

Content and attitude normativity

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1. Where it all begins: is content essentially normative?

Content normativist - Yes! Certain norms are essential to the content of mental states.

Content anti-normativist - No! No norm is essential to the content of mental states.

2. A first anti-normativist argument: if content is normative, all content-involving states should be subject to norms. Yet the norms presented by normativists - such as (DN) - only apply for beliefs, and not for other attitudes. **Primacy of Belief View:** content is subject to norms only or mainly as the object of belief.

3. Stronger anti-normativist argument: even if all content-involving attitudes are subject to norms, perhaps it is these attitudes that are essentially normative, and not content itself. **Side-Effect View:** the fact that content is involved in norms is just a side-effect of its role as the object of normative attitudes.

4. Our proposal: perhaps all content-involving attitudes are subject to norms, but the normativist needs something weaker.

-**Normativity:** x is normative iff x 's existence essentially entails the existence of norms.

-**Normativism about content:** it is an essential feature of contents to be the potential object of at least some attitude governed by norms.

This normativist view becomes plausible once we consider the whole array of content-involving attitudes subject to norms.

5. The plan:

(i) To examine and classify a number of candidate normative principles governing attitudes highlighting a content dimension and an attitude dimension.

(ii) To show that reflection on these principles undermines the two well-entrenched views on the normativity of content just mentioned:

The first is the **Primacy of Belief View** - this point goes against the first anti-normativist argument.

The second is the view that normativists cannot rule out the **Side-Effect View**. By contrast, we argue that normativists can discard the Side-Effect View if they show that it is an essential feature of contents to be the potential object of (at least some) attitudes governed by norms - this point goes against the second anti-normativist argument.

6. Doxastic norms: in discussions of the normativity of mental content or content-involving normativity, one often finds a doxastic principle such as (1):

(1) For any p and S : if S believes that p , then S ought not believe that not p

(1) has a series of features: contextually constrained, horizontal (as opposed to vertical) (Zangwill 1998), not truth-aiming (we can comply with it while believing what is false).

7. Content and attitude: in our view, doxastic norms such as (1) have diverted attention from the full complexity of content-involving norms. These norms are not proprietary to belief attitudes. These dimensions may be acknowledged whether or not one takes the norms to be essential to content, or indeed whether one takes them to be content engendered or content determining (Glüer and Wikforss 2009).

8. The content dimension: the normative structure of (1) extends to indefinitely many attitudes distinct from belief. Consider the following. For any p and S :

- (2a) If S assumes that p, then S ought not assume that not p
- (2b) If S suspects that p, then S ought not suspect that not p
- (2c) If S conjectures that p, then S ought not conjecture that not p
- (3a) If S desires that p, then S ought not desire that not p
- (3b) If S hopes that p, then S ought not hope that not p
- (3c) If S approves that p, then S ought not approve that not p
- (4a) If S intends that p, then S ought not intend that not p
- (4b) If S expects that p, then S ought not expect that not p
- (4c) If S endeavours that p, then S ought not endeavour that not p

We may make us also heed principles such as (5) (cf. Boghossian 2003a: 34, Speaks 2009: 410, Hieronymi 2006: 49-50, Glüer and Wikforss 2009: 48, n. 37):

- (5) For any p and S: If S imagines that p, then S ought not imagine that not p

It is however not plausible that content-involving normativity is confined to avoidance of contradictory contents. This is illustrated by (6)-(9), for any p, q, x, and S:

- (6) If S believes (p and q), then S ought to believe that p and S ought believe that q
- (7) If S believes that p and S believes that (if p then q), then S ought believe that q
- (8) If S believes that x is red, then S ought to believe that x is coloured
- (9) If S believes that x is square, then S ought not believe that x is round

This suggests that content-involving norms may take several forms along the content dimension.

9. The attitude dimension: we may also consider the normative impact of attitude variation when a given propositional content or content-relation is held fixed: *affirmative* attitudes (involve the affirmation or the consideration of the truth of the featuring content); *agnostic* attitudes (neutral about the truth of the relevant contents); *negative* attitudes (deny the truth of the relevant contents).

- (10) If S rejects that (p and q), then S ought to reject that p and S ought to reject q*
- (11) If S dislikes that (p and q), then S ought dislike p and S ought to dislike q*

Agnostic attitudes also seem to have a distinctive kind of normativity:

- (12) For any p and S: If S doubts whether p, then S ought to doubt whether not p

This group comprises principles relating different types of attitude:

- (13) If S knows that p, the S ought not believe that not p
- (14) If S believes that S ought to intend that p, then S ought to intend that p
- (15) If S desires that p, then S ought not believe that p

This last group involves attitudes that are normatively free or limited:

- (16) If S knows that p, then S ought to not to know that not p*
- (17) If S sees that p, then S ought not to see that not p*
- (18) If S feels that p, then S ought not to feel that not p*

10. Two lessons:

-**Primacy of Belief View:** it's not plausible that non-doxastic attitudes are not governed by norms. Speaks's Test doesn't deliver an anti-normativist verdict (and is not a good test).

-**The Side-Effect View:** the view that either content, or else attitude (and typically belief) is the source of content normativity is probably an oversimplification that we must abandon. The normativity of content is better seen as the result of the **interactive combination or interlocking of an attitude and a content dimension**.

This thesis is in itself neutral with respect to normativist and anti-normativist positions but strongly suggests that a version of normativism must be correct: it is plausibly an essential feature of content that it be the potential object of at least some attitude governed by norms.

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