

*Norms and Necessity*

**Replies to Critics**

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In *Inquiry*, DOI: 10.1080/0020174X.2023.2271616 (October 24, 2023): 1-40.

I am grateful to Kristie Miller, Rohan Sud, Jamie Dreier, and Boris Kment for their insightful and thought-provoking comments on *Norms and Necessity*. I can't imagine a better set of commentators, and I have learned a great deal from interacting with all their contributions. I have no doubt that they push the discussion forward about prospects for a normativist approach to metaphysical modality, about how it can be best developed, whether it can be generalized, and about how it stacks up against rival views. While some similar issues and themes come up across more than one set of comments, in order to treat each set of comments in detail and on their own terms, I will address the contributions in turn.

I will of course leave it for readers to evaluate the state of the debate, after all this discussion. To my mind, some of the important upshots that come out of the present discussion include (1) clarifying the direction of explanation, in part by showing how talk of possible worlds (useful for various theoretical purposes) may be derived from more basic forms of modal discourse, without the normativist approach to modality relying on a more 'robust' form of modal realism,<sup>1</sup> (2)

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<sup>1</sup> This builds on work I undertake more thoroughly in my more recent work on modal discourse (2023), which is intended as a further development of the work of *Norms and Necessity*, making use of work in systemic functional linguistics. Readers interested in developments after my (2020) may find that paper relevant.

altering my way of formulating how to understand the different forms of rule at stake underlying claims of *de re* and *a posteriori* necessities, (3) making it clear that modal normativism is not in conflict with truth-conditional semantics, and (4) better weighing up the epistemological standing of normativist versus essentialist approaches to modality. In these ways, I hope that readers will find that the discussion here moves things forward in productive ways from the work originally undertaken in *Norms and Necessity*.

### **Reply to Kristie Miller**

Kristie Miller's contribution raises interesting issues about the relationship between my view and Lewisian modal realism and provides a 'reformulation' of my metaphysical modal normativism in terms that make the parallels clear. However, this comes at a cost: for on the reformulated view, we can get a deflationary approach to *metaphysical* modality only by *presupposing* a form of 'robust realism' about what she calls 'possibility *simpliciter*', and so (she argues) the deflationary approach to metaphysical modality would only come at the price of accepting a broader form of modal realism.

The central question I will address in this reply is thus: does my form of metaphysical modal normativism rely on a deeper 'robust realism' about some form of modality? I will argue that it does not. Showing why it doesn't will shed light on the *direction of explanation* of modal normativism, and the potential for *generalizing* the view.

As Miller interestingly shows, there are important parallels between my treatment of metaphysical possibility and necessity, and a form of Lewisian counterpart theory. For like metaphysical modal facts on my view, Lewisian facts about what's a counterpart of what aren't 'baked into' the world(s), but rather depend 'on which similarity relations we care about' (2023,

18)—where these might be incomplete, and vary from person to person and across contexts. I appreciate this bridge-building and helpful comparison. And I'm very glad if philosophers of very different inclinations, with various different starting points, can find something to agree with, and perhaps even something useful in my work on normativism.

Miller suggests reformulating my modal normativist view as 'the view that the purpose of modal metaphysical claims is to convey semantic rules, where those semantic rules reflect the best compression of the regularities of use of terms—so called labels—across certain scenarios' (2023, 12-13). But, she argues, to get this right—to give the correct reports of what the semantic rules are—this must include appeal to all *logically possible* scenarios (2023, 13). And accounting for which scenarios are logically possible, she argues, requires 'robust facts about which scenarios really are possible' (2023, 16). If that's right, then (Miller argues) modal normativism only gives a deflationary account of *metaphysical* necessity and possibility 'against the backdrop' of robust realism about possibility *simpliciter*.

Miller acknowledges that that wouldn't be so *very* bad—since normativism might still give us a worthwhile account of specifically *metaphysical* necessities and possibilities, with epistemological advantages over 'abstruse views of robust metaphysical modal facts such as those we find popular at the moment' (2023, 20-21). I agree with that, and make a similar point in *Norms and Necessity* (2020, 125-6) that the normativist view of metaphysical modality could be epistemologically worthwhile, even if we still needed a non-normativist account of logical necessity and possibility—since the latter claims are far less epistemologically troubling. Moreover, if the Lewisian and I can agree that far, then we could also reach (at least rough) agreement about my original target—how to understand and aim to resolve modal debates within metaphysics.

Nonetheless, that leaves us with the central question Miller's essay raises: does modal normativism only give a deflationary account of metaphysical necessity and possibility by presupposing some more 'robust' form of realism about 'possibility *simpliciter*'?<sup>2</sup> To address this, we need to answer two prior questions: what is meant by 'robust', and what is meant by 'possibility *simpliciter*'? I will bracket the latter question for the moment—since it seems that modal normativism is in trouble (or at least incomplete) if it must presuppose 'robust' realism about *any* form of modality.

### ***How should we understand 'robust realism'?***

So let us begin by asking what is meant by 'robust' here. I tend not to use the term 'robust' myself, since it is so often left undefined, and can mask a lot of unclarities. Unlike many, however, Miller tells us what she will mean by it. She writes: 'I take robust facts to be facts that do not fall into either of two categories. First, they are not ... facts about our representations, such as facts about linguistic meanings. Second, they are not "thin" facts' (2023, 2). Instead, in accepting robust facts we are 'committed to there being a structured entity comprised of' the relevant objects and relations (2023, 2). As I insist in *Norms and Necessity* (2020, Chapter 6), the normativist *is* entitled to say that there are modal facts, modal properties, and the like, and these aren't facts *about* our representations—so my modal facts meet the first condition. I also see no barrier to adopting the language of speaking of facts as 'structured entities' comprised of objects and relations.

So, what more is really wanted, in the demand for a more 'robust' sense of possibility than modal normativism gives us? Miller also says that these 'robust' modal facts aren't the

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<sup>2</sup> I come closest to discussing these issues in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of *Norms and Necessity*, though there is nothing exactly like Miller's objection considered there.

‘cheap’ or ‘thin’ modal facts we can be committed to by ordinary discourse—they can’t be those we become committed to via (what I would call) an easy ontological inference. Why—what’s wrong with those? We get a clue in the next paragraph, when Miller notes that robust facts about *metaphysical* modality ‘could make metaphysical modal statements true’. Such ‘robust’ metaphysical modal facts, Miller suggests, could be objects having certain essences, or there being primitive modal facts that inhere in objects (2023, 2). Generalizing, we might think that ‘robust’ modal facts of any kind are modal facts that are suited to explain what makes the relevant kind of modal claim true. And this brings us to where I generally think of the divide between my view and those who think of themselves as giving more ‘robust’ accounts of modality (as mentioned in the *precis*): it concerns not *whether* we can truly say that there are modal facts, properties, or even possible worlds, but rather whether these are to serve as *explanatory truthmakers* for our modal claims (see my 2015, Chapter 3 and 2020, 139-141). And I think it is true that the modal facts, properties, and possible worlds that we can derive talk of via easy ontological inferences *cannot* fill this kind of explanatory role. For, on the easy ontological view,<sup>3</sup> we can arrive at talk of modal facts by hypostatization, as in: Annie could sit on the couch; it’s possible that Annie sit on the couch; it’s a modal fact that it is possible that Annie sit on the couch. But if talk of modal facts is just a hypostatization out of more basic modal talk (say, that it is possible that Annie sit on the couch), then the relevant modal fact can’t be invoked to *explain* the truth of the original claim—that would give us only a dormitive virtue explanation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The easy ontological approach combines with modal normativism to give us simple realism about modal facts, properties, and possible worlds (see my 2020, Chapter 6).

<sup>4</sup> See my (2015, 156-7) for the fuller argument that such attempted ‘explanations’ would only be dormitive virtue explanations. Of course, from the normativist point of view, failure to provide explanatory truthmakers is no shortcoming—for it is a central part of the normativist approach that basic modal claims, as non-descriptive, don’t *need* truthmakers to ‘explain’ what ‘makes’ them true.

### ***Does metaphysical modal normativism presuppose robust modal realism?***

So that turns our question to: does the metaphysical modal normativist need to ‘posit’ some (‘robust’) form of modal facts (that can’t just be understood as derivable via easy ontological inferences) in order to *explain* what makes (at least some of) our modal claims true?

Miller’s argument that metaphysical modal normativism can succeed only against the background of accepting that there are ‘robust modal facts about possibility *simpliciter*’ (2023, 20) goes as follows:

1. Modal normativism can be reformulated as the view that the purpose of modal metaphysical claims is to convey semantic rules, *where those semantic rules reflect the best compression of the regularities of use of terms—so called labels—across certain scenarios*, where the relevant ‘scenarios’ considered must include all and only those that are possible *simpliciter*.
2. Possibility *simpliciter* must be understood in a non-normativist, ‘robust’ way.

I will take these points in turn.

First on (1). I have some reservations about the ‘reformulation’ of my view. The first half is ok—that ‘the purpose of modal metaphysical claims is to convey semantic rules’—though, importantly, I would also add ‘or renegotiate’. The second half is where I’d slow down. Miller proposes understanding ‘semantic rules’ as ‘the best compression of the regularities of use of terms’ across scenarios. As is familiar, views that treat meaning in terms of rules of use take broadly two forms: *descriptive* views (such as Horwich’s (1999)), which take them to be *regularities* in patterns of use; and *normative* views (such as Brandom’s (1994, xiii)), which take them to be *norms for* using language in certain ways, rather than theorized *descriptions of* use

patterns. The reformulation Miller gives is a *descriptive* view. But it is not part of the normativist view, as I develop it, that metaphysical modal claims aim to convey semantic rules *where these are understood as reflecting the best compression of use-regularities* (across all *possible* scenarios). Instead, the idea is that metaphysical modal talk fulfills a more basic *normative* role, of regulating how we are *to use* terms (not describing or conveying how in fact we *do* use terms).<sup>5</sup>

This matters because, if we take the descriptive view, and think of rules of use as ‘reflecting the best compression of data about regularities in use’, then we seem compelled to consider *all the* possible scenarios in order to get a correct and complete description of the rules. In fact, Miller’s reason for thinking that all scenarios that are *possible simpliciter* must be considered is that, otherwise, we might get an incorrect statement of what the relevant use-regularities are. To know what the rules (in this descriptive sense) are—at least if one aspires to complete statements of the rules—one must first contemplate all the possible scenarios, and examine use-regularities across them.

