Against Metaphysical Egalitarianism

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Abstract

Many philosophers think that a metaphysical theory should be evaluated by the degree to which its ideology accurately represents the fundamental structure of reality. But that position pushes them to make seemingly invidious metaphysical distinctions. For instance: is a metaphysical theory that employs logical conjunction better than one that employs logical disjunction? In this paper, I evaluate a prominent solution to this problem: metaphysical egalitarianism. According to metaphysical egalitarianism, the best theory is the theory that avoids making seemingly invidious metaphysical distinctions by employing both logical conjunction and logical disjunction. I argue that metaphysical egalitarianism should be rejected, primarily because it neglects the disvalue of employing inaccurate ideology.

Keywords: epistemic values; fidelity; fundamentality; ideology; metametaphysics; metaphysical structure

Introduction

Metaphysics, or a part of it anyway, is about the fundamental structure of reality. Those who engage in this part of metaphysics develop competing characterizations of reality's structure and argue for and against these characterizations. The goal of this project is accuracy: ultimately, what makes one characterization better than another is the extent to which it more accurately corresponds to the way the world really is structured. Everything else – the arguments, the objections, the questionable appeals to intuition – is in service to achieving accuracy.

In my estimation, this metaphysical project is worthwhile.[1] Yet it leads to a problem.

[1]Of course, plenty of philosophers disagree. Some philosophers (like Warren (2016)) doubt the epistemological foundations for pursuing an accurate characterization of reality's structure. Other philosophers (like Dasgupta (2018)) doubt whether such a characterization is even worthwhile to begin with. I have nothing to offer, here, to such doubters.

In this paper, I will discuss that problem, a prominent solution to that problem, and some reasons to think that that solution should be rejected.

Here's the problem. Some characterizations of reality's structure differ in ways that do not seem capable of reflecting genuine differences in that structure. For instance, one characterization employs the logical connectives '$\neg$' and '$\wedge$' and another characterization employs the logical connectives '$\neg$' and '$\vee$'. Notationally, these are different characterizations. But do the notational differences reflect differences in reality's structure? It sure doesn't seem that way! Any project that forces us to choose one of them as the "correct" characterization has a problem.

Here's the prominent solution. We don't have to choose between either characterization. We may instead endorse a characterization of reality's structure that uses '$\neg$', '$\wedge$', and '$\vee$'. More generally, we should reject characterizations that seem to make invidious metaphysical distinctions; instead, we should endorse egalitarian characterizations that incorporate the elements from either side of the distinction.

Here's why that egalitarian solution should be rejected. Characterizations come with commitments. In metaphysics – the part of it that is about the fundamental structure of reality, anyway – the use of an expression comes with a commitment to the accuracy of that expression. The egalitarian solution increases the odds that the endorsed characterization says something accurate about reality's structure. But the egalitarian solution also increases the odds that the endorsed characterization says something inaccurate about reality's structure. To extend a common metaphor: the egalitarian solution is a good strategy for carving reality where its joints are, but it is also a bad strategy for not carving reality where its joints are not.

In what follows, I more fully develop the above line of reasoning. First, in section 1, I characterize the structure-based project and its application to the ideology of a theory. Then, in section 2, I develop the problem through the use of paradigmatic examples and try to find a more illuminating explanation of its scope. In section 3, I discuss some solutions to the

problem, most especially the egalitarian solution developed by Sider (2011). To set up my argument against the egalitarian solution, I more carefully detail the multi-faceted nature of accuracy in the characterization of reality's structure (section 4). Finally, in section 5, I use this more careful understanding of accuracy to argue that the egalitarian solution should be rejected.

1 Ideology, Ideological Correspondence, and Reality's Structure

In metaphysics, your choice of words matters. Of course, your choice matters because it might determine whether your characterization of reality is true or false. But your choice also matters because your choice determines how you characterize reality's structure.

Compare two competing characterizations of emeralds. The first characterization uses the predicates 'green' and 'blue'. The second characterization uses the predicate 'grue' (x is grue $=^{df}$ either x is green and observed before 3000AD or x is blue and not observed before 3000AD) and the predicate 'bleen' (x is bleen $=^{df}$ either x is blue and observed before 3000AD or x is green and not observed before 3000AD). The first characterization says that all emeralds are green and no emeralds are blue. The second characterization says that the emeralds that are observed before 3000AD are grue and the emeralds that are not observed before 3000AD are bleen.

Both of these characterizations are true. In that sense, then, they are equally accurate. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the second characterization is defective. Of course, there is an abundance of competing explanations for why the second characterization is defective. But let's limit ourselves to the explanation most commonly offered by those who are engaged in the structure-based metaphysical project under consideration in this paper. They say that the predicates 'grue' and 'bleen' do not accurately correspond to reality's structure. Thus, any characterization that employs these predicates is defective. Even if

'green' and 'blue' do not perfectly correspond to reality's structure, they are a lot closer to it than are 'grue' and 'bleen'. So, even though both characterizations are true, the first characterization is more accurate, and therefore better, than the second characterization.[2]

To give this second sense of accuracy a name, let's call it *fidelity*. The fidelity of a characterization is determined by the words it uses. More precisely, it is determined by the characterization's *ideology*. The ideology of a characterization is the stock of undefined terminology employed in stating the characterization. Thus, the ideology of the first characterization includes 'green' and 'blue' but does not include 'grue' and 'bleen', even though the latter can be defined in terms of the former. Likewise, the ideology of the second characterization includes 'grue' and 'bleen' but does not include 'green' and 'blue', even though the latter can be defined in terms of the former and even though the latter might be in some sense "conceptually" or "perceptually" primitive for human beings that endorse that characterization.

Importantly, the ideology of a characterization is not limited to so-called categorematic expressions like predicates and names. Ideology includes all undefined expressions. The ideology of "All emeralds are green", for instance, includes the quantifier 'All'. The same holds for characterizations that use truth-functional connectives (like 'and') and other non-referring expressions, like modal operators ('$\Box$', '$\Diamond$').

