EPISTEMIC NORMATIVITY AND THE SEPARATENESS OF PROPOSITIONS—AN INQUIRY

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Epistemic Normativity and the Separateness of Propositions—an Inquiry* by Lily Golan Simmons, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Philosophy at San Francisco State University.

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This paper explores the structural similarities between teleological theories in ethics and epistemology, and whether this implies a shared normativity. I critically examine a recent objection made by Selim Berker, who claims that the structure of epistemic teleology lends itself to objectionable tradeoffs in epistemology. First, I consider what is objectionable about the nature of a teleological method of justification. Second, I compare the structures of teleological theories in ethics and epistemology, and then present two analogous objections, one to ethical teleology and the other to epistemic teleology. However, I contend that the two objections are analogous, because I claim that merely focusing on a structural feature neglects how something's nature also plays into evaluation. Berker's argument relies on a tacit assumption that the nature between persons and propositions is similar. I go on to offer an account of how this could be the case, however I conclude that Berker's objection is too broad—his objection applies only to propositions with a certain nature, but not to all.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.
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This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Lila B. Golan; I told her I would.
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Introduction—The Trouble with Consequentialism

This paper explores the structural similarities between teleological theories in ethics and epistemology, and whether this implies a shared normativity. I critically examine a recent objection made by Selim Berker, who claims that the structure of epistemic teleology lends itself to objectionable tradeoffs in epistemology. First, I consider what is objectionable about nature of a teleological method of justification. Second, I compare the structures of teleological theories in ethics and epistemology, and then present two analogous objections, one to ethical teleology and the other to epistemic teleology. However, I contend that the two objections are analogous, because I claim that merely focusing on a structural feature neglects how something’s nature also plays into evaluation. Berker’s argument relies on a tacit assumption that the nature between persons and propositions is similar. I go on to offer an account of how this could be the case; however, I conclude that Berker’s objection is too broad—his objection applies only to propositions with a certain nature, but not to all. The purpose of this paper is to provide a plausible account for what makes people and propositions impervious to tradeoffs.

The appeal of consequentialism comes from its simplicity. First and foremost, consequentialism defines the good. Next, it defines right by grounding justification in the promotion of the good. If conflicts arise between values, tradeoffs are employed as a
means to maximize overall value. For example, if sacrificing X is conducive for maximizing the good, then sacrificing X is justified. Generally, this is a tenable method for comparing different values, however one can run into trouble while comparing two values of an incommensurable nature.

The trouble comes from the act of promoting or conducing towards a certain state of affairs, which possibly overlooks something of independent value. The focus on a certain end/goal means that there will always be a relational aspect to consequentialism's method of justification. Since "right" is always evaluated in terms of consequences, anything related to the promotion of the end/goal will be evaluated in terms of how it contributed to those consequences, irrespective to whatever independent value something may hold. I will call this kind of value *relational*, and for the purposes of this paper, will define anything that acquires value from its relation to something else as *instrumental*.

The value of a human being is different. When a person's value is judged based on their relation to some other kind of value, this turns the independent value of that person into an instrumental value for some other end. This conflicts with the generally held belief about the nature of a person, whose value independently holds irrespective to the value of anything else. For the purposes of this paper, I will define any *independent* kind of value as *intrinsic*.¹ Because tradeoffs undermine a person's the independent

¹ I have in mind a broader scope of "intrinsic" that includes "value as an end" as opposed to merely designating some kind of property intrinsic to an entity.
value, this gives the value of people a special status. I will call this kind of status "privileged," because a person's value naturally precludes her from tradeoffs with other kind of value.

