

the price of supervenience

My goal in this paper is to bring two things together. The first is an important contemporary modal challenge to non-reductive moral realism which I call the *explanatory argument from supervenience*. And the second is a package of ideas from Richard Price's *A Review of the Principle Questions in Morals* about the nature of moral facts. Although these two topics may seem unlikely bedfellows, Price's *Review* is one of the most full-throated and important historical defenses of non-reductive moral realism. Like many contemporary defenses of non-reductive moral realism, it emphasizes the analogy between the moral and the mathematical.¹ But *unlike* contemporary authors, the primary focus of Price's emphasis on the analogy between the moral and the mathematical is not their ontological commitments, or their epistemology. What Price sees as the primary analogy between the moral and the mathematical is their *modal status*: that both are domains of necessary truths.² This makes Price a natural interlocutor for contemporary *modal* arguments against non-reductive moral realism – and that is the role he will play in what follows.

So here is the plan: I'll start, in section I, by introducing the modal challenge to non-reductive realism on which I aim to focus in this paper. Then in section 2, I'll explain why the analogy with mathematics might – at least in principle – be helpful to the non-reductivist in defending against at least one important form of this challenge. In sections 3 and 4, I'll show that this analogy opens up an interesting strategy for the non-reductivist – but that carrying out this strategy is far from trivial. This is where Price comes in. In section 5, I'll explain why Price held that all moral truths are necessary, and what commitments are involved

¹ Compare Putnam [2004], McGrath [2010], Enoch [2011], Parfit [2011], and Clarke-Doane [forthcoming], as well as further references in Clarke-Doane [forthcoming].

² 'Right and wrong, it appears, denote what actions *are*. Now whatever any thing *is*, that it is, not by will, or decree, or power, but by *nature and necessity*. Whatever a triangle is, that it is unchangeably and eternally. [...] The natures of things then being immutable; whatever we suppose the natures of actions to be, they must be immutable. If they are indifferent, this indifference is itself immutable, and there neither is nor can be any one things that, *in reality*, we *ought* to do rather than another. The same is to be said of right and wrong, of moral good and evil, as far as they express *real characters* of actions. They must immutably and necessarily belong to those actions of which they are *truly* affirmed.' [Price 1748, 50] Though this passage illustrates the idea from Price that will be important for me in what follows, however, it oversimplifies Price's perspective, for Price also expresses related concerns about causal modality. I'll ignore these complications in what follows, but interested readers should consult Price's remarks about Newton in chapter I of the *Review*.

in maintaining this claim. And finally, in sections 6 and 7 I'll put all of the pieces together and explore both the prospects and limitations of the resulting Pricean strategy of responding to the modal challenge.

Lest there be no misunderstanding, let me be clear up front that my aim is not to defend an answer to the modal challenge on behalf of the non-reductive moral realist. I do not actually think that non-reductive moral realism is true, and one of the most pressing worries for me, at least personally, about non-reductive moral realism is precisely the kind of modal challenge that I will be considering in this paper. The paper is, rather, an exercise in doing as well as I can on behalf of a view with which I actually disagree – using the tools I find to be the most promising, and aiming to achieve the standards that would satisfy a critic like me. To foreshadow, my conclusion will be that the Pricean strategy is well-worth serious attention, offering striking but limited prospects for progress on this front. Its limitations help to shed light on the force and scope of the modal challenges facing non-reductive moral realism.

I the explanatory argument from supervenience

The modal challenge to non-reductive moral realism with which I will be interested in this paper is what I call the *explanatory argument from supervenience*. The argument starts, as its name suggests, with the observation that moral facts supervene on the non-moral.³ There are many different ways of formulating supervenience theses more precisely, but at bottom, supervenience is the idea that there can be no difference in the moral facts without some difference in the non-moral facts.⁴ However we precisify this idea, what is of interest to the explanatory argument from supervenience is that it requires necessary connections between the moral and the non-moral.

It is important, at the outset, to distinguish the explanatory challenge that I will be concerned with from the more familiar *direct* argument from supervenience to reduction. Both Jaegwon Kim [1984] and Frank Jackson [1998], and following them a number of other authors, have contended that supervenience theses of the sort that are plausible in metaethics *entail* reduction.⁵ The arguments that this is so consist primarily in a technical component, paired with a strong thesis about the coarse-grainedness of properties, according to which properties can be distinguished only up to their intensions, and so properties that are

³ For a prominent complaint in the broad family of the explanatory argument from supervenience, see Blackburn [1973], [1984], and [1985]. Blackburn believes that he has an argument against both reductive and non-reductive moral realism, however, and his argument differs from the ones considered here in several important ways. For the point, in a different context, that supervenience requires explanation, see especially Schiffer [1987, 153-154]. For versions of the explanatory argument from supervenience, see Schroeder [2007, chapter 4] and Schmitt and Schroeder [2011]. Scanlon [2009] considers a version of this argument and offers a response; we'll consider his response in section 4.

⁴ See especially the papers in Kim [1993], as well as Bennett [2004].

⁵ For versions of the direct argument, see Kim [1984], Jackson [1998], Streumer [2008], [2011], and Brown [2011].

necessarily shared are identical.⁶ This assumption about the coarse-grainedness of properties is strong and in my own view, not particularly plausible. So my own view is that these arguments do not present a forceful challenge to non-reductive moral realism. Regardless of how forceful we take this problem to be, however, the explanatory argument from supervenience is a challenge that still remains, even once we respond to these direct arguments.

In contrast to the direct arguments, the explanatory argument from supervenience doesn't even need the assumption of full-fledged supervenience. It only needs one necessary connection between the moral and the non-moral to get off of the ground. And indisputable such necessities are not hard to come by. To construct one, take your most cherished moral belief, and consider whether it could have been false even while every non-moral fact stayed the same. For me, I'm as sure as I am of just about anything that the fact that Carol Schroeder is my mother is not a reason for me to torture her. So the idea that this could have been false even while every non-moral fact was as things actually are strikes me as about as absurd as any. So for me, at least one necessity connecting the moral to the non-moral is intellectually rock-bottom, and I'm confident that some such necessity is rock-bottom for you, too. This necessity is a special case of supervenience: it is the thesis that some moral difference *couldn't* happen without any non-moral difference.

Once we get this far, the explanatory argument from supervenience can be pressed in two different ways. The first way of pressing the argument relies on a principle sometimes known as *Hume's Dictum*, which says that there are no necessary connections between distinct existences.⁷ If supervenience means that there are necessary connections between the moral and the non-moral, then Hume's Dictum and supervenience together imply that the moral and the non-moral are not wholly distinct. But non-reductive realism is, on the face of it, the thesis that the moral and the non-moral are distinct realms of truths. So supervenience together with Hume's Dictum appear to create trouble for non-reductive realism.

The 'Hume's Dictum' way of pressing the explanatory argument from supervenience is tidy, because it appears to give us a direct argument against non-reductive moral realism, at least one of whose premises is bound to be indubitable. We'll see, over the course of this paper, that this tidy appearance is somewhat misleading. But I call attention to its tidiness, because this contrasts with a second way of pressing the explanatory argument, which is much less direct. Rather than relying on Hume's Dictum, which is both a completely general principle and only applies to some necessities – those that involve a *connection* between the

⁶ For a different take on the commitments of the direct argument from supervenience to reduction, see chapter four of Dunaway [2013].