In starting from normative practices, I aim to take the direction of explanation the other way up: rather than thinking of semantic rules as telling us what regularities in use hold *across all possible worlds*, I think of talk of possible worlds as derived from more basic normative practices. Let me explain.

While Miller doesn’t make any claims about the development or acquisition of modal discourse, it is useful to think developmentally as a way in to seeing why it might be both possible and appealing to look at things the other way up. Children master norms (including linguistic norms), and learn to follow them, long before they can speak of what is ‘possible’ or

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., *Norms and Necessity*, Chapter 8.

‘necessary’, much less speak of or consider all ‘possible worlds.’ This suggests that understanding norms does not rely on a prior understanding, grasp, or knowledge of possible worlds. We can understand and follow norms, play along and become competent users of various terms, without having to first consider *all possible* scenarios in acquiring complete ‘data’ about what the (descriptively construed) ‘correct statement’ of the rule would be. Moreover, one can master a norm without thinking of that *norm* as ‘complete’ in the sense of telling us what to do *across all possible scenarios*. The linguistic norms we learn, as I often emphasize, may be *incomplete*, and are *open to renegotiation and change*.<sup>6</sup>

So, if we understand modal normativism *as given* (rather than as reformulated in these highly derivative and theoretical terms), we can understand talk of what’s metaphysically necessary or possible, without that relying on a *prior* understanding and inventory of all possible scenarios—or worlds that are ‘possible simpliciter’. The goal here is not to get the ‘correct rule’ by compressing labelling data across all the possible scenarios. In fact, many of the rules that are expressed in the form of claims of metaphysical possibility and necessity may be indeterminate in various ways. (Acknowledging this is a central part of my way of understanding what’s going on, and can go on, in various metaphysical modal debates (see my 2020, Section 8.5)). One reason many metaphysical modal questions seem ‘unanswerable’ may be precisely because our semantic rules just aren’t determinate enough. Where new scenarios are introduced for consideration (suppose what we called ‘cats’ turned out to be robots?), these may be ways of *pressing for decisions* about how to ‘go on’ with our semantic rules—which may have been indeterminate in the relevant respects (see my 2020, 95-105).

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<sup>6</sup> Note that Miller seems open to the idea that such rules are incomplete and renegotiable, but this seems in tension with the requirement that we consider *all possible scenarios* in order to get the ‘correct’ statement of the rules.

On the normativist view, we may start from norms, thought of as standards for what *to do*, not summaries of what *is or has been* done. We may master such linguistic norms first (even if these are open-ended, vague, and indeterminate), and mastering such norms does not require a prior ability to consider all ‘possible worlds’ or ‘possible scenarios’. We can then come to explicitly convey the norms in basic modal claims. The first form of modal discourse we learn (starting around age 2-3) uses modal auxiliary (and semi-auxiliary) verbs (Cournane 2020, 7). We can use these forms of discourse to convey semantic norms: bachelors *must be* (or *have to be*) unmarried; rectangles *can* have four sides of equal length. From these basic forms of modal discourse, we can engage in grammatical transformations that enable us to learn to talk about what is possible or necessary, and about modal facts and properties, etc. Such ‘objectified’ modal discourse is (on my normativist view) perfectly legitimate, but it is developmentally far downstream from the use of modal verbs, and is acquired much later—between age 6 and 12 (Papafragou 1998, 22). Modal predicates (that enable us to talk of what *is possible* or *is necessary*) and nominalized modal terms (introducing talk of *modal facts*, *modal properties*, etc.) are introduced as what linguist Michael Halliday calls ‘grammatical metaphors’—that is, transfers of grammatical category licensed by the rules of the language; in this case, by trivial inferences that take us from using a modal *auxiliary verb* to introduce modal predicates and modal nouns. From that basis, we can even go on to introduce nominalized talk of possible worlds. Lewis himself originally introduced possible worlds talk in roughly this way (1973, 84 and 1979, 182), long before he developed his ‘inference to the best explanation’ argument for concrete possible worlds. We can, for example, infer from ‘there could be a talking donkey’ to ‘it

is possible that there be a talking donkey’ to ‘there is a possible world in which there is a talking donkey’, and so introduce talk of possible worlds.<sup>7</sup>

As work in systemic functional linguistics has made clear, grammatical metaphors introduce new *textual* functions to the language. Nominalizations are particularly useful in enabling us to generalize and theorize in useful new ways.<sup>8</sup> And this, of course, is cohesive with Lewis’s (1986, Chapter 1) argument that adding talk of possible worlds adds *expressive power* to a language, and enables us to theorize philosophically in new ways—for example in articulating and evaluating global supervenience claims, avoiding scope ambiguities, and precisely characterizing the notion of logical consequence (see Lewis 1986, Section 1.2).<sup>9</sup> It is consistent with modal normativism to endorse the idea that such talk of possible worlds is not only legitimate, but *useful* for a range of *theoretic purposes*.

One such purpose might be roughly what Miller envisions in (1). That is, if we aim to give a theoretic linguistic reconstruction of what semantic rules are in force, and of *exactly* how they should be understood (avoiding incompleteness), we may indeed wish to generalize in new ways, as we aim to find the ‘best compression of regularities of use *across all possible scenarios*’. And that may be a fine project, if we are engaged in descriptive linguistic theorizing, and aim for *completeness* in our accounts of what the rules do or do not allow across all possible scenarios. But this is the *endpoint* in a theoretical project of modeling the actual semantic rules (descriptively understood), not the starting point of understanding our talk of what *could* or *couldn’t* be, or of what’s possible or necessary, and how this gets hypostatized into talk of what’s

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<sup>7</sup> Though one may need additional introduction constraints to ensure that the worlds are complete and maximal etc. See Steinberg (2013) and my discussion in my (2020a, 132-137).

<sup>8</sup> See Halliday (2009, 116-138). I had not yet discovered the work in systemic functional linguistics when I wrote *Norms and Necessity*, but have since aimed to incorporate it into a way of developing and justifying the normativist approach. For discussion see my (2023).

<sup>9</sup> This, of course, is cohesive with Lewis’s (1986) claim that adding talk of possible worlds adds *expressive power* to a language.

metaphysically necessary or possible. We can (as I also discuss in my reply to Sud below) introduce talk of possible worlds in ways that are useful for our semantic models, without thinking of possible worlds (or scenarios) as ‘robust’ entities that are *posited* to *explain* what *makes* our modal claims true. (In fact, if they are introduced via hypostatization out of these claims, then any such attempted explanations would only be dormitive virtue explanations).

In short, the direction of explanation goes the other way up on my normativist view, versus on the reformulation Miller considers. On the view Miller envisions, we must start by ‘positing’ ‘robust’ possible worlds (as explanatory truth-makers), and then can come to understand semantic rules as ways of ‘compressing data’ about how we apply labels across these different possible worlds, and we can see modal talk as conveying those semantic rules.

By contrast, I aim to begin from understanding basic modal talk as *normative*, and showing how we can move from there to derive talk of modal facts, possible worlds, and the like. I also aim to show how such talk can still be true, without requiring that we ‘posit’ this or other-worldly features to ‘explain’ what ‘makes’ them true. That talk might then enable us to theoretically model semantic rules in a descriptive fashion in terms of regularities in use across all possible worlds. And that’s fine. But it comes as a scientific model that we can discuss at the end of the linguistic development; the worlds we come to refer to there are not ‘posits’ needed as truthmakers for our original modal discourse (which, as non-descriptive, requires no truthmakers).

I hope that makes it clearer how the direction of explanation proceeds in metaphysical normativism, and why the modal normativist approach does not require presupposing a ‘robust’ understanding of which scenarios are possible. Talk of semantic rules in terms of regularities in use (or norms that apply) *across possible worlds* is an optional and derivative (but perhaps

useful) theoretic way of putting things. The normativist doesn't *rely on* it, but rather shows how we can *build up to it* in ways that are non-mysterious and that fit well with what we know about linguistic development and linguistic functions. In sum, metaphysical modal normativism is perfectly compatible with talk of possible worlds, and can even lead us to a good account of why such talk can be theoretically useful (including in building semantic models). But it does not require appealing to possible worlds (concrete or abstract) as explanatory *truthmakers* for this talk, or as something one must understand or know about before one is able to engage in basic modalizing. Instead, talk of possible worlds can be seen as a useful hypostatization out of our practices of modalizing, where these are understood more basically as entering language with normative functions.

### ***On 'possibility simpliciter'***

But what about Miller's second point above: that possibility *simpliciter* must be understood in a non-normativist way? I have so far brushed over the question of what kind of 'possibility' is at issue here—instead I have made the case that modal normativism does not presuppose appeal to *any kind of* 'robust' possible worlds (instead, it enables us to see how talk of possible worlds can get introduced—though these cannot serve as explanatory truthmakers, but instead serve other useful purposes in theorizing).

Nonetheless, you might still worry as follows. Suppose that we do need to talk about which worlds are possible *simpliciter* for some theoretic purpose (such as providing a more complete model of semantic rules, descriptively construed). Even if talk of these possible worlds is derived from more *basic* claims about what is possible *simpliciter*, if that talk about what's

‘possible simpliciter’ cannot be understood in a normativist way, *at the least* we won’t be able to get a modal normativist view *across the board*.

So, must possibility *simpliciter* be understood in a non-normativist, ‘robust’ way? To address this, we need to understand what Miller means by ‘possibility simpliciter’. Again, this is not a term I tend to use, and I’m often puzzled about what people mean by it. Sometimes Miller seems to use this interchangeably with ‘logical possibility’; sometimes it seems to concern something else—not what is possible *given the laws of logic*, but rather ‘which distributions of fundamental properties are possible’ (2023). I will proceed with the ‘logical possibility’ interpretation first, and then move on to consider the latter.

