ROBUST VS FORMAL NORMATIVITY II, OR:
NO GODS, NO MASTERS, NO AUTHORITATIVE NORMATIVITY[1]

Nathan Robert Howard (University of Toronto) & N. G. Laskowski (University of Maryland, College Park)

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Introduction

Reasons not to move your pawn three spaces differ from reasons not to drive when you drink. After all, drunk driving is a serious transgression; mismanaging your pawn is not. But *why* is only the former serious? Some say that it's *because* the reasons not to drive drunk exhibit a special kind of normativity that reasons not to move your pawn three spaces do not. Several words and phrases are used to mark this distinction: reasons not to drive drunk exhibit "robust" or "genuine" normativity while chess reasons exhibit "merely formal" or "generic" normativity. Following, *inter alia*, McPherson and Plunkett (2018), we'll call this the distinction between *authoritative* and *non-authoritative* normativity. Prior to the 21st century, only a few academic uses of "authoritative normativity", "authoritatively normative", or "normative authority" can be found.[2] Uses of

[2] "Normative authority" is the only search query among these three that yields any results in Philosopher's Index or PhilPapers from before the 21st century. Indeed, among the handful of results prior to 2000, the earliest is from 1986.

these expressions have since gone (the academic-philosophy equivalent of) "viral".[3] They merit further scrutiny.

This paper argues that including "authoritative normativity" in our conceptual toolkit isn't worth the cost. We do not better comprehend normativity by dividing it into authoritative and non-authoritative kinds. More specifically, we advance three claims:

(1) Motivation for including "authoritative normativity" is parochial, originating in a controversial conception of how reasons' "normative flavours" differ.
(2) The reasons for rejecting alternative conceptions are overstated.
(3) There is cause to reconsider the conception that posits authoritative normativity.

We do not aim to show that talk of "authoritative normativity" is incoherent or entirely unmotivated. Rather, we aim to discuss some of its deeper commitments to correct the impression that it is benign or that it is entailed by familiar and popular positions across the "metanormative" domain. Authoritative normativity, ultimately, is a solution in search of a problem.

1. Two Conceptions of Normative Flavour

We can mean several things by uttering "He should be here now". We can mean that our evidence makes it likely that he's here. Or we can mean something prescriptive. We might mean that he should be here, in the doctor's office, to receive his treatment -- he should be here for his own good. Or we might mean that he should be here to witness his child's graduation -- he should be here to live up to his commitments as a parent. Angelika Kratzer's (1981) "The Notional Category of Modality" develops an influential theory of how these uses differ, coining the term 'modal flavour' for the feature that differs.

This linguistic difference suggests a corresponding non-linguistic difference in, roughly, the different kinds of normativity underlying these varied uses of 'should' -- that is, in

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[3] Copp (1997) popularised use of the metaphor of "authority" among contemporary metaethicists. However, McPherson (2018, 2020a, 2020b) and Plunkett (2020) have undoubtedly been authoritative normativity's foremost advocates. See especially McPherson's and Plunkett's joint work (forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b, 2020). Other recent uses of the metaphor can be found in Bedke (2020), Lord (forthcoming), Rowland (forthcoming), Singh (forthcoming) and Woods and Maguire (2019), though the latter of which seem to use it unproblematically to mean something like 'categorically'.

their different *normative flavours*, echoing Kratzer's term. If he should be here for his own good, then we're naturally understood as making claims with a prudential normative flavour. If he should be here to live up to his responsibilities as a father, that's naturally understood as making claims with a moral normative flavour.

We want to focus on a divide in how to understand differences in "normative flavour". As we'll go on to show, whether we accept "authoritative normativity" alongside the other flavours depends on how we explain those differences. In particular, authoritative normativity looks virtually inevitable from one side of this divide; it looks redundant and perplexing from the other.

According to the *subset view*, as we'll call it, normative flavours of reasons (for someone to do something in some circumstance…) are just subsets of the total set of normative reasons (for them to do it in that circumstance… we'll just drop this qualification going forward). The subset view makes it natural to suppose that normative flavours are relatively easy to find, corresponding to different subsets of the total set of the considerations eligible as reasons. To determine what you *morally* ought to do given the balance of moral reasons, we simply need to identify what the balance of reasons favours in the unique set of moral-reason-giving considerations. To determine what you *prudentially* ought to do given the balance of prudential reasons, we identify what the balance of reasons favours in the unique set of prudential-reason-giving considerations. And so on.

Conversely, proponents of the *domain view* deny that different normative flavours correspond to various restrictions on the total set of reasons. Rather, according to them, different normative flavours correspond to different *normative domains* or *standpoints* – where different domains might encompass morality, prudence, rationality, the law, etc. To determine what you ought morally to do, according to the domain view, we assess the balance of reasons from a moral standpoint that stresses moral concerns and *mutatis mutandis* for other normative flavours.

These two views offer contrasting answers to the question of *what to do*, the central question for practical agents like you or me. For example, agents like us can wonder about what to do in cases like the following:

Sticky Situation You find yourself in a sticky situation. You conclude that morality requires you to stay and help, while prudence dictates that you take the money and run. Torn, you ask yourself what to do, given all of this.[4]

Intuitively, there is a sense in which it's true that you ought to stay and help --- you *morally ought* to stay. Moreover, it seems to many, there is a sense in which you also ought to take the money and run --- you *prudentially ought* to run. But because you can't both stay and run, there's a further question of what to do -- we'll call this *the practical question*.[5]

Not all accept that there's an unequivocal further question of what to do in *Sticky Situation*. So-called "normative pluralists", such as Evan Tiffany (2007), deny that there is a final or summative practical question. But, as we'll see, motivation for accepting authoritative normativity comes from difficulty in answering the practical question. So we'll set aside views that reject the practical question and examine two different kinds of answers to it. In particular, the subset and domain views answer the practical question in starkly different ways. As we'll go on to argue, whether to accept "authoritative normativity" depends on which answer is correct.

