

Defining Normativity (Abridged)

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to clarify debate over the nature, existence, extension, and analyzability of normativity, by investigating whether different philosophers' claims are about the same subject or (as argued by Derek Parfit) they are using the terms 'normative' and 'normativity' with different meanings. While I suggest the term may be multiply ambiguous, I also find reasons for optimism about a common subject-matter for metanormative theory. This is supported by sketching a special hybrid view of normative judgment, *perspectivism*, that occupies a position between cognitivism and noncognitivism, naturalism and nonnaturalism, objectivism and subjectivism. I explore three main fissures: between (i) the "normativity" of language/thought versus that of facts and properties, (ii) abstract versus substantive, and (iii) formal versus robust normativity.

In recent jargon, *metanormative theory* explores fundamental questions crosscutting ethics, political and legal philosophy, aesthetics, epistemology, and more. It is described as the study of *normativity*, and the literature on "normativity" has quickly become overwhelmingly huge. So a curious layperson might ask, "So, what is this "normativity", then?" This innocent question might already be enough to make philosophers squirm and sweat, because it is hard to find any definition that every theorist can agree on. At least one leading practitioner, Derek Parfit, has gone so far as to claim that many philosophers who appear to disagree with him about the nature of normativity must be using their terms with different meanings, and talking about something else entirely.¹ This paper finds, in partial agreement with Parfit, that philosophical discussion about "normativity" is plagued by systematic ambiguities contributing to significant confusion, as there are many things that "normativity" can reasonably be taken to be.² However, it ultimately finds cause for optimism, against Parfit, that different theoretical positions are nonetheless engaged in substantive disagreements over common questions.

¹ E.g. 2011: 439f.

² This aligns with a central theme of my 2014 book, that metaethical debates largely stem from a "confusion of tongues". However, there I was insufficiently sensitive to the ambiguities in the word 'normativity' itself.

Because my concerns are ultimately metaphysical rather than semantic, I largely avoid making claims about what ‘normativity’ *should* be used to mean. Instead, I’ll put pressure on three major fissures, in order to cast light on some central controversies. I start with the distinction between the “normativity” ascribed to (i) language and thought, and (ii) facts and properties, in order to explore the possibility of univocity between cognitivists’ and noncognitivists’ claims about “normativity”. Then I examine the possibility of univocity between different kinds of cognitivists, such as nonnaturalists, subjectivist naturalists and objectivist naturalists, by examining two further distinctions: between (a) abstract versus substantive senses of ‘normativity’, and (b) formal versus robust senses. This leads to a special kind of hybrid view of normative judgment I’ll call *perspectivism*, which has the resources to explain how different cognitivists could be united by interest in a common phenomenon, while at the same time potentially using ‘normativity’ with significantly different meanings. Whether or not this perspectivism is correct, observing the option casts helpfully disambiguating light on the debates over at least the nature, existence, extension, and analyzability of “normativity”.

1 Preliminaries

This paper addresses two words: the noun ‘normativity’ and the adjective ‘normative’. Since ‘normativity’ is just the nowadays-preferred nominalization of the adjective ‘normative’, one might expect these to be interdefinable as follows: to describe something as ‘normative’ (in a particular sense) is to ascribe it a property that is denoted by ‘normativity’ (in a corresponding sense). We’ll encounter some important exceptions to this rule, but I will shift between noun and adjective as suits the context.

I will argue that these words are multiply ambiguous, as used by metanormative theorists (subsequently, “theorists”). Readers might be skeptical that any systematic ambiguities would go unnoticed by trained philosophers. When we think about lexical ambiguity, we typically consider forms of *homonymy*: identically spelled and pronounced words with unrelated meanings, like ‘hide’ (animal skin vs. to conceal), or the standard example of ‘bank’ (financial institution vs. sloping landform). However, the ambiguities at issue here are cases rather of *polysemy*: identically spelled and pronounced words with distinct but closely related meanings, as classically illustrated by Aristotle’s example of ‘healthy’ (as of food vs. as of organisms). Polysemies are often subtle and easily overlooked even by sophisticated thinkers, as well as ubiquitous in natural language, and therefore pose a much greater equivocation risk in philosophy. .

In identifying different possible senses for ‘normativity’, I will be offering *descriptive definitions*. In particular, I will be seeking what I’ll call theorists’ *effective* definitions, which articulate the concepts that theorists are employing. Such a definition is reference-fixing for a theorist (or use-fixing) and therefore “nonnegotiable”: to talk about something that doesn’t satisfy the description is necessarily to change the subject. Effective definitions must be distinguished from theorists’ *official* definitions, or what they explicitly offer as definitions, whether analytic or synthetic. Theorists’ official definitions often constitute substantive theories of the nature of their objects, even when ostensibly offered as analytic. Official definitions are therefore “negotiable”, and a theorist can in principle come to recognize hers as incorrect and needing revision.

2 Univocity Between Cognitivists and Noncognitivists

The lack of any agreed-upon characterization of “normativity” might be thought simply an unsurprising consequence of metanormative theory’s being an area of live debate. But researchers in disputed fields don’t generally have difficulty agreeing on some characterization of their object of inquiry. Scientists disputing the chemical composition of water in the eighteenth century, for example, could agree at least that water is the stuff that fills Earth’s oceans and falls from the sky as rain. If we are to find a common object for metanormative theorizing, it will presumably be through examining the common ground: what can all parties to the metanormative debate agree on?

The possible answers to this question are seriously constrained by the fact that the field includes significant numbers both of theorists who claim that “normativity” is a property of facts, properties, and relations (like ought-facts, goodness and rightness, and being-a-reason-for), and also of theorists who deny there are any “normative” facts, properties, and relations, but nonetheless don’t generally deny that some kinds of things are “normative” or that there is “normativity”. Prima facie it might seem that common ground can be found in applications to language and thought. This includes linguistic and mental *entities* such as words, sentences, concepts, and beliefs, and *acts* such as utterances, assertions, claims, and judgments, but I’ll write in conveniently fudgy terms of “expressions and judgments”.

2.1 The Normativity of Language and Thought

Surely all theorists agree that some language and/or thought is normative? At least, I know of none who refuse to classify any expressions or judgments as ‘normative’. But are they all predicating the same property with the term? Many theorists, who I’ll call *cognitivists*, seem to favor an answer along the following, representationalist lines: an expression or judgment is “normative” just in case it is *about* something in the world of a special kind. What kind? The obvious answer is: of a “normative” kind. This answer is significant here for two reasons. First, it introduces us to an initial ambiguity (polysemy), just within cognitivists’ use. Second, it casts doubt on the univocity of different theorists’ talk about “normative” expressions or judgments.

This approach requires an ambiguity in ‘normative’, because whatever it is for something to be a “normative” fact or property, it can’t be *to be about something normative*, since facts (or states of affairs) and properties aren’t “about” things. Rather, it requires us to distinguish between *ontological* and *representational* senses of ‘normative’:³

NORMATIVE_{ont}: (As of facts and properties); Having a property P of some special kind.

NORMATIVE_{rep}: (As of expressions and judgments); Being about something normative_{ont}.

(To help readers, my definitions are collected together at the paper’s end.) The relationship between NORMATIVE_{rep} and NORMATIVE_{ont} manifests a common pattern, or *regular polysemy*, which can also be

³ Cf. Eklund 2017: 64.

observed, for example, in the adjective ‘mythological’. Mythological₁ language (=language about mythology) needn’t itself be mythological₂ (=existing only in cultural imagination).

