



CUDWORTH AND NORMATIVE EXPLANATIONS

BY MARK SCHROEDER

JOURNAL OF ETHICS & SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Vol. 1, No. 3 | OCTOBER 2005

URL: WWW.JESP.ORG

COPYRIGHT © MARK SCHROEDER 2005

CUDWORTH AND NORMATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Mark Schroeder

1.1 Understanding Normative Explanations

MORAL THEORIES DO NOT PURPORT merely to tell us which things we ought to do. They also try to tell us *why* we ought to do them. Moral theories, that is, generally have explanatory ambitions. What they try to explain to us is not why we *think* we ought to do certain things, of course, or why we *do* some things, but why we *ought* to do things. Little has been said, however, in a general vein, about how moral or, more generally, normative, explanations *work* – what sort of things they are, in what ways they are like and unlike explanations of non-normative or *descriptive* phenomena, and so on. And that is unfortunate – for given the importance of explanatory ambitions in moral theorizing, differences in expectations about how moral explanations can and cannot work could potentially be playing an important role in underwriting disagreement about many other questions in moral theory. In fact, I think that this is the case. But the only way to see whether this is so is to look hard for implicit theories about how moral or normative explanations must work.

The best way to look for implicit theories about normative explanations is to look for arguments which, once spelled out carefully, turn out to *need* assumptions about such explanations in order to work. In this paper I want to closely examine such an argument. It is originally due to Ralph Cudworth, and it is one of at least four different arguments that he offered against *voluntaristic* ethical theories. Cudworth's argument has since been widely held to conclusively establish its result; it was very influential in the 18th century, and arguments like it have recently been reiterated or endorsed by philosophers like Jean Hampton and Christine Korsgaard.¹ Voluntaristic theories, as Cudworth understood them, say that obligations derive from *commands* or *decisions*. Those commands or decisions may be those of God (as with Ockham, Descartes and the Calvinists), those of a temporal sovereign (as with Hobbes or Protagoras) or even those of anyone whatsoever (as Cudworth understood Epicurus to claim). Cudworth held that his argument worked against all of these views and, following Cudworth, Richard Price held that it worked against many other views as well.² But for concreteness, it is easier to focus on a single view.

¹ Hampton [1998], Korsgaard [1996], [1997a], [1997b].

² Cudworth's *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* is the original source for the argument [1996, 17-22]; it is prominently picked up by Richard Price in his *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* [1948, 50-56]. There is a case to be made that Samuel Clarke ran the argument in his second Boyle lectures of 1705, published in 1706 as *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* [1706, 221-222] and, as we will see later, Christine Korsgaard cites Clarke for the argument. Clarke's lectures were published before Cudworth's *Treatise* was, even though they

1.2 Cudworth and Voluntarism

So consider *theological* voluntarism: the theory that every obligation derives from one of God's commands.

Voluntarism: For any person x and action-type a , if x ought to do a , that is because God has commanded x to do a .

Cudworth argues like this:³ the voluntarist has to admit that in order for his theory to be true, God – or at least His commands – have to be pretty special. After all, we can all agree that when I command you to do something, it does not become the case that you ought to do it. So God's commands have to be different in some way from mine – they have to have *authority*, as Cudworth puts it. But what does the authority of God's commands consist in? Surely just this: that you *ought to do* what God commands. It is surely because you *ought to do* what God commands, while it is not the case that you ought to do what I command, that when God commands you to love your neighbor as yourself, you ought to do that, while when I command you to bring me my slippers, it has no such effect. And surely even the voluntarist has to agree with that much:

Authority Vol: $\square \forall x (x \text{ ought to do what God commands})$

But that is exactly what we need to get the voluntarist into trouble. For according to voluntarism, *every* time that you ought to do something, it is because God has commanded it. But why ought you to do what God commands? According to the theory, this would have to be because God has commanded it. But that is surely incoherent. God could not make it the case that you ought to do what He commands simply by commanding it – if it were not already the case that you ought to do what He commands, then such a command would make no difference, and if it were already the case

were a couple of decades after Cudworth would have written, so he may have some claim to independence. But the passage from Clarke is much less clear, and I think it is controversial whether he is really offering the same argument, so I will focus on Cudworth and Price in what follows.

³ “Wherefore since the thing willed in all laws is not that men should be bound or obliged to obey, this thing cannot be the product of the mere will of the commander, but it must proceed from something else, namely the right or authority of the commander [...] and an *antecedent obligation* to obedience in the subjects. Which things are not made by laws, but presupposed before all laws to make them valid. And if it should be imagined that anyone should make a positive law to require that others should be obliged or bound to obey him, everyone would think such a law ridiculous and absurd. For [...] if they were not before him, then they could not be obliged by any positive law, because they were not previously bound to obey such a person's commands. So that *obligation to obey all positive laws* is older than all laws, and previous or antecedent to them.” Cudworth [1996, 18-19], italics added.

that you ought to do what He commands, then it would be beside the point. So it follows that voluntarism is incoherent.

This *Cudworthy* argument – for as I will be arguing, it is well worth chewing on again – obviously trades on the fact that the voluntarist’s view is one about what *explains* why we ought to do things. If the voluntarist only believed that you ought to do something *just in case* God has commanded you to do it, or even *necessarily* just in case He has commanded it, then the Cudworthy argument would get no grip. For it might very well be that God *has* commanded you to do what he commands – little good though such a command does. Cudworth’s claim is simply that a command like this cannot be what *explains* why you ought to do what God commands. For according to Cudworth, that would already have to be true, in order to have such an effect. This is what makes Cudworth’s argument an initially good candidate for illustrating something of how philosophers think about *explanations* of normative phenomena – such as what you ought to do.

1.3 The Argument Generalizes

Theological voluntarism is less popular these days than it once was, at least in philosophical circles. And this is largely because of Cudworth’s argument, which was also widely promulgated in the 18th century by Richard Price.⁴ So just in case you find the problem posed by Cudworth for theological voluntarism to be less than gripping, it is worth noting that a similar kind of argument can be run against any view that takes the form:

Theory: For all agents x and action-types a ,
whenever x ought to do a , that is
because x stands in relation \mathfrak{R} to a .

Any perfectly general explanatory moral theory has the form of Theory. It is simply the form of a view that tries to give a perfectly unified answer to the question, “why ought I to do A ?” Yet a generalization of Cudworth’s argument looks to rule out any such view entirely.

⁴ Price [1948, 50-56]. Clarke is also often cited as having given the argument (see note 2), but I hesitate to attribute it to him. He certainly places much less importance on it; Price’s intuitionist epistemology is driven by his metaphysical views, in favor of which he offers the Cudworthy argument – since moral truths are necessary ones, we need to apprehend them in the same way as we know other necessary truths [1948, 85]. But Clarke’s metaphysical views are driven by his intuitionist epistemology – the *main* argument that he offers for the thesis that there are “unchangeable obligations of natural religion” is not the Cudworthy argument; he merely claims that his thesis is that “[t]hese things are so notoriously plain and self-evident, that nothing but the extremest stupidity of mind, corruption of manners, or perverseness of spirit, can possibly make any man entertain the least doubt concerning them.” Clarke [1706, 194]. The passage in which Clarke *does* seem to be offering the Cudworthy argument is buried in his critical discussion of Hobbes, and it is not obvious to me that he does not mean, there, to be relying on the same appeal to intuition.