If what’s ‘possible simpliciter’ is a matter of what’s *logically* possible, we needn’t worry too much. For there also seems a good prospect of developing a normativist approach to logical necessity and possibility. I discuss this briefly in *Norms and Necessity* (relying on work by Greg Restall (2005) and David Ripley (2013)), suggesting that claims about what’s logically necessary and possible may be understood in terms of norms for acceptance and rejection—where a proposition is logically necessary if (regardless of what else one accepts), one mustn’t reject it (see my 2020, 127). This would of course require further development than I give it in the book (given my focus on metaphysical necessity), but I don’t see a barrier to thinking that such a normativist account of logical necessity and possibility is achievable.

Miller expresses doubts about whether one could be a normativist about logical possibility, however (2023). For her account relies on a distinction between facts about ‘which distributions of fundamental properties are possible’ (2023), and the ways we *label* the things in those possible scenarios (where, on her reformulation, it is our labelling practices that are systematized in the semantic rules reflected in claims of metaphysical necessity). And she

suggests that no account in terms of norms of assertion and denial could tell us what fundamental properties are possible, or what arrangements of fundamental properties are possible. ‘The issue of determining which scenarios are possible is the issue of determining whether there is any possible thing like that, and if there is, how things like that can be distributed relative to other possible things and properties’ (2023). It is these, she suggests, that must be ‘robust modal facts.’

Now to my ears, talk of what properties and property combinations are possible, and of whether it’s possible that there be something ‘a lot like an electron but which has positive charge’ sounds more like it’s concerned with *physical* or *nomological* possibility than like *logical* possibility. (And that would explain why the norms of acceptance and rejection used in accounting for logical possibility wouldn’t be enough here.) It’s true (as I acknowledge 2020, 3-4 and 121-7) that it would be desirable for a normativist to also have an available normativist account of modality across the board—whether we are talking about logical, metaphysical, or physical modality—though naturally the relevant ‘norms’ involved may vary. The relevant approach for claims of physical necessity would be understood as norms of reasoning *on the basis of empirical evidence*, or something along those lines (see my 2020, 121)—views like this have been suggested by Sellars (1958), Brandom (2008, Chapter 4), Williams (2010, 323-9) and Price (1996). But again, if that is what we are concerned with, then there are good prospects of developing a normativist account of these claims of possibility as well.

So, in sum, I agree that it would be desirable to have an across-the-board normativist approach to various ‘flavors’ of modality, including not just metaphysical modality (which was my target, given my interest in the questions and methods of metaphysics), but also including physical modality and logical modality. Not everything can be done at once, or by one person, and I value the contributions of others (both past and future) to developing those other parts of

the program. But there doesn't seem to be any principled barrier to giving a broadly normativist account of those other forms of modal discourse, whether in their basic form (if we simply ask what combinations of properties there *could* be, or which propositions *could* both be true) or in more derivative forms that enable us to talk about the physically (or logically) possible worlds. On the contrary, seeing how talk of modal facts, properties, and possible worlds, may develop out of more basic forms of modal speech can help us see how a deflationary view of logically or physically possible worlds could likewise be developed. For the grammatical progressions are parallel across these different flavors of modality.<sup>10</sup> While the general project is certainly not all done yet, I hope to at least have given reason for thinking that it is both doable and desirable.

### **Reply to Rohan Sud**

Rohan Sud raises several interesting challenges for modal normativism, regarding how I can handle *de re* and *a posteriori* necessities, whether modal normativism is consistent with truth-conditional semantics, and whether there is circularity introduced in the introduction and elimination rules I appeal to for 'necessity'.

In the conclusion of *Norms and Necessity*, I say that my central goal there was to put a non-descriptive approach to modality back on the map, and to show that there is room for developing it—though 'the details may prove to need adjusting in various ways' (2020, 209). Sud's probing questions have led me to go back and adjust some of the details, including how to formulate the relevant semantic rules. I will begin by discussing his objections that the sorts of semantic rules I need to draw on may over-generate necessities. Responding to these objections

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<sup>10</sup> See my (2023) for details.

leads me to both a clearer formulation of what I mean by ‘semantic rules’ and a clearer articulation of the different forms such rules may take. Then I turn to a broader issue Sud raises: about the relation between my normativist approach and truth-conditional semantics. Here I will argue that, perhaps contrary to appearances, there is no conflict between my approach and giving a standard truth-conditional semantics for modal discourse. That gives us the happy result that accepting a truth-conditional semantics with its uses for solving problems in linguistics does not at all bar one from accepting modal normativism and its ways of dissolving epistemological and ontological puzzles about modality. In closing, I will make use of that work in responding to the concern that my introduction and elimination rules for ‘necessity’ introduce circularity.

### ***Do semantic rules over-generate necessities?***

One of the greatest challenges Sud presents is to press me on how I can understand ‘semantic rules’ in a way that will generate the *de re* and *a posteriori* necessities I need, without over-generating by also entailing ‘absurd’ metaphysical necessities. Here is the challenge. I say that we can account for *de re* and *a posteriori* necessities, while still seeing claims of metaphysical necessity as object-language formulations of semantic rules and their consequences, as long as we acknowledge the varied *forms* that semantic rules can take. So, for example, we can see the *de re* necessity claim ‘Necessarily: Kamala Harris is a person’ as an object-language reflection of the rule that (assuming that the application conditions for person-names are fulfilled), ‘Kamala Harris’ is *to refer to* a person (2020, 106). Similarly, we can see the *a posteriori* necessity claim ‘Necessarily, Water is H<sub>2</sub>O’ as a consequence of the schematic rule: ‘Water’ is to be applied only to whatever has (whatever microstructure the relevant sample has), while substituting in the ‘whatever microstructure’ clause with the empirical fact that the

relevant sample has microstructure  $H_2O$ , to get the filled-in rule: ““Water” is to be applied only to whatever has the microstructure  $H_2O$ ”; expressed in the object language as: ‘Necessarily, water has the microstructure  $H_2O$ ’.

Sud, however, introduces some (alleged) semantic rules of his own, which we clearly should not accept as being expressible in the object-language as true claims of metaphysical necessity. His first example is this: ‘(World-Grass): If grass is green, then we ought to apply “green” to grass’ (2023). Clearly this shouldn’t lead us to conclude that: Necessarily, grass is green.

My initial reply to this is to say that his ‘World-Grass’ is not (what I meant by) a ‘semantic rule’. But this nicely nudges me to say more about what I *did* have in mind by the relevant semantic rules. What I had in mind was not just any norms for language use, but rather *meaning-giving* rules, which could enable us to introduce terms to a language in ways that make them usable, and which could enable us to solve the two problems I discuss in that chapter (2020, Chapter 4): namely, disambiguating *whether* the term refers and, if so, *to what*.<sup>11</sup> The ‘World-Grass’ rule clearly is not that kind of a rule—since it uses the relevant term (‘green’) in the antecedent, it clearly is incapable of inducting speakers into how to use the term ‘green’. (It is perhaps just an instance of a more general disquotational rule).

On its own, this doesn’t solve the problems Sud raises—it just redirects us to other examples. A natural candidate for a kind of rule that *could* introduce terms for color appearances is one Sud discusses a bit later:

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<sup>11</sup> In my (2015, 263-4) I introduce some relevant restrictions on such rules to (merely) introduce new terms to the language. I also mean to cover rules for introducing a term to a language, without relying on translations from other mastered language(s).

- (Obs-rule) If something produces reddish visual conditions, then you ought to apply ‘looks red’ to it. (2023)

But, Sud argues, this again over-generates necessities, on the normativist view. For we can then infer from: ‘This produces reddish visual conditions’ to ‘You ought to apply “looks red” to it’ and then conclude: ‘Necessarily, this looks red’, which again seems wrong. Another example he raises is my own claim (from my 2015) that the application conditions for ‘table’ are satisfied by a situation in which particles are arranged tablewise. Sud paraphrases this as ‘If there are simples arranged tablewise, then one ought to accept that “tables exist”’ (2023), and says it gives the normativist the unfortunate conclusion that it is necessary that tables exist.

To respond to these difficulties, it is important to make a distinction that I didn’t draw clearly in the book.<sup>12</sup> That is the distinction between *conditional rules* (rules the *content* of which has an if-then form), and *conditionalized* rules (rules which may have content of any form, but where that content only *comes into effect* given that a certain condition holds).<sup>13</sup> Here’s a way of thinking of it: a conditional rule has a content like this: If there’s a red light, then drivers must stop. A conditionalized rule would be more like a constitutional principle—for when certain rules come into effect, e.g. If both houses of congress approve, and the president signs, a rule with content R, then it is a rule that R. In the latter case, whatever the content of R is (whether it has a conditional form or some other form), it only comes into effect *as a rule* given certain conditions. We can represent this by using a Rule operator and clarifying its scope.

- Conditional rule: ***It is a rule that:*** (If P, then Q)

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<sup>12</sup> The closest I come is in discussing conditionalized rules in my (2020, 99-100), but I do not there clearly draw the distinction that I make here between conditional versus conditionalized rules.

<sup>13</sup> Wang and Donaldson (2022, 299) give a nice way of distinguishing the *condition* from the *content* of a rule, which can be employed to the same effect for what I here call ‘conditionalized’ rules (under the given condition, there comes into effect a rule with a certain content). It is the content that of such rules that (when the condition applies) is necessary.

- Conditionalized rule: If/given/presupposing C, then *it is a rule that* (...)

The difference in the scope of the rule operator is easily obscured if we just express things in English, where the term ‘ought’ can shift grammatical position. But it is only the *content* of the rule (given in parentheses above, within the scope of the rule operator) that, for me, can be expressed in the object language as a true claim of metaphysical necessity.

The rules that Sud appeals to as generating counterexamples are both cases of *conditional rules*, not of *conditionalized rules*. So, the content of the rule in the (Obs-red) case is:

- Rule: If something produces reddish visual conditions, then apply ‘looks red’ to it.

