

ERC Grant “REASONS F1RST: The Structure of Normativity”

Principal Investigator (PI): Benjamin Kiesewetter

Project Description

Some of the core fields of philosophy – including moral philosophy, value theory, and epistemology – are, at their heart, concerned with normative questions: questions about what is good or bad, right or wrong, justified or unjustified. These questions concern the content of judgements that human beings are constantly making and that structure our way of thinking, feeling, and acting. But while there is wide agreement in contemporary philosophy that normative judgements form a unified and important category of human thought, philosophers still struggle to understand what normativity actually *is*. One highly attractive hypothesis is that normativity can be analysed in terms of reasons – i.e., in terms of the factors that count in favour of or against actions or attitudes. The aim of REASONS F1RST is to systematically explore this Reasons-First Approach on a large scale and across various philosophical subdisciplines. Fostering multidisciplinary conversations between moral philosophy, epistemology, value theory, aesthetics, the philosophy of emotions, and related areas, the project will develop novel analyses of normative phenomena. It also seeks to address recent challenges to the Reasons-First Approach and to compare it to competing approaches. REASONS F1RST thus pursues a twofold objective: (i) to assess the merits and demerits of the Reasons-First Approach compared to alternative proposals, and (ii) to work out in detail how different normative phenomena – including values, obligations and rights, the justification of beliefs, as well as appropriateness norms for emotions – can be explained in terms of reasons.

The work programme of REASONS F1RST will be carried out in four **sub-projects**: (1) “Reasons and Value”; (2) “Reasons and Ought”; (3) “Reasons and Knowledge”; and (3) “Reasons and Fittingness”. Each of these sub-projects focuses on the relation between reasons and one other key normative category. Each of these categories stands for a field of normativity that a Reasons-First Approach has to account for in one way or another, and each has been put forward as an alternative candidate for a fundamental explanation of normativity. Moreover, each sub-project corresponds to one (and in one case more than one) philosophical subdiscipline. For the first three sub-projects, these are value theory, moral theory, and epistemology. The fourth sub-project touches upon aesthetics, moral psychology, the philosophy of mind, and epistemology in equal shares. REASONS F1RST will employ up to four researchers (on a doctoral or postdoctoral level), each of which will be responsible for conducting one of the sub-projects in collaboration with the PI.

Sub-project 1 (“Reasons and Value”) focuses on the relation between reasons and value and its implications for the structure of normativity. It will examine the prospects of a value-based theory of reasons, on the one hand, and a reasons-based theory of value on the other. Research questions include the following: Can all practical reasons be explained by the value of the actions they support (or by some other value)? Can a reason-based rather than value-based framework for practical reasons be satisfactory? Can value concepts – including so-

called *thin* evaluative concepts like ‘good *simpliciter*’ (impersonal goodness), ‘good for’ (personal goodness), ‘good as a kind’ (attributive goodness), but also *thick* evaluative concepts (such as ‘cruel’ or ‘kind’), as well as virtue-related evaluative concepts like ‘virtue’ or ‘competence’ – be analysed in terms of reasons?

Sub-project 2 (“Reasons and Ought”) focuses on the relation between reasons and deontic normative concepts, such as ‘ought’, ‘must’, ‘required’, ‘obligated’, ‘prohibited’, ‘wrong’, etc. It will develop reasons-based analyses of deontic concepts and compare them with accounts of reasons in terms of the deontic. Research questions include the following: (How) can deontic normative concepts like ‘ought’, ‘obligation’, ‘requirement’, ‘duty’, ‘claim right’, etc. be analysed in terms of reasons? (How) can a Reasons-First Approach to deontic concepts account for merely justifying reasons, supererogation, the pre-emptive force of moral obligations, and the directedness of moral claim rights and (some of) our duties?

Sub-project 3 (“Reasons and Knowledge”) starts out from the assumption that core concepts of epistemology – concepts such as ‘reason to believe’, ‘justification’, and ‘knowledge’ – are normative concepts. It will examine the thesis that the normativity of epistemically normative concepts or properties can be spelled out in terms of reasons, and that this notion of a reason is identical to the notion of a practical reason. Research questions include: (How) can epistemic concepts like evidence, probability, justification, or knowledge be analysed in terms of reasons? (How) can epistemic reasons and epistemic justification be explained in terms of value, knowledge, or correctness? Are epistemic reasons normative reasons in the same sense in which normative practical reasons are normative? Can epistemic reasons be the basis of epistemic normativity?

Sub-project 4 (“Reasons and Fittingness”) focuses on the relation between the fact that emotions and other mental attitudes have standards of correctness, appropriateness or fittingness, and the fact that they are subject to reasons. Exploring this relation, it will compare the prospects of the Reasons-First Approach and the Fittingness-First Approach. Research questions include: Are fittingness norms unified in the sense that correct beliefs, appropriate emotions, and correct actions can be said to have the same normative status? In what sense (if any) is fittingness normative? (How) can reasons and fittingness be analysed in terms of each other and what are the theoretical alternatives to these approaches?

Contact:

Dr. Benjamin Kiesewetter
[firstname] [dot] [lastname] [at] uni-bielefeld [dot] de