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Practical Deliberation is Normative

ABSTRACT: *It is common for philosophers to suggest that practical deliberation is normative; deliberation about what to do essentially involves employing normative concepts. This thesis—'the Normativity Thesis'—is significant because, among other things, it supports the conclusion that normative thought is inescapable for us. In this article, I defend the Normativity Thesis against objections.*

KEYWORDS: Deliberation, Normative Concepts, Reasoning

Introduction

Below I defend the thesis that practical deliberation is normative; deliberation about what to do essentially involves employing normative concepts. This thesis—'the Normativity Thesis'—is of considerable significance. It features prominently in important discussions and debates in contemporary metaethics. Most significantly, the truth of the Normativity Thesis supports the conclusion that normative thought is inescapable for us, given the centrality of deliberation in our lives.

The structure of this article is as follows: In Section (1) I outline how I understand decision-making and deliberation. I also clarify the Normativity Thesis and show that it plays an important role in contemporary metaethics. Section (2) introduces a specific, widely accepted, interpretation of the Normativity Thesis according to which, necessarily, if one deliberates about what to do, one deliberates about what one ought to do. In Section (3) I discuss objections to this interpretation of the Normativity Thesis. Section (4) draws a lesson about the most defensible way of developing the Normativity Thesis. In Section (5) I discuss the most significant upshot of the Normativity Thesis, namely, how the Thesis supports the conclusion that normative thought is inescapable for us. Section (6) concludes.

1. Preliminaries

1.1 Decision-Making and Deliberation

I understand deciding (or choosing) as a matter of forming an intention—more precisely, as "a momentary mental action of intention formation" (Mele 2009: 693). Agents can form intentions on the basis of other attitudes, for example, on the basis of their beliefs and other intentions. This capacity is essential to agents' abilities to engage in practical reasoning. Practical reasoning is reasoning which concludes in the formation of an intention (Broome 2013: 250; although cf. Raz 2022; Dancy 2014; see Brunero 2021 for discussion). And, as a species of reasoning, practical reasoning involves basing a certain attitude (the conclusion attitude) on

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other attitudes (the premise attitudes) (Kauppinen 2018: 410; Boghossian 2019: 59–60; Broome 2019: 32–33).

Moving on to deliberation, deliberation is a conscious, voluntary activity aimed at making up one's mind about some issue or question (Owens 2011: 262; Shah 2008: 11; Arpaly and Schroeder 2012: 211; Malmgren 2019: 201–203). Practical deliberation is deliberation aimed at settling what to do. Agents settle what to do by making a decision—i.e., by forming an intention. The question of 'What to do?' is sometimes framed as the question 'What shall I do?' (Parfit 2011: 386–387). However, this way of framing the question is potentially misleading. By asking 'What shall I do?', an agent might be asking what it is they will in fact do —i.e., attempting to make a prediction about their future action. Deliberation about what to do is not deliberation about what one will do (Shah 2008: 6; Southwood 2018: 94). Not only is deliberation about what to do distinct from deliberation about what one will do, we make a mistake if we view evidence about the likelihood of our own future actions in the same way in deliberation as in prediction, namely "the mistake…of treating something that is up to us as if it isn't…We treat ourselves as strangers" (Vavova 2016: 534). Deliberation is also distinct from instrumental reasoning which starts from an intention to achieve some end *e*, involves the formation of beliefs concerning means to *e* and concludes in an intention to take some (believed) means to *e*. Deliberation involves adjudicating between competing ends (Kolnai 1961).

1.2 Clarifying the Normativity Thesis

According to the Normativity Thesis, necessarily, if one deliberates about what to do, one employs normative concepts, specifically *reason*, *ought*, or the concept expressed by 'best' as the word features in the sentence, 'The best thing for me to do now is to φ'. Saying that some option is best or good in this sense—in what we might call the 'goodness as choiceworthiness sense'—seems equivalent to saying that one has reason to do it or ought to do it (Wedgwood 2009: 502).[1] I think that some philosophers will find the Normativity Thesis so obvious that it needs no defence. However, as I'll shortly illustrate, the thesis is disputed. And, as I'll also go on to discuss, such objections raise an interesting question about how best to develop the thesis.

1.3 The Normativity Thesis in Contemporary Metaethics

The Normativity Thesis plays an important role in contemporary metaethical theorizing. It is central to David Enoch's indispensability argument for normative

[1] Some philosophers might worry about the idea that the belief that one ought to φ is equivalent to the belief that φ-ing is best on the grounds that this is in tension with the possibility of supererogation. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.) I'm not convinced that there is a problem if we think of supererogatory options as best (or better) but not required. It's plausible that we need to distinguish between thinking φ-ing is required and that one ought to φ anyway given the coherence of statements like 'You are required (must/are obligated to) put a grade on each student's exam but you ought to add useful comments' (Broome 2016, 5; see also Portmore 2021, 7). Of course, this raises a question about the relationship between reasons, oughts, and requirements. Unfortunately, I don't know what to say about this issue.

