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Normative roles, conceptual variance, and ardent realism about normativity

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ABSTRACT

In Choosing Normative Concepts, Eklund considers a "variance thesis" about our most fundamental (and seemingly most "authoritative") normative concepts. This thesis raises the threat of an alarming symmetry between different sets of normative concepts. If this symmetry holds, it would be incompatible with "ardent realism" about normativity. Eklund argues that the ardent realist should appeal to the idea of "referential normativity" in response to this challenge. I argue that, even if Eklund is right in his core arguments on this front, many other important challenges for ardent realism remain that also stem from the issues about possible variance in normative concepts that he considers. Following this, I introduce further issues about conceptual variance. These are issues that arise within the context of the framework that Eklund proposes the ardent realist use to confront the variance theses he considers. In particular, the issues concern what normative role as such is, as well as, relatedly, which roles associated with a concept (or predicate) get to count as part of its normative role. The upshot is that issues about conceptual variance in normative domains might be even more challenging for the ardent realist to deal with than Eklund argues.

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Introduction

At the end of *Choosing Normative Concepts*, Matti Eklund discusses two recently prominent issues in metaphysics. The first concerns verbal disputes, and the second concerns quantifier variance (Eklund 2017, 198–200).

The issue of verbal disputes can be glossed as follows. Suppose that different philosophers mean different things by important metaphysical terms (e.g. 'existence'). For ease of presentation, suppose that this involves them expressing different concepts by those terms (e.g. different

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"existence concepts") (Eklund 2017, 198–200). The worry is that, because of this difference, such philosophers end up engaged in "merely verbal disputes", wherein they "talk past each other" about distinct topics, with no important disagreements (or agreements) expressed.

The issue of quantifier variance is related, but distinct. Regardless of whether philosophers *in fact* use distinct "existence concepts", we could imagine the possibility of them doing so (and, thus, using different "existential quantifiers"). A question is whether one of those existence concepts is *privileged* in some way. In particular, one might want to know whether one such concept is privileged in some sense by *reality itself*, and not (even partially) in virtue of facts about us and our interests (e.g. what we happen to care about) (Eklund 2017, 198–200).

Directly parallel issues show up in lots of areas of philosophy, and, indeed, in other areas of inquiry beyond philosophy. With that in mind, Eklund asks us to consider the case of ethics. Eklund claims that philosophers working in this area have not given enough explicit, sustained attention to "variance theses" that parallel the issue of quantifier variance. In particular, Eklund claims that the following issue about conceptual variance deserves more attention: "there are different concepts of rightness, different concepts of goodness, etc., and none of these concepts are privileged over the others" (Eklund 2017, 200).

Variance theses of the kind that Eklund discusses – theses that there are alternative concepts that *could* play the same role as ours do, but which yield different extensions – matter in part because they bring up the possibility of a particular kind of *alarming symmetry*, whether in metaphysics, ethics, or elsewhere.[1] Consider the ethical case. Suppose there is someone who engages in behavior that we think is ethically horrible. Call this person *Bad Guy*. We can criticize Bad Guy for not doing the right thing, or for not doing things that are good. But suppose that Bad Guy uses *alternative* normative concepts in the following sense: he uses concepts that play the same roles as our concepts RIGHT and GOOD in his thought, talk, and action. These concepts are not co-extensional with our normative concepts. Rather, they pick out different normative properties. Thus, rather than being concerned with what is right, good, etc., Bad Guy is concerned with what is right*, good*, etc. Just as we can criticize Bad Guy using *our* normative concepts, so too can he criticize us using *his* normative concepts. The

[1]My use of the phrase "alarming symmetry" to describe the situation here draws on (McPherson 2018b, 2019).

worry is that neither set of concepts is privileged *independent* of appealing to normative properties picked out using either our concepts or his. Thus, it seems, there is a kind of alarming symmetry *all the way down*.

Many philosophers – with a range of philosophical commitments – will want to claim that Bad Guy is not on a par with us. One way to defend that idea is to claim that, insofar as Bad Guy uses alternative normative concepts, there isn't symmetry here: that ours are privileged over his in some way. Another option is to claim that Bad Guy really is (and perhaps *must*) be using the same normative concepts as us after all, but just has bad substantive views about rightness, goodness, etc. In that case, there would not be any alarming symmetry here: Bad Guy just has worse substantive views than we do on a topic of mutual interest. In *Choosing Normative Concepts*, Eklund is specifically concerned with how someone committed to what he calls *ardent realism* should seek to vindicate the idea that Bad Guy is mistaken. He glosses ardent realism as involving the following motivation:

> "you want to say that Bad Guy – someone who does bad things and is motivated by bad desires – is somehow objectively out of sync with how to conduct one's life: in no way are our differences with Bad Guy merely a disagreement in taste, or a matter of having different desires." (Eklund 2017, 1)

Furthermore, Eklund claims that the core idea in ardent realism is that "some ways of valuing or acting" (Eklund 2017, vi) are "privileged from the point of view of reality itself" (Eklund 2017, vi). Thus glossed, one might have this motivation and have a range of different metaethical views – e.g. one might be an expressivist and endorse a version of this claim. However, as Eklund understands it, in addition to making good on this motivation, ardent realism is also meant to be a kind of thorough-going, traditional form of "realism" in metaethics, where that is taken to be incompatible with a range of response-dependent, subjectivist, relativist, fictionalist, and expressivist views.[2] As Eklund emphasizes, ardent realism is only a rough sketch of a metaethical view. Still, Eklund claims, we should have enough of a grip on what ardent realism involves to wonder about what it would take to vindicate its core commitments.

One of the Eklund's main claims in the first part of *Choosing Normative Concepts* is that, in the face of challenges from the kind of variance theses introduced by the Bad Guy example, the best hope for vindicating ardent realism involves appealing to a certain *metasemantic* claim about what

[2]See (Eklund 2017), chapter 1. See Eklund's discussion chapter 8, section 3, for some thoughts on the possibility of non-realist views that still make good on key motivations behind "ardent realism".

determines (or "grounds") the content of our normative concepts and words. The metasemantic thesis involves the idea of what Eklund calls *referential normativity*, which in turn relies on the notion of *normative role*. Here is how he introduces the core idea:

> "If we spot ourselves the (perhaps objectionably obscure? I will keep getting back to this) notion of the *normative role* of a predicate or concept—the action-guiding role, perhaps motivational role, which is associated with the predicate or concept and is that by virtue of which the predicate or concept counts as normative—one can propose the view that normative role can be *reference-determining*, in such a way that two predicates or concepts conventionally associated with the same normative role are thereby determined to have the same reference. Let us say that predicates or concepts whose reference is determined by the normative roles that they are associated with are *referentially normative*, and they are *non-defectively* so if they are not empty, or wildly semantically indeterminate, or in some other way only have some kind of trivial extension." (Eklund 2017, 10)

By appealing to the idea that (at least certain relevant) normative concepts are (non-defectively) referentially normative, Eklund thinks there is a potential path forward for vindicating ardent realism in the face of examples such as the one involving Bad Guy. To be clear: Eklund isn't sure how promising a path this really is. For all he says, it might turn out to fail, and Eklund gives us multiple ways in which he thinks it very well might. But, he claims, it's the best path that ardent realists have open to them.

