philosophical topics

vol. 51, no. 2, Fall 2023

Beyond Evidence in Epistemology: Introduction

Marie van Loon

UCLA

Sebastian Schmidt

University of Zurich & University of Johannesburg

Anne Meylan

University of Zurich

For many epistemologists, it has become clear that purely evidential considerations cannot entirely account for the norms that guide us in forming and maintaining beliefs. Following this shift in our understanding of epistemic normativity, contemporary epistemologists become interested in the role of non-evidential considerations, ranging from practical stakes to coherence, for all kinds of issues in epistemology. For example, they interrogate how non-evidential considerations are relevant for the norms of inquiry (Friedman 2013; 2017) and the norms of suspending judgement (Lord 2020; Meylan ms.), how they can be epistemic reasons (Schroeder 2021; Schmidt 2023), how they help us to understand the foundations of epistemic normativity (Reisner ms.), the epistemic value of irrationality (Bortolotti 2015; 2020; Puddifoot and Bortolotti 2019), doxastic partiality (Stroud 2006; Crawford 2020), as well as the nature of credence and belief (Ganson 2008; Weatherson 2005; Gao 2019; Bach 2005).

 This special issue arises from the observation that an exploration of the role of non-evidential considerations in epistemology through a broader lens is missing from the current landscape of philosophical research. The present collection of contributions fills this research gap by bringing together three central and much-discussed epistemological topics for which non-evidential considerations become relevant.

 **The first part** of the special issue is concerned with the foundations of epistemic normativity and takes on to explore the question: ‘can non-evidential considerations explain the authority of epistemic norms?’. Traditionally, epistemologists have appealed to our desire for truth (Kornblith 1993; Papineau 2013), or to the value of epistemic goods, like true belief (McHugh 2014), knowledge (Williamson 2000), or understanding (Kvanvig 2003). However, sometimes we do not desire truth—as when we do not wish to know the latest celebrity gossip; and sometimes it is advisable to avoid epistemic goods—as when ignoring uncomfortable truths gives us peace of mind. Therefore, traditional accounts have difficulty explaining why we *always* ought to comply with epistemic norms. This worry is avoided by constitutivist accounts, which claim that we can only be believers or knowers if we accept truth as the categorical aim of our epistemic endeavors (cf. Littlejohn 2012; Nolfi 2015; Shah/Velleman 2005; Whiting 2012; Wedgwood 2002). Due to these problems, some epistemologists have raised doubts about the exclusive authority of epistemic norms. They argue that epistemic norms are best understood on the model of instrumental practical norms, like game rules, that become normatively relevant only when we have reason to ‘play the game of belief’ (see esp. Maguire/Woods 2020; also Bondy 2018; Cowie 2020, Schleifer McCormick 2020; Rinard 2019; Steglich-Petersen/Skipper 2020; and others). By contrast, others have recently attempted to preserve a distinctively epistemic dimension of normativity by grounding it in our epistemic sociality (Chrisman 2020; 2022) or in the practical value of being subject to epistemic norms (Owens 2017).

 The contributions in this part of the special issue connect to this debate by discussing whether epistemic normativity rests on pragmatic foundations. In *Epistemic Norms: What are they? Why do they matter?*, **Kate Nolfi** argues that a complete account of epistemic norms should spell out which doxastic responses to a given epistemic position are appropriate. Nolfi’s contribution sketches an action-oriented account, according to which epistemic norms are norms of doxastic attitude regulation. By this Nolfi means that these norms call for doxastic attitudes that can take on an action-oriented role. Such action-oriented epistemology, Nolfi argues, is able to explain the importance of conforming with at least some epistemic norms. In *Instrumentalism, Moral Encroachment, and Epistemic Injustice*, **Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen** argues that his own explanation of pragmatic encroachment, the view according to which practical considerations affect the epistemic position of a subject, also applies to moral encroachment, the view according to which moral considerations affect the epistemic position of a subject. Specifically, Steglich-Petersen defends a thesis that takes moral encroachment to be grounded in instrumentalism about epistemic reasons. In *Welfarist Pluralism: Pluralistic Reasons for Belief and the Value of Truth,* **Andrew Reisner** offers a monistic, well-being-based account of normative reasons for belief, called ‘welfarist pluralism’. As its name indicates, Reisner further argues that this pragmatist account accommodates pluralist views of theoretical reasons.