⁷ For more on Hume's Dictum, see Wilson [2010]. I'll worry later about how to formulate Hume's Dictum a little bit more precisely.

moral and the non-moral – the second way of pressing the explanatory argument relies instead on the principle that necessities require explanation. Since supervenience commits us to necessities, it follows from this principle that these require explanation. But it is not so easy to explain these necessities in non-reductivist-friendly terms, the proponent of this argument alleges, without appealing to further necessities that are not explained. So the second form of the argument is structured more as an alleged-to-be-insurmountable challenge, rather than as a direct argument.⁸

Although Hume's Dictum doesn't itself mention explanation, it is natural to think of it as motivated as a special case of the idea that necessities require explanation – together with the idea that all necessities are explained by the lack of full distinctness among the entities involved. Take, for example, the necessity that something cannot be a red square without being red. As a necessity, this is a strong claim, because it rules out even the *possibility* of a non-red red square. But it is not puzzling why this is necessary – it is necessary because being red is just part of what it is to be a red square. This example both illustrates how a necessity can be explained, and why at least this sort of explanation seems to depend on a lack of distinctness between the entities involved, and correspondingly why it seems to be the sort of explanation that a non-reductive realist could not give of the necessities involved in supervenience.

Similar points go for other famous necessities, such as the impossibility of water that is not composed of H₂O. The necessity of there being no water that is not composed of H₂O is not brute; it strikes us immediately as something that stands in need of explanation. And the identity of water with H₂O is just the sort of thing to explain it. Since being water *is* being composed of H₂O, there is no puzzle about why it is impossible for there to be water that is not composed of H₂O. But this explanation again adverts to the lack of distinctness of the entities involved, and again it is clear that it is not the sort of thing that moral non-reductivists could appeal to.

In these remarks, I've been cherry-picking examples in order to provide intuitive support for the high-level principle that necessities require explanation. But of course this principle is not indisputable; indeed, some examples are much harder. Among the more interesting cases are the necessary connections involved in the determinate/determinable relationship. It is impossible for something to be crimson without being red, or red without being colored, but it's unlikely that being red is just being colored plus something else, in the way that being a red square is being red plus something else. Nor does it seem likely that redness is part of what it is to be colored. Now to evaluate whether the determinate/determinable relationship is a counterexample to Hume's Dictum, we would need a more fine-grained way of assessing whether

⁸ See particularly chapter 4 of Schroeder [2007] for a statement and defense of this form of the challenge.

determinables and their determinates count as ‘distinct existences’. But at least this much is true: the distinctness of the moral from the non-moral posited by non-reductive realists – the sort of distinctness which is motivated by the thought that moral properties are simply “much too different” from non-moral properties to be analyzed in terms of them – does not seem to be consistent with the idea that moral properties are simply determinables with non-moral determinates.⁹ So however these sorts of necessities work, they don’t seem to be a promising model for non-reductive realists to explain their necessities, either, at least if their non-reductive realism is motivated, in part, by the thought that the moral is simply ‘too different’ from the non-moral.

So there seems to be at least some merit to at least the intuitive thoughts that necessities require explanation, and that failures of complete distinctness are at least a particularly promising, if not the unique, path to explaining such necessities. However, it is not my interest, here, to defend the force of this form of the explanatory argument from supervenience. For now, my aim is only to clearly distinguish these two forms the explanatory argument may take. Later we’ll return to reconsider which of these forms poses the greater threat to non-reductive moral realism.

It is important to note that there is at least one very serious response in the literature to the explanatory argument from supervenience. In the course of developing a response to the direct arguments from supervenience to reduction, Ralph Wedgwood [1999], [2007] develops an ingenious set of commitments which taken collectively offer a way of responding to both forms of the explanatory argument from supervenience, without simply dismissing the need for explanations for necessities. By rejecting the modal principles known as S4 and S5, Wedgwood makes it natural to reject Hume’s Dictum but replace it with a close and even more compelling neighbor principle, as well as to explain necessities by adverting to contingencies. Schmitt and Schroeder [2011] explore the intricacies of Wedgwood’s ingenious view in detail and show how many moving parts it needs in order to be successful; my project in this paper is motivated by interest in how well the non-reductive realist can respond to the explanatory challenge without taking on the whole package of Wedgwood’s commitments.¹⁰

⁹ For the ‘much too different’ intuition motivating non-reductive moral realism, see especially Nagel [1986, 138], Huemer [2005], and Parfit [2011], as well as the discussion and further references in Schroeder [2005b].

¹⁰ I’m interested, in particular, in what strategy the non-reductive realist might take to offer a response that consists in more than a gesture toward ‘partners in crime’. As we’ll see, the Pricean strategy in which I will be interested is inspired by the case of mathematics as a partner in crime, but the strategy goes beyond this point, by using the case of mathematics to construct a positive diagnosis of where at least one form of the explanatory argument may be evaded.

2 why the analogy with mathematics might be helpful

So much for the explanatory argument from supervenience. Our next task is to see why the analogy with mathematics might be a helpful one. The best way to see this is to start with the observation that the mathematical supervenes on the non-mathematical. All that supervenience requires, recall, is that there cannot be any difference of one kind without a difference of some other kind. And it is certainly impossible for there to be any difference in the truths of mathematics without there being a difference in something else. This is trivially true, in fact, because the truths of mathematics are necessities. Since it is impossible for necessities to be otherwise, it follows trivially that it is impossible for them to be otherwise unless something else was different as well.

Of course no one concludes from this case that the mathematical must reduce to the non-mathematical – and with good reason. Since math supervenes equally well on music and on biology, such an argument would have an equal claim to establish that math reduces to music as that math reduces to biology. (Here I assume that neither music nor biology reduces to the other, and hence that math cannot reduce to both, so I assume that this is a *reductio*.) So since the explanatory argument in metaethics also starts with supervenience and aims to get us to reduction, it would behoove us to think carefully about the case of mathematics.

The answer is given by the fact that the supervenience of the mathematical on anything else is *trivial*, in that it is guaranteed by the necessity of mathematics alone. It follows directly from this fact that though the supervenience of the mathematical involves some necessities, it does not involve any necessary *connections* between the mathematical and anything else. A different way of putting this is by saying that in cases of trivial supervenience, supervenience does not involve *covariation*. The mathematical truths do not vary in company with the musical or biological truths in any way; rather, they supervene precisely because they do not vary at all.

On the face of it, in contrast, moral supervenience is not like this. Many important moral truths are not necessary, but contingent. For example, it would be wrong for me not to show up for the Princeton Ethicists Network. But this is not necessarily true – it is true only because I promised to attend, and hence could easily have been false, if only I had been more selective about the commitments that I took on. The importance of the contingency of many of the most important moral questions about what we ought to do is a central theme in Sidgwick's *The Methods of Ethics*.¹¹

¹¹ In the *Methods*, this claim is closely related to the distinctive claim of intuitionism to offer a method for moral inquiry that is substantially non-empirical, in contrast to egoism and universalistic hedonism.

