

Epistemic norms from a naturalistic viewpoint: Interdisciplinary perspectives

October 7–8, 2010

Institut Jean-Nicod (Paris)



Organizers: Joëlle Proust and Kirk Michaelian

Avec le soutien de l'Institut Jean-Nicod, l'École Normale Supérieure, et
l'Agence Nationale de la Recherche

THURSDAY 7 OCTOBER

Salle Dussane
45, rue d'Ulm
Ecole Normale Supérieure

10h30 Speaker: Georgy Gergely (Budapest): Psychological Essentialism: The origins of representing artifact kinds. Commentator: Nicolas Baumard (Oxford).

11h45 Speaker: Beate Sodan (Munich): Development of epistemic norm sensitivity in children. Commentator: Fabrice Clément (Lausanne).

13h00 lunch (ENS restaurant)

14h30 Speaker: Asher Koriat (Haifa): Subjective convictions and social consensus: Evidence from research on social attitudes and social beliefs. Commentator: Elisabeth Pacherie (IJN).

15h45 Speaker: Jennifer Nagel (Toronto): Epistemic anxiety. Commentator: Kirk Michaelian (IJN).

17h00 coffee break

17h15 Speaker: Joëlle Proust (IJN): On the nature of epistemic norms. Commentator: Anders Nes (CSMN).

18h30 end

19h30 conference dinner (Bouillon Racine, 3, rue Racine)

FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER

Salle Jules Ferry
29, rue d'Ulm
Ecole Normale Supérieure

09h00 Speaker: Pascal Engel (Genève): Cognitivism about epistemic norms.
Commentator: Mikkel Gerken (Copenhagen).

10h15 coffee break

10h30 Speaker: Fabian Dorsch (Fribourg): Reasons and requirements. Com-
mentator: Conor McHugh (IJN).

11h45 Speaker: Christopher Hookway (Sheffield): Some norms of perception.
Commentator: Claudine Tiercelin (IJN).

13h00 lunch (ENS restaurant)

14h30 Speaker: Dan Sperber (IJN): Epistemic vigilance and epistemic norms.
Commentator: Ophelia Deroy (UMI-NYU & Paris Est).

15h45 Speaker: David Over (Durham) and Angelo Gilio (Roma): Inferring
conditionals from disjunctions: A psychological and probabilistic study.
Commentator: Ira Noveck (Lyon).

17h00 coffee break

17h15 Speaker: Jonathan Weinberg (Bloomington): What good are disagree-
ments? Commentator: Kristoffer Ahlström (Copenhagen).

18h30 end

Epistemic norms from a naturalistic viewpoint: Interdisciplinary perspectives

Epistemic norms are the norms on the basis of which, in a first-person way, cognitive systems control and monitor their perceptual attention, memory, learning, planning, categorizing, reasoning, etc. Epistemic norms are thus largely procedural; they are most often used as implicit action-guiding principles, without having to be explicitly represented. It is thus natural to study epistemic norms through the metacognitive evaluations that subjects make in the course of their daily lives, rather than only through subjects' verbal reports about what justifies them in forming certain beliefs.

There is no agreement, however, on the nature and scope of epistemic norms. For some, epistemic norms are universal constraints on cognition; others take them to be associated to instrumental goals in task-specific contexts. There is no agreement either on how cognizers become sensitive to epistemic norms. Some take sensitivity to a given epistemic norm, such as accuracy, coherence, or consensus, to be a cultural matter, influenced by a conceptual repertoire and by social norms, while others take it to be a universal, innate, disposition associated with metacognitive abilities. Here are some of the questions that our workshop will aim to address:

- Are epistemic norms of a constitutive or of an instrumental kind ? Are all epistemic norms at the same level, or are there epistemic “meta-norms” or, at least, “overarching” norms?
- Is norm-sensitivity selectively triggered by different cognitive systems (e.g., “system 1” for fluency, consensus, and “system 2” for truth, relevance)? Are these norms ultimately in conflict? If so, how is this conflict resolved?
- Is there significant cultural variation in epistemic norms? If so, what are the epistemological implications of this variation? Can epistemological relativism be avoided?
- Are epistemic norms dependent upon social norms? If so, in which ways?
- What does the psychology of metacognition tell us about the capacity of agents to satisfy different epistemic norms? About the role of norms in regulating cognition?

THURSDAY 7 OCTOBER

10h30 Speaker: Georgy Gergely (Budapest): Psychological Essentialism: The origins of representing artifact kinds. Commentator: Nicolas Baumard (Oxford).

