

COMMENTS ON
GREG RESTALL & GILLIAN RUSSELL'S
"BARRIERS TO INFERENCE"

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OVERVIEW

Part 1

HUME'S LAW:
NORMATIVITY FORMULATION

Part 2

TWO PROBLEMS
WITH HUME'S LAW

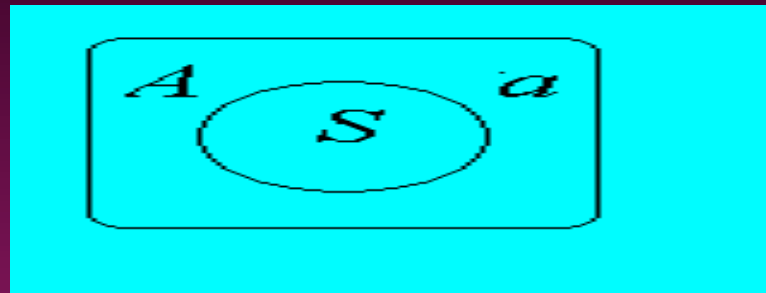
Part 3

TWO RESPONSES
TO THE SECOND PROBLEM

HUME'S LAW: NORMATIVITY FORMULATION

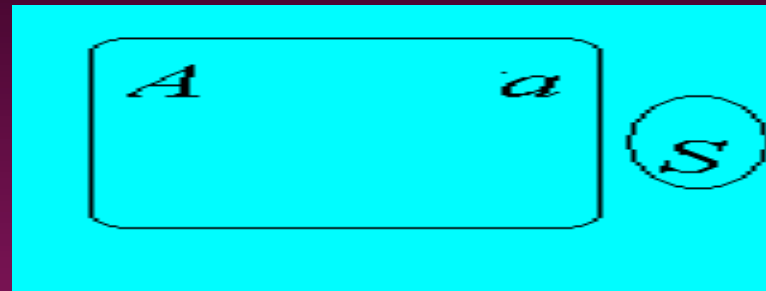
- Hume's Law: No satisfiable set of *descriptive* sentences entails a *normative* sentence.
- A sentence A is descriptive iff it is *preserved* under normative translations: for every model M that satisfies A , every normative translation of M also satisfies A .
- A sentence A is normative iff it is *fragile* under normative translations or extensions: for every model M that satisfies A , some translation or extension of M does not satisfy A .

PRESERVATION & FRAGILITY: NORMATIVE TRANSLATIONS



- S is the set of (a -) morally satisfactory worlds.
- A is obligatory iff it is true in *every* morally satisfactory world: $OA \leftrightarrow S \subseteq A$.
- A is permissible iff it is true in *some* morally satisfactory world: $PA \leftrightarrow S \cap A \neq \emptyset$.
- A normative translation changes S . So A remains true (is *preserved*), but PA and OA (if $A^C \neq \emptyset$) may become false (are *fragile*).

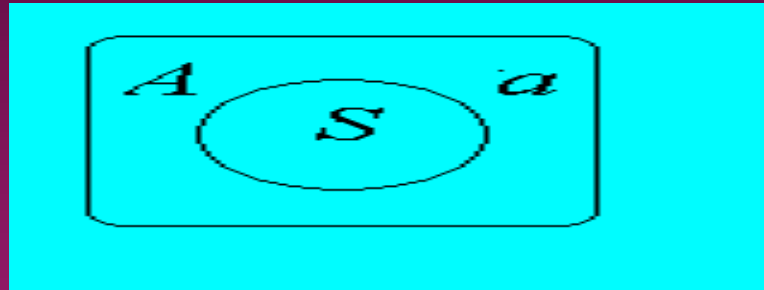
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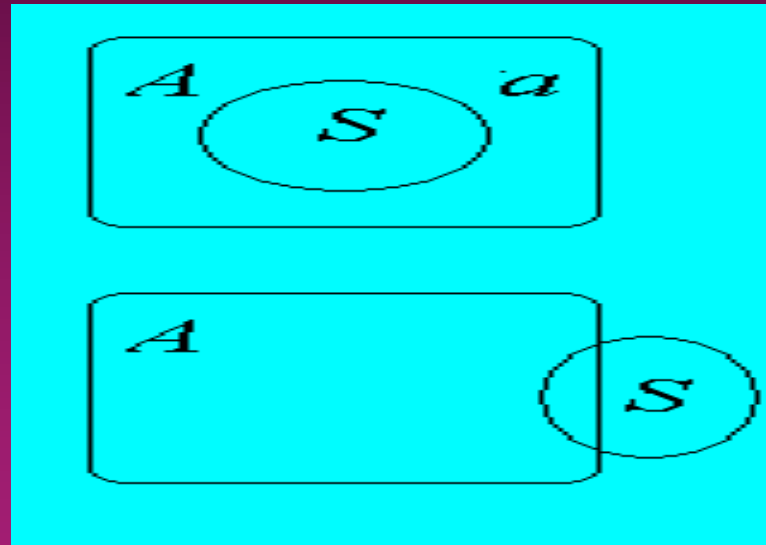
PRESERVATION & FRAGILITY: NORMATIVE EXTENSIONS

