Reply to Critics*

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1. Introduction

I am very grateful to the critics – Stephanie Leary, Kris McDaniel, Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett – for their thoughtful articles about *Choosing Normative Concepts*[1], and appreciate the opportunity to reply to their questions and criticisms.

Before turning to what the critics say, let me summarize some main themes from the book. The summary will of necessity be somewhat brief, and short on arguments. Those looking for more arguments are advised to consult the book.

The main themes in the book are linked to issues that come up in connection with conceptual engineering.[2] A guiding thought behind attention to conceptual engineering is that our actual concepts are only some among all possible concepts there are; and that some possible concepts may be better, along relevant dimensions, than actual concepts are. Maybe some possible concepts better limn the metaphysical structure of reality. Maybe some concepts are, for various reasons, more epistemically useful than the ones we use: they are more suited for inductive generalizations, or are more explanatory, or are simply more suitable for creatures like us to employ. Maybe some concepts are better for specific moral and political purposes: their use serves to highlight injustices and mobilize political action. In the book, the focus is on normative concepts, including the most central normative concepts, *right*, *ought*, *good*, *reason*.[3] Often when we question which concepts to use, we ask what concept best serves some good cause or what concept we ought to use. But can we not question concepts like good, right and ought themselves? Might there not be other, better concepts to employ than

* Many thanks to Daniel Fogal, Nils Franzén and Olle Risberg for comments on an earlier version of these replies, and thanks to each of the presents the critics for helpful discussions. Leary and McPherson were two of the critics at an Author-meets-Critics session at the Pacific APA meeting in San Diego, 2018 (William FitzPatrick was the third critic). An early version of some of my replies to them was presented at that occasion.

[1] Eklund (2017). In what follows, references are to this book unless otherwise specified.

[2] Compare ch. 10.

[3] I use "normative" broadly, to cover also what is sometimes called evaluative.

these?[4] Now, there are many dimensions along which concepts can be evaluated as better or worse than others. One concept can be funnier than another, or more interesting, or it may ascribe a more fundamental property than another. The kind of betterness that I seek to question has to do, roughly, with being better for the kinds of practical, action-guiding purposes to which we paradigmatically put normative concepts.[5] However, as we shall see (if it is not readily apparent), it is elusive, and for principled reasons, what is at issue here.

Here is how I introduce the issue in the book. Among the possible normative concepts there are, there are ones which are *alternatives* to our actual ones in the sense that they play the same *normative roles* – roughly, action-guiding or motivating roles – as our actual ones but are not coextensive with them. Suppose some other community, call them *the Others*, use such alternative concepts. Then it seems there is an issue of who gets it right, we or the Others, when we seek to do what is 'right' in our sense and they seek to do what is 'right' in their sense. (This kind of scenario is what I call *Alternative* in the book.) Should we go with with one concept or with the other when making decisions about how to act? One may at first think that this question has an easy answer: we should go with the concept that is the right one to use. But the problem is that from the perspective of the Others it may equally seem that there is an easy choice: go with the concept that is the 'right' one to use in their sense.

Some philosophers may be completely unmoved by the supposed problem. They may be happy with the thought that the choice between the right and the 'right' action is at bottom one of plumping for one or the other. There's what is "right" in our sense and what is "right" in the Others' sense *and that is that*. But for anyone who seeks a certain kind of objectivity in normative matters, there should be the sense that there is a genuine *further question* as to which concepts to employ, and that there is an objective answer to this question. In the book, I use the label *ardent realist* for someone who is a realist and seeks this kind of objectivity. As I note, one can seek this kind of objectivity without buying into other theses associated with realism.[6] However, I will here, for simplicity, assume that the philosopher targeted as a realist of a special kind – an ardent realist.

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[4] Throughout I will use "normative" as a broad covering term, also applying what is sometimes instead rather called "evaluative". Also, needless to say, expressions like "good" and "right" are used differently in different contexts. What I focus on are concepts expressed by these expressions in certain uses.
[5] Here is one complication regarding how to formulate the matter. Even a hardcore utilitarian might think that on utilitarian grounds, utilitarian concepts ought not to be used: their employment does not have the best consequences. In the sense in which I discuss "best" normative concepts, this utilitarian still thinks utilitarian concepts are the best. They are still the ones that ascribe the normatively most crucial properties, and draw the relevant distinctions.
[6] See section 8.3.

In the book, I describe the ardent realist as someone who holds that reality itself favors certain ways of acting.[7] I hope that is an evocative description, even though it certainly is impressionistic. The idea is that if there is not this further question then certain actions are right in our sense and others are 'right' in their sense, and those are all the relevant facts there are. Reality does not favor some of these actions over others.

The ardent realist holds that there is a real question at issue between us and the Others. But there are problems regarding what this supposed question might be. If we try to state it using our normative vocabulary – "what concepts ought we to use?", "what concepts are the right ones to use?" – the problem is that our normative concepts are what are questioned. What exactly have we learned if we can conclude that our concepts are the right ones to use, if the Others can equally well conclude "our concepts are the right ones to use", in *their* sense of "right"? One might instead try to state the supposed question using descriptive terms. Some metaethicists have recently adopted metaphysicians' talk of being *joint-carving*, or *elite*, and they might see the question as one of which normative concepts are joint-carving. However, as I argue in the book, eliteness in the metaphysician's sense is not immediately normatively relevant. Generally, if we try to formulate the supposed question in non-normative terms, then we have changed the subject. The ardent realist faces a *dilemma*. Either there is no question of whether we or the Others use the "right" concepts (the quotation marks around "right" are scare quotes!), or there is such a question but it is inexpressible. The first horn is unacceptable to the ardent realist: that way lies mere plumping. The second horn is compatible with ardent realism, but the idea of inexpressible questions is hard to accept.

One thing I centrally explore in the book is whether the ardent realist can respond to the problem by denying that the supposed dilemma arises in the first place. The dilemma arises on the assumption that there are alternative normative concepts are described. But maybe this assumption can be rejected. If normative role determines reference – if sameness of normative role guarantees sameness of reference[8] – then there cannot be alternative normative concepts as described, for then concepts associated with the same normative role are guaranteed to be coextensive. The scenario Alternative is not possible after all. This is a *metasemantic* way out, since it appeals to ideas about reference-determination. If a normative concept has its reference determined in this way then it is, in my terminology,

[7] p. 1.
[8] Here as elsewhere, distinctions can be drawn between saying on the one hand that sameness of A-facts guarantees sameness of B-facts and on the other hand that A-facts determine B-facts. Covariation can obtain without determination. For simplicity, I will speak of "determination", and only in footnotes keep track of whether the distinction matters.

referentially normative. A theory of the reference of normative concepts which allows that Alternative is possible is *Alternative-friendly*; other theories are *Alternative-unfriendly*.