In this paper, I consider Eklund's take on the relationship between referential normativity and ardent realism. I break up my work into two sections. In the first section (§1), I explain Eklund's take on the relationship between these things. I then argue that, even if Eklund is right that referential normativity can do some of the work for the ardent realist he claims it can, many other important challenges for ardent realism remain; and, in particular, ones that emerge from thinking about examples such as Bad Guy. In the second part of the paper (§2), I then introduce some further issues about conceptual variance that go beyond the ones Eklund considers. These are issues that arise *within* the context of the framework that Eklund proposes the ardent realist use to confront the variance theses he considers. In particular, the issues concern what normative role as such *is*, as well as, relatedly, which roles associated with a concept (or predicate) get to count as part of its normative role. I explain how (actual or possible) variance in different concepts of "normative" that we might use to settle that question seemingly give rise to alarming symmetries quite similar to the one that Eklund proposes the

ardent realist use the idea of "normative role" to avoid. The upshot is that issues about variance in normative domains might be even more challenging for the ardent realist to deal with than Eklund argues.

Referentially normativity concepts and ardent realism

After initially discussing the alarming symmetry he is interested in via the example of Bad Guy, Eklund gives us a somewhat more detailed example as well. This is his case:

> "*Alternative*. There is a linguistic community speaking a language much like English, except for the following differences (and whatever differences are directly entailed). While their words "good," "right," and "ought" are associated with the same normative roles as our words "good," "right," and "ought," their words aren't coextensive with our "good," "right," and "ought." So even if they are exactly right about what is "good" and "right" and what "ought" to be done, in their sense, and they seek to promote and to do what is "good" and "right" and what "ought" to be done in their sense, they do not seek to promote what is good and right and what ought to be done." (Eklund 2017, 18)

We can divide different metaethical theories (or metanormative theories more generally) into two camps using this example. *Alternative-Friendly* theories think this scenario is possible. The *Alternative-Unfriendly* ones claim that it is impossible (Eklund 2017, 18).

In considering Alternative, Eklund is wondering about a specific *kind* of normative concept. In his own words:

> "Sometimes one distinguishes between moral terms and all-things-considered normative terms, by appeal to the seeming non-triviality of worries like: I know that I morally ought to ϕ, but ought I (all things considered) really to ϕ? Given such a distinction, which I think is reasonable, what I am talking about when describing Alternative are the all-things-considered terms rather than the moral terms. Using the fashionable terminology of "thin" and "thick," the terms should be understood in the thinnest possible way." (Eklund 2017, 18–19)

As I understand it, what Eklund is driving at is this: Alternative concerns terms (or concepts) about (roughly) what one *really and truly* ought to do, what is *really and truly* valuable, etc., in light of *all* the relevant normative reasons, values, etc. on the table. One way to gloss this (which Eklund does not) is to put this in terms of *authoritative normativity* (or, equivalently, *robust normativity*).[3] Consider here the contrast between the rules

[3]On the idea of "authoritative" (or "robust") vs. "generic" (or "merely formal") normativity, see (Copp 2005; McPherson 2011, 2018a; McPherson and Plunkett 2017; Plunkett and Shapiro 2017).

of a board game vs. the standards of *what I really and truly should do*. The former are norms in a "generic", or "merely formal" sense – they are standards that some things (e.g. my actions when playing the game) can conform to or not. The latter norms are standards in that sense too. But, in contrast to rules of board games, they are also meant to have a distinctive kind of normative authority. The "normative authority" of this set of standards does not just stem from it considering all the verdicts of all the other normative systems – which is one thing we might mean by "all-things-considered". (That is something other normative systems/schemas, e.g. law, morality, or prudence might do too.)[4] Rather, it's that these norms are meant to *settle* "what to do" questions (or "what to believe" questions, etc.) in a fully normatively authoritative way. Again, it's about what one *really and truly* should do, not just about what one should do "from the point of" one normative system or other (e.g. morality, law, etc.).[5] Even if it is not standardly put in terms of "authoritative normativity", much of the recent discussion in metaethics (and metanormative theory more broadly construed) focuses on this kind of normativity, and our thought and talk about it.[6]

There are obviously difficult questions about what exactly authoritative normativity amounts to, or even if the very idea of it makes sense.[7] For now, I just want to flag that this is the kind of normativity that I think is at issue here in Alternative; or, more precisely, that the normative *concepts* deployed in Alternative are best understood in connection to this kind of normativity. After all, if A and B used different *moral-like* or *legal-like* concepts (that is, concepts that played the same normative roles as our moral and legal concepts), but shared the same *authoritatively normative concepts*, they could then *both* use those authoritatively normative concepts to figure out which of the relevant moral-like or legal-like concepts they should use. If so, then there wouldn't be an alarming symmetry *all the way down* in terms of their normative thinking – or at least not in a way that would be unsettling to the ardent realist whose ultimate concern is with the kind of normativity that really and truly settles what to value,

[4]On this point, see (McPherson 2018a).

[5]In turn, if one's focus with authoritative normativity is on the "all-things-considered" normatively authoritative "should", one can then think of there being a range of properties that play a *contributory* role relative to it; e.g. normative reasons that contribute to determining what one should (authoritatively) do. Parallel points apply to the relevant "authoritative" kind of value. See (McPherson 2018a; McPherson and Plunkett Forthcoming).

[6]This is arguably true for a wide range of work in the area, including (Korsgaard 1996; Gibbard 2003; Street 2006; Schroeder 2007; Enoch 2011; Parfit 2011).

[7]For defenses of the coherence of the idea, as well as theories of what it amounts to, see (Wodak 2018; McPherson 2018a). For critical discussion, see (Copp 2005; Tiffany 2007; Baker 2018).

how to live, etc. This is why the idea in Alternative, I take it, is that different communities might have different concepts that play the normative role (whatever that is) associated with our *most* authoritatively normative concepts (which Eklund, following many philosophers, also takes to be "thin" concepts).[8] In Alternative, we are asked to imagine that those alternative concepts pick out a set of normative properties that are not the same as those picked out by our "authoritatively normative" thin concepts.[9]

With that qualification in mind about what kind of normative concepts are involved in Alternative, consider the choice between Alternative-Friendly and Alternative-Unfriendly theories. Eklund argues that Alternative-Friendly theories face a dilemma, both horns of which are bad for the ardent realist.