Consider: anyone who accepts Theory, after all, has to think that the relation \mathfrak{R} is awfully special. Most relations you might bear to an action do not make it the case that you ought to do it, after all. You can be next to someone doing an action, or in a room where most people are doing it, or exactly 30 miles south of a piece of paper on which the action is written in Sanskrit, and none of these makes it the case that you ought to do it. So being related to it by \mathfrak{R} must be special. It must have, as Cudworth would put it, *authority*. But what does this authority consist in, to explain why being related by \mathfrak{R} to an action can obligate you to do it? It must be this: that you *ought to do* whatever action you are related to by \mathfrak{R} .

Now that – or so it seems – is exactly the sort of thing that Theory is supposed to explain – why you ought to do something. But if we *need* this, in order for the explanations offered by Theory to work, then it is hardly the sort of thing that Theory *could* explain. Imagine: if it were not already the case that being related by \mathfrak{R} to an action obligated you to do it, then being related by \mathfrak{R} to the action, doing-whatever-you-are-related-to-by- \mathfrak{R} , would not make a difference. And if it were already the case, then it would not matter whether you were related by \mathfrak{R} to it or not.

Now that was a mouthful. But on the face of it, it looks like a perfectly general application of Cudworth's argument. So if the Cudworthy argument successfully shows that not all obligations can be explained by God's commands, then it looks like it must also show that not all obligations can be explained by self-interest, by hypothetical contracts, by what would maximize the good, by what is in accordance with rules no one could reasonably reject, or *any* other source.⁵ If this implication of the Cudworthy argument does not grip you, then I do not know what could. Cudworth's argument has long been held to *conclusively* establish the unviability of voluntaristic views. And in this section we have seen that all of the relevant steps in the argument look the same, against *any* perfectly general explanatory moral theory.

Whether you are convinced by Cudworth's argument or not, and whether you care about the viability of voluntarism or not, it would be *very* surprising if Cudworth's argument could show so much – *fascinating* if, like Cudworth and Price, you do not think that fully general explanatory moral theories like these are possible, and *threatening* if, like so many moral philosophers, you are at least occasionally tempted by the quest to find such a theory. Of course, like me, you may be one of those who find it obvious that, at least on the naïve literal reading that I have given it so far, Cudworth's argument has a gaping hole in it. And, if so, then you should be puzzled at what could make so many moral philosophers find these arguments convincing in the first place, even in the face of their drastic consequences. The answer to this question is where I will look for a clue to how moral philoso-

⁵ Although see section 4.3 for an important caveat we can make once we understand the argument better.

phers tend to think about normative explanations. It will lead us to a *theory* about such explanations that I think is initially attractive and commonly implicitly accepted, and this theory will allow us to develop a better, more *sophisticated* reading of Cudworth's argument.

2.1 A Questionable Inference

The problem, I think, once we look more closely, is not to discover whether or not the Cudworthy argument shows as much as it seemed to show in the last section, but to discover what makes it so tempting to think that it even got off of the ground in the first place. For in order to work, Cudworth's argument had to establish that even the voluntarist must agree that God's commands oblige you *because* you are under an *antecedent* obligation – to obey God. The problem for voluntarism is that its explanation of why you ought to love your neighbor is incomplete until it posits a further obligation, and that though this obligation falls under the *scope* of the theory, it *cannot* be explained by the theory, because it is what makes the theory *work* at explaining everything else.

But why should we think that the voluntarist has to agree with this much? Here is what the voluntarist must agree with: she must agree that though God's commands oblige, mine do not. And she can agree that this is because God and I are different in an important way. And she can agree to stipulatively call this difference between me and God His *Authority*, and that He has *Authority* antecedently to any of His commands. But the problem arises when we try to say exactly what it is, in which God's Authority consists. As stipulated, it is simply whatever is necessary in order to explain the difference between me and God. What is in question is whether the thing that is necessary in order to explain this difference is something that also falls under the scope of the voluntarist's explanatory theory.

Consider the way that we characterized God's Authority in section 1.2:

Authority Vol: $\Box \forall x (x \text{ ought to do what God commands})$

But Authority Vol is *ambiguous*. It admits of two possible readings, depending on whether we read “do what God commands” transparently or opaquely. On the transparent reading, Authority Vol tells us nothing more than that whatever God commands, we ought to do *that*:

Conditional Vol: $\Box \forall x \forall a (\text{God has commanded } x \text{ to do } a \rightarrow x \text{ ought to do } a)$

According to Conditional Vol, when God commands you to do something, it becomes the case that you ought to do it. But Conditional Vol is not

committed, on the face of it, to there being any action-type A such that you ought to do A . For example, *logically speaking* Conditional Vol could be true even though God has not commanded anyone to do anything. If that were so, then there *might* be *nothing* that you ought to do – for all that Conditional Vol says.

On the face of it, Conditional Vol is all that should be needed in order to explain the difference between me and God: that His commands, but not mine, generate obligations. Conditional Vol tells us that God has a certain status: that His commands lead to obligations. I lack that status. That seems to be precisely the difference between me and God that the voluntarist needed to explain by the Authority of God. So it looks like the argument that God has Authority could only commit the voluntarist to Conditional Vol, the transparent reading of Authority Vol.⁶

On the other hand, as I characterized the voluntarist, he aspired to explain why, when X ought to do A , this is so. He aspired to explain actual cases of when someone ought to do something. But Conditional Vol does not *logically* commit the voluntarist to any action that someone ought to do. So his account is not even supposed to apply to Conditional Vol. The account cannot, therefore, be circular by both being explained by, and seeking to explain, Conditional Vol. It does not even aspire to explain claims of the form of Conditional Vol.

On the other hand, there is another reading of Authority Vol on which it does commit the voluntarist to an action-type which someone ought to perform. This is the opaque reading:⁷

⁶ On the way I understand Arthur Prior's reading [Prior 1949, 13-25] (see note 10), all that we need in order to get Cudworth's argument to work is Conditional Vol. But this is enough to refute voluntarism only if we understand the voluntarist as holding that God creates not only all actual obligations, but all *conditional* truths about what obligations. Only that way would Conditional Vol fall under the explanatory scope of the theory. But no actual voluntarist is plausibly interpreted in this way. And Cudworth is quite explicit in claiming to prove that voluntarists must appeal to an "antecedent obligation," and not simply an antecedent conditional truth about obligations. So Prior's reading would make Cudworth's argument out to be straightforwardly valid, but at the cost of depriving it of any real interest. J.A. Passmore's reading of the argument fits the one given so far, but he attributes to Cudworth a rather strong additional premise in order to make the argument work, similarly to what I will do in sections 2.2-3.1, but with less motivation [1951, 46]. (His discussion, moreover, is even more compressed than Cudworth's.) Stephen Darwall also discusses Cudworth's argument very briefly [1995, 118], but I will come back to his reading in note 20. Interestingly, J.B. Schneewind does not mention the Cudworthy argument at all in any of his discussion of Cudworth, Clarke and Price in *The Invention of Autonomy* [1998, 205-210, 310-323, 380-388].

⁷ Not everyone with whom I have discussed this paper has been able to generate both readings of Authority Vol. In particular, several have claimed not to be able to generate the opaque reading at all, taking it that there is clearly no such action as "doing what God commands" for the phrase "do what God commands" to refer to. But it should be obvious that I could not have succeeded in putting Cudworth's argument in the way that I did unless it was possible to get the opaque reading. Others, interestingly, have claimed not to be able to get the transparent reading of "do what God commands." This is also irrelevant to the main point. If there is no transparent reading of Authority Vol, then there is no sense in which

Categorical Vol: $\Box\forall x$ (x stands in the *ought to* relation to the action-type: *doing whatever God commands*)

According to Categorical Vol, it is not merely the case that when God commands you to do something, it becomes the case that you ought to do it. It is already the case that there is something that you ought to do. You have “an antecedent obligation to obedience,” as Cudworth himself puts it. There is an *action* to which you are already obliged.