Selim Berker models a similar objection against epistemic teleology in his paper, "Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions." Epistemic teleology also grounds justification in terms of consequences, except that instead of evaluating actions, epistemic teleology evaluates a belief's status based upon the consequences of our believing, namely that we aim for truth. Berker argues that the normative structure of epistemic teleology lends itself to objectionable tradeoffs just like those found in ethical teleology, except that instead of overlooking the status of persons, epistemic teleology overlooks the status of propositions. Propositions hold the status the belief in question, and whereas tradeoffs in ethical value could sometimes be morally defensible,\(^2\) Berker claims that tradeoffs of epistemic value would never defensible.\(^3\) He concludes that the entire framework of epistemic teleology is misguided\(^4\) and should therefore be rejected.\(^5\)

I contend with Berker's thesis, because I think his objection is misaimed. In identifying the relevant kinds of tradeoffs as a reason to reject epistemic teleology, Berker inadvertently fails to acknowledge a crucial presupposition: he treats propositions

\(^2\) This speaks to a distinction between inter-personal tradeoffs and intra-personal tradeoffs. See Berker, 2013a: 358
\(^3\) Berker, 2013a: 365
\(^4\) Berker, 2013a: 340
\(^5\) Berker, 2013a: 380
as having a kind of value, or warrant, that disallows certain kinds of tradeoffs just as people have a kind of value that disallows certain kinds of tradeoffs. However, I contend that the two kinds of warrant are analogous.

If the nature of propositions were such that their value naturally precluded them from being compared to other kinds of value, then the nature of a proposition’s value would be similar to the value of a person. However, a claim of this sort could only be supported with an account of the nature propositions. Berker provides no account, despite having a constraint on how a proposition’s status should be determined. Instead, he merely asserts that objectionable tradeoffs follow from a “deep structural feature” within epistemic teleology, but this speaks nothing to the kind of value that propositions hold. I believe that Berker is taking the nature of propositions for granted in his argument when comparing the value of propositions to the value of people, and because of this, I find Berker’s thesis unpromising.

However, I do believe that one could fashion a more nuanced version of Berker’s objection to give it more plausibility. Putting the onus merely on the teleological structure is too broad. A more precise version of Berker’s thesis would be that objectionable tradeoffs ignore the “privileged” status that comes from something having a kind of warrant that naturally precludes it from any comparison of value. If it were the case that the value of a proposition precluded it from being compared to other kinds of

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6 Berker, 2013a: 359
value, then we could plausibly claim that certain tradeoffs of epistemic value are inappropriate. The question is whether such a privileged status exists for propositions. I will present an account of the nature of propositions that includes propositions with a special kind of warrant that precludes them from any tradeoffs in epistemic value, in the attempt to create a more plausible version of Berker’s thesis.

**Analogous Structures**

Berker delineates three basic components for determining value in any teleological theory of justification: a theory of final value, a theory of overall value, and a deontic theory. These three components are lexically ordered, so that the theory of overall value depends on a theory of final value, and a deontic theory depends on a theory of overall value. A theory of final value specifies certain states of affairs as valuable only as ends in themselves. A theory of overall value assesses how well the entities—e.g. acts/beliefs—conduce toward those finally valuable states of affairs, and provides an all-things-considered verdict for the acts/beliefs that helped bring about that finally valuable state of affairs. Finally, a deontic theory confers deontic properties like “right/wrong,” “justified/unjustified,” and “warranted/unwarranted” based on the greatest overall net value. These three components make up the axiological structure of teleological theories.

At the heart of any teleological theory is a particular way in which the notions of “good” and “right” relate to each other. Goodness is defined independently of right,
while rightness is defined by how well it conduces towards the good.⁷

Teleological/consequentialist theories hold two constraints within their concept of value.⁸

First, fundamental value must be the kind of thing that can be promoted or prevented. Things such as happiness or pain accrue value, because they can be maximized or minimized. The value of people, on the other hand, does not accrue. We cannot maximize or minimize the value of Bob, nor can we compare Bob’s value to Fred’s value. Furthermore, the value of Bob and Fred together does not imply there is any additional value compared to Bob alone. As explained earlier, the nature of a person’s value is inherent, because Bob is valuable for his own sake. Thus, the nature of Bob is such that his value cannot be promoted or prevented.

