Norms and Necessity

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Draft as of 12/9/2011

Metaphysicians care about what categories of object are in the world, and also about what metaphysical modal properties—essences, identity or persistence conditions—the objects in the world have.

Cognitive psychologists study what categories we use to represent and interact with our world, and what rules govern, e.g. how infants, monkeys or adults track and individuate objects, identify agents, and so on. Linguists and philosophers of language study what rules of use govern our terms—including those sortal terms designed to pick out things of different categories.

Metaphysicians often express or evince a profound disinterest in these latter projects: I don't care what categories we use in interacting with the world, they often say, I want to know what the real categories of things are in the world. And I don't care what rules come with our terms or concepts: I care about the real modal properties of things in the world: about when persons or objects *really are* identical or distinct, *really do* survive or are destroyed.

And so the metaphysician sets out to discover these categories of entity, and the modal features of those entities there are. These are intimately linked, of course, since an entity's category is intimately connected to what essence or modal features it has: part of what it is to be a human (as opposed to a mere collection of matter) is to be incapable of surviving death; part of what it is to be a statue (as opposed to a lump) is to be incapable of surviving being crushed. So in setting out to discover categories, the metaphysician sets out, among other things, to discover the modal features of the world.

But if we see the work of the metaphysician in that way, as trying to discover and describe the modal and categorical features of the world, we encounter a number of problems. One symptom of trouble is the sheer diversity in answers we get as to what the categories are, and to what the modal features (identity and persistence conditions) are of entities like persons, works of art, or physical objects—a diversity that doesn't show any sign of convergence on the truth, or even agreement about what would resolve the issue.

But it's not just that there are signs of trouble: there are overt troubles every metaphysician knows about: most notorious is the epistemic problem of how we could possibly come to know about modal features of the world—given that the different features of, say, the statue versus the lump of bronze seem not to be empirically detectable: indeed the two seem to have all of their empirical features in common. Alongside these are metaphysical problems: what are these modal features of the world that are capable of making our modal claims true? How are they related to the non-modal features of objects (they seem not to supervene on them!). But while virtually everyone is familiar with these epistemic and metaphysical problems of modality, hardly anyone has any idea how to solve them.

Another, less-familiar, difficulty arises too. The metaphysician's concern is with claims of metaphysical possibility and necessity. But we also use modal terms in many other contexts—such as those used in giving permissions and obligations (you may get

up from the table, you must be home by ten) or in expressing the rules of games (the black player must go first; the king may move forwards or backwards), as well as in claims about physical possibility and epistemic possibility. If we think of claims about what is metaphysically possible or necessary as attempts to describe a world of modal facts or properties (or features of other worlds, for that matter), we must think of our metaphysical modal terms as having a radically different function and use from other modal terms. But it would be not only strange, but contrary to the developmental evidence, to think that modal terms are simply ambiguous (Papafragou 1998). Deontic, epistemic, and ability senses of modality are generally expressed by a single class of modal expression across many different languages (Papafragou 1998, 371). Moreover, children learn ability and permission uses of modal terms at round the same time [and epistemic uses only later—the closest to alethic modality, which isn't much seen in ordinary discourse], and their acquisition of modal language explodes around the same time as they learn social roles and norms.[1] So there is reason to think that these different modal terms have something in common: making it likely that they be learned together, and expressed in common terms across different languages. It's not terribly plausible to think of them all as describing modal features: the real permissibility of my moving the king backwards; the real obligation to be home by 10. Instead, it's far more plausible to think of all as engaged in conveying some sort of norm.

These problems motivate us to search for a different way of looking at our modal discourse. I will suggest that we should not think of modal discourse as attempting to describe modal features of this world that explain what makes them true, and shouldn't think of modal knowledge as coming through anything like contact with modal features. Instead, we can begin by seeing modal discourse as performing a more basic function: conveying norms—hence the link in the title, norms and necessity. I will deal (almost) exclusively with metaphysical necessity here. On this view, which I have called 'modal normativism', the basic function of talk about what's '*metaphysically* necessary' is not to try to describe modal features of the world, but rather to provide a particularly useful way of expressing constitutive semantic and conceptual rules in the object language. I will argue that a view along these lines is both well-motivated and plausible, and will try to show how we can work from this basic account of the function of metaphysical necessity claims to give an account of the meanings of modal terms, of modal truth, and modal facts and properties without taking the latter to be explanatorily basic features the metaphysician discovers in the world. The result is a view that enables us to avoid the epistemic problems of modality and mitigate the metaphysical worries, while also leaving open the possibility of a unified account of the function of modal language.
But a serious challenge arises from the serious metaphysician, who may acknowledge a relation between modal facts and our conceptual and semantic norms, yet insist that the order of explanation is the other way up: arguing that we have the norms we do in order to track the modal facts of the world, rather than seeing talk of modal features of the

