford to look at translation and the content of mental states in the same light." (Davidson 1991)

The analogy between norms and principles of measurement helps us to see why Davidson's notion of norm is the purely descriptive one (a) and not the prescriptive one (b). In this sense, as Schroeder points out, Davidson's theory of mind is not normative at all:

« His interest in rationality is thus an interest in it only insofar as it picks out a certain set of propositional attitude clusters (those which it would be fairly rational to hold) and distinguishes them from a different set of propositional- attitude clusters (those which it would be wildly irrational to hold). The fact that the patterns exhibited by the propositional attitudes of a rational organism are normatively commanded—that there exists a force-maker for the patterns—is of no significance in Davidson's theory. » (Schroeder 2003; see also Glüer 2000, Glüer and Wikforss 2007)

Let is now consider, in the light of this, Davidson's specific claims about epistemic norms, norms about belief and knowledge.  In  face of the familiar claim that truth is a norm of belief in the sense that the point or aim of belief is truth (Dummett 1959, Williams 1969, Engel 1998, 2000), Davidson is quite explicit that truth is not, for him, a norm at all: our beliefs are supposed to be true or false, but there is no norm of truth which our beliefs should follow:

« When we say we want our beliefs to be true, we could as well say we want to be certain that they are, that the evidence for them is overwhelming, that all subsequent (observed) events will bear them out, that everyone will come to agree with us. It makes no sense to ask for more. But I do not think it adds anything to say that truth is a goal, of science or anything else. We do not aim at truth but at honest justification. Truth is not, in my opinion, a norm » (Davidson 1998)

It could not even be said that our belief should follow an evidential norm, in the sense of the principle of total evidence mentioned above. That our beliefs "should" be based upon appropriate evidence is a framework requirement on belief, but it does not carry, for Davidson, any particular *ought* about belief, just as the fact that our beliefs "should" be true does not carry any particular *ought* for them, in the normative force sense.

Just as there are no genuine epistemic norms about belief for Davidson, there are no genuine norms in the ontological sense. As I mentioned in the introduction of this article, the ontology of norms is concerned with questions such as: are the norms real? Are they "out there"? Where to place them within nature ? Are they genuine properties of our beliefs? In order to understand Davidson's position on this point, we have to turn to his writings on the nature of moral values (see in particular Davidson 1985, 1995). The debate about moral values in meta-ethics is framed by the distinction between various kinds of realism about values (or of cognitivism) and various kinds of anti-realism (or non cognitivism). In his 1995 essay on the objectivity of values Davidson rejects this opposition. His stance is neither the anti-realist one that they are mere expressions of our psychological attitudes or feelings, nor the realist one that they are genuine features of the world. For Davidson values are "nowhere" to be found. His view, however, does not amount to Mackie's (1977) "irrealism" in the meta-ethical debate, according to which our ethical statements about values are all false. Our statements about values are susceptible to be true, and in this sense Davidson is a realist, but they are not true in virtue of any state of affairs in the world. They are true because they are objective, and their objectivity depends upon our shared beliefs :

"Objectivity depends not on the location of an attributed property, or its supposed conceptual tie to human sensibilities; it depends on there being a systematic relationship between the attitude-causing properties of things and events, and the attitudes they cause. What makes our judgments of the "descriptive" properties of things true or false is the fact that the same properties tend to cause the same beliefs in different observers, and when observers differ, we assume there is an explanation. This is not just a platitude, it's a tautology, one whose truth is ensured by how we interpret people's beliefs. My thesis is that the same holds for moral values. Before we can say that two people disagree about the worth of an action or an object, we must be sure it is the same action or object and the same aspects of those actions and objects that they have in mind. The considerations that prove the dispute genuine—the considerations that lead to correct interpretation—will also reveal the shared criteria that determine where the truth lies." (Davidson 1995)

Here again, objectivity is a by-product of the interpretive situation. The objectivity of values is a projection out of our shared beliefs about others and about ourselves:

" If, instead of asking  where values are, we turn to the problem of understanding what it is like to judge that an act or object or institution is morally desirable or ought to exist or is obligatory, we realize that we must be attributing some property or other to an entity or group of entities. The semantic nature of such judgments is clear: we are *classifying* one or more things as having a certain property. The thing or things must either have that property or not (assuming the things exist). How do we tell what the content of a particular moral judgment is? This is a question of interpretation, of the understanding by one person of the utterances of another, since there is no other context in which the content of a judgment can be agreed to or disputed. To take up the position of an interpreter is consciously to assume the status anyone with thoughts and attitudes must be in, for the attitudes of a person have a content—are interpretable—only if that person is in communication with others; only interpreters can be interpreted. Thus by explicitly introducing the interpreter we complete in microcosm the social situation which alone gives content to the idea of being right or wrong about a shared public world." (Davidson 1995)