Roughly, the issue here is this. Suppose Alternative is possible, and we then learn about what falls under the extension of our normative concepts (e.g. SHOULD, OUGHT, VALUE, etc.) and what falls in the extension of the alternative normative concepts of the other community (e.g. SHOULD*, OUGHT*, VALUE*, etc.).[10] By stipulation, these extensions are not the same.[11] If one is attracted to ardent realism, one will want to insist that there is, to use Eklund's phrase, a "Further Question" (Eklund 2017, 23). Put intuitively, this Further Question concerns whether we or the other community in Alternative is *correct* or *gets it right* in using our respective normative concepts, which (by stipulation) pick out distinct normative properties. As Eklund puts it, we want to be able to ask "whose normative terms is it that, as it were, limn the normative structure of reality? What set of normative terms ought to be used when we ask ourselves what to do? It could be ours; it could be theirs" (Eklund 2017, 22).

[8]As I read him, Eklund assumes that the thinnest concepts are the most authoritatively normative ones. However, I think it is conceptually possible that this is not so, and so one would need to provide (which Eklund does not) an account of why "thin" concepts are more authoritative than "thick" ones. For discussion, see (McPherson and Plunkett Forthcoming).

[9]For Eklund's own discussion of authoritative (or "robust") vs. generic (or "merely formal") normativity, see (Eklund 2017, 184–186). As suggested by my frontloading this cut here in setting up Alternative, in a way that Eklund does not, I think that Eklund underappreciates the import of that distinction for his own project. For connected thoughts, see (McPherson 2019).

[10]In this paper, I use smallcaps caps (e.g. CAT) to pick out concepts. Single quotation marks (e.g. 'cat') are used strictly to mention linguistic items. Double quotation marks (e.g. "cat") are used for a variety of tasks including quoting others' words, scare quotes, and mixes of use and mention.

[11]Following Eklund, I am putting things here in terms of extensions. It should be noted, however, that this isn't crucial to spelling out the core idea in Alternative. The core idea in Alternative is that we and the alternative community employ normative concepts with the same normative role, but that these concepts are *alternatives* to each other in that their application has different upshots for thought. That is most straightforwardly captured in terms of thinking of them delivering non-identical extensions, or in terms of picking out alternative normative properties. But the core idea could here could be translated without discussion of extensions (or properties), if one were attracted to views of the meaning of these terms in which they didn't yield extensions (or denote properties). However, given the focus on ardent realism, these issues are not crucial for my discussion.

The difficulties start when we try to unpack what exactly this Further Question amounts to. Consider: which normative concepts do we use when asking this Further Question? If it's our own normative concepts, this seems (at least prima facie) to utterly fail to get at what's really at issue; at least from the point of view of the ardent realist. Moreover, if we just using our normative concepts (e.g. SHOULD), rather than Bad Guy's (who might use the concept SHOULD*), isn't that just unfairly stacking the deck against Bad Guy (assuming that our normative concepts favor sticking with them, and vice versa with Bad Guy's concepts)? Couldn't Bad Guy just say "sure, you get at which concepts we *should* use, but I get at the ones we should* use"? And, if so, why aren't we just on a par with Bad Guy? The ardent realist wants to get at what's normatively privileged, in the sense of "normative" (whatever that is) that really is so privileged by "reality itself".[12] Part of what we want to know is whether our concepts really pick out properties that are so privileged. So it seems that it can't just be our own normative concepts we are using in asking that question. But it's then hard to figure out how to coherently state that question in a way that gets at intuitively what's at issue. At the end of the day, Eklund argues that if this Further Question really makes sense, and gets at what is intuitively at issue, then it is likely to involve an *ineffable* question – and, indeed, a perhaps *unthinkable* one. This takes on large, perhaps insurmountable, explanatory burdens having to do with the possibility of such ineffable questions.[13]

The upshot of this situation can be put in terms of a dilemma for ardent realists who embrace Alternative-friendliness. On one horn, the ardent realist claims that there is a genuine Further Question here (which isn't put in terms of our own normative concepts). This, Eklund argues, commits the ardent realist to thinking that there are ineffable questions, in a way that takes on serious (perhaps insurmountable) philosophical burdens.

On the other horn (which Eklund thinks is the easier one to occupy), one accepts that there is no version of the Further Question that isn't put in terms of some of the normative concepts whose normative status we wanted to ask about. In short, we can ask about what falls under our normative concepts vs. what falls under those of the alternative community vs. what falls under some other set of normative concepts, but these different sets of concepts are all on a par in a fundamental sense (as

[12]For a representative example of his use of "normatively privileged" in this way, see (Eklund 2017, 44).
[13]For connected discussion about difficulties that arise in using concepts in forming normative questions about whether to use those very concepts, see (Burgess and Plunkett 2013b; Burgess Forthcoming).

long as they are not defective in ways that Eklund describes, e.g. being impossible to satisfy, etc.). The result is that "theories in this class end up seeming rather deflationary – while they can accommodate that normative sentences express truths, they deflate the status of these truths" (Eklund 2017, 18). In particular, they are deflationary in a way that undercuts the core ideas of ardent realism. To see this, consider that on the picture I just glossed, once we are using some normative concepts (perhaps guided by what our aims in fact are, or what we contingently happen to care about) "reality itself" plays an important role; after all we don't get to *choose* what reality itself is like, and thus do not get to choose what falls in the extension of our concepts. But, on this picture, it is *not* that "reality itself" determines (independent in the right way from facts about us, and what we happen to care about) the prior normative question of which concepts we should use. And it is *that* result that the ardent realist seems to need. To see this, consider that the ardent realist needs the result that "reality itself" *fully* and *by itself* privileges certain ways of valuing, acting, etc. over others, such that certain properties are thus "normatively privileged" over others by "reality itself". If we assume that the alternative normative concepts in question refer to different normative properties (as Eklund stipulates is the case in Alternative), this means that ardent realists need to maintain that "reality itself" *fully* and *by itself* determines normative facts about which set of normative concepts we should use in this case. So, at least absent further argument, it seems that this horn of the dilemma is incompatible with core commitments of ardent realism. Thus, Eklund argues, neither horn of the dilemma is good for the ardent realist.[14]