'Psychological Essentialism' (Gelman 2003; Medin & Ortony, 1989) is a doctrine in recent cognitive developmental science according to which humans evolved an essentialist epistemic stance towards kinds that assumes that the existence, surface properties, and causal powers of individual members of kinds are determined by hidden essences with causal and rich inferential properties. The essentialist interpretational and representational stance about kinds is a cognitive adaptation that serves a number of basic epistemic functions by guiding and constraining early conceptual development, organization, and change in humans. While historically psychological essentialism has been clearly influenced by philosophical essentialism (as developed by Putnam and Kripke), its scientific viability and theoretical claims arguably do not depend on philosophical essentialism being true in a metaphysical sense about natural kinds.

11h45 Speaker: Beate Sodian (Munich): Development of epistemic norm sensitivity in children. Commentator: Fabrice Clément (Lausanne).

The literature on Theory of Mind development, and on metacognition in preschool and elementary school children indicates an explicit understanding of the most important epistemic norms around the age of 4 to 8 years. However, there is little research on earlier, implicit signs of metacognitive awareness in infants and young children. We will review research on an implicit Theory of Mind in infancy and ask for its significance for early metacognitive development. Based on longitudinal findings, we will trace epistemic norm sensitivity from joint attention around the first birthday to the acquisition of verbal labels for mental states between the ages of 2 and 3 years.

13h00 lunch (ENS restaurant)

14h30 Speaker: Asher Koriat (Haifa): Subjective convictions and social consensus: Evidence from research on social attitudes and social beliefs. Commentator: Elisabeth Pacherie (IJN).

Some researchers regard social attitudes as evaluative predispositions that are stable over time, whereas others argue that social attitudes are constructed on the spot on the basis of information that is accessible to the person at the time of making the judgment. In the study to be reported the degree of certainty in one's attitudes is shown to track the on-line construction of social attitudes and to provide clues to the stable and variable aspects of attitude construction. A sampling model is proposed of how attitudes are constructed and how confidence in these attitudes is assessed. According to the model, confidence in ones' attitudes and beliefs varies with the extent to which they coincide with social consensus: Attitudes and beliefs that deviate from those that are held consensually take longer to form and are held with lower confidence. This pattern occurs in the absence of any overt forces toward social conformity.

15h45 Speaker: Jennifer Nagel (Toronto): Epistemic anxiety. Commentator: Kirk Michaelian (IJN).

How much evidence should you collect on a given point before you make up your mind about it? This question has figured prominently both in recent psychological work on evidence accumulation and cognitive strategy selection, and in recent philosophical work on knowledge attribution. Both sides have noticed that it seems to matter whether the proposition in question is a high- or low-stakes matter for the agent who is trying to make up his mind: where psychologists have tracked the ways in which higher-stakes subjects seek out additional evidence, philosophers have made some parallel moves in examining our tendency to show greater stringency in ascribing knowledge to higher-stakes subjects. But what kind of norm is an agent observing when he allocates (or tries to allocate) more cognitive energy to a high-stakes issue? This paper examines that question in the light of some recent empirical work on natural distortions in adult mental state ascription.

17h00 coffee break

17h15 Speaker: Joëlle Proust (IJN): On the nature of epistemic norms. Commentator: Anders Nes (CSMN).

Naturalist philosophers tend to consider that all forms of normativity should be understood in terms of instrumental rationality. For example, Dretske (2000) argues that violations of truth, mistakes, fallacies, etc. are merely properties we don't like. Papineau (1999) similarly sees competition between norms such as accuracy, informativeness, or economy, as a clear expression of their underlying instrumentality. Instrumentalism about EN, however, is unable to explain the contrast between a reason to act, where the "ought" is pro tanto "an ought so far as it goes" and a normative requirement, that does not depend upon circumstances, nor on ulterior reasons (Broome,1999).

An alternative naturalistic theory of epistemic norms will be offered in terms of how they are used by agents to evaluate their own future cognitive dispositions or present cognitive achievements. An agent who tries to memorize words, necessarily tries to memorize them accurately: accuracy is a constitutive norm for learning a list of words. An agent may try to be exhaustive, or coherent, rather than accurate. Each normative requirement only steps in once a specific metacognitive strategy is selected, for it is constitutive of this particular strategy. This view implies that epistemic norms primarily apply to contents that are/can be actively controlled and monitored by cognitive systems, and only derivatively to passively acquired attitudes. The origin and nature of the various epistemic "oughts" will be discussed in terms of various objective relations between informational states and their associated brain states.

18h30 end

19h30 conference dinner (Bouillon Racine, 3, rue Racine)

FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER

09h00 Speaker: Pascal Engel (Genève): Cognitivism about epistemic norms.
Commentator: Mikkel Gerken (Copenhagen).