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- So A and PA remain true (are *preserved*), but OA may become false (is *fragile*).

PART 2

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A TECHNICAL PROBLEM WITH HUME'S LAW

- The problem: Hume's Law is false because $\Box A$ (which is descriptive because it is preserved under normative translations) entails OA (which is normative if A is not a tautology): in every model in which A is true at every world, A is true at every morally satisfactory world.
- The glitch: Lemma 26 is false because $\Box A$ is descriptive but not preserved under extensions.
- Restall & Russell might reply: $\Box A$ is not in their language. But then they should show that the problem disappears in a richer language.

PRIOR'S OBJECTION TO HUME'S LAW

- Prior's objection: Take a descriptive sentence D and a normative sentence N . Consider $D \vee N$.
- ① If $D \vee N$ is normative, Hume's Law is false because $\{D\}$ entails $D \vee N$.
- ② If $D \vee N$ is descriptive, Hume's Law is false because $\{D \vee N, \sim D\}$ entails N .
- Restall & Russell's reply: Prior's objection relies on a false dichotomy. $D \vee N$ may be *neither* descriptive *nor* normative.

WHY $A \vee OA$ IS NEITHER DESCRIPTIVE NOR NORMATIVE

- 1 Take a model in which A is false but OA is true (so $A \vee OA$ is true). Then in some translation OA becomes false and A remains false; so $A \vee OA$ becomes false and is thus not translation-preserved (i.e., not descriptive).
- 2 Take a model in which A is true. Then $A \vee OA$ is true and remains true in every translation or extension. So $A \vee OA$ is not translation- or extension-fragile (i.e., not normative).

A SUBSTANTIVE PROBLEM WITH HUME'S LAW

- The problem: Paradigmatically moral sentences are neither descriptive nor "normative". E.g.:
 - ◆ If he asks, you ought to tell him: $\sim A \vee OT$.
 - ◆ Every citizen ought to vote: $\forall x(Cx \rightarrow OVx)$.
 - ◆ No student may cheat: $\forall x(Sx \rightarrow \sim PCx)$.
- Importance of problem: Hume's Law is silent about such sentences, but we want a law which says that such sentences don't follow from nonmoral ones. So Restall & Russell have in effect retreated to a weakened barrier thesis.

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RESPONSE 1: INTUITIVE ARGUMENT FOR FRAGILITY

- The response: Intuitively, fragility captures normativity. E.g.: (1) it is obligatory that X not hit Y, but (2) it is *not* obligatory in an "extension" in which they are training, and (3) it *is* obligatory in a further "extension" in which Z would kill both if X were to hit Y.
- My reply: ❶ This justifies fragility at most for OA , not for PA or $A \vee OA$. ❷ (2) and (3) cannot both hold: if OA is false in a model, it's false in *every* extension. So the argument is suspect.

RESPONSE 2: HUME'S LAW IS THE BEST ONE CAN DO

- The response: Mixed sentences, although admittedly moral, *must* be excluded from *any* version of Hume's Law because they follow trivially from paradigmatically nonmoral sentences (Prior): "No one is a citizen" entails "Every citizen ought to vote".
- My reply: One *can* do better. Recent work focuses on versions of Hume's Law in terms of "non-vacuous" entailment. See Gerhard Schurz, *The Is-Ought Problem*, Kluwer 1997.