If we now apply this conception of ethical and practical values to epistemic norms about belief, such as evidence and truth, what would be Davidson's position? To my knowledge he never addresses the question in this form, but it is reasonable to predict that he would hold, for instance about the "norm" (in sense (b) above) for belief that our beliefs are such that they are correct only if true, or about the "norm" that our beliefs should respect evidence, that these norms are objective not in the ontological sense, but in the sense that they are part and parcel of what is presupposed by correct interpretation. This could be called, if we needed a label, a form of objectivism without realism about epistemic (and other) norms.

## 3.  PROBLEMS FOR DAVIDSON'S NORMATIVISM

Having tried to describe Davidson's position about norms, I would like now to point out its difficulties.

The first problem is the one which I have already outlined. Davidson's normativism is limited to (a)-type norms, and excludes (b)-type norms. The normative principles of rationality are not norms in the sense that that they do not prescribe or regulate any actions or beliefs. They could be conceived either as very general features of actions and beliefs or as very general features of what our concepts of actions or belief are. In this sense, as he himself recognises, Davidson's theory of mind is not normative at all. Now if one intends to limit the use of the notion of "norm" when speaking about the mental to the notion of general framework principles of rationality, the fact that these are not normative in the usual sense should not be a problem and is at best a case of equivocation. After all Davidson himself denies that truth, or any other notion, is a "norm" (for similar views, see Glüer 2000, Glüer and Wikförs 2006, Rey 2007). If, however, one intends to claim, as I do, that the thesis of the normativity of the mental implies a stronger notion of norm, this is a problem, for the notion of normativity with which we end up happens to be fairly shallow.

The second difficulty which is raised by Davidson's version of normativism concerns the uncodifiability of rationality. How far does it go? Interpretationism, the view that the mind is essentially interpretable, presupposes that we have the necessary aptitudes to distinguish, within a certain behavioural or linguistic pattern what is rational or not. But where do these aptitudes come from? They must belong, in one sense or another, to our natural equipment. If they are not to be mysterious, they have to be based on certain psychological capacities (Braddon Mitchell and Jackson 1997, Engel 1996)

A third problem concerns the ontology of norms according to Davidson. On his view, although they are objective, statements about norms of rationality do not have genuine truth conditions. They are merely posits within an instrumentalistic scheme of interpretation such as the one which is described by him as comparable to a measurement scheme. The uncodifiability of

rationality and the subjectivity which affects interpretation imply that Davidson is closer to a non-cognitivist or expressivist view about rational norms. But the combination of non-cognitivism about the norms of the mental and the thesis that the norms of the mental are *essential* to mental states and content (what I have called above normativism) gives rise to a threat of irrealism or eliminativism about the mental. Why? The problem for non cognitivism about normativity is that if non cognitivism about normativity is correct and if mental contents and states are essentially normative, there is no such thing as *satisfying* normative constraints, and therefore, it would seem, no such things as beliefs. For to satisfy a constraint is to have the relevant property. If belief is subject to normative constraints, being a believer requires that one has the relevant normative properties. For example if someone believes P and believes that if P then Q, then they have the property of being such that they ought to believe that Q. Again, for any believer, there is a way their beliefs ought to evolve under the impact of putative information. But if non cognitivism is true, there are no normative properties to have or to fail to have (Jackson 2000).

For these reasons, Davidson's normativism about the mental runs the risk of being like *Hamlet* without the Prince. A theory of the normativity of the mental must give us an account not only of the kind of norms to which various kinds of mental states are subject, but also an account of how these norms regulate the formation of mental states. If there is indeed such a thing as being correct or incorrect in one's beliefs, and if we want to have an account of the epistemic norms which regulate inquiry, we need to have a more full-fledged conception of these norms. It is quite understandable that philosophers have been reluctant to embrace a more substantial conception of the normativity of the mental and of the norms which rule the epistemic domain. They have feared that talk of norms in these domains could suggest that having a belief with a certain content implies *eo ipso* that one incurs thereby certain sorts of requirements or

imperatives. But certainly when I believe that it rains, or that Nicolas Sarkozy is proud of himself, I do not incur any sort of obligation. The mere fact that beliefs are supposed to be true or false does not create for believers any obligation with respect to their beliefs. So why insist that there are norms of the mind, or epistemic norms? I want to claim that, although these worries – which Davidson himself expresses when he denies that truth is a norm – are ill placed once we understand better what kind of normativity here is in place. It seems to me that it is neither the weak (a)-type normativity of rational principles nor the strong normativity of a categorical ought.

