5

Resisting Reductive Realism

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5.1. INTRODUCTION

In the second half of my graduate studies, I had a meeting with the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). After confirming that my dissertation was progressing smoothly, I was asked to describe the project. I gave the pitch: There's a family of views organized loosely around the possibility of explaining goodness, reasons, and other normative entities appealing only to the sort of entities to which natural and social scientists appeal. But a recently influential class of objections has led ethicists away from such views. I argue that the objections come up short in ways that reveal a slew of neat things about the *concepts* used to think about goodness, reasons, and the like.

"So you're defending reductive naturalism?," the DGS asked. "Basically—I defend reductive realism in ethics, a wider family of views of which reductive naturalism happens to be the most prominent member," I said. "Reductivism about *all* normativity?," asked the DGS. "That's right," I replied. The DGS then reached for an e-cigarette. "Wow," he said, through a plume of sweet-smelling vapor. "That's crazy. But I wish you the best of luck. I'll be here if you need anything."

The point of this anecdote is not to single out the DGS for vaping. It's to highlight their reaction to my project. The DGS was shocked ("Wow") to hear that I was defending reductivism. They found it incredible ("That's crazy") that I was attempting to do so. It's not an uncommon reaction. Similar ones can be found in Nagel (1986: 138), Wiggins (1993: 311), FitzPatrick (2014: §§7, 8), and Scanlon (2014: 46).[1] My aim in this chapter is to better understand why ethicists *resist* reductivism. I want to know what

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[1] This is a very small sampling. Unfortunately, references contribute to the 10,000-word count to which each chapter in this volume is capped. See Laskowski (2019) for many more examples of ethicists expressing similar reactions toward reductivism.

leads ethicists like Enoch (2011: 4, my emphasis) to say things like "Normative facts are *just too different* from natural ones to be a subset thereof."

In section 5.2, I discuss the natural idea that ethicists resist reductivism simply as a result of following the arguments against reductivism where they lead. Seeing why this idea comes up short further clarifies the sense in which ethicists resist reductivism. It also points toward the idea that resistance to reductivism isn't high-minded—that it has more to do with our psychology than any process of reflective reasoning. There are many different psychological explanations of why ethicists resist reductivism available. In section 5.3, I extract a concept-based, psychological explanation from *contextualists* who argue that normative concept use is interestingly flexible. I argue that the explanation fails but in a way that pushes the discussion in the right direction. Toward the end of section 5.3 through 5.4, I come down on the side of a different concept-based psychological explanation of why ethicists resist reductivism—one that is fully compatible with the truth of reductivism. Over the course of defending the explanation, I develop a novel kind of *hybrid* view of normative concepts on which using them depends on both cognitive and noncognitive aspects of our psychology.

That resistance to reductivism traces to special features of our use of normative concepts rather than the falsity of reductivism isn't a ground-breaking idea. Many philosophers of mind have gotten mileage out of a similar one in explaining resistance to reductive views concerning phenomenal consciousness.[2] In fact, the basic form of the idea has been imported to ethics already.[3] But I argue that too much has been read into parallel forms of such resistance. As a result, I claim that a promising version of such an explanation has been dismissed too quickly. While resistance to reductivism can be found in various philosophical domains, I highlight what is distinctive of such resistance in ethics.

Two disclaimers before proceeding. First, the main goal of this chapter might appear familiar—it looks like one that ethicists have been pursuing at least since Moore coined the phrase "naturalistic fallacy." But much of the commentary in Moore's wake focuses on the force of his charge against naturalism and reductivism more broadly. My project is more upstream. I'm interested in what might have led Moore to characterize reductivism as fallacious in the first place.[4] Second, I'm concerned principally with explicating a *psychological* phenomenon—the way in which ethicists struggle to

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[2] See Balog (2009) and the references therein.

[3] See Chappell and Yetter-Chappell (2013) and Mehta (forthcoming).

[4] A natural thought is that it was his *open question argument* that led him to view reductivism so unfavorably. I'll be arguing that something like this is only part of the story.

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believe reductive theses.[5] So, while it's true that much of what I say undercuts a familiar inference to the falsity of reductivism from the fact that ethicists struggle to believe it, I don't see that as my primary aim.[6] Outspoken resistance to reductivism far outstrips the force of the arguments against the view.[7] That makes ethicists' relationship to reductivism somewhat peculiar among views in ethics.[8] Everyone, including opponents of reductivism, should want to have a better grip on this psychological phenomenon regardless of which view of the metaphysics of ethics turns out to be true.

5.2. STAGE SETTING

5.2.1. Resistance to Reductivism, What

I'll be treating reductivism as the view that while normative entities[9] figure in a metaphysical account of everything, none of them do so at the most fundamental level.[10] This is a view that ethicists appear to *resist*. But they

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[5] Though psychological questions are amenable to empirical investigation, I won't be employing experimental data. That's in part because data bearing on the question of why ethicists struggle to believe reductive theses aren't yet available. Ethics isn't an exception. Chalmers (forthcoming) points out that such data are welcome but not currently available with respect to similar questions in the philosophy of mind regarding our attitudes toward reductivism about phenomenal consciousness. But even if such data were available, it could *inform* but not *settle* the question at hand. As we'll see, part of what's at issue is the not-recognizably empirical question of what it takes to even have the beliefs that ethicists struggle to form. Thanks to an anonymous referee for requesting clarification.

[6] But it's one of my primary aims in Laskowski (2019).