The subset view's answer to the practical question is straightforward. Once we've considered *everything* -- that is, all the reasons or reason-giving considerations -- we can balance those competing considerations to arrive at a judgment about what to do, *all things considered*.[6] So it's natural for proponents of the subset view to answer the practical question with a comprehensive *ought* that is uniquely sensitive to all reasons, namely, the "all-things-considered *ought*".

The domain view's answer is less straightforward. Answering the practical question in *Sticky Situation* requires a different normative flavour that reconciles morality with

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[4] Sticky Situation is McPherson's (2018) case. But discussion of such cases among academic metaethicists in the analytic tradition traces at least to Sidgwick (1874). More recent discussions of cases represented by the schematically described Sticky Situation include, *inter alia*, Brink (1997), Baker (2018), Case (2016), Chang (2004), Dorsey (2013), Finlay (2014), McLeod (2001), Parfit (2011), Phillips (2011), Sagdahl (2014), Stroud (1998), Tiffany (2007), and Wedgwood (2004).

[5] See Copp (1997), Dorsey (2013), Finlay (2014), and Tiffany (2007).

[6] We recognize that finite creatures like us may be unable to consider all reasons. The 'all-things-considered' *ought* is so-called simply because it is, in principle, sensitive to the normative contributions of all reasons, in contrast with, for example, the moral *ought*, which is not sensitive to at least some prudential reasons.

prudence. So the domain view seems to require a further "higher-order" standpoint that subsumes the concerns of morality and prudence. But what is that standpoint? Partisans call it the "authoritative standpoint" or the domain of "authoritative normativity". Correspondingly, we'll call these partisans 'authoritarians', justifying this provocative label in the final section.

This authoritative standpoint is unusual. Morality's nature is revealed by concerns such as others' pain and our promises. Prudence is revealed by considering, roughly, what's good for us. Conversely, there is no unified class of "authoritative" considerations. Without a distinctive class of authoritative considerations, why do authoritarians endorse an extra normative flavour?

It seems that authoritarians characterise authoritative normativity through a particular *role*, rather than through a particular kind of consideration. This role is settling normative conflicts, such as the conflict between morality and prudence in *Sticky Situation*.[7] Authoritative normativity, then, is a kind of superseding normativity that regulates conflict between "lower" domains of normativity. Just as a ruling from the Supreme Court tells us what to do when a ruling from a lower court is appealed, the verdict of authoritative normativity tells us what to do when lesser forms of normativity conflict.

This is how, it seems to us, authoritative normativity can look natural, even inevitable if we assume the domain view and reject pluralism by holding that the practical question has a univocal answer. While the subset view answers the practical question with a uniquely comprehensive *ought*, this answer is unacceptable for the domain view, for which all *oughts* are equally comprehensive. Each *ought* could weigh all reasons differing only in the emphasis they put on different reasons. Consequently, the *ought* that answers the practical question is distinguished by some other feature, besides its comprehensivity. That *ought* is *authoritative* -- it reflects authoritative normativity.

This is a critical difference between the two views. The domain view requires something *additional* to answer the practical question: it needs an authoritative *domain* or *standpoint*. It needs the quality of being authoritative. The subset view doesn't; it needs only the totality of reasons, which both views already accept.

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[7] And since we can ask versions of the practical question using other deontic concepts, such as what we *may* do in sticky situations or what we have *reason* to do, we have similar grounds for accepting claims about the corresponding authoritative concepts or properties such as the authoritative *may* or authoritative reasons.

Consequently, the debate between the two positions resembles a familiar debate about the nature of normativity itself. Naturalists tell us that natural reality entirely explains normative reality. Non-naturalists tell us that it isn't enough -- we must also posit *sui generis* "non-natural" entities. But since parsimony favours naturalism, non-naturalists must show that appealing to what's natural isn't enough to explain normativity.

Something similar is true here. The subset view tells us that the balance of all reasons answers the practical question. Authoritarians tell us that this balance isn't enough -- it must be "authoritative"; we must also posit *sui generis* "authoritative" reasons, domains, or standpoints. But since parsimony favours the subset view, authoritarians must show that positing authoritative normativity is indeed necessary for answering the practical question. They must show that the all-things-considered *ought* fails to answer the practical question.

In what follows, we'll answer the three most prominent arguments for rejecting the all-things-considered *ought*. Doing so thus undermines "authoritative normativity", on grounds of parsimony. We'll then close with a positive argument against "authoritative normativity".

2. *The Commensurability Concern About the All-things-considered Ought*

As we've just seen, the subset view offers a simple answer to the practical question: the balance of all reason-giving considerations determines what to do. However, this simple answer presupposes that all reasons can be balanced against each other. That is, it presupposes that all reasons are *commensurable*.

Some doubt this. After all, if the all-things-considered *ought* considers all (quantifiers wide open) reasons, do reasons that flow from systems of norms like etiquette matter?[8] The question presents a dilemma: either the fact that the piece of silverware is a fork bears on the question of whether to put it on the left-hand side of your plate or it doesn't. That is, either etiquette's reasons help answer the practical question or they don't.

It might seem that neither answer is appealing. For example, if etiquette reasons are irrelevant to the practical question, then *ought*, all reasons considered, is mysterious: not *all* reasons are then considered. However, if they are relevant, then we seem to put etiquette-involving reasons on a par, as it were, with moral reasons, prudential reasons, and so on. Doing so allegedly grants etiquette reasons the very same "normative

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[8] See Baker (2018: 240) and Case (2016: 5).

standing" as moral and prudential reasons — reasons of a higher normative caste. Many find this implication unappealing. This dilemma threatens the all-reasons-considered *ought*'s answer to the practical question.