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[1] "This period [the concrete operational stage, around age 7, when the 'negotiation of social roles and tasks begins') coincides with the proliferation of expressions of root modality [deontic, ability, and volition]" (Papafragou, 377). Gordon Wells even concludes: "semantic properties such as the (root) indication of modulation of action or social regulations facilitate the acquisition of modality" (Papafragou 374).

world as involved in hypostatization out of modal truths that reflect conceptual or semantic rules. I will close by discussing how the normativist may answer that challenge.

1. The Functions of Modal Discourse

One arena in which modal verbs serve an overtly normative function is in expressing the rules of games—it is useful to begin by seeing what function they serve there. Without modal verbs, rules can be stated using imperatives (e.g., in checkers, 'Black player: move first'). But we can also state them in the simple indicative form ('The black player moves first'). That shift to the indicative form brings some advantages: it enables us to express conditionals ("If the black player moves first then the red player doesn't move first") that we can use in making explicit our ways of reasoning among rules (to "The red player doesn't move first"). We could not make these ways of reasoning explicit in the imperative form, since imperatives cannot be embedded in conditionals.

But while we may engage in simple reasoning with indicative expressions of rules, there are limits to what we can do, and it is fraught with dangers. For a simple indicative statement of a rule may be mistaken for a description. Call statements of rules and their logical/analytic consequences statements with 'regulative' status. Without an explicit modal term we have no marker for whether an indicative statement does or does not have regulative status, and this may lead us into mistakes. For from "The black player moves first", as regulative, we may conclude "Red doesn't move first", as regulative. But from "The black player moves her leftmost piece", as descriptive, we may not conclude "The black player does not move her rightmost piece" and take this as regulative.

Moreover (as Ryle pointed out), when using simple indicatives, we have no way of expressing permissions, or reasoning from rules to permissions. So while we may express the rule "Black moves first" in a simple indicative, we cannot express the permission: "Kings *may* move both forward and backward" without inserting a modal verb.

Adding a modal verb ("Black *must* move first") thus brings several advantages to stating rules. It makes it explicit that the expression has a regulative rather than descriptive status. It thereby enables us to avoid mistakes, and enables us to express conditionals that make explicit our ways of reasoning with rules. Finally, it enables us express permissions as well as requirements.

On the normativist view, the function of modal verbs is much the same when they appear in metaphysical discourse as on the box tops of games: they help us convey and reason with constitutive rules and permissions in particularly advantageous ways. The idea is not to eliminate the modal or modal vocabulary, but rather to find a way of understanding metaphysical modality in terms of deontic modalities—rules, permissions, and obligations—giving us hope of a more unified account of the function of modal discourse.

The rules at issue, as I have argued elsewhere, are constitutive *semantic or conceptual* rules governing the very terms used in the modal claim. So the modal normativist view requires accepting that our terms are governed by constitutive semantic rules. Just as constitutive rules of games are rules that must be in force for that game to be played at all, so must constitutive semantic rules be in force for that very term (or

concept) to be used at all: if we change the rules of 'bat' (say, from application conditions that would be met by an animal to conditions that would be met by an artifact), we change one term for another (a homonym).

Now, constitutive semantic rules may be conveyed in various ways. They may, of course, be stated in meta-language imperatives that mention rather than using the terms— e.g. "Apply 'bachelor' only where 'man' also applies". But intra-language rules may also be conveyed using analytic claims—expressed in indicatives, in the *object* language, e.g. "all bachelors are men". Basic (unembedded) claims of the form "Necessarily p", like analytic claims, are also used to convey constitutive semantic rules in object-language indicatives and may be used to *correct* or *condemn* uses that violate the rule, but again without *reporting on* the linguistic rules or on the statement p. So, for example, 'Necessarily, all bachelors are men' (or 'Bachelors must be men, dear') may be used to correct a child who has said 'Aunt Laura is always going to stay a bachelor, isn't she?'