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truths, which suggests that if such truths are indispensable in deliberation about what to do we are justified believing in them (2011: Ch. 3), and it features prominently in Allan Gibbard's development of his 'plan-expressivist' brand of non-cognitivism (2003: Ch. 1). Something in the vicinity of the Normativity Thesis also appears in discussions of the question of what makes concepts normative. An increasingly prominent answer to this question points to such concepts' 'action guiding' or 'practical' role in thought, which some proponents of this view tie to deliberation. For instance, Matti Eklund (2017: 38) suggests that "it is characteristic of normative predicates that they are fit to be used in practical deliberation about what to do". Ralph Wedgwood (2018: 36–37) holds that normative concepts are to be identified by their role in 'reasoning problems' and that what he calls the 'practical ought' is characterized in terms of its role in the "practical reasoning problem—the problem of deciding what to do in a certain situation" (2018: 37; 2007: Ch. 4). In a similar vein, philosophers have argued that we can identify *simpliciter* or all things considered normative concepts through the role of such concepts in deliberation. J.L.D. Brown (2024: 504; cf. McPherson 2018) claims that "our concept of ought *simpliciter* essentially has the functional or conceptual role of non-arbitrarily settling what to do in practical deliberation". I'm sympathetic with the project of distinguishing *simpliciter* normative concepts by identifying their role in thought. I see this article as contributing to this project by helping to pin-down how such concepts figure in deliberation (see Section 3.3).

2. Deliberation About What to Do and Deliberation About What One Ought to Do

This section introduces a particular way of developing the thesis that deliberation is essentially normative. According to this development of the Normativity Thesis, call it 'Practical Deliberation is Normative Deliberation' ('PDND'), necessarily, if one deliberates about what to do (whether to φ), one deliberates about what one ought to do (whether one ought to φ). This thesis has numerous proponents. Among the philosophers who (explicitly or implicitly) commit themselves to this claim are David Enoch (2011: 74 & 77–78), R. Jay Wallace (2020: §1), Jonathan Dancy (2014: 4–6 & 11–12), Thomas Nagel (1997: 109–110), Garrett Cullity (2018: 423), Philip Pettit (2010: 253–256), Nishi Shah (2008: 6–7), Joseph Raz (2022: 82), and G.F. Schueler (2017: 318–319).[2] Other philosophers like Mark Schroeder (2011: 9 & 9 footnote 11), Susanna Rinard (2019a: 1925), and Paul Boghossian (2021: 380) endorse the closely related claim that judging that one ought to φ closes or settles deliberation about whether to φ. I say 'closely related' because a natural explanation for why judging that one ought to φ closes or settles deliberation about whether to φ is that, necessarily, if one deliberates about whether to φ, one deliberates about whether one ought to φ. I'll assume here that deliberation about what one ought to do is concerned

[2] I'm ignoring the complication that even those philosophers who explicitly commit themselves to PDND commonly don't employ a necessity operator. I use a necessity operator when formulating PDND (and the Normativity Thesis generally) because if PDND (or some other form of the Normativity Thesis) is true it will be true, I think, because of the nature of practical deliberation.

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with identifying which option is most favoured by the balance of (normative) reasons,[3] though I'm not certain whether all the aforementioned philosophers would agree with this (cf. Raz 1999a: 41).

In the remainder of this section, I'll try to motivate PDND. To bring out the *prima facie* plausibility of PDND, consider the fact that in deliberation about what to do one brings to mind and weighs considerations which one sees as bearing on the available options. This distinguishes deliberation about what to do from other ways of trying to settle what to do; trying to settle what to do by attempting to enter a state of meditative tranquillity because one believes that in this state the answer will occur to one is not deliberation (Arpaly and Schroeder 2012: 212). 'Bearing on' φ-ing appears to be a matter of providing support for or helping to justify (not) φ-ing —i.e., providing a reason (not) to φ. (Although, I'll shortly consider some views which deny this.) If it's true that to deliberate about whether to φ is to bring to mind what one takes to be reasons for or against φ-ing,[4] then it's plausible that deliberation about what to do is a process in which one is trying to work out whether one ought to φ. Why? The process of bringing to mind and weighing reasons appears to be a process aimed at the formation of a belief about which option one ought to take.