There is much to say about this proposed way out. One question is obviously whether it is plausible that normative role can determine reference in the way required. But other questions concern whether, even if it is so, this serves to get around the general kind of problem at issue. What if, say, the alternative community uses normative concepts with slightly different normative roles from the ones our concepts are associated with? Can't that sort of scenario be used to raise a new version of the problem? (This is what I call the *embarrassment of riches* problem. Normative role determines reference, but there are *too many* normative roles successfully doing so.) What if normative role determines reference, but, so to speak, for the wrong kind of reason? (To illustrate the latter concern: Suppose a capricious god has decided for all concepts with the same normative role as our concept *right* to have the same extension. This god has then decided to let normative role determine reference, in the sense that sameness of normative role guarantees sameness of reference.[9] But this is for a normatively irrelevant reason, and doesn't even suggest that there is anything especially choiceworthy about what is in the extension of these concepts.[10])

Above I mentioned conceptual engineering. One way the conceptual engineering perspective is of concrete relevance for what I discuss in the book has to do with how to understand the talk of normative role determining reference. The proposal, properly understood, isn't that the normative roles of all or some of our actual normative concepts determine reference, but that the normative roles of some possible concepts do. So long as the latter is true, the ardent realist may focus on these possible concepts, and the truths stated employing them.[11] The fate of ardent realism, which is a metaphysical thesis, does not turn on what concepts we happen to have.

In my discussion of the problem, I use the notion of normative role. I do leave that notion largely unspecified also in the book, but I talk about a concept's normative role as the specific action-guiding or motivating role of the concept. A concept's normative role is that specific aspect of the concept's employment which makes its use normative.

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[9] It can reasonably be objected that in the situation envisaged, normative role doesn't actually determine reference, even if there is necessary covariation. In fact, general questions about what determination is come up here. Suffice it here to say that it is sufficient to block the dilemma from arising is that sameness of normative role guarantees sameness of reference.
[10] Here the complication mentioned in fn9 is relevant. Maybe in the case of the capricious God, it isn't strictly normative role which determines reference: instead the god guarantees that reference covaries with normative role. One could envisage the view that problem mentioned in the text that the problem goes away if it genuinely is normative role that determines reference.
[11] p. 15.

Do note that the talk of "normatively privilege" here and elsewhere must be taken with a grain of salt. If we could simply help ourselves to that notion, we could express the question at issue in terms of what is normatively privileged. But any talk of what is "normatively privileged" must be understood to be merely promissory at best. There is a live threat that, e.g., if there are different non-coextensive concepts with the same normative role as "right", the same goes for "normatively privileged".

The questions just described at some length are the central questions of the book. In chapters four and five I discuss a different theme. What are normative concepts and what are normative properties? Do all normative concepts ascribe normative properties? Are all concepts that ascribe normative properties normative concepts? In the case of normative concepts, I distinguish three views. One is that what makes a concept normative is that it ascribes a normative property (*the metaphysical view*).[12] Another is that what makes a concept normative is being appropriately connected to some given, paradigmatic normative concept (*the minimalist view*).[13] A third is that what makes a concept normative is being associated with a given normative role. My favored view is the third one. Against the metaphysical view, I argue that some normative concepts (e.g. some thick concepts) don't ascribe normative properties, and that some concepts ascribe normative properties without themselves being normative – e.g. suppose the Martians introduce 'thgir' by the stipulation that it ascribe the same property as our expression 'right'. Against the minimalist view I argue, e.g., that even if that view is extensionally adequate, what it focuses on cannot be what normativity of concepts consists in. In the case of normative properties, I also focus on normative role, suggesting that a property is normative just in case it can be ascribed by a concept whose reference is determined by its normative role. Note that this is just a biconditional: I do not claim to identify what *makes* a property normative.

As I stress in the book, these views on the normativity of concepts and of properties are independent of what I say regarding alternative normative concepts and ardent realism.[14] The only connection there is, is more indirect. The discussions serve to illustrate the potential usefulness of the notion of normative role.

The commentators' articles are all wide-ranging, but some common, or otherwise particularly central, themes are worth flagging right away. In different ways, all the commentators

[12] p. 71.
[13] p. 85.
[14] p. 104.

question my focus on metasemantic questions about reference-determination, and propose other kinds of suggestions on behalf of the ardent realist. McPherson proposes focusing on what he calls authoritatively normative concepts, and this appeal to authoritativeness is a central theme in his remarks. Leary proposes a constructive characterization of what it is for a property to be normative, and also proposes that the ardent realist can take the relevant notion of normativity or normative privilege to be primitive. Plunkett's main point involves problematizing the notion of "normative role", thereby creating further problems for the ardent realist. There are different sorts of features that one can focus on when explicating this notion, and he thinks attending to this problem displays significant problems for ardent realism beyond those that I discuss in the book. McDaniel criticizes my appeal to metasemantics and instead focuses on, in his terminology, concepts that are conflicting alternatives. Both McDaniel and McPherson also criticize what I say about normative concepts and normative properties.

Speaking very generally, what I do in the book is to describe a problem which is supposed to be novel and important, to draw distinctions and characterize concepts which I find important when dealing with the problem, and to critically discuss different responses to the problem. The critics participating in this symposium are generally sympathetic to the problem, and its supposed novelty and importance.

I can certainly envisage criticism of the book which focuses on discrediting the central problem and its supposed novelty.[15] But the present critics tend rather to focus on what concepts and distinctions I describe as central for dealing with problem. That said, one can read Leary as maintaining that some things which non-naturalist realists anyway want to hold – in particular, regarding how they think of normative concepts – are sufficient for dealing with the problem. That is a way of dismissing the significance of the problem. And, as I will get to, some things McDaniel says about what is enough for the ardent realist also suggest that there are simple off-the-shelf solutions to the supposed novel problem.

2. Metaphysics and metasemantics

The first part of my response – the next four subsections – will mainly center on a theme brought up by all four commentators: the supposed relevance of metasemantics to the fate of ardent realism.

2.1 The 'alarming symmetry'

[15] Among the responses to date, what comes closest to fitting that description is the review of my book by Bykvist and Olson (2019) I reply to them in my (2019).