[7] Schroeder (2005: 3) makes a similar observation. It's not that there aren't any objections to reductivism. Indeed, see Paakkunainen (forthcoming) for a litany of objections that based on the "just-too-different" slogan that's at issue in this chapter. But objections usually amount to *challenges* rather than *fatal problems* for a view. You'd never get that impression from the hyperbolic language that so many ethicists use in dismissing reductivism.

[8] True, ethicists describe some other views in ways suggesting that they have a similarly hard time believing them. Streumer (2017) calls his book on the error theory *Unbelievable Errors* for a reason. But Streumer arrives at his incredulity about the error theory after working through a complex argument. I'll be arguing that ethicists arrive at their take on reductivism very differently.

[9] I use the word "entities" broadly to remain neutral about whether reductivism is best understood as a view about facts, properties, and the like. However, I also use the word in such a way as to exclude *mentalistic* entities, such as concepts, attitudes, and the like.

[10] There isn't consensus over the nature of reductivism. One issue concerns whether reductive theses should be understood as stating *identities* rather than *constitutive analyses*. See Cuneo (2015) and the references therein. Another issue concerns whether reductive theses are understood *strongly*, as providing characterizations of normative entities that are

don't seem to do so in the sense of merely intuiting that reductivism is false. That's not what Chappell (2019: 125, my emphasis) is getting at when they say that "Normativity is, intuitively, so fundamentally different in kind from natural phenomena that a reduction of the former to the latter may seem *hopeless* or even *absurd*."[11] It's more like ethicists have the intuition that reductivism is in some way incoherent rather than false, which prevents them from believing that the view is even possible.[12] This is what I call the *sense of incredibility* in ethics.[13] Instead of providing a precise characterization of it, I characterize it ostensively as *that* shared kind of struggle among ethicists to believe that reductivism is at all plausible upon reflection.

This is a rough characterization of the sense of incredibility. I'm eschewing the common philosophical instinct to offer a rigorous definition of it. A rigorous definition is a useful philosophical tool. But it's not the only such tool available. *Experiencing* the sense of incredibility is also a useful way into understanding it. Try it. Take a moment to reflect on the reductive thesis that *what it is* for an action to be good is for it to maximize pleasure. If you feel like you're experiencing the sense of incredibility at the moment, then I suspect that you understand the sense of incredibility well enough to see that it calls for explanation.[14] But you're not out of luck if you don't find

finitely specifiable, or *weakly*, as providing characterizations of normative entities that are not finitely specifiable. See Schroeter and Schroeter (2015) for discussion. There are also issues, among still many others, about what makes reductivism a form of realism. See Dunaway (2017). There isn't enough space to adjudicate these disputes. And as an anonymous referee suggests, pluralism about reductivism might be the right way to go in the end. I'll be treating the view as involving fundamentality and weak specification for the sake of exposition.

[11] I treat reductive naturalism ("naturalism") as a precisification of reductivism. It's the view that normative entities figure in a metaphysical explanation of everything, but not at the most fundamental level, because only *natural* entities so figure. Like reductivism, there's no uncontroversial way to understand naturalism. I'll be using the word "natural" to mean what others use the words "non-normative" or "descriptive" to mean. I'll also be assuming that intuitions about what falls on either side of the distinction are firm enough not to weigh in on the controversy. See Dowell (2013) for discussion.

[12] Parfit's (2011: 325, my emphasis) discussion is telling. He asserts that reductivism "could not be true" in the same way that claims like "rivers are sonnets" or "heat is a shade of blue" could not be true. Copp (2017: 29, original emphasis) reads Parfit in a similar way, writing that "I think that Parfit and many other non-naturalists may be driven to reject naturalism less by arguments than by the prior conviction that no natural fact *could* be normative. Their view is that normative naturalism is hopeless, not in detail, but in basic conception." But see Howard and Laskowski (forthcoming) for an interpretation of Parfit's remarks on which they serve as a premise in a sophisticated objection to reductivism.

[13] I borrow the phrase "sense of incredibility" from Melnyk (n.d.).

[14] It can be fruitful to compare your reaction to a different reductive thesis from outside of ethics, e.g. that what it is for a sample of liquid to be a sample of alcohol is for it to be sample of liquid consisting of an ionic compound of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen.

this exercise illuminating. Another, less direct way into understanding the sense of incredibility is to observe it at work in others. Consider, in particular, an exchange between a friend of reductivism, Schroeder (2005), and a foe of reductivism, Enoch (2011).

In one of the first explicit attempts of its kind of which I'm aware, Schroeder offers a diagnosis of why ethicists are so thoroughly resistant to reductivism. According to Schroeder, reductive views are all about explanation—they're put forward explicitly to account for the central phenomena constitutive of the relevant subject matter.[15] From this perspective, reductive views are appealing only insofar as anyone uses them to explain such phenomena.[16] The problem is that many of the most influential debates about reductivism in ethics, Schroeder suggests, take place at too high a level of abstraction for anyone to use them to explain anything in particular.[17] Schroeder can be read as suggesting that ethicists experience the sense of incredibility in virtue of failing to develop plausible reductive views.[18]

In his discussion of reductive views in ethics generally, and Schroeder's diagnosis of resistance to reductivism in particular, Enoch (2011: 104) acknowledges explicitly that one way of evaluating reductivism involves precisely the sort of work Schroeder encourages, namely, that of "engag[ing] in piecemeal evaluation of specific reductive proposals or the arguments for them." As it happens, Enoch thinks various considerations count

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[15] "Reductions, after all, are at least in principle supposed to be theoretically fruitful . . . they are supposed to make the reduced domain simply less *mysterious*, by telling us a little bit of what it is *about*." (2005: 3, original emphasis).