But here as in the case of games, adding a modal verb brings various advantages: it makes explicit that the expression has a regulative rather than descriptive status, and so helps us avoid mistakes in reasoning with rules. It also enables us to express conditionals that make explicit our ways of reasoning with rules (among rules, from rules to facts, and between rules and permissions).

Another important advantage of the specifically *modal* formulation here is that it enables us to convey permissible ways of speaking. A claim of the form "It is possible that a woman be president" conveys that 'a woman is president' uses the terms in accord with the rules, without *asserting* that a woman is president.

In short, then, our modal expressions fulfill a number of functions that couldn't be fulfilled by simple indicatives:

1. 'Necessarily' makes explicit that the expression has regulative status
2. Modal terms enable us to state conditionals and make explicit our ways of reasoning with rules
3. 'Possibly' enables us convey permissions as well as requirements

These are some reasons it's advantageous to introduce modal terms in expressing constitutive semantic rules. But why is it advantageous to convey *semantic* rules in the *object* language, under conditions of semantic descent, rather than stating them in a meta-language—particularly when this may mislead us into thinking that they aim to describe modal features of the world?

One advantage of using the object language is simply that it is less cumbersome, and more familiar to most speakers who don't happen to be linguists or philosophers. But there is more to it than that: for semantic rules may take many forms. The constitutive rules reflected in standard analytic claims like "All bachelors are men" are *intra-language* or *language-language* rules: rules governing when one expression is to be applied, stated in terms of when another expression is to be applied. But constitutive rules may also take the form of *world-language* rules: the sort of rules taught through ostensive definitions. Such world-regarding rules are set up by (explicit or implicit) ostensive definitions (e.g. "Call *this chemical kind* 'water'".) World-regarding rules cannot be fully stated in the meta-language since we need an object-language term (e.g. a demonstrative) to perform the ostensive definition (and set up the rule). But they can be conveyed in object-language modal indicatives.

Acknowledging the presence of semantic rules of many different forms, including

world-language rules, is crucially important. For it enables us to handle the challenges raised by Kripkean cases of *a posteriori* and *de re* necessities—challenges that have often kept any view along these lines off the agenda. I'll leave discussion of exactly how that goes to one side, to concentrate on some new points here, but we can discuss it in the q&a if anyone would like to.

2. The meaning of modal discourse

So far I have argued that the fundamental function of basic claims of *metaphysical* necessity is not to describe modal features of the world that make them true, but rather to explicitly convey constitutive semantic rules in the useful form of object-language indicatives, while also enabling us to express permissions as well as requirements.

But (as those who raise the Frege/Geach problem would remind us) giving an account of how modal discourse enters the language and of its pragmatic *function* and typical uses is not yet to give an account of the *meanings* of modal claims: for modal claims may also be used in contexts where they are embedded in hypotheticals or negation, and so are not being used to convey any constitutive rules. To avoid the Frege-Geach problem, we must not only say what the function of modal discourse is, but also of what the meanings of modal terms are, of how modal claims may express propositions and be true, reasoned with, and believed.

This is again a problem I have addressed elsewhere, so I will only discuss it briefly here: In brief, we can avoid the Frege-Geach problem by identifying the meaning of '(metaphysical) necessity' with its inferential and epistemic role—in such a way that a term that follows these inferential and epistemic rules is able to fulfill the characteristic functions identified above.

"Necessity", I have argued elsewhere, follows two rules: call them '**I**' and '**E**' (for 'introduction' and 'elimination'):[2]

> **I:** If p is an object-language expression of a constitutive semantic rule (or a logical consequence of constitutive semantic rules), then you are entitled to conclude: Necessarily p, regardless of any subjunctive suppositions.

Rule **I** licenses us to add on the necessity operator to any analytic claim, so, e.g. from "All bachelors are men" we may get "Necessarily, all bachelors are men". It also licenses us to add 'necessarily' to any object-language expression of an ostensive definition. The ostensive definition "call stuff of this chemical kind 'water'" may be expressed in the object language as: "stuff of this chemical kind is water"; to that we can add 'Necessarily' to get: "Necessarily, stuff of this chemical kind = water". This rule enables us to make the regulative status of our expressions explicit, fulfilling function 1.