Are there epistemic norms such as a belief is correct only if it is true or a belief is correct only if it based on sufficient evidence? According to cognitivism about epistemic norms, there are indeed such norms, and they are absolute. But many doubt it. Relativists hold that, like restaurants which are counted as right or wrong depending on whether one intends to eat one kind of food or another, in one kind of setting or in another, or how much one is prepared to pay, beliefs are right or wrong depending on what kind of interests one has. Eliminativists hold that there are no such norms. Expressivists or non cognitivists hold that there are such norms, but that these are mere expressions of our attitudes. I shall not deal here with expressivism about epistemic norms. My concern here is only to defend cognitivism against its relativist and eliminativist opponents. I shall do that on the basis of normativism about belief, the view that something is a belief only if it can be applied the norm of truth and the norm of evidence.

10h15 coffee break

10h30 Speaker: Fabian Dorsch (Fribourg): Reasons and requirements. Commentator: Conor McHugh (IJN).

My starting point in this talk will be Niko Kolodny's argumentation to the effect that rational requirements are only seemingly normative and that what is really doing the normative work are reasons and our beliefs about them. More specifically, two elements of his view will be important: (i) that normativity resides only in reasons and our recognition of them; (ii) that the merely seeming normativity of rational requirements can be explained in terms of (i). Apart from rendering Kolodny's argumentation and conclusion plausible (a full defense would by all means go beyond the scope of the talk), I will concentrate on one detail and one consequence of his account.

The detail is the fact that Kolodny takes our beliefs about which reasons we (seem to) have to be responsible for our misleading impression of being subject to rational requirements. This detail introduces an element of metarecognition into his view, and I aim to investigate two issues: first, to which extent it still allows us to talk of metarecognition as being involved in our attempts to conform to rational requirements; and, second, to which extent the view can allow for less demanding forms of metarecognition than beliefs about one's own reasons - for instance, epistemic feelings or experiences of rational support. My hypothesis will be that it is an important consequence of Kolodny's view that metarecognition is to be located at the level of responses to reasons, rather than at the level of conformity to rational requirements; but also that the metarecognitional element need not be full-blown belief.

11h45 Speaker: Christopher Hookway (Sheffield): Some norms of perception.
Commentator: Claudine Tiercelin.

There is a potential tension between a the view that perception is a passive process whereby external things impact upon us and an approach to epistemic norms which gives a central role for states such of virtue whose role is to regulate activities such as, for example, inquiry. The paper will describe this apparent tension, consider the strengths and weaknesses of some responses to and conclude by offering a positive account of how capacities analogous to virtues and affective states can have a regulative role in the processes of perception.

13h00 lunch (ENS restaurant)

14h30 Speaker: Dan Sperber (IJN): Epistemic vigilance and epistemic norms. Commentator: Ophelia Deroy (UMI-NYU & Paris Est).

Humans massively depend on information provided by others and thereby incur the risk of being intentionally deceived and manipulated (as opposed to just being accidentally misinformed, as they may be by their own senses and inferential abilities). Sperber et al 2009 (“Epistemic Vigilance” in *Mind & Language*, 25 (4), 359–393) argue that humans appeal to a variety of mechanisms of epistemic vigilance in order to minimise this risk. Some of these mechanisms attend to the reliability of source of information (whom to believe?), others attend to informational contents (what to believe?). What are the epistemic norms involved in epistemic vigilance ?

15h45 Speaker: David Over (Durham) and Angelo Gilio (Roma): Inferring conditionals from disjunctions: A psychological and probabilistic study. Commentator: Ira Noveck (Lyon).

There is a new probabilistic, Bayesian paradigm in the psychology of reasoning, with a new normative and descriptive account of when an inference is well justified. We will compare the new paradigm norms with the old binary paradigm norms in reasoning research, using as our case study inferring the conditional, if not-A then B, from the disjunction, A or B. This inference is logically valid in the old paradigm, but logically invalid in the new, probabilistic one. By a broader probabilistic norm, the inference is sometimes well justified probabilistically and sometimes not. The new paradigm is greatly supported by psychological results showing that people judge the probability of the indicative conditional in natural language, $P(\text{if } A \text{ then } B)$, to be the conditional probability, $P(B|A)$. Using this result, we will explain why reasoning from A or B to if not-A then B is a strong inference when A or B has a non-constructive justification, but not when A or B is justified constructively. We will also discuss how the new paradigm is related to naturalistic and instrumental analyses of rationality and to a distinction in dual process theory between System 1 and System 2 mental processes.