[16] "The only way to see whether any particular reduction succeeds at capturing all of the important phenomena about the normative is to actually carry out the reduction and test it on various normative phenomena in order to see how much sense it can make of them." (2005: 7).

[17] Schroeder has discussions like Jackson's (1998) in mind. Jackson's influential argument from supervenience tells us that one part of normativity, morality, concerns descriptive properties picked out by the Ramsification of mature folk morality, but it doesn't identify which particular descriptive properties morality concerns.

[18] I read Schroeder's diagnosis differently from Lutz and Lenman (2018), who claim that, on Schroeder's diagnosis, ethicists resist reductivism as a result of a lack of analytic connections between normative and natural concepts. While it's true that Schroeder is committed to such a lack of connections, I think the quotes in the footnotes above indicate that he is better read as claiming that such resistance stems from a lack of exposure to plausible reductive views. Indeed, in later work, Schroeder (2017: 682, original emphasis) writes explicitly that "no one has offered a proposed reduction that seems like it *could* possibly be true. High-level arguments that some reductive view *must* be true [e.g. Jackson's arguments] simply do not address the source of skepticism that no such view *could* be. The only antidote to this—the only dialectically fruitful way forward—is to defend better views."

decisively against all extant reductive views.[19] Tellingly, however, Enoch also suggests that anyone who already experiences the sense of incredibility is committed pre-theoretically to rejecting even merely possible reductive views that ethicists have yet to consider.[20] This is circumstantial evidence that ethicists don't experience the sense of incredibility as a result of failing to develop plausible reductive views. It's the other way around. Ethicists experience the sense of incredibility first and then conclude that reductive views can't work.

Some might still feel as though they don't quite see that the sense of incredibility is something to explain, even after trying to experience the sense of incredibility directly and even after observing it indirectly in others. Hold tight if that's the state in which you find yourself. I'll work toward further discharging the assumption that the sense of incredibility deserves special treatment over the course of this chapter. In the meantime, I can report that I experience the sense of incredibility. In fact, I experience it even though I'm quite sympathetic to reductivism.[21] I'd like to better understand how it could be that I struggle to believe reductivism despite my attraction to it.

5.3. PSYCHOLOGICAL, CONCEPT-BASED EXPLANATIONS

Ethicists resist reductivism in the sense of experiencing the sense of incredibility—they find reductive views so obviously implausible that they struggle to believe that they're even possible. I've argued against the idea that

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[19] Enoch (2011: 104) claims that currently available reductive views are either a priori or a posteriori. If they're a priori, then he says that the "just-too-different" intuition or what I call the sense of incredibility, counts against them. If they're a posteriori, then, according to Enoch, they're vulnerable to familiar moral twin-earth style considerations. As for the former horn, Enoch doesn't say why he thinks the sense of incredibility is incompatible with a priori reductive views. Enoch's second horn is also unpersuasive. Arguments from moral-twin earth style considerations simply don't have the right form to show that *no* a posteriori reductive view could work, as Schroeder (2017: 682, n.d.) observes. A more recent, stronger version of the argument from Sinhababu (2019) only further confirms Schroeder's diagnosis.

[20] Enoch writes that "perhaps there are a priori reductions that we just haven't thought of yet," and goes on to suggest strongly that it wouldn't matter. This is because, if we're following Schroeder, reductive views have to explain the central phenomena of ethics, and "the list of things we pre-theoretically want to say may itself include a denial of naturalist reduction. Indeed, the just-too-different point is precisely an attempt to capture such a pre-theoretical desideratum." (2011: 105–6).

[21] I defend reductivism in Laskowski (2018a, 2018b, 2019). Copp (2018: 17), one of the most influential contemporary proponents of reductivism, also admits to experiencing it.

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they experience it in virtue of having reflected only on implausible reductive views. Indeed, the sense of incredibility seems to have little to do with any kind of process of reflective reasoning, which points toward the idea that it has a basis in *arational*, *merely psychological* mechanisms. There are various ways to develop such a psychological explanation of the sense of incredibility. In this section, I'm going to begin exploring whether it's well explained by the psychological mechanisms employed in and enabling ethicists to have thoughts about reductive theses, which is to say the *concepts* that they use.[22]

For example, there are various concepts that ethicists use in reflecting on the reductive thesis that what it is for an action to be good is for it to maximize pleasure. This includes the paradigmatically normative concept GOOD[23] and the natural concept MAXIMIZE PLEASURE.[24] I'm going to explore the idea that concepts like the former might be special in a way that helps explains the sense of incredibility. There also happen to be a number of ways of developing the idea that such normative concepts explain the sense of incredibility. I'll introduce and argue against one such explanation in this section before introducing and defending another.

5.3.1. Using Normative Concepts to Explain the Sense of Incredibility: Contextualism

Start with the banal observation that you don't think of things as just plain short. You don't think of the 5'6" professional baseball player José Altuve as short, period. Rather, you think of them as short relative to a standard, like the average height among professional baseball players (6 feet). It's plausible to many philosophers that the concept SHORT resembles the nature of a gradable adjective for which an incomplete predicate analysis is best, in that its *context* of use has to be checked to uncover the full thought that it's being used to form. A number of ethicists have argued that normative concepts like GOOD are similarly flexible in virtue of their dependence on context.[25] You don't think of things as plain good, but rather as good relative to whichever standard happens to be relevant or salient in context. Such flexibility in the use of normative concepts appears to be in tension with the aim of *ambitious* reductive ethical theorizing—the aim of sorting out

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[22] See Margolis and Laurence (1999) for a discussion of understanding concepts as psychological entities rather than abstracta. See Laskowski and Finlay (2017) for a discussion of the nature of normative concepts in particular that's informed by Margolis and Laurence.