A second rule tells us what use we may make of these rules (now made explicit) in reasoning. Putting it informally, if we have an object-language statement of a constitutive semantic rule available as a premise, we are entitled to carry it over and make use of it as a premise in our reasoning, under any suppositions (as long as those very terms are being used at all). So, if we have *Necessarily p*, then we may use p in reasoning under any suppositions we may make about ways in which the world might have been different:

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[2] These parallel Restall's rules []R and []L respectively (forthcoming, 6-7). Restall argues that from []R and []L, combined with the standard rules, we can derive all the features of S5 (forthcoming, 7).

E: If you have *Necessarily p* as a premise, you may use p as a premise in your reasoning anywhere, under any subjunctive suppositions.

This rule enables 'necessarily' to fulfill the second function, enabling us to make explicit our ways of reasoning with rules, licensing us, for example, to move from 'necessarily all cats are mammals' to employ 'all cats are mammals' in our reasoning, regardless of any subjunctive suppositions.

As long as 'necessarily' is in a language involving negation, we may also fulfill function (3) of conveying permissions as well as requirements. For we can convey that p is permissible by writing ~[]~p. More succinctly, we can do all this by adding to the above principles the standard definition of possibility:

◊Df: ◊p iff ~[]~p

This may be taken as constitutive of the meaning of 'possibly', and enables basic possibility statements to fulfill their function of conveying permissions (by making evident what is not ruled out by the requirements).

Once we have that account of the meanings of the modal terms 'necessarily' and 'possibly' in place, we can combine it with a deflationary approach to propositions and truth to say how it is that, despite their basic normative function, modal expressions may be believed, be true, and be used in valid reasoning.

The first step is to adopt a deflationary approach to propositions (following Schiffer), allowing that introduction rules license us to move from any indicative sentence: p to derive the singular term "The proposition that P", which is guaranteed to refer (whether or not the original indicative was true). Claims of the form "Necessarily q" are themselves indicative sentences, and so we may apply the same rules to derive: "The proposition that *Necessarily q*" (or, more colloquially, "The proposition that it is necessary that q"), and so there is no barrier to thinking that modal claims express propositions, may be believed, and so on, in just the usual sense. Modal normativism is not a form of non-cognitivism.

Adopting a deflationary theory of truth also enables us to classify modal statements as true or false[3] without their having to be made true by modal features of the world.[4] We can, e.g., begin from 'All bachelors are men', and (since that is an object-language expression of a constitutive semantic rule) Rule I licenses us to add 'necessarily' and assert "Necessarily, all bachelors are men". Since the concept of truth is simply governed by the equivalence schema: <p> is true iff p, we can recognize the

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[3] It is, of course, not unprecedented to simply deny that modal claims may be true: Wittgenstein denied that claims of necessity can, strictly speaking, be true. For discussion of Wittgenstein's denial, see Wright (1980, 375). Bueno and Shalkowski (2004) also deny, on rather different grounds, that modal claims need to be true.

[4] We needn't here decide among deflationary views of truth. Other alternatives include following pro-sententialists (Grover et. al. 1975) in taking the claim: "'Necessarily p' is true" to be just a matter of (re-)asserting 'Necessarily p', then the standards governing saying: "'Necessarily p' is true" do not diverge from those governing saying: 'Necessarily p'. The standards for saying 'Necessarily p' are that p is an object-language expression of a rule or its consequence.[4] Blackburn offers another route, suggesting that the quasi-realist take truth in the relevant domain (about which we are being quasi-realist) to be a matter of *correctness* according to the relevant standards—where these standards need not be those of correspondence to reality (1993, 55). For a helpful comparative evaluation of different deflationary theories of truth, see Horwich (2010, Chapter 2).

equivalence of this with "'Necessarily, all bachelors are men' is true". The uncontroversial equivalence schema applies just as well to modal as nonmodal indicatives, so there is no problem in allowing that modal claims may be true. Once we have allowed that basic modal claims may be true or false, it is clear that they may be used in standard forms of truth-conditional reasoning.[5]

Once we have modal truths, we can move to introduce terms for modal facts and properties: For we can derive singular terms referring not only to modal propositions, but also to modal properties and facts, by way of trivial transformations from uncontroversial truths. So, from "Necessarily, all bachelors are men" we may move to: "It is a fact that it is necessary that all bachelors are men", and then to "there is a modal fact". Similarly, from a *de re* necessary claim, such as "Obama is necessarily human" we can move to "Obama has the property of necessarily being human" and thus assert that there is a modal property.[6] So the normativist position, as I see it, is one on which we get a straightforward first-order realism about modal properties and facts.