[14]Note that another possible take on the Further Question is that, in the Further Question, we aren't interested in which normative concepts we should use, but rather just which ones *to* use. If this "what to do" question isn't framed using normative concepts at all, then that might get around some of the issues involved here in the first horn of Eklund's dilemma for Alternative-friendly theories. (For a defense of this kind of idea in a related context, also concerning the selection of alternative normative concepts, see (Skarsaune Manuscript)). There are two main issues with this proposal in the present context. First, it is not clear that "what to do" questions are *fully* distinct from normative questions about what one should do. On this front, consider Allan Gibbard's view in (Gibbard 2003), according to which the topic of *what to do* just *is* the topic an agent is thinking about when she thinks about what she should do. On other views, these questions come apart much further: such that one can think one should do something but still ask oneself the practical reasoning question "what to do?" in light of that. For example, see (Silverstein 2017). In the dialectical context we are considering, someone who pursues this line thus takes on the burden of first showing why the Gibbard-style view is wrong, and then, second, defending a view on which the further practical reasoning question that Silverstein highlights really is devoid of *all* normative concepts. Second, and perhaps more importantly in this context, it is hard to see how the ardent realist is going to be happy thinking that the choice between alternative sets of normative concepts (e.g. between ours and those of the alternative community) is just going to come down to something we choose in a way that isn't fundamentally regulated by, or something that (put intuitively) *should be* responsive to, fully objective, mind-independent normative

Eklund thinks that ardent realists are better off accepting Alternative-unfriendliness instead. If Alternative-unfriendliness is the right view, then the alarming symmetry we are concerned with never even gets off the ground. Eklund argues that one could support Alternative-unfriendliness with a metasemantic view about what determines the content of our normative concepts and predicates. The view he recommends is that *normative role* determines the reference of such concepts and properties, and in a non-defective way. Put in terms of the earlier example of Bad Guy, the upshot from this view is that "we have ruled out the situation where Bad Guy's normative terms simply refer to different things and there is parity between us and Bad Guy" (Eklund 2017, 11). In short, either Bad Guy's relevant normative terms have the same normative role as ours, in which case his terms co-refer with ours (and he just has worse substantive views about the same thing), or they do not, in which case Bad Guy isn't even addressing the same "what to do" questions we ask when using our normative concepts (Eklund 2017, 11).

Eklund argues that the issue here with (non-defective) referential normativity isn't about whether our *current* normative concepts are (non-defective) referentially normative. Rather, he claims that what matters is whether there are *some* such concepts that are, which we *could* use (Eklund 2017, 16). Moreover, what we need are *relevant* such normative concepts: namely, the ones that have the right sort of normative role, of the kind I was glossing in terms of a concern with "authoritative normativity". (After all, we aren't interested in getting concepts here that could play a normative role that is akin to the one our current legal concepts do, for example). If there are such concepts, then ardent realism has a good basis for a response to the possibility of the alarming symmetry raised by Alternative, and by the earlier example of Bad Guy. In short: if there are such concepts, and we are using them, then Alternative is impossible. So there is no threat of an alarming symmetry here after all. It might of course be difficult to figure out identify which specific concepts yield this result, and thus difficult to figure out how good of a position *we* are (or might be) with respect to Bad Guy and the members of the other community in Alternative. But at least there is a possible way forward for defending ardent realism. Indeed, Eklund claims it is the best move he sees available on behalf of the ardent realist.

But there is also a way in which the move, at least prima facie, seems to be an odd fit with ardent realism. After all, recall how Eklund introduces *what it*

facts about how we *should* choose. So, at the end of the day, at best, this line of saying the Further Question is really a "what to do" question puts us squarely on the second horn of the dilemma.

is to be an ardent realist. A core claim of ardent realism, he says, is that "some ways of valuing or acting" (Eklund 2017, vi) are "privileged from the point of view of reality itself" (Eklund 2017, vi). Now ask: if Alternative isn't even possible (which is what Eklund recommends that ardent realists say), to what extent do ardent realists really get to say that some ways of valuing or acting are "privileged from the point of view of reality itself"? After all, if Alternative isn't possible, we *do* have the possibility of saying that (for example) Bad Guy is wrong about substantive matters about what his concepts (and ours) refer to – and, thus, put somewhat metaphorically, that he is "out of sync" with the objective part of reality those concepts refer to. Insofar as those objective parts of reality that fall under the relevant normative concepts are those that "themselves" privilege certain ways of valuing, acting, etc. (in the sense of "privilege" tied to the normative concepts we ourselves are using), this is *one* way we can make good on the metaphor at the heart of ardent realism, according to which "some ways of valuing or acting" (Eklund 2017, vi) are "privileged from the point of view of reality itself" (Eklund 2017, vi). But that's arguably only *part* of what ardent realists should want to say about Bad Guy. Consider: what makes us think that this objective part of reality that Bad Guy is "out of sync" with is *normatively privileged* in the right way? Maybe both Bad Guy and us are just referring to the *wrong part* of reality; one that (put roughly) is just not that normatively important.[15] If some ways of valuing or acting are privileged by "reality itself", we ultimately will want some explanation of the fact that the concepts under consideration (either our current concepts, or the relevant, better ones we could switch to using) get at what, intuitively, we can gloss as the *normatively important* part of reality. Embracing alternative-unfriendliness (by way of appeal to our use of relevant (non-defective) referentially normative concepts) does nothing to explain what makes the part of reality these referentially normative concepts refer to something that is (put roughly) *normatively important*.

To push this point further, suppose that creatures like us (or perhaps all agents) can't help but use the relevant (non-defective) referentially normative concepts that Eklund proposes the ardent realist builds her case around.

[15]I say "put roughly" because there are obviously thorny issues here about using "normatively privileged" to describe what's at issue here, as Eklund emphasizes. For example: why not be concerned with what is normatively* privileged (where that is a property picked out by the alternative normative concepts employed by Bad Guy). The issues here in using the language of "normatively privileged" as a gloss for what's intuitively at issue here are tied to the challenges for Alternative-friendly views that Eklund discusses (and which I glossed above in describing his dilemma for such views). For my purposes here, I am just sticking with "normatively privileged" as the gloss here, following Eklund himself (as on (Eklund 2017, 44)).

In other words, there is a kind of *psychological inescapability* here. If one were attracted to certain kinds of mind-dependent or constitutivist views in metaethics, one might think this fact of psychological inescapability helps explain the authoritative normativity of the properties picked out by those concepts.[16] But it's hard to see how this descriptive fact of psychological inescapability is going to help the ardent realist explain why certain parts of reality are "normatively privileged". This is because, given the sort of thoroughgoing mind-independence that is built into the idea of ardent realism, appeal to psychological inescapability seems like a non-starter here.[17]

The point I am pushing is that, at the end of the day, ardent realists will need an explanation of why the part of reality the relevant (non-defective) referentially normative concepts is the *normatively important* part of reality. Moreover, keep in mind that this explanation needs to fit with the thesis that reality *itself* privileges some ways of valuing, acting, etc. In response to this sort of concern, Eklund suggests that the ardent realist claims that there is ultimately something about the *properties themselves* picked out by the relevant (non-defective) referentially normative terms that makes them normatively privileged. Here is what he writes:

> "The overall picture would be that the properties ascribed by terms whose reference is determined by normative role are normatively privileged: there is something about how these properties are in themselves that make them fit to be picked out by these normative roles." (Eklund 2017, 44)

This response might be right. But given how schematic it is, it still leaves open many (perhaps most?) of the philosophical challenges for ardent realism, including ones that might naturally arise when confronted with Alternative, or the original case of Bad Guy. To see this, consider the following question: *in virtue of what* are these properties normatively privileged?