And the content of the rule in the tables case is:

- Rule: If there are simples arranged tablewise, then there is a table.<sup>14</sup>

From these we can indeed get necessity claims, but they have the following, non-problematic forms:

- Necessarily, if something produces reddish visual conditions, then it looks red.<sup>15</sup>
- Necessarily, if there are simples arranged tablewise, then there is a table.

By contrast, the relevant rules in the cases that correspond to claims of *de re* and *a posteriori* necessities are *conditionalized* rules: rules (which may be conditional or absolute in content) that *only come into effect* provided a certain worldly condition is met.

- (Supposing that the application conditions for ‘person’ are met, here’s the rule): ‘Kamala Harris’ is to refer to a person.

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<sup>14</sup> Or you could say: accept that tables exist. I accept that move, but getting there also requires views about how ‘exists’ claims work, so it’s simpler to put it in the above form.

<sup>15</sup> Obviously, to be complete this would need to include relativization throughout to: produces reddish visual conditions *for whom, when in what circumstances*.... But for present purposes we can leave those complications aside.

- (Supposing that there is a unified microstructure of the sample and it is H<sub>2</sub>O, here's the rule): 'Water' is to refer to stuff that has microstructure H<sub>2</sub>O.

Since those suppositions are fulfilled, the content of the rules is subject to being expressed in a necessity operator, as:

- Necessarily, Kamala Harris is a person
- Necessarily, water is H<sub>2</sub>O

Once again, it is the *content* of the rule that may be expressed in the object-language as a metaphysical necessity. If we restrict our attention to meaning-giving rules capable of introducing terms to language, and carefully distinguish rules with conditional form, from *conditionalized* rules, then (as far as I can see so far) we can avoid the overgeneration problems and retain the idea that metaphysical necessities are object-language formulations of (meaning-giving) rules and their consequences, while also answering Sud's fair plea to clarify what I mean by the relevant 'semantic rules' and to show how we can avoid problems of over-generation.<sup>16</sup>

Now, one might legitimately ask here how we can distinguish which rules are conditional in content, and which are conditionalized:<sup>17</sup> what justifies us in saying that the observation rule and table rule are rules with conditional content, while the person name rule and natural kind rule are *conditionalized*? I'd like to have something fuller to say about this (and I will return to this issue in my response to Dreier), but for now here are some initial suggestions. One is that there is a difference in *what is learned*: in the case of conditional rules, we learn to follow a particular

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<sup>16</sup> There is not space for a full discussion of the 'Shamala Harris' case Sud raises (2023), where 'Shamala' is introduced *to be* a name for a sibling. The case is tricky, as our actual English term 'sibling' is a derivative sortal, parasitic on 'person' (and so following those co-application conditions, which correlate with the identity conditions for persons)—that's why 'If Shamala Harris is a sibling, she is a person' (Sud 2023). If one could introduce a different term as a basic sortal (introducing its own co-application conditions, not parasitic on those for 'person'), the natural conclusion to draw would be to deny that the referent of the term would be identical to Kamala Harris (and to deny that Shamala would be a person), on grounds of different their identity conditions (parallel to statue/clay cases).

<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Sud for pressing me on this question.

rule with a certain (if... then) content. In the case of *conditionalized* rules, we learn *how the rules are (to be) set*, based on other facts of the world. (And that is a matter of becoming competent not with this or that particular name or natural kind term, but—as Dreier (current volume) puts it—of becoming competent with *how proper names (and natural kind terms) work*.) This is a bit analogous to the difference between learning the rules of the road, e.g. as one learns to drive, versus learning *how the rules of the road are established and changed*, e.g. if one becomes a member of the state legislature. Another difference is in *what happens if the condition fails*. (I will return to this in the discussion of Dreier). If the antecedent of a conditional rule fails in a given case, we simply don't apply the rule to the case at hand (but may go on to apply the rule in other cases). If the supposition of a conditionalized rule fails, we are thrown into disarray, and must reconsider what to do with the rule.

### ***Modal normativism and truth-conditional semantics***

The second major concern Sud raises is that my modal normativism requires us to 'relinquish orthodox truth-conditional semantic theories' (2023). I am grateful to him for raising this question, since it gives me the opportunity to reconsider an issue I had not sufficiently reflected on when I wrote *Norms and Necessity*—namely, the relationship between modal normativism and truth-conditional semantics.

To be clear, I don't reject truth-conditional semantics in the book, and I do argue that normativists can, using truth minimalism, legitimately say that modal claims are true and false (2020, 86-87), and even speak of possible worlds (such as are appealed to in Kratzer-style semantics for modality) (2020, 132-7). Sud thinks that my embrace of an inferentialist approach to meaning means that I must reject truth-conditional semantics. And this he finds a major cost

for the view. As he says, ‘Such a departure from semantic orthodoxy should not be taken lightly: truth-conditional semantics has been an immensely productive enterprise in a discipline where such success can be elusive’ (2023).

This raises two questions: 1) Why did I go with inferentialism in the book? And 2) Is normativism inconsistent with truth-conditional semantics?

To address the first question, let me begin by reviewing the context in *Norms and Necessity*. In Chapters 2 and 3, I emphasize the need to separate an account of the *uses* of modal terminology from an account of their *functions*, and to distinguish both of these from accounts of the *meanings* of modal expressions. For only by doing so can we avoid the Frege-Geach problem, of accounting for the meanings of modal terms even when they are embedded in negations and conditionals. I appeal to inferentialism as a way of giving the meanings of modal terms (by giving their rules of use) that remains constant even in embedded contexts. Given my goal of deflating the ontological and epistemological problems of metaphysical modality, I wanted to be sure that I could give an account of the meanings of modal terms that would meet these constancy needs, but at the same time would clearly *not* be appealing to ‘modal features of reality’, possible worlds, or other metaphysically mystifying entities as a way of *explaining* how our modal terms get their meanings. That is why an inferentialist account was an appealing route through these issues. It also fits neatly with the emphasis on linguistic function, since there is a nice tradition (e.g. from the work of Michael Williams (2011)) of connecting accounts of linguistic functions to the rules that enable terms to fulfill those functions.

That being said, I now think I should have more carefully separated issues of *semantics* and *metasemantics*. Once we do separate these issues, we can see clearly that there is no need for a modal normativist to reject a truth-conditional semantic theory. This is a point that Theodore

Locke (2023) argues for explicitly.<sup>18</sup> In *Norms and Necessity* I spoke simply of the ‘meanings’ of modal terms. But, as has become clear in recent work in philosophy of language (see, e.g. Burgess and Sherman 2014), there are at least two different types of question one might pursue in asking about ‘meanings’, with two different explanatory tasks:

- Semantic questions: As addressed in linguistics, one may ask about the ‘semantic value’<sup>19</sup> of linguistic expressions, as part of offering a general ‘semantic theory’. The central goals of such a semantic theory are to explain compositionality, in ways that also enable us to see how speakers could understand and utter an indefinite number of new expressions.<sup>20</sup> Truth-conditional semantics is a dominant paradigm in giving such a semantic theory, identifying the semantic value of a sentence with the conditions under which it would be true. The aim then is to give the truth-conditions of complex expressions via understanding the truth-conditions of simpler expressions, along with identifying axioms for how the truth-conditions of parts determines the truth-conditions of more complex wholes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Alejandro Perez Carballo (2014) makes a related argument that expressivism in metaethics is compatible with a standard truth-conditional semantics.

<sup>19</sup> As this usage suggests, it may be useful to switch to a technical term (‘semantic value’) to avoid the ambiguity of the ordinary term ‘meaning’, and to emphasize that it is this technical sense at issue.

<sup>20</sup> Sud has since suggested to me (personal communication) that one might also want a truth-conditional semantics not just to explain compositionality but also to explain the possibility of *communication*—as we might think of communication as a matter of speaker A having a mental state with a certain semantic value, and asserting a sentence with that semantic value, causing speaker B to have a mental state with that same semantic value. There isn’t space here to work through the details of this application of truth-conditional semantics. I would, however, suspect that it may be useful to talk of ‘semantic values’ in order to articulate (in our theories) what communication *consists in* (a deflationary approach *can* give us the tools for that articulation); but that appeal to these abstract ‘semantic values’ should not be thought of as a ‘posit’ to give anything like a causal explanation of communication. (See also my *Rethinking Metaphysics*, Chapter 1).

<sup>21</sup> For a nice clear exposition of truth-conditional semantics and its goals, see (Kölbel 2002, Chapter 1). On the above point and distinction between compositional semantics and metasemantics, see also Chrisman (2016, 13-19).

- Metasemantic questions:<sup>22</sup> These are more clearly *philosophical* questions, concerned with questions about *how*, *why*, or *in virtue of what* certain symbols (including those in the *simpler* expressions fed into compositional rules) *come to have* certain meanings (Burgess and Sherman 2014, 1-2), or about ‘how there come to be sentences with senses of a particular sort’—say, negative judgments, moral judgments, modal judgments, etc. (Price 2011, 72).<sup>23</sup> It may also include deeper questions about the *functions* of the relevant terminology, asking what explains why we would want such terms in our language anyway. And it may also include questions about how speakers could learn and come to understand the *simpler* expressions.

In retrospect, my issues were those in the latter group. For what I needed was a way of showing how modal terms get their meaning, how we can come to learn and understand and apply modal terminology, in way that doesn’t appeal to modal features of this world (or features of other possible worlds) to *explain* this, and in a way that doesn’t implausibly require a causal relation to modal features of this world or to other possible worlds (see my 2020, p. 82n8). (Incidentally, I now have a fuller response to these questions, based on work I discovered in systemic functional linguistics after the publication of *Norms and Necessity*—see my (2023)).