## 4. EPISTEMIC NORMS *WITH* NORMATIVITY

What would a more full-fledged conception of epistemic norms look like? It seems to me that it should at least satisfy the following six desiderata.

(1) It should specify what are the norms, and provide their proper formulation (if they are to be couched in terms of *oughts*, what kinds of *oughts* should they be ?)

(2) It should explain what is the point of conforming the standard of correctness that apply to normative statements; in other words it should give us the *rationale* of the specific norms. This is in large part done when we relate the norms to the most general properties of the states involved (for instance a belief is correct if it is true; but how is the notion of truth related to that of correctness ?)[5]

(3) It must explain how there can be an agreement between the normative standards and the normative prescriptions of rules which follow from the formulation of the norms (there

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[5] Although I cannot detail this point here, it presupposes that to any norm there corresponds a general truth ( hence a descriptive statement) about a given state, which grounds, in the appropriate way, the prescription which flow from it. In this respect I suscribe to Husserl's conception in his *Logical Investigations* according to which a norm exists in virtue of the truth of some independent descriptive statement.

should be an harmony between the abstract formulation or the truths upon which the norms are based and the prescriptive principles which derive from it, or if one prefers, how the normative connects to the non normative.

(4) Hence it must specify how norms regulate reasoning, thinking, acting. This involves in part understanding how the norms can be *reasons* for us to believe certain things, not simply in the objective or externalist sense of there being reasons to do or think such and such, but also in the internalist sense of there being reasons *for us* to do or to believe such and such. This is in part explaining how the norms can have some *motivating force* ( I take this to be analogue, for epistemic reasons, of the problem of motivation by moral norms in moral psychology, see Engel 2005 a)

(6) It must specify the appropriate ontology of norms.

Normativist theories of the mind – the view according to which normativity is in some sense an essential dimension of the mental - differ in many respects. I do not propose here to do more than a very short review of the main varieties (see Engel to appear for a fuller account).

In the first place theories of norms can either be high profile or low profile[6]. High profile norms are the norms of rationality which apply to mental states in general in virtue of principles of rationality, such as those of charity and coherence mentionned above. Davidson's conception of the normativity of the mental is a typically high profile one. Low profile norms are the norms which affect mental contents in virtue of the concepts which figure in them, and the rules which determine these contents. Conceptual role semantics, in the version of this view according to which conceptual content is determined by the rules of inferences that a rational agent would

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[6] This distinction is inspired by the one made by Bilgrami 1992 about norms of the mind. It has also some affinities with the one proposed by Glüer and Wikforss (to appear) between "content engendered" and " content determining norms"

follow, is a low profile conception. For instance such a theory would say that a belief content is subject to a specific norm if it involves the logical concept of conjunction and its usual associated rules of inference ( Peacocke 1992 is a conception of this sort, but Brandom 1994 is too, in spite of all the differences).

In the second place, normativist conceptions of the mental differ depending upon whether they take the normative load to bear upon the *contents* themselves ( as with the low profile conceptions) or the *attitudes* that one has to these contents ( Boghossian 2003). Davidson is neither a theorist of the former sort (he does not hold that the mental is normative in virtue of the concepts which figure within contents) nor a theorist of the second sort (he denies that norms could be attached to beliefs, desires, or intentions as such).

In the third place, normativist conceptions diverge on the nature of the normative load involved in mental contents. Some take this involvement to be a matter of *real essence* ( a mental content would not be a content if it did not have normative properties), others a matter of our *understanding* of mental contents[7]. Davidson is certainly a theorist of the second, and not of the first kind, since he does not hold that mental contents have real properties, apart from their being interpreted.

My own version of normativism (see Engel 1998, 2000, 2005, *to appear*) – which I can here only outline – locates the normative load at the level of the attitudes and not at the level of the concepts involved in the contents. A belief content, on this view, is not normative because it involves a certain kind of concept which are subject to inferential norms, but because it is subject to certain specific norms attached to the attitude of (for instance, but the same would be true of intentions, desires) belief. Which norms? The primary and the basic one is the truth norm :

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[7] For this disitnction see Wedgewood 2006

(B) A belief is correct iff it is true

from which one derives a prescriptive norm :

(B*) One ought to believe that P only if P is true

(B) is a semantic condition, but there are inferential or rational conditions as well such as:

(R) A belief is correct iff it is rational

from which one derives other prescriptions such as :

(R*) For any A, B, if B is entailed by A, then avoid believing A while not believing B

and similar ones about coherence.