One option would be to say they are normatively privileged *because* they are apt to be picked out by certain concepts. Eklund doesn't say that the ardent realist should endorse this idea. But it's a natural thing to wonder about given the quote above. Indeed, it's natural to wonder about given that, independently of his interest in how to best defend

[16]For example, consider here the sort of constitutivist view in (Korsgaard 1996).

[17]See (Enoch 2011, ch. 3), drawing on his arguments in (Enoch 2006). It should be noted that Enoch does think that facts about *rational* inescapability play an important role – namely as a key part of the argument for why his preferred form of Robust Realism is the correct metanormative theory. See (Enoch 2011, ch. 3). So maybe the ardent realist should take a page from Enoch's book here and go for "rational inescapability" here in this context as well, rather than psychological inescapability. This doesn't seem that promising in the current context, however. This is because 'rational' here is a normative term, and would thus be something where there is (at least potentially) an alternative concept used to play the same normative role associated with Enoch's 'rational'. So it doesn't seem that ardent realists will make much progress in appealing to rational inescapability in responding to Alternative.

ardent realism, Eklund argues for the following extensional (but not explanatory or constitutive) claim about normative properties in general (i.e. not just the authoritatively normative ones): "a property is normative exactly if it can be ascribed by some possible referentially normative predicate" (Eklund 2017, 64). This builds off of his preferred story of what it is for a concept (or predicate) to be normative, which is that "an expression or concept is normative by virtue of being conventionally associated with a normative role" (Eklund 2017, 64). With this in mind, one might wonder: maybe one could seek to build on this story to give an explanatory account of what *makes* normative properties *normative* at all. Then, in turn, one could argue that what makes a property authoritatively normative is that it can be ascribed a concept that is (non-defectively) referentially normative, where the normative role that determines reference in this case is the "authoritatively normative" role (whatever that is).

Eklund himself raises worries for using this sort of an idea in an explanatory (rather than just extensional) account about normative properties in general (and not just authoritatively normative ones) (Eklund 2017, ch. 5). So the first thing to note is that all of his objections there would need to be met for this strategy to work. Moreover, in the context of defending ardent realism, there is a key problem here that would need to be addressed. This is that, at least at first blush, the explanatory proposal on the table seems an odd one for an ardent realist to endorse, given the nature of ardent realism as such. In effect, it seriously privileges facts about thought and talk – rather than part of reality that is independent of thought and talk about it – in explaining what makes certain properties the "normatively privileged" ones. If "reality itself" privileges certain ways of acting, valuing, etc., why is that we need to talk about what properties are picked out by certain kinds of thoughts (or claims)? It might be that the ardent realist ends up needing to go down this route. But, at the very least, we should at least proceed with caution before we sign up the ardent realist for this way of going. In short, if she goes down this route, it will be difficult for her to maintain a thorough-going, familiar kind of "realism", on which normative reality is explained in a way that is independent in the right ways from facts about us, our cognition, or our judgments, and, indeed, also independent from facts about possible agents, their cognition, and their judgments. She might well end up with a view worth calling "realist", but one that is more tempered than many ardent realists would want.

A second possible answer to the question of "in virtue of what are properties normatively privileged?" would be to take a page from the

metaphysics literature in dealing with parallel variance theses (e.g. about existence concepts). One response there is to claim that certain properties are more "elite" or "natural" than others, in the sense that draws on David Lewis's discussion of this idea.[18] Eklund is at least *open* to that move working in the metaphysics case, when dealing with relevant variance theses there.[19] But, Eklund argues, it's far from clear that metaphysical eliteness will line up with the issue of what *normatively* matters. Indeed, Eklund is highly skeptical they do.[20]

But even if Eklund is right in his skepticism here, that doesn't mean that there is *no* notion of eliteness that could do the relevant explanatory work. For example, perhaps there is something along the lines of "normative eliteness", which is distinct from "metaphysical eliteness". This is something that Eklund leaves open as a possibility. If there were such a thing, "normative eliteness" seems like it would be the right *kind* of thing to underwrite the idea that certain properties are "normatively privileged", and, moreover, that *reality itself* privileges them. So it's at least worth further exploring this idea. But there are also obviously going to be difficulties in further developing this schematic (and somewhat obscure) idea, and then putting it to use in this context. Here are two important issues. First, without further explaining what "normative eliteness" is, it is not clear whether normative eliteness could really *explain* the fact that reality itself privileges certain ways of valuing and acting over others vs. just states *that it does so*, but in fancier terms. A second issue is that once we move beyond just metaphysical eliteness, there might well be *many* kinds of eliteness. In particular, maybe there is normative*-eliteness and normative**-eliteness etc. Which ones are privileged, and why? If metaphysical eliteness can't do the work here in settling that, then what (if anything) can? In particular, a question that matters for the ardent realist is this: what can do the privileging here in a way that amounts to "reality itself" doing the privileging, rather than facts about us and what we care about? Without a good answer to such questions, ardent realists who appeal to "normative eliteness" might be left with a new kind of alarming symmetry thesis, to which they don't yet have a good response.

Put together, this suggests the following: embracing Alternative-unfriendliness (by way of appeal to our use of relevant referentially normative concepts) just doesn't look that helpful for ardent realism for *explaining* how reality privileges (or even *could* privilege) certain ways of valuing

[18]See (Lewis 1983). For connected discussion, developing this idea further, see (Sider 2011).
[19]See (Eklund 2017, 202–203).
[20]See (Eklund 2017, 9, 28–32).

or acting over others, or, relatedly, what it so privileging *consists in*. I submit that, when ardent realists (or those interested in the view) are confronted with the (seeming possibility) of the alarming symmetry, this is part of what we want to know. Embracing Alternative-unfriendliness might rule out the possibility of the alarming symmetry. But those questions about what does (or even could) make ardent realism true – and what the truth of ardent realism really consists in – will still remain. And, at the end of the day, those questions might be the ones that are really the most pressing for the ardent realist, whether or not Alternative is possible. Put another way, we might say that Alternative can be thought of partly as a heuristic. Even if it is impossible, thinking about the case presses the ardent realist to make good on the metaphor of "reality itself privileging" certain ways of acting and valuing, and to explain what reality is like such that this is true.

