

Modal Normativism:

We can work it out

Claims of metaphysical necessity and possibility

- Don't aim to describe modal facts or properties or features of other possible worlds
- Provide a particularly useful way of expressing semantic rules and their consequences in the object-language

Challenges:

- The view can't properly capture the meanings of modal terms or explain our ability to reason with them
- The view has untenable ontological consequences
- The view is viciously circular

The lesson:

- Apply modal normativism across the board
- Combine it with:
 - meta-ontological deflationism
 - deflationism about meaning
 - deflationism about truth

The Plan

- The view
- Its attractions
- Problems:
 - With discourse
 - With ontology
 - With circularity

The Introduction of Modal Discourse

- In games, rules may be expressed:
 - in imperative form
 - the simple indicative form
 - Advantage: Express conditionals that make explicit our ways of reasoning among rules

Problems with the indicative formulation:

- Confusing the regulative and the descriptive
 - Leading to mistakes in reasoning
- No way to express permissions
 - Or reasoning between rules and permissions

Advantages of modal formulation:

- Makes regulative status explicit
 - Thereby enables us to avoid mistakes
- Enables us to express conditionals that make explicit our ways of reasoning with rules
- Enables us express permissions as well as requirements

In short:

- It's easy to see modal terms used in game rules as providing particularly advantageous ways of expressing rules and permissions and showing our ways of reasoning with them.

Claims of metaphysical necessity:

- Many metaphysicians are tempted to see as attempting to describe essences, modal properties, or features of all possible worlds

My way: Necessity claims

- Help us convey constitutive rules and permissions and our ways of reasoning with them in particularly advantageous ways
- The goal: understand alethic modality—in terms of deontic modalities—rules, permissions, obligations.

Constitutive semantic rules:

May be conveyed by:

- meta-language imperatives
- object language indicative analytic claims
 - Normally used in tacit language instruction
- Object language necessity claims

Common uses of basic necessity claims:

- Tacit language instruction
 - conveys that it would be improper (contrary to the constitutive semantic rules) to *deny* that p.
 - may also be used to *correct* or *condemn* uses that involve denying p, without *reporting on* the linguistic rules or on the statement p.

Functions of modal expressions:

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

Why convey semantic rules in the object language?

- Less cumbersome, more familiar
- Not all rules may be expressed in meta-language as ‘intra-language’ rules: e.g. those introduced by ostensive definitions
 - such rules that cannot be fully stated in the meta-language
 - But may be conveyed in object-language modal statements involving demonstratives or names

The Attractions of Modal Normativism

- Epistemic
 - Avoiding mysteries of heavyweight realism, possible worlds realism
 - Modal knowledge as acquired in moving from *mastering* the rules for expressions, to being able to explicitly *convey* them in the object language indicatives

Methodological:

- Clarifying methods of metaphysics
- Justifying use of 'intuition' on modal matters

Pragmatic:

- Clarifying what sorts of question are and are not answerable, and which require answers
- Dismissing radically revisionary views

Why it should be combined with a deflationary account of meaning

The embedding problem:

Searle: *don't confuse what speech act an expression is commonly used to perform with what the word means.* (1969, 137-8)

We need an account of the meaning of modal terms that:

- Is consistent with non-descriptivism
- Remains constant across changes of force
- Accounts for our ability to believe and reason with modal claims

An inferential role account:

- Plausible: ‘Necessarily’ is a logical term behaving in many ways like ‘all’
- Fits well:
 - With non-descriptivism
 - With our account of its function

Constitutive rules for modal terms

(a first shot)

- A. If p is an object-language expression of a constitutive semantic rule, then $\Box p$
- May add $\Box$ to any analytic statement , object-language expression of ostensive definition...
 - Helps fulfill function (1): making regulative status explicit

$$\text{B. } \Box p \rightarrow p$$

- licenses us to *eliminate* the modal operator
- enabling us to reason from (constitutive) rules to facts, fulfilling part of function (2).

$$C. (\Box p \ \& \ \Box (p \rightarrow q)) \rightarrow \Box q$$

- enables us to make it clear that logical consequences of rules also have regulative status. (fulfilling part of function (1))
- enables us to fulfill the other part of function (2): enabling us to make explicit our ways of reasoning *among* rules

$$D. \Diamond p \text{ iff } \sim \Box \sim p$$

- Enables us to fulfill function (3) of conveying permissions as well as requirements
- ...and part of (2): enabling us to make explicit our ways of reasoning between requirements and permissions (2)

Why it should be combined with deflationism about truth

Other challenges: Explain how the terms in question may be used

- to express beliefs,
- to express propositions that may be true and may be used in valid reasoning

Deflationism about propositions

(Schiffer 2003)

- From any indicative sentence p we may derive the singular term “The proposition that P ”, which is guaranteed to refer
- So from “Necessarily q ” we may derive: “The proposition that *Necessarily q* ”
- Modal claims may express propositions, be believed, etc.