The fact that many important moral truths appear to be contingent, rather than necessary, means that when the moral supervenes on the non-moral, it does so in a way that involves genuine co-variation, and not just the triviality of the necessity of the moral truths. And that makes it look like the example of the mathematical is not going to be very much help to the non-reductive realist. But the reason that Price will be of interest to us, is precisely that this is what he appears to deny. Price seems to think that moral truths are all *necessary*:

Thus, then, is morality fixed on an immoveable *basis*, and appears not to be, in any sense, *fictitious*; or the *arbitrary production* of any power human or divine; but *equally everlasting and necessary* with all *truth* and *reason*. [Price 1748, 52]

An analogy may help us to understand how Price seems to be thinking about things. To get started, consider *conjunctions* of mathematical and non-mathematical claims, such as that $2+2=4$ and there are at least five planets in the solar system. Conjunctions like this one are *partly* mathematical, but partly not. Let's call them *bastard* mathematical claims, and contrast them to the *pure* mathematical claims. Conjunctions like this one will co-vary in truth along with the non-mathematical claim that there are at least five planets in the solar system, and hence they will supervene on the non-mathematical. But there is no puzzle about how they do so – this follows simply from the fact that the truths of *pure* mathematics are necessary. Since the truths of pure mathematics are necessary, the truth of their conjunctions with non-mathematical claims depends only on the truth of the non-mathematical conjuncts.

Conjunctions of pure mathematical claims with non-mathematical claims are not particularly interesting, but note that conjunctions of claims from each of two domains are just a special case of *relations* between the domains. In general, we may include in the domain of bastard mathematics everything that posits a non-trivial relationship between the pure mathematical facts and the purely non-mathematical facts. For example, the fact that the number of planets closer to the sun than earth plus the number of planets whose orbits are between those of Venus and Jupiter is equal to the number of gas giants is a truth of bastard mathematics. It's not a conjunction between any particular mathematical claim and any particular non-mathematical claims, but it requires the two to be lined up in the right way. And its truth depends on the truth of a particular (necessary) truth of pure mathematics – namely, that $2+2=4$.

We may make two important observations about bastard mathematics. First, the truths of bastard mathematics supervene on the non-mathematical, and not simply trivially, in virtue of being necessities

themselves. For some of the truths of bastard mathematics are contingent.¹² But second, there is no puzzle about how this could be. The supervenience of the bastard mathematical on the non-mathematical follows immediately from the fact that the truths of pure mathematics are necessary. For given that the truths of pure mathematics are necessary, there is only one way for the truth of bastard mathematical claims to vary: by the truth of their non-mathematical component varying. It is these two facts that our Pricean strategy for responding to the explanatory argument from supervenience will exploit.

3 a path to a solution?

So the trick that we want to pull off, on behalf of the non-reductive realist, is to respond to the explanatory argument from supervenience by exploiting this analogy. The elements of success are straightforward: we must be able to distinguish, among the moral truths, between those which are *purely* moral, and those which are merely ‘bastard’ relationships between the pure moral facts and the non-moral facts. In addition to being intuitively *purely* moral, the pure moral truths must all be necessities. Their supervenience on the non-moral will therefore be trivial, on analogy with the supervenience of the truths of pure mathematics. The bastard moral truths will also supervene on the non-moral, but this will be no more puzzling than how the bastard mathematical truths supervene on the non-mathematical.

Such a distinction between ‘pure’ and ‘bastard’ moral claims allows us to make sense of Price’s claim that all moral truths are necessary – for this is true of the genuine, *pure* moral claims, and though it is not true of the bastard moral claims, even Price will allow that relationships between the moral and the non-moral may be contingent. Consequently, I will call this divide-and-conquer approach to the explanatory argument the *Pricean strategy*. There is much more to be said about exactly what the distinction between pure and bastard moral claims consists in, so the Pricean strategy can be implemented in different ways, depending on how we answer that question. In what follows, we’ll consider three such implementations. But the Pricean strategy in general is just the basic idea inspired by the analogy to the case of mathematics.

In the mathematical case, our examples of ‘bastard’ mathematical claims were gerrymandered claims that we were not intuitively inclined to classify as mathematical, to begin with. If there is a similar division among moral claims between ‘pure’ and ‘bastard’, however, it will be less obvious. Claims such as that it is wrong for me to fail to show up for the Princeton Ethicists Network are intuitively paradigmatic moral claims. Yet if we are to exploit our observations about the mathematical case in order to respond to the

¹² Note: not all. Bastard mathematical claims that relate the mathematical to non-mathematical non-contingencies will be necessarily true or necessarily false.

explanatory argument from supervenience on behalf of the non-reductive realist, it is claims like these that are going to have to be classified as the analogue of the ‘bastard’ mathematical claims. So if there is a division among moral claims between the ‘pure’ and the ‘bastard’, it will be substantially less obvious than in the case of mathematics.

Though this distinction is going to be less obvious, moreover, it is very important exactly how we draw the line between these two classes of intuitively moral claims. For in classifying ordinary moral claims such as that it would be wrong of me to fail to show up for the Princeton Ethicists Network as merely ‘bastard’ claims, the envisioned response to the explanatory argument from supervenience is effectively going to give up on the idea that these claims are wholly distinct from the non-moral. They are still not *completely* reducible to the non-moral, but that is simply in virtue of the fact that they relate the non-moral to a special class of ‘pure’ moral claims which are, in fact, wholly distinct from the non-moral. So in order to adopt this strategy, the non-reductivist must restrict her claims about the distinctness of the moral and the non-moral to the privileged, ‘pure’ class of moral claims. It must be these claims, and their special status, that make all moral claims intuitively moral.

I want to emphasize how important this is. The non-reductivist starts with the intuitive view that moral claims are wholly distinct from non-moral claims. But in order to exploit the analogy with mathematics, she must restrict this thesis – only *some* moral claims, it turns out, are wholly distinct from non-moral claims, while others are not. If this move is to preserve the spirit of the non-reductivist’s original view, it had better turn out that the class of ‘pure’ moral claims has some claim to be what the non-reductivist most cared about holding to be wholly distinct from the non-moral, in the first place. They must be the sort of claims which it makes sense to think are so central to morality, that ‘bastard’ moral claims seem to count intuitively as moral precisely because of their relationship to them. As we investigate various ways of trying to make good on this strategy in what follows, this is one of the most important constraints for us to keep in mind.

Before going forward, it is essential to understand two important things about the Pricean strategy. First, it constitutes a response to the first form of the explanatory argument, because it is wholly consistent with Hume’s Dictum. The basic form of the response is to divide the moral truths into two categories: the ‘pure’ moral, which are wholly distinct from, and hence irreducible to, the non-moral, and the ‘bastard’ moral, which are not, after all, wholly distinct from the non-moral, because they are defined, in part, in terms of non-moral claims. Both of these domains supervene on the non-moral, but only one involves a necessary connection. The supervenience of the bastard moral on the non-moral requires a necessary connection, and so Hume’s Dictum applies, but it is innocuous, because the non-reductivist grants that these are not, after

all, distinct existences. On the other hand, the supervenience of the pure moral on the non-moral does not involve any necessary connections – it follows trivially from the necessity of the pure moral truths, as in the case of mathematics. And so Hume’s Dictum does not apply.

This observation leads immediately to our second: that this line of response only gives us a response to the first form of the explanatory argument – the one which depends on Hume’s Dictum. This is because both parts of the account turn on the assumption that pure moral claims are all necessary – this is both what explains the supervenience of the bastard moral on the non-moral, and what explains why the supervenience of the pure moral on the non-moral is trivial. But now this necessity stands in need of explanation, according to the second form of the explanatory argument. Still, having a response even to the first form of the argument constitutes some real progress, so let’s see what we can do with it.