This, I think, points to some important limitations about what ardent realists should expect from embracing Alternative-unfriendliness by way of use of relevant (non-defective) referentially normative concepts. It should be emphasized, however, that I don't think of this caution I am emphasizing here as an *objection* to Eklund's main line of argument. His main argument for why ardent realists should embrace Alternative-unfriendliness isn't that doing so would explain why ardent realism is true. Nor is to explain anything about how to unpack the central metaphors involved in the view (e.g. about "reality itself privileging" certain ways of valuing, acting, etc.), or how to explain what makes the properties it picks out normatively privileged, or what being normatively privileged consists in. Instead, the thrust of what he says is just that ardent realists need to embrace Alternative-unfriendliness in order to avoid being impaled on one of the two horns of the dilemma that they would face if they endorsed Alternative-friendliness instead. So my discussion here doesn't necessarily involve an objection to Eklund (who, to emphasize, is himself not committed to ardent realism). Rather, it can be seen as a way of emphasizing the depth of the challenge in explaining and defending ardent realism, and in a way that emphasizes points that Eklund himself does not.

Normative roles

In this section, I now want to bring out a further worry about conceptual variance and normativity; one that arises once the ardent realist has accepted Eklund's proposal about how to respond to Alternative. The

worry concerns one way in which appeal to "normative role" might not help the ardent realist that much: namely, that it might not only be *very hard* to identity which roles of a given concept are the "normative" ones, but that different people might employ alternative normative concepts in this task. This then raises the specter of yet another alarming symmetry, to which it is unclear how the ardent realist should respond.

In order to explain my worry, I first want to start with a related, but distinct issue about normative role that Eklund himself raises for his suggestion for how ardent realism should respond to Alternative. This is what he calls the "embarrassment of riches" objection. Discussing this objection first will help set the stage for the worry I have, and give us some helpful tools in thinking about it.

Here is how Eklund presents the embarrassment of riches objection:

> "Suppose that all terms that have their reference determined by some specific associated normative role, R, are indeed coextensional. It is still possible for a term to have a slightly different normative role R*—it does not have the exact same action-guiding role, or link to motivation—and fail to be coextensional with the terms with normative role R. And it is still possible that a term associated with the slightly different role R* has a significantly different extension from R.
>
> If so, one community could use normative terms with some normative roles, And another could use normative terms with other normative roles. The members of these communities are guided by their deliberations to perform different actions. There is no sense to be made of whether to use a term with role R or a term with role R*. A problem similar to that faced by Alternative-friendly theories arises even if normative role determines reference." (Eklund 2017, 54)

Eklund thinks this is a very serious worry for his proposed strategy for how ardent realists handle Alternative, and the initial case of Bad Guy. After all, if Bad Guy uses normative concepts with slightly different normative roles than ours, then his concepts don't co-refer. But, still, since they are not *totally different* normative roles, it seems there is competition of some kind between our concepts and Bad Guy's for playing certain action-guiding and motivational roles. The question is whether our concepts (or some better ones we might switch to using instead) are normatively privileged in the relevant sense, and, moreover, are so privileged by reality. A version of the worry that there is an alarming symmetry here between us and Bad Guy remains. Moreover, since it seems hard to deny the impossibility of this kind of variation (concepts with *slightly* different normative roles), it seems we can't get around facing a version of the dilemma Eklund earlier raised for Alternative-friendly views. Thus,

it might be that ardent realists are stuck with thorny (perhaps intractable) issues about ineffability or else end up stuck with a deflationary position that conflicts with core commitments of ardent realism.

Eklund doesn't give a conclusive answer to how he thinks ardent realists should respond to the embarrassment of riches objection. He considers various options, none of which he finds totally satisfying. But the one that he finds most plausible is what he calls the *normative sparseness reply*. This reply rests on the following claim:

> "Even if there is an embarrassment of riches when it comes to the different normative roles that can be associated with a predicate, it can be that some but not all of these normative roles have normative properties corresponding to them." (Eklund 2017, 59)

As Eklund emphasizes, this reply involves some significant metaphysical assumptions. And it is not at all clear that those assumptions can be defended. But, Eklund claims, it is still the best reply available to the ardent realist.

Before moving on, I want to note another possible response here worth exploring to the embarrassment of riches objection. This is that the relevant normative roles associated with the (relevant) normative concepts we employ are coarse-grained and general enough that there really aren't *nearby* distinct normative roles that would generate the relevant sort of conflict here with our concepts, and the properties they pick out. In other words, one could insist that, once we develop a specific account of what the relevant normative roles are (one that sees them as quite general and coarse-grained), it might be that there just isn't an embarrassment of riches here at all in terms of nearby concepts, with nearby normative roles.[21]

The embarrassment of riches objection brings up a worry about possible variation *within* normative role, and what that might mean for the prospects of ardent realism. But we might worry about another kind of variation here, not within normative role, but in the concepts deployed in figuring out what normative role itself *is*, as well as, relatedly, in figuring out which roles a concept (or predicate) is associated with get to count as part of its properly normative role.[22]

To see what the core worry here is, let's start with Eklund's own discussion of what normative role is. As we saw earlier, Eklund introduces the idea of

[21]Note that this response might be used independently of the normative sparseness reply, or in combination with it.

[22]Notice that these issues are distinct from skepticism about the very coherence of the idea of "normative role" in the first place, or skepticism about whether concepts/words in fact have normative roles. Those are important issues too, as Eklund emphasizes. But they are different than the ones I focus on.

"normative role" in terms of a kind of an "action-guiding role, perhaps motivational role" (Eklund 2017, 10). These are, roughly, kinds of *inferential* roles. Given his aims in *Choosing Normative Concepts*, Eklund is mostly interested in the schematic idea of normative role as such, what work it can do in defending ardent realism, and what further work in can do in metaethics, ethics, and other areas of philosophy. Thus, given his purposes, he isn't that interested in nailing down exactly what the notion of normative role amounts to (which he admits from the start is perhaps a somewhat "obscure" idea) (Eklund 2017, 10). Nor he is that interested in trying to specify which exact normative roles are associated with which concepts.

The question I now want to raise about Eklund's appeal to normative role is this: given that concepts might play multiple roles in our lives, which ones get to count as the "normative role"? This question isn't just terminological. After all, how we answer it matters a great deal in Eklund's proposed way of defending ardent realism. In short, answering this question is necessary to settle which role(s) of the relevant normative concepts determine reference in cases such as Alternative.[23] Moreover, given that the notion of normative role is essential to Eklund's own account of normative concepts and properties as such, this issue matters for that part of his project as well, independently of its bearing on his discussion of ardent realism.

