The normativity of evaluative concepts·

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ABSTRACT. –– It is generally accepted that there are two kinds of normative concepts: evaluative concepts, such as *good*, and deontic concepts, such as *ought*. The question that is raised by this distinction is how it is possible to claim that evaluative concepts are normative. Given that deontic concepts appear to be at the heart of normativity, the bigger the gap between evaluative and deontic concepts, the less it appears plausible to say that evaluative concepts are normative. After having presented the main differences between evaluative and deontic concepts, and shown that there is more than a superficial difference between the two kinds, the paper turns to the question of the normativity of evaluative concepts. It will become clear that, even if these concepts have different functions, there are a great many ties between evaluative concepts, on the one hand, and the concepts of ought and of reason, on the other.

One can say without exaggeration that normativity has become one of the central themes in contemporary philosophy, if not *the* central theme. But what is normativity, exactly? Paradoxically, this is a somewhat neglected question. As Kevin Mulligan points out, a great number of ordinary concepts are taken to be part of the same family, which we have acquired the habit of qualifying as 'normative':

> We may say of a particular action performed by Sam that it is *elegant* or *evil*, that he *ought not* to be doing what he is doing, that it is the *right* thing to do, that he is *obliged* to do it, that it is his *duty*, that he has a *right* to act as he does, or that it is *virtuous*. The different properties we ascribe in this way belong to one very large family which, for want of a better word, we may call *normative* properties (Mulligan, 2009, p. 402).

The concepts that count as normative can appear quite heterogenous. However, some groupings seem natural. Thus, it is generally admitted that we can divide these concepts into two large distinct groups: evaluative or axiological concepts (from the latin *valores* or the Greek *axos*, both meaning that which has worth), such as *good* and

bad, and deontic concepts (from the Greek *deon*, meaning that which is binding), such as *obligatory* and *permissible*.[1]

The distinction between evaluative and deontic consists in a generalisation of the traditional opposition between the good and the right. The question of the relation between the evaluative and the deontic has been the object of numerous debates. Thus, one of the central tasks for all who are interested in ethics, but also in epistemology, aesthetics or any normative domain, is to specify the relation between these two families of concepts. Is one of the kinds more fundamental, conceptually speaking, than the other? That would mean that to possess one of the two kinds, one would have to possess the other. If there were such an asymmetry, which of the two kinds of concepts would be the more fundamental? Would the possession of deontic concepts be necessary for the possession of evaluative concepts or would it be the other way round, with evaluative concepts as more fundamental? A third possibility is to deny that one of the two kinds of concepts is more fundamental than the other. The two kinds of concepts would be at the same level, conceptually speaking.[2]

It is worth noting that apart from the question of conceptual priority, other questions of priority arise.[3] One can raise the metaphysical question by asking not only about the priority of evaluative and deontic concepts, but also about the objects that seem to correspond to them, whether these are properties or not. More generally, this question involves the relation between evaluative facts and deontic facts, supposing that these two types of fact exist. Finally, the question of priority also suggests itself when talking of explanation. Are evaluative facts able to explain deontic facts or, *vice versa*, can deontic facts explain evaluative facts? Evidently, one cannot rule out the possibility that nothing explains the facts in question, or that there is another kind of facts, such as, perhaps, natural non-normative facts, which can explain both evaluative and deontic facts.

The question that interests me here lies at the conceptual level. It is the question of whether it is possible to claim that evaluative concepts are normative. More precisely, if one maintains that evaluative and deontic concepts belong to two

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[1]. See von Wright, 1963; Wiggins, 1976; Heyd, 1982; Thomson, 1992, 2007, 2008; Mulligan, 1989, 1998, 2009; Dancy, 2000a, 2000b; Smith, 2005; Ogien et Tappolet, 2009; Wedgwood, 2009.

[2]. This is what Wedgwood (2009) maintains.

[3]. For the distinction between these three kinds of normativity, see Väyrynen, 2010.

distinct conceptual families, how is it possible to consider evaluative concepts well and truly normative? In fact, it is plausible to claim that deontic concepts, more particularly the concept of ought, are at the heart of normativity. Therefore, the wider the distance between evaluative and deontic concepts, the less it will seem true that evaluative concepts are a kind of normative concepts. In a more general manner, the question of the unity of the normative domain is at play here. Indeed, the division into two distinct groups raises the question of how it can be true that two kinds of concepts belong to one and the same family.