Philosophers have often tended to *interpret* truth-conditional semantics in ‘metaphysically serious’ terms, that take talk of truth-conditions to be talk of worldly *truth-*

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<sup>22</sup> The terminology ‘metasemantic’ is emerging and contested, and I do not need to take a stand on precisely which questions are (to be) considered metasemantic—it may be that the questions listed in the second group above should be subdivided further. The key point here is merely that the modal normativist approach is compatible with traditional truth-conditional semantics. There has been a rich recent discussion about whether expressivism in metaethics is compatible with a traditional truth-conditional semantics, which is clearly relevant here. See, for example, Perez Carballo (2014), Chrisman (2016, 13-19), and Ridge (2009). Chrisman also notes that the distinction between semantic and meta-semantic issues is prefigured in Blackburn (1984, 16-17).

<sup>23</sup> Price puts this in terms of the relation between a pragmatic-functional story (which includes questions here labelled as ‘metasemantic’) and a semantics.

*makers, of what it would take in the world, for there to be the relevant facts or states of affairs, in virtue of which the relevant statements are true. (And that is why I hesitated to appeal to it in the book). But this is a metaphysical interpretation of truth-conditional semantics that is totally unnecessary for truth-conditional semantics to fulfill the goals of linguistics (giving an axiomatic theory to account for compositionality). The metaphysically serious interpretation is also notoriously problematic for some areas of discourse (such as moral and modal discourse, where formidable problems arise about what these explanatory truth-makers could be and how we could know them). As Huw Price makes clear, to do its jobs in linguistics, truth-conditional semantics ‘needs only a thin notion of truth. It therefore applies uniformly to all minimally descriptive parts of the object language’ (2011, 73).*

So, an important result for me of thinking about Sud’s comments is that doing so has led me to more carefully distinguish semantic from metasemantic issues, in ways that can make clear that there is no need to sacrifice the significant uses of truth-conditional semantics in linguistics, if we adopt a normativist approach to metaphysical modality. Consistently with my adoption of a minimalist notion of truth, there is no problem with the idea that we can specify the truth-conditions of modal sentences in a formal semantic theory (taking these to be the ‘semantic values’ of the expressions) and use those in modeling the compositionality of modal language. But such models, like the accounts of semantic rules Miller considers, involve introducing talk of possible worlds or scenarios for theoretic purposes. As I would put it now, truth-conditional semantics gives us a model to derive the truth-conditions of complex sentences from those of simpler sentences—and in constructing such a theoretic model, it should be no surprise that it would be useful to introduce new grammatical metaphors entitling us to speak of possible worlds

and the like. Normativists can harmlessly state truth-conditions in those terms.<sup>24</sup> But talk of these truth-conditions (and of the ‘possible worlds’ used in stating truth-conditions) is derived via nominalization from more basic forms of modal talk, in ways that have proven theoretically useful. It is not a matter of ‘positing’ possible worlds to *explain* what *makes* our modal claims true.<sup>25</sup>

### *Are the rules circular?*

With this distinction between metasemantics and semantics in place, we can not only see that normativists need not give up truth-conditional semantics (and the uses it serves in linguistics); we can also see more clearly what *metasemantic* tasks the relevant inferential rules are needed for.<sup>26</sup> What I aimed to do was to give an account of how (basic) modal terminology could be introduced, could be meaningful, could be understood by speakers, and of why it would be *useful*. The functional account (a version of which is in my 2020, Chapter 2; now improved in my 2023) aims to answer the question of *why having a modal system in language is useful; what functions it serves*. The inferentialist account aims to show how it could *learnable* and introduced—without thinking that such terminology must be introduced by causal contact with or observation or tracking of certain ‘modal features of the world’ or other possible worlds. And many of our terms—including logical terms, moral terms, modal terms, mathematical terms, etc., *can’t* easily be thought of as capable of being introduced and learned via causal relations with the environment.

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<sup>24</sup> For discussion of the role of grammatical metaphors in sophisticated forms of modal talk, see my (2023).

<sup>25</sup> I discuss how a normativist may understand the introduction of talk of possible worlds in (2020, 132-7).

<sup>26</sup> I think, in contemporary terms, it is also apt to think of inferentialism as a *metasemantic* theory—as it is often presented as a view about what *determines* or *constitutes* the contents of our thoughts or language, or how our social and linguistic practices *confer content* on the relevant mental states and expressions. (Brandom 1994, xiii) See also Greenberg and Harman (2006), who take conceptual role semantics to be a view that ‘the meanings of expressions of a language... are determined or explained by the role of the expressions...in thinking’ (2006, 295). It is an ‘attempt to answer the question of what determines or makes it the case that representations have particular meanings or contents’ (2006, 295), and so would fall on the metasemantic side of issues.

(This is where many traditional ontological and epistemological problems arise.) In adopting a broad form of inferentialism at this level, we can get a more comprehensive story that accommodates the introduction rules for natural kind terms and the like (and the central role that causal contact plays in introducing *those* terms), while also accommodating introduction rules of entirely different kinds for talk of properties, numbers, modality, etc.<sup>27</sup>

With that in mind, let us look again at the inferential rules that Sud worries are circular. For both the introduction rule and the elimination rule, (following Greg Restall) I appeal to ‘subjunctive suppositions’:

- Introduction rule for ‘necessarily’: If *p* is an object-language expression of an actual semantic rule (or a logical consequence of actual semantic rules), then you are entitled to introduce *Necessarily p*, regardless of any subjunctive suppositions.
- Elimination rule for ‘necessarily’: If you have *Necessarily p* as a premise, you may use *p* as a premise in your reasoning anywhere, under any subjunctive suppositions.

Sud worries that these rules are circular: ‘The normativist has specified the meaning of the notion of necessity in terms of the role that notion plays in subjunctive supposition. However, without an independent account of subjunctive supposition, that is objectionably circular’ (2023).

But once we see these rules as aiming to give an account of how modal language could be learned, we can see that it is not circular. As with truth-conditions and semantic rules, it may be *useful* for certain *theoretical purposes* to model the content of suppositions in possible worlds terms. But this is highly derivative and theoretical. The basic activity of supposing does not rely on speaking of, understanding, or positing anything like possible worlds. Children learn to suppose and to reason from suppositions as they are introduced to reading and discussing fiction,

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<sup>27</sup> Some of these ‘introduction rules’ will take the form of the conceptual truths appealed to in easy inferences, such as I discuss in (2015, Chapter 3).

and the ability to reason under suppositions is exploited by adults reading speculative fiction. It is exploited in math classes as our teachers instruct us to suppose that we have a right triangle with sides of lengths three inches and four inches, and ask us to compute the length of the hypotenuse. We can entertain suppositions, and we can reason under suppositions. (An evolutionary psychologist might be called upon to give us an account of why this ability is useful.) Greg Restall, in developing the inferentialist approach to modal logic I draw on, writes that he plans to examine ‘the connection between our modal concepts and the activity of supposing’ (2012, 4). He argues that ‘we have intuitive access to necessity, actuality, and *a priori* knowability, not by a faculty like perception, but through our abilities to make different kinds of supposition and to manage our reasoning in the scope of these suppositions’ (2012, 5).

Of course, one can rephrase this, if one likes, by saying that in doing so *we are considering other possible worlds*. But such nominalized rephrasings are optional interpretations of the activity, stated in hypostatized terms that may prove theoretically useful for certain purposes. We can *learn* basic modal talk (What *would have happened* if the princess had drunk the potion? What *would the* length of the hypotenuse be? What *would* happen if I tried to ski down that hill?) via learning to entertain suppositions. And such suppositions needn’t be stated in possible worlds terms or modal terms—they can even be stated in the sorts of simple imperatives we get at the top of our mathematical proofs: ‘Suppose P’—and we can then ask, ‘what follows?’. It is this ability to reason under suppositions that is exploited in learning to *introduce* modal vocabulary, from simple modal auxiliary verbs, eventually to talk of possible worlds. Mastery of modal vocabulary is not needed *prior to* being able to do such suppositional reasoning; the reverse is the case: our ability to reason suppositionally can be leveraged into an ability to speak modally, and eventually, to even speak in terms of possible worlds.

One final question raised by Sud concerns whether the ‘ought’ in metaphysical necessity claims should be understood as ‘formal’ (like those of etiquette, clubs etc.) or ‘substantive’ (as ‘ought’ claims that, like epistemic and moral oughts, claim to have a ‘normative authority’) (2023). Sud argues that this is important because, if we think of them as substantive ought claims, we face additional challenges about how they are knowable, how they could be intrinsically motivational, etc.—but also have additional *motivations* for departing from traditional truth-conditional semantics. On the other hand, he argues, if we take them to be merely ‘formal’ we lack such motivations for departing from standard truth-conditional semantics, and risk treating modal disagreements as ‘merely-verbal’ disputes.

The short answer is that I think of them as more like what Sud is calling ‘formal’ ought claims—as he notes, my frequent use of comparisons with rules of games already points to that classification.<sup>28</sup> As I’ve argued above, however, the normativist needn’t abandon truth-conditional semantic theories (and so we don’t need motivation for doing so). I also (2020, Chapter 8) give an alternative explanation of why metaphysical modal disputes, on the normativist model, aren’t ‘merely verbal’, in assessing many of them as involving metalinguistic negotiation, with great significance for how we live and what we do. Nonetheless, the differences between the modal oughts and more ‘substantive’ moral oughts are worth bearing in mind, as they do suggest that there will be additional tasks to be undertaken, if we aim to give a related approach to moral discourse.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Of course, that does not stop us from asking ‘substantive’ ought claims (in conceptual ethics) about what terms or concepts we, all things considered, *ought* to use, or what rules we *ought to* adopt for them.

<sup>29</sup> For an initial approach to issues in metaethics that parallels this one, see Warren and Thomasson (forthcoming). I also have further work (in progress 1) on the topic.