Consider the wide range of things we do with normative concepts and predicates in our lives. Some of those things might not be ones we regard as central to what normative concepts as such involve. For example: consider the use of (at least certain) normative concepts (e.g. certain moral concepts) to bolster claims that attempt to rationalize objectionable forms of domination, exploitation, or oppression. Many will think that the core role of those *qua* normative concepts can be divorced from the roles they play in supporting domination, exploitation, or oppression. If that is right, the need some story for *why* those roles aren't part of the "normative role" of those concepts or predicates.

Providing such a story becomes tricky when we consider the fact that there are a range of different things we do with normative concepts, at least prima facie, deserve more serious consideration as possibly tied to "normative role" of these concepts *qua* normative concepts. Consider, for example, the following things about our use of normative concepts (and terms).

[23]A further question (which I am not pushing on here) is what exactly it means for a concept to be "associated" with a normative role. See (Eklund 2017, 45–49) for discussion of that issue.

First, as Eklund emphasizes, individual agents use normative concepts to guide their own behavior, actions, etc. There are characteristic "downstream" effects on an agent's thinking, behavior, etc. of engaging in the relevant kind of first-personal use of normative concepts in asking questions about what to do, think, feel, etc.[24] What exactly those ways *are* is of considerable controversy. For example, some think that the use of certain normative concepts in first-personal deliberation results in being necessarily motivated in certain ways in light of one's normative judgment, whereas others think that only would be so if one were fully *rational*.[25]

Second, we use normative concepts to criticize other agents (or institutions, etc.), and to hold them to account for their actions or activity.[26] There are also characteristic "downstream" effects here, but distinct from those in the first-personal cases. (And, again there are a range of different proposals here for what those ways are).

Third, we use normative concepts to give second-personal advice.[27]

Fourth, in many cases, a key part of someone using (at least many) normative concepts seems to be her *endorsing* what the concept applies to (or *not* endorsing those things, depending on the kind of normative concepts it is).[28]

Fifth, we use normative concepts to (try to) correctly represent and learn about normative reality. Moreover, we think that trying to do this is important (at least for certain normative concepts – e.g. OUGHT or RIGHT). (This is a sort of "upstream" role of normative concepts, rather than a "downstream" one, since it involves how we orient ourselves to normative questions prior to asking them).[29]

It might be that, when we talk about the "normative role" of a concept we are talking about *all* of these roles (or others) the concept plays. Or, perhaps, the only important truly "normative" role of the concept is one (or a few) of those roles. Suppose someone wanted to insist that this was so. Or suppose someone wanted to insist that certain kinds of motivational patterns are part of the role of normative concepts in first-personal judgments that another denies. For example: suppose one person accepts, while the other denies, that genuine first-personal normative judgments of the form "I should ϕ" necessarily motivate the person making the

[24]For some work that emphasizes this role of normative concepts, see (Korsgaard 1996; Gibbard 2003).
[25]For example, compare (Gibbard 2003) to (Smith 1994).
[26]For work that emphasizes this role of normative concepts, see (Railton 2003; Darwall 2006).
[27]For work that emphasizes this role of normative concepts, see (Railton 1986; Smith 1994; Manne 2014).
[28]For work that emphasizes this role of normative concepts, see (Gibbard 1990; Blackburn 1998).
[29]This sort of "upstream" role of normative concepts (emphasized, for example, in (Smith 1994; Enoch 2011)) is largely absent from Eklund's discussion, as McPherson discusses in (McPherson 2019).

judgment to actually try to ϕ.[30] How should we adjudicate these kinds of dispute? One thing we could do is look to how we currently use the term "normative", or how we currently use those concepts or terms that we currently classify as "normative" ones. That might then give us a way to adjudicate which roles really should be counted as "normative".

But there are two key issues with this proposal, given the overall dialectic here with Eklund's work.

First, consider the project of metanormative inquiry as such. On the view I favor, metanormative inquiry aims to explain how actual normative (and evaluative) thought and talk – and what (if anything) that thought and talk is distinctively about – fits into reality.[31] The question of how exactly to demarcate what counts as "normative" or "evaluative" thought and talk is a topic of serious controversy in the field. There is controversy not only about the correct theory of that thought and talk – including what it's being "normative" or "evaluative" consists in, or in virtue of what it counts as such – but also what counts as examples of such thought and talk that needs to be accounted for. This controversy is at the heart of contemporary debates in metanormative inquiry. This underscores that the above proposal would, in effect, require the ardent realist who wants to make use of the idea of "normative role" to engage in some of the most contentious debates in metanormative inquiry. Perhaps that should come as no surprise. But one might have at least initially hoped that appeal to "normative role" might not require one to engage in the some of the most difficult and most contentious debates in metanormative inquiry. After all, as I explained earlier, Eklund claims that we can *use* the notion of normative role to explain what it is for a concept to be normative. On his view "an expression or concept is normative by virtue of being conventionally associated with a normative role" (Eklund 2017, 64). What we are now imagining here is the need to do prior work to determine which roles count as "normative" ones. There might be no way of avoiding this work. But it just to underscore the depth of the task here.

One thing that might emerge in this inquiry into our actual thought and talk is that there is *one* normative vs. non-normative distinction here that is being tracked (and theorized about); one that picks out something (namely, *normativity*) that plays various roles in our lives (including the roles I glossed above). In turn, different philosophers might have different substantive views about which of the various roles I glossed above are most important (or most explanatorily fundamental) with

[30]For an overview of the issues involved in this debate, see (Faraci and McPherson 2017).
[31]See (McPherson and Plunkett 2017; Plunkett and Shapiro 2017).

respect to normativity as such. For example: perhaps the first-personal, action-guiding role is explanatorily fundamental with respect to other aspects of normativity, which tie into the other things we do with normative concepts I glossed above. But another possibility is that there might be a range of important, only partly overlapping "normative vs. non-normative" distinctions we use; perhaps split partly in terms of the different roles I glossed above. Maybe some of those matter more in one context (e.g. when engaging in certain projects in political philosophy) and others matter more in others (e.g. when engaging in certain projects in epistemology). For example, perhaps something tied to speaker-endorsement is more important in certain contexts, whereas something tied to guiding first-personal deliberation is more important in others – and both things are tracked using the language of what is "normative" vs. not in their respective contexts. We can build different ideas of what counts as a "normative role" based on these different ideas about how to make the distinction between the "normative" and the "non-normative". The question would then be: which ones of these multiple "normative vs. non-normative" cuts *should* matter for the ardent realist, in the context of defending and developing her theory using the idea of "normative role"?

