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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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 $D \lor N$.
  
  1. If $D \lor N$ is normative, Hume's Law is false because $\{D\}$ entails $D \lor N$.
  
  2. If $D \lor N$ is descriptive, Hume's Law is false because $\{D \lor N, \sim D\}$ entails $N$.

- **Restall & Russell's reply**: Prior's objection relies on a false dichotomy. $D \lor N$ may be *neither* descriptive *nor* normative.
WHY $A \lor OA$ IS NEITHER DESCRIPTIVE NOR NORMATIVE

1. Take a model in which $A$ is false but $OA$ is true (so $A \lor OA$ is true). Then in some translation $OA$ becomes false and $A$ remains false; so $A \lor OA$ becomes false and is thus not translation-preserved (i.e., not descriptive).

2. Take a model in which $A$ is true. Then $A \lor OA$ is true and remains true in every translation or extension. So $A \lor OA$ is not translation- or extension-fragile (i.e., not normative).
The problem: Paradigmatically moral sentences are neither descriptive nor "normative". E.g.:
- If he asks, you ought to tell him: $\sim A \lor OT$.
- 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.
PART 3

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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**: This justifies fragility at most for OA, not for PA or A∨OA. (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".