However, the dilemma's second horn is no genuine threat. The subset view implies only that both moral reasons and etiquette reasons bear on what to do. But this doesn't imply that they have the *same* normative standing, contrary to the objection. After all, just because a dollar and a cent are both currency doesn't imply that they have the same financial standing. Morality and etiquette thus differ, contrary to the objection, in normative standing. Morality, after all, matters much more than etiquette.

In short, moral reasons and etiquette-based reasons differ systematically in their *weight* or *strength* on a single scale of normative standing.[9] Consequently, advocates of the all-things-considered *ought* need (should) not place etiquette and morality on a normative par; indeed, on the contrary, they can explain how they differ.

Some doubt this simple response to the dilemma, based on a keenly felt sense that etiquette and morality differ *in kind*, not simply in degree, insisting that reasons of morality and etiquette are "just too different" to occupy a common normative scale. We appreciate the force of this complaint. However, complex intuitions such as this one are highly fallible. After all, until Lavoisier (1781), it mistakenly seemed to many that water was a distinctive element rather than a compound of hydrogen and oxygen.[10] To them, water was "just too different" to be a compound. Similarly, until the early 20th century, it mistakenly seemed to biologists like Bateson (1916) that heredity could not be understood in terms of nuclear chromatin.[11] Absent further argument, a firmly felt sense that moral and etiquette reasons are just too different to differ merely in scale offers scant evidence for that claim. That sense arguably tells us more about how we *think* about those things than about their nature.[12]

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[9] We should hedge this claim. We are assuming that when morality and etiquette conflict, morality always wins. But that needn't be so. There may be some weak moral reasons that are outweighed by considerable reasons of etiquette. That's a possibility. It's a strength of this picture that it allows for the idea that sometimes reasons of one kind beat reasons of another and sometimes *vice versa*.

[10] See Papineau (2002) for discussion of how intuitions of difference have been employed in debates about the allegedly fundamentally distinct nature of phenomenal consciousness.

[11] We learned of the Bateson example from Shea's (2014) discussion.

[12] See Laskowski (2019, 2020) for elaboration and defense of this way of understanding "just too different" claims in metaethics.

Consequently, appealing to this "just too different" intuition also requires further argument. One such argument comes from the apparent difference that morality is always and everywhere worthy of practical consideration but etiquette is not. In particular, you can just ignore etiquette if you don't want to be polite in a way that you can't ignore morality even if you don't want to be good or virtuous. So morality and etiquette differ in *deliberation-worthiness*, which contributes to the sense that morality is "just too different" from etiquette to be the same kind of thing as it.

Naturally, we agree that morality is more deliberation-worthy than etiquette. But there's an independently-motivated explanation of that difference that does not require authoritative normativity. Some reasons to do something are reasons for everyone to do it. Some are reasons only for some to do it. The first are *agent-neutral* reasons; the second are *agent-relative*.

Differences in the deliberation-worthiness of morality and etiquette are rooted in this difference. For example, suppose that personal relationships can give agent-relative moral reasons. In particular, suppose that the fact that Ahmed Jr. is Ahmed's child gives Ahmed a special reason to care for Ahmed Jr. but it does not give you a special reason to care for him. Suppose further that Ahmed can care for his son only by acting rudely -- maybe his son needs to "cry it out" but that will make a scene at the grocery store. Is the fact that Ahmed Jr.'s crying will disturb other shoppers and the fact that he needs to vent both worthy of Ahmed's deliberation? *Of course they are*.[13]

So we propose that a reason is worthy of your deliberation only if it's a reason for you. It follows that agent-neutral reasons, such as moral reasons, merit anyone's deliberation. But agent-relative reasons merit deliberation only for those who possess those reasons. Vivid differences in deliberative profile, such as those between morality and etiquette, can emerge if we compare apples and oranges -- that is, agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons.

Consider, for example, the deliberative profiles of morality and the mafioso code of *Omerta*. Must you consider the Omerta when deciding what to do? Far from being worthy of deliberation, Omerta-based reasons seem strikingly *unworthy* of deliberation.

But Omerta reasons are agent-relative reasons. Only Mafiosi who accept the code have the reasons. However, because you don't accept the Omerta, you don't have cause to consider its reasons. So when you stack up your moral reasons against your (absent) Omerta reasons, there's an obvious difference in deliberation-worthiness: you should

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[13] We trust that any parent will feel the force of this dilemma.

consider the moral reasons and exclude the Omerta ones. But this difference isn't owed to the fact that morality possesses authoritative normativity and that Omerta lacks it. It is rooted in the difference between agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons.[14] Consequently, any account that incorporates the agent-relative/agent-neutral distinction in reasons can explain differences in deliberation-worthiness, such as between moral considerations and considerations pertaining to etiquette or the Omerta, without needing to appeal to authoritative normativity.[15]

Nevertheless, we appreciate why deliberation-worthiness may seem to offer compelling grounds for requiring authoritative normativity. After all, whether a consideration merits deliberation is a categorical difference. But we offer only a scalar difference between etiquette and morality. So it may seem that we offer the wrong kind of difference to explain deliberation-worthiness.

But categorical differences can emerge from scalar differences: being a skyscraper is a categorical difference between buildings but one clearly grounded in the scalar property of height. On the way we prefer to think about things, morality matters more than etiquette in the way that winning the Powerball lottery matters more than winning the local Monday night bingo. When you win either, you win money. But only the first is enough to be genuinely life-changing, to put you in a new tax bracket, to arouse the newfound affections of distant relatives, etc. The two winnings differ in scale -- the scale of *money* -- not in kind. Similarly, etiquette and, say, moral reasons, differ on a scale of normative *strength* or *weight* or *support*. Moral reasons, for example, are to Powerball as etiquette reasons

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[14] Some may insist that a deliberative difference persists between morality and Omerta, beyond the difference between agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons. For example, some may insist that even Don Corleone should ignore reasons given by Omerta. This depends. Perhaps there are parts of that code — for example, norms to favour pinstripes, see-through socks, and Frank Sinatra — that are mere Mafioso etiquette. These surely have a place in the Don's deliberations about what to wear or to listen to.