The details of how ideology corresponds to reality's structure is a matter of controversy, but thankfully not one that needs to be resolved here. Some philosophers may choose to understand ideological correspondence in Lewisian terms, where an individual expression has a greater or lesser degree of fidelity based on how well it expresses natural properties. Thus, 'green' has a greater degree of fidelity than 'grue' does in the sense that the property expressed

[2]This position is what in Finocchiaro (2021) I call ideological externalism, specifically extreme externalism. Sider (2011) is a prominent example. I will talk as if he endorses the extreme position, but I admit he has not done so explicitly. I have, though, in Finocchiaro (2019) and elsewhere. Many other philosophers (like Lewis (1983)) seem to enodrse this position, except they may not phrase it in terms of reality's structure. Though I cannot discuss all of the details here, proponents of the structure-based project often think that there is no need within the project itself to be able to express claims about what grounds what (see, for instance, Sider (2011): 169–174). Of course, grounding can play a role in other projects. Thanks to an anonymous referee for reminding me to clarify this issue.

by 'green' is more natural than the property expressed by 'grue'. Other philosophers may choose to understand ideological correspondence in terms of some other relation, or even choose to take the correspondence as primitive. These differences do not matter for what follows. So, rather than wade into the controversial details, I will frame the point abstractly: according to the structure-based project, ideological correspondence is a representation-like relation that holds between a theory's ideology and reality's structure; it is evaluated on the basis of its accuracy.

Finally, not every philosopher thinks that your choice of words matters in the way I have articulated here. Those who work on projects in ameliorative metaphysics or conceptual engineering often advocate for terminological choices on the basis of reasons that have little to do with the fundamental structure of reality. For example, Dembroff (2018) argues that we should employ trans and non-binary gender kind terms even if they do not reflect metaphysically "real" gender kinds. By doing so, we can better reveal the hidden relationships between gender kinds, power, and privilege. Along different lines, those who work on projects in descriptive metaphysics aim to provide systematic characterizations of already-existing human conceptual schemes. In service of this aim, they may follow the lead of Strawson (1959) and insist on employing expressions that refer to individual entities even if, as some have argued, the world might fundamentally be a world without individuals.

Let a hundred flowers safely bloom. Both types of projects have as much of a right to the label "metaphysics" as does the structure-focused project that I am addressing in this paper. Perhaps there are reasons to reject metaphysical egalitarianism as it relates to these other projects. But that is beyond what I want to argue for here.

2 Invidious Metaphysical Distinctions

The structure-focused project maintains a firm commitment to the fidelity of a characterization's ideology. This commitment excels at explaining how to navigate choices between

predicates like 'green' and 'grue'. But it also generates a problem that threatens to undermine the legitimacy of the entire project.

Consider the two claims "For all x, if x is an emerald, then x is green" and "For all x, either x is not an emerald or x is green." The two claims seem to employ different ideologies. The first employs the material conditional ('$\rightarrow$') whereas the second employs disjunction and negation ('$\vee$', '$\neg$'). Intuitively, though, neither claim is a better characterization of reality than the other. They seem to say the same thing but with different words. And yet that intuition is incompatible with the structure-based project. According to this project, your choice of words matters. Thus, if the material conditional better corresponds to reality's structure than does logical disjunction, then you ought to endorse the first characterization instead of the second. As Sider puts it, "one wants to treat the choice... as a conventional one, whereas [the structure-focused project] elevates this choice to one of high metaphysics" (Sider (2011): 258).

Of course, not everyone would agree that they say the same thing. Different philosophers can have different meta-theoretical presuppositions with different expressive resources. Those who favor an intuitionistic logic, for instance, may reasonably claim that there is a difference between these two characterizations. Fair enough. For now, though, I will continue to frame the problem in terms of classical logic. I want to ignore controversies about the correspondence between logical expressions in natural languages and their analogues in formal languages and I also want to ignore controversies about the "right" meta-theory in which to frame the problem. As far as I can tell, non-classical logics will have their own versions of the problem. The same could be said for hyperintensional logics with grounding.[3]

The problem seems most acute in the case of logical connectives. But it's ubiquitous, and pretty much every philosopher even remotely engaged in the structure-focused project will encounter some version of this problem. Do you think that there is a metaphysically privileged quantifier most suitable for conducting ontological dispuites? Okay. Is that priv-

[3]Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me to clarify this important point.

ileged quantifier the universal quantifier or is it the existential quantifier? Do you believe in sets? Then do you express membership relations with '$\in$' or with '$\ni$'? Do you think Lewis's counterpart theory fails to meet its reductive ambitions and the objective modal features of the world are best characterized through claims that employ primitive modal operators? Well, which modal operators?

The structure-focused project requires that every difference in ideology has the potential to be metaphysically significant. Many differences in ideology, though, seem metaphysically insignificant. Because we cannot avoid making a choice between these differences, we are forced to maintain that there might be a metaphysically significant difference where there seems to not be one. That's a problem. To use Sider's evocative language, let's call this problem the *problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions*.[4]

My aside about meta-theory might have suggested that this problem is about how to handle equivalent characterizations of reality. But that's not quite right. The green characterization and the grue characterization are equivalent, but there is no problem in distinguishing between them. Perhaps, following Sider (2020): 189–190, we can distinguish between *weak* equivalency and *strong* equivalency. The green characterization and the grue characterization are weakly equivalent in that they "say the same thing" about reality, but they are not strongly equivalent because the green characterization says it more perspicuously – that is, in my terms, the green characterization has greater fidelity. In contrast, the conditional characterization and the disjunction characterization are equal in their fidelity. That might be right, but it fails to capture the force of the problem. There might be other characterizations that we discover, after arduous metaphysical investigation, to be equal in their fidelity. But we do not now regard distinctions between those characterizations to be invidious in the same way.

Thus far I have mentioned some distinctions that, to me, seem paradigmatic of the problem: distinctions between truth-functional connectives, quantifiers, set-theoretic and

[4]Other philosophers who have articulated this problem (though not always exactly as I do here) include: Cowling (2013); Donaldson (2015); Javier-Castellanos (2019); McSweeney (2019); Torza (2020, 2021).

mereological terms, and modal operators. But I don't assume my intuitions are universally shared; philosophers are bound to disagree about which cases should be included. For that reason, it may be worthwhile to consider some potential explanations for why a distinction would be invidious.

In each of the paradigm cases, the ideology on one side of the distinction is mutually interdefinable with the ideology on the other side. But interdefinability isn't sufficient for invidiousness since color predicates are mutually interdefinable with their gruesome counterparts. Another suggestion is that these distinctions are invidious because they break symmetries without good reason.[5] Unfortunately, I'm not sure how to understand symmetry in a way that includes the paradigmatic cases but excludes the gruesome cases.