Before I consider objections to PDND I want to distinguish it from a less plausible claim, namely, that judging that one ought to φ just is to decide to φ. Agents can exhibit weakness of will and decide to do what they believe that they ought not do. Also, Buridan's donkey cases show that agents sometimes decide what to do when they don't believe that there is an answer to the question of what they ought to do; an agent might decide to take one of two identical bales of hay even though they don't believe that they ought to take one over the other. (Of course, they might believe that they ought to take either bale A or bale B or that they ought to take A if they don't take B and *vice versa*, but these normative beliefs won't help them decide which bale to take.) It seems, then, that reaching a conclusion about what one ought to do is neither necessary nor sufficient for deciding what to do (Hieronymi 2009: 201 & 204; Southwood 2016: 62; Parfit 2011: 386–387; although cf. Chislenko 2016; 2020). This gap between judging that one ought to φ and forming an intention to φ means that proponents of PDND must say that practical deliberation does not directly issue in a decision; it "is not automatically practical in its issue" (Wallace 2020: §1). Matthew Silverstein suggests that the claim that deliberation about what to do concludes in a belief about what one ought to do, but that there is a gap between the judgement that one ought to φ and an intention to φ "makes it hard to see how intentions or actions could ever be proper objects of rational assessment" (2017: 361). However, this claim is mistaken if there is an *enkratic* requirement of rationality; a requirement that one intends to do what one believes that one ought to do (Broome 2013: Ch. 16; Wallace 2020: §1; Wedgwood 2007: 25).

[3] All references to reasons in this article are to normative reasons (as opposed to motivating or explanatory reasons) unless specified otherwise. For discussion of the distinction between these kinds of reasons see Alvarez (2017).

[4] I'm going to help myself to the idea of 'taking' some consideration to be a reason in this article. I think that the idea of taking something to be a reason is one we need for all sorts of purposes, including explaining what is involved in acting for a reason, given that we commonly act for normative reasons without explicitly judging that that some consideration is a reason. For a discussion of the state of taking a consideration to be a reason see Schlosser (2012).

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3. Challenges to PDND

Let's consider four sets of objections to PDND. I'll use this discussion to draw a conclusion about how best to defend the Normativity Thesis in Section (4).

3.1 Deliberation and Desire

The first challenge to PDND maintains that one can deliberate about what to do by deliberating about what one wants. Derek Baker (2017: 589; see also Olson 2014: 172–177) suggests that "While my deliberation about what to do next often begins with the question, 'What *should* I do now?' it just as frequently begins 'What do I *want* to do now?'" Perhaps then, at least some of the time, the considerations agents take to bear on the options in deliberation are (putative) facts about what they desire or facts about what would promote their desires. The truth of this claim doesn't show that PDND is false if desires are themselves to be understood in normative terms or if one must be taking facts about one's desires to be reasons in deliberation. I have more sympathy with the latter claim than the former claim, though the former claim has its supporters (Scanlon 1998: 37–41; Quinn 1993; Raz 1999b; Gregory 2013). To bring out the plausibility of the idea that one must be taking facts about one's desires to be reasons in deliberation, consider the fact that deliberation about what to do presupposes that some answers to the question of what to do are better or worse than others. This assumption is plausibly constitutive of deliberating about what to do (Schueler 2017: 307; Enoch 2011: 72–73; Finlay 2014: 142). If the idea of answers being better or worse is understood in terms of answers being closer or further from the truth, a proponent of the view that agents can deliberate about what to do by deliberating about what they desire (without taking facts about their desires to be reasons) can accommodate the idea by suggesting that agents are presupposing that there is a correct answer to what it is that they desire. However, this interpretation of the idea that deliberation presupposes a commitment to better or worse answers is unsatisfying. When one deliberates about what to do one brings to mind considerations which one takes to bear on the correctness of an answer to this question by helping to render an action choiceworthy. Of course, it might be that desire facts help render an action choiceworthy in a particular agent's eyes. However, this is just to acknowledge that this agent is taking facts about their desires to provide reasons in deliberation about what to do. In the background of my discussion is the important point that agents can step back from their desires and critically evaluate them. The reflective distance that agents have from their desires is plausibly a condition of deliberation; without this capacity there would be no deliberation, only reasoning about how to fulfill one's momentarily strongest desire (Wallace 2006: 192; see also Enoch 2011: 75–76).[5]

[5] See Wallace (2006; 2014) for arguments against views which agree that we can reflect on our first-order desires in deliberation but understand such reflection as a matter of the formation of a higher-order desire. As Wallace (2006, 193) puts it, "when questions arise about the status of our first-order desires, it is obscure how they can be resolved simply through the generation of further desires of a higher order."