McPherson begins by very nicely setting out the problem that sets the stage or my discussion of ardent realism. He calls the problem one of "alarming symmetry". There are alternative normative concepts, and the threat is that there is an alarming symmetry between employing some normative concepts and using some other normative concepts: there is nothing to mark some normative concepts or others as normatively privileged. There is a symmetry. And it is alarming, for we intuitively want there to be something that privileges some possible normative concepts over others.

McPherson devotes much of section 2 of his paper to showing how ruling out Alternative is not sufficient for ardent realism. He anticipates the response I am inclined to give: that my point anyway is that ruling out Alternative is necessary, not that it is sufficient, and hence I can take the points about insufficiency in my stride. When remarking on this, he says that his bigger point is that ruling out Alternative (which is a matter of metasemantics) does not have "*any* bearing on whether ardent realism is possible".[16] I agree regarding the intuitive force of the considerations he brings up. But I keep wanting to reply: yes, yes, but this appeal to metasemantics is still what is needed to break the "alarming symmetry" – and the turn to metasemantics is driven by that problem, and not any supposed immediate intuitive appeal of the move.

As McPherson lays out, there are two ways around the alarming symmetry:

(i) allowing that Alternative is possible, and then finding a way to *break* the symmetry, or
(ii) ruling out the possibility of Alternative, thereby *preventing* the symmetry challenge from arising.[17]

I regard the prospects of (i) as pretty hopeless. To say that there is a way of breaking the symmetry is to say that there is some feature which makes some concept *normatively privileged*, as we may put it. But no matter how we try specifically to put this, we run into problems. If we describe the feature in normative terms, the question arises: which normative terms? Our or some other community's? And if we try to do things purely descriptively then we seem simply to have changed the topic. So if there is a way of breaking the symmetry we don't seem to be able to express it. There remains the possibility of saying that it is simply inexpressible what breaks the symmetry, but this appeal to inexpressibility faces the same general problems that appeals to inexpressibility always face. Either what is inexpressible is still thinkable, or it is not. If it is not thinkable then we do not grasp or

[16] McPherson (this issue).
[17] McPherson (this issue).

understand what is being proposed. If it is claimed that it is thinkable then the question arises of how thought can differ from language in this regard; and the question also arises of whether not the argument for inexpressibility generalizes to be an argument for unthinkability.

It is because of these concerns about (i) that I am so hung up on (ii). And that is why I am somewhat less than moved by points to the effect that (ii) is not immediately appealing.

However, here is a concern about focusing on (ii); and it may be that this concern underlies McPherson's discussion. Ardent realism is only explained metaphorically, in terms of what "reality favors". Either we regard that metaphor as sufficiently clear to provide ardent realism with content, or we regard it as a mere promissory note – and hold that unless it can be replaced by something better, ardent realism lacks content. In the former case, the ardent realist can say that Alternative is possible, and the privileged normative concepts are the ones that ascribe properties connected to what "reality favors". In the latter case, there is the project of supplying the doctrine of ardent realism with content: and one may well be worried that no foray into metasemantics helps with *that*. It is not very plausible that what it is for reality to favor certain actions has anything to do with reference-determination.

This theme – or rather the second horn of the just stated dilemma – comes up explicitly in Plunkett, who says, "Embracing alternative-unfriendliness…does nothing to explain what makes the part of reality these referentially normative concepts refer to something that is (put roughly) normatively important", but "when ardent realists (or those interested in the view) are confronted with the (seeming possibility) of the alarming symmetry, this is part of what we want to know".[18]

(In the course of describing the view I explore, McDaniel says "If alternative normative concepts aren't possible, then it's trivial that the ardent realist's concepts are the best normative concepts".[19] This way of putting the view very naturally suggests the objection that McPherson and Plunkett both raise: even if some concepts are the only normative concepts, that doesn't mean that they are privileged in any sense that matters. If I am the only one who

[18] Plunkett (this issue). Plunkett notes what he brings up here doesn't necessarily amount to an objection: "my discussion here doesn't necessarily involve an objection to Eklund (who, to emphasize, is himself not committed to ardent realism). Rather, it can be seen as a way of emphasizing the depth of the challenge in explaining and defending ardent realism, and in a way that emphasizes points that Eklund himself does not".
[19] McDaniel (this issue).

has ever sung the song I just made up then my rendition is trivially the best rendition of it – but clearly that fact doesn't speak to the quality of the rendition.)

I have some responses to this. First, my inclination is to say that *if* this train of thought is on the right track then so much the worse for ardent realism. I believe, as stated, that I have a good argument against (i). If this train of thought can be taken to show that (ii) is no good either, then there is no way to salvage ardent realism. Such a conclusion goes beyond anything I argued or claimed in the book, and is in tension with the agnosticism I expressed towards the end. But I wouldn't feel very bad about being forced to accept it. But second, my thought wasn't that the foray into metasemantics would help explain what ardent realism is. It was, more straightforwardly, that appeal to metasemantics would help the ardent realist get around the dilemma presented for her. To be sure, ardent realism is stated only in metaphorical/impressionistic terms. But the extent to which this is a problem depends on the theoretical need to spell out ardent realism further. The need becomes pressing if there are alternative normative concepts in the way supposed when the dilemma is stated. For then we need to state what normatively privileges certain concepts over others (and what "normative privilege" is to begin with). But if the dilemma cannot be stated in the first place, then where, so to speak, is the itch?

As the commentators note, I do not actually *defend* the metasemantic response to the challenge presented to ardent realism. Even though I present it as the most important response, I also present some problems for this response; and I do not insist that these problems have satisfactory solutions.[20]

Here is one problem, mentioned already above: what if all expressions or concepts associated with a given normative role have the same reference, but this is so for, intuitively, the wrong sort of reason? Consider, to relate back to the example I used in the introduction, the possibility that the capricious god of semantics has decided on a whim that property P should be the property ascribed by all concepts playing the rightness role. Or, to take a different example, suppose that properties that are more metaphysically explanatory are more eligible to be referred to – more reference-magnetic – and that P's reference-magnetism is the reason why all concepts playing the rightness role ascribe P. That wouldn't say very much about the objective correctness of letting P guide one's actions. Generally, it is important not just that all concepts with the same normative role have the same reference, but that this is for the right sort of reason. The property ascribed should be in and of itself apt to be what is ascribed by the concepts in question.

[20] See primarily chapter 3.