One potential way symmetry can be developed is through the notion of converse asymmetric relations.[6] Consider expressions like 'earlier than' and 'later than'. If one of those relations is interpreted so as to include the present moment, then the pair is expressively redundant: x is earlier than y if and only if y is later than x. So there can be two true theories that differ only insofar as the first theory's ideology includes 'earlier than' and the second theory's ideology includes 'later than'. According to the structure-focused project, there might be a metaphysically significant distinction between the two with respect to how they characterize reality's structure. And yet that seems implausible. The expressions do not seem to offer different characterizations of reality's structure. *Mutatis mutandis* for other pairs of expressions like 'loves' and 'is loved by', 'above' and 'beneath', and 'inside' and 'outside'.

I do catch a whiff of invidiousness here. But I think that, ultimately, the problem is not a problem of converse asymmetric relations. Most pairs of converse asymmetric relations can be eliminated in favor of a single expressively equivalent relation. For instance, anything that can be said in terms of 'earlier than' and 'later than' can be said in terms of the three-part

[5] Cf Sider (2011): 260

[6] Cf McSweeney (2019): 122–124, though her discussion of converse asymmetric relations is importantly different from mine.

relation 'is temporally between', as in "My 30th birthday is temporally between the Spanish flu pandemic and the COVID-19 pandemic." More importantly, many of the paradigmatic cases do not involve converse asymmetric relations.

A better way symmetry can be developed (or replaced) is through duality. Duality is a somewhat contested concept. But, according to the version I want to consider here, duality holds between two expressions when each is logically equivalent to the simultaneous inner and outer negation of the other.[7] One well-known pair of dual expressions is logical conjunction ('$\wedge$') and logical disjunction ('$\vee$'). They are interdefinable as:

$$\phi \vee \psi \equiv \neg(\neg\phi \wedge \neg\psi)$$
$$\phi \wedge \psi \equiv \neg(\neg\phi \vee \neg\psi)$$

As these definitions show, '$\wedge$' and '$\vee$' are connected through a combination of external negation (negation applied just outside the scope of the connective) and internal negation (negation applied to each element within the scope of the connective).

Interestingly, duality is exhibited by many of the other paradigmatic cases. Existential and universal quantifiers are duals:

$$\exists x\phi \equiv \neg\forall x\neg\phi$$
$$\forall x\phi \equiv \neg\exists x\neg\phi$$

as are sentential modal operators:

$$\Box\phi \equiv \neg\Diamond\neg\phi$$
$$\Diamond\phi \equiv \neg\Box\neg\phi$$

Even more interestingly, the pattern fails to hold for standard gruesome cases. Though 'green' and 'grue' are interdefinable, they are not duals of one another.

[7] For some of the controversy surrounding duality, see Löbner (2011); Carnielli (2017). I should emphasize that there are even broader conceptions of duality beyond what I consider in this paper. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me to properly recognize this situation.

And yet duality does not seem to adequately characterize the difference between the metaphysical distinctions that are intuitively substantive and the metaphysical distinctions that are intuitively invidious. First, some expressions are duals but a distinction between them is not obviously invidious. For instance, obligation and permissibility are duals: the claim that ϕ-ing is obligatory is logically equivalent to the claim that it is not the case that not ϕ-ing is permissible. But obligation and permissibility seem like distinct features of normative reality.[8] Second, some of the paradigmatic cases of invidious distinctions do not seem to involve duality. The standard mereological primitives, for instance, are interdefinable but are not duals. Taking parthood ('Pxy') as primitive, proper parthood ('PPxy') and overlap ('Oxy') are defined as:

$$PPxy \equiv Pxy \wedge \neg(x = y)$$
$$Oxy \equiv \exists z(Pxz \wedge Pyz)$$

And, taking overlap as primitive, parthood and proper parthood are defined as:

$$Pxy \equiv \forall z(Ozx \rightarrow Ozy)$$
$$PPxy \equiv \forall z(Ozx \rightarrow Ozy) \wedge \neg Pyx; \text{ or } PPxy \equiv \forall z(Ozx \rightarrow Ozy) \wedge \exists w(Owy \wedge \neg Owx)$$

Maybe this mismatch can be corrected. Obligation and permissibility seem importantly different to me. But maybe their duality is reason enough to take them to be offering identical characterizations of normative reality. If so, then any metaphysical distinction between them is invidious. On the other side, maybe the fact that the standard mereological primitives are not duals is reason enough to take them to be different in their characterization of reality's mereological structure. Suppose one term (say, 'proper parthood') has greater fidelity than any other known mereological term. The fact that the others *seem* to have an equal degree of fidelity might be an relic of our misguided conceptual history.[9] Understood in this way, our situation would be similar to that of an imaginary alien civilization that was equally

[8] Cf. McNamara (2006); Gustafsson (2020)

[9] Fine (2010) argues that, despite initial appearances, fusion should be the favored mereological term. In contrast, Brenner (2020) argues that proper parthood is conceptually and linguistically more natural.

comfortable describing the world as either 'green' and 'blue' or as 'grue' and 'bleen'. A metaphysical distinction between these expressions would seem as invidious to them as a distinction between 'part' and 'overlap' seems to us.

At this stage, it's reasonable to suspect that the notion of an "invidious metaphysical distinction" is a gerrymandered mess. If so, then perhaps it would be better to think of the problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions as divisible into separate problems to be solved separately. For instance, perhaps there is a problem of duality and progress can be made by attempting to separate invidious duality from substantive duality.

Alternatively, which metaphysical distinctions are invidious might be an irreducibly epistemic matter. In the paradigm cases, we struggle to find reasons to choose one alternative over the others. In some cases, we entirely lack reasons. In other cases, we have reasons, but those reasons don't seem metaphysically relevant. For instance, the fact that the typical usage of the English word 'part' more closely matches the mereological relation of proper parthood might give English-language users a reason to choose that relation over the parthood relation. But that reason, in the absence of further argument, says nothing about the goal of the structure-based project to accurately characterize how the world really is. Finally, even in cases where we have *some* metaphysically relevant reason to choose one over the others, the legitimacy of that reason is highly contested. Some philosophers have alluded to intuition and to the phenomenology of experience as potential sources of metaphysically relevant reasons for choosing one of the alternatives.[10] Yet many philosophers would deny that they can provide any such reasons, and even more philosophers would deny that the reasons they can provide are strong. Perhaps, then, what makes a metaphysical distinction invidious is our epistemic situation: we lack metaphysically relevant reasons for making the distinction one way rather than another or all such reasons are either extremely weak or extremely contested.

I currently favor the epistemic account. But I won't resolve the matter here. That's not

[10]See, for example, Brenner (2020): 13–14; Korman (2015): 111–115; McDaniel (2017): 6–7; McSweeney (2019): 127–128.

because I think an explanation for why a distinction would be invidious isn't worth having. Indeed, it's hard to discuss the problem at the right level of abstraction without at least attempting to provide such an explanation. But, ultimately, a complete understanding of which distinctions are genuinely invidious and which are not is not required for what I want to argue for in this paper. I think metaphysical egalitarianism toward *any* potential invidious metaphysical distinction should be rejected.