The thesis according to which there is a real, rather than superficial, difference between evaluative and deontic concepts has been the object of criticism. For reasons which seem principally strategic, a uniform treatment of the normative domain has seemed particularly seductive for those who subscribe to prescriptivism, the doctrine according to which moral judgements are assimilated to imperatives. Rudolf Carnap formulated the most striking rejection of the distinction between the evaluative and the deontic. According to Carnap, the difference between an evaluative judgement, such as 'Killing is bad' and a norm or a rule, such as 'Don't kill', is merely one of formulation. In fact, both statements have an imperative form and are neither true nor false. For Carnap, "a value statement is nothing other than a command in a misleading grammatical form" (1935, p. 24). Carnap's conception is close to that of Richard Hare (1952). So, although Hare mentions a certain number of differences on the level of "grammatical behaviour" between 'good' on the one hand and 'right' and 'ought' on the other, he maintains that there is enough similarity between 'good' and 'right' and 'ought' to consider all three evaluative.[4] It would be false to conclude that Hare thinks that evaluative concepts have priority. In fact, according to the classification that he proposes at the beginning of his book, imperatives as evaluative judgements form part of a larger class of 'Prescriptive Language'.[5] As becomes clear at the end of his book, Hare in fact maintains that statements containing 'right' and 'good' can be replaced by statements containing 'ought'. Statements containing 'ought' can, in turn, be formulated in the imperative form.[6]

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[4]. See Hare, 1952, p. 152-153.
[5]. See Hare, 1952, p. 3 et 153.
[6]. See Hare, 1952, p. 180-181.

My plan is the following. To measure the gap that separates evaluative concepts from deontic concepts, I will begin by presenting the principal differences between the two kinds of concepts.[7] Indeed, the question is whether there is more than a merely superficial difference between the two kinds of concepts and, if that is the case, what this difference consists in. After this, I will turn to the question of the normativity of evaluative concepts.

Before beginning, I should make a point about my methodology. The truth is that there is no agreement over which terms count as evaluative and which as deontic. For example, is the concept of reason, in the normative sense of the term, evaluative or deontic, supposing that it falls into one of the two categories?[8] Faced with this difficulty, the best strategy is to work principally with the paradigmatic cases, such as *good* and *bad* for evaluative, and *ought* for deontic. It is only by grasping cases of this kind that it will be possible to deal with the difficult cases, such as the concept of reason.

1. The gap between the evaluative and the deontic

The first reason for distinguishing between evaluative and deontic concepts is that these concepts form two distinct, which we might call 'tightly-knit', conceptual families. On the one hand we have the family organised around the concepts *good* and *bad*, but which also includes the concept *indifferent*. On the other hand, we have the family made up of *obligatory*, *permissible* and *forbidden*, which constitute the domain of deontic logic.[9]

The members of each of these families are connected by direct inferential links. If something is good, it follows that it is not bad. In fact, the three most general evaluative concepts seem interdependent. What is good is what is neither indifferent nor bad; what is bad is what is neither indifferent nor good; and what is indifferent is what is neither good nor bad. These links seem to form part of what we learn when we acquire the concepts in question. The assertion 'If something is good, it is neither bad nor indifferent' is one of the truisms describing the dispositions to make inferences that characterise possession of these concepts.

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[7]. For a more complete presentation, see Ogien & Tappolet, 2009, chap. 2.
[8]. Smith (2009, p. 11), for example, counts reason as a deontic concept.
[9]. A more complete list includes *gratuitous* and *optional* (see McNamara, 2006).

In the same way, the three principal deontic concepts belong to a family that forms a closely woven web of interdefinable concepts. Whichever concept is considered fundamental, it is possible to use it to define the other two concepts. For example, if one considers, following von Wright (1951), that *permissible* is the base concept, one can define what is forbidden as what is not permissible and what is obligatory as that which it is forbidden not to do. But one can also take *forbidden* or *obligatory* as the fundamental concept, which suggests that the three concepts are at the same level, conceptually speaking.

By comparison, the relation between evaluative and deontic concepts seems slacker. It is possible to maintain that evaluative concepts can be analysed or elucidated with the help of deontic concepts or, *vice versa*, that deontic concepts can be analysed or elucidated with the help of evaluative concepts, or even that the two kinds of concepts can be analysed or elucidated by a third kind of concepts. For example, according to a suggestion tracing back to Franz Brentano (1889) and that has recently been the object of renewed interest, evaluative concepts can be analysed or elucidated with the help of the notion of appropriate (or fitting) attitudes, a notion which many authors consider deontic.[10] Thus, it would be true that something were good if and only if it were appropriate to have an attitude of approbation towards it. Whether or not such a suggestion is deemed overall defensible, it seems clear that one cannot consider it a simple truism. One has only to think of the debates this kind of conception has inspired to convince oneself of this. The same point applies to the inverse suggestions, according to which deontic concepts can be analysed or elucidated with the help of evaluative concepts. Thus, the assertion, dating back to G.E. Moore (1903), according to which one must carry out an action if and only if this action is that which has the best consequences, or simply is the best of all possible actions, is perhaps true, but it is certainly not a truism.