## Reply to Jamie Dreier

Like Rohan Sud, Jamie Dreier questions whether my way of accounting for *de re* necessities succeeds. For, like Sud, he argues that it would seem to overgenerate necessities: leaving us saying that (if John is a bachelor), then necessarily, John is unmarried (Dreier 2023). In replying to Sud above, I distinguish between *conditional rules* (rules the content of which has an if-then form), and *conditionalized* rules (rules which may have content of any form, but where that content only *comes into effect* given that a certain condition holds). The rules that are reflected in claims of *de re* necessity are those that give the content of a *conditionalized* rule—a rule that is conditionalized on (and only comes into effect given) certain actual empirical facts. This is cohesive with my ways of thinking about these rules in *Norms and Necessity*—I say, for example, that the relevant rules (say, for person names) ‘hold conditional on certain empirical assumptions, and that these rules are revisable in cases in which those assumptions fail’, and that these ‘conditionalized’ rules enable us to handle claims of *de re* and *a posteriori* necessity (2020, 105).<sup>30</sup>

As I argue above, this difference results in a different scope for the rule operator. This enables us to demonstrate an important difference between the claim that bachelors are necessarily unmarried, as compared with the claim that Kamala Harris is necessarily a person. As noted above, it is always the *content of the rule* (within the scope of the rule operator) that is expressed in the necessity claim, so we have:

As a conditional rule:

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<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, the examples I give (2020, 99-100) in introducing the idea all seem to be rules with conditional content, not conditionalized rules. (I would now revise those, and more clearly draw the distinction between rules with conditional content, and conditionalized rules.)

- ***It is a rule that:*** For all x, if x is a bachelor, then x is unmarried
- Giving us (as an application) the object language conditional necessity: Necessarily, if John is a bachelor, then John is unmarried.

Contrast that with the *conditionalized* rule:

- Supposing that there is a person here, then ***it is a rule that*** ‘Kamala Harris’ is to refer to a person
- (and since that condition is fulfilled, we can conclude): ***It is a rule that*** ‘Kamala Harris’ is to refer to a person
- (with semantic descent we can get): *Necessarily*, Kamala Harris is a person.

It seems at first comforting that this solution is very like one of those that Dreier considers, that the relevant rules for *de re* necessities are those that institute ‘a normative power’ (2023) or give us a new rule [under certain conditions], while the rule for ‘bachelor’ ‘is a rule whose content is a universally quantified conditional’ (Dreier 2023). That comfort might wane, however, when we note that Dreier goes on to reject that suggestion. So, what are Dreier’s reasons for rejecting it? He writes:

The idea was supposed to be that... when it turns out that ‘Kamala’ names a person we get a new rule (‘Kamala’ is to refer to a person). But in fact, that is not a semantic rule. So it looks like the trick doesn’t work. (2023)

Why think that this isn’t a semantic rule? And does it matter if it is? Dreier writes ‘It isn’t semantics that tells us that water is H<sub>2</sub>O any more than it’s semantics that tells us that John is unmarried’. Is this just a verbal point, that we can’t call such rules ‘semantic’ rules, since they involve empirical knowledge? If so, our verdict will depend on what we mean by ‘semantic’—if

we mean to include among semantic rules *any* rules that determine the proper use of expressions, perhaps these *are* ‘semantic’. (And perhaps one lesson we should keep from externalist arguments is that we shouldn’t expect all those rules to be knowable based on our linguistic competence alone.) But I don’t really have to take a stand on whether these rules should be called ‘semantic’ rules or not, since I always allowed that metaphysically necessary truths are those that give object-language expression of semantic rules *or what follows from them*, in some cases (as here), as combined with empirical facts. Call these ‘rules of use’ if you prefer. Then what we can say is, under the relevant condition (or assuming the relevant assumption is fulfilled), the following rule of use comes into effect: Only apply ‘Kamala’ to a (indeed, to *this*) person. And it is that rule (or norm) that is reflected in the *de re* necessity claim.

Is there any other reason to reject this suggestion, then? Dreier raises concerns again that, at least if we model it on the idea that deontic rules ‘detach’ in games, we should also be able to ‘detach’ the antecedent in ‘If someone is an unmarried man, you must call him a bachelor’ to (falsely) conclude that it is necessary that he is a bachelor (Dreier 2023). But I think this is a challenge that can be met: it is the *content of a rule of use* that can be stated in the object-language as a metaphysical necessity claim. The rule of use for ‘bachelor’ isn’t: ‘Apply the term ‘bachelor’ to John’. Instead, it can be put most clearly in quantified form: ‘For all x, if “unmarried man” applies to x, then apply “bachelor” to x’. The content of the rule for Kamala (a rule which is in effect provided that there is a person present) is ‘Apply “Kamala” to *this person*’.

Now, to make sure that I am not cheating, you might justifiably ask: How can we tell a *conditionalized* rule apart from a *conditional* rule, and be sure which one we are dealing with? On my view, a *conditionalized* rule is a rule (which may have any form of content—including an

unconditional or conditional form) that only *comes into effect* provided certain conditions hold. What happens if the relevant conditions don't hold? We are thrown into disarray, without a rule in effect—and must *decide* what to do with the term. This is exactly what happens (or so I argue (2020, 95-105)) if the presupposition for use of a person-name, statue-name, natural kind term, etc. 'turns out to' fail. If, on the other hand, we have the term 'bachelor', and discover that John is married, we are not thrown into any disarray; the usual (universally quantified) rules remain in effect and we don't have to reconsider what to do with the term 'bachelor'; the extant rules then do not tell us to apply the term *to him* (but still tell us what to do in many other cases).

So, here's a way to articulate the difference. Dreier says:

Don't say: well, semantics tells us that *if* the H<sub>2</sub>O structure explains the stereotypical qualities of water, *then* we must only apply 'water' to H<sub>2</sub>O... and the H<sub>2</sub>O structure *does* explain those qualities! Because likewise, semantics tells us that *if* John meets the requirements to be called 'bachelor', then we must also apply 'unmarried' to him, and he does meet those requirements (2023)

What I'll say instead is this:

In the water case, we have a rule that comes into effect on a certain condition. If there is some natural kind structure that explains the stereotypical qualities of water, the following rule of use for 'water' comes into effect: Apply 'water' only to whatever has *that* natural kind structure.

In the 'bachelor' case, we have a standing rule, with a conditional content: For all x, if 'bachelor' is to be applied to x, then 'unmarried' is to be applied to x.

Why doesn't the rule 'detach' in the latter case, yielding the claim that John is necessarily a bachelor? Because necessities reflect the *content* of the rule. The rule in the second case is a general conditional, so what is necessary is that: *If* someone is a bachelor, *then* they are unmarried (it is a rule with a *de dicto* form). The rule in the first case (should it come into effect) applies to stuff with *that* natural kind structure (it is a *de re* rule).<sup>31</sup>

This brings us to another question, and a particularly interesting part of Dreier's paper. That is the constructive suggestion that a normativist can use an inferentialist approach to handle *de re* necessities. We can see the introduction rules for claims of metaphysical necessity as having 'the function of giving us... markers, reminders, or licenses... to mark each sentence that we are supposed to be able to use freely under any supposition' (Dreier 2023). But how do we 'earn' the relevant 'license' to add on the necessity operator? Roughly, by 'understanding how proper names work' (Dreier 2023). Dreier suggests (cohesively with my suggestion above) that the bachelor rule has a conditional *as content*, so we can only introduce 'necessity' before the whole conditional (and it is the conditional—not its consequent—that we can go on to use under any suppositions) (2023). Person-names, by contrast, tell us that 'so long as the name N successfully denotes a person, we can use the premise that *N is a person* under any supposition' (2023). Dreier says that here 'necessity is *mentioned*' in this rule, 'rather than being simply an object language expression of the fact that it is a rule' (2023), and concludes that '*de re* necessities are *not* in general the expressions of semantic rules, and that the metaphysical deflation of alethic modality will need some extra inferentialist machinery' (2023).

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<sup>31</sup> As I have discussed in some of my other work (2003), even rules of childhood 'pretend' games can have *de re* or *de dicto* form: it can be a rule that Lily is the queen; or it can be a rule that *whoever possesses the golden hanky* is 'it'.

Let me first say that I'm open to that, if it works better for reaching the deflationary goals I set out in *Norms and Necessity*. If my belt fails, I'll be happy to make use of these suspenders. Or maybe the two really go together. For I think there is more of a connection here than at first appears.

Consider what Dreier calls the 'Person Name Rule' ('so long as the name *N* successfully denotes a person, we can use the premise that *N is a person* under any supposition' (2023))? Is this a semantic rule? Again, Dreier seems to think not. But (setting aside disputes about how to use the term 'semantic') it does seem like a rule of use for names, mastery of which is part and parcel of mastering 'how proper names work'.

More broadly, Dreier makes the helpful suggestion that a normativist can understand 'rigidity' in general as: what it is for a term to be a rigid designator is that 'when we go to identify which thing is the one we're calling "t", in subjunctive reasoning contexts, we are to *return* from those contexts for our identification; we drop the subjunctive supposition and use our actual context to determine what it is that we're calling "t"' (2023). These are norms to govern counterfactual reasoning.

That sounds good to me. I would only be tempted to add that these norms reflect certain kinds of conditionalized rules of use for our terms—including proper names and natural kind terms. And these are rules that come into effect under certain conditions (under the condition that the chemical composition of the liquid that (actually) fills our oceans and lakes is H<sub>2</sub>O,) the rule is: (Always and anywhere, under any conditions) apply 'water' only to whatever is H<sub>2</sub>O. The content of the rule (that comes into effect) may be unconditional, and hold always and everywhere, regardless of any subjunctive suppositions. This enables us to hold on to the hope I

expressed in the book that, once we recognize the different forms that rules can take, we can do better at accommodating different types of necessity claim in a normativist framework.

### **Reply to Boris Kment**

Boris Kment begins by raising an interesting challenge for the normativist view, and goes on to develop a very welcome defense of an epistemology of essence, which enables us to better weigh up the prospects for (descriptive) essentialist versus normativist approaches to modality. I will discuss these two points in turn.

#### ***Evaluating Counterpossibles***

Kment begins by asking how a normativist would address claims such as:

(4) If whales were fish, they would be mammals.

(5) If I were Joe Biden's son, then I would not be Joe Biden's son.

Given my rule E (that necessary truths are held fixed under all suppositions about ways the world might have been different) (2020, 84), as Kment notes, it looks like I should say they are true.

But, as Kment says, both look at the least 'dubious'. So what can a normativist say here?