We can’t stop with just these two senses of ‘normative’, because they fail to accommodate the claims of *noncognitivists*, who acknowledge the existence of “normative” expressions and judgments, but deny that they are about “normative” facts and properties. This includes both *nondescriptivists* who deny that “normative” expressions and judgments are about anything at all, and virtually all *hybrid theorists*, who allow that “normative” expressions and judgments are representational, but attribute their status as “normative” to some other (noncognitive) function or property they have. As this makes clear, my distinction here between “cognitivism” and “noncognitivism” differs importantly from the usual distinction drawn in these terms. The issue here is not whether normative judgments have cognitive (representational, descriptive) content, but whether their status *as normative* is due to their cognitive content.⁴

Noncognitivists are committed to holding that there are no normative_{rep} expressions or judgments, at least in our ordinary “normative” language and thought. So when noncognitivists classify an expression or judgment as “normative”, they must mean something other than NORMATIVE_{rep}. Indeed, many theorists use ‘normative’ and ‘descriptive’ as terms of contrast. Noncognitivists’ talk about “normative” expressions and judgments seems to require a definition conforming to the schema:

NORMATIVE_{funct}: (As of expressions or judgments); Having the nonrepresentational function F.

There is a wide variety of noncognitivist theories about function F, although I presume they all construe it as a broadly psychological function. For example, it could be the function of *expressing the speaker’s motivational attitudes*, or the function of *motivating attitudes or behavior*: “putting pressure on choice and action” (Blackburn 1993). Whatever F might be, however, its nonrepresentational character entails that whether an expression or judgment is normative_{funct} is a different issue from whether it is normative_{rep}.⁵

If I have correctly identified the effective definitions underlying cognitivists’ and noncognitivists’ talk, then there is no real common ground over whether there is normative language and thought, only a superficial overlap in application of an ambiguous vocabulary. If this was the best hope for finding a common object for theories of “normativity”, then perhaps there is no common object. Since noncognitivists deny that “normative” language and thought derive their claim to “normativity” from representing special kinds of facts, they can be expected to deny that anything is normative_{ont}. And since cognitivists deny that “normative” language and thought derive their “normativity” from a special nonrepresentational function they possess, they can be expected at least to deny that normativity_{funct} is what their investigations are concerned with. It is too early to draw this conclusion, however, because we can dig deeper to locate an underlying univocity between cognitivists and noncognitivists.

⁴ Cf. Ridge 2014: 79-80, Streumer 2017: 91-2.

⁵ Cf. Copp 2007: 266, Streumer 2017: 128.

2.2 Ostending Normativity

I'll sketch the approach I consider most promising. This takes the form of ostensive, natural kind definitions, which look to samples of expressions or judgments to pick out some underlying common characteristic, the nature of which is open to dispute. Schematically:

NORMATIVE_{lang/judg-ost}: (As of expressions/judgments); Having the common property of samples
 $n_1, n_2, \dots$

Theorists who appeal to different samples would be operating with different versions of this kind of definition, but this is no barrier to univocity so long as their definitions pick out the same kind.

This approach has a number of things in its favor. First, it can be motivated by the observation that metanormative inquiry typically begins from reflection on an ordinary practice of making a certain kind of claim or judgment. Second, many theorists endorse it either explicitly, or implicitly by the way they introduce their quarry. Parfit, for example, appeals to a particular judgment (*I ought to jump*) in a particular scenario (*Burning Hotel*—in which one's hotel is on fire and the only way out is through the second-story window) to fix on the kind of judgment that interests him.⁶ Third, it plausibly locates a common object for cognitivists and noncognitivists, who can agree (mostly) on what is a paradigm of “normative” language or thought, and that this class of expressions or judgments shares some philosophically important property that interests them. We could then interpret the parties as disagreeing over whether the common property that unifies the class of normative_{lang/judg-ost} language and thought is the property of being about something that is normative_{ont}, or the property of having some nondescriptive function F.

Remaining obstacles seem best overcome by opting for a thought- or judgment-based definition (NORMATIVE_{judg-ost}) rather than a language-based one (NORMATIVE_{lang-ost}). This is partly because the words commonly identified as “normative” are often ambiguous between normative and nonnormative uses. We can identify a derivative sense of ‘normative’ as applying to language, as follows:

NORMATIVE_{lang-exp-judg}: (As of language); Having the property of being conventionally used to
express normative_{judg-ost} judgments.

So, we might hope, cognitivists and noncognitivists can agree that they are interested in normative_{judg-ost} judgments, and derivatively, normative_{lang-exp-judg} language.

The main problem facing this approach is that ostension of samples alone might not be enough to fix on a particular underlying kind. The same set of samples can be exemplars of multiple kinds. Perhaps, for example, the samples feature both normativity_{funct} *and* normativity_{rep} (cognitivists do not generally deny that these words have the functions that noncognitivists describe); do our definitions then pick out one, the other, both, or neither?

⁶ Parfit 2011: 326-7, Wedgwood 2007: 1, Thomson 2008: 1.

Common ground can arguably be found over the role of normative judgment in practical deliberation.⁷ Approximately, normative judgments are the kinds of judgments that we aim at reaching to close our deliberations, and on which we directly base our decisions. This is something at least some cognitivists and noncognitivists agree about. David Enoch (2011a) is a nonnaturalist cognitivist who claims that normative judgments are “deliberatively indispensable”; i.e. one isn’t deliberating if not reasoning toward normative judgments. The naturalist noncognitivist Allan Gibbard (2003) agrees: normative judgments just *are* deliberative judgments about what to do. Enoch and Gibbard disagree about the nature of the judgments that play this role: Enoch thinks they are judgments about certain kinds of facts and properties, while Gibbard thinks they are noncognitive attitudes (roughly, intentions).

I therefore suggest that in $\text{NORMATIVE}_{\text{judg-ost}}$ we have identified a kind of concept which could, in principle, provide a common object for cognitivists’ and noncognitivists’ claims about “normative judgments”. Similarly, in $\text{NORMATIVE}_{\text{lang-exp-judg}}$ we have a potentially unifying concept for claims about “normative language”. There is thus reason for optimism about the univocity of at least these parts of metanormative discourse. I hesitate to draw the stronger conclusion that this is the kind of concept all theorists actually employ.

What about the “normativity” of facts and properties, which cognitivists identify as the ultimate object of their investigations? Cognitivists clearly don’t mean to classify these facts and properties as $\text{normative}_{\text{judg-ost}}$, and so we still need another sense of ‘normative’ to accommodate these claims along the lines of $\text{NORMATIVE}_{\text{ont}}$ —perhaps of the following, derivative kind:

$\text{NORMATIVE}_{\text{ont-judg-rep}}$: Having the property P that is common to all and only the kinds of facts and properties that $\text{normative}_{\text{judg-ost}}$ judgments (and $\text{normative}_{\text{lang-exp-judg}}$ expressions) are about.

Noncognitivists are committed to denying that anything is $\text{normative}_{\text{ont-judg-rep}}$, since they reject the presupposition that $\text{normative}_{\text{judg-ost}}$ judgments as such are about any special kind of property. From their point of view, cognitivists are engaged in a wild goose chase, led astray by their misinterpretation of the underlying nature of these judgments. Noncognitivists’ positive claims about the nature of “normativity”, therefore, are not claims about $\text{normativity}_{\text{ont-judg-rep}}$, the primary object of cognitivist’s metanormative claims. Regarding this, Parfit’s claim that noncognitivism is “close to nihilism” (2011: 267) therefore seems right.