But it is not a realism that takes modal facts and properties as *explanatorily* basic—treating modal truths as descriptions made true by modal facts or properties, and modal knowledge as derived from detecting these modal features. Instead, we work the other way up: we begin by understanding the function of modal discourse, use that to build an account of the meaning of 'necessity' (in terms of its inferential and epistemic role), use that (combined with a deflationary approach to truth and ontology) to account for modal truth, and explain our talk of modal facts and properties in terms of hypostatizations from necessary truths.

3. The Payoffs: Epistemic, Metaphysical, Linguistic

Having said something about how the normativist position on metaphysical modalities goes, let me now say something about why it is appealing. The most important attraction is the epistemic advantage of resolving the notorious difficulties in accounting for our knowledge of modal facts. We can rid ourselves of the troubling picture that we must peer into this world or other possible worlds to discover modal facts—troubling since specifically modal facts seem not to be empirically detectable—and so demystify modal knowledge. The normativist demystifies modal knowledge by considering the move from *using* language to knowing *basic* metaphysical modal facts expressible in one's home language to be a matter of moving from *mastering* the rules for properly applying and refusing expressions (as a competent speaker), to being able to explicitly *convey* these constitutive rules in the object language and indicative mood, and to generalize and reason from them. While this may often be challenging, the move from mastering rules to being able to convey them explicitly in this way is not deeply mysterious—something similar must be done in working out grammatical rules, cultural behavioral rules, and in general in moving from competence to explicit instruction.

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[5] Jamie Dreier (1996) famously argues that truth minimalism does not help solve the embedding problem. But the upshot is that it does not do so on its own; we must first solve the embedding problem (e.g. by offering an inferential role account of the *meaning* of 'necessarily') and then we may find it attractive to adopt truth minimalism (to make a clean and straightforward account of how modal claims, so understood, may be true, may be reasoned with, etc. (1996, 39)). That is precisely how I proceed above.
[6] We can derive talk about essences in the same way.

We also mitigate the metaphysical worries about modality—we no longer need to look for truthmakers capable of explaining what makes our modal facts or propositions true (for the account of modal truth runs from the rules of use for 'necessarily' to the deflationary view of truth—with no appeal to correspondence to modal facts). Nor do we need to posit modal features of the world as the basis for modal knowledge (which we acquire by somehow coming into contact with these modal features, as one acquires knowledge of seahorses by commerce with seahorses). Nonetheless, the normativist is not an eliminativist: she may insist that there are modal facts and properties *in the only sense that these terms have;* a sense in part constituted by the rules that introduce such noun terms into our vocabulary, and even that in some sense these modal facts and properties are what much metaphysical discourse is 'about'. We might say this is a simple realism about modal facts and properties, rather than an *explanatory* realism.

Finally, we can at least see where to look for a unified account of our modal terms. What might modal terms used in giving moral or parental rules and permissions, conveying rules of games, epistemic possibilities, and metaphysical necessities have in common? Plausibly, they just might all serve to convey norms of different kinds: whether norms of behavior (local or categorical), norms of inference, or norms of use for our terms or concepts. This, of course, isn't so much as to sketch an answer to the difficult issues of how to understand these other modal terms, but it does at least leave the way open to find a plausible picture of what these modal terms have in common—a picture that is not open if we take metaphysical modal terms as seriously descriptive.