A second consideration that allows us to differentiate evaluative and deontic concepts concerns the number of elements in each of the two families: the evaluative family is much bigger than the deontic family.[11] As many have pointed out, the

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[10]. See, among others, Smith, 2005; Schroeder, 2008; Bykvist, 2009.
[11]. See Mulligan, 1989, 1998, 2009.

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concept *good* (and also *bad*, of course) can be used in a variety of ways.[12] Something can be called good *simpliciter*, such as when one says that knowledge or pleasure is good. When one says this kind of things, one uses the term 'predicatively', as an authentic predicate, and not 'attributively' as a term modifying a predicate.[13] And yet *good* can also be used attributively. One can also say that Sophie is a good philosopher, but a very mediocre cook. Furthermore, there are various locutions that involve the term *good*.[14] Indeed, one can say that something or someone is good for something or for someone, or that something is good for an end, or even for doing something. In each case, it seems that the thing or person in question is good in a way, to use Judith Thomson's expression (1992).

The family of evaluative concepts also includes more specific concepts, such as *admirable*, *desirable*, *fair*, *generous*, *honest*, *benevolent* and *courageous*, to name only a few of the terms used to express approbation.[15] It is fitting to stress that the attribution of these terms, in their ordinary usage, implies the attribution of the more general evaluative concepts, *good*, *bad* and *indifferent*. So, the question of whether what is admirable is also good or, more exactly, good in a way, does not arise. If an action is admirable, it is necessarily good from this point of view.[16]

By comparison, the family of deontic terms is much poorer. There does not seem to be a specific way of being obligatory, permissible or forbidden. It is true that one can distinguish between different kinds of obligations: moral obligations, legal obligations and prudential obligations seem well and truly distinct. However, even if one allows that there are different ways of being obligatory, rather than the same idea of obligation applied to different domains – which is far from evident – one must recognise that the deontic family is still poorer than the evaluative family. Indeed, the latter also engages with different normative domains, so that one can distinguish what

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[12]. See Ross, 1930, p. 6; von Wright, 1963; Thomson, 1992, 1997, 2008; Wedgwood, 2009.

[13]. See Ross, 1930, p. 65; Geach, 1956, p. 33.

[14]. See von Wright, 1963; Thomson, 1992; Wedgwood, 2009.

[15]. Many of these concepts are called 'thick' evaluative concepts, in contrast to 'thin' evaluative concepts (see Williams, 1985). Thick concepts are characterised by the fact that they include a purely descriptive element. For example, the attribution of the term 'courageous', implies an attribution of the capacity to stand up to danger, or more generally to difficulties. On the basis of this distinction, one can say that, contrary to deontic concepts, evaluative concepts can be thick (see Mulligan, 1998, p. 164-5).

[16]. This is what Wallace (2010) fails to recognise.

is good from a moral point of view from what is good from a legal or prudential point of view.

The thesis according to which the deontic family is poorer than the evaluative family has been recently criticised by Ralph Wedgwood (2009). He claims that the English terms *ought* and *should* are comparable with 'good' in the sense that they are multivocal. They are capable of expressing many different concepts in different contexts. Wedgwood distinguishes four kinds of *oughts*. The first, which he calls the "'ought' of general desirability", is what one uses when one says 'Milton ought to be alive', or 'there should be world peace'. It is what ought to be, as opposed to what an agent should do, that is at play here.[17] The second is the *ought to do*, which Wedgwood calls the "practical 'ought'". This kind of *ought* is indexed to a particular agent at a particular time and involves the actions that the agent in question is capable of accomplishing. The third kind of *ought*, qualified as relative to an end and that one could call "instrumental 'ought'" is illustrated in the statement 'He ought to use a Phillips screwdriver to open that safe'. Finally, the fourth kind of *ought*, which is qualified as "conditional 'ought'" is to do with what one ought to do when one does not do what one ought really to do. This usage is illustrated in 'If you don't stop shooting up heroin, you ought at least to use clean needles', where it is understood that one ought to stop shooting up heroin.

Should we conclude that the deontic family is as large as the evaluative family? I think not. An initial question arises concerning the notion of ought to be. Indeed, the fact that Wedgwood is tempted to talk of the *ought* of general *desirability* is evidence of this; one can question whether he is really discussing a deontic notion here.[18] A second question involves the relation between different usages of the term 'ought'. Could we not reduce the instrumental and conditional *oughts* to practical *oughts*? Nevertheless, let us suppose that there really do exist four kinds of distinct *oughts*. It would still be true that the family of evaluative concepts is much more numerous. Four usages are very little in comparison with the multitude of usages of *good* and *bad*. Furthermore, there is an important difference regarding the structure of the two conceptual families. As we have seen, the evaluative family includes general

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[17]. As Wedgwood recalls, Sidgwick ironically talks of the 'political ought' to designate a kind of ought. Mark Schroeder (2011) qualifies this notion of evaluative ought and distinguishes it from what he calls the deliberative ought.