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An important piece of evidence for the claim that one must take one's desires to be reasons, insofar as they figure in one's deliberation about what to do, comes from reflecting on why it is that agents sometimes deliberate about what to do by considering what they want and *sometimes don't*. (I assume that, at least some of the time, desires are 'backgrounded' in practical deliberation so that they don't explicitly feature in such deliberation.)[6] A natural answer is that sometimes we take our desires to settle which course of action is most choiceworthy or best, but not always. The proponent of the view that we can deliberate about what to do by considering what we want without taking facts about our desires to be reasons will presumably try to explain this phenomenon by suggesting that agents choose to deliberate about what to do in different ways on different occasions, and sometimes they choose to deliberate about what to do by deliberating about what they want. Granting for the sake of argument that agents can choose how to deliberate, I think that this explanation does not ultimately help one avoid the conclusion that one must take one's desires to be reasons in deliberation. Notice that we can't decide to deliberate about what to do by considering any question whatsoever. For instance, I cannot deliberate about whether to go to law school or take a job in philosophy by considering what Napoleon would do in my shoes. But what explains the limitation on how we can choose to deliberate? The answer is that we take the answers to some questions to be relevant to settling what to do but not others. But now the challenge is to spell out what this relevance amounts to in a way that isn't normative—i.e., which isn't a matter of some answers either being reasons for a particular action or telling us which action we ought to perform. If relevance is understood in normative terms, deciding to deliberate about what to do by thinking about what one wants involves taking facts about one's desires to be reasons.

3.2 Silverstein on Deliberation

Matthew Silverstein (2017) develops our next challenge to PDND. Silverstein considers a case where an agent judges that they ought to have lunch at home tomorrow without having decided where to eat tomorrow. Silverstein—who seems to think that this is not simply a standard case of *akrasia* (2017: 357)—uses this case to illustrate the way that reaching a judgment about what one ought to do and deciding what to do (which he thinks of as forming an intention or performing an action) can come apart. However, he also thinks that the case shows that practical deliberation, which concerns the question of what to do, and normative deliberation, which concerns the question of what one ought to do, are distinct. He characterizes the case as one where "normative or ethical deliberation has concluded even though practical deliberation has yet to begin" (2017: 358). Silverstein (2017: 358) adds that "Of course, as I deliberate about where to eat I will weigh various considerations against one another" but he claims that "I can weigh the relevant considerations

[6] See Pettit and Smith (1990, 565-578). Note that everything I say in this article about the relationship between desire and deliberation is, I believe, compatible with the view that all intentional action involves a desire. Cf. Enoch (2011, 76).

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against one another and come to a decision about what to do without deploying any normative concepts".

I find it hard to make sense of the activity of consciously weighing considerations for and against various actions without this simply being a case of weighing what one takes to be reasons. Suppose one makes a list of all the considerations one thinks bear positively or negatively on whether one ought to eat at a particular location. Then suppose one tries to list considerations which bear on whether to eat at that location but don't also belong on the former list. There won't be any (cf. Schueler 2017: 318–319). The items on the two lists will be the same. For instance, the fact that restaurant A is the cheapest option might be on both lists, along with the fact that it's closer than the other restaurants one is choosing between. If this is right, deliberation about what to do takes the same inputs as deliberation about what one ought to do, namely, what one takes to be reasons.

Reflection on Buridan's donkey cases also supports the idea that deliberation about what to do takes the same inputs as deliberation about what one ought to do. In such cases (e.g., choosing between multiple packages of the same brand of cereal in a supermarket aisle) it appears that one is unable to deliberate about which option to select precisely because one believes that there are no reasons to choose any option over any other (Enoch 2011: 74; Finlay 2014: 142). In such cases one must 'just pick'.

Silverstein relies on an analogy with deliberation about what to believe to make his case that deliberation about what to do does not involve deploying normative concepts. He (2017: 358 footnote 10) tells us that "I can reason my way to a belief without deploying normative concepts because theoretical reasoning is governed by a substantive, nonnormative aim: truth. All I need to do in order to believe on the basis of reasons is believe on the basis of my evidence. If—as I argue…practical reasoning is also governed by a substantive, nonnormative aim, then I should also be able to reason my way to an intention or action without deploying normative concepts." Silverstein is committed to claiming that thinking of something as evidence for a belief is distinct from thinking of it as a reason for belief. This claim isn't obviously false, though it is controversial (cf. Kelly 2007). Granting the claim for the sake of argument, it provides Silverstein with a way of making sense of how we could weigh considerations in deliberation about what to believe that doesn't collapse into weighing reasons for or against a belief. What we are doing is something like weighing degrees of evidential support (2017: 538). In the practical case, what Silverstein needs is a story about how we can make sense of weighing considerations in deliberation about what to do that isn't to be understood in normative terms—something which he doesn't provide. In my view, such a story won't be forthcoming because, as I've argued, it appears that whatever considerations we take to bear on whether we ought to φ we also take to bear on whether to φ (and *vice versa*).

