

ESSAY 5.2

Snare's Puzzle/Hume's Purpose:

Non-Cognitivism

and

What Hume Was Really Up to with No-Ought-From-Is

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1. Snare's Puzzle: How to Argue *from* No-Ought-From-Is to Non-Cognitivism?

Frank Snare had a puzzle. Taking Hume to be a non-cognitivist, Snare devoted a great deal of time and effort to the Motivation Argument, or as he called it, the Influence Argument, which he took to be the chief weapon in Hume's non-cognitivist armory. But he could not see how the No-Ought-From-Is passage was supposed to fit in. Hume seems to think it important and that 'a small attention' to this point would 'subvert all the vulgar systems of morality'. But so far as Snare could see, No-Ought-From-Is is impotent against the vulgar systems of morality if vulgarity consists in being cognitive. Why so? Because No-Ought-From-Is *follows* from non-cognitivism but not vice versa. Now it may be that Hume did not suppose himself to be developing a fresh argument for non-cognitivism. But if Hume *did* suppose himself to be giving a new and distinct argument it would be a 'particularly question-begging' affair, 'making Hume himself the first of the dogmatic Humeans' 'Thus Hume seems to argue that a new "ought" relation (or affirmation) cannot be deduced from others "entirely different from it". But is it so clear that "new" relations or affirmations cannot be deduced from "old"?' And even if it is 'then to assume moral affirmations are "new" in this sense is just to beg the issue'. (Snare, 1991, p 39.) So *either* No-Ought-From-Is affords no argument at all for non-cognitivism (but simply draws an interesting consequence) *or* the argument it affords is flagrantly question-begging.

The problem persists if we forget about Hume and his intentions and concentrate on recent and contemporary non-cognitivists. *They* seem to think that No-Ought-From-Is somehow supports non-cognitivism, but if No-Ought-From-Is follows from non-cognitivism but not vice-versa, how is this supposed to work?

The first point to note is that No-Ought-From-Is doesn't follow from non-cognitivism *by itself*. As Snare's rhetorical question reveals, another premise is required. 'Is it so clear,' he asks, 'that "new" relations or affirmations cannot be deduced from "old"?' The claim is that logic or deductive reasoning is *conservative*, that in a valid argument you don't get out what you haven't put in. If we add in this premise, then we can reconstruct the argument *from* non-cognitivism *to* No-Ought-From-Is.

- 1) Deductive logic is conservative: in a valid inference you can't get out a new relation or affirmation that you haven't put in.
- 2) Since moral judgments are not designed to state facts but to express emotion or prescribe action [insert non-cognitivist theory of choice] moral words always express 'a new relation or affirmation'
- 3) You can't derive an *ought* from an *is*, a moral conclusions from non-moral premises

This suggests a solution to Snare's Puzzle. If logic is conservative and non-cognitivism correct, then you can't get an *ought* from and *is*, a moral conclusion from non-moral premises. But, by the same token, if you *can* get an *ought* from and *is*, then either logic is not conservative or non-cognitivism is not correct. And, since the conservativeness of logic is widely taken for granted, it looks as if it is non-cognitivism that would have to go. This suggests a solution to Snare's puzzle, at least as regards the recent non-cognitivists. Perhaps they are *not* trying to argue *from* No-Ought-From-Is *to* non-cognitivism. Rather they are trying to vindicate No-Ought-From-Is in order to rescue non-cognitivism from a possible refutation.

Well maybe, but this does not sit well with the triumphalist tone of the non-cognitivists' rhetoric. For them, No-Ought-From-Is is not an outpost to be defended in order to avert defeat, but a forward base from which they hope to launch an offensive operation. They are not nervously insisting on No-Ought-From-Is in order to fend off a disproof - they are using No-Ought-From-Is to prove, or at least to argue, that non-cognitivism is correct.

So the puzzle persists: how can we construct an argument *from* No-Ought-From-Is *to* non-cognitivism?

2. Epiphany: Inference to the Best Explanation

About a decade ago it struck me with the force of revelation that most of the key arguments for non-cognitivism are best construed as inferences to the best explanation. That way they can be formulated in a clear and intellectually respectable manner. The No-Ought-From-Is argument is no exception. We take No-Ought-From-Is as a datum and reason backwards to the non-cognitivism that implies it. The argument goes something like this:

- 1*) You can't derive an *ought* from an *is*, moral conclusions from non-moral premises.

2*) The best explanation of 1*) is

a) that logic is conservative: in a valid inference you can't get out a new relation or affirmation that you haven't put in;

and

b) that since moral judgments are fundamentally different from non-moral propositions [insert non-cognitivist theory of choice] moral words represent a 'new relation or affirmation'

Therefore, probably:

3*) Moral judgments are fundamentally different from non-moral propositions [insert non-cognitivist theory of choice].

I call this the *Generic Argument* for non-cognitivism, since it is not so much an argument as an argument schema, which can be deployed by different kinds of non-cognitivists with more or less plausibility. In so far as there is one, this seems to be the argument of Hare's *Language of Morals*. According to Hare, the 'basis' of 'Hume's celebrated observation on the impossibility of deducing an 'ought'-proposition from a series of 'is'-propositions' is the logical 'rule' that *no imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative* (Hare, 1952, pp 28-29). And what is the basis of *that*? The principle, 'now widely regarded as true by definition that (to speak roughly at first) nothing can appear in the conclusion of a valid deductive inference which is not, from their very meaning, implicit in the premises'. (Hare credits this hoary old platitude to 'Wittgenstein and others', which rather suggests that the history of philosophy, let alone the history of logic, were not his strongest suits.) It follows that 'if there is an imperative in the conclusion, not only must *some* imperative appear in the premises, but that very imperative must be implicit in them' (Hare, 1952, p 32). Thus in so far as we have an argument *to* prescriptivism *from* No-Ought-From-Is, it would appear to be an inference to the best explanation. The 'basis' for Hume's celebrated observation (No-Ought-From-Is) is the principle that you can't get an imperative from a set of indicatives, and this in turn follows from the thesis that in a deductive inference you cannot get out what you haven't put in. If you put these together with the central thesis of prescriptivism - that moral judgments generally, and ought-judgments in particular typically contain an imperative component - it is possible to derive No-Ought-From-Is. But Hare takes No-Ought-From-Is to be a datum. And if it is an obvious fact that you can't get an *ought* from an *is*, and if prescriptivism plus the conservativeness of logic can *explain* this obvious fact, then this affords an argument for prescriptivism.