One first thought that you might have, at this point, is that once we see the structure of this Pricean strategy, it is in some way trivial to take advantage of it. This thought is a natural one, and one way of motivating it is by way of the idea that since any supervenience thesis is committed to necessary truths, we can simply take those necessities to be the ‘pure’ moral truths. But unfortunately, it is not quite so easy to do this as it sounds. Because it’s important to see that implementing the Pricean strategy is a non-trivial task, I’m going to take the remainder of this section to walk through this problematic reasoning in some detail. We may think of it as one way of implementing the Pricean strategy – the *trivialization* implementation.

First, the reasoning that might lead us to think that the Pricean strategy is trivial. We may start, to make things precise, by assuming a particular kind of supervenience thesis, *strong* supervenience. According to strong supervenience, no two possible entities (whether or not they exist at the same world) differ in any moral property without also differing in some non-moral property. So for any possible action x that is wrong in world w , there is a necessarily true conditional, $Fx \rightarrow (x \text{ is wrong})$, where ‘F’ is a complete non-moral characterization of x in w – the conjunction of all of its non-moral properties.¹³ This (material) conditional is guaranteed to be necessarily true, because by strong supervenience, there is no possible entity in any possible world which shares all of x ’s non-moral properties (i.e., which satisfies ‘F’) but differs in some moral property (for example, in whether it is wrong). So now construct such a conditional for every pair $\langle x, w \rangle$ such that x is wrong at w , and let B be the (infinite) conjunction of all of these conditionals. By construction, B is also necessary. Similarly, let A be the disjunction of the predicates ‘F’ in the antecedents of each of these conditionals. By construction, A is completely non-moral.

¹³ The reader will observe that the construction in this and the following paragraph has much in common with the techniques applied in Kim [1984] and Jackson [1998].

Finally, compare the claim ‘ $Ax \& B$ ’ to the claim ‘ x is wrong’. Since every disjunct ‘ F ’ of the predicate ‘ A ’ is the antecedent¹⁴ of a necessary conditional whose consequent is ‘ x is wrong’, ‘ $Ax \& B$ ’ trivially has ‘ x is wrong’ as a necessary consequence. But since we have a disjunct in ‘ A ’ for every possibly wrong action, and ‘ B ’ is necessary, ‘ x is wrong’ also has ‘ $Ax \& B$ ’ as a necessary consequence. So our construction guarantees that ‘ x is wrong’ and ‘ $Ax \& B$ ’ are necessarily equivalent. But since B is necessary (and moral) and ‘ A ’ is completely non-moral, this means that we’ve succeeded at reconstructing an ordinary moral claim like ‘ x is wrong’, which as we’ve already noted, seems moral but can sometimes express a merely contingent truth, as a conjunction of a necessary moral claim and a possibly contingent wholly non-moral claim. And that is the core of what our Price-inspired strategy requires us to do – it requires us to defend the view that ordinary, contingent moral claims are really just bastard moral claims, and conjunctions are the simplest case of bastard moral claims.

So far, so good. At this point we’ve seen enough to see why the thought that the Pricean strategy might somehow be trivial to carry out might be initially tempting. But I don’t think that this can be right, for at least two different reasons. Both turn on the fact that the Pricean strategy that I’ve been outlining actually requires *more* than we’ve gotten so far. To carry it out, it is not enough to construct, for each contingent moral claim, a conjunction of contingent non-moral claims and necessary moral claims with which it is necessarily equivalent; two more things are required. First, this conjunction must also reveal the true ‘bastard’ nature of the contingent moral claims, by revealing to us what they are really about. And second, the necessary moral claims which appear in these conjunctions must be plausibly construed to be *pure* moral claims. But I don’t think that this construction gets us either of these things.

To see why not, recall how we constructed ‘ B ’. We chose it to be a conjunction of infinitely many material conditionals, each of whose antecedents is the conjunction of all of the non-moral properties of some action at a world at which that action is wrong, and each of whose consequents is ‘ x is wrong’. It strikes me as deeply implausible that we’ve elucidated the true nature of ‘wrong’ claims by analyzing them in terms of...wrongness. So though we’ve constructed a claim that is necessarily equivalent to ‘ x is wrong’, I don’t think that we’ve shown that ‘ x is wrong’, itself, is a bastard claim, even if we assume that ‘ B ’ is a pure moral claim.

It is true that this objection requires a fine-grained conception of properties – the idea that different properties can be necessarily shared by the very same things. And this is controversial – indeed, the direct

¹⁴ Throughout the statement of this argument I’m being slightly sloppy; strictly speaking, for every disjunct of the predicate ‘ A ’, the corresponding sentence ‘ Fx ’ is the antecedent of a necessary conditional, etc.

arguments from supervenience to reduction work by denying it. But for precisely that reason, I think that it ought to be safe in this context. For if necessarily equivalent properties must be identical, then the non-reductive moral realist should be worried about the direct arguments from supervenience to reduction, and the explanatory argument is otiose.

However, the second problem with this construction doesn't require a fine-grained conception of properties. It is that though the construction gives us every reason to think that 'B' is a moral claim, and that it is necessary, it gives us no reason whatsoever to think that it can plausibly be construed as a *pure* moral claim. For by construction, it is simply the conjunction of infinitely many material conditionals, each of whose antecedents is wholly non-moral. Nothing about this makes it at all clear how 'B' could really be the 'pure' moral claim that non-reductive realists need in order to carry out our Price-inspired strategy.

Of course, it *could* be that this infinite conjunction of material conditionals is itself, despite appearances, a pure moral claim. Or if not, it is at least possible that it could be necessarily equivalent to a pure moral claim, which would be just as good for our purposes. Nothing that we have said can rule this possibility out. But on the other hand, nothing we have said has given us any insight, either, into why we should think that this is true. And this is why we need more from Price than the idea that pure or genuine moral claims are all necessary. For while there is a trivial path to seeing contingent moral claims as at least equivalent to conjunctions of necessary moral claims with contingent non-moral claims, there is no trivial path to seeing how those necessary claims could be *pure*. A deeper look at Price can give us a picture of exactly that. But first, it will help to explore a recent implementation of the Pricean strategy by T.M. Scanlon.

4 being realistic about reasons

In the last section, we saw that though the Pricean strategy offers some *prima facie* promise to offer a response to the 'Hume's Dictum' form of the explanatory argument from supervenience, it is not trivial to carry this strategy out. To carry it out, we need not only a diagnosis of how each contingent moral claim really consists in a relationship between a necessary moral claim and a contingent, wholly non-moral claim, but an account of what these necessary moral claims are which makes clear why they are the 'pure' moral claims about which we wanted to be non-reductivists, in the first place. Fortunately, in his 2009 Locke Lectures, *Being Realistic About Reasons*, Scanlon sketched a response to modal worries about non-reductive normative realism that exemplifies the Pricean strategy.¹⁵ Scanlon's response has the virtue of advocating a particular conception of

¹⁵ So far, in keeping with Price's own discussion, I've been focused on the case of non-reductive *moral* realism. But Scanlon generalizes to the case of non-reductive *normative* realism more generally, and I will follow him in what follows.

the pure normative necessities, and hence it is exactly the right sort of thing for us to look at, in order to see how we might try to improve on the trivialization implementation the Pricean strategy. Since it is the second implementation of the Pricean strategy that we will consider, I will refer to it as *Scanlon's* implementation.