But there are other parts of the code, we imagine, that are positively objectionable: immoral Omerta norms promoting violence, theft, and extortion. Because these reasons are immoral, they compete against countervailing moral reasons not to promote violence, theft, and extortion. And because immoral reasons tend to be weak, we can justifiably believe, in advance, that the immoral Omerta reasons are defeated by any of the relevant moral ones. Consequently, it may seem that deliberation should exclude Omerta reasons because they are consistently defeated. But this is no argument against the subset view, which accommodates the mechanics of defeat and so accommodates this explanation of the difference in deliberation-worthiness between morality and Omerta.

[15] We can identify agent-neutral reasons in what is now the standard way, with *universal* agent-relative reasons -- that is, reasons for *every* agent to do something -- in the style of Schroeder (2007b). Agent-neutral reasons to do something are the ones in every agent's total set of reasons to do it.

are to bingo: they are so much higher on a common scale that their effects are categorically distinct. For example, if moral reasons always outweigh prudential reasons, that's similar to how no amount of local Monday bingo will get you close to winning the Powerball --- you just aren't going to win a billion dollars at a local bingo. So categorical differences in deliberation-worthiness may emerge from scalar differences in weight.[16]

3. *The Alternative Normative Concepts Concern About the All-things-considered Ought*

We've just argued that commensurability between reasons is nevertheless compatible with deep and important differences between them, such as differences between morality and the Omerta. This answers an important concern about the all-things-considered *ought*. But it's not the only concern.

There are also concerns about whether it is *uniquely* comprehensive. That the all-things-considered *ought* is uniquely comprehensive is an important part of the subset view's answer to the practical question. Both the domain and subset views aim to explain why one particular *ought*, rather than another, answers the practical question. For the domain view, an *ought* answers the practical question iff it is authoritative. But the subset view instead claims that the all-things-considered *ought*, rather than some other *ought*, tell us what to do because only it is sensitive to all reasons. It is uniquely comprehensive.

However, so-called *alternative normative concepts* seem to show that the all-things-considered *ought* is not uniquely comprehensive. Alternative normative concepts are less alien than they sound. Moral considerations favour you not murdering. Prudential considerations favour you going on regular walks. Rational considerations favour you not holding contradictory beliefs. And so on. These differing considerations suggest at least three normative flavours.

But why stop there? Can't we imagine that there are moral* considerations, which are just like moral considerations except that they favour murder? Or can't we imagine that there are rational* considerations that favour holding contradictory beliefs? And so on, *ad*

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[16] "How, exactly?" is an interesting question. Here's one answer. Eating in some way may be polite. But that is only an extremely weak reason to act that way, which is easily defeated by countervailing reasons. In particular, politeness has an opportunity cost: it's a hassle, sometimes it's expensive, and there's a chance that you'll get the ritual wrong, not only failing to be polite but also positively offending your company. So unless you're committed to being polite, these standing countervailing reasons can easily defeat your reasons to be polite since the latter are so weak. Consequently, these standing opportunity costs together with the fact that reasons of etiquette tend to be weak mean that they're often defeated and so rightly excluded from deliberation.

infinitum. It seems to some that a panoply of *alternative* normative concepts shadow the familiar ones, alternative concepts such as a moral* *ought*, a rational* *ought*, etc.[17]

If that's right, then just as there's the all-things-considered *ought* that we favour, there's also an alternative all-things-considered* *ought*, which forbids everything that the former recommends, an all-things-considered** *ought* which only ever recommends wearing blue suede shoes, an all-things-considered*** *ought* which permits everything, etc. In short, if we think of *oughts* as functions from reasons and circumstances to actions, then there seem to be as many alternative comprehensive *ought*s as there are ways of matching actions to pairs of circumstances and the class of all reasons. Consequently, we cannot distinguish the real answer to the practical question by looking for a uniquely comprehensive *ought*. It looks like we must once again appeal to some distinctive, *authoritative* kind of normativity.

However, this concern begs the question against the subset view. According to it, recall, normative flavours are limited to the powerset of the totality of reasons; that is, there's a one-to-one correspondence between normative flavours and sets of reasons. *Ipso facto*, if there's only one totality of reasons, there's only *one* sense of 'ought' that expresses its balance. From this standpoint, *all* normativity is authoritative in varying degrees. Calling some kinds of normativity "authoritative" is redundant. That is, it's repetitive or pleonastic. It says the same thing over and over. It's redundant. Alternatives to that uniquely comprehensive *ought*, which claim to report differently on the balance of the totality of reasons, are thus mistaken or defective in some sense.

But why do some (excellent) philosophers mistakenly think otherwise? Here's an error theory: some alternative *ought*s are as comprehensive as the all-things-considered *ought*. And some *ought*s offer true answers to the practical question. It's natural to suppose that these two properties -- of *being an alternative* and of *answering the practical question* -- freely recombine, generating alternative answers to the practical question. If so, then we indeed need something like "authoritative normativity", as these philosophers suspect.

But the two properties *don't* freely recombine. That is, if an *ought* answers the practical question, then it's not an alternative normative concept. And if a comprehensive *ought* is an alternative, then it doesn't answer the practical question. So there are no alternative answers to the practical question. The all-things-considered *ought* is its uniquely comprehensive answer.