Now, the voluntarist can accept Categorical Vol without incoherence. He may, for example, think that God *has* commanded (and would necessarily command) everyone to obey him. But he cannot accept without incoherence that Categorical Vol is the correct way of cashing out the thesis that God has Authority. For we stipulatively understand God’s Authority as whatever is required to explain why, when God commands you to do something, it becomes the case that you ought to do it. So if Categorical Vol is the right way of understanding the claim that God has Authority, then the voluntarist’s *complete* explanation of why you ought to be nice to your neighbors goes like this: God has commanded you to be nice to your neighbors, and obeying God is something that you ought to do. But if this is the form of explanation provided by the voluntarist, then it cannot be applied to explaining why you ought to do what God commands, in the sense of Categorical Vol. But Categorical Vol is precisely the kind of claim that the voluntarist aspired to explain. So if we assume that Categorical Vol is the way that the voluntarist has to understand the claim that God has Authority, then Cudworth’s argument *works*.

The problem is this: Cudworth’s argument *can* succeed at committing the voluntarist to appealing to Conditional Vol in order to explain the difference between me and God. But it *needs* to commit her to appealing to Categorical Vol. And the problem is that Categorical Vol simply does not follow from Conditional Vol, except by blatant equivocation. This makes it look like the Cudworthy argument simply turns on this blatant equivocation. That is the obvious hole in Cudworth’s argument, on the naïve reading that we have given it so far.

Authority Vol uncontroversially sets out the claim that God has Authority, since we are understanding that claim to be whatever explains why God has, but I do not, the power to generate obligations by commanding others. All that is needed to explain this is Conditional Vol.

2.2 An Explanatory Inference

But I think that we can do better for Cudworth. For one thing, most philosophers who find Cudworth's argument gripping are not at all put off when the difference between Conditional Vol and Categorical Vol is pointed out to them. So it would at least be worthwhile arriving at an explanation for this *sociological* phenomenon about moral philosophers. And I hold that we can do better than a sociological explanation. I will now show how to develop a *sophisticated* reading of Cudworth's argument – one that can really show that the voluntarist must appeal to Categorical Vol in order to complete the explanation of why God's commands can oblige you.

The thing to notice is this: For Cudworth's argument to work, it would not be enough if Categorical Vol was merely a logical consequence Conditional Vol. For the argument to work, Categorical Vol has to be needed to *complete* the explanation of why being commanded to by God makes it the case that you ought to love your neighbor. But so far as we have seen, all that the argument establishes is that Conditional Vol is needed in order to complete this explanation. If Categorical Vol *were* a logical consequence of Conditional Vol, that would not be enough to make *it* part of this explanation. So as long as Categorical Vol and Conditional Vol are *distinct*, Cudworth's argument needs something different from the thesis that Categorical Vol *follows* from Conditional Vol – which is convenient, because it does not.

In order to work, Cudworth's argument needs the thesis that Categorical Vol is *needed* in order to *explain* Conditional Vol, and thus to *complete* the explanation of why you ought to be nice to your neighbors. What the argument needs, in short, is a thesis about how explanations of normative phenomena have to work. And it is in search of this thesis that we have been investigating Cudworth's argument all along.

2.3 A *Grounding* Obligation

The pressure behind the idea that a thesis like Conditional Vol must be explained by one like Categorical Vol is not, in fact, hard to diagnose, and in this section we can draw it out in two steps, by comparison to two explanations – one non-normative and one normative – which seem like they *do* and *have* to work in this way. Take the non-normative explanation first. This is the explanation:

Anchorage: Anchorage is accessible by car from Philadelphia because Destruction Bay is accessible by car from Philadelphia.

By the same reasoning that was supposed to commit the voluntarist to Conditional Vol, this would not be an *adequate* or *complete* explanation unless the following were true:⁸

Conditional Anch: If Destruction Bay is accessible by car from Philadelphia, then Anchorage is accessible by car from Philadelphia.

But no one thinks that this is where the explanation ends. On the contrary, Conditional Anch cannot float free, without anchorage in the fact that:

Categorical Anch: Anchorage is accessible by car from Destruction Bay.

It is *obvious* that Conditional Anch is true only if and because Categorical Anch is. The thought about normative explanations that I want to pursue starts with the idea that Conditional Vol is like Conditional Anch – it needs to be explained or *grounded* by something else, and the thing it must be grounded in has to be a property of the *same* kind that is being explained. So, since what is being explained is why Anchorage is accessible by car from somewhere, what needs to be appealed to is that Anchorage is accessible by car from somewhere else. Similarly, in the Cudworthy argument, since we are explaining why some person ought to do some thing, what we have to appeal to is that she ought to do some other thing: to *obey God*.

Whether this is how things work in the Cudworthy argument should, I take it, be controversial. But it is easy, in fact, to isolate cases in which things *do* seem to uncontroversially look like they work similarly to the Anchorage case. So let's focus on the case of Rachel. Rachel is a liberal-arts undergraduate enrolled in a poetry-writing class, in which Professor Smith gives her the following assignment: "every morning when you get up, spend an hour writing about what you are thinking about." Since that is what was assigned, I take it that we can uncontroversially allow that here is an action that Rachel ought, each morning, to do: to write about what she is thinking about.

Categorical Rachel: Every morning Rachel ought to do this: write about what she is thinking about.

But of course, doing what she ought to do every day is going to lead Rachel to act *differently*, on each day. So when she wakes up late on Monday with thoughts of regret for her feather pillows and dread of snoring through

⁸ It might be controversial whether an "adequate" explanation needs to appeal to any such conditional. But if it does not, then the voluntarist is not even committed to Conditional Vol, and the argument does not even get off of the ground.

poetry class, writing about what she is thinking about is going to have to involve writing about feather pillows. And when she wakes up early on Thursday full of anticipation of her weekend plans, writing about what she is thinking about is going to have to involve writing about Phil's smile (for that is what lends excitement to her weekend plans). So, on Monday, not only is it the case that she ought to write about what she is thinking about, it is also the case that she ought to write about feather pillows. And similarly, on Thursday, not only is it the case that she ought to write about what she is thinking about, it is also the case that she ought to write about Phil's smile. On each day, that is, whatever she is thinking about, she ought to write about that.

Conditional Rachel: Every morning, for all x , if Rachel is thinking about x , then Rachel ought to write about x .

But there is no mystery about why Conditional Rachel is true. Since we have already settled that it is uncontroversial that Categorical Rachel is true, it is clear that that is what explains why Conditional Rachel is true. It works this way: the soporific Professor Smith's assignment grounds Categorical Rachel, Categorical Rachel grounds Conditional Rachel, and Conditional Rachel, together with the facts about what Rachel is thinking about on each day, grounds the facts that on Monday she ought to write about feather pillows, on Thursday she ought to write about Phil's smile, and so on.

Rachel gives us a clear case in which a normative explanation works in the way that they have to *all* work, in order for Cudworth's argument to have the force that it requires. If all normative explanations have to work this way, then the explanation of Conditional Vol will have to work in this way. And if it does, then it must be explained by Categorical Vol. And that is what we need to make the Cudworthy argument work. It is a thesis about how normative explanations *have* to work.

3.1 The Standard Model for Normative Explanations

The explanation of why on Thursday Rachel ought to write about Phil's smile had three important features worth keeping track of. When we say, "On Thursday Rachel ought to write about Phil's smile because that is what she is thinking about," what we have given is only a sketch of the complete explanation. For the explanation to be *complete*, it must (1) appeal to some further action that Rachel ought to do on Thursday, which (2) she ought to do whether or not she is thinking about Phil's smile, and such that (3) the fact that on Thursday she *is* thinking about Phil's smile explains why writing about Phil's smile is a *way* or *means*, in some broad sense, for her to do this other thing. In Rachel's case, the *further* action that she *antecedently* ought to do is to write about what she is thinking about. The fact that she is thinking

about Phil's smile is *why* writing about Phil's smile is a way to do *this*, and *that* is why it is part of why she ought to write about Phil's smile – since she already, independently, ought to write about what she is thinking about.