As we've done here for morality, but generalizing to the case of the normative more generally, Scanlon distinguishes between 'pure' and 'mixed' normative claims, and like us, he takes disjunctions of pure normative claims with non-normative claims as a paradigm of 'mixed' claims. Then, discussing the case of supervenience, he reasons,

To understand the phenomena of covariance and supervenience it is important to be clear what kind of normative claims they involve. The normative facts that can vary as non-normative facts vary are facts that consist in the truth of mixed normative claims... [Scanlon 2009, 28]

Here Scanlon is making the point that it matters which supervening claims *co-vary* with the non-normative in such a way as to involve a necessary *connection* of the kind that Hume's Dictum prohibits between distinct existences. According to Scanlon in this passage, only *mixed* claims co-vary in this way, which shows that in keeping with our Pricean strategy, Scanlon is assuming that the pure normative claims are all necessary.

In contrast to the trivialization implementation that we considered in the last section, Scanlon offers a positive conception of what these pure normative necessities are like – one which promises to give us some insight into why they are really pure normative claims:

The essential element in normative statements is not a term referring to an entity, but a relation: the relation that holds between a proposition, a set of conditions, and an action or attitude when *p* is a reason for a person in situation *c* to do or hold *a*.

This sounds like a three-place relation, but it contains an implicit universal quantification over agents: it holds that *p* is a reason for *any* agent in *c* to do *a*. And we want not only to make not only general claims of this kind but also to claim, of a particular agents *x*, that some fact *p* is a reason for him or her to do *a* in *c*. So the underlying relation must be a four-place one $R(p, x, c, a)$. [Scanlon 2009, 19]

We can see immediately from this description that Scanlon's proposal has at least some *prima facie* promise to help us in exactly the place where the trivialization implementation dropped the ball. It is a common idea about normativity, endorsed by many different philosophers – including myself on another occasion – that reasons are the fundamental normative concept, in virtue of their relationship to which all normative claims count as normative. So if it is widely accepted that reasons are essentially normative, and all other normative claims are normative by virtue of implicating reasons, then claims about reasons have a particularly strong claim to be 'pure', in the sense that we require. And that is what Scanlon is claiming – that the pure normative

claims are claims about reasons. So his picture offers us precisely what the trivialization implementation does not – an answer to why the special category that he has picked out is genuinely pure.

Unfortunately, whereas the trivialization implementation could easily show that its special category of normative claims are *necessary*, this is something Scanlon needs to take more care about. For though it is plausible – or at least, widely agreed – that all normative claims are normative in virtue of implicating reasons, it is also clear that ordinary claims about reasons are often contingent, in the same way as ordinary claims about wrongness or about what someone ought to do. In fact, with reasons this is even easier to see, for in general, reasons are facts which support some course of action or other – but many facts are contingent. So, for example, one reason for you to keep reading this paper is that it is insightful and penetrating, but this can only be true because the paper is in fact incisive and penetrating, which, though true, could easily have been otherwise. If it were otherwise, then it wouldn't be true that one reason for you to keep reading this paper is that it is insightful and penetrating. So consequently, that ordinary claim about reasons is contingent. And the same goes for any ordinary reason attribution citing any contingent fact whatsoever as a reason, as Scanlon himself recognizes. Indeed, ordinary claims about reasons are one of his leading examples of *mixed* normative claims:

The normative facts that can vary as non-normative facts vary are facts that consist in the truth of mixed normative claims, such as the claim that someone has a reason to do a certain action, or that a particular consideration is such a reason. [Scanlon 2009, 28]

Scanlon is not unaware of this problem; in fact, it is precisely because of this problem that he takes care to appeal to his four-place $R(p,x,c,a)$ relation:

The essentially normative content of R , however, is independent of whether p is true: it lies in the claim that, whether p is the case or not, if p were the case it would be a reason for someone in c to do a . [Scanlon 2009, 23]

So according to Scanlon, ordinary 'reason' claims in natural language are only 'mixed' normative claims – the only genuine pure normative claims are those of the form, $R(p,x,c,a)$. And claims of *this* form are all necessary, even though ordinary 'reason' claims are not.

But now we have a new problem. For though it is plausible (or at least, widely agreed) that reasons are the central normative concept, it is not widely agreed that $R(p,x,c,a)$ is the central normative relation. Indeed, I'm not entirely clear that I understand this relation at all. And Scanlon's explanatory gloss doesn't do a lot to reassure me that it is genuinely a pure normative relation. For he explains what this means by

saying that its content comes from a subjunctive claim about whether p *would* be a reason if it were true.¹⁶ But recall that ordinary ‘reason’ claims are *not* pure – they are *mixed*. And so now I think we have a problem: if we’re making sense of the content of supposedly ‘pure’ normative claims by cashing them out in terms of ‘mixed’ normative claims, then I think we’ve lost the standing to claim that the ‘pure’ claims are the basic ones and the ‘mixed’ ones are just what we get when we mix pure normative claims with non-normative ones.

Perhaps this objection is unfair to Scanlon; he may have intended, in the passage I’ve just quoted, merely to be giving us some assistance in cottoning on to the relationship between ordinary ‘reason’ claims and the $R(p,x,c,a)$ relation, rather than telling us *in what the essentially normative content of R lies*, as he explicitly says. But whether or not the objection is unfair to Scanlon, it’s important to be clear that this strategy requires a defense not only of the division of the normative into ‘pure’ and ‘bastard’ or ‘mixed’ categories, but that this be done in a way that is plausible and defensible.

So far, we’ve seen that by appealing to reasons, Scanlon’s account has some promise to be able to make good on the claim that his distinguished class of normative claims are genuinely ‘pure’. But at the same time, we’ve also seen that there is a tension between this and the requirement that the pure normative claims all be necessary – for ordinary claims about reasons are not all necessary. But in fact, there is a deeper problem with Scanlon’s answer to the modal challenge, which we may see by returning to reflect further on what, exactly, Hume’s Dictum requires.

So far, I’ve been very sloppy about exactly how to formulate Hume’s Dictum precisely. For our purposes, it’s been sufficient to note that it forbids necessary covariance between distinct realms of truths. But at a closer pass, we might think that it says something more general: such as that there is no relation R such that for distinct existences x and y , necessarily $R(x,y)$. And if the correct version of Hume’s Dictum says such a thing, then Scanlon’s treatment clearly runs afoul of Hume’s Dictum after all – for presumably p , x , c , and a are at least in general distinct existences, and Scanlon’s basic normative necessities say that some relation – the R relation – holds of such tuples necessarily.¹⁷ This reasoning suggests that the Pricean strategy comes with (you guessed it) a strict price: the basic normative properties must be *monadic*, rather than polyadic, if we aim to avoid violations of Hume’s Dictum, so construed.

¹⁶ Presumably he would say something similar to solve the closely related problem about what it means for p to be a reason for x to do a in c , in cases in which x is not actually in c . Since claims of the form $R(p,x,c,a)$ are necessary, but whether a given agent x is in a given circumstance c is only contingent, the $R(p,x,c,a)$ claims must often be true even though x is not in c .