4. The Metaphysician Strikes Back

I have so far tried to make the normativist picture of metaphysical modality both plausible and attractive. But traditionally minded metaphysicians may object as follows: Consider the constitutive semantic rules, which (according to the normativist) are reflected in our object-language claims of metaphysical necessity. Are they simply arbitrary, or did they *have* to be this way? If we take the first option, the accusation goes, the normativist view seems to be too much like old-fashioned conventionalism, and to leave us with the view that the basic necessary truths could have been different if we had adopted different semantic rules; and that what rules we have are completely arbitrary (when in fact they seem quite natural). On the other hand, if we say: no, the rules *have to* be this way, then we seem to be building modality in on the ground floor after all. The picture the critic seems to want at this stage is that the semantic rules *have to be* that way: that we have the semantic rules we do *for a reason*, namely, to enable us to track the modal boundaries in the world. But in that case we must invoke the modal features to explain why we have the rules that we have, rather than starting from rules to (ultimately) explain object-language talk of modal features: the direction of explanation goes the other way up, and we must after all presuppose an explanatory modal realism, and a view of modal talk as describing those modal features of reality.

But it is important to notice the differences between this normativist view and classical conventionalist views—especially as they are traditionally (mis-)understood in contemporary analytic philosophy. First, we must also rid ourselves of the mistaken idea that the view entails that if the rules were different, different things would have been necessary or possible (compare my 2007, Chapter 3). That is simply not so. If the

constitutive rules governing the letters 'building' for example, were different, enabling us to apply 'same building as' where a structure is destroyed and replaced with a roughly resembling one on the same site, then it's not the case that in that world a building [now using our term] could survive demolition (whereas in the actual world they can't). Instead, it would be that a building* (their homophonic term) could survive demolition. That is a modal truth that is not expressible in our language, but that's not to say that it's false at our world; it's just that we don't have the word for it. In short, where semantic rules differ, there are differences in what modal truths may be *expressed*, quite simply because the languages differ—but that should be no surprise. But that's not to say that which modal claims (if they were to be uttered) would be *true* differs where the languages differ. We needn't let the critic worry us on that score.

Second, when I say that basic metaphysical necessities are object-language reflections of constitutive semantic or conceptual rules, this is not tied to the idea that the rules are merely *conventional or arbitrary*.[7] It is entirely open to the modal normativist to hold that at least some of our concepts are governed by basic rules that are built-in for creatures like us, that are innate or natural. It is, of course, an empirical issue whether any such basic concepts are built in to human beings or other species, and if so what they are and what rules govern them—but there is no reason the normativist must deny that some such rules may 'come naturally' and thus not be 'merely conventional' or arbitrary in a sense that would see them as the products of groundless choice. Normativism is not conventionalism.

In fact, good psychological evidence has been amassed for the idea that there are certain basic concepts, which Susan Carey (2009) calls those tied to 'core cognition', which are a product of natural selection (Carey 71-72). Carey identifies these as including concepts for middle-sized objects, agents, causation, and quantity (Carey 449). All of these concepts, Carey argues, are generated by innate input analyzers, which act on perceptual input *in accord with rules* built-in as a product of evolution.[8] The object concept, for example, involves rules in which tracking spatio-temporal continuity plays a key role in object individuation and identification, as do features like perceived rigidity and cohesiveness. Thus here we can see certain rules for identifying the presence of an object and for reidentifying the same object over time as built-in to contemporary people as the product of a long evolutionary process.[9] For, as Carey writes: "All the work to date suggests that the core cognition of objects exhibited by young infants has a long evolutionary history" shared with cottontop tamarins (with whom our common ancestor reaches back more than 100 million years) and our closer relatives, the Rhesus macaques (2009, 96). Many of the modal judgments as we make, verbally or non-verbally, about object identity, continuity and number, may be seen as reflections of these rules: rules that are not arbitrary or conventional but built in as the products of a long evolutionary process.

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[8] Thus we shouldn't think of basic experience as merely involving perceptual primitives, and on that basis learning and constructing representations of objects, number, agency, or causality: indeed she says that there is no known proposal for how this learning could work (456).
[9] Stephen Pinker makes a similar point that certain rules may be built-in, writing: "a rule doesn't gain its power from being pounded into the child's mind. Instead, it may gain its power from the very nature of the child's mind" (1999, 270).

The idea that some concepts are more basic than others, and that some rules (and with them certain concepts) may be built-in as the product of evolution is certainly open to the modal normativist—whose claim is not that these are arbitrary, merely conventional, or anything like that, but rather that what is explanatorily basic is rules, and that our talk of kinds and modal features in the world is an object-language reflection of these basic rules.[10]

But if such basic concepts are built-in for us as a product of evolution (the critic might ask) doesn't that give us reason to think that they are built-in *for a reason:* that they track those categories and modal features of the world that *there really are,* leading us back again to an explanatory form of modal realism?