Since it is *typical* or *standard* to expect explanations of why someone ought to do something to work in this way, I call this *model* for how normative explanations can work the *Standard Model*. To be more precise, an explanation follows the Standard Model insofar as it has the three features catalogued in the previous paragraph:

Standard Model: The explanation that X ought to do A because P follows the *Standard Model* just in case it works because there is (1) some further action B such that X ought to do B and (2) not just because P and (3) P explains why doing A is a *way* for X to do B .

And correlatively, the view that *all* normative explanations have to work in this way, we can call the *Standard Model Theory*:

SMT: For all x , a and p , if x ought to do a because p , that explanation must follow the Standard Model.

The Standard Model Theory seems to be what we need in order to get the Cudworthy argument to work. The voluntarist believes that whenever you ought to do something, that is because God has commanded it. For this explanation to follow the Standard Model, it must appeal to some further thing that you ought to do, and not just because God has commanded this thing. And since that further thing that you ought to do also falls under the scope of the theory, the explanation of why you ought to do it must appeal to the same thing – namely, itself. But that makes the explanation circular, which is what gets us Cudworth's conclusion. So that is my provisional diagnosis of the force of Cudworth's argument: its key premise is a theory about how normative explanations *have* to work: the Standard Model Theory. This gives us a *sophisticated* reading of Cudworth's argument.

In support of this diagnosis, it is worth pointing out that the early proponents of the Cudworthy argument, including Cudworth and Price, were some of the only philosophers to explicitly articulate the Standard Model. Cudworth's moral work, entitled *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, whose title Price echoes approvingly, is not only committed to the thesis that the basic moral truths are eternal and immutable. It is actually committed to the thesis that *which actions* are right or wrong does not and cannot change from one possible situation to another: the things that you

ought to do are the *very same* as the things that I ought to do, and necessarily so, in the views of both Cudworth and Price, as well as Clarke.⁹

So how, then, could this be? Surely, for example, if I promise to meet Sally for lunch at noon at Plato's Diner, and you promise to meet April for lunch at noon at Ben's Chili Bowl, the right thing for me to do at noon is to show up at Plato's Diner, and the right thing for you to do at lunch is to show up at Ben's Chili Bowl – right? So surely there are some cases in which the right thing for me to do and the right thing for you to do are different. The British rationalists used the Standard Model Theory to explain this phenomenon away:

No will, therefore, can render any thing good and obligatory, which was not so antecedently, and from eternity; or any action right, that is not so in itself [...] It is true, the doing of any indifferent thing may become obligatory, in consequence of a command from a being possessed of rightful authority over us: But it is obvious, that in this case, the command produces a change in the circumstances of the agent, **and that what, in consequence of it, becomes obligatory, is not the same with what before was indifferent.** [...] 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.**¹⁰

⁹ Clarke's second Boyle lectures were entitled, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*. He says, "Some things are in their own nature good and reasonable and fit to be done [...] Other things are in their own nature absolutely evil" [1706, 196]. So Clarke does not merely believe that there are basic necessary truths (which might be conditionals) about obligations; he actually thinks that there are basic *actions* that are *fitting* or *unfitting*, and necessarily so. See also Price [1948, 51-52] and Cudworth [1996, 20-21].

¹⁰ Price [1948, 52-53], boldface added for emphasis; italics in original. Cudworth also outlines the Standard Model:

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

According to Cudworth and Price, our promises change what the *ways* are for us to do the thing that we antecedently ought to do – to keep our promises – but that is only by changing which action-type showing up at Plato’s Diner at noon is an *instance* of. It is not *qua* showing up for lunch at Plato’s Diner that an action is *ever* right or wrong or something I ought to do. It is only because it is an instance of keeping a promise, which is something that I independently ought to do, that I ought to do it. And that is precisely how Standard Model explanations work. So we really have cottoned on to what is doing the work in the Cudworthy argument, and it really is a distinctive and interesting theory about how normative explanations have to work.

3.2 Further Interesting Implications

In fact, I think, Cudworth’s argument is only the beginning of the interesting implications of the Standard Model Theory. Understanding the Standard Model is crucial for appreciating the motivations and resourcefulness of historical ethical rationalist positions, and of importance to the 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 [1996, 20], boldface added for emphasis; italics in original.

Prior notes that “[t]o anyone acquainted with the Aristotelian logic, this use of the phrase ‘falling under’ immediately suggests the minor premiss of a syllogism” [1949, 20], recalling his contention that logic alone is enough to validate Cudworth’s argument:

We cannot infer ‘We ought to do A’ from, for example, ‘God commands us to do X’, unless this is supplemented by the ethical premiss, ‘We ought to do what God commands’; and it is quite useless to offer instead some non-ethical premiss, such as ‘God commands us to obey his commands’ [18-19].

Here the claim is that as a matter of *logic* we need to appeal to a further premise, and in the text Prior appeals to the *ambiguous* Authority Vol. If we are to agree with him that this is needed as a matter of logic, then we have to read it as Conditional Vol. And the same goes for Prior’s example of how the Aristotelian syllogism would go: “To keep a promise is good; to do X is to keep a promise; Therefore, To do X is good” [20]. This *seems* to attribute *goodness* to the action of keeping promises, and so it *seems* to follow the Standard Model. But if this is an Aristotelian syllogism, then it has the same form as, “men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore Socrates is mortal.” And the major premise of *this* syllogism attributes mortality not to man as such, but to *individual men*. To get this reading of Prior’s example, we would have to read his major premise in the *transparent* way: as saying that *those actions* that are ways of keeping promises are good, but not necessarily saying anything about the further action of keeping promises as such. So if we read Prior as making the strictly logical claim – as suggested by his title, *Logic and the Basis of Ethics* – then he is disagreeing with me about how to read what is going on here in Cudworth. But Prior’s own example is naturally read in a way that fits the Standard Model.

ism/generalism debate, answers to the question, “why should I be moral?” and much more.¹¹ This paper is not the place to become bogged down in all of the different problems in ethical theory in which I think that the Standard Model Theory can make an important difference. But let me catalogue just one more implication of the Standard Model Theory, just in order to make clear exactly how strong of a theory it is.

It is a corollary of the Standard Model Theory that if normative differences between what different individuals ought to do can be explained at all, they must be explained by things that *everyone* ought to do. For example, take anything that some people ought to do, but not others. If this difference can be explained, the Standard Model Theory tells us that it must be explained by something that each ought to do. If there are yet others who ought not to do this, then *that* difference can only be explained if there is yet something further, which all ought to do. So either some differences must be totally unexplained, or all differences are ultimately explained by something that everyone ought to do.

But this is a very striking view. For on the face of it, many forms of skepticism about the objectivity of morality are motivated by the idea that it is *easier* to understand how it could be the case that John, who likes to ski, ought to ski, and Jim, whose sister is Mary, ought to help Mary study for the LSAT, than to understand how both John and Jim, no matter what they are like, ought to give their earnings to world hunger relief, or ought to love their neighbor, or ought not to kill people. These kinds of skepticism about the universality of morality are precisely skepticism that there are things that *everyone* ought to do, even though there are things that one or another individual ought to do. The problem about *morality* is that *its* requirements are supposed to be things that *everyone* ought to do, no matter what they are like.