¹⁷ For this point I’m indebted to Krister Bykvist.

5 the standard model for normative explanations

So here is where we are so far: we know the general form of the Pricean strategy to respond to the Hume's Dictum form of the explanatory argument from supervenience. But we've also seen that it's non-trivial – indeed, *highly* non-trivial – to make good on all of the elements of this strategy. For to carry it out, we need some diagnosis of a privileged class of normative claims, such that all other intuitively normative claims can be understood as relationships between such claims and the non-normative. We need to have a firm enough grip on the content of these privileged claims that we are confident that they count as genuinely 'pure'. Yet this grip cannot come in a form that connects these claims to any of the ordinary classes of normative claims that are sometimes contingent, for they must all be necessary. And finally, these necessities themselves need to respect Hume's dictum by not consisting themselves in necessary connections between distinct existences. And so in particular, they cannot be relational claims whose relata are distinct existences at all. If we are to take advantage of this Pricean strategy, therefore, we need to do better at meeting each of these criteria. Fortunately for us, a closer look at Price gives us just the tools that we need.

One of the most striking features of Price's *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* is its intellectual indebtedness to Ralph Cudworth's *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. Despite citing Cudworth only on peripheral points and getting his title wrong¹⁸, Price returns over and over to a pattern of argument that to the best of my knowledge is first given in the first section of Cudworth's *Treatise*. I call it the *cudworthy argument*, and have argued elsewhere that it is important enough to be well-worth chewing on again.¹⁹

The key background assumption that drives the cudworthy argument is a general theory of how explanations of moral facts must work – a substantive picture that I call the *Standard Model Theory*. According to this picture, when we explain why something is wrong by adverting to some fact, this explanation always works by adverting to something else that is wrong, and pointing out that in virtue of our explanans, the action in question results in doing the other thing that is (as adverted) wrong.²⁰ In moral philosophy, we're familiar with such explanations all over the place. Having money is good because it lets you buy things. That's a good explanation because being able to buy things is good, and what the explanans tells us is that in virtue of having money, you are able to buy things. In this case, we say that what we explained is why having

¹⁸ Price makes a point of always saying 'immutable and eternal', rather than 'eternal and immutable', including when he cites Cudworth's title [Price 1748, 55].

¹⁹ Schroeder [2005a]. The cudworthy argument is also prominently featured as Clarke's main argument against Hobbes in his Boyle lectures (Clarke [1706]).

²⁰ In Schroeder [2005a] I allowed that the historical Cudworth and Price each had views that were slightly more sophisticated than that I've described here, for reasons that are connected to the dialectical role of the early versions of the open question argument in each of their discussions. This complication won't matter for our purposes, here.

money is *instrumentally good*, and when we reach a point where such subsumptive explanations can go no further, we say that we have found something that is *intrinsically good*.

Cudworth and Price held that the same goes for explanations of what is wrong. It is wrong for me to fail to show up for the Princeton Ethicists Network, because I promised to come. This is a good explanation, Cudworth claims, because what the explanans points out, is that in virtue of failing to show up for this workshop, I would break a promise, and it is wrong to break a promise. So failing to show up for the conference is only, as we might put it, instrumentally wrong, and we have only located something that is intrinsically wrong when such explanations can go no further.

Here is Cudworth presenting this picture:

As for example, to keep faith and perform covenants is that which natural justice obligeth to absolutely. Therefore upon the supposition (*ex hypothesi*) that any one maketh a promise, which is a voluntary act of his own, to do particular something which he was not before obliged to by natural justice, upon the intervention of this voluntary act of his own, that indifferent thing promised **falling now under** something absolutely good and becoming the matter of promise and covenant, standeth for the present in a new relation to the rational nature of the promiser, and becometh for the time a thing which ought to be done by him, or which he is obliged to do.' [Cudworth I73I, p 20, boldface added for emphasis]

In this passage we see the main elements of the picture that I've just described. There is something that is absolutely obligatory – necessarily and immutably so. When we explain why something is obligatory by appeal to a further fact, what we are doing is explaining why, given that fact, this action *falls under* the case of what is absolutely obligatory.

It follows from the *Standard Model Theory* that no explanatory moral theory can be perfectly general. For example, it can't be true that all obligations are explained by God's commands, or that everything you ought to do is explained by a value that it promotes. This is because according to the Standard Model Theory, all explanations are subsumptive – they all advert to a claim of the very kind that they are explaining. But whatever claim is adverted to as part of an explanation must not, on pain of circularity, itself fall under the explanation. So there cannot be any perfectly general explanations of where obligations or values or reasons come from. Cudworth used this style of argument to argue against voluntarist ethical theories, and Price extended the argument to apply to other kinds of view.

I want to point out three very important features of this picture. First, it is highly intuitive to draw the line between 'pure' and 'bastard' moral claims between facts about intrinsic and instrumental value, and similarly, between intrinsic and instrumental wrongness. Second, it is a familiar assumption about intrinsic value (and similarly, about intrinsic wrongness, though this is much less discussed) that facts about such

things are necessary, rather than contingent.²¹ (I'm not endorsing this assumption; only pointing out that it is widely held.) And finally, the idea that intrinsic value is necessary is not a coincidence, *if* we accept Cudworth and Price's idea that all moral explanations must be subsumptive.

The reasoning here is not quite airtight, but it is simple and attractive: if intrinsic value were contingent, then it could turn out that whether something was good could depend on something else (otherwise we'd have a violation of supervenience). But if this something else could explain a difference in whether the thing is good, then by the Standard Model Theory, it must do so by adverting to something else, more general, that is good, and that the thing in question is a way of getting in some cases, but not in others. So a subsumptive explanation needs to advert to a claim about what is good that encompasses all of the worlds which the explanation encompasses within its scope. Eventually, we must reach a violation of supervenience, or a case where there is a moral difference and a subvening non-moral difference but the non-moral difference does not do anything to explain the moral difference, or we must have an infinite sequence of explanations achieving greater and greater generality but never encompassing all possible worlds – or we must advert to something that is necessarily good. So if there are not to be unexplanatory difference-makers or infinite sequences of explanations, then things are going to have to end with something that is necessarily good. And since the claim about goodness that such explanations end with is the one about *intrinsic* goodness, it follows that claims about intrinsic goodness will be necessary. What this reasoning illustrates, is that Moore's idea that intrinsic value must supervene on intrinsic properties is not simply a linguistic error, confusing two senses of 'intrinsic'. Rather, it is the natural upshot of the Standard Model Theory as applied to 'good'.²² Note again that I'm not saying that this conclusion is right – for I don't actually think that the Standard Model Theory is true. But I think the case is good that this is the right conclusion to draw if you accept the Standard Model Theory.

Where Price differs from Cudworth, is that he appears to think that bastard moral truths are not really moral truths at all. Even if you have promised to attend a workshop, failing to attend the workshop is not wrong, according to Price – what is true instead, is that *by* failing to show up for the workshop, you break your promise. And breaking your promise is wrong. So the apparent moral fact that it is wrong for you to fail to show up for the conference is not only explained by the fact that it is wrong to break your

²¹ This assumption is most famously made by Moore [1903] and is the basis of his theory of organic unities. For an important dissenting opinion, see Korsgaard [1983]. Ironically (from my perspective), lecture one of Korsgaard [1996] advances a version of the cudworthy argument, drawing on Clarke [1706].