[23] I am following the convention of using small caps to denote concepts.

[24] It could be that MAXIMIZE PLEASURE isn't a natural concept. I'm only using it as an example.

[25] See Ziff (1960) and Thomson (1992), among many others.

what it is for something to be (say) good and hence the aim of sorting out what good things have in common across *all* contexts. *Contextualists* about normative concepts might exploit this tension to explain the sense of incredibility.

Consider Finlay's (2014) brand of contextualism about normative concepts to illustrate. According to Finlay, GOOD has the structure of a relational predicate with contextually sensitive argument-places for *objects* and *ends*. On Finlay's view, objects stand in a kind of *probability-raising* relation to ends. When you think that going vegan is good in a context where you're discussing how to relieve suffering in the world, you're thinking that going vegan raises the probability of relieving suffering. When you're thinking that using a hammer is good in a context where you're considering whether to hang a frame, you're thinking that using a hammer raises the probability of hanging the frame. In other contexts, you'll be thinking about raising the probability of still other contextually salient ends. The resulting picture is one on which it's possible to think of things as good in at least as many ways as it's possible for context to supply different standards.

Imagine some ethicists reflecting on the question of what it is for an action to be good. On Finlay's view, they're really thinking about what it is for an action to *raise the probability of end e*, where "e" is whichever end is salient in context. Plausibly, whether any answer to such a question will strike them as plausible depends in part on whether they're able to sort out which of their ends is salient in the context. But it can be awfully difficult to sort out which are salient for a variety of reasons. It could be due to the sheer number of ends. It could be indeterminate whether such ends are shared sufficiently. More interestingly, it could be that their ends just are their desires and that desires never rise to the level of conscious awareness to be recoverable from context.[26] In failing to recover their end(s) from context, the ethicists don't uncover at least one of the elements constitutive of goodness (i.e. the ethicists' ends). But that could leave them with the impression that reductivism is incredible, since the aim of ambitious reductive theorizing about goodness is to identify what all good things have in common.

5.3.1.1. Contextualism Doesn't Explain the Sense of Incredibility

There's a problem with the explanation despite its promise. Continue to imagine the group of ethicists reflecting on the question of what it is for an action to be good. In doing so, however, don't imagine them thinking about

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[26] See Hulse et al. (2004).

the question in the same way as before. That is, where the question of what it is for an action to be good is left incomplete (e.g. where adjunct prepos017itional phrases like "good *for such and such*" are not included), such that context supplies an end. Instead, imagine the ethicists stating explicitly that the question of interest to them is the question of whether what it is for action to be good *across all contexts* is for it to be an action *that raises the probability of some contextual salient end*. Such explicitness makes it implausible to maintain that the ethicists are being duped, as it were, by any covert contextual variation. But if not then the contextualist explanation of the sense of incredibility under discussion predicts that they wouldn't experience the sense of incredibility. The problem is that it seems like they would.[27]

5.3.2. Using Normative Concepts to Explain the Sense of Incredibility: Unanalyzability

Of course, there are responses to this objection available. But instead of working through them, I'm going to explore a constructive reaction to the apparent failure of the contextualist explanation. In broad terms, context-ualism seemed like a promising explanation of the sense of incredibility in virtue of the fact that it can be *hard* to reveal whatever analytic or otherwise a priori connections ("connections" from here on) there might be among normative concepts (e.g. GOOD) and natural concepts (e.g. CONTEXTUALLY SALIENT END *E*). And this seems like it engenders doubt about reductivism. But it doesn't engender enough doubt because such a view doesn't, as the explicit-ends case above suggests, make connections among normative and natural concepts *hard enough* to reveal. This points toward a way forward: appeal to views of normative concepts on which it's *much harder* to reveal any connections between normative and natural concepts.

One way to guarantee that it's much harder to reveal connections between normative and natural concepts would be to appeal to views on which there *just aren't any* such connections. Standardly, concepts are said to have connections to one another in virtue of having a definitional structure, wherein it is possible to list all the necessary and sufficient conditions for their application via analysis. The idea that concepts can be analyzable in such a way has been around a long time, of course. But there are well-established families of views in the general theory of concepts on which some concepts are *unanalyzable*.[28]

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[27] Joyce (n.d.: 7–10) suggests a similar issue.
[28] I only need the weaker claim that they *aren't fully analyzable*. But I use the word "unanalyzable" to mean "not fully analyzable" for the sake of convenience.

There are at least two such families. On the *prototype* theory, concepts are prototypes, which are stores of features observed together at a certain rate of statistical frequency.[29] Concepts are unanalyzable on this view because such features aren't necessary or sufficient for a concept's application—they're just observed together at a high rate.[30] Another view of concepts on which they're unanalyzable is *conceptual atomism*, which just is the denial of the possibility of concepts having a definitional structure, packaged with further views about the sort of relations such concepts have to stand in to the world to be associated with information at all.[31] On either view, the result is that normative concepts are unanalyzable, which encourages the thought that when ethicists use normative and natural concepts to reflect on reductive theses, no amount of such reflection can reveal connections among these concepts.[32] The view that normative concepts are unanalyzable builds on the insights of the contextualist explanation. The question now is whether it can explain the sense of incredibility.