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[17] The issue discussed here echoes the central concern raised in Eklund (2017). Thanks to Tristram McPherson for deepening our appreciation and understanding of these issues in conversation.

3.1 *If an* Ought *Answers the Practical Question, Then It's not an Alternative*

There are alternative comprehensive *ought*s -- but these don't answer the practical question. Why? Because the practical question is an ordinary question and ordinary questions are linked to their answers by truth. When you're wondering what city is the capital of France, "Paris" uniquely answers your question. Likewise, when you're wondering what to do, some action or disjunction of actions uniquely answers your question. In both cases, the question and answer are linked by truth.[18]

Consequently, if an alternative comprehensive *ought* recommends something different from the all-things-considered *ought*, its answer to the practical question is false. For example, suppose that you, all things considered, ought to stay and help in Sticky Situation. If conjectures about alternative normative concepts are correct, then at least one alternative comprehensive *ought* recommends taking the money and running. Which *ought* is the one to reach from when you're wondering what to do in Sticky Situation? Authoritarians claim it's the "ought" with authoritative normativity. But that's an *additional* commitment, which disadvantages the domain view similarly to how normative non-naturalism is disadvantaged relative to normative naturalism. Moreover, it's an *unnecessary* commitment. After all, only the all-things-considered *ought* truly answers the practical question if the subset view is correct. So *it* is the *ought* to reach for, not the alternative *ought*, because only it truly answers the practical question. In short, *truth* favours the all-thing-considered *ought*, not authoritative normativity.

3.2 *If an* Ought *Is an Alternative, Then it Doesn't Answer the Practical Question*

We suspect that advocates of alternative normative concepts will respond denying that there's *one* practical question. There's also the practical* question of what to* do and the practical** question of what to do* and so on. Answers to these alternative questions may involve comprehensive *oughts* that weigh the totality of reasons differently, seeming to jeopardise the all-things-considered *ought*'s comprehensiveness as its distinguishing feature. If we cannot distinguish that *ought* by its comprehensiveness, then we are pushed to distinguish it by its authoritative normativity.

We're unconvinced. The most straightforward problem with this response is that it's a distraction. Our central claim is that we don't need authoritative normativity to identify the *ought* that answers the practical question since it is the answer that is uniquely

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[18] To be clear, we're making a substantive claim here by assuming that the practical question (asked at a time by an individual) has an (perhaps disjunctive) answer. Some philosophers deny this claim, namely, the pluralists we mentioned earlier. But authoritarians *do not* deny it. After all, motivation for accepting authoritative normativity comes from accepting both the domain view of normative flavours and the claim that the practical question has an answer.

comprehensive. The response just above concedes that very point but makes a further orthogonal point that answers to *different* questions can be comprehensive.

This further point is not under dispute. We're simply trying to offer an answer to the question of what to do that doesn't involve authoritative normativity. We're not trying to answer the practical* question of what to* do or the practical** question of what to do*. So alternative normative concepts offer no grounds for appealing to authoritative normativity rather than comprehensiveness as an answer to the practical question.

Authoritarians may insist that the practical question and the practical* question are so close that this further point is *not* orthogonal. But we shouldn't be fooled into thinking that these two questions are all that close. Just because the English terms for being practical and being practical* share many letters, if one is normative, so too is the other. Indeed, if being practical* doesn't bear on what to do, how could it be normative?

Discussions concerning the possibility of alternative normative concepts like alternative reasons or *schmeasons* often take place at an extremely high level of abstraction. Philosophers in these discussions sometimes wonder whether there could be an alternative reason or schmeason to act very "differently" than the ways of acting preferred by reasons. We conjecture that philosophers would find themselves much less sympathetic to alternative normative concepts if these discussions were more concrete; e.g., no one would be remotely inclined to consider tying themselves and their family down to the kitchen table in response to the fact that the kitchen is on fire even if somehow the balance of alternative "smeasons" recommended it. That's because they, like all other practical agents, are forever trying to answer the question of what to do by assessing reasons to do various things. They are not practical* schmagents trying to answer some different practical* question by assessing schmeasons. The practical question -- the central question for practical agents like us -- is privileged by its unique and constitutive connection to agency in a way that alternatives are not.[19]

In sum, *some* accounts of normative flavour, such as the domain view, need something like authoritative normativity to respond to the problem of alternative normative concepts. But not all accounts of normative flavour have this problem. The ones that don't have this problem don't need authoritative normativity to solve it. Rather, the all-things-considered

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[19] In Eklund (2017)'s terms, the practical question is "alternative unfriendly". Part of this comes from the fact that it's entirely unclear whether you've tokened any normative concepts when you're wondering what to do -- neither *what*, nor *to*, nor *do* is normative. So alternative normative concepts do not seem to give us grounds for positing alternatives to the practical question. We're merely granting the existence of such alternatives on behalf of our opponents -- but we're deeply sceptical that there are genuine alternatives to the practical question.

ought suffices to answer the practical question for these views because it, and its corresponding *may*, *must*, etc., are the uniquely comprehensive normative concepts.

4. *Deliberation and Authoritative Normativity.*

The final argument for authoritative normativity we'll consider appeals to practical deliberation itself, deliberation about what to do. McPherson (2018) offers the most developed version of the argument, with important antecedents such as Enoch (2011). This argument begins with a question. How do you decide what to do in cases like Sticky Situation, where prudence and morality conflict? You could just flip a coin to decide whether to do the prudent thing or the moral thing. But, if you did, you would clearly be choosing an option arbitrarily. After all "selection can count as arbitrary in virtue of the etiology of that selection involving either (a) relevant arbitrary picking or (b) a failure even to consider a relevant normative conflict" (2017: 264).