A lot more should be said about the proper formulation of (B) and (R), and there is a lot of discussion about this (see Wedgewood 2002, Boghossian 2003, Engel 2003, 2005, Shah 2003, Steglish Petersen 2006, Hattiangadi 2007)

In a sense, Davidson recognises (B)-type norms on belief. But as we saw, he does not accept (R)-type ones. Like Peacocke (1992), I distinguish the norms at the level of reference, like (B), and those at the level of sense, like (R), and I take them to be strongly associated (unlike Brandom 1994, who gives primacy to (R) kind of norms).

(B) and (R ) are just *statements* of the norm, which in a sense flow from what belief is and what minimal constraints it obeys, and are meant to say something about questions (1) and (2)  of the previous section, but these formulations do not answer questions (3) and (4). In order to answer these questions we need to ask : how is belief regulated by the correctness condition? Here there are several kinds of answers : one can claim that belief is, in some sense, directly regulated by (B) (Wedgewood 2000), or that it is regulated by a specific attitude, the intention to have only true beliefs (or consciously aiming at truth ) (Velleman 2000), or that there is a psychological feature of belief, its "transparency"  ( the fact that the best first person test about

our believing that P is answering the question whether P) (Shah 2003). I favour a version of the last position.

How can the norm governing belief have motiving force? How can we answer the question which I raised about Davidson's uncofiability of rationality thesis: from where, psychologically speaking, do our rational abilities come from? Here I would defend a view similar to Wedgewood's (2006). To be able to have certain concepts and attitudes, and to be able to be moved by the norms involved in these attitudes, the subject must have certain *dispositions* to conform the principles of rationality that feature in the correctness conditions for a given concept of attitude. But we have to be careful in specifying what these dispositions are, and their connections to the norms. There is a certain view, which might be called dispositionalism, but of which functionalism about the mental is but a version, wich attempts to *define* an attitude through the set of set of characteristic dispositions associated to it. Notoriously dispositionalism encounters a problem. Suppose that we say that a normative principle on belief like (R* ) - For any A, B, if B is entailed by A, then avoid believing A while not believing B. If we take it to consist in a disposition, how can it be explained by a mere regularity ?  Can the ideal of rationality expressed by (R* ) be explained simply by the value we place upon conforming to such standards?  No. And that was in part Davidson's point about there being no norm of truth to which we aspire and which would regulate our actual belieivngs. If we have to explain the connection between the normative principle (R*) and our behaviour we have to postulate not simply dispositions to follow such rules, but also *rational dispositions*. In other words the dispositions themselves have to be specified in normative terms. Subjects must have a disposition to conform to the norm of correctness of belief or the implication principle. Why is that so? Wedgewood 2006 gives the following (in my view convincing) explanation. Everytime we formulate a form of reasoning in wholly non normative terms, it will turn out that form of

reasoning in question is defeasible, and that there can be cicumstances where it is not rational to engage in such forms of reasoning. Defeating conditions have to be specified. But the very notion of defeating condition is itself normative. The rational disposition must be such that it tends not to be manifested in the absence of defeaters. Now someone might find that this is very close to the idea that rationality is uncodifiable, and in so far as this means that we cannot explain rationality through disposition without invoking rationality itself, I agree. But that does not mean that there is no basic disposition corresponding to the norm of correctness for a concept. For instance consider the disposition that we have to follow the logical rule of *Modus Ponens*. Well known empirical studies of reasoning show that only 72% of subjects accept instances of Modus Tollens, and that the proportion strongly increases with modus ponens, which suggests that Modus Ponens may be the primary rule for « if », and there is a possible account of this at the psychological level (e.g. in terms of mental models Johnson Laird and Byrne 1991). We can say that we have a rational disposition to accept the MP inferences, and not the MT ones. We can also *violate* these norms. *Modus ponens* is in turn justified as a rule of logic. So there is an harmony between the justificatory principles and the psychological dispositions (see Engel 2001). Of course a lot more should be said, but I have tried to indicate what form a theory of epistemic and mental norms could take.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Davidson was *almost* right. He was right that epistemic norms are primitive and irreducible, and that they are part and parcel of our understanding of the mind, and of the nature of mind. He was, however, wrong to consider that they are uncodifiable. We can specify them, and the psychological disposition which underlie them. So contrary to what anomalous monism claims,

the normative principles have an « echo » in the psychology of agents. Contrary to what Davidson claims, the mental and the epistemic norms do not operate at a high profile level of rationality principles only. They are not framework principles about what our mental states and contents are. They are genuine norms, with normative force, and they can regulate our mental states. Moreover they are not mere interpretative principles similar to the principles of measurement. They are objective.

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