Consider, again, the reductive thesis that what it is for an action to be good is for it to maximize pleasure. Ethicists use natural and normative concepts in reflecting on this thesis. But if normative concepts are unanalyzable then even if it's true that it's part of the nature of good actions to maximize pleasure, it's not accessible to ethicists that it is so. On such a view, no amount of reflection with the concept GOOD can reveal any connection to MAXIMIZE PLEASURE. That seems like it would leave ethicists struggling to believe the reductive thesis that what it is for an action to be good is for it to be an action that maximizes pleasure. In other words, the unanalyzability of normative concepts seems to provide an alternative explanation of why ethicists experience the sense of incredibility.[33]

Nevertheless, despite its promise, there is still a lot of work to do to develop the explanation. In particular, I'm going to highlight several problems for the explanation and develop the view by showing how to solve them. Since the problems are challenging, I'm going to spend much of the rest of the chapter addressing them. But there will be an added payoff in

[29] Prototype theory hasn't had much uptake in ethics. But see Goldman (1993) and Stich (1993).

[30] I only mean that prototypes aren't analyzable in any *standard* sense.

[31] Fodor (1998) is the locus classicus.

[32] The thought is encouraged rather than forced because it might be possible to combine a prototype or atomistic view of concepts with a view of conceptual competence (perhaps e.g. a kind of *inferentialist* view) to forge some other kind of connection among normative and natural concepts that could in some way be revealed.

[33] While I'm using these claims to explain why ethicists struggle to believe reductivism, Moore used similar ones brought out by the open question argument to argue against reductivism. So, there's a sense in which I'm turning the considerations that Moore enlists on their head.

doing so. In addition to showing how this explanation of the sense of incredibility works more fully, I'm going to lay the groundwork for developing a new view of what it is to use a normative concept that's of independent interest.

5.4. REFINING THE ACCOUNT

5.4.1. Addressing Two Problems

The first problem is straightforward. The unanalyzability of normative concepts might explain why ethicists experience the sense of incredibility when reflecting on reductive views purporting to state connections among normative and natural concepts. But ethicists are well aware that reductive views aren't always put forward as purporting to state analytic or otherwise a priori connections ("connections") among normative and natural concepts. They're well aware that reductive views often take the form of purporting to state a posteriori truths. Yet ethicists struggle to take both kinds of reductive views seriously. Thus, proponents of the view that the unanalyzability of normative concepts explains the sense of incredibility have to face up to the challenge of explaining the sense of incredibility *in full*, in light of the variety of reductive theses.

The second problem gets going when you use your natural concepts to conceive of a world that is naturalistically identical to our own. That is, it gets going when you use your natural concepts to conceive of a world containing all of the same physical, biological, chemical, social, linguistic, and psychological entities with the same history of interaction among them as in our world. Conceiving of such a world involves conceiving of the same kind of events and actions that have taken place in our world. This includes conceiving of all of the same kind of events and actions involving *slavery* that have taken place in our world. If natural concepts have no connections to normative concepts whatsoever, as is true on the explanation of the sense of incredibility under consideration, then it seems possible to use your natural concepts to conceive of such a world in which slavery takes place without also using your normative concepts to conceive of slavery *as wrong*. After all, without such connections, it seems like you can conceive of slavery with all of its natural features and, as it were, stop there.[34] But it's *not* possible to conceive of a world just like ours naturalistically without conceiving of

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[34] Cf. Loar's (1997) suggestion that the lack of analytic or otherwise a priori connections among phenomenal and physical concepts explains why failures of phenomenal-physical supervenience theses are conceivable.

slavery as wrong. In other words, the view under consideration seems to imply that failures of normative-natural supervenience theses that are intuitively inconceivable are conceivable.[35]

It used to be that defending the conceivability of normative-natural supervenience failures would land an ethicist in hot water.[36] But those days are over. A surprising number of ethicists now argue explicitly that such supervenience failures are conceivable.[37] In light of such arguments, you might think that that the second problem isn't much of one. If so, think of it this way. Even if normative-natural supervenience failures in ethics are conceivable, at least some of them are *tremendously difficult* to conceive of. I struggle to conceive of a world naturalistically like ours in which slavery is not wrong. I'd wager you do, too. But if, as is true on the explanation of the sense of incredibility under consideration, there aren't connections among normative and natural concepts, then it seems like it would be *easy* to conceive of normative-natural supervenience failures in ethics (just "supervenience failures" from here on, unless otherwise stated). Thus, a proponent of the view that the unanalyzability of normative concepts explains the sense of incredibility still looks like they face a problem, even if supervenience failures in ethics are conceivable in principle.

Addressing these two problems will clarify and elaborate the view that the unanalyzability of normative concepts has a role to play in accounting for the sense of incredibility. Accordingly, it will also be the focus of much of the rest of this chapter. I'll start with the second problem, because my answer to it will carry an answer to the first problem along with it.

5.4.2. Why Supervenience Failures in Ethics are Hard to Conceive of

Fortunately, I don't have to go it alone in tackling the second problem, as several ethicists have recently set out to address it in different but related contexts. In particular, Hills (2009) and Hattiangadi (2018) suggest the same kind of explanation of why conceiving of supervenience failures can

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[35] There are a variety of ways to precisify supervenience theses. But the problem I'm highlighting doesn't turn on more than the basic idea of (strong) normative-natural supervenience—that there can't be two worlds exactly naturalistically alike but normatively different.

[36] See Hare (1952: 145), Ridge (2007: 335), Shafer-Landau (2003: 78), and McPherson (2009: 77).