Which side is right? The cognitivists’ claim can seem compelling. In Parfit’s *Burning Hotel* scenario it seems phenomenologically correct that one looks for and recognizes a *fact*, of a $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$ kind, about what one ought or has most reason to do, and that this is what our $\text{normative}_{\text{judg-ost}}$ judgment is *about*. But the noncognitivists’ positive claim can seem compelling too: $\text{normative}_{\text{judg-ost}}$ judgments are distinguished by having a special nonrepresentational property or function. Another option, however, is

⁷ E.g. Schroeter and Schroeter ms.: “What’s distinctive of the normative is a characteristic psychological role played by certain concepts in deliberation and action”, Wedgwood 2007, Eklund 2017: 38, McPherson forthcoming. See Silverstein 2017 for a dissenting view; cf. Williams 1981. This strategy looks problematic for (e.g.) epistemic or aesthetic normativity.

a widely overlooked kind of *hybrid* position: that normative_{judg-ost} judgments are distinguished as a kind by *both* (i) being about a special normative_{ont} kind of property, *and* (ii) having a special nonrepresentational property or function. This is importantly different from the familiar kind of “hybrid theory” which attributes normative_{judg-ost} judgments both cognitive content and noncognitive properties. These *first-order* hybrid theories are not hybrid regarding the second-order question at issue here, concerning a judgment’s status as *normative*.⁸ Instead, they adopt a straightforwardly noncognitivist answer to this question, assigning normative_{judg-ost} judgments ordinary, “nonnormative” contents, rejecting the cognitivist (in our sense) view that they are distinguished by being normative_{rep} or about properties of a normative_{ont} kind. We’ll see that the option of a *second-order* hybrid theory significantly complicates the possible interpretations of cognitivists’ claims about normativity_{ont}.

3 Univocity Among Cognitivists

I turn now to examine the prospects for univocity in talk about “normativity” among cognitivists. These are commonly divided into two camps: *naturalists* who claim that “normativity” is identical or reducible to ordinary “natural” properties, and *nonnaturalists* like Parfit who deny it. Here we can ignore the difficult issue of how to understand the relevant concept of naturalness, as the most salient difference is that nonnaturalists generally deny that “normativity” can be analyzed or reduced in “nonnormative” terms at all (*primitivism*). The camp of naturalists can be further divided into *subjectivists*, who analyze “normativity” in partly psychological terms (e.g. involving counterfactual motivation or relations to desires or agency), and *objectivists* who analyze “normativity” in terms of some nonpsychological natural property.⁹ Cognitivists have generally assumed that there is something which they all call “normativity”, the nature of which is at issue. But after many years arguing against forms of naturalism, Parfit concluded that theorists who appear to disagree with him about the nature of normativity must be using a different concept and talking about something else entirely. He identifies *five* different senses (2011: 267-8), and claims that naturalism, like noncognitivism, is “close to nihilism”, the view that there are no normative_{ont} facts and properties (2011: 368).

We might suppose that cognitivists should all agree that the object of their theories is normativity_{ont-judg-rep}: the special property, whatever it might be, possessed by all and only the facts and properties of the kind that our normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about. But among nonnaturalists it is commonly thought that the normativity_{ont} that interests them is *just too different* (as David Enoch puts it)¹⁰ from natural facts and properties to be naturalistically analyzable, and some claim that this is so self-evident that nobody could seriously suppose otherwise. On this basis, Parfit concludes that charity requires interpreting naturalists’ claims as addressed to a different object altogether.

⁸ Possible exceptions include Tresan 2006, Toppinen 2013, Schroeder 2013; also Laskowski 2017, Copp 2017, and cf. Finlay 2004, 2010, 2014.

⁹ Objectivist views commonly take broadly Aristotelian forms (e.g. Foot 2001, Thomson 2008); I have often understood my views (e.g. Finlay 2010: 71, 2014: 79) as non-Aristotelian objectivist naturalism; see also Copp 2007.

¹⁰ Enoch 2011a: 105-9 (see also his references in n.27, and Huemer 2005: 94-5); for discussion see Laskowski 2017, ch. 3.

Below I examine the prospects for univocity between different cognitivists' claims about the "normativity" of facts and properties. I start by exploring two straightforward polysemies in ontological senses of "normativity": (i) an abstract/substantive distinction, and (ii) a formal/robust distinction. Reflection on these will lead us to a second-order hybrid option with significant but ambiguous implications for univocity in metanormative theory.

3.1 Abstract vs. Substantive

We need to observe an often overlooked distinction between *normative properties* and (the property of) *normativity*. "Normativity" can seem ubiquitous. Anything that is a (normative) reason can appropriately be called "normative" and any ordinary fact can be a normative reason (e.g. a reason to believe something). Similarly, diverse properties can apparently be normative_{ont}, like the property of being painful, or of being what you were asked to do. However, we can distinguish between facts and properties that are *inherently* normative_{ont} (whose nature it is to be normative_{ont}), and those that are *derivatively* normative_{ont}.¹¹ Derivatively normative_{ont} facts and properties are "normative" in virtue of contingently or necessarily having properties that are inherently normative_{ont}. A reason to act, such as the fact that it's raining, is derivatively normative_{ont} because it has the inherently normative_{ont} property of being a reason for some action, like opening your umbrella. Physical sensations of pain are derivatively normative_{ont} because they have the inherently normative_{ont} property of being *bad*.

This means we need to distinguish between *three* levels of facts or properties. At the first level are the ordinary facts and properties that can be (e.g.) reasons, or valuable, or obligating: the derivatively normative_{ont} facts and properties. Cognitivists' claims that there are "normative" facts and properties are not usually about this level; what distinguishes cognitivists from noncognitivists is not their claims that some facts are reasons, or that some properties are valuable, but their recognition of properties like being-a-reason and goodness. At the second level are these special facts and properties—of what somebody ought to do, or of being a reason, goodness, etc.—which are inherently normative_{ont}. At the third level is the abstract property of normativity_{ont} (being normative_{ont}) itself, the common feature of all the facts and properties of the second level (inherently) and the first level (derivatively).

So cognitivists' claims about "normativity" are about this third-level property, right? Not necessarily. Theorists commonly proceed straight from an analysis of (e.g.) what it is to be a reason, to the claim to have analyzed "normativity", or from the claim that the reason-relation or ought-facts are unanalyzable, to the claim that "normativity" is unanalyzable.¹² Many claims about "normativity" are clearly about the *second-level* facts and properties, like ought-facts, the reason relation, and the property of goodness, rather than about what it is to *be* normative_{ont}.

¹¹ This distinction is drawn in various terms; e.g. Schroeder 2007: 80, Parfit 2011: 278. .

¹² For a culprit look no further than my claims (e.g. Finlay 2010, 2014) to have analyzed "normativity" as *end-relational* on the basis of analyses of what it is to be *good*, a *reason*, etc. This invites the criticism in Eklund 2017: 71.

This could be interpreted as a simple fallacy of conflation: failing to observe the difference between a property ($\text{normativity}_{\text{ont}}$), and that which has that property (the things that are $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$).¹³ More charitably, we might recognize it as a further form of regular polysemy in uses of ‘normativity’. Nouns formed by nominalizing adjectives (‘normative’ $\rightarrow$ ‘normativity’) are often ambiguous, used to refer either to the higher-order or *abstract* property P predicated by the adjective, or to any of a set of lower-order or *substantive*, P-making, properties (or tropes/property-instances). For example, we might identify the “nutritiousness” of a carrot substantively with its vitamin-A content and the “nutritiousness” of a potato substantively with its carbohydrate content, whereas the abstract property of nutritiousness, which the carrot and the potato share, is approximately the property of being disposed to promote a person’s health when consumed.¹⁴

Use of ‘normativity’ (=“normativeness”) presents the same polysemous pattern. First-level $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$ facts and properties (e.g. the fact that it’s raining, the property of being painful) have the abstract (third-level) property of $\text{normativity}_{\text{ont}}$ because they have second-level $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$ properties (e.g. being a reason to open your umbrella, being bad). Accordingly, ‘normativity’ is apt to be used in a substantive sense to refer to the second-level $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$ properties in virtue of which the first-level facts and properties are $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$. In the substantive sense, “normativity” would not strictly be a property, but rather a *kind* of properties, relations, etc., or a *domain* of reality: “the normative”. We can therefore distinguish a further dimension of ambiguity between abstract and substantive senses:

$\text{NORMATIVITY}_{\text{ont-ab}}$:	The property of being $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$;
$\text{NORMATIVITY}_{\text{ont-sub}}$:	The properties (etc.) that are inherently $\text{normative}_{\text{ont}}$ (“the normative”).