While Bob’s value cannot be maximized or minimized, he can still contribute to the promotion of states of affairs that maximize or minimize overall value. This implies a second constraint. All non-fundamental value must be explained in terms of how well it conduces towards something of fundamental value. Since the nature of Bob’s value does not accrue, it cannot be fundamental. Rather, it must be explained in terms of how well it conduces towards a good state of affairs. Thus, Bob’s value must be analyzed in terms of how well he promotes some other end.

**Analogous Objections**

⁷Rawls, 1971: 16
⁸Berker, 2013a: 343-344
Now that we the structural view of teleological normativity in mind, we can start exploring Berker’s specific objection to epistemic teleology. Since both kinds of theories have a structurally analogous normativity, one strategy for exposing the problematic structural feature of epistemic teleology is to identify an analogous objection to ethical teleology. Berker uses (simplified) hedonic utilitarianism to make his case.

Hedonic utilitarianism holds pleasure as a fundamental value and aims to maximize it. An action's value is determined by how well that action conduces towards pleasure, or conversely, avoids pain, but this leaves the status of people in question. There is now a conflict between the value of people and the value of pleasure. Settling this conflict will require a trade-off to maximize overall value.

The two constraints mentioned above tell us the role people and pleasure play in hedonic utilitarianism. First, pleasure is fundamental, because it must be promoted or prevented. This leads to the second constraint. People must now be evaluated in terms of how well they conduce towards a pleasurable state of affairs. This reduces the value of a person into instrument for promoting pleasure, and when the status of a person becomes instrumental, people become interchangeable. Thus, the focus on the promotion of pleasure “ignores” that people are valuable for their own sake—i.e. disregards the ethical the separateness of persons.

The Separateness of Persons
The "ethical separateness of person" refers to an objection made originally by John Rawls as a reason to refute classical utilitarianism.\(^9\) When Rawls claimed that utilitarianism "does not take seriously the distinction between persons,"\(^{10}\) he was responding to a feature of utilitarianism that conceives of justice as if it were one ideal individual reflecting on her own well-being. In other words, utilitarianism extends the method for maximizing one's well-being to society as a whole. A just society is one that legislates itself in a manner that maximizes its own welfare in the same way a person would choose certain actions that maximize their well-being. Utilitarianism focuses on maximizing the overall welfare, rather than the welfare for each individual, implying that it doesn’t matter how welfare is distributed between individuals so long as there is a maximal output of overall welfare. Therefore, since the individual welfare of each person is not taken into consideration, a utilitarian method of justification disregards the ethical separateness of persons.

**The Separateness of Propositions**

On the other side of the analogy sits the epistemic analogue, veritism.\(^{11}\) Veritism sees true beliefs as the *only* final epistemic value and false beliefs as the *only* final epistemic disvalue. Berker uses veritism to formulate a similar objection against epistemic consequentialism:

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\(^9\) As theorized by Henry Sedgwick

\(^{10}\) Rawls, 1971: 19

\(^{11}\) Alvin Goldman first coined the term, "veritism." See Goldman 1999: 5
When determining the epistemic status of a belief in a given proposition, it is epistemically irrelevant whether or not that belief conduces (either directly or indirectly) toward the promotion of a true belief and the avoidance of a false belief in other propositions. Vertistic epistemic teleology, in flouting this fact, ignores what we might call "the epistemic separateness of propositions," just as many forms of consequentialism ignore "the ethical separateness of persons." 

Berker is speaking how a belief’s status should be determined. He claims that the truth-conduciveness of a belief in one proposition does not bear the truth-conduciveness of beliefs in other propositions, meaning that a belief’s epistemic status should be confined to the very proposition that contains it. In contrast, veritism focuses on the promotion of overall epistemic value, similar to how utilitarianism focuses on the promotion of overall welfare, which then alleges that veritism countenances objectionable tradeoffs between propositions similar to how utilitarianism countenances objectionable tradeoffs between persons. Berker borrows an example from Roderick Firth to illustrate an objectionable trade-off between propositions. 