[18]. As I have already remarked, Mark Schroeder talks of 'evaluative ought'.

and specific terms, which does not seem true of the deontic family. None of the four *oughts* listed by Wedgwood is more general than the others.

Another point we should note in this context is that evaluative concepts, particularly some of the more specific evaluative concepts, are closely tied to affective reactions.[19] Concepts such as *admirable* or *contemptible*, which correspond to words that are lexically tied to affective terms, are the first to spring to mind; but it also seems plausible to think that more general evaluative concepts, such as *good* and *bad*, are tied to specific affective reactions – approbation and disapprobation – or even an ensemble of affective reactions – positive reactions and negative reactions. In contrast, the relation between deontic concepts and affective reactions seems much less tight. There is no lexical relation between 'obligatory', 'permissible' and 'forbidden', on the one hand, and terms that reflect affective reactions, on the other. More generally, no specific emotion seems to exist that corresponds to the obligatory, nor to the permitted, nor to the forbidden.

A third consideration weighing in favour of the existence of a real distinction between evaluative and deontic concepts is that evaluative concepts, but apparently not deontic concepts, can take comparative and superlative forms.[20] In other words, values, but not *oughts*, admit of degrees. One can say of someone that she is more or less admirable, or that her action is more or less courageous. And one can also say that a novel is better than another. Ordinary deontic terms, on the other hand, do not seem to allow comparative and superlative forms. As Hume noted, one does not say that something is more or less obligatory, or else that an action is more forbidden than another (1739-40, III, vi: 530-1). A plausible explanation of the absolute nature of deontic concepts is that these concepts are applied primarily to things that do not admit of degrees, that is to say, actions. Actions can be characterised by all kinds of properties that admit of degrees – one can sing more or less loudly or more or less out of tune – but one has to either act or not act – in principle, there is no way of *more or less* singing: one either sings, or one does not.[21] This is a particularly important point in the context of deliberation or decision. When you try to work out what to do, you need to know whether a particular action ought or ought not be performed. The

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19. See Mulligan, 1989, 1998, p. 166.
20. See Hare, 1952, p. 152; Mulligan, 1998; Wedgwood, 2009.
21. See Ogien & Tappolet, 2009, p. 64-5.

conclusion that an action is one that one ought to perform to certain degree – it is *a bit* obligatory to perform it – is not what is sought.

It could be objected that we implicitly allow for deontic comparisons when we conceptualise moral dilemmas. Suppose that an agent has a choice between killing or lying. We will certainly conclude that this agent ought to lie rather than kill. Thus, one can ask whether this is not the same as saying that one ought to lie more than one ought to kill, or that killing is more forbidden than lying. It seems in any case that the prohibition on killing has priority over the prohibition on lying.[22] Furthermore, ordinary language seems to allow for deontic nuance. We distinguish between what *must* be done and what *should* be done, for example.[23] Should we therefore think that, despite appearances, deontic concepts do admit of degrees? No, because we should recognise that the existence of a relation of priority between different *oughts*, something which is hard to deny when there is no question of doing all the considered actions, does not imply the existence of a relation of degree.[24]

A fourth consideration that can be put forward to support the claim that there is an important difference between evaluative and deontic concepts concerns the logical form of evaluative and deontic statements.[25] At first glance, the simplest evaluative judgements, such as 'this is good' have a subject-predicate form, F(x), where the evaluative terms stand for predicates. Deontic concepts, on the other hand, are standardly taken to be propositional operators, which means that deontic judgements are taken to have the form O(p) (where 'O' stands for obligatory).

However, things are not so straightforward. Firstly, evaluative terms can take the form of propositional operators, such as when we say that it is good, or desirable, that it rains. Secondly, we cannot rule out the possibility that the apparent structure of evaluative judgements is misleading. Their logical form could, for example, contain a tacit reference to a speaker or a social group. Moreover, deontic judgements can also take a variety of forms, such as when one says that doing this or that is forbidden, or that someone should do this or that. Finally, there is a reason to think that the hypothesis that deontic statements involve propositional operators is problematic. As

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[22]. See Hansson, 2001.
[23]. See Hansson, 2001, p. 131-132; Thomson, 2008, p. 124, 229-230.
[24]. See Mulligan, 1998, p. 164, for the idea that recognising that one promise binds us more than another does not imply deontic degrees.
[25]. See Mulligan, 1989, 1998.