These problems with the metasemantic response also feed into concerns about stating what ardent realism is. If there are recalcitrant versions of the underlying problem which arise also given the metasemantic response, then the need to spell out ardent realism further remains. To relate to how I put it above: there is an itch after all.

So to sum up: If the metasemantic response is otherwise unobjectionable, I am not much concerned about the fact that the appeal to metasemantic response does not do much to explain or explicate ardent realism. But insofar as there are independent problems with the metasemantic response, like those brought up in the book, those problems may well also serve to bring out a need to explain or explicate ardent realism, and the metasemantic response itself does not meet any such need.

2.2 Authoritativeness

Let me now turn to McPherson's own favored response to the alarming symmetry.

When discussing Alternative, I explicitly focus on so-called *thin* concepts. There is a distinction often drawn in the literature between thin concepts (e.g. the concepts expressed by "right", "good", etc. in certain paradigmatic uses) and thick concepts (e.g. the concepts expressed by "courageous", "lewd", "brutal"). Relating to this distinction, I said I focus on thin concepts. McPherson thinks the focus on thinness is a mistake. What matters is a feature he calls *authoritativeness*. Before getting into that issue, I should stress that I didn't see the focus on the thin as a significant theoretical choice. It seemed natural to characterize what I focused on by describing it as "the thin", but if someone else characterized the concepts to focus on in a different way, that would not matter. McPherson, however, thinks it genuinely matters if one should focus on the "authoritative" rather than the thin concepts.

Authoritative concepts, in McPherson's sense, are concepts which "purport to have a distinctive kind of authority in our reasoning".[21] Turning from authoritative concepts to authoritative properties, he says "if you are an ardent realist, and think that there are possible and non-empty authoritative concepts, you will think that there are also *authoritatively normative properties* that such concepts pick out".[22] He goes on to remark that "[o]ur concept of an authoritatively normative property seems to require a kind of

[21] McPherson (this issue).
[22] McPherson (this issue). In the quoted passage, I see "if you are an ardent realist" as doing significant work. Otherwise it is very much a live option that there are authoritatively normative concepts and they pick out properties, but there is nothing metaphysically or normatively distinctive about the properties picked out.

uniqueness…it doesn't make sense to imagine that there are two authoritatively normative relations – ought and ought* - such that I ought to do A, but I ought* not to do it".[23]

McPherson thinks this appeal to authoritativeness helps get around the dilemma. The ardent realist can focus on the authoritatively normative concepts and the properties they ascribe. There will of course be questions of whether these concepts succeed in (determinately) ascribing properties. But those are just metaphysical questions of a familiar kind.

Where McPherson now uses the notion of authoritativeness, he earlier used the terminology of robust versus merely formal normativity, which has caught on.[24] Paradigm examples of merely formal normativity are the normativity of etiquette, and the normativity of chess. There are many different things which on the face of it seem to contrast with merely formal normativity in this sense. Morality and prudence come to mind as candidates. But on McPherson's understanding of authoritativess, neither morality nor prudence is authoritatively normative. Given facts about what we morally ought to do and what we prudentially ought to do, there is a distinct question of what I "practically" ought to do (which ought, the moral or the prudential one, wins?). It is only the practical ought that is authoritative. It is also because of this – because specific domains like morality and prudence don't count as authoritatively normative in McPherson's sense – that McPherson with some plausibility can claim that authoritativeness carries with it a kind of uniqueness.

In the course of defending the idea of authoritatively normative concepts, McPherson in other work (2018) embarks on a project of carefully characterizing an authoritatively normative concept. This concept he calls the "practical ought", and the conceptual analysis he ends up with is:

> S practically ought to do A in context of action C $=_{df}$ the constitutive success conditions for non-arbitrary selection concerning C require doing A.[25]

If this is a successful characterization of an authoritatively normative concept, then McPherson can insist that ardent realism is true if this concept successfully picks out an instantiated property (and facts about its instantiation are suitably objective).

[23] McPherson (this issue). My emphasis.
[24] See e.g. Finlay (2019), Wedgwood (2018), and Woods (2018).
[25] McPherson (2018).

The main thing I want to stress in connection to what McPherson says about authoritativeness can be stated succinctly. McPherson presents his appeal to authoritativeness as something that undercuts how I present the dialectic. But I instead see what he says as nicely feeding into it. He characterizes PRACTICAL OUGHT in terms of its normative role. And it is clearly supposed that this suffices to determine its reference. If this concept PRACTICAL OUGHT is successfully characterized in the way McPherson characterizes it but its reference is determined by other factors, then appeal to it and what it applies to for obvious reasons does not help the ardent realist. Consider the following alternative model. It is constitutive of competence with PRACTICAL OUGHT to accept that the claim

> S practically ought to do A in context of action C if and only if the constitutive success conditions for non-arbitrary selection concerning C require doing A,

but when it comes the actual extension of the concept, a causal story is correct: what is in the extension of the concept depends on what its use is appropriately causally related to. If so, then what the concept applies to is determined in part by factors that are not directly normatively relevant. Of course, when describing the model, I have tweaked the characterization of the concept: where McPherson uses a "$=_{df}$", I instead speak of what competence requires. But I find such tweaks to be reasonable in the context. The aim is to be more explicit about how it is determined what a concept applies to, and exactly how it is or can be ensured that a concept applies to exactly what satisfies a certain descriptive condition.

To stress, my conclusion from the discussion of PRACTICAL OUGHT is then that even if McPherson can seem to suggest otherwise, I see him as accepting the terms of debate that I propose. It is a separate question whether the specific suggestion he presents amounts to a promising way forward for the ardent realist. I have some doubts, e.g. regard the notion of (non-)arbitrariness he makes use of, but since he primarily develops his idea in other work this is not the place to go deeper into that.

2.3 Leary on normative properties

Leary picks up on the fact that I mention skepticism, and that I say that if Alternative is possible, then a new kind of skeptical challenge can seem to arise: even if I know exactly which actions are right and wrong, there is a separate question regarding how one knows or can know what rightness and wrongness concepts are privileged.[26] She notes that ardent realism can be true even while inviting this kind of skeptical concern: it can be true but

[26] Leary (this issue).

"crummy".[27] I agree with what Leary says about the threat of skepticism, and didn't mean to suggest anything else in the book. In the book, I did mention this new kind of normative skepticism, but swiftly set that aside, focusing instead on the foundational problem of what the so-called further question could possibly be. I didn't mean for the appeal to normative skepticism to carry any sort of argumentative load. The threat of this kind of normative skepticism only arises if Alternative is possible, and still the further question can be made sense of.