 **The second part** deals with the epistemic value of epistemic irrationality and asks whether believing for non-evidential considerations might promote epistemic goods. Traditionally, irrationality as a property attributed to beliefs is considered to indicate that something is wrong with a belief. When we say a belief is epistemically irrational we mean that it is at odds with the evidence (Kiesewetter 2017; Lord 2018) or with other beliefs (Broome 2013). Therefore, harbouring irrational beliefs seems detrimental to achieving epistemic goals like knowledge, truth, or justification. Due to this, there is a general agreement that we should avoid forming and maintaining irrational beliefs.

 Recently, philosophers have discussed the view according to which, despite their negative epistemic value, irrational beliefs might still be valuable in other ways. For example, epistemically irrational beliefs might have pragmatic value, because holding on to them promotes practical goals (Rinard 2019). Others have also argued that epistemically irrational beliefs are sometimes the ethically correct ones (Gendler 2011). Following a similar line of thought, in *Are Conspiracy Beliefs Epistemically Innocent?*, **Lisa Bortolotti** tackles a category of belief which is typically considered irrational: conspiracy beliefs. She does this through the lens of her account of epistemic innocence. To say that a belief is epistemically innocent is to say that a belief comes with certain epistemic and/or psychological benefits, despite the belief being epistemically irrational. In her contribution to this special issue, Bortolotti defends the view that asking whether conspiracy beliefs are epistemically innocent presents us with certain advantages like finding support in a like-minded community or satisfying a desire for curiosity. In *Motivated Irrationality, Epistemic Innocence, White Ignorance*, **Veli Mitova** addresses Bortolotti’s argument against what Mitova calls the Trade-off view, the view according to which some irrational beliefs carry significant psychological value despite their epistemic disvalue. Whereas Bortolotti holds that motivated beliefs can be epistemically innocent and possibly epistemically beneficial, Mitova argues that the epistemic innocence view has an undesirable consequence which is to exculpate beliefs that arise out of *white ignorance*. In order to remedy this aspect of Bortolotti’s view, Mitova proposes an additional condition to her account which requires an epistemically innocent belief not to cause harm to individuals in virtue of their membership in a non-dominantly situated group. In *Defending Doxasticism about Religious Conviction and Political Ideology*, **Miriam** **Schleifer McCormick** brings together questions regarding epistemic irrationality and the nature of beliefs. At first sight it may seem that political and religious beliefs are not beliefs at all because they present strikingly irrational features such as their resistance to evidence and inconsistency with other beliefs. Schleifer McCormick argues against this view and sketches out the foundations of an account of belief as emotion.

 **The third part** of our special issue engages with the norms and aims of inquiry. This part focuses on the role of non-evidential reasons when we inquire. Epistemologists have been concerned with putting the finger on the exact nature of the norms that guide inquiry. Again, some believe they are simply epistemic; that is, they are the same as the ones that guide other intellectual states or activities. Others believe that the normativity of inquiry is instrumental (Steglich-Petersen 2021). More recently, some have argued that inquiry has its very own set of norms (Friedman 2020). Whatever the answer to these questions might be, it seems that non-evidential considerations have a big part to play when it comes to suspension of judgement and inquiry.

 The contributions to this part of the special issue tackle these very questions and offer competing accounts of the normativity of inquiry. In *Norms of Inquiry*,**David Thorstad** develops a general account of the conditions for rational inquiry. Thorstad’s general account applies the reasons-responsiveness conception of rationality to the case of inquiry and further takes these norms to be epistemic. This application allows him to explain two widely discussed norms of inquiry, the norm of clutter avoidance and the norm of logical non-omniscience.

 Against epistemic accounts of the normativity of inquiry, Jane Friedman has argued that inquiry is governed by its own kind of normativity, zetetic normativity. Friedman further argues that zetetic normativity stands in direct conflict with what epistemic norms dictate (Friedman 2020). In *On instrumental zetetic normativity*, **Leonardo Flamini** addresses Friedman’s view and argues against her that the conflict between epistemic and zetetic norms is in fact a conflict between pragmatic and epistemic norms. According to Flamini, although our duties to inquire are practical, our reasons to inquire are overall instrumental and can therefore be derived from both epistemic and practical norms.