An atheist scientist seeks a grant from a religious organization that stipulates any grant recipient must (genuinely) believe that God exists. This is a case of conflicting final values: the belief that <God exists> has disvalue, because it would directly

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12 Berker, 2013a: 365
13 For full example, see Berker, 2013a: 363-364
undermine the negative goal of avoiding false beliefs. At the same time, it has value, because it would indirectly promote the positive goal of acquiring an untold number of true beliefs through grant-funded research. Since epistemic teleology also settles conflicts in final value by maximizing overall value, this requires aggregating the disvalue of \(<\text{God exists}\)\> with the value of an untold number of true beliefs. The result is a prescription that suggests the scientist should countenance the false belief that \(<\text{God exists}\)\>, because that would maximize the positive goal of acquiring true beliefs (and lots more of them).

Veritism considers the promotion of acquiring true beliefs and the avoidance of false beliefs to be fundamentally valuable, and this implies a certain role for propositions. If veritism focuses on the maximization of true beliefs, then the status of a proposition must then be explained in terms of whether it conduces towards truth. This turns the status of a proposition into an instrument for the sake of some other epistemic aim—namely, acquiring true beliefs. The Firth example is meant to illustrate how veritism ignores the status of a proposition itself in its effort to satisfy other epistemic aims. Thus, a veritisic method of justification entails ignoring the separate statuses of certain propositions.

Berker uses Rawls's "separateness of persons" objection as support for his objection against veritism. Both utilitarianism and veritism take something of

\[14\] Assuming that God does not exist
independent value and reduce it into value for another end. Therefore, Berker brazenly concludes:

So Firth was right: epistemic consequentialism tries to analyze intrinsic epistemic merit in terms of instrumental epistemic merit, and for this reason should be rejected.¹⁵

An Insidious Disanalogy

Contrary to Berker, I argue that there are good reasons not to compare the nature of people to the nature of propositions and that only the objection to ethical teleology can be properly qualified. Berker intends for Rawl’s objection to be analogous to his objection against veritism, but I contend this analogy, because I feel Berker is overlooking how the nature’s people and propositions also play a role in determining the kind of value they hold. Each objection holds a particular presupposition about the value of people and propositions. The “separateness of persons” objection presupposes that people are valuable for their own sake. This is qualified by a number of ethical theories, most notably by a Kantian moral framework. Kantian moral theory assumes that people are valuable as ends in themselves, simply on their own merit. Kant attributes a person’s value to their rational nature, something inherent to all people.¹⁶ He calls this value “dignity” and recognizes it as a distinctive kind:

¹⁵ Berker, 2013b: 377
¹⁶ Velleman, 1999b: 611
If [something] has a price, something else can be put in its place as an equivalent; if it is exalted above all price and so admits of no equivalent, then it has a dignity.\textsuperscript{17}

The concept of dignity not only implies that people are independently valuable; it also implies a certain way that people should be treated. Dignity elicits respect, because, according to Kant, morality requires that we respect the dignity of persons.\textsuperscript{18} The example of hedonic utilitarianism demonstrates what happens when the value of a person is treated instrumentally—i.e. not respected. With pleasure as the only fundamental value, this puts a “price” on the status of a person. If we believe that people are in fact independently valuable, then we cannot compare the value of a person to the value of anything else. The distinction between dignity and price demonstrates how a person’s nature plays into the kind of value she holds: dignity recognizes a person’s “self-existence” as a valuable end, while price assigns value to a person based on their relation to something else.\textsuperscript{19} Dignity confers a special status to people so that their value is precluded from comparison. Tradeoffs between persons are inappropriate, because they take a self-existent value like dignity, and turn it into a comparative value like price.

If we apply this ethical analogue to the value of propositions, then tradeoffs in epistemic value are inappropriate, because propositions must also have some sort of “self-existent” value. If it were the case that propositions held an independently valuable status, then

\textsuperscript{17} Kant, 1964: 4:434

\textsuperscript{18} Velleman, 1999b: 611

\textsuperscript{19} Velleman, 1999a: 364
one could plausibly suggest that there are certain propositions with a special kind of epistemic warrant that disallows certain trade-offs, giving them a privileged status similar to that of a person.