Peter Geach (1982, p. 35) has argued, the hypothesis does not acknowledge that obligations concern agents and not just states of affairs. Geach maintains that deontic terms are operators taking verbs to make verbs. Thus, when we say that Sophie ought to sing, what we say is that *ought to sing* is true of Sophie.[26]

However, there nonetheless appear to be two important facts that distinguish evaluative from deontic judgements. The first is that some evaluative judgements resist transformation into judgements involving a deontic propositional operator. This is true not only of specific judgements like 'This is a good knife' or 'She is courageous', but also of sentences with more general evaluative terms, such as 'This soup is good for him'. In contrast, it appears that all deontic judgements can be transformed either into judgements involving a propositional operator or into judgements involving an operator modifying a verb. The other difference is that evaluative terms describing actions, but not deontic terms, can be transformed into adverbs that describe how an action is performed.[27] Suppose that Sally's action was both courageous and morally obligatory or required. We can say that Sally acted courageously, thus describing how she acted; but, even though in a sense she might be said to have acted obligatorily, we do not describe *how* she acted if we say this. There thus appears to be a category mistake involved in the sentence 'Sophie acted courageously, energetically, and obligatorily'. Acting in the way you ought does not appear to be a way of acting. What these points suggest is that, in contrast to deontic concepts, evaluative concepts correspond to properties characterising things and people.

The next consideration that weighs in favour of a distinction between evaluative and deontic concepts concerns their respective domains of application. As David Heyd (1982, p. 171-72) claims, it is clear that all sorts of things, ranging from persons and their actions to objects and states of affairs, can be the object of evaluation. In contrast, deontic concepts typically concern agents and their actions. It

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[26]. Mark Schroeder (2011) defends a similar thesis. Schroeder, who, contrary to Geach, argues that there are two kinds of *oughts*, deliberative *oughts*, relative to what is to do, and evaluative *oughts*, relative to what ought to be, claims that deliberative *oughts* reflect a relation between an agent and an action. In our example, the term 'ought' would reflect a relation between Sophie and the action of singing.

[27]. This is the test proposed by Ogien and Tappolet, 2009, p. 56.

might thus be thought that deontic concepts only apply to what is subject to the will.[28] As expressed in the principle *'ought* implies *can'*, it is only as far as an agent is able to perform an action that she can be subjected to an obligation to perform that action. In fact, the domain of deontic concepts is broader, for it includes things such as beliefs, intentions, choices, emotions and character traits, etc. One can certainly say that a person should or should not believe something, have a certain intention, make such and such a choice, feel a certain emotion, possess such and such character trait, etc. And yet, it is often claimed that these things are not subject to the control of the will. Nonetheless, in as far as it is possible for an agent to have an indirect influence on her beliefs, intentions, etc., one can say that deontic concepts are concerned with things that have to be at least indirectly subject to the will.[29]

This claim poses a problem when it comes to judgements about what ought and ought not to be. These appear to be *bona fide* deontic judgments, but they are far from being concerned with things that are subject to the will, directly or indirectly. One could suggest that what ought to be should at least be possible.[30] But that is not certain. Indeed, if one accepts it is the best of all worlds that ought to be, and one also accepts that the world would be better if 2 + 2 made 5 – this would allow us to feed more people, after all – one would have to conclude that an impossible world, even a logically impossible world, ought to be.

Nevertheless, it remains true that, compared to deontic concepts, evaluative concepts have a much broader diet. Evaluative concepts are omnivorous, while deontic concepts are used either for that which is directly or indirectly subject to the will, or for states of affairs.

A final consideration in favour of the distinction between evaluative and deontic concepts concerns the possibility of dilemmas.[31] In contrast to evaluative judgements, deontic judgements seem to give rise to authentic dilemmas. As we know, our obligations can conflict, in the sense that we ought to perform two actions

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[28]. This would explain why it seems that deontic judgements imply the possibility of holding someone responsible (see Smith, 2005).

[29]. Cuneo distinguishes between what he calls 'responsibility norms' and 'propriety norms', which apply not only to voluntary actions, but also to things that are beyond our direct voluntary control (2007, p. 82).

[30]. See Wedgwood, 2009, for this suggestion.

[31]. This is a point that has recently been added to the list in Ogien and Tappolet, 2009.

that are incompatible. If twins are drowning, it seems that one ought to save one as much as the other, even if it is impossible to do both because the twins are too far from one another. What we have in this kind of dilemma can be described in the following manner (to simplify, I will use propositional deontic operators):

    (1) O(p)

    (2) O(q)

    (3) Impossible(p and q)[32].

Of course, there are also value conflicts. It can be just as desirable to spend one's holidays by the sea as to spend them in the mountains, but it is unfortunately impossible to spend them in two places at the same time. Here is how we can formalise these conflicts ('V' is for value):

    (4) V(p)

    (5) V(q)

    (6) Impossible(p and q).