 Further puzzles arise from considering the aim and norm of inquiry. For instance, if the aim of inquiry is knowledge and knowledge is achieved in inquiry, the need to double check seems irrational. In view of this result, we might be tempted to give up on the idea that the aim of inquiry is knowledge. Against this conclusion, **Eliran Haziza** argues that it is possible to maintain knowledge as the aim of inquiry because it can be rational to pursue an aim that has already been reached. In the case at hand, double checking is simply checking that one has knowledge, says Haziza. Another such puzzle involves a conflict between one’s own view that an inquiry into a question would be epistemically beneficial on the one hand, and on the other, the belief in one’s own view lacks evidential support. In order to solve this puzzle, in *Rational Hypothesis: Inquiry Direction Without Evidence*, **Michele Palmira** defends a norm of inquiry according to which the doxastic state that guides one’s inquiry about whether P is rational just in case this attitude is the best way to achieve the relevant doxastic attitude that P which promotes settling the question whether P. On Palmira’s framework, the guiding doxastic attitudes is an hypothesis. In *Contagious Inquiry: Deferring to Others about Whether to Inquiry*, **Eleanor Gordon-Smith** addresses another kind of motivating factor in pursuing an inquiry into whether P, namely, the fact that a third party is inquiring into whether P. Gordon-Smith argues that there is a version of such practice which is detrimental to inquiry. In this version, the fact that a third party is inquiring into whether P is the sole reason for the subject to engage with the question whether P. Rather, the right way to treat the fact that a third party inquires into the question whether P is as a reason to question one’s own answer to the question whether P. Finally, in *Coherence, First-Personal Deliberation, and Crossword Puzzles,* **Marc-Kevin Daoust** zooms in on a particular species of inquiry, first-personal deliberation and the norms that guide it. Daoust addresses views both for and against the idea that coherence should factor in first-personal deliberation, in addition to reasons-responsiveness, and argues that both views neglect the details of the interaction between coherence and reasons-responsiveness, coherence and deliberation, and between coherence and further epistemic norms. In order to start spelling out these details, Daoust draws on Susan Haack’s crossword puzzle analogy.

 We hope that the present collection of works offers a thought provoking and informative overview of the current research on questions of epistemic normativity, beyond evidential considerations.

Acknowledgements

This special issue is, in part, the fruit of a conference on *The Value of Irrationality* which took place in the fall of 2021 at the University of Zurich which was made possible by a grant from the UZH Graduate Campus and from the Swiss National Foundation for Science. In addition, Marie van Loon was able to co-edit this special issue thanks to a Postdoc.Mobility grant from the SNFS, as was Sebastian Schmidt. We are also grateful to all the anonymous referees who have worked to help secure the high quality of the special issue’s contributions.

Grant number Value of Irrationality, SNFS: IZSEZ0\_194757

Grant number Value of Irrationality, GRC: 2020\_Q1\_G\_013

Grant number van Loon: P500PH\_210961

Grant number Schmidt: 210979

References

Bach, Kent. 2005. “The Emperor’s New ‘Knows.’” In *Contextualism in Philosophy*, edited by Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter, 51–90. Oxford: Oxford University Press https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199267408.003.0003.

Bondy, Patrick. 2018. *Epistemic Rationality and Epistemic Normativity*. Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy 102. London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Bortolotti, Lisa. 2015. “The Epistemic Innocence of Motivated Delusions.” *Consciousness and Cognition* 33 (May): 490–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2014.10.005.

———. 2020. *The Epistemic Innocence of Irrational Beliefs*. New product. New York: Oxford University Press.

Broome, John. 2013. *Rationality through Reasoning*. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley Blackwell.

Chrisman, Matthew. 2020. “Believing as We Ought and the Democratic Route to Knowledge.” In *The Ethics of Belief and Beyond: Understanding Mental Normativity*, edited by Sebastian Schmidt and Gerhard Ernst, 47–70. London New York: Routledge.

———. 2022. *Belief, Agency, and Knowledge: Essays on Epistemic Normativity*. First published in paperback. Oxford, United Kingdom New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192898852.001.0001.

Cowie, Christopher. 2020. “Do Constitutive Norms on Belief Explain Moore’s Paradox?” *Philosophical Studies* 177 (6): 1685–1702. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-019-01280-6.

Crawford, Lindsay. 2020. “Relationships and Reasons for Belief.” In *The Ethics of Belief and Beyond: Understanding Mental Normativity*, edited by Sebastian Schmidt and Gerhard Ernst, 87–108. London New York: Routledge.

Friedman, Jane. 2013. “Suspended Judgment.” *Philosophical Studies* 162 (2): 165–81. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-011-9753-y.

———. 2017. “Why Suspend Judging?: Why Suspend Judging?” *Noûs* 51 (2): 302–26. https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12137.