Flew, to his credit, is a bit more explicit. No-Ought-From-Is 'states a simple but vastly important logical truth' and is a 'consequence of Hume's fundamental insight about values' (Flew,

1986, p. 145). What is that insight? That ‘there is a categorical difference between pure calculating or detached describing and ... engaged preferring or practical prescribing; and that we cannot therefore, validly deduce conclusions about the latter from premises referring exclusively to the former’ (Flew, 1986, p. 149). Thus No-Ought-From-Is is true, indeed a truth of logic. And what makes it true is ‘Hume’s fundamental insight about values’, pretty much that they are non-cognitive in character (together with the thesis that in logic you don’t get out what you haven’t put in). But if Hume’s ‘great insight about values’ helps to explain ‘a simple but vastly important logical truth’, that suggests that it is a *genuine* insight and hence that some kind of non-cognitivism is correct. Again, an inference to the best explanation.

3. An Improvement on the Argument?

In the case of Hare it is perhaps possible to improve upon the argument. One of Hare’s greatest claims to fame is his simple insistence that there are logical relations between imperatives (for instance that they that can contradict each another) and hence that the notion of an imperative logic makes sense. But what is conspicuously absent from his work is a developed conception of imperative consequence. Thus Hare rightly insists that one order can *follow from* others, and that imperative inferences can be *valid* without ever giving an adequate account of what *validity* or *following from* amount to when the premises and the conclusion are both in the imperative mood. But perhaps with the aid of J.J.C. Smart we can do a little better on Hare’s behalf.

The basic idea behind imperative consequence is that an imperative **X** is the consequence of a set of imperatives **K** iff the premises **K** cannot be obeyed without obeying the imperative that constitutes the conclusion **X**. More formally, an imperative sentence **X** is the logical consequence of a set of imperative sentences **K** and a (possibly empty) set of factual sentences **C**, if and only if, however the non-logical vocabulary is interpreted, the imperatives expressed at **K** cannot be obeyed under the circumstances described in **C** unless the imperative expressed by **X** is obeyed too. (See Smart, 1984, pp. 14-19). (We ignore the semantic content of the non-logical vocabulary because we want to characterize a *formal* relation.) But this won’t quite do as it stands, for it has the bizarre consequence that any command whatsoever is a consequence of a set of commands **K** if that set is empty. Since it is impossible to obey a set of non-existent commands, it is impossible to obey the commands in such a set without obeying any command whatsoever. Furthermore, the definition implies that any command whatever follows from an inconsistent set of commands (or a set of commands which cannot be obeyed under the circumstances **C**). For if it is impossible to obey a set of commands (either because they are inconsistent or because they are ‘inconsistent’ given **C**) it is impossible to obey them without obeying any command whatsoever. (If it is impossible to do **A**, it is impossible to do **A** and not do **B** for arbitrary **B**.) To solve these problems

I suggest adding the proviso that a set of imperatives **K** only implies another imperative **X** if it is logically *possible* (under the circumstances **C**) to obey the commands **K**. Given this proviso, an empty set of commands has no consequences, nor does a set which is formally inconsistent or ‘inconsistent’ given **C**.¹ The proviso has another advantage. It excludes some more absurdities that might otherwise creep in. It is impossible to obey a command either to bring about the necessary or to bring about the logically impossible. There is no action that can count as doing either of these things, no state of affairs that consists in making them so. Which means that commands like ‘Bring it about that $P \ \& \ \sim P!$ ’ or ‘Bring it about that $\sim(P \ \& \ \sim P)!$ ’ cannot be obeyed. Since such commands cannot be obeyed, it is not the case that any obeyable set of commands cannot be obeyed without obeying the command to bring about the truths of logic.

We now have an (admittedly sketchy) conception of imperative consequence that underwrites Hare’s ‘rule’ that *no imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative*. For since the empty set of imperatives cannot be obeyed, it cannot be the case *both* that an empty set of imperatives **K** cannot be obeyed without obeying some imperative ‘conclusion’ **X** *and that the set of imperatives **K** can be obeyed*. Furthermore, we have managed to underwrite Hare’s rule without appealing to the dubious and distressingly metaphorical principle that in logic you don’t get out what you haven’t put in. The rule is itself a consequence of our conception of imperative consequence, which does not appeal to hazy notions of content or containment. Now, if we also suppose, as Hare does, that moral judgments contain an imperative element (here the metaphor of containment comes creeping back in!) we can derive the conclusion that you can’t get an *ought* from an *is*. If *oughts* are essentially imperative, and if you can’t derive imperatives from indicatives, then you can’t derive an imperative *ought* from an indicative *is*. Thus if we take No-Ought-From-Is as a datum, we can develop a new and improved inference-to-the-best-explanation for prescriptivism:

1*) You can’t derive an *ought* from an *is*, moral conclusions from non-moral premises.

2**) The best explanation of 1*) is

a) that *no imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative* (which is in turn explained by our conception of imperative consequence);

and

b) that moral judgments typically contain an imperative element.

Therefore, probably

3**) Moral judgments typically contain an imperative element (i.e. prescriptivism is true).

Call this the *Specific Argument* since it can be deployed by prescriptivists but not necessarily by emotivists or non-cognitivists of other kinds.

4. No Fact to Be Explained? Entailment and Analytic Bridge Principles

What would Snare have said to my rational reconstruction? He would surely have said that it is question-begging. Why should the descriptivist concede that you can't get an *ought* from an *is*? Indeed, some philosophers have gone one better. They have tried to argue that the alleged fact to be explained is no fact at all since you *can* get an *ought* from an *is*.

Some have tried to argue that non-moral premises sometimes *entail* moral conclusions. Now **K** entails **X** iff **X** can be logically derived from **K** with the aid of certain analytic truths. Thus (if logic is conservative) non-moral premises can only entail moral conclusions if there are what Schurz calls 'analytic bridge principles' connecting the moral and the non-moral. This suggests *semantic naturalism*, the idea that the moral can be (at least partially) *defined* in terms of the non-moral. But naturalism, semantic or otherwise, is a form of moral realism and thus a form of cognitivism or descriptivism. Hence if there are such analytic bridge principles, then non-cognitivism is false and some kind of semantic naturalism is true. In which case the sensible thing to do is to disprove non-cognitivism directly by producing the principles, thus preempting any inference to the best explanation.