Truth deflationism

Equivalence schema: $\langle p \rangle$ is true iff p

- So given “Necessarily, all bachelors are men” we can say “ $\langle$ Necessarily, all bachelors are men $\rangle$ is true”.
- So modal statements may be true/false, reasoned with...

Why it should be combined with a deflationary metaontology

Objections:

- It is absurd to think that there just are no facts of the matter about what sorts of change a person or statue can survive
- Denying modal properties/facts entails denying that there are objects in the world

Understandable

- To associate non-descriptivism with anti-realism
 - Moral expressivism
 - Modal conventionalism: Sidelle “there is no necessity ‘out there’” (1989, xi)
 - Blackburn: quasi-realism

But wrong:

- Combine with a deflationary meta-ontology:
e.g. the 'easy' approach
- Allows trivial entailments may take us from uncontroversial truths to true existence claims
 - About numbers
 - About properties
 - About events
 - About propositions

Apply this here:

- Modal normativism gives modal truths
- By trivial transformations we can derive singular terms referring to modal properties, facts
- There are modal properties, facts *in the only sense these terms have*.

What distinguishes this from traditional modal realisms?

- The meta-ontology
- The role the properties and facts play:
 - Not as ‘posited’ truthmakers
 - Not as explanatory
- Not *explanatory* realism but *simple* realism

Objection 3: Counterexample

A necessary truth without a corresponding semantic rule:

- Necessarily, numbers exist
- But on the easy approach, there are semantic rules that guarantee that the term ‘number’ refers.
- These are the correlates of the object-language necessity claim “Necessarily, numbers exist”

Why we must apply modal normativism *thoroughly*

Circularity worry 1:

- You analyze alethic modalities in terms of constitutive rules
- But constitutive rules must be understood in terms of alethic modalities: as rules that *must be* in force if the term is to be used

Reply:

- Necessarily, term T (bat1) is used only if rules R (apply only where there is an animal) are in effect.
- This is an object-language reflection of a constitutive semantic rule for ‘term’:
 - say this is the same *term* as that only if the same core semantic rules are in effect.

In short:

wherever they are made: in first-order metaphysical debates, or in the statement of the modal normativist theory itself, basic claims of metaphysical necessity are to be understood as object-language correlates of constitutive semantic rules.

Circularity worry 2:

- Are they constitutive rules simply arbitrary, or did they *have* to be this way?
 - If arbitrary: Conflicts with the feeling that we have the semantic rules we do *for a reason*
 - If they *have* to be this way: we must invoke the modal features to explain why we have the rules that we have, rather than using rules to explain object-language talk of modal features

Replies:

- For some terms, the rules may be fairly arbitrary

But what about basic/natural terms?

- We can deny they are arbitrary without saying they map modal features
 - Checkers rules
 - Foul rules

In short:

Adopting certain rules rather than others may be *pragmatically* justified

- Similarly for our more basic terms ‘same person, ‘same (medium sized) object’

We may even be able to say that certain basic rules are not optional, *given the kinds of creature we are*

But doesn't that invoke a metaphysical necessity?

- No: a physical one
- But these needn't be thought of descriptively either:
 - Ryle (laws as inference tickets)
 - Sellars (laws as justifying or endorsing inferences)

But aren't laws of logic/math
necessary in a stronger sense?

- For *any* kind of creature/thinker?
- Maybe, but we needn't see this as *because they match the necessities in the world*

In short:

- The normativist needn't deny that in some sense or other we *have to have* at least some of these rules
- We must just understand these claims of necessity as also implicitly *normative*

Other ways to see it:

- Some laws of logic as object-language expressions of rules of use for connectives
- Others as rules the force of which must be acknowledged by anyone who is to count as a thinker/reasoner at all?

The recurrent lesson:

- If you're going to be deflationary, go all the way.
- If you do, there's good hope that:

We can work it out.