

*Abstract*

In meta-normativity, there is a dispute over the following question:

(Q1): Is (are) any normative notion(s) fundamental within normativity? And if so, which normative notion(s) is (are) fundamental within normativity?

The dispute over (Q1) is over whether any normative notions, such as *a reason* or *ought*, are correctly understood as *fundamental* within normativity. That is to say, the dispute is over whether any normative notion(s) is (are) both i) not reductively analysable in terms of any other normative notions, and ii) whether all other normative notions can be explained in terms of this (these) non-reductively analysable notion(s).

Three common families of positions in answer to (Q1) are reasons-first theory (Scanlon 1998, Parfit 2011, Schroeder 2007), ought-first theory (Broome 2004, 2013, 2015, Kearns & Star 2009), and value-first theory (Wedgwood 2009, Finlay 2014). These theorists agree that there is a *single* fundamental normative notion within normativity, but disagree over *which* normative notion is fundamental—with the first positing *a reason*, the second *ought*, and the third *value* (or a particular value, such as *goodness*) as the single fundamental normative notion within normativity.

These positions have also been advanced as metaphysical theses about the *ontology* of normativity. Some participants such as Bedke (2011) and Broome (2015) have explicitly treated, for example, reasons-first theory as an ontological thesis according to which all normative notions are *metaphysically reducible* to reasons, and that reason provides a *metaphysical explanation* of all other normative notions. Such positions treat (Q1) as a first-order ontological question about the ontology of normativity, and provide competing accounts of what notions are fundamental within it.

Strikingly, the following question *about* this dispute has hitherto remained unaddressed:

(Q2): What considerations, if any, are relevant to *adjudicating between rival accounts* of which normative notions are fundamental within normativity?

That is, what, if any, are the relevant *criteria for theory-choice* in the dispute over (Q1), which provide considerations that *count in favour of* competing accounts over the ontology of normativity? In this paper, I raise, explore, and propose an answer to this neglected question.

I proceed as follows. In §1, I explain the dispute over which normative notions are fundamental within normativity, provide reason to believe those party to the dispute over (Q1) understand the question to be a first-order ontological question about normativity, and explain the notions of fundamentality and explanation as they appear here.

I raise the novel question of what considerations, if any, are relevant to adjudicating between competing accounts of which normative notions are fundamental within normativity— (Q2)—in §2.

I turn to provide two reasons for meta-normative theorists to be concerned with this question about the dispute over (Q1): firstly, without an answer to (Q2) it is unclear at best what considerations there is good reason to take to be *relevant* to adjudicating between competing accounts. Secondly, without an account of such criteria for theory-choice it remains unclear *in principle* how the dispute over (Q1) could be settled.

Finally, I show that appeals to criteria for theory-choice have been made in recent literature by Broome (2015). After illustrating Broome's appeals to the certain criteria for theory-choice, I argue that such appeals call for attention.

In §3, I consider two objections to the fruitfulness of the project of attempting to ascertain what the criteria for theory-choice are in the dispute over (Q1). The first: we have good reason to accept whichever account in the dispute is most *useful* for the aims of whatever project such an account is *employed in*. The second: without an answer to the meta-ontological question of whether (Q1) is a substantive, non-trivial question about the nature of reality or not *first*, then the project of this paper would be unfruitful.

In response to the first objection, I argue this objection both begs-the-question by assuming a sufficient condition for deciding between competing accounts of which normative notions are fundamental is whether they are most useful for a given theoretical goal, and that there are independent reasons to reject this view. In response to the second, I grant that any attempt to answer (Q2) will *assume* an answer to the question this objection raises over (Q1). But I deny that this would render the project of this paper unfruitful.

Finally, in §4, I propose a framework that provides criteria for theory-choice in the dispute over (Q1). I argue that, conceived of as a substantive first-order ontological dispute over the ontology of normativity, there is good reason to adopt the criteria for theory-choice in *other* ontological disputes.

These criteria are: 1) match with *ordinary usage* of normative concepts, 2) support from certain *intuitions* regarding the relationship between normative notions, 3) *theoretical insight*, such as *explanation*, provided by the views defended, 4) relative *ideological parsimony* of competing accounts, 5) relative *ontological parsimony* of competing accounts, 6) The *integration* of accounts with other domains of discourse (such as, at least, the natural sciences and deontic logic) (Sider 2009).

I note that—as for any framework that posits multiple criteria for theory-choice—at least three questions arise regarding this framework. In particular: a) are 1)-6) *independently necessary and jointly sufficient conditions* for the correct position in the dispute over (Q1)?, b) if not a), do any conditions, if met, count in favour of a position *more* than another condition— that is, are any of these criteria *weightier* than others?, and c) can any of 1)-6) *conflict* with one another?

The answers to a)-c) regarding this framework are widely disputed amongst those who employ them in metaphysics. I do not settle the answers to a)-c) in the remainder of the paper, as my aim is to provide and illustrate a plausible framework I argue there is good reason to adopt in the dispute over (Q1). But I discuss them where relevant in the remainder of §4.

I finally demonstrate how these criteria illuminate the dispute over (Q1) and aid us to see how the dispute may in principle be settled: by articulating how such criteria may be marshalled to provide reason to accept or reject rival positions. In the process, I show how the adoption of some of these criteria also gives rise to novel arguments that may be employed by competing positions in the ontology of normativity.

(1000 Words)

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