Besides, No-Ought-From-Is, to my mind, is not a thesis about *entailment* at all, but a thesis about *consequence*. It is the claim that no moral conclusion can be the *logical* consequence of non-moral premises, not the claim that no moral conclusion can be the logical consequence of non-moral premises *plus analytic bridge principles*. And this could be true even if there *were* analytic connections between the moral and the non-moral, since logic is officially blind to such connections. So I shall assume that No-Ought-From-Is is a strictly logical thesis, *not* the claim that No-Ought-is-Entailed-by-an-Is, though I shall also assume that the existence of analytic bridge principles of the right kind has not been demonstrated, and thus that the truth or otherwise of non-cognitivism remains an open question.

5. No Fact to Be Explained? Prior's Challenge

Now, one philosopher, namely Arthur Prior, has argued in effect that there is no fact to be explained even though he takes No-Ought-From-Is to be a thesis about consequence rather than entailment. (Prior, Essay 1.1, this volume.) No-Ought-From-Is is false because logic is not

conservative since it *is* sometimes possible to deduce a new relation or affirmation from others which are entirely different from it. Let us focus on the most politically incorrect of Prior's three counterexamples:

1. Tea-drinking is common in England.

Therefore:

2. Either tea-drinking is common in England or all New Zealanders ought to be shot.

That this is a challenge to the conservativeness of logic should be obvious when we consider the parallel inference:

1. Tea-drinking is common in England.

Therefore:

2. Either tea-drinking is common in England or all New Zealanders are hedgehogs

In the second inference, as in the first, we have a new affirmation or relation (an affirmation about hedgehogs) which is a deduction from others which are entirely different from it. And of course, Prior has two other counterexamples making much the same point.

6. Prior's Challenge Met: There is Still a Fact to Be Explained

My solution to this problem is to redefine conservativeness and then to prove it in an amended version. First I develop a concept of *inference-relative vacuity*. A (non-logical) expression occurs vacuously in the conclusion of a valid inference if it can be uniformly replaced with any other expression of the same grammatical type *salva validitate*, without prejudice to the validity of the resulting inference. In the above inferences the two subsentences 'all New Zealanders ought to be shot' and 'all New Zealanders are hedgehogs' are both vacuous in this sense. Each can be replaced by any grammatical equivalent (for instance by each other) without prejudice to the validity of the resulting inference. Then, instead of the rather vague formula that in logic you don't get out what you haven't put in, I suggest the following: In logic (first-order predicate logic at any rate) no predicate or propositional variable can appear non-vacuously in the conclusion of a valid inference unless it appears in the premises. In other words, you can't get any non-vacuous, non-logical symbol out that you have not put in. (See Pigden 1989. For the proof, see the Introduction and Salwen, Essay 5.1.) Indeed, to logicians the proof is trite and obvious since it follows from the uniform substitution theorem.

Now Prior's counterexamples were counterexamples *both* to the conservativeness of logic *and* to No-Ought-from-Is. And just as the conservativeness of logic had to be redefined to be saved, so too does No-Ought-from-Is. Instead of that simple-minded slogan we have the admittedly less pithy No-Non-Vacuous Ought-from-Is. This too can be proved and that for an obvious reason. It is simply an instance of the conservatives of logic, more precisely, a substitution instance of the general formula. And since the one is provable so too is the other (with the important proviso that 'ought' is not a logical word).

7. The Non-Cognitivist Argument Reformulated.

This brings us back to the inference to the best explanation. An inference to the best explanation can go wrong is if the fact to be explained is a non-fact. Prior's counterexamples suggested that this might be the case with No-Ought-from-Is. But this is not so. In its amended form and given a certain proviso it is not only true but demonstrable. The fact to be explained would appear to be a genuine fact. However, the argument needs to be reformulated:

1**) You can't derive a non-vacuous *ought* from an *is* - that is, you cannot non-vacuously derive moral conclusions [conclusions containing moral words] from non-moral premises [premises which don't contain moral words].

2***) The best explanation of 1**) is

a) that logic is conservative – a new relation or affirmation cannot appear non-vacuously in the conclusion of a valid inference unless it appears in the premises;

and

b) that since moral judgments are not designed to state facts but to express emotion or prescribe action [insert non-cognitivist theory of choice] moral words always express 'a new relation or affirmation'

Therefore (probably):

3*) The role of moral judgments is not to state facts but to express emotion or prescribe action [insert non-cognitivist theory of choice].

8. A Better Explanation: The Argument Fails

Does this argument work? No. Because another way that an inference to the best explanation can go wrong is if a better explanation is available. And in this case a better explanation of 1*) - our modified version of No-Ought-From-Is - is staring us in the face. It is this:

2****) Logic is conservative – that is you cannot non-vacuously derive *F*-conclusions [conclusions containing the predicate ‘*F*’] from non-*F* premises [premises which don’t contain predicate ‘*F*’]

This is a better, because a simpler, explanation. It accounts for the facts without dragging in what Geach describes as the ‘dubious semiotic theories’ of non-cognitivism. But if you can account for the truth of No-ought-From-Is without appealing to the dubious semiotics, *then No-Ought-From-Is provides no evidence for non-cognitivism*. The inference-to-the-best-explanation argument may be formally respectable but it just doesn’t work. For the crucial premise 2****) is simply false. The best explanation of 1**) - No-Non-Vacuous-Ought-from-Is - is *not* a) that logic is conservative (since you can’t get anything out that you haven’t put in unless it suffers from inference-relative vacuity) and b) some kind of non-cognitivism. The best explanation of 1**) is simply the thesis that logic is conservative. Non-cognitivism is quite redundant. Thus we cannot argue for some kind of non-cognitivism on the grounds that non-cognitivism plus the conservativeness of logic affords the best explanation of No-Ought-from-Is, since, in so far as No-Ought-from-Is is a defensible thesis, it can be explained without the aid of non-cognitivism.