3 Solutions to the Problem

Now I will present some solutions to the problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions. I am ultimately interested in arguing against the egalitarian solution. I present other solutions primarily for the purpose of better understanding the egalitarian solution. Thus, I will not exhaustively develop, defend, or argue against them.

The first solution revises the scope of ideological correspondence.[11] Your choice of words matters, but your choice of words doesn't always matter. Some expressions, like predicates, offer characterizations of reality's structure and so choices between competing predicates have the potential to offer characterizations with lesser or greater fidelity. In contrast, on this solution, other expressions are simply silent about reality's structure. For instance, while quantifiers are used in describing reality, quantifiers are not the kind of thing that characterizes structure. Thus, choosing a characterization that employs '$\exists$' over a characterization that employs '$\forall$' does not entail making a metaphysically invidious distinction.

There are two major problems with this solution. First, it is *ad hoc*. Why should we think that the cases that seem invidious just so happen to involve expressions that do not characterize reality's structure? Second, and more importantly, this solution fails to support that which the structure-focused project was originally intended to support. Once upon a time, meta-ontological deflationists like Hirsch (2009) questioned the substantivity of many meta-

[11] This first solution denies what in Finocchiaro (2021) I call maximal realism. It denies maximal realism by claiming that these expressions are – to use a phrase from Sider (2020) – representational artefacts.

physical disputes. Take, for instance, the dispute about mereological composition. According to one metaphysician, mereological composites (like tables) exist, but according to another they do not. Meta-ontological deflationists say that there is no substantive sense in which the two metaphysicians are disagreeing. Rather, the two metaphysicians are employing different notions of existence. The first metaphysician employs a permissive existential quantifier that admits the existence of composite entities. The other does not. The structure-focused project can salvage the substantivity of this metaphysical dispute – in fact, salvaging the substantivity of metaphysical disputes was why the structure-focused project was developed in the first place.[12] It salvages the dispute by enabling two claims. First, some notions of existence are more natural than others. Second, metaphysical disputes should be conducted in a shared language, one that by definition employs the more natural notion of existence. But all of this is just to say that some quantifiers better represent reality's structure than others do. Thus, this first solution to the problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions undermines the original motivations for the structure-based project. Furthermore, this is not a niche response to deflationists. The idea that there is a privileged quantifier for conducting metaphysics is one of the dominant positions in contemporary meta-ontology, so much so that other positions are often pitched as alternatives to it.[13]

The second solution to the problem offers an alternative analysis of the correspondence between ideology and reality's structure. In my original presentation, I implicitly assumed that the relata were individual bits of ideology like 'green', '$\vee$', and '$\Diamond$'. But, according to the second solution, ideological correspondence is not a relation between reality's structure and bits of ideology; it is a relation between reality's structure and ideological kinds. The difference between a bit of ideology and an ideological kind is analogous to the difference between an individual entity and an ontological kind. Widget and Igby are distinct entities, but they are both cats. Likewise, '$\Diamond$' and '$\Box$' are distinct bits of ideology, but they are both

[12]To the best of my knowledge, the first explicit development of this salvaging strategy is in the Introduction to Sider (2001).

[13]See, for instance, Tahko (2016), where Fine's reality-based approach is presented as an alternative to the privileged-quantifier approach of Sider.

modal expressions. According to the second solution, characterizations that employ one member of an ideological kind do not differ from characterizations that employ a different member of that ideological kind with respect to how they represent reality's structure. Thus, choosing one or the other does not entail making an invidious metaphysical distinction.[14]

The second solution relies on the notion of an ideological kind. But that notion has been notoriously hard to define.[15] Certainly, many of the paradigm cases of invidious metaphysical distinctions involve bits of ideology that seem to be of the same ideological kind. But without an independently motivated definition it would be *ad hoc* to insist that ideological kinds are individuated in a way that just so happens to avoid all such distinctions. Furthermore, this kind-based solution fails to account for cases that do not seem to be invidious. If 'green' is more natural than 'grue', then – according to this solution – they are not members of the same ideological kind. But why? They're both color predicates. Similarly, if some existential quantifiers are more natural than others, then – according to this solution – they are not members of the same ideological kind. I don't see how to develop a coherent account of ideological kinds that produces these results in a non-arbitrary and non-question-begging way.

The first two solutions attempt to substantiate the initial impression that invidious distinctions are invidious in virtue of the fact that they are incapable of delivering distinct characterizations of reality. The next three solutions abandon that attempt. They concede that distinct bits of ideology provide distinct characterizations of reality's structure. They then must confront a new challenge: for any seemingly invidious metaphysical distinction, there are no compelling reasons to favor one bit of ideology over the others. The solutions differ with respect to what they recommend endorsing in these situations.

According to the third solution, the fact that there are no compelling reasons to favor one bit of ideology over the others shows that none of them accurately corresponds to reality's structure. According to one version of this solution, there must be some other, unknown,

[14]Cf. McSweeney (2019): 122, 126–127
[15]Cf. Cowling (2013); Finocchiaro (2019)

bit of ideology that more accurately characterizes that aspect of reality's structure. Adapting terminology from McSweeney (2019), call this version of the third solution *metaphysical unfamiliarity*. According to another version of the third solution, the fact that there are no compelling reasons to favor one bit of ideology over the others shows that the choice between them outstrips reality's structure. In other words, reality's structure is partially indeterminate. Consequently, there is no fact of the matter as to which bit of ideology more accurately corresponds to it. Call this version of the third solution *metaphysical indeterminacy*.[16]

According to the fourth solution, some proper subset of the ideology best characterizes reality's structure. For example, either '$\Diamond$' better characterizes reality's modal structure or '$\Box$' does. But we simply don't know which it is. Again adapting terminology from McSweeney (2019), call this solution *metaphysical privilege*. Metaphysical privilege can be separated into two importantly different solutions. The first, *metaphysical dogmatism*, recommends employing one proper subset, perhaps for reasons that do not bear on whether or not that proper subset provides the characterization of reality's structure with the greatest amount of fidelity. For example, a metaphysical dogmatist might endorse a two-connective system like $\{\wedge, \neg\}$ because it is more conceptually familiar than one-connective systems like $\{\uparrow\}$. In contrast, *metaphysical agnosticism* recommends suspending judgment about which characterization to endorse. Thus, metaphysical agnosticism avoids making an invidious metaphysical distinction by refusing to make a choice. Metaphysical dogmatism acknowledges the invidiousness of the distinction but makes it anyway.