The difference between the two kinds of conflicts is that the first threatens to produce a contradiction, while the second does not. Indeed, the two principles that allow us to derive a contradiction – the principle that *ought* implies *can* and the principle of agglomeration – seem plausible in the case of obligations, but not in the case of values. As we have seen, it is plausible that *ought* implies *can*. It is only in as far as an agent is capable of fulfilling a requirement that this requirement can apply to him. The evaluative equivalent of the principle is clearly false: something can be desirable or good while being impossible. Indeed, many things are. Moreover, as Bernard Williams (1965) suggested, the principle of agglomeration, although it seems plausible in the case of obligations, has no plausibility in the case of values. Indeed, it seems legitimate to say that someone who ought to keep her promise to Pierre, but ought also keep her promise to Paul, ought to keep her two promises. Contrary to this, it is easy to imagine that, even if doing something is good or desirable – marrying Pierre, for example – and that doing something else is also desirable – marrying Paul, for example – doing both things is not at all desirable: marrying both Paul and Pierre might turn out to be a nightmare (supposing it were a legal possibility, of course). It is

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[32]. See Williams, 1965; Tappolet, 2004.

for this reason that some deny that it is possible that two obligations, or at least two obligations that are *all things considered*, can conflict. On the other hand, no one is tempted to deny that two incompatible things can be good, even good all things considered.

In summary, there are good reasons to think that there is more than a superficial difference between evaluative and deontic concepts. The two kinds of concepts each form a distinct conceptual family, linked by a cluster of truisms. The evaluative family is much bigger than the deontic family and it has much tighter links with affective reactions. In contrast to evaluative concepts, deontic concepts do not admit of degrees. Their logical form is not the same; evaluative concepts, but not deontic concepts, at least apparently correspond to simple predicates. Evaluative concepts are omnivorous, while deontic concepts are concerned with what is at least indirectly subject to the will, or, in the case of *ought to be*, with the state of things. And lastly, value conflicts are not authentic dilemmas; the principle *ought* implies *can* and the principle of agglomeration have no kind of plausibility in the case of evaluative judgements.

2. Bridges between the normative and the evaluative

What does all this imply about whether it is possible to accept that evaluative concepts and judgements involving these concepts are normative? The differences that we have examined suggest that the two kinds of concepts serve functions that are too different for it to be reasonable to propose conceptual reductions. Evaluative concepts let us describe and compare different things around us according to a great variety of criteria, corresponding to our diverse affective reactions and allowing for all sorts of nuance. Deontic concepts, on the other hand, concern what we ought or ought not to do, or what ought or ought not to be. There seems to be no reason why we should be tempted to relinquish the services that either kind of concepts provides.[33] But this observation does not resolve the question of whether evaluative concepts are normative. On the contrary, the more it seems that the two kinds of concepts are distinct, the less we can see how they can belong to the same class.

To answer the question of how evaluative concepts can be considered normative, we will have to tackle two tasks that are far from easy. The first consists in

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[33]. See Ogien and Tappolet, 2009, p. 121-122, for an argument along the same lines, based on the idea that evaluative considerations give us reasons to act.

determining what makes a concept normative. There are two principal and conflicting conceptions of normativity: the first says that the concept of ought is the central normative concept; and the second that it is the concept of reason or, more precisely, normative reason, that plays this role.[34] A concept is normative if it is linked to one or other of these two concepts, depending on which conception is advocated. This link can be considered in the first instance as permitting a reduction to the concept that is normative *par excellence*, whether this is that of ought or that of reason. However, nothing excludes a more liberal position, whereby what counts is simply the ability to establish inferential links. The second task consists in examining all the possible links between evaluative concepts and the central normative concept, whether this is that of ought of that of reason. Rather than settling for one of the two conceptions of normativity, I will consider the options available to adherents of each rival view. As will become apparent, there are in fact many inferential links between evaluative concepts, deontic concepts and the concept of reason.

The first option that I would like to discuss assumes that the concept of ought is the central normative concept. The question of the normativity of evaluative concepts would thus reduce to the question of what is the link between evaluative and deontic concepts. Given the distinction between *ought to do* and *ought to be*, we should divide this question into two. Let us first consider the version claiming that *ought to be* is the central normative concept. Evaluative concepts will be normative in as far as they are connected to the concept of ought to be. This is exactly what Jonathan Dancy suggests:

> It is often said that normativity is the characteristic common to everything that appears on the 'ought' side of the distinction between what is and what ought to be. This is true however […] only if we include what is good and bad under the general heading of what ought to be or not to be (Dancy, 2000b, p. vii).

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[34]. For the first conception, see Dancy, 2000a, 2000b; and Broome, 2004. For the second, see Raz, 1999, 2010; Scanlon, 1998; Skorupski, 2007; Wallace, 2010. The question that arises is whether the concept of reason is deontic, evaluative or constitutes a class of its own. It is the third solution that seems plausible. The concept of reason does not appear to belong to either of the two 'tightly-knit' families I discussed; but above all, judgements involving reasons seem to have a different logical form from that of deontic and evaluative judgements – a proposition or a fact is a reason (of a certain strength and at a certain moment) for someone, in such and such circumstances, to do something or to adopt an attitude, which suggests that the predicate of reason is relational (see Väyrynen, 2010). On the contrary, the concept of reason shares a part of the traits of each of the other two kinds of concept. It falls on the deontic side when we consider the criteria of variety, of the link with affective reactions and of the domain of application, but not when we consider the criteria of degree nor that of dilemmas – the principle of agglomeration does not apply.