9. The Specific Argument: a Problem for Prescriptivism

That disposes of the Generic Argument but it leaves the Specific Argument standing. The Generic Argument failed because it paired non-cognitivism with the conservativeness of logic in the ‘best explanation’ of No-Ought-from-Is. And once you have got conservativeness, a better explanation of No-Ought-from-Is becomes available which relies on conservativeness alone. But there is no explicit mention of conservativeness in the Specific Argument (though Hare’s ‘rule’ might be regarded as an instance of it). So it is not so obvious that an explanation of No-Ought-from-Is which relies on conservativeness alone is better than an argument which relies on a) Hare’s rule (which in turn is derived from a conception of imperative consequence) plus b) the prescriptivist thesis that moral judgments typically contain an imperative element. But the Specific Argument suffers from a different defect. The version of No-Ought-from-Is that prescriptivism helps to explain is in fact false. Indeed it was refuted by Prior. Thus the fact that the prescriptivist thesis plus Hare’s rule ‘explains’ this version of No-Ought-from-Is provides no evidence for prescriptivism. Indeed it is worse than that. What implies a falsehood is itself false. The conjunction of prescriptivism plus Hare’s rule implies a falsehood. And since Hare’s rule follows from a sensible conception of imperative consequence, it is the prescriptivist conjunct that has to go. My argument can be summarized thus:

1#) If a) no imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative; and b) moral judgments typically contain an imperative element, then Prior's 'counterexamples' to No-Ought-from-Is are invalid.

But

2#) Prior's 'counterexamples to No-Ought-from-Is are *not* invalid (rather we have to reformulate No-Ought-from-Is).

Therefore

3#) Either c) an imperative conclusion *can* be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative, or d) moral judgments do not typically contain an imperative element.

But

4#) no imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative (this follows from our Hare-based conception of imperative consequence).

Therefore:

5#) Moral judgments do not typically contain an imperative element (and prescriptivism is false).

The argument is valid, but is it sound? That all depends on premise 1#) since 4#) is common ground and 2#) is obviously true.

10. Prior Refutes Prescriptivism

What is the imperative content of 'All New Zealanders ought to be shot' according to prescriptivism? Something like 'Shoot all New Zealanders!' (addressed to the world at large). There may be more to it than that, such as indicative component expressing the shoot-worthy characteristics shared by New Zealanders, but it means at least that. Armed with this elevating imperative, let us examine Prior's inference:

1. Tea-drinking is common in England.

Therefore:

2. Either tea-drinking is common in England or all New Zealanders ought to be shot.

Under prescriptivism the conclusion metamorphoses into the somewhat quaint disjunction:

2'. Either tea-drinking is common in England or shoot all New Zealanders!

Now what is the semantic status of 2'? One disjunct is indicative and the other imperative. But what is the status of the disjunction as a whole? We need some kind of principled method to adjudicate such questions since, if prescriptivism is correct, Prior's conclusions are mostly complex sentences with imperative and indicative components. The right rule seems to be this. A complex sentence qualifies as an indicative if it is either logically true or logically false or if it is logically possible *both* for it to be true *and* for it to be false (though not both at the same time). It qualifies as an imperative if it is possible *both* for it to be obeyed *and* for it to be disobeyed. This leaves open the possibility that some sentences are both imperative *and* indicative with respect to the same content (as opposed to decomposing into two sentences one of which is indicative and the other imperative). I suspect that this possibility is never realized, but it does not do to be dogmatic and I would not want to exclude the possibility by conceptual fiat. Now, what about 2'? Is 2' semantically capable *both* of being true *and* of being false? Perhaps it can be true if the first disjunct is true (though this sounds very odd to me). But if the indicative disjunct were *false*, the disjunction *as a whole* would not be false. Indeed it is precisely under these circumstances that its imperative status becomes evident. For if tea-drinking were not common in England we could either obey 2' by shooting all New Zealanders or disobey it by letting some live. And since it can be obeyed *and* disobeyed (at least under these circumstances) it qualifies as an imperative. Indeed 2' is equivalent to:

2''. If tea-drinking is not common in England, shoot all New Zealanders!

which despite its indicative antecedent, is clearly in the imperative mood. Now does 2' follow from 1? Not if Hare is right, and *no imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative*. For the set of premises consisting of 'Tea-drinking is common in England' does not contain any imperatives. Not if I am right, and an imperative **X** follows from a set of premises **K** only if i) **K** cannot be obeyed without obeying **X** and ii) **K** can be obeyed. For premise 1 - 'Tea-drinking is common in England' - cannot be obeyed since it is not an imperative. Thus if prescriptivism were correct, Prior's Tea-drinking Inference would not be valid. But it is valid. So prescriptivism is not correct.

What about the Chair Inference?

3. There is no man over 20 feet high.

Therefore:

4. There is no man over 20 feet high who is allowed [morally permitted] to sit in an ordinary chair.

More perspicuously, we can state 4 as follows (confining the domain of discourse to persons):

4'. For anyone if they are a man over 20 feet high then they ought not to sit in an ordinary chair.

If prescriptivism were correct, what would be the imperative content of 4'? Surely this:

4''. For anyone if you are a man over 20 feet high, then do not sit in an ordinary chair!

Now 4 and 4' follow from 3. But 4'' does not. To begin with 4'' is not an *indicative* consequence of 3, since it is not itself an indicative. But neither is it an imperative consequence of 3. For, according to Hare himself, *no imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises that does not contain at least one imperative* and the singleton set containing Premise 3 does not contain an imperative. And according to my conception of imperative consequence (from which Hare's principles can be derived) an imperative **X** only follows from a set of premises **K** if i) **K** cannot be obeyed without obeying **X** and ii) **K** can be obeyed. But since 3 is an indicative, the purported inference fails condition ii). Now, if 4 and 4' follow from 3 but 4'' does not, 4'' cannot be part of the meaning of 4.

What about the Undertaker inference?

5. Undertakers are Church officers

Therefore

6. If all Church officers ought to be reverent, undertakers ought to be reverent.

If prescriptivism were correct, what would be the imperative content of 6? That's a hard one, and the very fact that it is a hard one seems to me a problem for prescriptivism. My best guess is:

6'. If (be reverent Church officers!) then (be reverent undertakers!)

But we really don't need to decide. For on Hare's showing it must *have* imperative content, since a) it can be derived from an entirely moral premises ('Undertakers ought to do whatever all church officers ought to do') and b) it can be used in conjunction with another moral premise to derive an obviously moral conclusion, thus:

6. If all Church officers ought to be reverent undertakers ought to be reverent.
 7. All Church officers ought to be reverent
- Therefore
8. Undertakers ought to be reverent.