In the book, I distinguish between metaphysical and metasemantic issues. After having praised me for emphasizing this distinction, Leary charges that I "end up re-entangling the metaphysical and metasemantic issues that ought to be kept separate".[28] One point she makes is that the purportedly metasemantic solution to the problem for ardent realism that I present in fact relies on some metaphysical assumptions. To this I respond: yes it does, and I never meant to suggest otherwise. More importantly, I think, she thinks metaphysics is where the action is, and any excursion into metasemantics is just a detour.

Much of Leary's ensuing discussion revolves around giving a characterization of a notion of normative property that may be used by the ardent realist to get around the problems I raise. The idea is that among all the different properties picked out by different possible normative concepts, only some are genuinely normative. I think the most important challenge Leary presents for me is when she discusses the possibility that the property of being a normative property may simply be primitive.[29] (Where Leary speaks of what property is normative, I instead speak of what property is normatively privileged. But this particular difference is just terminological.)

Before I turn to that challenge, let me discuss some things Leary says in the lead-up. Talking about what it is for a property to be normative, she first mentions, e.g., "sui generis prescriptivity", "to be promoted-ness" and "to be considered-ness".[30] I think these are pretty clearly unhelpful glosses. If we knew what "prescriptivity" was, what are we so hard at work at when trying to figure out what "normativity", in the sense at issue, is?[31] And saying that

[27] Leary (this issue).
[28] Leary (this issue).
[29] Leary (this issue).
[30] Leary (this issue).
[31] The formulation is an allusion to Quine (1951, p. 29): "Does [the adverb "necessarily"] really make sense? To suppose that it does is to suppose that we have already made satisfactory sense of 'analytic'. Then what are we so hard at work on right now?". Quine may be wrong about the relationship between necessity and analyticity. But the general point is that if a certain notion is questioned we can't well spot ourselves a notion which presents the same sorts of problems as that which we are questioning.

something "is to be promoted" or "is to be considered", in the sense at issue, is exactly to say that it ought to be promoted, or that it ought to be considered. No progress is being made.

Leary then turns to a more detailed proposal. She first provides, on the behalf of a normative non-naturalist, a recursive definition of "non-normative property":

> For any property, F:
> (i) If F is a paradigmatic physical, biological, psychological, mathematical, logical, supernatural, or ... property (where we list all the other kinds of properties that exist), then F is non-normative.
> (ii) If the essence of F can be fully specified in terms of paradigmatic physical, biological, psychological, mathematical, logical, supernatural, or... properties, then F is non-normative.
> (iii) If the essence of F can be fully specified in terms of non-normative properties, then F is non-normative.[32]

Then she says, "the non-naturalist can say that what it is for a property F to be a *sui generis normative property* is for F to fail to satisfy all of (i)-(iii) in the above recursive definition". My problem with all this is that if "sui generis normative property" just means: property which isn't "non-normative" in the sense of the recursive definition, then what does this have to do with normativity? All we have is that if F is a "sui generis normative property" then it is not a physical, biological, psychological, mathematical, logical, supernatural, or ... property, and it cannot be constructed out of such properties. But that is just to say that F is really very different from all properties we are otherwise familiar with. What does that have to do with the normativity of F? And if some normative concepts ascribe properties that are normative in Leary's sense but others do not, why should we take that to in any way speak in favor of thinking that we should let the former guide our actions?[33]

I have criticized Leary's appeal to things like prescriptivity and "to be promoted-ness", as well as her more systematic characterization of what it is for a property to be normative. But she may well say that her main point anyway is the appeal to primitiveness – and her other characterizations chiefly serve the purpose of showing how we anyway can say somewhat informative things about the primitive notion of being a normative property. So let me turn to the appeal to primitiveness – what I will call *primitivism*. The idea, in the context, is that

[32] Leary (this issue).
[33] One can also problematize the "..." in Leary's characterizations, and the parenthetical remark under (i). How are the lists to be completed?

of all the different properties there are, perhaps including a multitude of properties ascribed by concepts with the same normative role, some select properties have a primitive feature of normativity; and it is this primitive feature that privileges them from the point of view of reality.

Leary accuses me of a pretty bad confusion when discussing primitivism: that of failing to distinguish between on the one hand appeal to some primitive property or other and on the other hand appeal to some particular primitive property.[34] I hope and believe that I am not guilty of that confusion. But I certainly should have discussed primitivism more than I did, especially since, for independent reasons, it may seem plausible to many theorists that normativity is a primitive feature of the world.

First, to stress, the view familiar from the literature is that, e.g. goodness and rightness are primitive. That view by itself does nothing to help with the dilemma I present for the ardent realist. For even if goodness and rightness are primitive, that does nothing to help with the question of what the question is we try to ask, when we try to ask whether goodness and rightness are normatively privileged, or if instead some properties ascribed by alien normative concepts are normatively privileged. The relevant primitivist suggestion is rather that normative privilege is primitive; and that is a more exotic view.

The friend of primitivism may suggest that the view sounds less exotic if it is stated as concerning *normativity* rather than *normative privilege* – and that is also how Leary states it. Can't we think of the question as over whether the properties ascribed by our concepts or the properties ascribed by some alternative concepts (or any properties at all) have a primitive feature of normativity? The idea that normativity is primitive may again sound familiar. But arguably it should be so taken only if understood as amounting to something like the view that rightness has the primitive property that it *ought* to be promoted. But this would just be a version of the previous strategy for explicating normativity. The relevant primitiveness idea is instead that there is a property, normativity, distinct from, and not understood in terms of, familiar normative properties like rightness and being what ought to be done. That should seem less familiar, and more like a philosopher's invention.

Now, sometimes philosophers' inventions are fine. But there is a more general point for me to make. The structure of the problem I am raising is this: The supposed further question cannot be stated. For either we state it using normative terms, or we state in using descriptive terms. If we state it using normative terms, then (bracketing the metasemantic solution) the

[34] Leary (this issue).

problem arises: which normative terms do we state it in? And if we state it using descriptive terms, then we have changed the subject in a problematic way. That is the dilemma. And notice now that going primitive about the property ascribed appears not even to promise to be a way out of the dilemma. Either the supposed expression ascribing the primitive property is normative, and then we are impaled on the first horn, or it is descriptive, and then we are impaled on the second horn.