I also want to put some pressure on Silverstein's doxastic deliberation analogy. Can deliberation about what to believe and deliberation about what one ought to believe come apart? If the answer is 'No', then doxastic deliberation doesn't look like a useful analogy for Silverstein's purposes. Suppose then that the answer is 'Yes'. Given Silverstein's comments about doxastic deliberation, he may say that this is

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because deliberation about what to believe doesn't involve deploying normative concepts while deliberation about what one ought to believe does. Now consider the fact that in deliberation about what one ought to believe agents frequently consider evidential considerations. (One should accept this even if one holds that there are in fact no evidential reasons for belief but only practical reasons for belief (Rinard 2015: 291). The truth of this claim doesn't preclude one from holding that people frequently mistakenly think of evidential considerations as reasons for belief.) Given that deliberation about what one ought to believe involves deploying normative concepts, we sometimes represent facts that we take to be evidence for *p* as reasons for believing *p*. Consequently, it appears that Silverstein is required to say that if one thinks about evidential considerations when considering whether to believe *p* one is not thinking of them as reasons, but also that when one thinks of these very same evidential considerations when deliberating about whether one ought to believe *p* one does think of them as reasons for believing *p*. Put differently, Silverstein looks committed to saying that the way an agent thinks of evidence as bearing on the belief that *p* is different depending on whether the agent is thinking about whether they ought to believe *p* or about whether to believe *p*. This isn't an incoherent position, but it does strike me as implausible; I don't see any grounds for holding that the way we think of evidence as bearing on the belief that *p* changes depending on which of these questions we ask ourselves in deliberation.

Suppose Silverstein were to try to distinguish deliberation about what to believe from deliberation about what one ought to believe by saying that the latter, unlike the former, can involve broadly pragmatic (non-evidential) considerations. Again, I'm not sure why one would think that deliberation about what one ought to believe and deliberation about what to believe differ in this way. Silverstein (2017: 376) appears to accept the 'transparency' thesis according to which deliberation about whether to believe *p* collapses into deliberation about whether *p*. However, influential explanations of transparency—such as Nishi Shah's (2006: 488) view that the concept of belief includes a constitutive standard of correctness according to which a belief that *p* is correct if and only if *p* is true—look as though, if successful, they will have the consequence that deliberation about whether one ought to believe that *p* similarly collapses into deliberation about whether *p* is the case.[7] To sum up my discussion of doxastic deliberation, since it's not obvious that deliberation about what one ought to believe and deliberation about what to believe are in fact distinct, doxastic deliberation is arguably unhelpful for Silverstein's purposes.

I admit that there is an important gap in the response to Silverstein I've developed on behalf of PDND. My response claims that deliberation about what to do takes the

[7] Why is this true on Shah's view? Suppose an agent asks themselves whether they ought to believe that *p*. The agent is employing the concept of belief and, according to Shah, "one is forced to apply the standard of correctness in situations in which one exercises the concept of belief" (2006, 490). The explanation of transparency offered by Steglich-Peterson (2006) – which similarly points to the way that deliberating about whether *p* involves deploying the concept of belief but claims that "the concept of believing *p* is that of accepting *p* with the aim of doing so only if *p* is true" (2006, 515) – also appears to have the implication that deliberation about whether one ought to believe *p* will collapse into deliberation about whether *p* is the case. I am sceptical about transparency myself. For relevant discussion see Sharadin (2016).

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same inputs as deliberation about what one ought to do, namely what one takes to be reasons. However, this leaves open the possibility that one might weigh these reasons differently depending on whether one is focused on the question of what to do or the question of what one ought to do. For instance, an agent might assign the fact that restaurant A is the cheapest option a different weight depending on whether they are deliberating about where they ought to eat or where to eat. Consequently, deliberation about what to do might still be distinct from deliberation about what one ought to do. This possibility involves positing that we take the same considerations to lend different levels of support to the same actions, depending on the question we are considering in deliberation. This appears to commit us to making a mistake in thought because it is mysterious why the same consideration would lend a different level of support to an action depending on a fact about which question an agent considers. However, one might suggest that there may not be a mistake here if it's the case that reasons are not in fact things which bear on responses (i.e., actions and attitudes) but rather things which bear on questions, a view defended by Pamela Hieronymi (2009; 2014; 2021). The truth of this claim would, I agree, make the position we are considering here less puzzling. However, it still requires one to provide some explanation for why we take one and the same considerations to bear on these questions with different weights.