²² Compare Schroeder [2009] for further discussion.

promises and the fact that you promised to attend the conference; it is actually an unholy hybrid of the fact that it is wrong to break promises and the fact that you promised to show up for the workshop.

Here is Price presenting his version of the picture:

When an action, otherwise indifferent, becomes obligatory, by being made the subject of a *promise*; we are not to imagine, that our own will or breath alters the nature of things by making what is indifferent not so. But what was indifferent *before* the promise is still so; and it cannot be supposed, that, *after* the promise, it becomes obligatory, without a contradiction. All that the promise does, is, to alter the connexion of a particular effect; or to cause that to be an *instance* of right conduct which was not so before. There are no effects producible by us, which may not, in this manner, fall under different principles of morality; acquire connexions sometimes with happiness, and sometimes with misery; and thus stand in different relations to the eternal rules of duty. [Price I748, 51-52]

So Price and Cudworth share the same underlying picture, but differ over how to classify what I've been calling bastard moral claims. Cudworth is content to allow that there are contingent moral obligations, so long as we recognize that for there to be any moral obligations at all, some must be necessary. So a nonreductivist who follows Cudworth would refine the statement of her nonreductivism, to apply only to *pure* moral truths, and not to moral truths in general (many of which are bastard). Whereas Price seems to want to insist that ordinary moral terms like 'obligatory' can only apply necessarily. A nonreductivist who follows Price would continue to maintain that all moral properties or truths are irreducible, but explain away the appearance that bastard moral claims are really moral claims. This, I think, is largely a terminological dispute. Either way, the core of the strategy drawing on the Standard Model Theory is simple. It is a direct defense of the move that we've seen has just the right sort of flavor to offer a response to the first version of the explanatory argument from supervenience to reduction.²³

6 putting it together

Piecing together a natural version of Price's picture in order to develop a more properly Pricean implementation of the Pricean strategy, we get the following ideas: first, we may take *intrinsic wrongness* to be a property of action-types, as opposed to token acts. This is because token acts exist only contingently, but we want claims about intrinsic wrongness to be pure, and hence necessary. Second, we will assume that any action-type that has the property of *intrinsic wrongness* has it necessarily. However, third, 'wrong' is a binary predicate of action-types and agents. It expresses the relation that if the agent performs that action, then she

²³ Another way of thinking about the Pricean picture that I've been describing here is as a kind of arch-generalism. For discussion of this dimension of both Cudworth and Price, see Schroeder [2009].

will perform an action of a type that has the property, *intrinsically wrong*. So, for example, ‘failing to show up for the Princeton Ethicists Network is wrong for Mark’ is contingent, even though intrinsic wrongness is necessary wherever instantiated. We could easily expand this picture to apply to other moral terms like ‘good’ and ‘ought’, but all of the lessons will mirror those from this case.

Given this picture, the Pricean response to the first form of the explanatory argument from supervenience is exactly as we’ve anticipated: only atomic ascriptions of intrinsic wrongness and claims in their Boolean closure are *pure* moral claims. Ordinary claims about what is wrong, in contrast, are impure, bastard moral claims. Pure moral claims supervene trivially on the non-moral, in the same way as math, and without co-varying or being otherwise “connected” in any way. So there is no conflict with Hume’s Dictum. In contrast, bastard moral claims do co-vary with claims about the non-moral, but by construction, they are not distinct existences. So again there is no conflict with Hume’s Dictum.

This picture has promise to make good on each of our criteria: it *is* plausible that ‘wrong’ claims, in general, are about the relationship between what is intrinsically wrong and the non-moral facts. Claims about intrinsic wrongness, in turn, *are* a plausible candidate to be the genuinely ‘pure’ moral claims. And – at least conditional on the Standard Model Theory – it *is* at least plausible that claims about intrinsic wrongness are all necessary.

Our final requirement for a solution is that the ‘pure’ moral necessities must not themselves run afoul of Hume’s Dictum, and over this issue we must take some greater care. In contrast to Scanlon’s pure necessities, which consisted in the relation R holding necessarily among the distinct existences p, x, c, and a, the more strictly Pricean account to which we’ve appealed reserves the title of ‘pure’ for atomic attributions of intrinsic wrongness and their Boolean combinations – and intrinsic wrongness is taken to be a one-place property, rather than a relation. So at the least, we don’t run afoul of this constraint in the same way that Scanlon does.²⁴

Still, this may not put us in the clear. After all, intrinsic wrongness is itself presumably a distinct existence from any of the action-types which instantiate it. And so we might worry that if some action-type is intrinsically wrong, then that itself constitutes a necessary connection between distinct existences, in violation of Hume’s Dictum. This may be right – if so, I think it would show the Pricean strategy to be

²⁴ Can this strategy be extended to reasons? It can, if being intrinsically reason-supported is a one-place property of action-types, rather than a relation between considerations and the action-types they support. On such a view, the three-place ‘reason’ relation will be the bastard relation that holds of a fact p, an agent x, and an action a just in case p explains why if x does a, then x does something that is intrinsically reason-supported. So on this view, once we get to the ultimate reason-supported actions, there do not need to be any considerations which actually count in favor of doing these things. For an interesting historical view with exactly these commitments, see Nagel [1970]’s introduction of the distinction between objective and subjective reasons. And for discussion, see Schroeder [2007b].

ultimately fruitless. Still, I think there is reason to be optimistic on behalf of the non-reductive realist who seeks to employ this strategy. Fortunately for the prospective defender of the Pricean strategy, there are (regress-based) reasons to deny that property instantiation is itself a relation. And if it is not, then the mere fact that intrinsic wrongness is necessarily instantiated by the action type of torturing puppies does not suffice for there to be some necessary relation between those distinct existences.

Could the Pricean strategy be committed to some other necessary relation, then? Here is one last attempt. The proponent of the Pricean strategy will note that it follows from the necessity of the intrinsic wrongness of torturing puppies that necessarily, if someone would torture puppies by moving their arm in a certain way, then if they move their arm in that way, they will perform an action of a type that is intrinsically wrong. And so she must accept that necessarily, if moving your arm in a certain way would torture puppies, then if you move your arm in that way, you will do something that is intrinsically wrong. This conditional is necessary, and appears to connect the pure moral with the non-moral. So it constitutes, I think, the best case to be made that the Pricean strategy is still committed to a violation of Hume's Dictum. But in response, the Pricean can claim that the consequent of this conditional is really just the bastard claim that it is wrong to move your arm in that way. I'm not quite convinced that this amounts to a satisfying answer to the worry about whether we are still violating Hume's Dictum, so I still have some reservations about whether we've fully confronted that form of the explanatory argument. But it makes sense for the proponent of the Pricean strategy to fall back on the fact that this necessity is really a bastard claim, in her defense.

So to sum up, it is still not entirely clear whether we ultimately have a strategy that appeals to necessities that do not themselves constitute some kind of violation of Hume's Dictum. But what is clear, I think, is that appealing to the intrinsic/instrumental distinction, along with the familiar idea that intrinsic wrongness is necessary, which can be supported by the Standard Model Theory, offers the most promising path for making good on the Pricean strategy for responding to the modal challenges to non-reductive moral realism.