Another point Leary makes presents a more genuine problem for me. As noted, she stresses that the broadly metasemantic suggestion on the ardent realist's behalf which I discuss in fact relies on metaphysical assumptions. She notes that I speak of the properties in fact picked out by concepts having the same normative role as "in themselves fit", or "apt", to be so picked out.[35] In other words, such a property has a feature, X, which renders it so apt. But this provides fodder for an argument that metasemantics does not matter: what makes the property relevantly privileged is its having X, and not anything to do with metasemantics. So long as the property has X, that is what matters – even if, perhaps per impossibile, the metasemantic facts were different, the property would intuitively be relevantly privileged. Hence the question of normative privilege is a question of which property is X: the metasemantic ladder can be kicked away. I am not completely sure what in the end to say about this point. It may well present a serious problem for the metasemantic response. But even if it does, that does not help with the serious problem regarding what the further question is supposed to be.

2.4 McDaniel on conflicting alternatives

McDaniel gives the name *normative referentialism* to the view that "what determines which property a normative predicate refers to is the normative role of its associated concept", and says, correctly, that I hold that ardent realism is true only if normative referentialism is true.[36]

The first argument McDaniel marshals against this claim involves appeal to necessarily equivalent concepts which still ascribe different properties. He mentions that the evaluative concept *maximizes intrinsic value* and the deontic concept *is obligatory* may turn out to be like that.[37] And he further adds that this can be so while the concepts have the same

[35] Leary (this issue).
[36] I have a minor qualm about how normative referentialism is stated. Why state it indirectly, in terms of an expression's reference being determined by the normative role of the associated concept, instead of simply in terms of the concept's reference being determined by normative role? (Expressions, if they need enter the story at all, do so by what concepts they are associated with.)
[37] McDaniel (this issue).

normative role.[38] The argument assumes that two properties can, of necessity, be exemplified by exactly the same things and yet be distinct.

The argument is meant to show that even if this is all so, the two concepts are not conflicting alternatives, in the sense McDaniel characterizes. Roughly, two concepts are conflicting alternative when one cannot rationally exemplify all attitudes that are rationally required given competence with both concepts, even if one can rationally exemplify all attitudes that are rationally required given competence with each taken separately. The intended upshot of the argument is that two concepts having the same normative role but being different in extension does not mean that the concepts are conflicting alternatives in this sense.[39] McDaniel takes this to speak in favor of the view that what really matters is the notion of conflicting alternatives, and questions about normative role and referential normativity are not invariably related to the question of which concepts are conflicting alternatives.

Crucial to McDaniel's argument is the assumption that the concepts in question have the same normative role. But the way I am thinking about normative role, evaluative and deontic concepts have different normative roles: they play different roles in practical reasoning and it is at least partly in virtue of that they are different kinds of concepts. Since the claim that normative role determines reference only implies that two concepts cannot have the same normative role while differing in reference, the example then isn't a counterexample.

But even if the example isn't a compelling counterexample to what I claim, the example may still show something important, and worrisome for me. One can see McDaniel's point as being that the crucial thing is whether there are concepts which are conflicting alternatives; the issue of whether normative role determines reference is a sideshow.

Now, in the book I do bring up what in essence is the issue of conflicting alternatives, only under a different heading. I make the point that the thesis that normative role determines reference may not suffice for the ardent realist to get around the problem. What I bring up can be put, using McDaniel's terminology, as: concepts with different normative roles may still be conflicting alternatives. And when discussing that problem, I mention the possibility that some normative roles may fail to determine reference – the counterpart of McDaniel's suggestion that some normative roles fail to determine instantiated properties.[40] Notice that even if what matters is that conflicting alternatives are ruled out, that does not immediately

[38] McDaniel (this issue).
[39] McDaniel (this issue).
[40] p. 58f.

contradict that ardent realism is true only if normative referentialism is true. The immediate conclusion can only be that if normative referentialism doesn't rule out conflicting alternatives, then normative referentialism is not sufficient for ardent realism.

When explicating my talk of normative role, McDaniel does so in terms of rules of use. What a rule of use is, is itself characterized employing the notion of rationality. McDaniel says, "the rule for the use of a concept is a function that takes a set of beliefs employing a concept and yields a set of preferences, emotions, actions, or whatnots…that are rationally required given those beliefs".[41] The notion of rationality is also employed in the characterization of what it is for two rules to be compatible; and for two concepts to be conflicting alternatives is for them to have incompatible rules.

The way McDaniel characterizes rules of use, rules of use only concern practical, non-doxastic consequences of beliefs. The reason for this choice is that he only puts the notion of rule to use to work in characterizing normative role.

In the context of a discussion of alternative normative concepts, it can in principle complicate matters if one states views on meaning and content using normative notions like rationality. That by itself is not itself an objection to doing so: maybe matters really are complicated. Generally, I don't think any differences between McDaniel and myself regarding rules of use matter greatly to other issues brought up. But for what it is worth, I myself favor a view on which "rules of use" is not cashed out in normative terms but is instead cashed out in terms of dispositions to form various attitudes are necessary for full competence.

I also want to remark on some general claims McDaniel makes. McDaniel says at one point,

> Eklund…might protest that forming a natural kind or having a distinctive essence is not normatively relevant. That might be so—but in this context, what matters to the ardent realist is explicating the thought that her normative concepts are the "best".[42]

and, a little bit below,

> But if the ardent realist's concepts are not self-effacing and they correspond to metaphysically fundamental properties with distinctive essences lacked by their

[41] McDaniel (this issue).
[42] McDaniel (this issue).

> competitors, it is hard for me to see what else she qua ardent realist could possibly want. This would be enough for me.[43]

It is not completely clear to me what McDaniel wants to say here, but there is at least a suggestion that he has a fundamentally different view on the matters at issue than I do – not just on what view to hold, but also what is at stake.

The first passage quoted, taken in isolation, would lead me to suspect that McDaniel and I may be talking past each other. What I am concerned with is very much whether some normative concepts are better than others in a certain normatively relevant sense. For all I want to say, there may certainly be other, independent ways in which some normative concepts are "best". I am concerned with which concepts are best for the normative purposes to which these concepts are paradigmatically put – roughly, arriving at verdicts about what to do.

However, McDaniel's point in the second passage quoted about what is "enough" for him at least suggests that there simply is a fundamental disagreement between us regarding what ardent realism should be thought to require.

Given what I am concerned with, the question about the relevance of metaphysical privilege, like forming a natural kind or having a distinctive essence, is for me a question of whether, and how, such privilege is relevant when it comes to which normative concepts are privileged for normative purposes like action-guiding. I think questions about such privilege don't directly speak to which normative concepts to employ to guide action. (There could in principle be indirect ways in which metaphysical privilege is evidence of something normatively relevant, but that is a different matter.)