Obviously, a proposition's privilege does not come from having a rational nature, so it must come from something else. The concept of dignity gives us a clue for a possible ethical analogue to a kind of epistemic value that would give a proposition a special status. Regardless, an account of the nature of propositions will be needed in order to explain what this special status could be. I argue that we need not go so far as Berker and reject epistemic teleology outright. Instead, we need a proper account of the nature of propositions to determine what makes tradeoffs in epistemic value inappropriate. I suggest that an account of this sort will show which propositions are subject to appropriate trade-offs, and which propositions are not. Contrary to Berker, I conclude that epistemic teleology should not be rejected merely on the basis of some structural feature. Since the nature of a proposition's value also how its value is determined, the nature of propositions should get the proper attention they deserve before we default on Berker's thesis.

The Nature of Propositions—A Proposal

I will now offer my own account of the nature of propositions. I begin by distinguishing two classes of propositions. I propose that Berker's objection only holds
to a certain class of propositions whose independent value, like people, is "self-existent," that is, a class of propositions whose nature gives them an *intrinsic warrant*. The other class of propositions is immune to Berker's objection, because they derive epistemic warrant from their relation to other propositions. Rather, the second class of propositions has *instrumental warrant*. I claim that Berker's objection will only apply to propositions with intrinsic warrant, because their value, like people, gives them a privileged status, which would naturally precludes them from tradeoffs. For instance, if the status of a proposition were to confer warrant onto other propositions, then employing a tradeoff would undermine any subsequent propositions derived from that sacrificed proposition. A proposition would be inherently valuable, if its status were to justify the statuses of other propositions, such as in the case of inference. Thus, a proposition has a privileged status when it is *foundational*.

**Foundation as a Privileged Status**

My strategy for improving Berker's thesis is to distinguish two classes of propositions, so that Berker's objection only holds to a certain class of propositions—propositions with a privileged status. I will now argue for what this kind of privileged status could be. This will take us back to the structure of teleological theories.
Within the structural view of veritism and hedonic utilitarianism are three propositions within each respective theory's theory of final value. These propositions contain a belief about a state of affairs considered good to promote/prevent. To reiterate, the components of a teleological axiology are lexically ordered, so that a theory of overall value is built upon a theory of final value, and a deontic properties are then assigned based upon the verdict in the overall theory of value. We are now in a position to see the further significance of this: The lexical ordering of a teleological axiology means that the propositions in a theory of final value play a particular structural role—they're foundational, or *basic*—and we use them to justify, or assign deontic statuses, to subsequent propositions.

The significance of the role that propositions play in a theory of final value comes from how they are *positioned* with respect other propositions. Since we use them to justify subsequent inferences, this gives them a kind of an epistemological priority, meaning that we need to know the status of a proposition in a theory of final value before we can to justify any propositions derived from them. The propositions in a theory of final value play a justificatory role in a certain web of beliefs, and this gives them a particular kind of warrant—their status comes from being *non-inferential* or basic. I will construe epistemological priority as having a "privileged", status, giving any non-inferential proposition a distinct warrant.

20 For a visual representation of each theory’s structure, see Berker, 2013a: 348-350
21 Williams, 1991: 63
One could object that the idea of epistemological priority creates the possibility of infinite regress, because how then do we justify the propositions in a theory of final value? However, one could assuage this concern by referring to the way teleological theories treat the notions of “good” and “right.” Each notion is defined separately and then put in a specific relation with each other. Good is established first, followed by right. The idea of epistemological priority bodes well with a teleological method of justification, since the status of good needs to be known before we can justify what is right. This gives good an epistemological priority over right. Furthermore, this also entails that the notion of good has a privileged status, since we use to infer what’s right. Since we could not infer what is right without knowing what is good, the role good plays a teleological method of justification is privileged by virtue of being foundational. Only then is right is assigned to whatever promotes the good.