———. 2020. “The Epistemic and the Zetetic.” *The Philosophical Review* 129 (4): 501–36. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-8540918.

Ganson, Dorit. 2008. “Evidentialism and Pragmatic Constraints on Outright Belief.” *Philosophical Studies* 139 (3): 441–58. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-007-9133-9.

Gao, Jie. 2019. “Credal Pragmatism.” *Philosophical Studies* 176 (6): 1595–1617. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1081-z.

Gendler, Tamar Szabó. 2011. “On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias.” *Philosophical Studies* 156 (1): 33–63. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-011-9801-7.

Kiesewetter, Benjamin. 2017. *The Normativity of Rationality*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kornblith, Hilary. 1993. “Epistemic Normativity.” *Synthese* 94 (3): 357–76.

Kvanvig, Jonathan L. 2003. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*. Cambridge Studies in Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Littlejohn, Clayton. 2012. *Justification and the Truth-Connection*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139060097.

Lord, Errol. 2018. *The Importance of Being Rational*. First edition. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

———. 2020. “Suspension of Judgment, Rationality’s Competition, and the Reach of the Epistemic.” In *The Ethics of Belief and Beyond: Understanding Mental Normativity*, edited by Sebastian Schmidt and Gerhard Ernst, 126–45. London New York: Routledge.

Maguire, Barry, and Jack Woods. 2020. “The Game of Belief.” *The Philosophical Review* 129 (2): 211–49. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-8012843.

McHugh, Conor. 2014. “Fitting Belief.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 114: 167–87.

Meylan, Anne. ms. “What Do We Do When We Suspend Judgement.”

Nolfi, Kate. 2015. “How to Be a Normativist about the Nature of Belief.” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 96 (2): 181–204. https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12071.

Owens, David. 2017. *Normativity and Control*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198713234.001.0001.

Papineau, David. 2013. “There Are No Norms of Belief.” In *The Aim of Belief*, edited by Timothy Chan, 64–79. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199672134.003.0004.

Puddifoot, Katherine, and Lisa Bortolotti. 2019. “Epistemic Innocence and the Production of False Memory Beliefs.” *Philosophical Studies* 176 (3): 755–80. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1038-2.

Reisner, Andrew. ms. *A New Theory of Reasons for Belief: Pragmatic Foundations and Pluralistic Reasons*. Under contract with Oxford University Press.

Rinard, Susanna. 2019. “Believing for Practical Reasons.” *Noûs* 53 (4): 763–84. https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12253.

Schleifer McCormick, Miriam. 2020. “Believing Badly: Doxastic Duties Are Not Epistemic Duties.” In *Epistemic Duties: New Arguments, New Angles*, edited by Kevin McCain and Scott Stapleford. Routledge Studies in Epistemology. New York ; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Schmidt, Eva. 2023. “Facts about Incoherence as Non-Evidential Epistemic Reasons.” *Asian Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1): 22. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44204-023-00075-1.

Schroeder, Mark. 2021. *Reasons First*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198868224.001.0001.

Shah, Nishi, and J. David Velleman. 2005. “Doxastic Deliberation.” *The Philosophical Review* 114 (4): 497–534. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-114-4-497.

Steglich-Petersen, Asbjørn. 2021. “An Instrumentalist Unification of Zetetic and Epistemic Reasons.” *Inquiry*, November, 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2021.2004220.

Steglich-Petersen, Asbjørn, and Mattias Skipper. 2020. “Instrumental Reasons for Belief: Elliptical Talk and Elusive Properties.” In *The Ethics of Belief and Beyond: Understanding Mental Normativity*, edited by Sebastian Schmidt and Gerhard Ernst, 109–25. London New York: Routledge.

Stroud, Sarah. 2006. “Epistemic Partiality in Friendship.” *Ethics* 116 (3): 498–524. https://doi.org/10.1086/500337.

Weatherson, Brian. 2005. “Can We Do Without Pragmatic Encroachment?” *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (1): 417–43. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2005.00068.x.

Wedgwood, Ralph. 2002. “The Aim Of Belief.” *Noûs* 36 (s16): 267–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0068.36.s16.10.

Whiting, Daniel. 2012. “EPISTEMIC VALUE AND ACHIEVEMENT.” *Ratio* 25 (2): 216–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9329.2012.00533.x.

Williamson, Timothy. 2000. *Knowledge and Its Limits*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/019925656X.001.0001.