The question, evidently, is whether one can count what is good and bad, and more generally all the different ways of being good and bad, as part of the category of what ought to be. To defend this approach, one could argue that, if it is true that something is good, it is true that that thing ought to be.[35] In truth, it does not seem that the fact that something is good is enough to conclude that it ought to be. It rather seems that what ought to be is what is best.[36] Since it also seems plausible to say that if something ought to be, that thing is the best, one obtains the following principle:

(1) x is the best if and only if x ought to be.

An initial question that arises is how to integrate the specific evaluative concepts, such as *courageous* or *admirable*. Possession of a characteristic, even to the highest degree, does not imply that something ought to be. The most courageous or admirable action is not necessarily the action that ought to be because one cannot exclude the possibility that that action is not the best action – another action could be better, after all. The different specific evaluative characteristics determine if a thing is the best, or more exactly if it is the best all things considered, but specific evaluative judgements do not directly imply judgements about what is the best or what ought to be. Thus, specific evaluative concepts are normative in as far as they contribute to determining the comparative value that something possesses, all things considered.

Another question that this suggestion raises is the extent to which this link with ought to be properly renders the idea that evaluative judgements are normative. What we seem to lose is the link with the idea that normative judgements are judgements that guide our actions. This suggests that it is rather the concept of ought to do that is the normative concept *par excellence*. The difficulty is that even if it is without doubt true that, if an agent ought to perform an action, that action ought to be,

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35. It is Moore who argues: "Every one does in fact understand the question 'Is this good?' When he thinks of it, his state of mind is different from what it would be, were he asked 'Is this pleasant, or desired, or approved?' It has a distinct meaning for him, even though he may not recognise in what respect it is distinct. Whenever he thinks of 'intrinsic value,' or 'intrinsic worth,' or says that a thing 'ought to exist,' he has before his mind the unique object —the unique property of things— that I mean by 'good'." (1903, section 13, p. 68) See also Mulligan, 1989, for the claim that to judge something good implies that that thing should be. Mulligan suggests that the unity of the normative domain is due to the fact that *ought to do*, like *good*, implies *ought to be*.

36. See Wedgwood, 2009, p. 512.

ought to be does not seem to directly imply ought to do.[37] That world peace ought to exist does not imply anything concerning what particular agents ought to do. After all, it is almost impossible to do anything to contribute to world peace. However, there is a way of skirting around this difficulty by suggesting that we should limit what an agent ought to do to that which she is capable of doing. Thus, one can propose the following principle:

(2) S ought to φ if and only if S is capable of φ and φ ought to be.

This principle allows us to highlight the link between evaluative concepts and the concept *ought to do*. Expressed differently, the principle in question claims that an agent ought to perform the action that is the best among those she is capable of performing:

(3) S ought to φ if and only if S is capable of φ and φ is the best of all actions.

Some will object that this principle implies consequentialism, at the very least a controversial doctrine, and so should be rejected. Indeed, if (3) were a conceptual truth, we would have to conclude that the numerous opponents of consequentialism were not only wrong, but did not properly understand ordinary concepts. What we should note, however, is that it is possible to understand (3) in a non-consequentialist manner. It is sufficient to define what counts as an action that ought to be, or even the best action, in non-consequentialist terms. One can, for example, suggest that what counts is what is good relative to the agent, given the duties that fall to her.[38] From this point of view, the best action for an agent can be not to lie, even if a lie would have the best consequences in neutral terms in the agent's view – she would save more lives, for example.

Furthermore, another link between evaluative concepts and the concept of ought concerns the affective reactions we ought to have towards values. Thus, it seems plausible to say that we ought to approve of what is good, disapprove of what is bad, admire what is admirable, despise what is despicable, etc. This is one of the

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[37]. See Mulligan, 1989, for this suggestion.
[38]. See Wedgwood, 2009, for this suggestion.

interpretations of the idea that value concepts can be elucidated in terms of what are called appropriate (or fitting) reactions.[39] More generally, we have:

(4) x is V if and only if x is such that S ought to R towards x (where 'V' is an evaluative predicate and 'R' is an affective reaction towards S).