If the Standard Model Theory is right, this kind of pervasive concern about the objectivity of morality is not merely mistaken or over-hasty. It is incoherent. For according to the Standard Model Theory, it *could not* be the case that John ought to ski or that Jim ought to help Mary get into law school, unless there was something that everyone ought to do. So if the Standard Model Theory is right, whatever is puzzling about morality, it *cannot* be that its demands apply to everyone, no matter what they are like. According to the Standard Model Theory, *everyone* has to acknowledge *some* such universal demands. The only question can be whether their *content* is moral or not.¹² Yet this kind of puzzlement is certainly widespread and seems to be shared at least in principle by many philosophers who are ultimately not

¹¹ On the last of these counts, see Schroeder [forthcoming].

¹² “Motivational skepticism about practical reason depends on, and cannot be the basis for, skepticism about the possible content of rational requirements” Korsgaard [1986, 331-332]. Again: “Most philosophers think it is both uncontroversial and unproblematic that practical reason requires us to take the means to our ends. [...] The interesting question, almost everyone agrees, is whether practical reason requires anything *more* of us than this” [1997b, 215]. See Schroeder [ms] for further discussion.

skeptical at all about the universality of morality. Even *Kant* held that categorical imperatives required *more* philosophical explanation than hypothetical imperatives, rather than less. And all of that is incoherent if the Standard Model Theory is true.¹³ So here we have yet another important question for which the Standard Model is going to have important implications.

3.3 Still a Puzzling View

The implications of the Standard Model Theory should be enough to demonstrate that it should be controversial – lots of interesting views in ethical theory must hold that it is false, on pain of incoherence. It has undeniable initial appeal which, as I have noted, consists in the idea that conditionals like Conditional Vol cannot be true all by themselves, but must somehow be grounded in categorical facts. This seemed particularly obvious in the Anchorage case. But as other examples can easily show us, there are *other* ways in which such conditionals can be grounded – *without* being grounded in the *kinds* of fact that Standard Model explanations require.

The problem is that the *accessible-by-car* case is actually quite unusual among non-normative explanations. *Very few* non-normative explanations work in a way that closely parallels the Standard Model. Most are more like the following case: Marcus is in Milwaukee. So he is north of Chicago. He is north of Chicago *because* he is in Milwaukee – if he left Milwaukee for St. Louis, for example, then he would no longer be north of Chicago. So consider how a Standard Model-like explanation of Marcus's situation would go. We can appeal to the following *conditional*:

Conditional Chi: If Marcus is in Milwaukee, then
Marcus is north of Chicago.

For this to be a Standard Model-like explanation, then this would have to be true in virtue of someplace that Marcus is north of – the very kind of thing that we are trying to explain.

But there is no place that Marcus is north of that explains Conditional Chi. Even if Marcus goes to the South Pole, it will still be true that if he goes to Milwaukee, he will be north of Chicago – but he will not be north of any-

¹³ Compare Jean Hampton: “Kant’s position on the nature of hypothetical imperatives **must** be construed (contra his explicit wishes) such that understanding the bindingness of a hypothetical imperative is no easier than understanding the bindingness of a categorical imperative. My interpretation cannot save Kant’s belief that the former is more straightforward than the latter; indeed, my argument is that Kant’s belief is wrong. The **only** way to analyze Kant’s analyticity claim is to do so in a way that locates in hypothetical imperatives the same mysterious objective authority that attends the categorical imperative. Even more strikingly, I have argued that the force of hypothetical imperatives is dependent on, and *is at least in part constituted by*, the force of some antecedent categorical imperative that is in part definitive of instrumental rationality.” Hampton [1998, 165-166], boldface added for emphasis.

where. This *conditional* property of where Marcus can end up being north of is not grounded in a *categorical* property that *he* has, of already being north of somewhere. This is not to say that it is not grounded in *any* categorical property of Marcus, nor to say that it is not grounded in any categorical fact about what is north of what. On the contrary, it is grounded in the fact that *Milwaukee* is north of Chicago. All I am pointing out is that it is *not* grounded in a categorical fact about where *Marcus* is north of, as we would be bizarrely pushed to say if we sincerely tried to model this explanation on the Standard Model for normative explanations.

4.1 An Alternative to the Standard Model

I hope now to have established two broad theses: first, that the Standard Model Theory has a certain intuitive appeal, is widely accepted – at least implicitly – and plays a crucial role in whether Cudworth’s argument successfully establishes the incoherence of theological voluntarism, let alone any of the wide range of views taking the form of Theory. And, second, that the Standard Model Theory, once articulated, should be a *surprising* thesis, once compared to the Milwaukee case, and should in fact be highly controversial even in ethics, given the kinds of consequences to which it leads. I now want to articulate a model for normative explanations that is opposed to the Standard Model – which leads to an alternative theory about how at least some explanations of normative phenomena can, at least *in principle*, work.

In order to see whether the Standard Model is the only way to explain conditionals such as Conditional Vol, it is worth looking at how we might explain *non*-normative conditionals like Conditional Chi. We did not need the analogue of the Standard Model in order to explain Conditional Chi. There does not have to be any place that everyone is north of, in order to explain how it could be true that everyone has the following property: if she goes to Milwaukee, she will be north of Chicago. So what explains the truth of Conditional Chi?

Conditional Chi, I think, is true because of two things. First, Milwaukee is a place north of Chicago. And, second, for a person to be north of a place is just for her to occupy a *place* that is north of that place. That is why it is true that if anyone goes to Milwaukee, she will be north of Chicago. Going to Milwaukee is a way of occupying a place, Milwaukee, that is north of Chicago, and that is precisely what it takes to be north of Chicago. Other ways of being north of Chicago include being in any of Evanston, Racine, Sheboygan or Green Bay. And that is because Evanston, Racine, Sheboygan and Green Bay are all places that are north of Chicago.

This explanation relies on a constitutive truth: the fact that occupying a place that is north of a given place is *just what it is* to be north of the given place.¹⁴ This constitutive truth explains¹⁵ why it is true that:

Conditional Place: $\Box \forall x \forall p (\exists q (x \text{ is in } q \ \& \ q \text{ is north of } p) \rightarrow x \text{ is north of } p)$

Conditional Chi falls out from Conditional Place and the fact that Milwaukee is north of Chicago. Rachel's case gave us some reason to think that at least sometimes *normative* conditionals do not *have* to be explained in this constitutive way – they can be explained by appeal to a further, categorical, fact about what someone ought to do. We might say that such explanations follow a *different* model than Standard Model explanations, and we can call it the *Constitutive Model*.

4.2 Reduction and Constitutive Explanations

Suppose, then, that the voluntarist holds that just as *what it is* to be north of a place is to occupy a place that is north of it, *what it is* for it to be the case that someone ought to do something is just for God to have commanded her to do it:

Constitutive Vol: For God to have commanded X to do A is *just what it is* for it to be the case that X ought to do A .

¹⁴ I will not pretend that this explanation is uncontroversial. It commits to substantialism about space. A relationalist about space may think that Milwaukee counts as north of Chicago because *people* in Milwaukee are north of *people* in Chicago – in short, that the explanation goes the other way around. For my purposes, I do not care which of these is the case; I merely want to use the case to illustrate how a constitutive explanation might work. I could have used an uncontroversial example, about triangles or something, but this one was already salient in the discussion.