I extend this argument to the two classes of propositions I have just identified. I will construe any proposition whose role is foundational in a certain web of beliefs as basic. Because the status of a basic proposition is needed in order to justify subsequent propositions, this gives a basic proposition an intrinsic warrant by virtue of being foundational. I classify basic propositions as having a “privileged” status, because we cannot undermine the status basic proposition without also undermining all the subsequent propositions that depend on it for their own justification.
This distinguishes the other class of propositions—those without a privileged status—whose status depends on their relations to other propositions. I will construe any proposition without a privileged status as non-basic, since its warrant relies on the status of another proposition. We now have two kinds of propositions with distinct epistemic merit—one kind has intrinsic warrant, while the other has relational warrant.

Specifically, there are basic propositions, whose intrinsic warrant plays a foundational role within a certain web of beliefs, and there are non-basic propositions, whose justification comes from their relation to another proposition.

**Basic Propositions**

With this distinction in mind, I argue that Berker’s argument will only affect certain propositions with a privileged status. Berker says:

> When it comes to the evaluation of *individual* beliefs, it is never epistemically defensible to sacrifice the furtherance of our epistemic aims with regard to one proposition in order to benefit our epistemic aims with regard to other propositions.\(^{22}\)

This statement presupposes that individual beliefs are justifiable on their own merit, similar to the way people are valuable as ends in themselves. Berker says that sacrificing a belief to further an different epistemic aim “ignores” the separateness of propositions, but I believe a more precise way of expressing this concern is: epistemic teleology.

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\(^{22}\) Berker, 2013a: 365
disregards the privileged status that some propositions have by virtue of playing a foundational role in a certain web of beliefs. Propositions of this sort have an "inalienable" epistemic character\(^{23}\) that precludes them from comparison to other kinds of epistemic value, because a tradeoff of a basic proposition would violate its privileged status.

We find a similar motivation in the Rawlsian objection to utilitarianism. Rawls says that utilitarianism ignores the separateness of persons by collapsing the rationale of all people into that of one person. This can be qualified by a Kantian view of morality that says tradeoffs between persons violate the dignity of persons, because they disregard the independent value of people. Thus, when utilitarianism attempts to maximize societal welfare, it thereby disregards that people are inherently valuable by virtue of their rational nature. Similarly, the nature of a basic proposition is such that its status is also inherent. Thus, any trade-offs of a basic proposition in an attempt to maximize epistemic value would ignore the "inalienable" character a basic proposition, namely that it plays a foundational role in a certain web of beliefs.

As argued earlier, the propositions in a teleological theory of final value are epistemologically prior to the propositions found the theory of overall value and for assigning deontic statuses. Hence, we can identify the kind of role propositions play in a

\(^{23}\) Williams, 1991: 63
teleological theory: the propositions in a theory of final value are foundational in a teleological theory's axiology. This gives them a special warrant to confer a deontic status to any inferences derived from them. It would be inappropriate to employ an epistemic tradeoffs with a basic proposition, because that would disregard its foundational nature of a proposition, ignore its intrinsic warrant, and undermine any subsequent inferences that depend on it for their own justificatory status.

A Different Analogue

I will now argue for why epistemological priority matters within a foundational role. I do this by example in demonstrating the importance modus ponens plays in deductive reasoning. Modus ponens is a simple rule that tells us whether or not we can justify an inference based on prior knowledge. It has a special warrant, because its plays a necessary role in deductive reasoning; it gives us a rule to follow, so that we may deliberate correctly.