Recognizing such a polysemy only gets charity so far. It still seems we have to recognize widespread confusion in metanormative theory. Notice that it doesn’t necessarily follow from a fact or property at the second level (like goodness, or being-a-reason-for) having a certain property (like being analyzable, unanalyzable, natural, or nonnatural) that the property at the third level ($\text{normativity}_{\text{ont-ab}}$) also has that property, or vice versa. For example, nonnatural second-level properties, if there are any, can have the (arguably) natural third-level property of *being thought about by us*.

Conceivably, therefore, $\text{normative}_{\text{ont-sub}}$ properties like *being a reason* could be nonnatural while the property of $\text{normativity}_{\text{ont-ab}}$ is entirely natural, or vice versa. It is open to nonnaturalists about the reason-relation or value to identify $\text{normativity}_{\text{ont-ab}}$ as the property of *being the kind of property that agents look to in order to close their deliberations*, for example. This looks like a natural third-level property, although it could conceivably be possessed only by nonnatural second-level properties. A rival

¹³ Cf. Parfit 2011: 329. This is one way G.E. Moore (1903) characterizes the “naturalistic fallacy”: confusing substantive and adjective on the basis of failing to distinguish the ‘is’ of identity (是) and the ‘is’ of predication (很). Ironically, many contemporary nonnaturalists (among others) may be committing the mistake Moore cautioned against!

¹⁴ Cf. Finlay 2001: 48f. Substantive definitions of nouns are common in metanormative theory. For example, Judy Thomson (1996) identifies moral “goodness” with the various *ways* of being morally good, such as being generous, just, etc.

suggestion is that to be “normative” is to *reduce to facts about reasons*,¹⁵ which is clearly addressing normativity_{ont} in the abstract sense. This would make normativity_{ont-ab} a reductively analyzable property, but would refer questions about naturalness back down to the second-level issue concerning the naturalness of the reason-relation.

This possibility of “ticket-splitting” hasn’t been widely recognized,¹⁶ and even theorists who draw the distinction explicitly seem to assume that the questions of naturalness and analyzability must have the same answer at both levels. Parfit himself may be a case in point. He objects to theories that analyze normative properties like *being-a-reason* as a natural property N that they face a fatal “lost property” problem, of explaining what it is that we would learn about N if we were to learn that N is the normative property of being-a-reason. A naturalist about reasons could reply that we learn that N has the property of normativity_{ont-ab}, or of being normative_{ont}; perhaps, for example, that N is a property that certain agents look to in order to settle deliberation.

Should the problem of univocity in cognitivists’ talk about “normativity” be understood in the abstract sense, or the substantive sense—or both? The various familiar positions, like nonnaturalism, subjectivist and objectivist naturalism, seem primarily to be theories of inherently normative_{ont} facts and properties, i.e. of normativity_{ont-sub}. Privileging the abstract property of normativity_{ont-ab} would make for strange bedfellows where the self-described “nonnaturalist” David Enoch might agree with self-described “naturalists” like David Copp (2012) and Laura and Francois Schroeter (ms) that “normativity” is reductively analyzable as the property of *being the kind of thing that agents look toward to close deliberation*, against the self-described “naturalist” Mark Schroeder and the self-described “nonnaturalists” Parfit and Tim Scanlon (1998) who might agree it is the property of *reducing to facts about reasons*. So the familiar battlelines over the nature of “normativity” seem best interpreted mostly in terms of normativity_{ont-sub}. By comparison, the question of what normativity_{ont-ab} is has drawn little attention.

Despite suggesting rampant equivocation over “normativity”, observing this ambiguity may be a promising development for unity in metanormative theorizing. Even if the different theories of “normativity” in the substantive sense are about radically different facts and properties, they could still be unified by the common aim of describing those facts and properties, whichever they are, with the further, third-level property of normativity_{ont-ab} that theorists are assuming rather than analyzing. The radical differences between the camps could then be explained by divergence in opinion about which facts and properties those are. Of course, this hope hinges on different theorists assuming the *same* third-level property, which is possible even if they would endorse different official definitions of it, but we have yet to identify decisive evidence for or against this.

3.2 Formal vs. Robust Normativity

In section 2.2, I suggested that what unifies cognitivists and noncognitivists is interest in a particular kind of judgment we all make. What unifies all cognitivists against noncognitivists, I provisionally suggested,

¹⁵ E.g. Hampton 1998: 115, Raz 1999: 67, Schroeder 2007: 79f.

¹⁶ One exception is Eklund 2017: 65.

is the view that these are representational judgments, about normative_{ont} properties and facts. So univocity might be secured by defining normativity_{ont-ab} as normativity_{ont-judg-rep}: the property shared by all and only the facts and properties of the kind that normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about, and by defining normativity_{ont-sub} as the facts and properties that have this property inherently. However, I will argue that matters aren't so straightforward. The difficulty emerges from reflection on a further ambiguity in talk about "normativity", between *robust* and *formal* senses.

Cognitivists encounter difficulties identifying the object of their investigations, normativity_{ont} (abstract or substantive) to others in uncontroversial terms, due to the lack of agreement over its nature. These difficulties are particularly acute for nonnaturalists, since they deny that "normativity" can be explained in "nonnormative" terms. Attempts to pick it out therefore generally rely on either the mention (in language-based ostensions) or use (in judgment-based ostensions) of normative_{lang-exp-judg} language: "normativity" is the special property or domain of what "ought to", "should", "must", or "may" be, or of "obligation", "right" and "wrong", "correct" and "incorrect", "value", "good" and "bad", or—the present favorite—of "reasons".¹⁷ Allan Gibbard identifies the target by reference to "a circle of ought-like terms", for example, and Mark Schroeder defines it as what is reducible to "reasons".¹⁸

Inconveniently however, at least much of this normative_{lang-exp-judg} vocabulary turns out to be ambiguous. As John Broome puts it,

I could not explain the term 'normative' except in terms of 'ought'. 'Normative' means 'to do with ought', but this ought has to be a normative one, of course. So this definition gets us nowhere if we cannot already identify the normative ought. I simply have to assume you know a normative ought when you meet one. (2013: 10)

There are ordinary uses of 'ought', 'must', 'may', 'should', 'obligation', 'right', 'wrong', 'correct', 'incorrect', 'value', 'good' and 'bad' that describe facts and properties that nonnaturalists allow are naturalistic and reductively analyzable (e.g. Parfit 2011: 308), and subjectivists allow are nonpsychological. For example, "oughts" of etiquette, "right" answers to exam questions, "good" moves in chess, and legal "obligations". Philosophers therefore commonly deny that these statements are about the normative_{ont} facts and properties that are the objects of their metanormative investigations.

One might think the quarry can be identified as what the *normative* uses of 'ought', 'right', 'good', 'value', etc. are about. The need for a general term to capture this "fugitive thought" eluding our grasp in ordinary normative_{lang-exp-judg} language may be a primary motivation for theorists largely abandoning talk of "value", "obligation", etc. since the 1970s in favor of 'normativity' as a term of art. But the move has been an ironic failure, because today the same distinction is observed for 'normative' itself. Broome continues,

The terminology in this area is confusing because so many words have both normative and nonnormative senses. Even the word 'normative' has a nonnormative (in my sense) sense. (2013: 11)

¹⁷ I proposed a solution above in terms of *normativity*_{ont-judg-rep}.

¹⁸ 'Ought' is also favored in Broome 2013, while 'reason' is also favored in Raz 1999, Parfit 2011, Scanlon 1998.