There is no need, however, to presuppose explanatory realism about modality to accept the view that natural selection is responsible for the most basic set of rules underlying our conceptual system. Natural selection doesn't care a bit about correspondence to a modal or categorical reality. It cares about the *success* of the organism*:* success at surviving, success at breeding. All of this can be understood in perfectly pragmatic terms that simply appeal to the fact that these rules are very *useful* to have—more useful than rules that would track simply by property continuity or location or other ranges of perceptual features. The evolutionary usefulness of certain core category concepts no more provides evidence for a kind of explanatory modal realism than the usefulness of color perception in enabling us to avoid dangerous snakes and detect tasty fruit provides evidence for a sort of color realism that would say we have experiences with these phenomenal qualities because these qualities as we experience them are part of the world, or than the fact that those who aren't depressed survive better shows that they have a more accurate perception of their own abilities (it is actually worse).

Ah, but if the normativist accepts that given the way we evolved, we *had to* have basic concepts something like these to survive—even if she rejects the idea that that is because they reflect the true modal properties of the world—aren't we still bringing in a deep metaphysical necessity when we say that (given the laws of natural selection—perhaps plus facts about the environment and the mutations that occurred) we *had to have* concepts with these basic rules?

 To the extent that laws are involved in making this sort of claim, they are not laws expressing metaphysical necessities, but rather scientific laws regarding the relation between possessing certain types of conceptual systems and survival in various environments. But there seems to be no good reason to think that scientific laws themselves have to be understood as attempts to describe physical necessities in the world that explain what makes them true. As mentioned above, one attraction of normativism is the hope of unifying our understanding of different sorts of modal claim as all reflecting (different sorts) of norm: while metaphysical modalities are reflections of constitutive semantic or conceptual rules, the natural correlate view would take the

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[10] Can built-in rules really be normative? Yes, if evolution may be normative. And also yes, if we retain and accept them and tie them to linguistic rules, rather than overriding them [that they may be and are overridden: see Carey 69. As soon as language comes in, we've explicitly got rules—and there's evidence that language acquisition shapes the use of these rules (Carey 254, 465): e.g. if infants hear items labeled the same, they are more likely to classify them together. Language learning affects use of sortals.

physical necessities expressed in scientific laws to reflect for norms of reasoning on the basis of empirical evidence, or something along those lines. (Views that take scientific laws to be non-descriptive have been around: e.g. Ryle's view that statements of scientific laws serve as inference tickets (licensing possessors to move from asserting some factual statements to others (1949, 121), and Sellars' view that they function not to report the presence of necessary connections in the world, but rather to serve to justify or endorse inferences (1958, 281-283; cf. Brandom 2008, Chapter 4)). As Michael Williams writes, "On a Sellarsian approach, causal talk is a special kind of normative talk" (2010, 324-5). Exactly how to work out the details is beyond the scope of this paper, but as long as some such treatment of claims of scientific laws is defensible, there is no need for the normativist to shy away from claims—if empirically justified—that the rules governing certain basic concepts are not accidental.

So it is entirely open to the normativist to embrace the empirical evidence that there are some basic concepts, complete with rules for individuation, that are built-in for us—while denying that we have these rules because they map the modal facts. The move to avoid arbitrariness by appealing to the naturalness of certain basic concepts, however, clearly won't work across the board—for it is just implausible that many of our social and culturally-local concepts are built-in. Clearly a great many more concepts are built from the most basic ones: concepts that are tightly tied to our linguistic sortals and their particular rules, and that vary across different language and culture groups. How can we respond to the arbitrariness worry in these cases? Well, for starters, the worry seems far less urgent—in many of these cases, it doesn't seem out of place to allow that there is some arbitrariness in rules, e.g. for whether this counts as the same nation as that (is Latvia the same nation now as it was in 1920, before the period of more than 50 years of Soviet (and German) rule?) or this is the same literary work or festival as that. It does not seem terribly plausible to think that these terms are designed to 'match' modal boundaries discoverable deep in the world—instead, we seem to adopt precise rules as we need them to adjudicate legal or political disputes.