7 where this leaves us

What I've shown in this paper is that there is at least one strategy that offers at least some initial promise for responding to the Hume's Dictum form of the explanatory argument from supervenience, *without* taking on substantial commitments either in modal metaphysics or about which kinds of supervenience theses turn out

to be true.²⁵ I haven't shown that adopting Price's commitment to the Standard Model Theory of normative explanations is the only way of making good on this strategy, and so perhaps there could be some less committing way of making good on the kind of ideas I've explored in this paper. But I do think that I've shown that it is non-trivial to carry this strategy out, particularly because it is highly non-trivial to offer a plausible rationale for why the moral necessities on which the view is based should intuitively count as *pure*. It is to this question that I think the full set of Price's commitments offer us the most promise of a satisfying answer, for reasons that I've tried to make clear in my discussion of Scanlon.

So what remains of the explanatory argument from supervenience, given the Pricean response? The answer, of course, is – at a minimum – its second form – the less direct argument based on the principle that necessities require explanation. This is because the Pricean strategy relies throughout on postulated moral necessities, of which it offers no explanation. Indeed, if the Pricean strategy is really best motivated by the idea I've traced to Cudworth that all moral explanations are subsumptive, then the strategy requires moral necessities that admit of *no* explanation.

The second form of the explanatory argument from supervenience is, of course, less exciting than the form which relies on Hume's Dictum. It gives us no decisive refutation of nonreductive realism; it only probes a source of concern. But the foregoing reasoning leads me to think that this form of the argument is really where the action is. The challenge for nonreductivists is to say why pure moral necessities require no explanation.

One thing that is certainly achieved by the broadly Pricean strategy of responding to the Hume's Dictum argument, is that it forces the non-reductive realist to adopt some clear commitments about the nature of at least some of the pure moral necessities. According to the picture I sketched in the last section, the basic necessities are atomic claims of the form that some action-type has the property of intrinsic wrongness. And according to Scanlon's implementation, the basic necessities are again atomic claims, this time of the form $R(p,x,c,a)$.

We may appeal to what we know about these basic necessities, in order to press the second form of the explanatory argument. For though the relationship between pure and bastard moral claims according to the Pricean strategy is closely analogous to the relationship between pure and bastard mathematical claims, as we've seen, the *kind* of claims postulated to be necessities is actually quite different. The necessities of pure morality, according to the Pricean strategy that I've described, ascribe moral properties to action-types

²⁵ In contrast, as Schmitt and Schroeder show, the strategy advocated by Wedgwood [1999], [2007] carries not only both of these commitments, but also commitments about the interrelated status of the normative and the intentional.

individuated in non-moral terms. Many of them have a simple, atomic structure, ascribing a moral property to a non-moral action-type. The necessities of pure mathematics aren't like this at all. They ascribe mathematical properties – or identity – to mathematical entities. Maybe – just maybe – this makes unexplained moral necessities fishier than unexplained mathematical necessities. Maybe it makes mathematical necessities easier to explain. A full elaboration of the explanatory argument from supervenience would need to say why this would be, and a full proper defense of non-reductive moral realism would need to say why not.

Either way, Price reminds us that the explanatory challenges facing the modal commitments of non-reductive moral realism are complex, and will reward further attention. If modal truths require explanation, then supervenience will not come without some sort of price.²⁶

references

- Bennett, Karen [2004]. 'Global Supervenience and Dependence.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68(3): 501-529.
- Blackburn, Simon [1973]. 'Moral Realism.' Reprinted in Blackburn [1993], 111-129.
- _____ [1984]. *Spreading the Word*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____ [1985]. 'Supervenience Revisited.' Reprinted in Blackburn [1993], 130-148.
- _____ [1993]. *Essays in Quasi-Realism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Campbell [2011]. 'A New and Improved Supervenience Argument for Ethical Descriptivism.' *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 6: 205-218.
- Clarke, Samuel [1706]. *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*. Selections reprinted in Raphael, ed., *British Moralists 1650-1800*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, 191-225.
- Clarke-Doane, Justin [forthcoming]. 'Moral Epistemology: the Mathematics Analogy.' Forthcoming in *Noûs*.
- Cudworth, Ralph [1731] (1996). *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. Sarah Hutton, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁶ Special thanks to Krister Bykvist, Bart Streumer, John Broome, Shieva Kleinschmidt, John Hawthorne, Jim Van Cleve, Ralph Wedgwood, Jamie Dreier, Geoff Sayre-McCord, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Brad Hooker, and audiences at the Carolina Metaethics Workshop in Chapel Hill in December 2012, and at the Oxford University Moral Philosophy Seminar and the University of Reading in February 2013.

- Dunaway, William [2013]. *Realism and Fundamentality in Ethics and Elsewhere*. PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan.
- Enoch, David [2011]. *Taking Morality Seriously*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huemer, Michael [2005]. *Ethical Intuitionism*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Jackson, Frank [1998]. *From Metaphysics to Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kim, Jaegwon [1984]. 'Concepts of Supervenience.' Reprinted in Kim [1993], 53-78.
- _____ [1993]. *Supervenience and Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine [1983]. 'Two Distinctions in Goodness.' *Philosophical Review* 92(2): 169-195.
- _____ [1996]. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGrath, Sarah [2010]. 'Moral Knowledge and Experience.' *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 6: 107-127.
- Moore, G.E. [1903]. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagel, Thomas [1970]. *The Possibility of Altruism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____ [1986]. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parfit, Derek [2011]. *On What Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Price, Richard [1748]. *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*. Facsimile by Ibis Publishing: Charlottesville, VA.
- Putnam, Hilary [2004]. *Ethics Without Ontology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Scanlon, T.M. [2009]. *Being Realistic About Reasons*. Locke Lectures. Last accessed from Oxford University philosophy faculty website at http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/25856/Lecture_2.pdf on 1/23/2013.
- Schiffer, Stephen [1987]. *Remnants of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Schmitt, Johannes, and Mark Schroeder [2011]. 'Supervenience Arguments Under Relaxed Assumptions.' *Philosophical Studies* 155(1): 133-160.
- Schroeder, Mark [2005a]. 'Cudworth and Normative Explanations.' *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* www.jesp.org, vol. I, no. 3.
- _____ [2005b]. 'Realism and Reduction: The Quest for Robustness.' *The Philosophers' Imprint* 5(1): www.philosophersimprint.org/005001/.
- _____ [2007a]. *Slaves of the Passions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____ [2007b]. 'Reasons and Agent-Neutrality.' *Philosophical Studies* 135(2): 279-306.
- _____ [2009]. 'A Matter of Principle.' Joint critical notice of Jonathan Dancy, *Ethics Without Principles*, and Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge, *Principled Ethics*. *Noûs* 43(3): 568-580.

- Streumer, Bart [2008]. 'Are There Irreducibly Normative Properties?' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 86(4): 537-561.
- _____ [2011]. 'Are Normative Properties Descriptive Properties?' *Philosophical Studies* 154(3): 325-348.
- Wedgwood, Ralph [1999]. 'The Price of Non-reductive Moral Realism.' *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 2(3): 199-215.
- _____ [2007]. *The Nature of Normativity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, Jessica [2010]. 'What is Hume's Dictum, and Why Believe It?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80(3): 595-637.