A thesis that can be derived from an entirely moral premise and can be used (in conjunction with another entirely moral premise) to derive an obviously moral conclusion (which cannot be derived from the other premise alone) bids fair to being a moral proposition. Hence if prescriptivism were correct it would have to have imperative content. But if it had imperative content it would not follow from the indicative premise 5 - that undertakers are Church officers. But it *does* follow from that premise. Therefore it does not have imperative content and prescriptivism is false.

11. Taking Stock

Snare construed Hume as a non-cognitivist but was puzzled as to how No-Ought-From-Is could provide an argument for non-cognitivism, No-Ought-From-Is follows from non-cognitivism (with the aid of the assumption that logic is conservative). But vice is not versa - non-cognitivism does *not* follow from No-Ought-From-Is. So it is hard to see how No-Ought-From-Is can provide argumentative backing for non-cognitivism. But perhaps an inference to the best explanation can be constructed which takes No-Ought-From-Is as a datum and reasons backwards to non-cognitivism via the conservativeness of logic. Unfortunately, in so far as No-Ought-From-Is is true - which it only is in the modified form of No-Non-Vacuous-Ought-From-Is - a better (because simpler) explanation is available, namely that logic is conservative, i.e. that you cannot non-vacuously derive *F*-conclusions (conclusions containing the predicate '*F*') from non-*F* premises (premises which *don't* contain the predicate '*F*'). So Snare was basically correct. All those philosophers - from Hare and Nowell-Smith through to the middle Flew - who seem to be arguing *from* No-Ought-From-Is *to* non-cognitivism were making a ghastly mistake. You can't do it deductively (since No-Ought-From-Is follows from non-cognitivism but not vice versa) and you can't do it abductively either, since the best explanation of No-Ought-From-Is - that logic is conservative - does not include non-cognitivism. That is bad enough. But the inference-to-the-best-explanation *from* No-Ought-From-Is *to* prescriptivism turns out to have been a disastrous *faux pas* on the part of R.M. Hare. For prescriptivism implies a variant of No-Ought-From-Is that turns out to be false - a point proved long ago by Prior. And since what implies a falsehood is itself false, we can see, retrospectively, that by 1960 Prior had refuted prescriptivism in - three years before the publication of *Freedom and Reason* in 1963. Hare's intellectual baby was still-born.

12. A Puzzle Renewed: What is the Point of No-Ought-From-Is?

But if we cannot argue *from* No-Ought-From-Is *to* non-cognitivism and if we don't need non-cognitivism to *derive* No-Ought-From-Is (which is why the abductive argument fails) the non-cognitivist interpretation of Hume. begins to look a lot less plausible. We should at least consider the possibility that Hume was *not* arguing fallaciously to (or from) non-cognitivism, but that he had a respectable argument for some other thesis. After all Hume never commits himself to non-cognitivism in print; indeed his explicit meta-ethical pronouncements suggest that he thinks of moral properties as akin to secondary properties, (of which he admittedly takes a subjective view). 'Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind' (T, 3.1.1.26/469). We don't attribute to Hume a non-cognitive theory of colors. Why then should we attribute to him a non-cognitivist theory of vice and virtue? The reason, in so far as there is one, is that the two chief arguments of *Treatise* 3.1.1 - No-Ought-From-Is and the Motivation Argument - *seem* to support non-cognitivism rather than a dispositional theory of value. With No-Ought-From-Is this has proved to be an illusion. No-Ought-From-Is neither implies nor needs to be explained by non-cognitivism. What about the Motivation Argument? This too can be read as an argument for sentimentalism, the view that moral opinions are not based on reasoning or inference but are due to the operations of the moral sense. Hume is out to establish the primacy of feeling over argument. (See Pigden 2009, Cohon, 2008.) But though the moral facts are discovered by feeling (and are indeed facts about what we are disposed to feel) it does not follow that they are non-facts, or that moral judgments are not truth-apt. Snare himself had it right with a thesis he dismissed as too weak to be what Hume had in mind.

N2. Moral judgments are not [usually²] *inferred* (deductively, inductively or whatever) beliefs.

But as Snare himself notes, N2 implies the even weaker claim

N3. Moral judgments are not [usually] *deductively inferred* beliefs. (Snare, 1991, p. 14.)

And this is the specific point that Hume is trying to prove with the aid of No-Ought-From-Is.

13. No-Ought-From-Is: What Hume was Really Up To

Hume makes large claims for No-Ought-From-Is. He professes to be ‘persuaded’ that a ‘small attention’ to this point, ‘would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality’. Hume is being cheeky. He is coyly dismissing some of the most famous philosophers of the day as intellectual riff-raff. He identifies his targets a few pages back: ‘There has been an opinion very industriously propagated by certain philosophers, that morality is susceptible of demonstration; and tho’ no one has ever been able to advance a single step in those demonstrations; yet ’tis taken for granted, that this science may be brought to an equal certainty with geometry or algebra. (T, 3.1.1.18/463)’ These are the vulgar philosophers that Hume had in mind, since these are the systems that No-Ought-From-Is is designed to subvert. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, demonstrative systems of morality were all the rage. Some of the most illustrious philosophers of the age as well as many lesser lights - Descartes and Malebranche, Hobbes and Spinoza, Locke and Pufendorf, Cumberland and Clarke, Burnet and Balguy - were either claiming to demonstrate the truths of morality or arguing – often ferociously - that the chief principles of morality are demonstrable. (See Krayer, 1998, pp. 1301-1308, James 1998, and Norton & Norton, 2007, pp. 884-893, and Raphael, 1991, 104-118, 119-153, 224-261, 436-461. Sometimes the rhetoric of demonstrability overwhelms the demonstrations themselves, as in the case of Clarke. See Raphael, 1991, 224-261.) But the demonstrative moralists fall into two classes: the naturalists and the non-naturalists. The naturalists purport to derive the truths of morality from self-evident but *non*-moral premises whereas the non-naturalists typically include some moral principles amongst their axiom sets. The distinction is a little difficult to draw in practice since, despite the protestations of logical and geometric rigor, it is often hard to tell what is supposed to follow from what. Nevertheless some philosophers, such as Cudworth, Clarke and Balguy, seem happy to take moral propositions as basic³ whereas others, such as Hobbes, Locke and Spinoza want to derive morality from something *else*, such as facts about God or human nature⁴. Thus Locke:

The idea of a supreme being, infinite in power, goodness, and wisdom, whose workmanship we are, and on whom we depend; and the idea of ourselves, as understanding rational beings; being such as are clear in us, would, I suppose, if duly considered and pursued, afford such foundations of our duty and rules of action, as might place morality amongst the sciences capable of demonstration; wherein I doubt not but from self-evident propositions, by necessary consequences, as incontestable as those in mathematics, the measures of right and wrong might be made out to any one that will apply himself with the same indifferency and attention to the one, as he does to the other of these sciences⁵. (*Essay*, 4.3.18/549.)