This distinction is marked with various terminology; I'll adopt the theory-neutral labels of *formal* versus *robust* normativity_{ont}.¹⁹ "Mere" formal normativity_{ont} is said to be ubiquitous (found in law, etiquette, games, shopping lists, and more), naturalistic, nonsubjective, but of little philosophical interest. Robust normativity_{ont} is said to be the important kind of normativity_{ont} of special interest to ethics and other branches of "normative" philosophy.

Some theorists think this ambiguity problem can be solved by identifying a special subset of normative_{lang-exp-judg} vocabulary that is unambiguously robust. 'Reason' has been the most popular candidate. Parfit distinguishes robust normativity as "reason-implying" from formal normativity as "rule-implying". I think this attempt to disambiguate "normativity" fails. We can legitimately talk about merely "institutional" *reasons*, such as legal reasons, or reasons of chess,²⁰ and some domains of allegedly robust normativity, like morality, seem to imply robustly normative *rules* like the Categorical Imperative or the Principle of Utility. This claim might be rejected, or a theorist might appeal to some other normative_{lang-exp-judg} word instead.²¹ I'll sketch an alternative way of looking at the relationship between formal and robust normativity, which treats the parallel vocabularies as an important datum to be explained rather than a problem to be explained away. My goal is not to establish that this view is correct (although I believe it is), but to show how it complicates the task of defining normativity_{ont}.

Are formal and robust normativity_{ont} both forms of "normativity" in the same sense? Or do the qualifiers here function to disambiguate different senses of a word, as in "river banks and financial banks"? The parallel vocabularies are a strong reason to think the former. But this prompts a second question: what kind of adjectives are the labels 'formal' and 'robust' here? In particular, do they function *subsectively*? (An adjective A is subsective just in case being an A N entails being an N.) For example, 'formal' might function *anti*-subsectively like 'fake' (or *non*-subsectively like 'alleged'), in which case even if there is one common meaning of 'normativity' at issue, formal normativity isn't really normativity at all. We could then presume that 'robust' is *exhaustively* subsective, and equivalent to 'genuine' (e.g. Broome 2013); all normativity would then be robust normativity. Or 'formal' might function subsectively, so that formal and robust normativity are each subclasses of normativity_{ont} in a general and common sense.

Many theorists are attracted to the anti- or non-subsective views. Among legal philosophers, it is a popular idea that legal "normativity" consists in law necessarily *purporting* to be genuinely (robustly) normative.²² However, this view is controversial even in the philosophy of law, and seems much less plausible for other instances of "formal normativity", such as games like chess and football, grocery lists,

¹⁹ McPherson 2011. Formal normativity has also been labeled 'rule-implying' (Parfit 2011), 'pseudo', 'institutional' (Joyce 2001), and 'generic' (Copp 2007) while robust normativity has been labeled 'reason-implying' (Parfit 2011), 'genuine' (Joyce 2001), 'true' (Broome 2013), and 'authoritative' (Copp 2007).

²⁰ E.g. Joyce 2001, Finlay 2006, Enoch 2011b, Copp 2017, McPherson forthcoming. A certain chess move might be a *good* move because it will provoke a rash response, which is a *reason* to make it, but doesn't imply any *rule*. Similarly, some philosophers acknowledge the existence of *moral reasons* while denying they are necessarily robustly normative; e.g. Finlay 2006, Copp 2007.

²¹ For example, 'rational', 'matters', or 'important'. For discussion, see Finlay 2006, 2014: 252f; cf. Korsgaard 1996: 42-4.

²² E.g. Raz 1979; for extension to formal normativity generally, see Wodak ms.

or exam rubrics. (Is calling an exam answer “wrong” really to pretend or allege that it is “robustly” prohibited?) Additionally, there are popular analyses of what it is to be formally normative which make it out to be something real rather than putative. It’s commonly said that to be “formally normative” is just to provide a standard, rule, or norm—in the original senses of *yardstick*, *ruler*, or *builder’s square*—against which other things can be compared.²³ So a code of laws describes (ideal) behaviors, against which actual behavior can be compared, and a shopping list describes possible purchases, against which actual purchases can be compared. Formal normativity_{ont-ab} would then be roughly *norm-relativity*.

Along such lines, in my work I have claimed to provide a reductively naturalistic, objectivist analysis of “normativity” (substantive) as consisting in *end-relational* properties of increasing/ decreasing the probability of some outcome or “end”, and *rule-relational* properties of conforming/ nonconforming with some proposition or “rule”.²⁴ I subsume these with what Kant called “hypothetical imperatives of skill”, or claims about what has to happen in order that some outcome obtains. This invites the objection that my account is about the wrong kind of normativity_{ont}.²⁵ Other cognitivists are interested in *robust* normativity_{ont-sub}, or what our normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about. So Parfit’s pessimistic conclusion might seem partially vindicated: at least one of his supposed cognitivist opponents isn’t talking about “normativity” in the same sense at all.

However, this conclusion may be too hasty. I have advanced claims about “normativity” aware of the formal/robust distinction, and that my fellow theorists are typically interested only in the latter. My reductivist, objectivist claims about “normativity” are based on the belief that “robustly normative” judgments and expressions are about exactly the *same kind* of facts and properties as “formally normative” judgments and expressions. So these claims are concerned with (substantive) normativity_{ont-judg-rep}, the facts and properties that normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about, which we were supposing to be the common object of cognitivist theories.²⁶

This view might seem absurd: surely there is a clear difference between formal and robust normativity_{ont}! I agree that there is a difference between mere judgments about formal normativity_{ont-sub}, such as many judgments about the requirements of law, games, and etiquette, and (robustly) normative_{judg-ost} judgments, such as (perhaps) those about morality or rationality. But it doesn’t follow that those judgments are about different kinds of facts and properties. Recall the noncognitivists’ views about what distinguishes a judgment as normative_{judg-ost}, and the availability of a (second-order) hybrid theory of this. Perhaps what distinguishes a judgment as robustly normative is not *merely* what it is about, but also some nonrepresentational property it has.

For concreteness, I’ll assume my own view here: that robustly normative_{judg-ost} judgments are distinguished from nonrobust judgments about normative_{ont} facts and properties by *being made from a*

²³ See especially Railton 2003: 322-3; cf. Copp 2007: 267.

²⁴ For end-relational normativity_{ont-sub}, see (e.g.) Finlay 2006, 2009, 2010, 2014. For rule-relational normativity_{ont-sub}, see Finlay & Plunkett forthcoming.

²⁵ Cf. Dowell 2016. This might be attributed to my focusing on (ambiguous) normative_{lang-exp-judg} *language*, as opposed to normative_{judg-ost} judgments.

²⁶ See Woods 2017 for a similar account of formal normativity.

relevantly motivated perspective.²⁷ A judgment with end-relational content (concerning the probability of some outcome) is “robust” in case the judge contemporaneously desires the end in question, and a judgment with rule-relational content (concerning what conforms with some general proposition), such as a legal judgment, is “robust” in case she contemporaneously accepts the rule in question as a guide to conduct. In Parfit’s *Burning Hotel* scenario, for example, there is no deliberation over whether to live or die; the goal of living is simply assumed. Within this deliberative context, the judgment “[In order to live], I ought to jump!” qualifies as robustly normative_{judg-ost}. On this view, an amoralist’s “moral judgments” would be “merely formal” judgments—despite possibly having the same *content* as the moral judgments of ordinary people²⁸—while the committed mafioso’s judgments of familial obligation are robustly normative_{judg-ost} judgments. I’ll call this kind of hybrid view of normative_{judg-ost} judgments a *perspectivist* account, tipping my hat to Nietzsche.