[37] See Hills (2009), Roberts (2017), Hattiangadi (2018), and Rosen (n.d.), the latter of whom has said in correspondence that he conceives of supervenience failures before he even has breakfast in the morning. Interestingly, a recent psychology study from Reinecke and Horne (2018) suggests that most people cannot engage in such conceptualizations.

be difficult. Hills and Hattiangadi claim that some normative-natural supervenience failures are conceivable. They support this claim by appealing to similar cases. One such case involves a world that's like ours naturalistically but where a different moral theory (e.g. consequentialism) is true from whichever one is true in our world (e.g. deontology). They, and especially Hills, suggest that not only is such a world conceivable—it's easy to conceive of.[38]

But both of them also acknowledge that not all supervenience failures are easy to conceive of. Hills and Hattiangadi appeal to cases involving Hitler to illustrate the point—it's not easy to conceive of a world that's like ours naturalistically but where Hitler's actions are not wrong. They each suggest a similar explanation of why such a scenario is not easy to conceive of. According to Hills (2009: 172), conceiving of such a world could be "contaminating," such that conceiving of it increases the risk of acquiring "bad habits." Similarly, Hattiangadi (2018: 594) writes, "we are prevented" from conceiving of a normatively inverted Hitler scenario "by a powerful feeling of moral disgust." When ethicists have trouble conceiving of worlds that are naturalistically but normatively different from our own, Hills and Hattiangadi might say, it's because they want to avoid engaging in conceptual acts that are contaminating or disgusting.[39]

Desires to avoid contaminating or disgusting actions might explain why ethicists struggle to conceive of a world that is naturalistically identical to ours in which Hitler's actions are not wrong. But there are other worlds that are difficult to conceive of that aren't well explained by such desires. For example, I have a hard time conceiving of a naturalistically identical world to ours that is normatively different, in which everyone with dark hair has an obligation to cartwheel on the third Sunday of each month. But it's not plausible that I think of such an act as contaminating or disgusting.[40] My struggle to conceive of such a scenario is not plausibly explained by a corresponding desire to avoid contaminating or disgusting acts. At best,

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[38] "Support" for their view, Hills (2009: 173, my emphasis) writes, "comes from reflection on different false moral claims . . . Suppose that you think (like the utilitarian) that it is not always wrong to tell a benevolent lie . . . Can you imagine that it is always wrong (as the Kantian believes), that it is a failure of respect for that person not to tell them the truth? *Surely you can*. Similarly, if you believe that the Kantian is right about this, you can imagine that she is not. But if so, then you can imagine two worlds with the same natural facts (someone tells another a proposition that they believe to be false in order to make her happy), one in which it is morally wrong, one in which it is morally acceptable. Perhaps in one world utilitarianism is true, in another Kant's moral theory is true."

[39] Moreover, according to Hills and Hattiangadi, the conceivability of supervenience failures is evidence for the further claim that such failures are *metaphysically possible*.

[40] Hattiangadi (2018: 595) notes that their explanation from disgust might only work to explain why it's hard to conceive of normatively inverted "horrific" cases like Hitler's.

the kind of explanation on offer from Hills and Hattiangadi has limited reach. It's worth exploring whether a better explanation is available.

Hills and Hattiangadi appeal to our desires or desire-like states to explain why it's hard to conceive of a world that's naturalistically identical to ours where Hitler's actions aren't wrong. This kind of *noncognitive* explanation makes an alternative explanation salient. Note that conceiving of a world that's naturalistically identical to ours where Hitler's actions aren't wrong appears at least in part to be a kind of *cognitive* act. Perhaps ethicists have a hard time conceiving of Hitler's actions as possessing their natural but not their normative features because conceiving of Hitler's actions as possessing their natural features *involves* conceiving of Hitler's actions as possessing their normative features. In particular, it could be that *part of what it is* to conceive of Hitler's actions normatively as wrong is to conceive of Hitler's actions as possessing some natural feature. As soon as ethicists use their natural concepts to conceive of Hitler's actions as possessing their natural features, they might *thereby* count as using their normative concepts to conceive of Hitler's actions as possessing their normative features. In other words, on this alternative explanation, ethicists have a hard time conceiving of a world that is naturalistically identical to our own where Hitler's actions are not wrong because they *can't*.

Think of it this way. Hitler's actions had a number of natural features or properties, such as their temporal and spatial properties. Plausibly, at least some of these natural properties are candidates for being identical with or fully constitutive of normative properties. For example, it's plausible that Hitler's actions had the natural property of *failing to generate the weakest individual complaint*, which is a candidate for being identical with or fully constitutive of the normative property of being wrong put forward in the tradition of Contractualism in normative ethics.[41] If Hitler's actions had the natural property of failing to generate the weakest individual complaint, then conceiving of his actions as possessing all of their natural features includes conceiving of them as possessing this property. Now suppose it turns out that the natural property of failing to generate the weakest individual complaint is identical with or fully constitutive of the normative property of being wrong. In conceiving of Hitler's actions as possessing this natural property, ethicists are well on their way to conceiving of Hitler's actions as possessing the normative property of being wrong.

[41] The property of failing to generate the weakest individual complaint might not be a natural property—"complaint" has a normative ring to it. But the point I'm making doesn't turn on the example I'm using to illustrate it. Feel free to substitute the property of failing to maximize pleasure or some other property that might be more clearly naturalistic.

To be clear, I'm claiming that part of what it is to use a normative concept is to use a natural concept. Moreover, per our discussion above, I'm still pursuing the idea that normative concepts are unanalyzable concepts. Thus, I'm committing to the view that part of what it is to use a normative concept is to use an *unanalyzable natural concept*. This means that I'm *not* claiming that part of what it is to use the normative concept WRONG is to use the *analyzable* natural concept FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT. That would be an implausible claim to make—not everyone competent with WRONG is competent with or even possesses FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT.