You could also plump for one of those two options, pushing yourself to choose one just option for the sake of choosing it. But if, for example, you just choose the moral option simply because it's the moral option, you're wrongly excluding prudential factors from consideration and *vice versa*. Choices based on that wrongful exclusion are also arbitrary since they arbitrarily exclude relevant factors.

You could appeal to a third standard instead. But it needs to be special. Choosing to do the moral thing because it is also, for example, the *polite* thing fails to consider the relevant normative conflict; after all, how do prudence and morality figure in your decision about what to do if you're ultimately just doing what's polite? This third standard must, therefore, account for these competing standards, rather than being wholly independent from them, as etiquette is to morality and prudence.

McPherson offers a *constitutivist* account of that third standard: for many activities, you count as engaging in that activity only if you're subject to its constitutive standards. For example, you count as playing chess only if the way you move the chess pieces is subject to the rules of chess. McPherson argues that the activity of *choice* — that is, of choosing how to act — is like chess. The activity of choice is constituted by standards that underlie a distinctive sense of *ought*, which tells us what to do in sticky situations. McPherson argues that the hallmark of this *ought* is its 'authoritative normativity', so, according to him, we need authoritative normativity in order to choose correctly. What's distinctive of authoritative normativity, McPherson alleges, is that it offers "the constitutive success

conditions for [an agent]'s activity of non-arbitrary selection concerning [action, broadly construed]".[20]

Of course, we disagree for reasons stated above. Satisfying the constitutive standards of choice requires only a *comprehensive* sense of 'ought', not a distinctively authoritative one, for the all-things-considered *ought* is (a) non-arbitrary and (b) considers the relevant normative conflict as a special case of considering all normative conflicts. McPherson explicitly rejects this proposal. But his reasons for rejecting it depend on arguments that we've already rebutted.[21] So by rebutting those arguments, we also rebut McPherson's deliberation-based argument.

Nevertheless, his argument deserves its own discussion given its clarity, novelty, and influence. So we'll rebut McPherson's claim that non-arbitrary deliberation employs authoritatively normative concepts without relying on the preceding arguments. We'll rebut it by arguing that non-arbitrary practical deliberation does not require *any* normative concepts -- such as *ought*, *reason*, *best*, and so on -- much less *authoritative* ones.[22]

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[20] McPherson (2018: 270).

[21] For example, McPherson offers an argument against the all-things-considered *ought* on pp.257-8. He writes, "Similarly, a gloss of "all things considered" as all reasons considered is unhelpful. If this means all authoritative reasons considered, then we have simply moved the bump in the rug. If it means all reasons, including the non-authoritative ones, considered, then it is hard to see how this distinguishes the authoritative ought from other oughts: just as the function from reasons to the authoritative ought will presumably assign zero weight to some reasons (the non-authoritative ones), the function from reasons to the prudential ought will presumably assign zero weight to the non-prudential reasons" (258). Whether the final *ought* needs to be sensitive to the authoritative/non-authoritative distinction is part of what's at stake in this debate. It is therefore question-begging to assume that the distinction is a good one -- that there are authoritative reasons -- and then reject the all-things-considered *ought* because it does not respect the distinction. Second, McPherson seems to imply that both the prudential *ought* and the all-things-considered *ought* consider all reasons. But only the latter does according to the subset view.

[22] McPherson (2018: 256) writes, "*practical ought* is part of a family of authoritative concepts, which range across various dimensions of normative structure. Just as we can talk of a range of narrowly moral concepts — *moral requirement*, *morally better*, *moral reason*, etc.—we can talk about their explicitly authoritative structural correlates: *practical requirement, practically better*, *practical reason*, etc. The last of these is arguably the most infectious contemporary locution for gesturing at authoritative normativity".

Deliberation is a transition between attitudes, starting ones and a concluding one, that is 'rationalizable' or susceptible to rational explanation.[23] Practical deliberation, it is widely assumed, concludes in an intention or intention-like attitude — an attitude with a world-to-mind fit. So our dispute concerns whether transitioning from starting attitudes to a state with a world-to-mind fit requires normative concepts to avoid both "(a) relevant arbitrary picking [and] (b) a failure even to consider a relevant normative conflict."

How does non-arbitrary reasoning exclude arbitrariness without including normative concepts? We think instrumental deliberation does. In particular *virtuous* instrumental deliberation excludes arbitrariness since virtuous intentions are non-arbitrary. Here's why.

An ancient and appealing conception of virtue requires desiring the good in proportion to its goodness and hating the bad in proportion to its badness.[24] Correspondingly, because value comes in degrees, the virtuous agent's various desires come in various strengths, the strength of each desire reflecting the weight or strength of the agent's reasons for having those desires. So if the virtuous agent has a strong reason to give to charity, she strongly desires to give to charity. And if she has an only weak reason to mind her manners, she only weakly desires to mind her manners.

Suppose that the virtuous person is stuck in Sticky Situation. That is, she can do what's prudent by taking the money and running or she can do what's moral by staying and helping. But how does she decide what to do? We think that she reasons instrumentally. When we reason instrumentally, we investigate the means to our ends, and, if we're doing it well, we pursue our most strongly desired end by the sufficient means that most promotes our other ends.

As a result, the virtuous agent can decide what to do by engaging in sound instrumental deliberation. Suppose that, all things considered, she ought to stay and help, doing what's moral. Given that she's virtuous, her desires are proportioned to the reasons to do what's prudent and moral, so she desires to do what's moral in this case. And given that she's reasoning well, she'll judge that staying and helping is the necessary means to her most strongly desired end.

Does this episode of reasoning satisfy McPherson's first criterion -- that is, does she avoid "relevant arbitrary picking"? The virtuous agent is not picking arbitrarily but choosing the sufficient means to her most desired end. So it clearly satisfies the first criterion. Does it satisfy McPherson's second criterion -- that is, does she avoid a failure even to consider

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[23] See Wedgwood (2006), Broome (2013a), and McHugh and Way (2016) for some recent, influential scholarship. See Davidson (1963) and Harman (1986) for some foundational work that informs our assumptions.