¹⁵ Constitutive answers to questions are sometimes *contrasted* with explanatory answers. If, when asked why Zena is tired, I say that it is because of a certain chemical pattern in her bloodstream, I may have succeeded in giving a constitutive answer, but intuitively I have not offered an explanation. Naturally there is a restricted sense of explanation in which we want something more specific. And in any normal context, explaining why a person is tired by noting what is going on in her bloodstream will not count as having answered the original question. But it does seem that “because Milwaukee is north of Chicago” is a perfectly good explanation of why if anyone goes to Milwaukee, they will be north of Chicago. And I do not see any way to fill out this answer except by noting the constitutive truth that being north of a place *just is* being in a place that is north of that place. So there we do have a constitutive story that counts as giving an explanation. The constitutive explanation of Conditional Place is simply a limiting case. Unlike with the constitutive explanation of Conditional Chi, we do not have to mention anything at all other than the constitutive truths. The most basic conditional accepted by the voluntarist will be like that.

Such a view would be a *reductive* view about *oughts*. It would analyze them in terms of something else – God’s commands. But it would be an intelligible picture on which not all normative explanations follow the Standard Model. On this picture, though many normative explanations may follow the Standard Model, Standard Model explanations eventually run out, and when they do, the only further explanation of why it is the case that someone ought to do something, is to point to *what it is* for it to be the case that she ought to do it, and to point out that this, in fact, holds.

None of this move, however, hinges on the voluntarist accepting Constitutive Vol in particular. In fact, we may have some reason to suspect that a good voluntarist would not accept Constitutive Vol. After all, if you ask a voluntarist why we ought to do what God commands, you might expect him to say that it is because God is our creator, or our savior, or is all-loving. If this seems to him to be an appropriate answer, then he must not really accept Constitutive Vol. But he might still accept a *structurally similar* claim:

Constitutive Create: For X ’s creator and savior to have commanded X to do A is just what it is for it to be the case that X ought to do A .

The voluntarist who accepts Constitutive Create can make all of the same moves against Cudworth’s argument as the voluntarist who accepts Constitutive Vol; he just thinks that the constitutive answer lies farther along the line. Constitutive Create may be a more plausible view for other reasons, but in our dialectic, accepting it works in exactly the same way as accepting Constitutive Vol.¹⁶ So for Cudworth’s inference to be plausible, we need to have some reason to think that we *could not* replicate this style of constitutive explanation for Conditional Vol. But if it works elsewhere, why *couldn’t* it work here?

4.3 Additional Considerations

It may be that neither Constitutive Vol nor Constitutive Create seems to you to be a plausible view. Indeed, like many moral philosophers, you may believe that *no* view which says *what it is* for it to be the case that someone *ought* to do something in non-normative terms, supernatural or otherwise, could possibly be true. So my proposed *Constitutive* model for normative explanations, modeled on my explanation of the Milwaukee case, may not seem to you to be a particularly promising alternative to the Standard Model and, thus, you may believe that it does not constitute a very good response

¹⁶ It is worth noting, on this score, that Robert Adams’ version of theological voluntarism *is* a constitutive view. See Adams [1973], [1979]. Some authors, in fact, actually *define* theological voluntarism as such a reductive view. But compare Quinn [1979], [1990], [1999].

on behalf of the voluntarist to the Cudworthy argument. But I think that even you should be able to agree that the Constitutive Model is, at least *in principle*, enough to let us off of the hook as far as the Cudworthy argument goes. For I think that the Constitutive Model can serve very well to explain one of the glaringly obvious features of how the Cudworthy argument seems to work in relation to different explanatory moral theories.

As we saw in section 1.3, except for the questionable inference, the Cudworthy argument makes no discrimination between different explanatory moral theories. So it would seem to work just as well against Explanatory Consequentialism as against theological voluntarism:

Expl. Consequence: For all x and all a , if x ought to do a , that is because of the options available to x , doing a will bring about the most good.

A consequentialist does not have to accept Explanatory Consequentialism. Some consequentialists, perhaps for Standard Model reasons, think that there is one basic action that everyone ought to do at all times – to bring about the most good.¹⁷ But it would be incoherent for Explanatory Consequentialism to think that this obligation was needed for its explanation, for it certainly cannot explain itself.

One puzzle about the Cudworthy argument is why the argument is much more persuasive against voluntarism than against Explanatory Consequentialism. Many¹⁸ who find it obvious that voluntarism is doomed because of Cudworth's argument are less worried about the prospects for Explanatory Consequentialism. I propose that if the Constitutive Model for normative explanations is the principal alternative to the Standard Model, that can serve to *explain* this reaction.

Suppose that some constitutive theories are more or less plausible or attractive than others. For example, Constitutive Vol might be much less attractive than Constitutive Create. And both might be considerably less plausible than Constitutive Consequentialism:

¹⁷ According to James Dreier, consequentialism is committed to a “demand that each person seek to maximize the realization of what is of impersonal value” [1993, 22]. Shelly Kagan places great weight on the existence of a *pro tanto* reason to promote the good, to which he claims *everyone* – even non-consequentialists – are committed, and takes the difference between consequentialists and non-consequentialists to lie in whether there are any other, conflicting, *pro tanto* reasons [1989, 15-19].

¹⁸ Though perhaps not all. Presumably Dreier and Kagan, if they are really sincere in holding that all consequentialists are committed to these basic requirements, rather than simply to a basic *conditional*, would have to think that Explanatory Consequentialism is not a viable possibility.

Constitutive Con: For it to be the case that X ought to do A is just for it to be the case that of the options available to X , doing A will bring about the most good.

There are a number of reasons why Constitutive Con might be more plausible than either Constitutive Vol or Constitutive Create. Chief among them might be that Constitutive Con employs another *normative* notion – the *good*, in order to explain what someone ought to do, rather than amounting to a reduction of a normative category to entirely non-normative categories. So though it is in one sense *reductive*, it does not seek to reduce any normative category in *non-normative* terms. But the important thing, for my explanation, is merely that it *is* a more plausible thesis.

If Cudworth's argument against voluntarism looks like a better argument than the Cudworthy argument against Explanatory Consequentialism, that has to have something to do with the Questionable Inference in Cudworth's argument. For otherwise the two arguments are exactly identical. On my interpretation, the Questionable Inference can be filled out by appealing to the need to *complete* the explanation of how God's commands can oblige, or how bringing about the most good can. The argument gets its force, then, from how much pressure we feel to follow the Standard Model in completing this explanation. So how compelling the argument seems should vary inversely with how plausible we find *alternative* modes of explanation. And if the Constitutive Model that I have sketched is the chief alternative to the Standard Model, then the difference in the plausibility of Constitutive Vol and Constitutive Con can successfully explain the difference in how compelling the Cudworthy argument seems, against each of these views. I take this explanation as some support in favor of my contention that my Constitutive Model for normative explanations is at least in principle one of the chief alternatives to the Standard Model.

But I can offer yet one more piece of historical evidence on this score. For having articulated the Constitutive Model as an alternative to the Standard Model, I think we can now see that on the best reading of Cudworth's original argument, the argument does not, in fact, rely on the full-fledged Standard Model Theory. For *both* Cudworth *and* Price, in running the Cudworthy argument, *take care to insist* that voluntarists cannot really intend to mean that "ought to" just *means* "has been commanded by God to," and in favor of this point each offers an argument that anticipates Moore's Open Question Argument¹⁹ (in fact, Price's argument is plausibly more careful than

¹⁹ Cudworth prefaces his discussion with the remark, "Wherefore in the first place, it is a thing which we shall very easily demonstrate, that moral good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest (if they be not mere names without any signification, or names for nothing else but willed and commanded, but have a reality in respect of the persons obliged to do and avoid them) cannot possibly be arbitrary things, made by will without nature" [1996, 16]. Schneewind claims that this passage sets the reductive view aside without argument [1998,

Moore's). This makes the most sense if Cudworth and Price in fact did not accept the Standard Model Theory, but instead only something somewhat *weaker*: what we might call the *Standard-Constitutive Conjecture*:

SCC: All normative explanations must *either* follow the Standard Model or the Constitutive Model.