A first thing to note is that 'whales are fish' and 'I am Joe Biden's son' are not ways the world might have been different—if it is genuinely metaphysically necessary that whales are mammals (as follows from my account) and metaphysically necessary that I am not Joe Biden's offspring (but Clarissa and Neill Thomasson's offspring) (as also follows from my account), then these are not considerations of counterfactual situations, but rather of *counterpossible* situations. (We might accordingly be tempted to read them as *epistemic*—*supposing we had discovered* that what we called 'whales' turned out to be fish—but I assume the intended reading here is metaphysical.)

What, then, should a normativist say about evaluating counterpossible statements?

Theodore Locke develops a normativist understanding of counterpossibles that is helpful here. On his (2019) view, while a normativist takes claims of metaphysical necessity to be object-language illustrations of semantic rules, we may accordingly take counterpossibles to be ways (in the object-language) of reflecting on potential changes in semantic rules, and what would follow from them: ‘counterpossible claims can be used as an object language resource for considering the consequences of changes in the actual meaning constituting rules that govern the use of our terms without actually adopting those changes’ (2019, Section 4).

This can then enable us to explain the apparent oddness of the relevant counterpossibles: for in a situation in which the rules were changed, and ‘whale’ referred to a kind of fish, the things so-named would not be mammals—accounting for intuitions that the relevant claim is false. But this of course would not be a situation in which *whales* (now using the term with our rules intact) were not mammals.

### ***The epistemology of essence***

The majority of Kment’s comments focus on providing a defense of his essentialist view against the epistemological objections I raise for descriptive approaches to modal discourse. I am glad to see such an epistemology developed, and welcome the opportunity to discuss essentialist views such as Kment’s here, since I did not address those approaches in *Norms and Necessity*, and owe a fuller engagement with them.

The version of essentialism Kment defends is a *descriptivist* approach, in my terms. In note 2, he acknowledges that a normativist reading of essence talk may be available (citing Locke 2020), but says, ‘In this paper, I will have in mind a descriptivist position that rejects [the]

normativist interpretation of essentialist locutions’ (2023). A descriptivist approach, as I define it, is one that assumes that the relevant ‘statements are *descriptive or representational*’ (Thomasson 2020, 7), where this is taken to be not merely the triviality that they state facts of the relevant kind (which the normativist doesn’t deny (Thomasson 2020, Chapter 6)), but that they function to track features of the world, and that those features explain the truth or falsity of the claim (Kment 2023; cf. Thomasson 2020, 8). So, the form of essentialism that Kment defends is one on which our talk of essences is thought to track certain features of the world that explain the truth of the relevant claims, and that can figure in ‘metaphysical laws’. Perhaps not surprisingly, my objections will be not to the essentialism, but to the descriptivism.

As Kment has reminded me, there is some disagreement about whether essences should be considered ‘modal’ notions (or if we should instead use ‘modal’ to only include what can be expressed by the box and diamond of modal logic, counterfactuals, and/or the notion of a possible world, and anything definable in those terms). As far as I can see, nothing hangs on that terminology for present purposes. To mark the distinction, I will use the term ‘broadly modal’ to cover *both* essentialist and narrowly modal notions.

In *Norms and Necessity*, I raise two central problems for descriptivist approaches to modality: ontological problems and epistemological problems. Kment does not here address the ontological problems, and as far as I can see they arise just as much for the essentialist version of descriptivism as for the modal descriptivism I discuss in the book. Take Goliath (the statue) and Lumpl (the lump of clay), for example. Essentialists appeal to essences or ‘real definitions’ (together with facts about the entities in terms of which each is defined) to ‘metaphysically explain’ the different modal properties of Goliath and Lumpl. But a version of the ‘grounding problem’ remains at the deeper level: how could two entities, with all the same physical parts

and properties, have different *essences*, then? Essentialists may of course deny that any such metaphysical explanations are possible, and instead take facts about real definitions or essences to be in some relevant sense *fundamental*.<sup>32</sup> But many will find the appeal to essences as ‘metaphysically basic’ entities hard to accept. Versions of related ‘location’ or ‘placement’ problems also remain (see my 2020, 9): What are these things called ‘essences’, and how can they relate to those parts of and facts about the world that are not broadly modal—particularly as they seem not to supervene on them? (Compare my 2020, 141). By comparison, the normativist view does not require that our modal or essentialist claims be interpreted as *describing* special metaphysical *features of the world* that we must ‘posit’ as metaphysically fundamental.

In his reply here, Kment focuses on providing a response to the epistemological problems: how could we come to know these essences, on a descriptivist version of essentialism? It is great to see someone address these epistemological questions, for, as Kment notes, ‘the question of how we gain knowledge of essences has until recently been largely neglected’ (2023). Kment’s primary response to the epistemological problem is to appeal to abduction: ‘the essentialist’s best reply to the epistemological objection is to say that abductive methods can... be used to support the reality of the essence–accident distinction as well as to support theses about the essences of specific entities’ (2023). That is, Kment argues that essences play a central role in scientific explanations: real definitions (taken as essential truths about a non-fundamental entity *e*, laying out necessary and sufficient conditions for being *e* or instantiating *e* (Kment 2023)) play a role, for example, in enabling us to explain why (the statue) Goldie is golden, given that Goldie is composed of atoms whose nuclei contain 79 protons. For we can make use of the essentialist claim that ‘to be golden is to be composed of atoms whose nuclei contain 79

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<sup>32</sup> Thanks to Boris Kment for further discussion here.

protons’ in enabling us to infer from ‘Goldie is composed of atoms whose nuclei contains 79 protons’ to ‘Goldie is golden’ (2023). In short, to gain knowledge of essential truths, we begin by seeking the best explanation of various facts. Once we find these, we will find that these often involve ‘certain assumptions about the laws that cover the explanatory relationships, and these laws frequently include some essential truths’ (2023)—giving us reason to believe the relevant essential truths, as part of a ‘scientifically informed philosophical picture of the natural world’ (2023).

Let me begin by noting some points of agreement. I agree with Kment and other essentialists that talk of ‘essences’ is useful, particularly given that it functions differently than merely modal talk. I also agree that, in some sense, essence talk may be prior to (narrowly) modal talk. (As Kment notes) Locke (2020) has developed a normativist interpretation of essentialist claims. Locke takes essentialist claims to be object-language expressions of constitutive rules for using certain terms or concepts—whereas necessary truths (as I handle them) are ways of conveying semantic rules *or what follows from them* in the useful form of object-language indicatives. On this reading, essentialist claims *would* be more basic, with necessity claims including the wider class of essentialist claims and *what follows from them*. The question for me isn’t whether we should use essence talk, or even whether it is in some sense prior to (narrow) modal talk, but whether we should take it as tracking or describing some special things in the world that it is the business of metaphysics to discover.

So let us look at cases in which an essentialist claim apparently plays a role in a scientific explanation. To use Kment’s example: *The fact that (something is golden iff it is composed of atoms w 79 protons) is essential to goldenness* explains the fact that Goldie’s composition by atoms w 79 protons grounds the fact that Goldie is golden. I am happy to accept that the fact that

[*what it is to be golden* is to be composed of atoms with 79 protons in their nuclei] plays some role in explaining the fact that Goldie is golden.

But we can interpret that role in different ways. On Kment's view, we can come to know the 'essentialist fact' by inference to the best explanation: 'We apply abductive methods to find the best explanations of various facts' (2023), and the laws that cover explanatory relationships 'frequently include some essential truths' (2023). So, on Kment's view, we can come to know the relevant essentialist truth by knowing the best explanation abductively. For example, if the best explanation of Goldie being golden includes this essentialist fact (that what it is to be golden is to be composed of atoms with 79 protons in their nuclei), then accepting that best explanation also 'supports our hypothesis' that there is such an essentialist fact. On this model, facts about essences are confirmed *with* the relevant scientific theory that they form part of: 'When we support our theory of what grounds temperature by abduction, we support the hypothesis about the real definition of being-hotter-than at the same time' (2023).

Here is an alternative interpretation of the role of 'real definitions' in explanatory theories—and of our knowledge of them. In order to formulate theories and reason with and from them, we must *use* language, and that requires making assumptions about how the terms are to be defined, and (more broadly) what their rules of use are. Claims about essences are object-language expressions of these semantic rules. To draw inferences and make predictions from a theory, we must also make assumptions about what our terms mean, and (more broadly) about how these terms are to be used. These definitions aren't 'discovered' or 'confirmed with' our theories, but rather are what we *use* in formulating our theories. We *can*, however, discover empirically that adopting some (sets of) definitions or rules of use would work better than others, to serve certain purposes (such as formulating efficient and fruitful predictions and

explanations). We can accordingly *decide to change* how we are to use key terms, in order to serve our purposes better (see my 2020b). We can also discover what follows from the rules of use combined with empirical facts. For example, we can discover that, if it is a rule of use that ‘gold’ is to be applied only to whatever shares the microstructure of the relevant sample, and that the microstructure of the relevant sample includes 79 protons in the nucleus, then gold essentially has 79 protons in its nucleus (see my 2020a, 108-111). On this model, essentialist truths aren’t ‘confirmed’ with scientific theories; they are known via extrapolation from our linguistic or conceptual competence—sometimes as combined with empirical facts.

What’s at stake between these two interpretations, and why does it matter? The descriptivist and the normativist provide different accounts of how essentialist facts can be known. Kment’s descriptivist account insists that facts about essences, like scientific facts, are known *abductively*. But as I have argued elsewhere (2017, 369-373), despite the popularity of metaphysicians’ appeals to ‘inference to the best explanation’ in arguing that our metaphysical views may be confirmed with scientific theories, there are serious problems with that idea. Those responding to pessimistic induction arguments against scientific realism have found the need to distinguish what *parts of* a scientific theory *are* and are *not* confirmed with it (see, e.g. Psillos 1999, Hawley 2006). I have argued elsewhere (2017, Section 1) that we have reason to deny that specifically *metaphysical* claims (which do not affect the ‘assertive content’ of a theory) are confirmed with a scientific theory they figure in—for specifically metaphysical claims can be (in Stephen Yablo’s (2009) terms) ‘subtracted out’ while the predictions generated remain the same. Eliot Sober’s contrastive method also entails that purely metaphysical or mathematical claims that are shared by rival theories cannot be thought to be confirmed by them (1993, 45; and see discussion in my 2017).