3.3 A Perspectivist Diagnosis of Metanormative Disagreement

From the perspectivist’s point of view, metanormative theorists are unified by interest in a kind of judgments that can be properly understood only within the two-dimensional space generated by the twin axes of subjective psychology or motivation, and objective world. This gives perspectivism the resources to explain why different theorists could come to such opposed views of a common subject: each correctly perceives part of the phenomenon but fails to see the whole, and so goes wrong in trying to analyze something two-dimensional in a single dimension, as depicted below. Furthermore, each is sensitive to the errors of their opponents, which, given ignorance of the perspectivist alternative, strengthens their conviction that their own views must be correct.

			Recognizes Cognitive Dimension?	
			Yes	No
Recognizes Noncognitive Dimension?	Yes		Perspectivism	Noncognitivism
	No <i>Sensitive to Noncognitive Dimension/ Robustness?</i>		Recognizes Content is Nonpsychological?	
			Yes	No
		Yes	Nonnaturalism Error Theory	Subjectivism
		No	Obj. Naturalism	

Fig 1.: What Makes a Judgment Robustly Normative?

From this vantage-point, *noncognitivism* is explained as the result of recognizing the noncognitive dimension of robust normative_{judg-ost} judgment (e.g. that they are made from a motivated perspective), but—perhaps blinded by this insight—missing the cognitive dimension, of what those judgments are

²⁷ For similar views, see references in note 8.

²⁸ Cf. Tresan 2006, Finlay 2004.

about. As Parfit complains against Gibbard, normative judgment isn't a matter of arbitrary choice or preference, but (in part) of discovering antecedently existing facts (2011: 386f, 408).

Objectivist naturalism, whether of neo-Aristotelian (e.g. Foot 2001, Thomson 2008) or non-Aristotelian (e.g. Copp 2007, Finlay 2014) forms, is explained as a result of recognizing both the cognitive dimension and (broadly) the essentially nonpsychological nature of its content (what robustly normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about), but perhaps failing to sufficiently heed the (noncognitive) difference between robustly normative_{judg-ost} judgments and mere judgments of formally normative_{ont} facts and properties.²⁹ Hence the charge commonly leveled against such views, that they leave out the “normativity” altogether. As Parfit quotes Darwall, “For the philosophical naturalist, concerned to place normativity within the natural order, there is nothing plausible for normative force to be other than motivational force” (2011: 363).

Subjectivist naturalism, Humean or Kantian, can be explained as a result of sensitivity to the (noncognitive) dimension that differentiates robustly normative_{judg-ost} judgments from mere judgments of formal normativity_{ont}, as well as recognition of the cognitive dimension, but failing to recognize that these are two separate dimensions, and therefore misinterpreting the noncognitive dimension in terms of cognitive content, incorrectly analyzed in psychological terms (perhaps committing the “psychologistic fallacy” of analyzing something objective in terms of our subjective reactions to it). As Parfit complains against his subjectivist opponents, normative_{judg-ost} judgments aren't about anybody's psychological attitudes or dispositions, actual or counterfactual.³⁰

Nonnaturalism, finally, can be explained as also being sensitive to both dimensions though failing to distinguish them, but also recognizing that the content is nonpsychological, and as a result misinterpreting the specially robust character of these judgments in terms of their being *about* something of a special robust character (perhaps committing the “projective fallacy” of mistaking our subjective affects or reactions to the world for objective qualities that prompt those reactions).³¹ Also recognizing that no other kind of ordinary, natural property is such that being about it would give normative_{judg-ost} judgments their robust character, nonnaturalists mistakenly but understandably conclude that these judgments must be about special, *nonnatural* properties, the mysteriousness of which encourages *error theorists* to maintain that all positive normative_{judg-ost} judgments are untrue.

Perspectivism therefore provides an alternative explanation of how metanormative theorists could come to such different views, rescuing us from Parfit's pessimism. However, once we return to what cognitivists might mean by “normativity”, the case for ambiguity is bolstered. For this two-dimensional, perspectivist view on normative_{judg-ost} judgment brings to light a number of alternative things these different theorists might reasonably mean by ‘normativity’. Rather than dismissing them as mistaken

²⁹ Although my work (like Copp's) has been informed by the difference, I have often ignored it when making claims about “normativity”, assuming the concept of NORMATIVITY_{ont-judg-rep}.

³⁰ 2011: 324f, 431f. See also Dancy 2005, Enoch 2011a.

³¹ Cf. Copp 2017: 48. Perspectivism also offers a potential explanation of many nonnaturalists' barely comprehensible *quietist* claims that “normativity” exists/ is a property, but not in any “ontological” sense (Parfit 2011, Scanlon 2014), as an attempt to reconcile that (i) robustly normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about a particular kind of facts and properties, but (ii) there *is no property* of robust normativity_{ont}.

about the nature of “normativity”, we might rather identify different concepts they could be using on the basis of their sensitivity to different parts of the complex phenomenon of normative_{judg-ost} judgment as understood by the perspectivist.³²

3.4 The Many Possible Faces of Normativity

Start with the concepts introduced above;

NORMATIVITY_{ont-judg-rep-sub}: The facts and properties of the kind that normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about.

NORMATIVITY_{ont-judg-rep-ab}: The property shared by all and only the facts and properties of the kind that normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about.

According to perspectivism, objectivist naturalism (of the kind in my work) provides the correct account of normativity_{ont-judg-rep-sub}, which turns out to be the same kind of facts and properties that merely “formally normative” judgments are about. So if nonnaturalists and subjectivists are employing the same effective definition in their talk about “normativity”, as hypothesized above, their metanormative claims are false. They err about the nature of normativity_{ont-judg-rep} because they wrongly attribute the special character of their (robust) normative_{judg-ost} judgments to it. Of course, they would deny they are talking about “mere formal normativity”. But this would be mistaken, just like somebody encountering ice for the first time denying they were talking about “mere” water or H₂O.³³ According to nonnaturalists and subjectivists, on the other hand, perspectivism errs about normativity_{ont-judg-rep} because it wrongly attributes this difference to a noncognitive or nonrepresentational property of normative_{judg-ost} judgments.³⁴

However, the “robustness” of the property itself may be nonnegotiable for some cognitivists’ concept of “normativity”. For example, some nonnaturalists declare that either “normativity” is irreducible, or else it doesn’t exist at all (e.g. Parfit 2011: 267). These claims might simply reflect what (in the perspectivist’s eyes) is the nonnaturalists’ mistake, but they could instead point towards other, more discriminating definitions. For example, sometimes nonnaturalists—together with *error theorists* about “normativity”³⁵—seem to employ concepts along the following lines:

NORMATIVITY_{ont-judg-rep-robust-sub}: The facts and properties of the kind that normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about, in virtue of which they are (robustly) normative_{judg-ost}.

³² For similar speculation, see McPherson & Plunkett ms.

³³ For discussion of opacity in normative thought and language, see Copp 2012, Laskowski 2017.

³⁴ The most pressing worry might be that perspectivism, like noncognitivism, cannot adequately account for practices of wondering or deliberating about final ends or intrinsic value (e.g. Olson 2011). See Finlay 2014: 204 for discussion. It also must deal with the contextualist’s well-known problem with disagreement; for my response see Finlay 2014: ch. 8.

³⁵ A once-rare but increasingly popular position; e.g. Streumer 2017.

NORMATIVITY_{ont-judg-rep-robust-ab}: The property shared by all and only the facts and properties of the kind that normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about, in virtue of which they are (robustly) normative_{judg-ost}.

Or alternatively, a directly ostensive ontological definition:

NORMATIVITY_{ont-ost-robust}: *That* property (ostending a “robust” property being cognized, perceived, or imagined).

In either case, the perspectivist will conclude that the projective fallacy infects the concepts nonnaturalists are employing, and that “normativity” in the nonnaturalists’ substantive sense neither exists, nor (contra error theorists) is what our ordinary normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about.