Modus ponens begins with a conditional—if P, then Q. If the conditional is true, and P is true, then we can infer Q from P. The Ps and Qs could represent any proposition while the structure of the rule illustrates how some propositions have epistemological

24 Williams, 1991: 63
25 The example of modus ponens is not entirely analogous to basic propositions, since modus ponens is not itself a proposition, but a rule. However, I am not comparing what gives each their special status. Rather, I am highlighting that both confer justificatory statuses to our inferences, and in this way, they both share epistemological priority.
priority over others. We need to know the status of $P$ before we can make an assessment on $Q$. Modus tells us whether or not an inference is valid. If the conditional were false, then we could not validly infer proposition $Q$ from proposition $P$. The value of modus ponens is intrinsic, because we could not tradeoff modus ponens without also undermining rationality itself, which would make our inferences indiscernible. I claim that this gives modus ponens a privileged status. Its warrant is special, because it confers justificatory statuses to the propositions that make up our inferences, and this gives modus ponens an epistemological priority over the statuses of other propositions.

One point of clarification about modus ponens: I use it as means to illustrate epistemological priority, but I am not claiming that basic propositions are a necessary for justification. Rather, a basic proposition’s status comes from being positioned epistemically prior to that of another proposition, and this is similar to knowing modus ponens prior to evaluating the validity of an inference. I make this qualification, because if, say, the status of a basic proposition were incorrect, then we should be able to revise that proposition. Modus ponens, on the other hand, is not revisable, since it is necessary component of rationality.

The reason why epistemic tradeoffs are never defensible, in Berker’s sense, is beginning take shape: Tradeoffs in final epistemic value disrupt the structurally defined roles that certain propositions play in a teleological framework—namely, the very foundation from which other propositions acquire their justification. I have demonstrated
this with an example of the role modus ponens plays in deductive reasoning. A tradeoff of something like modus ponens would undermine whatever knowledge is built upon inference. Perhaps this would be permissible if the basic proposition in a certain web of beliefs were false, but this only speaks to the point about revisability—it is not the content of the proposition that needs protection from tradeoffs, but the role that it plays within a belief framework. The role of being foundational should trump other epistemic ends in order to keep our belief webs cogent. Thus, we need propositions with intrinsic warrant, so we can then justify propositions with relational warrant. Therefore, I conclude that a basic proposition should be precluded from any tradeoffs in epistemic value.

This leaves the other class of propositions I have distinguished—non-basic propositions—unscathed. Berker claims that epistemic tradeoffs are inappropriate, because they determine the status of a proposition indirectly, and that this ignores the status of the proposition itself. However, the nature of a non-basic proposition is such that its value is already determined indirectly, because it relies on the status of another proposition for its own justificatory status. Therefore, I conclude that Berker’s objection to epistemic teleology is too broad. His objection applies to propositions with a certain nature but not to all propositions. Therefore, his reason for rejecting epistemic teleology is not properly qualified. If epistemic tradeoffs are in fact inappropriate, then this applies specifically to those propositions with an epistemically privileged status.
Non-Basic Propositions—The Missing Qualification

I have argued that Berker's objection only applies to propositions with a privileged status, and I have demonstrated how a basic proposition plays a role in a foundationalist/teleological framework. Now I need to demonstrate how non-basic propositions play a role in a foundationalist/teleological framework. I will use an example of an epistemic tradeoff that would not only be appropriate, it should be exempt from Berker's objection. Contrary to Berker, I claim that there are some cases of defensible epistemic tradeoffs. In other words, it would sometimes be to our epistemic advantage to sacrifice a proposition for the sake of some different epistemic aim. Think of the process of copy-editing.

Let's say I am given a job to copy-edit a monograph. One of my goals as a copy-editor is to maximize the clarity of a monograph, and I decide that cutting a certain section would increase its overall clarity. My decision has nothing to do with the statuses of the propositions in that section. I know that the each proposition has its own epistemic value. However, my goal is not to preserve the status of certain propositions, but to create a better monograph. From a teleological perspective, sacrificing a section of the monograph of propositions for the sake of clarity would be considered a justifiable act. However, if we abide by Berker's thesis, any instance of copy-editing would be an inappropriate, because that would sacrifice the statuses of propositions for the sake of
another epistemic aim. Thus, from the perspective of Berker, the copy-editor’s decision
to cut a section of the monograph would not be justified.