The question of how exactly to formulate this kind of equivalence remains tricky. For example, we can ask how we should understand the term 'ought'.[40] However, it is difficult to deny the plausibility of such an equivalence, which makes it plausible that a formulation that makes it true exists. Furthermore, even if the equivalences are often proposed with the aim of reducing evaluative concepts to other kinds of concept, in this case to deontic concepts involving our reactions, this is not the only possibility. We can think that what such an equivalence shows is that there is a tight connection between the two kinds of concepts, without this implying an asymmetry.[41]

Another formulation of the idea that there is a link between value judgements and our reactions uses the concept of reason, rather than the concept of ought.[42] According to Thomas Scanlon, evaluative judgements are not only linked to judgements involving our affective reactions, but also to our practical judgements. More precisely, Scanlon claims that something is good in as far as it possesses the natural properties that give us reasons to act or to react positively towards that thing. For Scanlon, the thought is that showing that something is good is nothing more than showing that it possesses the traits which provide reasons.[43] However, a reductionist reading is not the only reading here. One can subscribe to the idea that if a thing gives reasons to do something or to feel something, it is precisely because it possesses value. To leave both possibilities open, one can simply propose the following equivalence:

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[39]. See Brentano, 1889; Wiggins, 1987; Mulligan, 1998; Scanlon, 1998; D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000, among others.

[40]. In certain uses of the term, the equivalence is clearly false. Something can be amusing, even if from a moral point of view one ought not be amused. See D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000; Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2004.

[41]. See Wedgwood, 2009. Also see Tappolet, 2011, for the claim that, if it is true that one ought to feel such and such a reaction in response to something, it is because we want to have correct reactions in response to things, where *correct* is not a normative concept.

[42]. See Scanlon, 1998, for example.

[43]. For a critical discussion, see Ogien and Tappolet, 2009, chap.3.

(5) x is good if and only if x gives a reason to perform certain actions and to have R towards x.

This leaves one free to say that, if something provides reasons, this is simply in virtue of its natural properties. This claim is as compatible with (5) as the claim that reasons are based on the evaluative properties of things.

In any case, this equivalence, which one cannot deny is plausible, allows us to render the normative character of evaluative concepts within the framework of a conception that states that the normative concept *par excellence* is that of reason. A point worth underlining is that this conception allows us – and more directly than the conception that privileges the concept of ought – to render the normative character of specific evaluative concepts. Indeed, (5) can be formulated for specific evaluative concepts just as well as it can for general evaluative concepts. It seems plausible that something is admirable in as far as it gives us reasons to act, and overall to feel admiration towards it.

However, we should keep in mind that the concept of reason and the concept of ought are also connected. Few would deny that we ought to perform an action if and only if we have sufficient reason to do it. Indeed, this is a claim that can be as easily accepted by someone who privileges the concept of ought as by someone who privileges the concept of reason.[44] Following on from this, it is possible to claim that, in as far as the fact that something possesses such and such a value gives us a reason to act, the fact of possessing a value is linked to what we ought to do. In giving us reasons to act, values contribute to determining what we ought to do. The upshot is that it is not surprising at all that values and the concepts that relate to them are considered normative.

The picture that crystallises is one which a great many equivalences allow us to build bridges between the evaluative and deontic domains. Doubtless, we need to formulate these equivalences in a more precise manner. However, it is difficult to deny their plausibility. One might thus think that there is only a little work needed to show that all these different concepts can be reduced to each other. If the only

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[44]. For a version of the claim that privileges the concept of ought (*ought-first*), see Broome, 2004, p. 24 and 39. According to Broome, this equivalence is not analytic, but is implied by the fact that the reason for doing something is an explanation of the reason why one ought to do that thing.

concepts we needed were deontic, for example, we would lose nothing if, suddenly, from one day to the next, we stopped using evaluative concepts.

I think that the conception that emerges is rather different. On the contrary, what the existence of multiple links suggests is that evaluative concepts and deontic concepts are two kinds of concepts that belong to the same conceptual level. Neither one nor the other of the two families should be considered prior. As Wedgwood claims, these concepts are too closely linked for it to be plausible to claim that some have conceptual priority over the others.[45] Even if I have not shown that this conception is inevitable, I think one must concede that it is not only possible, but attractive.

Conclusion

In brief, the reply to the question of whether evaluative concepts can be considered normative is the following: they can because they possess a great number of inferential relations with both deontic concepts and the concept of reason. The normative domain, although made up of many different kinds of concepts, is a unified domain.

It should be clear that this way of conceiving of the normative domain corresponds to the image that our examination of the distinctions has provided us with. Indeed, as we have seen, the differences between evaluative and deontic concepts suggests that the two kinds of concepts fulfil distinct functions: for evaluative concepts, this consists in the description and comparison of things around us, including people and their actions, according to a variety of criteria and nuances corresponding to multiple affective reactions; for deontic concepts, this consists in a verdict on what one ought or ought not to do, or on what ought or ought not to be.

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[45]. Wedgwood, 2009, p. 513. Wedgwood suggests that the case is roughly comparable to the relation between *possible* and *necessary*.

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