Finally, according to the fifth solution, the fact that there are no compelling reasons to favor one bit of ideology over the others shows that we should treat all of them as if they accurately correspond to reality's structure. This is the solution that Sider adopts. Adapting his terminology, call it *metaphysical egalitarianism*. Thus, according to metaphysical egalitarianism, for any invidious metaphysical distinction, we should employ all the bits of ideology that lie across the distinction. For instance, assuming that the modal structure

[16]Torza (2020) considers how adopting metaphysical indeterminacy can help to solve the problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions (although he does not use that phrase).

of reality is roughly what we think it is, we should employ both '$\Diamond$' and '$\Box$'.[17] Though the differences may seem subtle, metaphysical egalitarianism and the second, kind-based, solution are importantly distinct. The second solution holds that '$\Diamond$' and '$\Box$' "co-refer" to the same aspect of reality's structure. Metaphysical egalitarianism does not. Metaphysical egalitarianism keeps the correspondence at the level of bits of ideology and maintains that '$\Diamond$' and '$\Box$', if they accurately characterize modal structure, characterize different aspects of that modal structure. In a sense, then, metaphysical egalitarianism says that modal structure is richer than other solutions say it is.

Metaphysical egalitarianism's recommendation entails endorsing redundant ideology. Some philosophers have argued against it for precisely this reason. McSweeney accepts a principle that she calls *Weak Non-Redundancy*: there are no unexplained necessary connections between fundamental facts (McSweeney (2019): 124–127). Metaphysical egalitarianism seems to violate Weak Non-Redundancy. If 'parthood' and 'overlap' are both accurate, then facts about parthood will necessarily co-vary with facts about overlap. But remember that metaphysical egalitarianism says that they characterize distinct aspects of reality's structure. Thus, facts about parthood are fundamentally distinct from facts about overlap. But this necessary connection is unexplained. *Mutatis mutandis* for any set of ideology that metaphysical egalitarianism is applied to: quantifiers, modal operators, logical connectives, and so on. Therefore, metaphysical egalitarianism violates Weak Non-Redundancy.

Sider admits that metaphysical egalitarianism does violate Weak Non-Redundancy, but he also claims that Weak Non-Redundancy should be rejected. According to Sider, the only feasible non-redundancy constraint is a constraint on reasonable belief about what ideology we take to accurately characterize reality's structure. This explanatory constraint says that we shouldn't employ ideology that is not needed for reaching our explanatory goals. But this constraint is just one among many competing constraints on our choice of ideology.

[17] In fact, Sider denies that the world has modal structure (see Sider (2011): 316–323). Yet, as I hope is clear from the way I've framed the main body of this paper, my argument against metaphysical egalitarianism is a general argument against metaphysical egalitarianism. The details regarding which specific solutions specific philosophers apply to which specific cases do not matter.

Another constraint says that we shouldn't make metaphysically invidious distinctions. Thus, according to Sider, the *prima facie* case against employing redundant ideology is defeated by the stronger case against metaphysically invidious distinctions.[18]

Personally, I'm not sure what to make of McSweeney's non-redundancy argument nor am I sure what to make of Sider's reply. So I will set them aside and develop a new argument against metaphysical egalitarianism. This argument is based on a recognition of the underlying complexity of how fidelity relates bits of ideology to reality's structure.

4 The Multi-Faceted Nature of Fidelity

Believe truth! Shun error! As James (1979) reminds us, these are two separate commands. To be sure, they are both commands to "get it right". And people who seek to believe truth will often as a consequence shun error, and *vice versa*. But that is a consequence – and an uncertain one, at that. In reality, everyone has to find a way to balance their pursuit of believing truth and their pursuit of shunning error. How they strike this balance shapes their epistemic behavior: how much evidence they require before they begin to believe a claim to be true, what circumstances will lead them to abandon a belief of theirs, and so on. As a result, someone who prioritizes believing truth is, typically, more likely to succeed in believing claims that are true but less likely to succeed in not believing claims that are false.

In Finocchiaro (2022) I identified an analogous distinction for getting the right characterization of reality's structure. Seek the joints! Avoid the gruesome! These are two separate commands. On the structure-focused project, to employ a bit of ideology is to commit to it being an accurate characterization of reality's structure – to commit to its fidelity. So employing a bit of ideology is analogous to believing a claim to be true. To not employ a bit of ideology is to not commit to its fidelity. So not employing a bit of ideology is analogous to suspending judgment about a claim's truth.

[18]See Sider (2011): 259–260; Sider (2020): 209. To be more accurate, Sider's competing consideration is a consideration against making distinctions between symmetries. But, as I mentioned earlier, I think symmetry is a misleading way of framing the issue.

Similarly, there are different ways someone can balance their pursuit of endorsing fidelity and their pursuit of avoiding infidelity. How they strike this balance shapes their choice of ideology. Someone who prioritizes endorsing fidelity is typically more willing to employ extra ideology and, as a result, is more likely to succeed in employing ideology that accurately characterizes reality's structure. Someone who prioritizes avoiding infidelity is typically more cautious about employing extra ideology. As a result, they are less likely to succeed in employing ideology that accurately characterizes reality's structure. But they are more likely to succeed in not employing ideology that inaccurately characterizes reality's structure.

The analogy between truth and fidelity is strong, but it isn't perfect. In deciding what to believe, the decision is often between beliefs that are mutually inconsistent. That inconsistency motivates most people to either choose one of the options or suspend judgment. The same cannot be said about deciding what ideology to employ. There is nothing inconsistent about employing both '$\exists$' and '$\forall$', nor is there anything inconsistent about employing both 'green' and 'grue'. The functional role of inconsistency of belief is to some extent satisfied by redundancy of ideology. For philosophers like McSweeney, redundancy of ideology motivates them to either choose one of the options or suspend judgment. But I think even they would admit that the case for a constraint like Weak No Redundancy is not as strong as the case for the law of non-contradiction.