A normativist can acknowledge the usefulness of essentialist claims, and their roles in formulating our theories, but will insist that there are different *functional roles* of different parts of our theories (for example, of definitions versus observations), and accordingly different ways in which they can be known. On this view, essentialist claims are not seen as attempted worldly descriptions or ‘hypotheses’ which might be confirmed or disconfirmed with the scientific theory, but rather as object-language reflections of working definitions *used in formulating* and *in reasoning with and from* scientific hypotheses. As such, our methods of knowing them are different from our methods of knowing empirical claims: they are not confirmed abductively, but rather are knowable via extrapolation from our conceptual competence, sometimes combined with empirical knowledge. (Moreover, they are always open to alteration, if we find that, given the empirical situation and/or our evolving needs, other options might serve our needs better (see my 2020b).)

Kment also offers a slightly different route to acquiring knowledge of particular essentialist facts—for example, facts about the essence of a statue (Goliath), as compared with the essence of the lump of clay it is made from (Lumpl). His route here is to make use of the same sorts of semantic rules I appeal to (put in essentialist terms): ‘of all the entities on top of the pedestal, “Goliath” refers to the entity with essence  $E_G$  if there is such an entity (and does not refer otherwise) while “Lumpl” refers to the entity with essence  $E_L$  if there is such an entity (and does not refer otherwise)’. Knowledge of that semantic rule, combined with knowledge of a metaphysical principle of modal plenitude, can enable us to know that Goliath has a statue-essence. How can we know the principle of modal plenitude? Again, Kment appeals here to abduction—suggesting that ‘The abductively best supported theory of the world includes a principle of plenitude’ (2023). I am not sure how one could show that that the abductively best

supported theory of the world includes a metaphysical principle of modal plenitude.<sup>33</sup> So I will just say that the concerns about whether metaphysical principles can be abductively confirmed are relevant here as well. And in any case, the account of knowledge that the normativist gives (which appeals to parallel semantic rules but not to an allegedly abductively known principle of modal plenitude) is simpler, and allows that we can know that Goliath is (essentially) a statue, without waiting on the best theory of the world and hoping it will abductively confirm a metaphysical ‘principle of modal plenitude’.

Why does it make a difference whether we interpret essentialist claims in a descriptivist or normativist way? Some of the differences we have already seen: the normativist approach is better able avoid ontological problems, and to retain appropriate and needed distinctions about what is and is not confirmed with a theory. The normativist view, as I have come to see more fully since *Norms and Necessity* came out, also fits well with work in empirical linguistics (see my (2023) and (Wu, manuscript)). It also matters which view we choose, since it will make a difference to how we think we can justify essentialist claims, and to when we should change them and why. On my view, the normativist approach enables us to be more transparent about the sorts of reasoning that play a role in justifying such claims and changes.

It is certainly useful to develop both the normativist and the essentialist approaches, so that we can better see what is at stake, and better compare them. Kment’s paper is a welcome contribution to this development—even if (as I hold) the normativist approach ultimately

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<sup>33</sup> One way I can imagine things going is to argue that our best theories all involve license to engage in certain kinds of talk about essences, possibilities, possible worlds, etc. If that is the case, however, I would urge us to consider the idea that the reason for this is that (as established in work in linguistics, e.g. Halliday 2009, 116-38) introducing such modes of talking, as grammatical metaphors, adds expressive power, capacities for generalization, and other functions that are centrally useful in formulating generalized scientific theories (see discussion in my 2023).

provides a more transparent and illuminating way of understanding all forms of modal discourse—including that about essences.

## Conclusions

Let me close by summarizing some of what I take to be the most significant upshots of engaging with the incisive comments from Miller, Sud, Dreier, and Kment. Some parts of the discussion have provided the basis for tidying and tightening up parts of the normativist view internally, others have clarified the relation between this view and other views of modality, while still other parts help us take a broader view to see the surrounding context of the view, and the work that remains to be done.

Internally, the critics' comments have enabled me to make clearer some features of how the relevant linguistic rules should be understood, and of how best to articulate the different forms they can take. One important result is to better articulate the sort of 'semantic rule' I had in mind, identifying them as meaning-giving rules, in the sense I develop in the response to Sud above. Another result, crucial to responding to concerns that arise in both Sud's and Dreier's discussions, is to carefully distinguish the different forms that the relevant semantic rules may take, in particular distinguishing between *conditional rules* (rules the *content* of which has an if-then form), and *conditionalized* rules (rules which may have content of any form, but where that content only *comes into effect* given that a certain condition holds)—and to clarify that it is, in any case, only the *content* of the rule that is reflected in a statement of metaphysical necessity.<sup>34</sup> This distinction was implicit in the way of thinking about things in *Norms and Necessity*, but the

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<sup>34</sup> Wang and Donaldson (2022, 299) give a nice way of distinguishing the *condition* from the *content* of a rule, which can be employed to the same effect for what I here call 'conditionalized' rules (under the given condition, there comes into effect a rule with a certain content). It is the content that of such rules that (when the condition applies) is necessary.

critics' concerns have prompted me now to draw it out more carefully and explicitly. By doing so, we can enable normativists to give an adequate way of handling *de re* and *a posteriori* necessities (along the lines I suggest in the book), without also (over-)generating spurious metaphysical necessity claims.

Responding to objections here has also given me the opportunity to clarify the direction of explanation, and the relationship between the modal normativist view and popular talk of 'possible worlds' in both Lewisian metaphysics and standard truth-conditional semantics. A common concern (a form of which arises in the comments by both Miller and Sud) is that the normativist view is implicitly circular, as it relies at some level on appealing to possible worlds—either (as Miller suggests) in understanding the relevant semantic rules (as *reflecting the best compression of the regularities of use of terms across possible scenarios*), or (as Sud's comments suggest) in making sense of the 'subjunctive suppositions' I appeal to in giving introduction and elimination rules for 'necessity'. In responding to these concerns, I have aimed to clarify the direction of explanation the normativist takes. While many of those philosophically trained may be tempted to describe the view in possible worlds terms, this is an optional, theoretical, and derivative way of expressing things. One goal of the normativist view is to show how possible worlds talk may be *derived from* and *introduced from* more basic forms of modal talk and thought, in ways that usefully add expressive power to our language. (Recent work in systemic functional linguistics enables us to do a better job at this, as my (2023) aims to show). Such talk is (on the normativist view) perfectly legitimate, and even useful, but it comes in at the end of the linguistic story—and just because we may come to express things legitimately in possible worlds terms, does not mean that we must take the existence of Lewisian possible worlds as a metaphysical presupposition for understanding the semantic rules and suppositions to

which a normativist appeals. Another important new upshot of this work is that it enables us to make clear that the normativist need *not* relinquish truth-conditional semantics, understood as an approach in linguistics that enables us to introduce theoretical talk of possible worlds in order to model the compositionality of modal language.

The above discussion also brings us to a deeper understanding of the relation between a normativist approach and more recent essentialist approaches to modality such as Boris Kment's. Kment helps make clearer the resources available to an essentialist in addressing the epistemological problems of modality; and in turn, I have aimed to make clearer where the relative advantages for normativism lie in handling both the epistemological and ontological problems of modality, why it matters, and how this is connected to more general issues in the epistemology of metaphysics. An important area for future work will be to investigate more thoroughly the relation between normativist and essentialist and other alternative approaches to modality—issues which will bring us into more general issues about the epistemology of metaphysics, including the role of abductive arguments in metaphysics.<sup>35</sup>

But perhaps the most important and interesting area that remains for future work is considering how or whether an approach to modality along normativist lines might be generalized to other forms of modal discourse. In *Norms and Necessity*, I focus on claims of *metaphysical* necessity, given my driving interest in the methods of and knowledge in metaphysics. Several of the comments here (including Sud's and Miller's), as well as elsewhere (such as the insightful review of *Norms and Necessity* by Matthew Chrisman and Kevin Scharp (2022)) emphasize the desirability of having an across-the-board account of modal discourse of various kinds, including logical necessity, physical or nomological necessity, and even deontic

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<sup>35</sup> I address these issues further in my (in progress 2).

necessity claims found in pragmatic, institutional, and moral discourse. I fully acknowledge the desirability of such generality (and allude to it a couple of places in the book). While I don't see a major barrier in principle to offering accounts of other forms of modal discourse in broadly normative terms—as ways of making explicit, conveying, enforcing, or renegotiating *various* sorts of norms—much of the detailed work remains to be done. I have engaged in some of this work myself since *Norms and Necessity* came out, aiming to draw out in more general terms the functions of different forms of modal discourse (in my 2023), and to begin to address the specific problems of *moral* discourse (in progress 1). I also appreciate the work of others in developing compatible views of other forms of modal discourse and invite those who are interested in the potential benefits of a normativist approach to go further in investigating its prospects in other areas. But that will have to be left for later work.

For now, let me reiterate my deep gratitude for the thoughtful work done in this volume by Miller, Sud, Dreier, and Kment, which has done so much to help make clear areas in which the view I articulated in *Norms and Necessity* needs to be clarified and tidied up, in making clear (and prompting me to make clearer) the relations between the modal normativist approach and other views, and in pointing towards areas where further work should be done. As I have tried to make clear in *Norms and Necessity*, an approach to modality along these lines is highly desirable for addressing formidable ontological, epistemological, and methodological problems of modality. Beyond that, it is useful as part of a total deflationary approach to metaphysics. It may even provide a useful model for how we can think anew about other classic philosophical problems (concerning moral or mathematical discourse, for example). But only by getting the view in the strongest form possible, by seeing how it can respond to such challenging objections, can we properly evaluate its prospects.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Kristie Miller, Rohan Sud, Jamie Dreier, Boris Kment, and David Plunkett for their helpful comments on prior versions of these replies.

## **Disclosure of Interest**

The author reports no conflict of interest

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