3.3 A Challenge from Normative Scepticism?

The next set of objections to PDND I'll examine arise from considering the practical deliberation of normative sceptics. Nicholas Southwood (2018: 95) appears to reject PDND by appealing to the possibility of a consistent normative nihilist, a figure who is capable of consistently deliberating about what to do despite explicitly thinking that there are no normative truths. I'm sceptical that such a figure is possible, given the points I've made about how deliberation about what to do appears to involve bringing to mind and weighing what one takes to be reasons; what are the inputs into such an agent's deliberation supposed to be if not what they take to be reasons?

Stan Husi (2013) discusses deliberation about what to do in the context of defending the view that: while there are truths about what various norms recommend or require, no norms have authority. To get a grip on the notion of a norm lacking authority, think of some norm like the touch nose rule according to which one must touch one's nose whenever one takes a step. Although we can sensibly talk about what one ought to do or has a reason to do according to this norm, intuitively one does not make a mistake if one ignores this norm. This norm—in contrast with the norms of, say, prudence—lacks authority; it doesn't genuinely or really tell one what one ought to do, rather it (and any ought or reason it issues) is merely 'formally' or 'generically' normative (McPherson 2018; Wodak 2019; see Baker 2018a for discussion). Husi takes the view that we need normative truths to deliberate but that such truths can be provided by norms which we regard as lacking authority. As he puts it (2013: 425), he wants to show "how to deliberate in a sceptical fashion"—i.e., how to deliberate once we realize that no norms are "authoritative, true, and correct, period" but only endorsed by us or correct according to some other norm (2013: 424–425). Husi would, I think, accept

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PDND read as claiming that deliberation about what to do is deliberation about what one ought do *according-to-some-norm-or-another*.

Which norms are involved in practical deliberation according to Husi? The relevant norms are ones to which we are committed. Husi (2013: 443) explains that "Commitments are stable psychological dispositions, endorsed by reflection, to follow some norm's dictates, incorporating a readiness and willingness to be guided by it without regret". Without the appeal to the idea of commitment, the claim that we deliberate about what to do by thinking about what norms recommend has no plausibility. To see this, observe that I might judge that according to some norm (or set of norms)—e.g., the norms of Leviticus—I ought to φ but think that this has as much bearing on whether to φ as the fact such as that sugar maples are deciduous. Husi (2013: 443) is sensitive to something like this point, explaining that when we commit to a norm, we "endow it with a special kind of motivational force…with the consequence that we empower the norm to assume an action-guiding capacity, as a map we steer by." The picture Husi appears to offer is one according to which, what makes it the case that the sceptical deliberator deliberates about what to do by considering certain norms, is that the deliberator desires to comply with these norms. These desires to comply with the relevant norms explain why these norms resonate with the deliberator in a way that other norms do not.

But, in reply, consider the point I developed in Section 3.1 to respond to the view that deliberation about what to do is deliberation about what one desires. I argued that deliberation induces a kind of reflective distance from one's desires that requires one to take a stand on whether one's desires render courses of action choiceworthy. This point obviously extends to a desire to comply with some norm. For the sceptical deliberator to structure their deliberation by thinking about what some norm recommends involves them taking a stand (at least implicitly) on whether their desire to comply with the norm provides a reason to do so and, importantly, this reason doesn't seem to be merely a reason according to yet some further norm. Here is another way to make the point I'm developing: It seems arbitrary to deliberate using one norm rather than another if one regards this norm as no more justified than any another. What we are trying to do in practical deliberation is to avoid just picking arbitrarily (Enoch 2011: 75). The answer to this arbitrariness worry offered by Husi (cf. Husi 2013: 436–437) is that the norms we use in deliberation are ones to which we are committed. But if committing to a norm is desiring to comply with it, we are faced with the question of how we think of our desires in the context of deliberation. And, in such deliberation, we think of these desires as providing us with (not merely standard-relative) reasons.

Husi might reply that his view of commitment to a norm involves 'reflective endorsement' of the norm, which goes beyond merely desiring to comply with it. However, Husi doesn't tell us much about the state of reflective endorsement. Reflective endorsement is either a normative or evaluative state, or it is not. If it is not, I don't see how it will be anything other than a state constructed from materials like desiring or intending. Consequently, it will not help Husi respond to the worry that we need to take a stand on the justificatory force of our mental states in deliberation

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about what to do.[8] On the other hand, if reflective endorsement is normative or evaluative, Husi owes us an explanation of which normative or evaluative notions are essential to reflective endorsement, subject to the constraint that they can't imply a commitment to (non-standard-relative) reasons and oughts.