**Implications of My Proposal**

The ultimate goal of this paper is to introduce nuance into our evaluation of
tradeoffs, epistemic or otherwise. The process of copy-editing illustrates the difference
between an appropriate and an inappropriate tradeoff in regards to satisfying different
epistemic aims. For example, the propositions cut from the monograph were indirectly
valuable, because the decision to cut the section promoted a good state of affairs, namely
an increase in clarity. This reduces the status of those propositions into something
instrumental, but this is not necessarily a negative tradeoff. Rather, it gives those
sacrificed propositions an indirectly positive epistemic status. I want to suggest the same
could be true for the statuses of non-basic propositions. They also derive their warrant
indirectly through inference. Their epistemic merit specifically comes from their
relation to other propositions. The example of copy-editing shows that sometimes our
epistemic aims are satisfied indirectly, and not all instances of this are necessarily
inappropriate. Adding an account of something’s nature introduces nuance into our
evaluative judgments, because it allows us to see how a thing’s nature affects its value,
aside from a structural feature of teleology.
This works in the other direction too. Let's say cutting a section from the monograph leads to greater overall clarity, but in doing so, it also removes some crucial information. Now the monograph is misleading. In this case, we must weigh the value of clarity against epistemic integrity. If we believe that epistemic integrity trumps clarity, then sacrificing that section of the monograph would be inappropriate, and the decision to sacrifice would gain an indirectly negative status. Any particular proposition whose role helps maintain epistemic integrity will also help us to make correct inferences about the monograph, making an epistemic trade-off of this sort inappropriate. An account of the nature of propositions provides a better qualification to Berker's thesis, because it helps distinguish whether or not a tradeoff between propositions is in fact appropriate.

My qualification to Berker's thesis could help epistemic consequentialism overall. Berker claims that the epistemic tradeoffs are never defensible, but my argument shows that, in some cases, it may be appropriate to sacrifice a proposition for the sake of another epistemic end. My suggestion to add an account of the nature of propositions captures which tradeoffs are inappropriate without extending the same consideration to all of propositions. Thus, my account maintains a teleological method of justification, while disallowing tradeoffs of basic propositions. The epistemic teleologist can take solace that the outlook for epistemic consequentialism is not as bleak as Berker makes it to be.

Conclusion
This paper examined the normative structure of teleological theories in ethics and epistemology as well as the implications of a shared normativity. I dissected a recent objection by Selim Berker that says epistemic teleology countenances objectionable tradeoffs between propositions, in a similar way to the how ethical teleology countenances objectionable tradeoffs between persons. Expressed in slogan form, Berker compares the “separateness of propositions” to the “separateness of persons.”

Berker uses an objection by Rawls against utilitarianism to create an analogous objection to epistemic teleology, however I contended the analogy, because it presupposes that the nature of persons and propositions are similar. This would mean that propositions have a kind of value, or warrant, that disallows certain kinds of tradeoffs similarly to how people have a kind of value, or warrant, that disallows certain kinds of tradeoffs. However, Berker’s objection to the structure of teleology does not accurately capture how the nature of persons or people plays into a teleological method of justification. His objection against epistemic teleology implies that propositions have a uniform kind of value, but since Berker does not provide an account of the nature of propositions, this claim cannot be verified. I then went on to provide my own account of the nature of propositions by distinguishing basic from non-basic propositions. I claimed that distinguishing basic from non-basic propositions could plausibly qualify Berker’s objection by introducing nuance into our evaluations of tradeoffs, because this would allow us to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate tradeoffs in epistemology.
Therefore, Berker’s objection is too broad. His objection only holds for propositions with a certain nature and should not be extended to all propositions. I argued that Berker’s objection only applies to propositions whose value, like people, is inherent, giving those propositions a privileged status similar to that of persons. Thus, only propositions with a privileged status should be precluded from tradeoffs. Since Berker does not make this distinction, I concluded that his thesis is not a sufficient reason for rejecting epistemic consequentialism. This leaves epistemic consequentialism on safe grounds, for now.

References


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