Now consider the subjectivists. They could conceivably be employing any of the effective definitions already surveyed in this section. In this case, perspectivism agrees with nonnaturalists that subjectivist theories are in error, since whatever normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about \, it isn’t something psychological. Parfit doubts that anybody with his concept of (robust) normativity_{ont} could believe it to be psychological, and so charity leads him to pessimism about a common object of inquiry between himself and subjectivists like Williams, Darwall, Korsgaard, and Schroeder.³⁶ Perspectivism casts helpful light here too. It implies that whenever somebody makes a first-personal normative_{judg-ost} judgment (e.g. about what she herself has a reason or ought to do), the propositional content of that judgment is true if and only if the object of judgment has a corresponding *subjective* property of being instrumentally related to the satisfaction of a desire of the agent. Furthermore, according to perspectivism this subjective property may be the *only* property tracked by all first-personal normative_{judg-ost} judgments, since different judgments are about different properties (as relevant to different motivated perspectives). It would therefore be understandable that a theorist might identify substantive normativity_{ont-judg-rep} (what normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about) or substantive normativity_{ont-judg-rep-robust} (the facts and properties they are about in virtue of which they are robust) with this subjective property—even though this would be an error because normative_{judg-ost} judgments are not *about* such properties.

While this provides a possible explanation of how theories as different as nonnaturalism and subjectivism could be aimed at the same object it *also* reveals how subjectivists’ claims about “normativity” could be about a different property or domain. Perhaps subjectivists are not using any of the above concepts, but rather a concept like

NORMATIVITY_{ont-judg-relation}: The relation that obtains between an agent and an action iff a first-personal, robustly normative_{judg-ost} judgment about that agent and that action would be true.

According to perspectivism there is such a relation, and a subjectivist or instrumentalist theory of it is correct (for first-person judgments, at least)—although subjectivists are mistaken if they claim that this

³⁶ E.g. Parfit 2011: 294.

is what normative_{judg-ost} judgments are *about*. Nonnaturalists could also be employing this concept, but then (the perspectivist will think) the nonnaturalists' claims about normativity_{ont-judg-relation} are false.

Once we recognize a concept of normativity_{ont-judg-relation}, we also must recognize additional, related concepts, and potential further polysemies in talk about "normativity". Presumably, a fact or property would be "normative" in a relevant sense only if it stands in this relation to some agent. So "normativity", understood as the abstract property of being "normative" in this sense, will not be the relation itself, but the *relational property* of standing in this relation to some agent. Or more precisely, 'normativity' will be an essentially relativistic term, like 'tall', referring to any of a family of relational properties: something could be *normative/normativity-relative-to-s₁*, or *normative/normativity-relative-to-s₂*, etc., but nothing would ever be *normative-simpliciter*.³⁷ So we have:

NORMATIVITY-RELATIVE-TO-S: The property of standing in the relation of normativity_{ont-judg-relation} to S.

If there is such a relation as normativity_{ont-judg-relation}, tracked by our (first-personal, robust) normative_{judg-ost} judgments, then why *not* think this is normativity_{ont-judg-rep}, or what our normative_{judg-ost} judgments are about? An answer arises from considering what the extension of the relevant class of judgments is. While the central paradigms of normative_{judg-ost} judgments are first-personal judgments, concerning what "I" have a reason or ought to do, etc., I don't know anybody who denies that there are second- and third-personal "robustly normative" judgments, e.g. about what "you", "he", or "they" ought to do. But this introduces a complication, because these judgments can be motivationally "internal" or "external" in two fundamentally different ways, corresponding to the two dimensions distinguished by perspectivism.³⁸ A judgment could be about normative_{ont} facts and properties that stand in an internal relation either to the specified *agent's* desires or agency ("agent-internalism"), or to the *judge's* desires or agency ("judge/speaker-internalism").

First-personal "robust" normative_{judg-ost} judgments are internal both to the judge and to the agent, being one and the same individual, whereas paradigmatic judgments of "merely formal normativity" are external both to the judge and to the agent. Taking first-personal normative_{judg-ost} judgments as one's paradigm of robust normativity therefore conceals the fundamental dilemma that faces us here in trying to define (robust) "normativity". This dilemma comes into view when we consider second- and third-personal judgments, in which agent-relativity and judge-relativity can come apart. Which kind of internality determines a judgment as being of the relevantly "robust" or normative_{judg-ost} type?

³⁷ This shouldn't be confused with the relation of *being-a-reason-for*. Looking beyond first-personal judgments, it allows for reasons *for* *s₁* that are normative-relative-to-*s₂* but not normative-relative-to-*s₁*. For example, reasons for Hitler not to commit genocide might be normative-relative-to-us, but not normative-relative-to-him (cf. Finlay 2006). This account also shouldn't be confused with a "constructivism" that analyzes F's being "normative-relative-to-s" in purely psychological terms of *s's taking* F to be normative (e.g. Street 2008), any more than x's being "to the left-relative-to-s" can be analyzed in terms of *s's believing* x to be to the left. Rather, "*s₁ believes that p is a normative reason for s₂ to ϕ relative-to-s₃*" is parallel to "*s₁ believes that x is to the left of s₂ relative-to-s₃*".

³⁸ This point is widely observed; e.g. Dreier 1990, Harman 1996.

By attributing the robustness of normative_{judg-ost} judgments to their being about a partly psychological relationship between the agent and the action, subjectivists commit themselves to denying that any judge-internal judgment about normative_{ont} facts and properties is a normative_{judg-ost} judgment if it isn't agent-internal. This gets subjectivists into trouble, with their opponents objecting that second- and third-personal *moral* judgments are “robustly normative” yet also *categorical*, their truth-value being independent of any instrumental relationship to the agent's desires or agency. Perspectivism understands these objections as a result of privileging instead the judge-internal relation, and classifying a judgment as “robustly normative” only if it is internally related to the judge's own desires or agency (even if nonnaturalists misinterpret it due to the projective fallacy). Here perspectivism agrees with the noncognitivists: this relation lies wholly on the dimension of motivated perspective, rather than that of cognitive content.³⁹

Perhaps, then, subjectivists really are employing a different concept of “robust normativity”? If so, then the perspectivist will think that they should stand their ground and insist that morality indeed isn't necessarily “normative” (e.g. that Hitler may not have had any genuinely “normative” reason not to engage in genocide)⁴⁰, explaining away the indignant reactions such claims provoke as results of misunderstanding their (nonendorsing) sense of “normative”. We can grant that there were *exceptionally good* reasons for Hitler not to engage in genocide, even if these weren't normative-relative-to-Hitler. However, subjectivists sometimes respond to this kind of objection by instead trying to accommodate the “normativity” of moral judgments by denying that they really are agent-external—a move which typically strikes their opponents as desperate and implausible. This perceived need to accommodate the “normativity” of morality may be evidence that they are at least in part concerned to capture a kind of robustness which is in fact agent-external.⁴¹

Since there are no facts and properties that all and only these judge-internal judgments are about (different judges being related in this way to different sets of formally normative_{ont} facts and properties), and no special “normative” property shared by all the facts and properties in this (empty) set, this implies that no property of “robust normativity” along these lines, such as normativity_{ont-judg-rep-robust-ab}, is ever instantiated. So we might conclude that the only robust kind of “normativity” to be found in the world is the noncognitivist's notion of normativity_{funct}: the nonrepresentational, purely psychological property (or properties) of normative_{judg-ost} judgments and normative_{lang-exp-judg} language. However, there is at least one further possibility. We might still make sense of talk about “robustly normative facts and properties” by construing ‘normative’ as itself a (robustly) normative_{lang-exp-judg} term.⁴² This would be to adopt a *quasi-realist* concept of normativity_{ont}, which could be defined, in the expressivist's “sideways-on” style, as follows:

NORMATIVITY _{quasi-ont} :	To apply this concept to some facts or properties involves having or expressing a favorable attitude towards them.
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³⁹ This contrasts with unpopular *judge*-subjectivism (not to be confused with the *agent*-subjectivism under discussion here) that analyzes normative_{judg-ost} judgments as *introspectively* psychological.