It is clear that this ‘demonstration’, if were to be constructed, would be precisely the kind of thing that Hume makes fun of in the Is/Ought passage. It would start off with ‘the being of a God’ and ‘observations concerning human affairs’, and would then progress via ‘deductions’ or ‘necessary consequences’ to claims about what we ought to do. Philosophers like Clarke seem to have something similar in mind except that in their case *some* of the self-evident propositions from which morality is to be derived would appear to have moral content. Even Locke seems to think that there might be self-evident propositions involving distinctively moral notions. He goes on to say:

‘Where there is no property, there is no injustice,’ is a proposition as certain as any demonstration in Euclid: For the idea of property being a right to any thing, and the idea to which the name injustice is given, being the invasion or violation of that right; it is evident, that these ideas, being thus established, and these names annexed to them, I can as certainly know this proposition to be true, as that a triangle has three angles equal to two right ones. (*Essay*, 4.3.18/549.)

Since demonstrative inferences are a kind of reasoning and since the object of 3.3.1 is to show that moral distinctions are *not* derived from reason, Hume is obviously opposed to such claims. Indeed he is quite explicit: ‘If you assert that vice and virtue consist in relations susceptible of certainty and demonstration ... you run into absurdities from which you will never be able to extricate yourself’ (T, 3.1.1.20/363). For Hume *substantive* truths about vice and virtue are not ‘susceptible of certainty and demonstration’.

Here’s an argument that would (if sound) dispose of *both* sets of demonstrative moralists, (the naturalists and the non-naturalists) in which No-Ought-From-Is plays a crucial role. If we take this to be Hume’s underlying argument, the role of No-Ought-From-Is becomes clear. The point of the principle - Premise iii) of my reconstruction - is to dispose of the naturalists whilst another premise - Premise ii) - is needed to skewer the non-naturalists.

- i) For a moral proposition to be demonstrable it would have to be either a) self-evident or b) deducible from self-evident propositions.
- ii) [Perhaps with certain important exceptions] no non-trivial moral proposition is self-evident (such that its negation implies a contradiction).
- iii) You can’t get an *ought* from an *is*. No moral proposition - that is no proposition involving distinctively moral notions - can be deduced from non-

moral propositions - that is, propositions innocent of moral content. [This follows from the principle, widely accepted in Hume's day, that the conclusion of a valid inference is contained within the premises. If the premises contain no *oughts* then there should not be any *oughts* in the conclusion.]

- iv) Triviality is closed under deduction. That is, if **K** is trivial and **X** can be deduced from **K**, then **X** is trivial too.
- v) Therefore [perhaps with certain important exceptions] no non-trivial moral proposition is demonstrable

I submit that Hume subscribes to each of the premises as well as the conclusion, so it is reasonable to ascribe him this argument.

Premise i) is simply a commonplace of early modern logical theory. For a proposition to be demonstrable it must be either self-evident or derivable from self-evident propositions by 'necessary consequences' in which the premises can't be true and the conclusion false.

Premise ii) was defended by Hume's sometime philosophical hero Hutcheson, and is defended by Hume himself at *Treatise* 3.1.1.18-25. Hume assumes that only propositions involving the four relations of '*resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number*' are self-evident, and then endeavors to prove, with a rather lame and confused argument that these cannot provide the basis for any moral propositions. In the *Treatise* he seems to deny the existence of *any* self-evident moral propositions but in the *ECU* he relents and in effect concedes that *some* moral propositions are self evident, but that the propositions in question are trivial.

It seems to me, that the only objects of the abstract sciences or of demonstration are quantity and number, and that all attempts to extend this more perfect species of knowledge beyond these bounds are mere sophistry and illusion. ... But as all other ideas are clearly distinct and different from each other, we can never advance farther, by our utmost scrutiny, than to observe this diversity, and, by an obvious reflection, pronounce one thing not to be another. Or if there be any difficulty in these decisions, it proceeds entirely from the undeterminate meaning of words, which is corrected by juster definitions. That *the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the squares of the other two sides*, cannot be known, let the terms be ever so exactly defined, without a train of reasoning and enquiry. But to convince us of this proposition, *that where there is no property, there can be no injustice*, it is only necessary to define the terms, and explain injustice to be a violation of property. This proposition is, indeed, nothing but a

more imperfect definition. It is the same case with all those pretended syllogistical reasonings, which may be found in every other branch of learning, except the sciences of quantity and number; and these may safely, I think, be pronounced the only proper objects of knowledge and demonstration. (ECU, 12.3.27/163.)

In other words, Locke's vaunted self-evident truth - *that where there is no property, there can be no injustice* - is, in Locke's own terminology, a 'trifling proposition' (*Essay*, 4.8/609-617) a trivial analyticity, a mere truth of language. But Hume's concession still entails that there are *some* self-evident propositions that *don't* involve the four relations of '*resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number*' (at least not in any obvious sense). And he needs a proof - or at least an argument - that all such propositions are trivial.

In fact, Hume subscribed to a principle that would have gotten him at least part of the way. He thought that a proposition is only self-evident if its negation entails a contradiction (the DEM principle in *Essay* 3.4.) This trait is inherited by propositions which are not themselves self-evident but are derived via deductive inference from premises which are. It is therefore a trait shared by *all* demonstrative propositions. 'When a demonstration convinces me of any proposition, it not only makes me conceive the proposition, but also makes me sensible, that 'tis impossible to conceive any thing contrary. What is demonstratively false implies a contradiction' (*Abstract* 18/652-653). It follows that any proposition whose negation does not entail a contradiction is not self-evident. But given the principle that a proposition is only self-evident if its negation entails a contradiction, Hume could have argued that no non-trivial moral claim would be likely to meet this condition.