This gives us a *third* reading of Cudworth's argument. In section 1.2 I gave the *naïve* reading of the argument, which I showed in section 2.1 turned on an equivocation. The Standard Model Theory gave us a *strong* sophisticated reading of the argument in section 3.1. But now I can give a weak sophisticated reading of Cudworth and Price's argument. Instead of assuming the Standard Model Theory in all of its strength, they only need to assume the Standard-Constitutive Conjecture. This conjecture forces the voluntarist onto a dilemma. He must either accept a constitutive view or not. If he does, then it is supposed to fall to the Open Question argument. Whereas if he does not, then his explanation must follow the Standard Model and the argument continues as on the strong sophisticated reading.²⁰ This is my considered interpretation of the historical Cudworth and the historical Price: both allow that there *could in principle* be non-Standard Model explanations, *if* there were any true reductive view about *ought*. Their arguments turned on having an *independent* argument against reductive views: the Open Question argument.

5.1 Cudworth and Reduction

But if that is right, then the Cudworthy argument has been misappropriated by more contemporary theorists. For one of the reasons why Cudworth's argument against voluntarism looks initially so interesting, is that it looks like it gives us an independent, perfectly general, argument that no *reductive* view about morality could possibly be true. For any reductive view

208], but Darwall claims that this relies on a rudimentary argument that surely a voluntarist would not want to be committed to his thesis being a tautology, reminiscent of the Open Question argument [1995, 118]. In Price things are much clearer. He says, "Right and wrong when applied to actions which are commanded or forbidden by the will of God, or that produce good or harm, do not signify merely, that such actions are commanded or forbidden, or that they are useful or hurtful [...] Were not this true, it would be palpably absurd in any case to ask, whether it is *right* to obey a command, or *wrong* to disobey it; and the propositions, *obeying a command is right*, or *producing happiness is right*, would be most trifling, as expressing no more than that obeying a command, is obeying a command, or producing happiness, is producing happiness" [1948, 16-17].

²⁰ On the weak sophisticated reading, then, Cudworth's argument has essentially the structure attributed to it by Stephen Darwall [1995, 118]. But Darwall's discussion of the second fork of the dilemma is too compressed for us to be able to tell whether he understands it in my way – what he says is compatible even with Prior's reading [1949, 18-19].

about what we ought to do surely counts as attempting to give a unified explanation of every case in which someone ought to do something. So any reductive view is going to be committed to a thesis of the form of Theory. And the generalized version of Cudworth's argument purports to show that any view of the form of Theory is incoherent.

Christine Korsgaard, in fact, seems to endorse Cudworth's argument as decisively refuting any reductive view about morality. According to Korsgaard, there are only four ways of answering what she calls the "normative question," which is essentially the question "why should I do what I ought to do?" But only one of Korsgaard's four answers, the first, *voluntarist*, answer, actually involves an answer of the form, "you ought to be moral because *p*." The second, *realist* answer, is no answer at all – it is just foot-stomping in insistence that *it is a fact* that you ought to be moral.²¹ Korsgaard's third answer amounts to something like, "you already believe that you ought to be moral," and what her fourth answer really does is to explain why you *have* to believe that you ought to be moral.²² So it is a kind of transcendental argument for the truth of "I ought to be moral," but it does not give us any answer of the form, "you ought to do what you ought to do because *p*." Only the first, *voluntarist*, answer does that. So if there is *any* place for a reductive view in Korsgaard's purportedly exhaustive classification of potential answers to the normative question, all reductive views must fall under the *voluntarist* category. And Korsgaard's argument against the voluntarist answer is just the Cudworthy argument, for which she cites Clarke.²³

Yet if my diagnosis of what makes the argument compelling is right, then this is a misappropriation of Cudworth's argument. Korsgaard and, on one reading, Hampton,²⁴ would have us use the Cudworthy argument as an

²¹ "Having discovered that he needs an unconditional answer, the realist concludes straightaway the he has found one" [1996, 33].

²² "Kant, like the realist, thinks we must show that particular actions are right and particular ends are good. Each impulse as it offers itself to the will must pass a kind of test for normativity before we can adopt it as a reason for action. But the test that it must pass is not the test of knowledge or truth. For Kant, like Hume and Williams, thinks that morality is grounded in human nature, and that moral properties are projections of human dispositions" [1996, 91]. See, in general, all of lectures 2 and 3.

²³ "We can keep asking why: 'Why must I do what is right?' – 'Because it is commanded by God' – 'But why must I do what is commanded by God?' – and so on, in a way that apparently can go on forever." [1996, 33]. Also: "Samuel Clarke, the first defender of realism, was quick to spot what he took to be a fatal flaw in the view I have just described" [28]. See notes 2 and 4. Korsgaard also appeals to considerations that look like the Cudworthy argument elsewhere, for example, in explaining Kant's argument at [4:420-421] of the *Groundwork*, in her introduction to the Cambridge edition [1997a, xvii]. And it seems to be presupposed by how she sets things up in "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason" [1997b].

²⁴ Hampton [1998] (See note 13). In a nice but brief discussion, Richard Joyce infers that Hampton is committed to using the Cudworthy argument this way [2001, 115-123]. I tend to agree that this is the best way to make Hampton's arguments out to be interesting and have the kind of scope she intends for them. But Hampton's unfinished and posthumously pub-

independent argument for the impossibility of reductive normative theories. If it were such an independent argument, that would help to explain why philosophers like Korsgaard and Hampton insist that reduction is thoroughly hopeless, even though it is widely acknowledged that the only generally discussed objection to reductive normative theories, the Open Question argument, fails to conclusively establish anything about *synthetic* reductive views.²⁵ The Cudworthy argument – at a first pass – looks like it *could* give us a deep and general argument against reductive normative theories, and I think there is a good case that at least some philosophers have understood it in this way.

But what the Cudworthy argument shows, in fact, is merely that reductive views are committed to understanding some normative explanations as working in some non-Standard Model way. The stakes for demonstrating a view to be internally incoherent are high. If there is *any* way of understanding a view as not being internally incoherent, it is more charitable to understand it in that way. So at the very least, we have to understand a reductive theorist as *believing* that reductions can provide an alternative model for normative explanations to that provided by the Standard Model.

And I agreed in section 4.3 that non-reductivists should be able to agree with this, even though they think no reductive view is true. The fact that Cudworth's argument seems to show too much – even that Explanatory Consequentialism is incoherent – supports the view that some other model for normative explanations must be available. And the fact that reductions of some normative concepts to others are more plausible than reductions of the normative to the non-normative supports the view that what distinguishes Explanatory Consequentialism from voluntarism is precisely that Constitutive Con is more plausible than Constitutive Vol. So whatever you think of reductions of the normative, if you think that Explanatory Consequentialism stands up to the Cudworthy argument better than voluntarism does, then you ought to think that explanations of normative phenomena can at least *potentially* follow the Constitutive Model – *if* there are any true constitutive views.

But if they *can*, then Cudworth's argument shows a reductive view to be false only if we can assume that its constitutive explanation, like that of Constitutive Vol, cannot work. And that means that Cudworth's argument does not show us *anything* about the general viability of reductive views. It shows them to be incoherent only by assuming that their reductions cannot work. And so if *it* is going to provide a successful argument against the possibility of the reduction of the normative to the non-normative, then it is going to have to presuppose some *other, independent* general argument to the same effect. Cudworth and Price think that they have an independent argument for this conclusion, but that is only because they are convinced by the Open Question argument. If we are no longer convinced by the Open Question

lished [1998] is *very* unclear, so it is not safe to stake too much on this interpretation – or on any other.