[24] See Hurka (1998) for an especially lucid articulation of this view.

a relevant normative conflict? The virtuous person is virtuous precisely because their desires track their reasons. She considers, indeed *mirrors*, the relevant normative conflict by a symmetrical motivational conflict. Although she does not consider the conflict through her beliefs, she is constitutively attuned to it through her desires. So the episode satisfies the second criterion

So it seems that defending the necessity of normative concepts for non-arbitrary practical deliberation requires insisting that the virtuous person's practical deliberation in Sticky Situation tokens normative concepts. But the evidence seems to show otherwise.

Because the virtuous agent's desires reflect her reasons, where there is competition between reasons there is competition between her desires. These desires compete to determine what she does analogously to how her reasons compete to determine what to do in her case. So virtuous agent has at least three desires in Sticky Situation:[25]

1. *Desire*(to stay and help if that benefits others)

2. *Desire*(to grab the money if that benefits you)

3. *Desire*(to stay and help if that's what benefits others and not you)

Given these desires, if the virtuous agent learns that staying and helping would benefit others but not herself, she can perform *modus ponens* on (3) (or something reasonably close) and arrive at the desire or intention to stay and help.[26] That is, if she desires to stay and help if it benefits others, she will reason her way to staying and helping even if she does not benefit from helping them. Critically, none of these attitudes tokens a normative concept as part of its content. So engaging in practical reasoning does not require tokening normative concepts; it suffices to condition one's non-cognitive attitudes on the right beliefs.

This concludes our defense of the second claim offered in the introduction. We rebutted concerns about the all-things-considered *ought*, leading us to believe that authoritative normativity is a solution in search of a problem. We'll now turn to the third claim, arguing that not only is authoritative normativity *unnecessary* for normative theorising, there are also good reasons to avoid the concept altogether.

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[25] Broome (2013b) represents reasoning in roughly this way, using what he calls "marked contents", which are marked by reflecting both content and attitude so as to reflect, for example, the difference between believing that the Habs won the Stanley Cup in 2021 and wishing that the Habs won the Stanley Cup in 2021.

[26] We'll have to treat these indicative conditionals as non-monotonic to get the right results. This is not terribly controversial in this context. See Dancy (2004) and Horty (2012). We're thinking of conditional imperatives along the lines sketched by Charlow (2013; 2014).

5. Against Authoritative Normativity

After visiting Oxford University's colleges, a tourist asks their guide, "These colleges are *lovely* but where's Oxford University?". The tourist is making a particular kind of mistake, imagining that Oxford University is something over-and-above its constituent colleges. Gilbert Ryle called this a *category mistake*.

Consider an analogy. Suppose a student is interested in studying moral normativity. So we point out some reasons: reasons against lying, reasons to act fairly, reasons to promote equality, reasons to protect others from harm, and so on. The student then asks, "These reasons are *lovely* but where's the moral normativity?". We think the student is just as confused as the tourist. The "moral normativity", if we wish to speak of it in such misleadingly reifying terms, is *right there*; it is constituted by those very reasons. We can abstract from them, and discuss "moral normativity" as such, but that abstraction is derivative at best and misleading at worst.

Now, revisit the contrast with which we opened. Reasons not to move your pawn three spaces differ from reasons not to drive when you drink. After all, drunk driving is a serious transgression; mismanaging your pawn is not. But why is only the former serious? According to authoritarians, drunk driving is a serious transgression because the reasons against it have authoritative normativity.

We favour a different explanation: drunk driving is a serious transgression because it kills people. Pawn mismanagement does not kill people. So it's not as serious a transgression. That is, the reasons not to drive drunk involve things like killing pedestrians, passengers, and yourself; causing costly damage to both public and private property; imposing the risk of harm on those with whom you share the road; etc. You don't add anything to this explanation by saying, for example, risking others' lives is a reason not to drive drunk *and moreover, it's an authoritative reason*. The fact that drunk driving is deadly does all the work. Just as there's no "moral normativity" over-and-above the moral reasons, there's no "authoritative normativity" over-and-above the weighty reasons that count against drunk driving. Just as it's a category mistake to think that there's an Oxford University apart from the colleges, it's a category mistake to think that there's authority apart from reasons.

This is why we find it perplexing that someone could look at the totality of reasons, discern where their balance lies, yet look for something over-and-above the totality of reasons -- namely, their "authoritative normativity -- for guidance about what to do. The authority is

right there, in the reasons themselves, not in something we add to those reasons such as an authoritative standpoint, an authoritative domain, or an authoritative point of view.

Authoritative normativity relies on locating kinds of normativity outside of reasons. As we've shown, it relies on the domain view's cheap and plentiful selection of normative flavours. And this relies on a similarly cheap and plentiful supply of standpoints or domains.

However, the subset view is stingier. It recognizes fewer normative flavours. It limits them to kinds of reason-giving considerations. We have cause to recognize a moral normative flavour only because something unifies the normativity exhibited by the fact that some act would help me keep my promise, or avoid harm to others, or help another flourish, etc. And we have cause to recognize a prudential normative flavour only because something unifies the normativity exhibited by the fact that some act would satisfy one of my desires, or be pleasurable, or help me flourish. So, assuming the subset view, authoritative normativity also requires a special kind of consideration, which we'll call *authoritative considerations*.