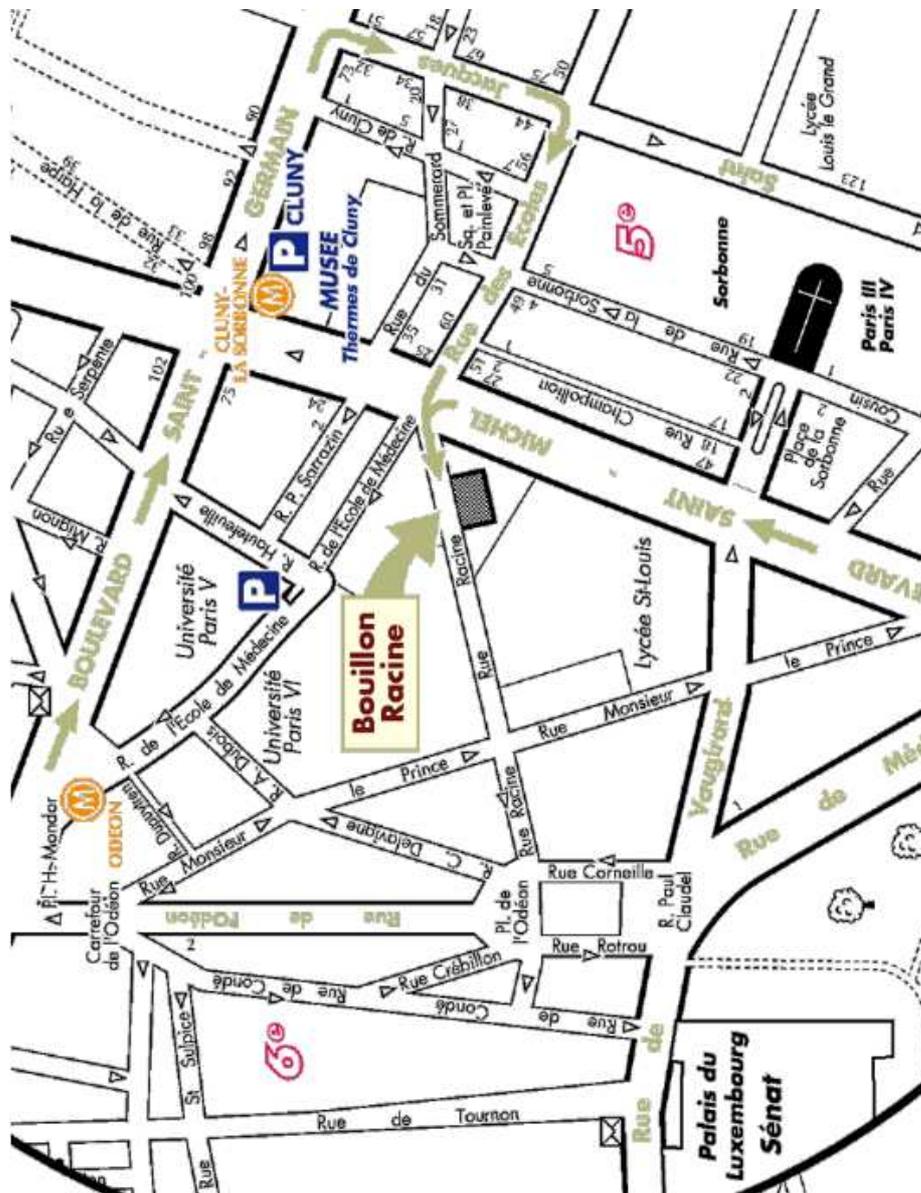
17h00 coffee break

17h15 Speaker: Jonathan Weinberg (Bloomington): What good are disagreements? Commentator: Kristoffer Ahlström.

The topic of peer disagreement is extremely hot these days, with the majority of the argumentation trading in our intuitions about how much credences should or shouldn't be adjusted in various sorts of scenarios, of

varying degrees of far-fetchedness. I will explore the topic through a different, more methodologically naturalistic apparatus: given the social and practical purposes that our norms of justification are meant to help serve, we can ask a kind of engineering question, as to just what rules regarding disagreement would best serve those purposes. I posit that the epistemic goals we have for the norms of justification are most basically what I call the “DR desiderata” of diachronic reliability and dialectical robustness. The first is our goal of attaining and keeping a hold of truths; the second, that we be able to learn well from each other, both from our collaborations and – very relevantly to this topic – from our disagreements. So we can ask the question: what policies regarding disagreement would best support our interests in these desiderata?

My answer has three parts. First, where there may be some means available to settle the dispute, it would be best to motivate both parties to seek out those means, generally by decreasing their credences in the disputed proposition. But, second, the exact distribution of credence-decrease need not follow any sort of “equal weight” rule, but rather should be based in our best account of where the different agents, as fallible investigators, may be making erring. So at least sometimes this may lead one or even both disagreeing agents not adjusting their credences at all. Third, where there is not any available means to resolve the dispute, it would sometimes be best for the parties simply to part ways regarding p , so long as they possess a robust enough set of non- p -dependent forms of interaction. This will occasionally lead to an instrumental and hopefully temporary form of epistemic relativism.



Conference dinner restaurant (Bouillon Racine)

For all information, please contact Sophie Bilardello at +33 (0) 1 44 32 26 96.