Nonetheless, even in these cases, we needn't treat the rules that govern our particular sortal terms (and thus that are reflected in basic modal truths regarding the objects if any picked out by those sortals) as completely arbitrary, even if we don't say that they are designed to map the modal features of reality.

Considering the rules of games again may help: it would be absurd to suggest that the rules of checkers, say, are designed to map the facts about what really is obligatory and permissible in the game (facts which make the rules true). Yet even if we don't treat the rules as trying to map the facts, and correct to the extent that they do so, we also needn't say that the rules are completely arbitrary. It is not arbitrary, for example, that one player is permitted to control all of the red pieces and the other all of the black pieces rather than, say, one being given 9 red pieces and 3 black, while the other has the converse. That would be confusing, and hard to track who was entitled to move which pieces: in short it would be a disaster from a *pragmatic* point of view. Nor is it arbitrary that the players alternate moves rather than, say, the black player being permitted to make seven moves for every play the red player makes: that would lead to such accusations of unfairness that no one would want to play such a game—such a game would not be taken up and survive in our culture. In short, that, too, would be a pragmatic disaster. Similarly,

the rules defining what counts as a foul in basketball, football, or soccer are not arbitrary, but rather are largely designed with the pragmatic goal in mind of limiting player injuries.

So we can respond to the arbitrariness worry in part by saying that the rules governing our concepts and terms are not arbitrary to the extent that adopting these rules rather than their rivals is of *pragmatic* use to us. It may, for example, be of pragmatic use to individuate artifacts in part by their shape (rather than their color or location), since this is so often crucial to preserving their proper function (which is what we care about), while individuating mere lumps by quantity of matter rather than shape or color reflects their role in our practices of buying and selling basic materials—where we care not about the shape.

If these replies to the serious metaphysician's worries about arbitrariness and circularity are sufficient, we are left with good reason to take the normativist's alternative approach to modality very seriously indeed: for it can help us overcome the traditionalist's traditional epistemic and metaphysical problems of modality, and give us hope of getting a more unified approach to our diverse modal terms than would be possible on a descriptivist view.

5. Conclusions:

So where does all this leave us with respect to the metaphysical question with which we began: what categories of entity there are, and what their modal properties are? If the normativist view is on the right track, the metaphysician's blithe indifference to issues about what concepts and terms we have, and what rules govern them—the sorts of issue well spoken to by cognitive psychology, philosophy of language, and linguistics—is naïve and misguided. For on this view there is a very close relation between the object-oriented work of metaphysics, and the language- and concept-oriented work of linguists and psychologists: the modal truths metaphysicians may express in the object language will parallel conceptual or semantic rules the psychologist or linguist might uncover and make explicit in the meta-language.

And on this view we arrive at modal knowledge (presupposed also in knowledge of category differences) only through knowledge of the corresponding rules: in the case of claims in our home language, we may do this by mastering the rules and then coming to explicitly convey them in object-language indicatives. But if we want to be able to discover such modal truths as are expressible in some alien linguistic or conceptual scheme (one we have not mastered), we must take a somewhat different route. If I want to discover what sorts of change a Shinto shrine may survive, or what persistence conditions come with objects—as infants conceptualize them—we may need to rely on the work of empirical linguistics and psychology to discern what rules govern the use of the relevant terms and concepts. Even in one's home language, empirical work may be needed to confirm that I have mastered the relevant rules, and so to acquire the higher-order knowledge that I have the relevant metaphysical knowledge.

There is also an important Carnapian lesson to be drawn out of this: If categories are distinguished largely in terms of modal features, and modal features are reflections of conceptual or semantic rules, then we must also see the categories we find in the world as reflecting the semantic and conceptual rules we put to work in our interaction with the world. But then idea that there is a single best language, best because the concepts and terms of it correspond to the modal and categorical features of the world, is—on this

conception—misguided. Nonetheless, some categories may be basic to creatures like us, others derivative; some better suited to our survival, reproduction or other pragmatic aims; others less well suited. And we may legitimately engage in projects such as trying to discover the most basic concepts in our scheme, their relation to derivative concepts, and the rules governing all of these concepts—projects in which cognitive psychology and linguistics, as well as our own competence and mastery, may have a significant role to play in acquiring or justifying the metaphysical knowledge we go on to express in the object language.