Nevertheless, the analogy between truth and fidelity can be usefully pushed just a bit further. There are many ways to balance the pursuit of believing truth and the pursuit of shunning error. But not all of them are rational. For instance, someone who cares only about believing truth ought to believe everything. But they thereby come to believe all sorts of falsehoods and contradictions. Similarly, someone who cares only about shunning error ought to suspend judgment about everything. Such a committed skeptic would be guaranteed to succeed in their goal. But that goal would be epistemically misguided. I think the same holds for fidelity: some ways of balancing the pursuit of endorsing fidelity and the pursuit of avoiding infidelity are irrational. Someone who cares only about endorsing

fidelity ought to employ 'green', 'grue', and every other gerrymandered color predicate on the off-chance that one of them successfully characterizes reality's structure. Similarly, someone who cares only about avoiding infidelity would end up not saying anything at all no matter the circumstances. Both of these strategies strike me as clearly irrational.

The philosophically challenging question is: which of the remaining strategies are rational?

5 Three Obstacles for Metaphysical Egalitarianism

A crime has been committed. Two suspects have been identified: Zhang San and Li Si. But none of the available evidence discriminates between the two. Thus, there is no compelling evidence-based reason for accusing one instead of the other. In fact, there is no compelling evidence-based reason for accusing only one of them. For all we know, Zhang San and Li Si might have worked together.

Who should we accuse? Zhang San? Li Si? Neither? Both?

Given what I've said thus far, none of these answers is determinately better than the others. None of these answers is determinately better because the case is thus-far insufficiently detailed. Everyone agrees that it would be better to accuse all and only those who in fact participated in the crime. But people may begin to reasonably disagree about whom to accuse as the details of the case are developed. Even if we set aside all of the practical and ethical concerns, there are many epistemic concerns that people may reasonably weigh differently. Just how much evidence has been gathered? And how carefully has that evidence been gathered? Are we confident that these are the only two people who could have done it?

There is also no determinately best solution to the problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions. Each case has its own details and those details can, in principle, sow reasonable disagreements about what to do.

Nevertheless, I think that the details of the paradigmatic cases show that metaphysical egalitarianism is not a good solution. More specifically, the solution faces at least three obstacles.

Here's the first obstacle. Sometimes, we don't know what to believe because some portion of the total available justifying evidence supports one option and another portion of the total available justifying evidence supports another option. In such cases, we could appeal to some epistemic considerations to adjudicate the decision. But that's not what is going on in cases of metaphysically invidious distinctions. Rather, in these cases, the total amount of available justifying evidence is really small, too small to justify any one of the options over the others. This is not incidental. As I have suggested, the main thing that makes each of these distinctions seem invidious is the fact that there is nothing – or next to nothing – that points in favor of making the distinction one way rather than another. To be clear, I don't mean to rule out every first-order consideration for making a particular metaphysical distinction. My point is more general: once we have resolved all of the cases that can be resolved on the basis of first-order considerations, we will be left with some cases that cannot be resolved that way. What should we do about those remaining cases? In a sense, any choice about what ideology to employ would be nothing but a guess. I suspect that many philosophers would view guesses in the absence of evidence as always irrational. If so, then any solution to the problem besides metaphysical agnosticism is irrational.

But let's try to be as charitable to metaphysical egalitarianism as possible and see if there is a way to rationalize its guess. In the face of uncertainty, we may adopt a decision-theoretic framework to guide our choice of ideology.[19] On this framework, decisions about what bits of ideology to employ are evaluated by their expected "utility". Positive utility is realized by employing ideology that accurately matches reality's structure. Negative utility is realized by employing ideology that fails to accurately match reality's structure. Assume

[19]Cf. Joyce (2009). Many philosophers have called into question the application of decision-theoretic frameworks to matters of belief (see, e.g., Berker (2013); Horowitz (2018)). Nevertheless, the simple framework I offer here is at worst a useful fiction for illustrating a line of reasoning that an egalitarian may adopt.

(for now) that success is as valuable as failure is disvaluable. Strictly speaking, fidelity comes in degrees and so success and failure also come in degrees. But let's simplify and assume that they are all-or-nothing. Thus, for any particular bit of ideology, you can choose to employ it or choose not to employ it. If you choose to employ it and it turns out to be accurate, that choice has a utility of 1. If you choose to employ it and it turns out to be inaccurate, that choice has a utility of -1. If you choose not to employ that bit of ideology, that choice is like the choice to suspend judgment about a belief and so it has a utility of 0.

Interestingly, on these assumptions metaphysical egalitarianism is the optimal guess. Consider the decision over which quantifiers to employ. Because we have very little – if any – available justifying evidence about which quantifiers accurately represent reality's structure, we should distribute our credence equally among all the possible outcomes under consideration. Thus (for now) the subjective probability that only '$\exists$' is accurate is 1/3, the subjective probability that only '$\forall$' is accurate is 1/3, and the subjective probability that both '$\exists$' and '$\forall$' are accurate is 1/3. Now consider the decision about what quantificational ideology to employ: (a) '$\exists$', (b) '$\forall$', (c) '$\exists$' and '$\forall$', or (d) agnosticism. The decision matrix looks like this:

	Agnosticism	Dogmatism ($\exists$)	Dogmatism ($\forall$)	Egalitarianism
Only $\exists$ is accurate	(0 + 0) = 0	(1 + 0) = 1	(0 - 1) = -1	(1 - 1) = 0
Only $\forall$ is accurate	(0 + 0) = 0	(-1 + 0) = -1	(0 + 1) = 1	(-1 + 1) = 0
$\exists$ and $\forall$ are both accurate	(0 + 0) = 0	(1 + 0) = 1	(0 + 1) = 1	(1 + 1) = 2

and the calculations for expected utility look like this:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{EU(Agnosticism)} &= 1/3(0) + 1/3(0) + 1/3(0) &&= 0 \\
\text{EU(Dogmatism } (\exists)) &= 1/3(1) + 1/3(-1) + 1/3(1) &&= 1/3 \\
\text{EU(Dogmatism } (\forall)) &= 1/3(-1) + 1/3(1) + 1/3(1) &&= 1/3 \\
\text{EU(Egalitarianism)} &= 1/3(0) + 1/3(0) + 1/3(2) &&= 2/3
\end{aligned}$$

Metaphysical egalitarianism's advantage holds for other paradigmatic cases as well. If the decision over mereological ideology is restricted to parthood and proper parthood, then that decision looks exactly the same. If the decision is expanded to include other mereological expressions – overlap, proper extension, etc. – then the math is more complicated insofar as there are more permutations to calculate. But the basic point remains: on the assumption that success is as valuable as failure is disvaluable, metaphysical egalitarianism has the highest expected utility.