²⁵ Moore [1903, 61-68], Boyd [1988], Brink [1989, 144-170].

argument, then so far from being able to appeal to the Cudworthy argument in order to be able to bolster our case against reductive views, we are still in need of evidence against reduction in order to get the Cudworthy argument off of the ground. *Any* reductive view can offer a Constitutive Model explanation, and so any reductive view can evade Cudworth's argument.

5.2 Three Lessons

I now hope to have accomplished at least three things in this paper. First, I hope to have made sense of why it is that Cudworth's argument is so attractive to moral philosophers, despite the fact that it looks to trade on a blatant equivocation. The argument is nevertheless attractive, because (1) conditionals like Conditional Vol, just like conditionals like Conditional Anch, seem to need to be grounded *somehow*, and (2) like Rachel's, so many other normative explanations *do* follow the Standard Model. So it is very *natural* for a moral philosopher to believe that all do.

Second, I think that this serves to help us answer a hard question in meta-ethics. Non-reductive realists about the moral or normative believe that reductions of the normative to the non-normative are obviously impossible, or that such reductive views are crazy.²⁶ The chief purported argument to this effect in the literature is the Open Question argument, but it is far from clear that it establishes that reductive views must be false, let alone that it is *crazy* to think that a sophisticated reductive view could be true. So why is it, then, that non-reductive theorists find reduction so hopelessly crazy? I think that there is more than one reason, and have written about some of the others elsewhere.²⁷ But the Cudworthy argument gives us one natural diagnosis. If you already find reductions of the normative to the non-normative implausi-

²⁶ As Thomas Nagel puts his skepticism about reduction: "If values are objective, they must be so in their own right, and not through reducibility to some other kind of objective fact. They have to be objective *values*, not objective anything else" [1986, 138]. This expresses the idea that reduction is not a way of being realist about the normative at all. In fact, David McNaughton, in a book marketed as a textbook, explicitly categorizes reductive views as *irrealist*: "While such a reductive account ensures that moral views are true or false in virtue of facts that are independent of the speaker's opinion on the matter, it is nevertheless an irrealist position. For it does not allow that there are *distinctive* moral facts which are independent of our current opinions, waiting to be discovered by our moral inquiries" [1989, 44]. McNaughton maintains this despite the fact that the "distinctive" part did not actually make it into his definition of moral realism [39] – he finds it so obvious as not to require further argument. According to Graham Oddie [2005, 18], it is obvious that reductive views are insufficiently realist because "[t]hat which is reducible is less real than that to which it reduces." And, of course, Derek Parfit has been known to say such things as that "it is *amazing* that these truths still need defending," when referring to such theories as the value-based theory of reasons and non-reductive normative realism (in an unpublished manuscript). Despite lack of clear, conclusive argument, many philosophers continue to think that it is *obvious* that reductive normative realism is false.

²⁷ Schroeder [2005].

ble, you will think that the reductive theorist's constitutive explanation of why his theory works does not work.

By the Standard-Constitutive Conjecture, if it does not work, then you need a Standard Model explanation to explain why his theory works. And that has to appeal to something that falls under the scope of his theory, but cannot, on pain of vicious circularity. So the reductive view looks hopeless. But if this line attracts you, you are ignoring the fact that the reductive theorist has different ideas about the possible range of models for explanations of normative phenomena. Because *he* thinks that his reductive view is true, he has no trouble accepting that it can successfully back up constitutive explanations of normative phenomena. If neither the non-reductivist nor the reductivist makes their theories about how their explanations are working *explicit*, it is easy to see how they could end up butting heads over this question.

And third, I hope to have succeeded in at least further articulating the problem with which I began: to characterize what assumptions are at work in moral philosophers' explanations of normative phenomena, and how those explanations are both like and unlike other kinds of explanation. On the Constitutive Model, normative explanations can sometimes work in ways that are very like explanations of non-normative phenomena, like the fact that if you go to Milwaukee you will be north of Chicago. But Standard Model normative explanations are much less like explanations of other kinds of thing – with implications, at least, for how we should think about the scope and tasks of explanatory moral theory, and the intelligibility of certain kinds of skepticism about the objectivity of morality.

And that only leaves us with more, and harder, questions than I can attempt to answer here. What other hard questions in moral philosophy are affected by how we think about how normative explanations have to work? How can we generalize and precisify the Standard Model to explanations of reasons, of what is good, and so on? What more can we say about how constitutive explanations work? Are there other good, independent, general reasons to think that such explanations are not possible in the normative case? And most importantly, is the Standard-Constitutive Conjecture correct? Are there further, as yet unexplored, models for understanding how explanations of normative phenomena might work? Ones which commit neither to the implications of the Standard Model, nor to the reductive theses required in order to make constitutive explanations work? I wish I knew. The most that I can claim to have done is to have demonstrated that there is far more interesting work to be done, in articulating our implicit and sometimes surprising theories about how normative explanations are supposed to work.²⁸

²⁸ Special thanks to Gideon Rosen, David Sussman, Stephen Darwall, Michael Morreau, Nic Southwood, Ralph Wedgwood, David Sobel, Alasdair Norcross, Scott James, Mark Johnston, Gillian Russell, and Zena Hitz, to audiences at Northwestern University, Rice University, New York University, the University of Maryland at College Park, and Bowling Green State University, and to all the members of the Princeton graduate student

Mark Schroeder
 Department of Philosophy, University of Maryland College Park
mschroed@umd.edu

REFERENCES

- Adams, Robert [1973]. "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness." In Outka and Reeder, eds., *Religion and Morality*. New York: Anchor Books, 1973.
- [1979]. "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again." Reprinted in Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, 128-143.
- Boyd, Richard [1988]. "How to be a Moral Realist." Printed in Sayre-McCord, ed., *Essays on Moral Realism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, 181-228.
- Brink, David [1989]. *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 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.
- Cudworth, Ralph [1996] (1731). *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. Sarah Hutton, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Darwall, Stephen [1995]. *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dreier, James [1993]. "Structures of Normative Theories." *The Monist* 76(1): 22-40.
- Hampton, Jean [1998]. *The Authority of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Joyce, Richard [2002]. *The Myth of Morality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kagan, Shelly [1989]. *The Limits of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Korsgaard, Christine [1996]. *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [1997a]. "Introduction" to Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [1997b]. "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason." In Cullity and Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 215-244.
- McNaughton, David [1989]. *Moral Vision*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Moore, G.E. [1903]. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nagel, Thomas [1986]. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oddie, Graham [2005]. *Value, Reality, and Desire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parfit, Derek [ms]. *Rediscovering Reasons*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Passmore, J.A. [1951]. *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Price, Richard [1948]. *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*. D.D. Raphael, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Prior, A.N. [1949]. *Logic and the Basis of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

dissertation seminar, for helpful or stimulating discussion of this or related topics. Thanks also, finally, to the brave students in Honors 218Z at the University of Maryland.

- Quinn, Philip [1979]. "Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory." In Idziak, ed., *Divine Command Morality*. New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979, 305-325.
- _____. [1990]. "An Argument for Divine Command Ethics." In Beaty, ed., *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*. South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 1990, 289-302.
- _____. [1999]. "Divine Command Theory." In LaFollette, ed., *Guide to Ethical Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999, 53-73.
- Schneewind, J.B. [1998]. *The Invention of Autonomy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schroeder, Mark [2005]. "Realism and Reduction: The Quest for Robustness." *The Philosophers' Imprint* 5(1): www.philosophersimprint.org/005001/.
- _____. [forthcoming]. "Reasons and Agent-Neutrality." Forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*.
- _____. [ms]. *Slaves of the Passions*. Book manuscript. Revisions under contract for Oxford University Press.