There are at least two reasons to reject authoritative normativity if it requires accepting an authoritative class of considerations. The first is that there simply *doesn't* seem to be a third set of considerations to which we appeal when we, for example, settle the conflict of morality and prudence in Sticky Situation. There are the considerations in virtue of which staying and helping is moral. There are also considerations in virtue of which taking the money and running is prudent. But there are no *further* considerations that, properly appreciated, reveal what to do. Rather, it seems that we deliberate in the manner required by the all-things-considered *ought*: we weigh the moral reasons against the prudential ones and try to see where the balance lies. Without distinctively authoritative considerations, we have no cause (or need) to posit authoritative normativity.

The second problem is that authoritatively normative facts are not just absent, not just superfluous, but *immoral*.[27] Suppose that perfect deliberators intrinsically desire only that which is fundamentally normative -- that what's normatively fundamental is what's motivationally fundamental. Authoritative normativity is said to explain the conflict of other norms. That makes authoritative normativity more fundamental than moral, prudential, rational, aesthetic, legal, etc. normativity. Thus, if there *are* authoritatively normative facts *and* if the structure of ideal motivation mirrors the structure of normativity, then what's motivationally fundamental are facts about what's authoritatively normative. On these

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[27] Compare with Erdur (2016) and Hayward (2019).

assumptions, good or virtuous agents will, therefore, be motivated by facts about what's authoritatively normative rather than other facts.

We find this implication totally unacceptable. Only a philosopher could believe it. What matters *most* --- what motivates us if we're good people --- is facts about pleasure, pain, and promises: prosaic facts. Facts about what's authoritatively normative simply do not matter in this way. As Frankena put it, "morality was made for [hu]man[s], and not [hu]man[s] for morality". Centering authoritative normativity therefore privileges the wrong, spooky, normative stuff rather than what obviously matters.

The point is worth belabouring. It is quite frankly bizarre to think that authoritatively normative facts tell us anything about why you ought to be patient with your kids and why you ought to answer that referee request in 24 hours beyond what the moral facts do. So it seems that authoritatively normative facts can't matter in the way that they must matter to have any bearing on how we ought to live our lives.

Authoritarians might shrug: so much the worse for the subset view that it finds no space for authoritative normativity. But by rejecting the subset view, authoritarians compromise their metanormative neutrality. That's because one of the leading metanormative theories requires the subset view.[28] *Reasons First* is the view that facts about normative reasons explain all other normative truths. As a special case of this thesis, facts about *normative flavour* are explained by facts about reasons -- in particular, facts about the kind of considerations that give reasons.

For example, if the fact that it would hurt someone is a moral reason not to do it and if the fact that it would offend their sensibilities is an etiquette reason not to, then the difference between morality and etiquette is owed to a more fundamental difference between the fact that it would hurt someone and the fact that it would offend their delicate sensibilities. And if you're committed to explaining *all* normative differences with differences between the facts that are reasons, then those differences between facts cannot themselves be normative.[29] For example, we cannot explain why the fact that it would hurt someone is a *moral* reason by appealing to a further normative property -- a *moral* perspective on reasons, a *moral* standpoint, a *moral* domain -- that distinguishes morality and etiquette.

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[28] See Howard (2021) for an extended defense of this argument. See also Howard & Schroeder (forthcoming).
[29] Unless those normative differences are further explained by non-normative differences between other facts about reasons. Schroeder (2007: Chapter 7) employs this observation in his recursive theory of weight.

After all, doing so introduces a new normative distinction that must be reduced to claims about non-normative differences between facts, beginning the cycle anew. Consequently, the only way to justify a distinct kind of normativity, on these assumptions, is to locate a distinctive kind of fact. A distinctively authoritative kind of normativity will therefore require distinctively authoritative reasons --- that is, a special class of considerations. And there just aren't such considerations.

Of course, the fact that Reasons First and the doctrine of authoritative normativity are incompatible does not show that one or the other is false. But every argument for Reasons First is an argument against authoritative normativity. Of course, the converse is also true. But we've hoped to show that the case for needing authoritative normativity is actually quite thin. The all-things-considered *ought* and related concepts such as *may* do everything that authoritative normativity is said to. So far from being metanormatively neutral, it is needlessly controversial.

Conclusion

French socialist Louis Auguste Blanqui coined the expression "Ni dieu, ni maître!" in 1880. Anarchists and labour advocates across the English-speaking world have since championed the counterpart phrase "No gods, no masters!". Its popularity is no mystery. The slogan forthrightly expresses the spirit common to those three broadly progressive movements: that political authority flows from the people up. Authority conjured *ex nihilo* at the top of a political hierarchy is specious at best and pernicious at worst. If a political office --- secretary of state, tax collector, chief of police, etc. --- has power, it is only derivatively so, because the office serves those at the bottom.

Our chapter can be read as an argument for extending this slogan from the political domain to morality, prudence, rationality, and every other normative domain. Whether in the political realm or elsewhere, normativity always rests on, and flows from, the bottom up. It rests in the prosaic considerations that are evident to anyone attuned to human needs and wants; not in something that abstracts away from those considerations like authoritative normativity. When conjured *ex nihilo* at the top of a normative hierarchy, authoritative normativity is specious at best and pernicious at worst.

What's at the bottom of normative hierarchies? Well, the people, once again. This chapter's title is written half in jest. But only half. Normativity is located in pleasure, pain, the promises we've made, and the conventions by which we live; that is, it rests with our distinctly human concerns. Why shouldn't you do it? Because it hurts or because you said

you wouldn't or because it's rude. Again, as Frankena (1973: Ch.3) put it, "morality was made for [hu]man[s], not [hu]man[s] for morality." Likewise, Williams in Williams (1985) and elsewhere continuously stressed that losing grip of this thought alienates us from what genuinely matters. While Frankena and Williams express undeniable truths, signs of those truths' waning influence portend trouble on the metaethical horizon. We fear that some metaethicists have lost grip of the common-sense idea from which Williams and Frankena remarks draw force. Metaethicists should resist authoritarians.

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