What happens if we relax that assumption? In general, egalitarianism's advantage increases as the value of success increases in proportion to the disvalue of failure, but its advantage decreases as the disvalue of failure increases. This relationship sets up the second obstacle for the egalitarian solution. When success is half as significant as failure (e.g. employing an accurate bit of ideology has utility 1 and employing an inaccurate bit of ideology has a utility of -2), then metaphysical egalitarianism loses its advantage over metaphysical agnosticism. Thus, the plausibility of the egalitarian solution depends on a further claim that the range of permissible ways to weigh success and failure is more narrow than we originally thought. This dependence is a considerable obstacle for those who like the egalitarian solution but would like to remain permissive about the balance of epistemic value.

At this point, I should acknowledge that my (admittedly crude) application of decision theory to metaphysical theory choice is not immune from the problems that typically plague probability theory. I want to address two problems in particular.

First, how should probabilities be assigned to the various outcomes? Above, I implicitly appealed to the principle of indifference in order to assign them equal probability. But the principle of indifference is controversial, to say the least.[20] To those subjective Bayesians who would reject any constraints on their prior probabilities, I have nothing new to say. Certainly, the principle of indifference remains controversial. Many philosophers find it deeply intuitive. But philosophers have also offered substantive arguments for it. Pettigrew (2016) argues that

[20]For a useful summary of its controversy, along with those of other symmetry principles, see Zabell (2016).

agents who do not follow the principle of indifference are irrational insofar as they risk greater inaccuracy in their beliefs than necessary. Williamson (2007) gives a more practical defense, arguing that the principle of indifference leads to more (on average) cautious decisions in the face of practical risk. Someone may instead criticize my particular use of the principle of indifference. For example, the principle of indifference should be used by an agent who is trying to set their credences in the absence of any evidence whatsoever – a superbaby, in David Lewis's words. But those of us engaged in this dispute about which ideology to employ are not superbabies. Arguably, we have some direct evidence, however slight, regarding which bits of ideology are accurate. And, of course, we have indirect evidence from elsewhere in metapyhysics, including evidence in support of general principles that might be applicable to the problem at hand. Fair enough. But we are near enough to being superbabies that there's no substantive harm in simplifying the problem. If the evidence we had were enough to make a difference, then the choice between '$\exists$' and '$\forall$' would no longer seem invidious.

Second, even if the principle of indifference should be used, what is the space of possibilities it should be used for? Above, I defined the space of possibilities to include three elements: {Only '$\exists$' is accurate, Only '$\forall$' is accurate, Both '$\exists$' and '$\forall$' are accurate}. But there are other ways to define it, such as the two-element set {One and only one of the quantifiers is accurate, Both of the quantifiers are accurate}. There is nothing intrinsic to the decision-theoretic framework itself that privileges my three-element definition over other definitions. And yet different definitions can lead to different verdicts on which guess is the optimal one. Nevertheless, it seems clear to me that for this decision the 3-element definition of the space of possibilities is better than the 2-element definition. The 3-element definition is the one that the actual participants in this dispute use, and thus the 3-element definition provides a better representation of the preferences that are being evaluated. I concede the subjectivity of the decision. But the decision already involves subjective value judgments and I fail to see how this additional subjectivity is problematic. We don't know what the "true symmetries" of the world are for this decision. In the absence of such knowledge, we

can agree to individuate the possibilities as finely as we are able to, as we have already done.

The decision over which truth-functional connectives to employ presents a slightly more fraught version of this problem. We could define the space of possibilities over the accuracy of individual connectives or we could define it over the accuracy of minimally expressive sets of connectives. I think the first definition is ultimately implausible. If we were to define the space of possibilities over individual connectives, then we would have one possibility where negation was the only accurate bit of ideology. Plausibly, though, we know that is not possible. Whatever the correct logical ideology is, it has to be expressively adequate. Thus, we should define the space of possibilities over minimally expressively adequate sets and the various combinations of them.[21] When we distribute our credence equally among these possibilities, metaphysical egalitarianism remains the optimal solution.

But metaphysical egalitarianism faces a third – and in my opinion more daunting – obstacle. There might be other, unknown, bits of ideology that accurate represent reality's structure. McSweeney (2019) explicitly makes this point in connection to truth-functional connectives. We may know all of the truth-functional connectives, but McSweeney suggests that they might be grounded by some alternative logical structure. Of course, what that alternative logical structure might be is hard to say – it's unknown! Imagine what it would be like to be a philosopher in the grip of the Aristotelian logical tradition. For them, as for us, it is difficult or perhaps impossible to see alternatives.

I see no reason to not extend this point about unknown possibilities to every other decision involving seemingly invidious metaphysical distinctions. But if the possibility that the accurate ideology is unknown is included among the outcomes, then metaphysical egalitarianism's advantage shrinks in proportion to how likely that possibility is.

So, just how likely is it that the accurate ideology is unknown? Anyone who wants to adopt metaphysical egalitarianism has to maintain that it is quite unlikely. In fact, for the

[21]In fact, there is an infinite amount of minimally expressively adequate sets if we allow for connectives that "ignore" one or more inputs in the sense that their truth value is not sensitive to changes of those inputs' truth values. But let's follow Sider's lead in limiting the decision to 1-place and 2-place connectives.

decision over which quantifiers to employ, they have to assign the unknown possibility a probability of no more than 0.25. Otherwise, egalitarianism would have negative expected utility, putting it behind agnosticism as the optimal guess. This gap only increases as the probability of the unknown option increases.

When it comes to unknown ideology, the decision over which quantifiers to employ is a best-case scenario for metaphysical egalitarianism. That decision involves only four outcomes: the unknown outcome with some to-be-debated probability, and three other outcomes with equal probability.[22] One of those equiprobable outcomes, the one where all of the known bits of ideology turn out to be accurate, produces the most positive utility for egalitarianism. The unknown outcome, of course, produces the most negative utility. So the gap between agnosticism and egalitarianism also increases as the number of known outcomes increases. A decision over three bits of ideology – like 'parthood', 'proper parthood', and 'overlap' – generates eight outcomes. Thus, anyone who wants to adopt metaphysical egalitarianism for mereological ideology has to maintain that the probability that the accurate ideology is unknown is no more than 0.125. The situation is even more grim for the decision over which truth-functional connectives to employ.

I doubt that such probability assignments can be justified. Admittedly, I don't have a formal proof that the probability is greater than 0.25, or 0.125, or whatever. I don't even know how to go about providing such a proof. But I do have some reasons against the sort of low probability assignments that metaphysical egalitarianism needs. At a minimum, I think these reasons shift the burden of proof onto anyone who is inclined to adopt it as a solution.