The points I've developed in response to Husi in this subsection can be used to raise a challenge to normative authority scepticism—the view that not only are there no authoritative reasons and oughts (as Husi thinks) but that we cannot even make sense of the idea of normative authority; talk of authoritatively normative reasons and oughts is confused, incoherent, or empty (Tiffany 2007; Baker 2018b). The response is this: Authority sceptics cannot capture the way normative concepts figure in practical deliberation because it is authoritatively normative concepts which feature in such deliberation (cf. McPherson 2018).

Authority scepticism entails conceptual normative pluralism which denies that we can make sense of an ought *simpliciter* and corresponding reasons *simpliciter*, maintaining instead that there are only truths about what one ought to do or has a reason to do according to some normative system or standpoint—i.e., according to some set of norms or another. David Copp, who is probably the most prominent proponent of conceptual normative pluralism, claims that we can't make sense of an ought *simpliciter* because the notion is subtly incoherent (2007; 2021) but he rejects authority scepticism, suggesting that certain systems of norms (e.g., moral norms) generate "genuinely normative" reasons and oughts while others (e.g., the touch nose rule) do not (2009: 30). He (2021: 418–419) tells us that these genuinely normative reasons and oughts are such that one is making a "mistake" if one knowingly ignores them when deciding what to do. Copp's view raises a challenge to arguing from the claim that we need something more than merely formally normative reasons and oughts in practical deliberation to the conclusion that we are employing *simpliciter* normative concepts in such deliberation. However, in my view, the most promising way of defending *simpliciter* scepticism is through adopting authority scepticism.[9] If this is right, my discussion in this subsection can help to support the conclusion that there are *simpliciter* normative concepts.

3.4 Three More Objections

The next three objections to PDND I'll consider are grouped together because they accept that deliberation about what to do involves bringing to mind and weighing what one takes to be (*simpliciter*) reasons, but they dispute that this shows that such deliberation is a matter of thinking about what one ought to do, understood as thinking about what is most favoured by the balance of reasons. The first of these

[8] It's worth quoting Thomas Nagel (1997, 109) on this point: The standpoint of decision "introduces a subtle but profound gap between desire and action, into which the free exercise of reason enters. It forces us to the idea of the difference between doing the right thing and doing the wrong thing…given our total situation, including our desires. Once I see myself as the subject of certain desires, as well as the occupant of an objective situation, I still have to decide what to do, and that will include deciding what justificatory weight to give to those desires."

[9] I can't vindicate this claim here, but see Case (2016, 10-11) for worries about Copp's attempt to avoid authority scepticism. Baker (2018b) defends *simpliciter* scepticism by defending authority scepticism.

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objections focuses on the fact that an agent might entertain a question like 'Granted I ought to φ but I'm not going to do that, so what is the next best option?'. It may seem that the thinking an agent entertaining this question engages in is naturally described as deliberation about what to do. I think that the strongest response available to the proponent of PDND is to say that this agent is deliberating about what they ought to do—it's just that they are deliberating about what they ought to do, *given that they are not going to φ*. To put it another way, they are engaging in deliberation about what they ought to do over a constrained set of options.

The second objection suggests that when agents engage in deliberation about what to do—unlike when they deliberate about what they ought to do—they are concerned with identifying a sufficiently good option rather than the most favoured option. This objection picks up on the fact that in deliberation about what to do it seems that agents are often content to satisfice rather than try to identify what is best. However, it isn't obvious that this marks deliberation about what to do as distinct from deliberation about what one ought to do. Even if one explicitly considers what one ought to do in deliberation, one might settle for determining that an option is sufficiently good because of, say, the costs in time and mental effort associated with continuing to consider the matter. To make this objection work it needs to be shown that, in the case of deliberation about what to do, agents don't set out with the goal of determining which option they ought to take.

The third objection to PDND claims that one's belief that one ought to φ might feature as an input into deliberation about whether to φ alongside other considerations (cf. Silverstein 2017: 358), so deliberation about what to do can't be a matter of deliberating about what one ought to do. Here is an example: suppose David is thinking about whether to leave the party to go home and study. He believes that he ought to go home to study but that there are also things to be said for staying: he is having a good time and a friend he hasn't seen recently had told him they will be coming later. Seemingly, David might weigh these considerations against his belief that he ought to go home. The proponent of PDND should reject the description of the case I've given here. They should maintain that this case involves either: (1) David reopening the question of whether he ought to go home and study or (2) rather than deliberating about whether to go home and study, David is finding his attention directed towards the considerations which support staying. This sort of mental process involved in (2), they can suggest, is the mental process commonly involved in agents' choosing against their better judgment.