If, as McDaniel appears to, one holds that a normative concept is relevantly normatively privileged over other normative concepts by virtue of being the one picking out a natural kind, or a property with a distinctive essence, then much of what I say in the book is based on a false assumption. However, it may be worth mentioning that allowing for such metaphysical privilege to be normatively relevant does not mean that all problems in the vicinity of what I discuss go away. It is a piece of quite substantive speculation that out of all possible normative concepts there are, sufficiently few pick out natural kinds, or properties with essences, that the issue of conflicts between alternative normative concepts goes away. It is also a piece of quite substantive speculation that it is our actual normative concepts, rather than some alternative concepts, that pick out natural kinds, or properties with essences.

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[43] McDaniel (this issue). A thinker's normative concepts are self-effacing if the thinker "all things considered shouldn't use her own normative concepts" (McDaniel (this issue)). The "should" is the thinker's own "should": the question is whether the concepts validate themselves. (Matters of formulation mentioned in fn. 2 are relevant to how more carefully to construe self-effacingness.)

3. Normative concepts and normative properties

In the following two subsections I will consider McPherson's and McDaniel's criticisms of what I say about the normativity of concepts and of properties. I think their respective criticisms are rather similar in spirit; and my responses will also be similar.

3.1 McPherson: properties first

McPherson distinguishes two kinds of view:

> **Concepts First** What it is for P to be an authoritatively normative property is just for P to bear relation R to some (actual or possible) authoritatively normative concept or concepts
> **Properties First** What it is for C to be an authoritatively normative concept is just for C to bear R* to some actual or possible authoritatively normative property or properties [44]

McPherson takes me to defend Concepts First, and says that my arguments against what I call the metaphysical view do not suffice to rule out Properties First.[45] I agree regarding what my arguments do and do not show. But I have some other qualms about what McPherson says. He goes on to illustrate how Properties First can be true without the metaphysical view being so by appealing to

> **Toy Theory** For a concept to count as a K concept, for a class of natural kinds K, is for it to play the right role in an actual or possible social-epistemic practice directed towards investigating and utilizing the K-aspects of reality.[46]

"Right kind of role" is explained using examples. The concept conjunction does not play the right kind of role in chemistry, but both the concept ionic bond and the concept phlogiston do. McPherson says that the Toy Theory does not classify the concept thgir as a normative concept, for the term "thgir" "is imagined to be used in a way that bears no relationship to the community's investigation of normative reality, and hence is not a normative expression".[47] Given the occurrence of "possible" in Toy Theory I don't see how that is so. Couldn't the

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[44] McPherson (this issue). R and R* are here schematic.
[45] I have one concern about what he says about this argument of mine. He says the point is made already by examples like "the property Sally was thinking about at t". But as I note in the book: even if a complex description like this can in some sense pick up the property of rightness, this is not a case of a predicate ascribing the property. Compare Jackson (1998), p. 119fn10, from whom I took the talk of ascription (see p. 8fn9).
[46] McPherson (this issue).
[47] McPherson (this issue).

Martians come to use their expression "thgir" in a practice directed towards investigating the normative aspects of reality? In general, the "possible" seems to let a lot in. Suppose I and my mates believe the concept conjunction ascribes a chemical property – a truly absurd belief, but surely not impossible to hold. If so, can we not engage in a practice of investigating the chemical aspects of reality where the concept conjunction plays the right kind of role? The concept conjunction is then a chemical concept, and not just for us but full stop, since for something to be a K concept full stop it suffices that it play the right role in some possible concept. Given the "possible", and given that false beliefs are sufficient for a concept to play the "right kind of role", McPherson's Toy Theory overgenerates.[48] (And were McPherson to strike the "possible", the theory would undergenerate in a rather obvious way: there can be K concepts we do not actually use.)

Whatever in the end should be said about these skeptical remarks regarding the Toy Theory, there is a more basic thing I want to stress. It is not clear to me that anything I say about alternative normative concepts and ardent realism commits me to rejecting McPherson's Properties First. To repeat, the only clear connection for me between those issues and the questions about the normativity of concepts and properties is that the notion of normative role seems to me to be useful also in the latter case. And if I were to have to concede that it in fact is not, I don't see that as a very serious concession.

3.2 McDaniel on stating normative truths

Let me now turn to what McDaniel says about this issue. The overall tenor of McDaniel's discussion of these matters is much like that of McPherson's discussion. He thinks that there is a kind of broadly metaphysical view on the questions of what normative concepts and normative properties are that is left untouched by my arguments against what I dub "the metaphysical view". McDaniel's proposal is that generally, what makes something a normative (/biological/mathematical/....) expression is that it is an expression whose function is to be used to state normative (/biological/mathematical/...) truths.[49] One question that this invites has to do with what it is for a truth to be a normative (/biological/mathematical/...) truth to begin with. McDaniel says, "a normative truth is a true proposition about normative properties" suggesting that similarly a mathematical truth is a true proposition about mathematical properties, a biological truth is a true proposition about biological properties, etc.[50] He presents his proposal as an alternative importantly different

[48] Later in his discussion, McPherson stresses that in addition to connections to action, normative concepts also have "upstream functional roles". But he does not get into what these upstream functional roles can be or how they are supposed to help.
[49] McDaniel (this issue).
[50] This is of course not to commit oneself to the general validity of the schema

from the views I discuss. But what is it for an expression to have the *function* to be used to state such-and-such truths?

McDaniel does not really get into this. But here are some suggestions regarding what it might amount to. A first suggestion (1) is that to have such a function is exactly to be such that it can be successfully used to state such truths. A second suggestion (2) adds to this that the users of the term must actually use the term with the intention of stating such truths. A third suggestion (3) eschews the talk of intentions in favor of something like sense or rules of use. This is to add something about the meaning of the expression.

McDaniel thinks that 'thgir' does not have the function of being used to state normative truths, despite ascribing the same property that 'right' ascribes. Accordingly, he can't very well accept (1). For since "thgir" ascribes a normative property, it can be used to state true propositions about normative properties. Turn then to suggestions (2) and (3) on our list. If one accepts only (2), that makes an expression's status as normative (/biological/mathematical/....) an ephemeral feature. As user intentions change, the expression's status automatically changes. By contrast, (3) allows for an expression to be normative as a matter of its meaning. But if one cashes out the talk of "function to be used to state normative truths" in terms of (3) then one doesn't get a view importantly different from what I propose. There is an aspect of meaning or content, distinct from reference, and it is in virtue of this aspect that an expression is normative. That aspect needn't be identified as exactly what I call normative role. But even if it isn't, the views described are of the same general kind.