This ties into the second, more important, issue with the proposal. Consider Eklund's own methodological approach in *Choosing Normative Concepts*, which is explicitly oriented around normative questions about how we *should* think and talk, rather than solely describing how we in fact do think and talk.[32] Especially given this focus, we should ask: why care so much about we currently *do* use the term "normative"? Shouldn't we ultimately care instead about how we *should* use the term, given different possible ways of doing so? But, if *that* is the question, then we potentially face another alarming symmetry issue here. For couldn't Bad Guy focus instead on the way we should* use the term 'normative' in orienting our search for the property picked out by the relevant notion of "normative role"? Or couldn't he insist that the role that really matters is a concept's normative* role, rather than its normative role? Is there not then symmetry between us and Bad Guy here? The ardent realist wants to say that (put intuitively) we are asking the important questions, using the right concepts (or at least we *could* be doing that), and that Bad Guy is not. But

[32]See (Eklund 2017, ch. 10). Eklund describes this methodological approach in terms of "conceptual engineering", drawing on (Scharp 2013). For a similar use of the term 'conceptual engineering', see (Cappelen 2018). For connected discussion, see (Burgess and Plunkett 2013a, 2013b) on the topic of "conceptual ethics".

why are we just not on a par, asking different questions each of us happens to be interested in, with neither set privileged by "reality itself"?

Importantly, Eklund appeals to normative role in his proposal for how the ardent realist should break this kind of threat of parity in the case of Alternative. But it seems much harder to make such an appeal to normative role this when what's at issue is what normative role *is* in the first place – or, put another way, *which* roles really get to count as reference-fixing for the relevant "normative" terms.

So how should the ardent realist respond? One straightforward answer here would be this: which roles matter in fixing the reference of our terms is just a descriptive metasemantic fact. In the case of the relevant terms under discussion (call them "normative terms" if you want) it doesn't matter whether you call the roles that fix the reference "normative" roles or not. What matters is just that these are the roles that *in fact* fix the reference for the relevant concepts (or terms).

This response might in the end be the way to go. But it faces two problems.

First: what if this metasemantics is itself something that could be changed? If so, why care that much about the current metasemantics of these terms vs. the metasemantics we *should* have for them?[33] If we care about the latter, then we just return to the same basic issue we started with, which this appeal to metasemantics was meant to solve. Of course, it could be that metasemantic facts aren't things we can change. But, at the very least, this sort of perspective on metasemantics needs to be wrestled with, especially in the context of Eklund's emphasis on the import of wondering about what should be different in our thought and talk.

Second, consider what the move on the table looks like when plugged into Eklund's overall proposal for how the ardent realist should respond to Alternative. That proposal isn't going to be as attractive if the reference-determining roles in for our normative terms aren't really the properly "normative" ones. This is because, if they are not, then the normative concepts and terms we use might well have their reference fixed by *something* but not the part of reality that (put roughly) is the normatively privileged part. It is hard to see how that result – even if it closes off the symmetry between us and Bad Guy – is going to be attractive for the ardent realist. After all, on

[33]See (Cappelen 2018, ch. 6). It should be underscored that, on Cappelen's view, a change in metasemantics here need not result in change in topic. So, for example, we could still be talking about the topic of marriage, even if the metasemantics (and, indeed, the semantics) for 'marriage' has changed. See (Cappelen 2018, chs. 9–11).

this result, Bad Guy, us, and everyone else might all successfully refer to the same thing, but simply totally miss thinking and talking about what (put intuitively) is the normatively important part of reality.

Another possible response to the issue I raised is this. The ardent realist could simply articulate the role she wants to use in her theory – e.g. pointing to certain inferential roles – without using the terminology of "normative" at all. The ardent realist can then just say it is *this* role that does the metasemantic heavy-lifting she is after, without getting into worries about what counts as "normative" or not. Furthermore, she might do this for multiple *different* roles, each of which could then be associated with different groups of "normative" or "evaluative" concepts (or predicates). She can point to the relevant roles – which might be connected in key ways, or which perhaps are relatively disaggregated – and simply make the case one-by-one that they are worth caring about in the relevant context, and which (by hypothesis) matter for determining reference. She could then combine this move with one (or both) of the responses to the embarrassment of riches objection that I glossed earlier: namely, (a) the normative sparseness reply and (b) appeal to the lack of alternative normative concepts that really would count as playing a similar normative role. If so, then the ardent realist already has the main tools she needs for responding to this worry from the embarrassment of riches objection, and can bypass discussion of what does or should count as the domain of the "normative".

The above strategy is a promising one to investigate on behalf of the ardent realist at this stage in the dialectic. A crucial question, however, is whether it avoids further alarming symmetries of a now familiar kind. The strategy I glossed above doesn't just say that these roles (whether or not they are called "normative roles") are ones that we in fact happen to care about, or happen to be interested in. And that seems to be for good reason. After all, such an appeal to descriptive facts about us and what we happen to care about at this stage would, at least on the face of it, be out synch with the basic motivations behind ardent realism, as well as Eklund's own methodological approach. This is why I presented the strategy as involving the claim that these roles (e.g. certain inferential roles) are *worth* caring about. That is an evaluative claim about *worthiness*, which in turn supports a normative claim about what we *should* care about in this context. But then we should ask: which evaluative and normative concepts are we employing here? For example: are we just employing our current concepts of WORTHINESS and SHOULD? If so, why can't Bad Guy employ his alternative concepts WORTHINESS* and SHOULD* and make a claim about what roles we

should* care about, or about what is worth* caring about? In short: it seems that we face a threat of the same sort of alarming symmetry we started with in the original cases of Alternative and Bad Guy.

It might be that the ardent realist can show that there is no alarming symmetry at all at this stage in the dialectic in thinking about "normative role", or that there are tools for dealing with it. Nothing I have said rules that out. The point though is that, at least prima facie, we can keep getting alarming symmetries *within* the framework that Eklund suggests the ardent realist use to confront the initial alarming symmetries we started with. Moreover, it is not entirely clear to me which arguments the ardent realist should use to respond to the possibility of these new alarming symmetries, or whether they will ultimately work.

Conclusion

In *Choosing Normative Concepts*, Eklund draws attention to a number of underappreciated bleak possibilities within normative domains (such as key parts of ethics, epistemology, aesthetics, and political philosophy), and also underscores the depth of issues involved in trying to respond to them. A number of these bleak possibilities have to do with issues stemming from (possible) variance among alternative normative concepts, and the possible alarming symmetries they suggest. One way of thinking about my contribution in this paper is that it furthers this strand of Eklund's work. In short, I argued there are further bleak possibilities that we can use Eklund's framework to articulate; ones, moreover, that are also tied to concerns about variance theses and alarming symmetries. That doesn't mean that there aren't ways of responding to these bleak possibilities on behalf of ardent realism. There very well might be. It is just that doing so might be even harder in certain ways than Eklund argues; and he already argues that ardent realism is harder to defend than many philosophers working in (or about) normative domains have thought.

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