4. Lessons for Defending the Normativity Thesis

My overarching aim in this article is to defend the Normativity Thesis, rather than PDND. The key lesson of my discussion of objections to PDND for defending the Normativity Thesis is that this discussion provides strong support for another, weaker version of the Normativity Thesis. According to this way of developing the Normativity Thesis—call it 'the Reasons Claim'—in deliberation about what to do agents bring to mind and weigh what they take to be reasons. The Reasons Claim is central to the positive case I offered for PDND and to many responses to objections to PDND that I developed. It also entirely avoids several of the objections to PDND I

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considered (e.g., those in Section 3.4) because these objections accept the Reasons Claim.

There are, I think, two particularly pressing worries for my defence of the Normativity Thesis based on the Reasons Claim. The first worry is focused on the connection between the Reasons Claim and PDND. It begins by observing that the Reasons Claim can be used to provide support for PDND and, moreover, some philosophers accept views that appear to have the consequence that the Reasons Claim entails PDND. For instance, according to one theory of the nature of reasons it is a conceptual truth that what it is for something to be a reason is for it to play a role in explaining why one ought to φ (Broome 2013: Ch. 4; 2021). If this is correct, to bring to mind and weigh what one takes to be reasons may just be to think about what one ought to do.[10] Suppose, then, for the sake of argument, that the Reasons Claim entails PDND. While I don't take my discussion of objections to PDND in Section (3) to show that PDND fails, I also don't take myself to have vindicated PDND. Consequently, one might worry that if the Reasons Claim entails PDND, my case for the Normativity Thesis will be called into question. I am not particularly concerned about this worry because none of the arguments against PDND I've considered are more plausible than the case I've made for the conclusion that deliberation involves bringing to mind and weighing what one takes to be reasons (i.e., the Reasons Claim). So, if an argument that there is such an entailment is forthcoming, we should employ *modus ponens* instead of *modus tollens*.

The second worry about my defence of the Normativity Thesis is more promising and where I think that critics of the Normativity Thesis should focus their attention. This worry is based on the point I noted in Section (2) that PDND leaves us with a gap between the conclusion of practical deliberation and decision (on the assumption that to decide is to form an intention)—despite such deliberation being an activity which looks to be aimed at arriving at a decision. This point looks as though it will apply to any development of the Normativity Thesis. If one could show that the cost of positing such a gap is unacceptable, then one will have the makings of an argument against the Normativity Thesis.

5. Deliberation and Inescapability

Suppose I am right that deliberation about what to do is essentially normative because the Reasons Claim is true. The most significant upshot of this conclusion comes from combining it with the claim that deliberation is psychologically inescapable: normative thought is psychologically inescapable for us. While I don't have much sympathy for the Kantian constitutivist project, my discussion echoes points made by theorists in this tradition. Christine Korsgaard (1996: 113) claims that the "reflective structure of human conscious…forces us to act for reasons". I'm

[10] I've tried to stay neutral about the nature of normative reasons in this paper. Everything that I've said is consistent with both reasons fundamentalism and explanationist theories (which hold that what makes normative reasons normative is the normativity of what they explain) such as Broome's ought-explanationism. See Fogal and Risberg (2023) for the relevant terminology and references. However, I'm not certain about how my argument fits with the view that normative reasons are premises in good reasoning (Way 2017).

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not sure Korsgaard is right about this, but I think that the reflective structure of human consciousness (by which Korsgaard means our capacity to step back from out impulses) means that we can deliberate, and, once we do this, we need reasons (Wallace 2006: 192–193; Nagel 1997: 109).

If my points in the preceding paragraph are correct, an interesting implication is that, even those of us who doubt the existence of normative truths must, at least implicitly, put these doubts aside some of the time. If normativity is an illusion, it's one that we are trapped in.

6. Conclusion

I have argued for the Normativity Thesis, which holds that deliberation about what to do is essentially normative. I introduced a specific version of the Normativity Thesis according to which deliberation about what one ought to do is deliberation about what one ought to do ('PDND'). I considered objections to this position and concluded that, even if this view is untenable, another version of the Normativity Thesis according to which deliberation involves bringing to mind and weighing what one takes to be reasons ('The Reasons Claim') is not defeated by such objections. Finally, I explained the significance of the Normativity Thesis by showing how it contributes to establishing that normative thought is inescapable for us.

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