⁴⁰ Harman 1973; see also Foot 1972, Joyce 2001.

⁴¹ E.g. Schroeder 2007 (cf. Parfit 2011: 361).

⁴² E.g. Gibbard 2003.

So for example, judging a fact F to be a normative_{quasi-ont} reason to do A might be to approve of weighing F in favor of doing A.

This quasi-realist concept of “normativity” is presumably different from the concept that the subjectivist employs in claiming that “normativity” is always relative to or dependent on the relevant agent’s desires. That is, unless the subjectivist happens (unusually and perversely) to approve of agents always acting in ways that instrumentally serve the agent’s own desires, even if, for example, the desires in question are genocidal.⁴³ However, as Gibbard points out (2003: 184f), the concept of normativity_{quasi-ont} does a reasonable job of modeling the claims of nonnaturalists, who unlike subjectivists generally describe a fact, property, or consideration as “normative” only if they approve of an agent’s being guided by it. So it could be argued that the metanormative claims of nonnaturalists like Parfit actually employ the concept of normativity_{quasi-ont}, attributing their disavowals of noncognitivism either to a lack of self-understanding,⁴⁴ or to their metanormative claims being aimed at primarily practical rather than theoretical effect (i.e. “bullshitting”).

Having exposed these potential ambiguities in talk about “normativity”, we are now able also to identify potentially insidious cases of equivocation within familiar and influential lines of philosophical reasoning. It is commonplace today for theorists to recognize the distinction between mere “formal normativity” (which is neither judge- nor agent-internal; symbolically: $\bigcirc$), and “robust normativity”. But what has usually not been noticed is that there are three distinct kinds of robustness: that involving judge-internality only (symbolically: Φ), that involving agent-internality only (Θ), and that involving both judge- and agent-internality ($\oplus$). This may lead us into the following kinds of inferences:

Anti-Instrumentalist Inference: Moral oughts are robustly normative (Φ). Moral oughts do not depend on agents’ attitudes. Therefore, it is not the case that robust normativity (Θ) depends on agents’ attitudes.

Moral Instrumentalist Inference: Robust normativity (Θ) depends on agents’ attitudes. Moral oughts are robustly normative (Φ). Therefore, moral oughts depend on agents’ attitudes.

Moral Nihilist Inference: Robust normativity (Θ) depends on agents’ attitudes. Moral oughts do not depend on agents’ attitudes. Therefore, moral oughts are not robustly normative (Φ).

Noncognitivist Antirealist Inference: Judgments are robustly normative (Φ) in virtue of the judge’s attitudes, not in virtue of being about a particular class of facts or properties. Therefore, there are no robustly normative (Θ) facts or properties.

Moral Rationalist Inference: Moral oughts are robustly normative (Φ). If an agent believes they ought to do A, and that ‘ought’ is robustly normative ($\Theta/\oplus$), then they are irrational if they are not motivated to do A. Therefore, if an agent believes they morally ought to do A, then they are irrational if they are not motivated to do A.

⁴³ Although the implication that they do arguably lies behind the perceived outrageousness of subjectivist claims about (e.g.) what normative reasons monsters like Hitler might have.

⁴⁴ Parfit concedes he “cannot exclude the possibility” (2011: 272).

Anti-Egoist Inference: Harm and pain are bad in a robustly normative way ($\ominus$). All else being equal we robustly ought ($\oplus/\Phi$) to prevent whatever is bad in a robustly normative way ($\oplus/\Phi$). Therefore, all else being equal we robustly ought ($\oplus/\Phi$) to prevent harm and pain.

Isn't it a violation of the principle of charity to think that philosophers ever equivocate in these ways? Our reason to suspect equivocation is that while each of these premises is quite plausible (perhaps even compelling) under the suggested, equivocal disambiguations, each argument contains a premise or conclusion that is far less plausible (and perhaps even very implausible) under the disambiguation required for validity.

4 Conclusion

What do philosophers mean by 'normative' and 'normativity', and can the univocity of metanormative theory be saved? I first argued that univocity between cognitivists' and noncognitivists' talk about "normative" thought and language could plausibly be secured by an ostensive, judgment-focused concept. Plausibly, all metanormative theorists are united by interest in a common kind of judgment we all make. I then asked whether univocity in claims about the "normativity" of facts and properties between different kinds of cognitivists could be secured by a derivative concept, concerning what those normative judgments were about. My findings here were more ambiguous. First, I showed how a perspectivist, hybrid theory of normative judgments offers an explanation how philosophers could come to radically different views on this common subject-matter, potentially saving us from Parfit's pessimism about metanormative theory. But second, I showed how from this point of view we could alternatively distinguish a range of interrelated though different things these theorists could mean by 'normativity' — which would save the truth of many of their superficially conflicting claims, but at the expense of implying that many metanormative debates involve talking past each other. One way of looking at this is that metanormative theory is centrally concerned with a complex network of interrelated properties and relations, and the words 'normative' and 'normativity' are commonly used, polysemously, to pick out different parts of this network by different theorists and at different times. I hope this investigation helps advance metanormative debate by aiding disambiguation of different claims about "normativity" and thereby avoidance of equivocations and mere verbal disputes.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This translation is an abridged version of a paper published in D. Plunkett, K. Toh, and S. Shapiro, *Dimensions of Normativity* (Oxford University Press, 2018). For acknowledgments please see the original version.

Glossary of Definitions:

NORMATIVE _{ont} :	(As of facts and properties); Having a property P of some special kind.
NORMATIVE _{rep} :	(As of expressions and judgments); Being about something normative _{ont} .
NORMATIVE _{funct} :	(As of expressions or judgments); Having the nonrepresentational function(s) F.
NORMATIVE _{lang/judg-ost} :	(As of expressions/judgments); Having the common property of samples $n_1, n_2, \dots$
NORMATIVE _{lang-exp-judg} :	(As of language); Having the property of being conventionally used to express normative _{judg-ost} judgments.
NORMATIVE _{ont-judg-rep} :	Having the property P that is common to all and only the facts and properties of the kind that normative _{judg-ost} judgments (and normative _{lang-exp-judg} expressions) are about.
NORMATIVITY _{ont-ab} :	The property of being normative _{ont} .
NORMATIVITY _{ont-sub} :	The properties (etc.) that are inherently normative _{ont} (“the normative”).
NORMATIVITY _{ont-judg-rep-sub} :	The facts and properties of the kind that normative _{judg-ost} judgments are about.
NORMATIVITY _{ont-judg-rep-ab} :	The property shared by all and only the facts and properties of the kind that normative _{judg-ost} judgments are about.
NORMATIVITY _{ont-judg-rep-robust-sub} :	The facts and properties of the kind that normative _{judg-ost} judgments are about, in virtue of which they are (robustly) normative _{judg-ost} .
NORMATIVITY _{ont-judg-rep-robust-ab} :	The property shared by all and only the facts and properties of the kind that normative _{judg-ost} judgments are about, in virtue of which they are (robustly) normative _{judg-ost} .
NORMATIVITY _{ont-ost-robust} :	<i>That</i> property (ostending a “robust” property being cognized, perceived, or imagined).
NORMATIVITY _{ont-judg-relation} :	The relation that obtains between an agent and an action iff a first-personal, robustly normative _{judg-ost} judgment about that agent and that action would be true.
NORMATIVITY-RELATIVE-TO-S:	The property of standing in the relation of normativity _{ont-judg-reason} to S.
NORMATIVITY _{quasi-ont} :	To apply this concept to some facts or properties is to have or express a favorable attitude towards them.

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