In addition to criticizing the metaphysical view on what it is for an expression or concept to be normative, I criticized the minimalist view which starts by taking some paradigmatic normative expression and then defines what it is to be a normative expression in terms of relations to this expression, or a property we regard as paradigmatically normative and then defines what it is to be a normative property in terms of relations to this property. McDaniel criticizes a specific argument I make in this connection.[51] The argument McDaniel criticizes is indeed problematic. Among other things, I definitely overstated my case. I do, however, stand by my main point. Cleaned-up, the point is that just because we can define a property, F-ish, in terms of relations to a property in a given way does not mean that being F-ish is any kind of interesting property at all. In the book, I compared Frege-analyticity. A sentence is Frege-

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A _____ truth is a true proposition about ____ properties.

There are true propositions about interesting properties which are not themselves interesting truths.

[51] McDaniel (this issue).

analytic if it is a logical truth or can be transformed into one by substitution of synonyms for synonyms. Frege-analyticity can be a useful notion. But importantly, nothing about the characterization provides any reason to think that there is anything metaphysically or epistemologically special about Frege-analytic sentences.[52] In order to get to that conclusion one would need to appeal to independent points about the epistemology and metaphysics of logical truth and synonymy. Similarly – and here is what I want to defend of the argument I give in the book – even if one can define a property of properties in terms of the properties' relationship to being a reason, that doesn't show that there is anything special about the properties that meet the characterization. The question remains: what is so special about being a reason?

McDaniel also notes that in the book I make the point that "competing alternative normative expressions might fail to ascribe normative properties" on some of the views I discuss, and notes that I raise this as a criticism. He remarks on this that "This strikes me as a consequence that ardent realists should welcome rather than eschew, since it is another way for an ardent realist to be reject conflicting alternative concepts".[53] McDaniel's criticism may seem obviously correct, but the point I wanted to make was this. (And I happily concede that my formulation in the text may not have been clear enough.) Even though the ardent realist certainly may want to reject conflicting alternative concepts, she should want to do it for the right reason.[54] The context of my remarks was the minimalist view. My point was that on the view I discussed, it ends up a trivial and irrelevant point that the alternative normative expressions fail to ascribe normative properties. The alternative normative expressions fail to ascribe normative properties on the sole ground that these the properties that these expressions ascribe are not suitably connected to properties ascribed by our normative expressions – end of story. One way to see my intended point is that if we characterize what is 'normative' in terms of what is suitably connected to some property picked out by one of our normative concepts, then the other community might equally well characterize 'normative' in their sense in terms of what is suitably connected to some property picked out by one of their normative concepts. We might congratulate ourselves on being the ones who pick out the normative properties; but they might congratulate ourselves on being the ones who pick out the 'normative properties' in their sense – and this shows how empty boasts on these grounds are.

4. Plunkett: more worries for the ardent realist

[52] See p. 86.
[53] McDaniel (this issue). The quoted passage from the book is from p. 98.
[54] "May": the ardent realist may certainly think some *alternative* concepts are the best ones.

When I describe the embarrassment of riches problem I focus on, I point out (as Plunkett notes) that it is not in itself a problem if there are different normative roles for concepts to be associated with. After all we do have different non-coextensive normative concepts, and for anyone who likes a notion of normative role, it is natural to think that they are associated with different normative roles. What would engender the supposed problem is that there are different normative roles which are, in some way, in competition – "we" use a concept *right* with one normative role and "they" use a concept with a somewhat different normative role and the concepts are somehow in "competition", as Plunkett puts it, or "conflicting alternatives", as McDaniel puts it.

Plunkett brings up what he describes as a new kind of embarrassment of riches problem. The problem has to do with the fact that there are different ways of construing "normative role". Plunkett distinguishes different kinds of roles that may be identified as normative role: role in guiding one's own action, role in criticism, role in giving advice, and role in endorsing. Which role is "normative role"? The apparent concern is that there may be concepts associated with each one of these erstwhile roles, and these concepts may pick out different properties, in a way that spells trouble for the ardent realist.

But is there really competition of the relevant kind between (say) a concept associated with the first kind of role he describes, that of guiding one's own action, and a concept associated with the second, third or fourth kind of role? Can't concepts with the different kinds of roles live together in harmony – without any competition? If they can, that by itself deals with the problem he brings up.

Here is one way that the different concepts can live together in harmony. For simplicity, consider just the first two kinds of roles. Let $\text{ought}_{\text{actionguiding}}$ correspond to the first role and $\text{ought}_{\text{criticizing}}$ correspond to the second role. $\text{Ought}_{\text{actionguiding}}$ guides action, and $\text{ought}_{\text{criticizing}}$ applies to the actions one is criticizable for not performing. I think that it would be natural for an ardent realist to hold that these two concepts are fairly neatly related. She might say that it would be peculiar if there wasn't a pretty systematic connection between what actions are $\text{ought}_{\text{actionguiding}}$ (first sense) and $\text{ought}_{\text{criticizing}}$ (second sense). Maybe we shouldn't expect outright coextensiveness between the concepts, but so long as the concepts by and large agree, the concepts can even more clearly live in harmony. If so, then Plunkett's worry is not much of a concern.

But this piece of speculation could of course be misguided. So assume, for argument's sake, that concepts associated with the different kinds of normative roles that Plunkett focuses on

have their reference determined by normative role, and that the concepts are far from coextensive. What we ought$_{actionguiding}$ to do seldom matches what we ought$_{criticizing}$ to do. Arguably this would be a weird and confusing situation. The view that there are these different oughts is an unattractive view. But is the view really in conflict with ardent realism as such? This seems to be compatible with the view that reality favors certain actions, and favors criticizing certain actions – but normative reality is weird and confusing, because often the actions that reality favors are actions that reality also favors criticism of.

5. Conclusion

The critics make many good points. Again, I am very grateful to them for their thoughtful articles. While I have been concerned to defend my arguments and claims, in some cases I have made concessions and expressed doubts about what I said in the book. One central theme has been the pushback I have received regarding taking the metasemantic way out to be the most promising route for the ardent realist. I presented concerns regarding the metasemantic route already in the book, but some of the critics' most probing points have to do with additional problems regarding the metasemantic route.

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