Indeed, part of the point of Hume's polemic against Wollaston might have been to suggest precisely this. Wollaston (1724) believed that the essence of wrong-doing consists in deceit. If I have sex with somebody else's wife, I falsely suggest that she is not his wife but mine. Hume joked that I might avoid the sin by closing the window and drawing the blinds, which would prevent anyone getting the wrong idea (T, 3.1.1.15n/461). But his real point was that Wollaston's theory presupposes the moral principles that it purports to explain. 'A man that is ungrateful to his benefactor, in a manner affirms that he never received any favors from him. But in what manner? Is it because it is his duty to be grateful? But this supposes that there is some antecedent rule of duty and morals (T, 3.1.1.15n/462).' Jenny is not my wife but Johnny's and by conducting an affair with her I perpetrate an expressive act which suggests that she is my wife not his. My action contradicts the way things are, and it is in this that its wrongness consists. But my action only contradicts the way things are if we presuppose the principle that we ought not to have sex with other people's spouses. For if this were not so, neither Jenny nor I would be suggesting a falsehood if we decided to make the beast with two backs.

Now suppose someone were to suggest that it is self-evident that *we ought not to commit adultery*, claiming that the negation of this proposition entails a contradiction. Hume might reply that although you can derive a contradiction from its negation – that it is *not* the case that we ought not to commit adultery – you can only do this by assuming either that we *ought not* to commit adultery or some stronger thesis (or set of theses) from which the claim *that we ought not to commit adultery* can be derived. Similarly my adulterous actions only constitute an expressive act which contradicts the facts on the assumption *that we ought not to commit adultery*. Thus the negation of this supposedly self-evident proposition - *that we ought not to commit adultery* - does not entail a contradiction *by itself* - it only entails a contradiction when conjoined with the claim *that we ought not to commit adultery*. And every proposition, whether necessary, contingent or false, entails a contradiction if conjoined with its own negation. Thus Hume seems to think that although you can derive a contradiction from a moral principle and its negation, it is impossible to derive a contradiction from the negation of such a principle by itself. Or at least, you can only do so if the principle in question is a ‘trifling proposition’, and thus devoid of substantive content.

As for Premise iii) that is simply the No-Ought-From-Is thesis which is itself a trivial consequence of another commonplace of early modern logical theory - that in a deductive inference ‘although the form of the syllogism be never so irregular ... the premises do really contain the conclusion that is deduced from them, which is a never-failing test for true syllogisms’ (Watts, 1996, p. 284 [originally published 1724]). Thus if there is no ‘ought’ in the premise it is indeed ‘altogether inconceivable’ that this ‘this new relation [could] be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.’

Premise iv) would appear to be implied by the passage from the *EHU* that I have quoted already. It is clearly Hume’s opinion that ‘pretended syllogistical reasonings’ from premises that are little more than ‘imperfect definitions’ will lead to conclusions which are as trivial in themselves as the premises from which they are derived.

Thus we have an argument leading from premises Hume accepted to a conclusion that he believed; an argument which explains the function of No-Ought-From-Is. The systems it is designed to subvert are those of the demonstrative naturalists, a group which included the leading philosophers of Hume’s day. If, as Hume probably believed, demonstrative non-naturalism is a non-starter then a ‘small attention’ to No-Ought-From-Is would indeed tend to show that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects (as the demonstrative moralists like to think) and that it is not ‘perceived by [demonstrative] reason’.

But what about the ‘exceptions’ flagged at premise ii)? Well, as we have seen (Introduction and at Essay 3.4§2) Hume is committed to naturalistic definitions of the moral concepts. To say that *V* is a virtue is to say that *V* is a mental action or quality that would give to a suitably qualified

spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation. (EPM, App.1.10/289.) Thus it is *analytic*, a conceptual truth, that *if V is a mental action or quality that would give to any suitably qualified human spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation then V is a virtue*. It is likewise analytic that if the omission of *B* by *A* would arouse disapprobation in any suitably qualified human spectator, then *A* ought to do *B*. (T, 3.1.1.26/469) But analytic though they may be, they also look like moral propositions, since moral terms appear non-vacuously in each. Presumably we become aware of them by noticing that the idea of a being a virtue is *identical* with the idea of being a mental action or quality that would arouse the sentiment of approbation in any suitably qualified spectator, and that the idea of an obligation or a duty is *identical* with the idea of an act whose omission or nonperformance would likewise arouse the sentiment of *disapprobation*. Does this make them demonstrable? Presumably yes, though it seems a bit implausible to suppose that it is self-contradictory to deny them. But doesn't this make them counterexamples to the claim that no non-trivial moral proposition is self-evident (such that its negation implies a contradiction)? Indeed, aren't they counterexamples to Hume's *general* thesis that except for the truths of mathematics, *all* analytic truths are trivial? Perhaps not. 'To convince us of this proposition, *that a virtue is whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*, it is only necessary to define the terms, and explain virtue to be whatever arouses a certain kind of sentiment in a certain kind of observer. This proposition is, indeed, nothing but a more imperfect definition'. (ECU, 12.3.2/ 163, slightly doctored.) And since it is 'nothing but [an] imperfect definition', nothing of moral consequence can be expected to follow. It seems pretty obvious that we cannot derive anything of moral substance solely from Hume's premise that *V* is a virtue if it gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation. To arrive at something solid such as 'Courage is a virtue' we need the extra premise that courage *would* excite such a sentiment, and that is a contingent proposition about our dispositions to approve.

But although Hume's 'conceptual truths' may be morally trivial they are meta-ethically momentous. For if the moral concepts can be defined in terms of our dispositions to approve and disapprove, then naturalism is vindicated and we can have moral truth without metaphysical spooks. No need for non-natural properties or mysterious faculties of intuition, no need for Kantian fairytales about our rational capacities! Right and wrong become plain matters of fact though matters of fact that are usually determined by sentiment rather than reason. And if this were true it would be quite important. Thus it seems that for Hume there are propositions that are *moral* (because of their matter), *self-evident* (because they are analytic) but *non-trivial* (because they are philosophically important). Are they exceptions to Hume's general rule or have we uncovered a contradiction?

The truth is, I think, that Hume never faced up to the epistemic status of his own conceptual claims, perhaps because he did not notice that he was making them. Like his latter-day disciples, the logical positivists, what Hume *wants* to say is that all substantive truths can be ultimately derived from experience. Yet *that* claim if true, would be substantive and it is difficult to see how it could be derived from experience. A good deal of conceptual analysis is required to make it look remotely plausible, especially if the truths you want to vindicate include the truths of morality. But since these conceptual truths are required to establish a substantive philosophical thesis, it seems that they themselves must be substantive. Yet they cannot be derived from experience. These are the rocks on which positivism foundered, and it is not perhaps surprising to find them lurking beneath the surface of the *Treatise of Human Nature*.