Let me start with a slight *ad hominem*. In the same work where Sider endorses the egalitarian solution, he admits that "metaphysical inquiry is by its nature comparatively speculative and uncertain" (Sider (2011): 15). More recently, he admits that it seems "very unlikely" that we'll ever know which quantifiers have the greatest degree of fidelity (Sider

[22] I assume, for the sake of argument, that if there is an unfamiliar structure then it undermines the accuracy of all of our current ideological options. However, we might discover that reality's structure is such that some unknown bit of ideology is accurate as well as some known bit.

(2020): 209–210). In this respect, Sider and I seem to agree about the epistemic limitations of the structure-based project. But it would be unreasonable for someone to admit these limitations while simultaneously insisting that the probability that the accurate ideology is unknown is no more than 0.25. Seven-day weather forecasts accurately predict the weather about 80% of the time, while the accuracy of ten-day forecasts falls to 50%.[23] Again, I don't know how to translate speculative uncertainty into a precise probability assignment. But I would hesitate to say that metaphysics is somehow *less* speculative than meteorology.

More seriously, it is worth remembering that the details of each case really do matter. What reasons do we have for endorsing the ideology that is known to us? For quantifiers, we should believe that they accurately characterize reality's structure because they are indispensable. As Sider puts it, "every serious theory of anything that anyone has ever considered uses quantifiers, from physics to mathematics to the social sciences to folk theories" (2011: 223–224). He says the same for logical connectives (256–257). And, even though Sider doesn't, someone else could make the same argument in support of modal operators, mereological terms, and other bits of ideology connected to the problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions.[24] Such arguments could be used to justify the probability assignments that metaphysical egalitarianism needs.

Even the most compelling indispensability argument fails to give us certainty. But certainty isn't what metaphysical egalitarianism needs. It only needs to justify a high degree of confidence that the ideology is indispensible and, thus, that it accurately characterizes reality's structure. Perhaps the indispensability argument really is that good – again, I don't know how to translate such an argument into a precise probability assignment.

But I don't need to. I don't need to because what the indispensability argument shows

[23]These percentages come from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (specifically this website: https://scijinks.gov/forecast-reliability). Predictably, though, it is quite difficult to summarize weather forecasts into a single, all-encompasing number. For an excellent survey of the issue, see Hoffman et al. (2017), especially Chapter 5.

[24]Of course, not all indispensability arguments are equally compelling. I personally find the indispensability argument for quantifiers much more compelling than the indispensability argument for mereological terms. But I don't want to advocate for any specific position here. I only want to introduce indispensability arguments as a general counterpoint to my reasoning against metaphysical egalitarianism.

is that quantifiers *of some sort* are indispensable, that logical connectives *of some sort* are indispensible, and so on. The argument does not show that this particular quantifier ('$\exists$' or '$\forall$') or that particular logical connective ('$\rightarrow$' or '$\vee$') is indispensible. Of course, we don't know whether some currently unknown quantificational ideology could play the role that our current quantificational ideology plays. But, unless the indispensibility argument can be developed in a way that favors the specific set of ideology known to us now, it fails to justify the probability assignments that metaphysical egalitarianism needs.

I will end with one somewhat speculative reason to doubt that metaphysical egalitarianism can be justified. In his new book, *Alien Structure: Language and Reality*, Matti Eklund discusses how our current linguistic constructions could fail to perspicuously describe reality. He asks "Wouldn't it be a miracle if all possible languages were found among what we find familiar? And if there are possible alien languages, wouldn't it be a miracle if only familiar languages were in the market for presenting reality as it is?" (74). By definition, it is hard to articulate what these possible languages could be. But we may begin by considering familiar languages that nevertheless differ significantly from languages like English: higher-order quantification (Fritz and Jones (2024)), Tractarian factalism (Turner (2016)), and maps (Camp (2018)). We may also consider what would be alien to other beings. Eklund (following Hofweber (2016)) suggests that the representational systems of honeybees lack the sort of structure that human representational systems have. This difference is important for metaphysics insofar it suggests that honeybees are cognitively unable to endorse a characterization of reality that matches the way the world really is structured.[25]

In fact, the comparison to honeybees is the start of an argument in favor of alien structure. Like honeybees, humans are products of evolution. We have minds that represent reality because, evidentally, that helps us to survive. It's possible that we evolved in a way that enables us to accurately represent all of reality. What's more likely, though, is that we evolved

[25]To be clear, Eklund's notion of an alien language that could more perspicuously describes reality's alien structure is not the same as my notion of unknown ideology. As I understand it, alien language is among the unknown ideology. But there could be unknown ideology that is semantically similar to known ideology and therefore, in Eklund's terminology, familiar rather than alien.

in a way that enables us to accurately represent those parts of reality that were relevant to our survival but not those parts of reality that were not. Thus, we should suspect that humans are incapable of representing some parts of reality's structure. We already know that this is true for honeybees; it would be arrogant to assume that it is not true for us as well.[26]

Maybe this evolutionary argument doesn't succeed. (Indeed, as a proponent of the structure-based project, I really hope it doesn't succeed!) My point is that there are several reasons to suspect that the accurate ideology is unknown to us. Someone who wants to adopt the egalitarian solution to the problem of invidious metaphysical distinctions owes an explanation for why those reasons should be discounted. That might still not be enough to justify a credence as low as 0.25, or 0.125, or whatever. It is a start, though.

In summary, metaphysical egalitarianism faces three obstacles. First, egalitarianism is a guess in the absence of evidence, which some philosophers may judge to be always irrational. Second, egalitarianism requires a less permissive position about the balance of positive value and negative value – more specifically, about the positive value of accurate ideology and the negative value of inaccurate ideology. Third, egalitarianism requires assigning an unjustifiably optimistic probability to the claim that whatever bits of ideology turn out to be accurate are bits of ideology that are already known to us.

Conclusion

What should we do when we are forced to make a decision about what ideology to employ but lack any compelling evidence for how to make that decision? If we cared only about pursuing fidelity, then we should be egalitarian and employ all of the ideological options. But it is a mistake to care only about pursuing fidelity. Avoiding infidelity is also important, though how important it is in comparison to pursuing fidelity is a difficult question. Thus,

[26]This line of reasoning comes from Hofweber (2016): 254–256. See Eklund (2024): 234–241 for helpful discussion.

the decision about what to do comes down to difficult questions about value and probability.

Nevertheless, the math is only in favor of metaphysical egalitarianism when we give some contentious answers to those questions, the most contentious of which being that the probability that the accurate ideology is unknown is no more than 0.25, 0.125, or whatever. These answers might be right, of course. But they are answers in need of defense.

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