Rather, I'm claiming that you possess and are competent with a coextensive, *unanalyzable* natural concept the use of which is part of what it is to use the normative concept WRONG. As the discussion in section 5.3 illustrates, it could be that the concept is unanalyzable in virtue of being a prototype or atom. I'm not offering a view about this question, in part because I'm not offering a complete theory of normative concept use. I'm only saying enough about the nature of normative concepts to explain why it's hard to conceive of a world that's naturalistically identical to our own in which Hitler's actions aren't wrong. The idea is that conceiving of such a world involves conceiving of Hitler's actions as possessing the natural property of failing to generate the weakest individual complaint. Conceiving of Hitler's actions as possessing the natural property of failing to generate the weakest individual complaint involves using an unanalyzable natural concept. And using this unanalyzable natural concept is part of what it is to use the normative concept WRONG. That explains why it's hard to conceive of a world that is naturalistically identical to ours in which Hitler's actions aren't wrong.[42]

5.4.3. Explaining the Sense of Incredibility in Full

Let's take stock. By the end of section 5.3, I offered an explanation of why ethicists find reductive theses so obviously implausible that they struggle to believe them, i.e. an explanation of why ethicists experience the sense of

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[42] There are various ways to fill in the view to explain why it's difficult to conceive of normatively inverted scenarios that are more innocuous, like the above case in which I struggle to conceive of a world that is like ours naturalistically in which everyone with dark hair has an obligation to cartwheel on the third Sunday of each month. One way would be to say that none of the natural concepts that I'm using in conceiving of such a world are among those natural concepts constitutive of using the normative concept OBLIGATION. And that using whichever natural concept is constitutive of using OBLIGATION in conceiving of such a world would amount to conceiving of a world that is *not* naturalistically identical to our own.

incredibility. The idea is that normative concepts are unanalyzable and hence lack any connections to natural concepts, in virtue of being proto-types or atoms. But this explanation raised another issue. Without such connections, it might be implausibly easy to use natural concepts to con-ceive of supervenience failures, including conceiving of a world that is naturalistically identical to ours where Hitler's actions are not wrong. I addressed this issue by offering a view of normative concept use. Part of what it is to use a normative concept is to use an unanalyzable natural concept. When ethicists conceive of Hitler's actions as possessing the natural property of failing to generate the weakest individual complaint, they do so using an unanalyzable natural concept, and hence *ipso facto* use normative concepts to conceive of Hitler's actions as wrong. The unanalyzability of normative concepts can be invoked to explain the sense of incredibility without worrying that supervenience failures become too easy to conceive of.

That leaves the first of the two problems introduced in section 5.4.1. Recall that appealing to the unanalyzability of normative concepts looks like it explains why ethicists experience the sense of incredibility when reflecting on reductive theses purporting to state connections among normative and natural concepts. But ethicists also experience the sense of incredibility when reflecting on reductive theses purporting to state a posteriori truths not involving any connections among normative and natural concepts. The remaining issue is to find a way of supplementing the explanation from unanalyzability to explain the sense of incredibility in full.

One way to address the issue is to continue developing the view advanced in the previous section of what it takes to use a normative concept. Reflect on the reductive claim that what it is for an action to be wrong is for it to fail to generate the weakest individual complaint, understood as stating a true a posteriori necessity. In reflecting on it, I claim that you're using two natural concepts. One of those natural concepts is analyzable, namely, FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT. The other natural concept that you're using is unanalyzable. I call this unanalyzable natural concept "gnorw."[43] I also claim that using FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT is not constitutive of using WRONG, while using GNORW is partially constitutive of using WRONG. Explaining why will reveal a full explanation of the sense of incredibility.

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[43] I introduce the word "gnorw" for this unanalyzable natural concept in Laskowski (2019). It's worth noting that some philosophers start becoming suspicious of the view when they hear the word "gnorw," at least in correspondence. But this isn't the right place for suspicion. That a word is needed to be introduced to talk about a concept that people already possessed is not unusual—I used to fear missing out on events like MadMeta and form thoughts about that fear-induced anxiety before I acquired the word "fomo" to talk about it.

One explanation of why using GNORW but not FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT is partially constitutive of using WRONG is that the former but not the latter is unanalyzable. But that's a lousy explanation. There are plenty of uses of unanalyzable natural concepts that aren't partially constitutive of using normative concepts. For example, when I use the atomistic-demonstrative concept THAT to think of *that dog over there* I'm not thereby using a normative concept. So too would it be a lousy explanation to say that it's because GNORW but not FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT picks out the property of failing to generate the weakest individual complaint. Recall, both concepts pick out the same property.

A better explanation of why using GNORW but not using FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT is partially constitutive of using WRONG is that only the former is *hooked up* with a *corresponding* desire or desire-like state. One way in which your use of GNORW could be "hooked up" with a desire is in the sense that it *activates* or *makes it occurrent*.[44] And one way in which a desire could "correspond" to GNORW is in the sense that GNORW figures as part of its content, such as the *desire to avoid performing actions that are gnorw*.[45] The result of this illustrative package of claims is that you think of something as WRONG when you think of it as GNORW while actively desiring to avoid performing actions that are gnorw. By appealing to the way in which using GNORW is related to a desire, I'm offering a kind of Humean answer to the question of why using the unanalyzable natural concept GNORW is partially constitutive of using the normative concept WRONG.