14. A Final Puzzle: Whatever Happened to No-Ought-From-Is?

But a final puzzle remains. Why does Hume banish No-Ought-From-Is from the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* after trumpeting it in the *Treatise*? In the *EPM*, as in the *Treatise*, Hume argues that moral distinctions are not derived from reason but are the products of a moral sense (though again we must use reasoning to determine the facts before the moral sense comes into play). Furthermore he redeploys the Motivation Arguments in order to establish this conclusion (*EPM*, 1.7/172). But the Is/Ought argument has completely disappeared. The argument which was supposed to subvert all the vulgar systems of philosophy has now been quietly burked. Why did Hume suppress an argument of which he had formerly made so much? Perhaps because he no longer needed it. For by the end of the *ECU*, he seems to have embraced the following principle:

TRIV) No non-trivial proposition (with the possible exception of the truths of arithmetic and geometry) is self-evident (such that its negation implies a contradiction).

This, I take it, is part of what Hume is trying to establish in the passage I have cited already, *ECU*. 12.3.5/163:

...the only objects of the abstract sciences or of demonstration are quantity and number, and that all attempts to extend this more perfect species of knowledge beyond these bounds are mere sophistry and illusion. [For example] to convince us of this proposition, *that where there is no property, there can be no injustice*, it is only necessary to define the terms, and explain injustice to be a violation of property. This proposition is, indeed, nothing but a more imperfect definition. It is the same case with

all those pretended syllogistical reasonings, which may be found in every other branch of learning, except the sciences of quantity and number; and these may safely, I think, be pronounced the only proper objects of knowledge and demonstration.

But once he has TRIV) Hume can prove that morality is not demonstrable without the aid of No-Ought-From-Is.

i) For a proposition to be demonstrable it would have to be either a) self-evident or b) deducible from self-evident propositions

TRIV: ii') No non-trivial *proposition* (with the possible exception of the truths of arithmetic geometry and - Hume should say – logic⁶) is self-evident (such that its negation implies a contradiction).

iii) Triviality is closed under deduction. That is, if **K** is trivial and **X** can be deduced from **K**, then **X** is trivial too.

iv) No non-trivial *moral* proposition is demonstrable.

Thus, given a principle which is useful, if not vital, if the No-ought-From-Is argument is to do its business - that with the possible exception of the truths of arithmetic, geometry (and maybe logic), *no* non-trivial truths, whether moral or otherwise, are self-evident – Hume can derive the conclusion that he is arguing for – that no non-trivial *moral* proposition is demonstrable. Hence No-Ought-From-Is could be safely suppressed since it had proved to be redundant.

NOTES

1. Thus the consequence relation for my imperative logic is non-monotonic. If a command **!X** follows from a consistent set of commands **K**, it will not follow from the inconsistent set of commands $\mathbf{K} \cup \{\sim\mathbf{X}\}$, though consistent *subsets* of $\mathbf{K} \cup \{\sim\mathbf{X}\}$ will have imperative consequences. Furthermore if a command **!X** follows from a set of imperative premises **K**, it may not follow from the set $\mathbf{K} \cup \mathbf{C}$ where **C** is a set of factual premises. Thus the set of imperatives {'Kill your father's murderer!' and 'Don't kill your mother!'} has the trivial consequence 'Kill your father's murderer!'. Not so the set of premises {'Kill your father's murderer!' , 'Don't kill your mother!' and 'Your mother is your father's murderer.'} which on my conception implies nothing at all. Thus on this conception of imperative consequence, the reason for the famous proverb 'Order, counter-order, disorder' is not that an inconsistent set of commands implies anything whatsoever, but that the set consisting of the order and the counter-order implies *nothing* whereas the order and the counter-order considered separately, imply *different* things. That, I submit, is the right result. The problem people have when trying to cope with inconsistent commands is that there is *nothing* they can do which counts as obeying them all, not that *anything* they can do counts as obeying them all.

2. Note that it is in principle *possible* to arrive at moral beliefs by reason. I can know on inductive grounds that I *would* approve of an action under certain conditions and thus that it would be virtuous without actually activating my moral sense. Indeed, an alien psychologist could know on the basis of anthropological data that human beings would approve of a certain practice and thus that it would be virtuous, whilst remaining a total stranger to the sentiment of approbation. But though we can arrive at moral knowledge without activating or even possessing a moral sense, the distinction between vice and virtue is not derived from reason but from feeling, though we can reason our way to moral knowledge from a knowledge of these feelings.

3. Although I *think* Clarke is a non-naturalist who takes certain moral propositions as basic there are certainly passages where he seems to be arguing from *is* to *ought* without the aid of any intervening moral premises. See Raphael, 1991, 245.

4. So far as I can see there are *no* explicitly moral axioms in Spinoza's *Ethics*. See Spinoza, 2002, pp. 213-383. Hobbes' Laws of Nature are supposed to be *theorems*, things *demonstrated* not things *assumed*. See Hobbes, 1994 [*Leviathan*], ch. 14.

5. Fired by Locke's big talk about the demonstrability of morality, William Molyneux, begged him to produce the demonstrations that he proclaimed to be possible. 'One thing I must needs insist [is that you would oblige] the world with *A Treatise of Morals*, drawn up according to the hints you frequently give in your Essay, of being demonstrable, according to the mathematical method. let me beg of you to turn your thoughts this way; and if so young a friendship as mine have any force, let me prevail upon you...' (Molyneux to Locke, 27/8/1692, in Goldie, 2002, p. 170.) But when asked to pony up with an actual demonstration, Locke became suddenly coy: 'Though by the view I had of moral ideas, whilst I was considering that subject, I thought I saw that morality might be demonstratively made out; yet whether I am able so to make it out, is another question. Every one could not have demonstrated what Mr. Newton's book hath shown to be demonstrable.' (Locke to Molyneux, 20/9/1692. in Goldie, 2002, p. 172.) Although Locke declined to put up, this did not cause him to shut up. For in subsequent editions of the *Essay* (1694, 1695 & 1700) his brags about the demonstrability of morals remain in place. At least he is less aggressive about it than Clarke.

6. Hume needs this qualification avoid pragmatic self-refutation. The argument employs principles of a broadly logical kind to arrive at substantiative conclusions about the nature of morality