It's an answer that carries with it a full explanation of why ethicists experience the sense of incredibility. Suppose that you're reflecting on the thesis that what it is for an action to be wrong is for it to fail to generate the weakest individual complaint, which states a true a posteriori truth. Assuming the truth of the illustrative claims above, you're using GNORW and FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT in reflecting on the thesis. Your use of GNORW activates or makes occurrent a desire to avoid performing actions that are gnorw whereas your use of FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT doesn't. As such, the property that you're thinking about in using GNORW seems very different from the property that you're thinking about in using FAILING TO GENERATE

[44] There are other views available of what it is for a use of a concept to be hooked up with a desire, such as the view that using the relevant concept disposes you to have the relevant desire. The view I'm plugging is meant to be illustrative.

[45] This view on what it is for a concept to correspond to a desire is also merely illustrative.

THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT, even though you're using both to think about the same property. This results in the impression that it's not possible to use GNORW and FAILING TO GENERATE THE WEAKEST INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT to think about the same property. It's a mismatch between the way it seems to use these concepts that explains why ethicists experience the sense of incredibility when reflecting on a posteriori reductive theses involving them.[46]

To be clear, I'm illustrating a distinctive kind of view of what it is to use a normative concept to explain the sense of incredibility in full. What it is to use the normative concept WRONG is to use the unanalyzable natural concept GNORW while actively desiring to avoid performing actions that are gnorw.[47] Part of what makes this a distinctive view of normative concept use is that it's a distinctive *hybrid* view of what it is to use a normative concept. It's a hybrid view in the sense that it explains normative concept use in terms of both a *cognitive* element (the natural unanalyzable concept GNORW) and a *noncognitive* element (desiring to avoid performing actions that are gnorw). It's a *distinctive*[48] hybrid view in the sense that it's explicitly a view about normative *concept* use rather than the use of normative words or thoughts.[49] It's also distinctive for its emphasis on the role of *unanalyzable* natural concepts.[50]

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[46] I'm using the word "seem" as another placeholder. I want to allow that it might seem like these concepts can't pick out the same properties in the sense that using them *feels* phenomenologically different in virtue of activating a corresponding desire or desire-like state. But I also want to make space for a non-phenomenological explanation. Perhaps it might seem like these concepts can't pick out the same properties in the sense that using them leads one to *attend* differentially to features of their awareness. In either case there would be the kind of structural mismatch in concept use that I conjecture is doing the work. Copp (2017: 48) offers an explanation in a similar spirit, which is expanded upon in Copp (2018). It's worth noting that Copp's view is more committal, built in part on a theory of vindicated reasoning that I'm not sure is strictly needed to explain the sense of incredibility.

[47] It's a commitment of the view that everyone competent with WRONG has the same desire. Some, like Schroeder (2009) and Perl (2018), have worried about this commitment. A full defense of it requires more space. But I will say that I don't find it hard to talk myself into it. It strikes me as quite plausible to say that you don't count as competent with WRONG unless you desire to get along with others in your society, for example.

[48] But see also Finlay (2019), who now champions a related view explicitly.

[49] See Toppinen (2017) for an overview of hybrid views of thought and talk (but not concepts). See also Perl (2018), who develops a sophisticated account of normative thought that secures a wide range of theoretical goods on behalf of hybridists of a particular stripe. Perl's view challenges other friends of hybridism to do more with their hybrid views. This chapter, along with Laskowski (2019), can be understood as making modest steps in that direction.

[50] But see Ridge (2015), who also suggests a role for unanalyzable concepts (demonstrative concepts) in his brand of hybridism. Mogensen (2018) can be read as suggesting that there's something objectionably exotic about this element of Ridge's view and

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5.5. CONCLUSION

My goal has been to better understand why ethicists resist reductivism in the sense of experiencing the sense of incredibility, in the sense of finding reductive theses so obviously implausible that they struggle to believe them. After arguing against a contextualist explanation, I put forward the idea that the explanation involves the unanalyzabililty of normative concepts. Not only did this fail to explain the sense of incredibility in full, it also seemed to make it too easy to conceive of normative-natural supervenience failures in ethics. The keys to answering these challenges were found in claims about the nature of normative concept use. In particular, they were found in the claim that using normative concepts involves using an unanalyzable natural concept in the presence of a suitably related desire.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that I'm not the only one who thinks resistance to reductivism in ethics can be understood in terms of normative concepts. Chappell and Yetter-Chappell (2013) and Mehta (2019) suggest similar ideas. They recognize that seemingly parallel forms of resistance to reductivism crop up in various philosophical domains, including, especially, philosophy of mind with respect to phenomenal consciousness. Chappell and Yetter-Chappell and Mehta also suggest that some of the explanations that have been offered by philosophers of mind to explain these analogous forms of resistance might help explain resistance to reductivism in ethics. In particular, Mehta suggests that something like conceptual unanalyzability can explain everything across these domains. But resistance to reductivism patterns very differently in ethics than in domains like the philosophy of mind. As I argued, it seems to be a problem for the view that unanalyzability explains the sense of incredibility that it makes it too easy to conceive of normative-natural supervenience failures in ethics. Such an issue would be much less of one in the philosophy of mind, where there is much more tolerance for the conceivability of supervenience failures (think "philosophical zombies").[51] This chapter tells in favor of the sort of "essentially piecemeal" solution to understanding resistance to reductivism in philosophy that Mehta dismisses.[52]

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perhaps the view on offer here. But section 5.3 makes it clear that unanalyzable concepts are an ordinary part of our cognitive economy.

[51] Chappell and Yetter-Chappell (2013: 871) also flag this difference.

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