1. Synthetic reductionism

Synthetic reductionism says that evaluative properties reduce to nonevaluative ones, although no nonevaluative expression is synonymous with an evaluative expression. Synthetic reductionists thus concede the point of Moore's Open Question Argument, but they insist that this doesn't rule out reductionism.

2. Theoretical identities

The inspiration here comes from influential work in the philosophy of language on theoretical identities.

Heat is mean kinetic energy, but 'heat' does not mean 'mean kinetic energy'. Light is a stream of photons, but 'light' does not mean 'stream of photons'. Water is H2O, but 'water' does not mean 'H2O'. And notice we could run this argument:

- 1. 'Is it water H2O?' is an open question. (Premise)
- 2. 'Is water water?' is not an open question. (Premise)
- 3. Therefore the questions in 1 and 2 are not synonymous. (From 1 and 2)
- 4. Therefore 'H20' is not synonymous with 'water'.

But still, water is H20. Perhaps 'good' and 'promotes happiness' work similarly to 'water' and 'H2O'?

How do we arrive at theoretical identifications? We originally have some **observational concept**, O, that allows us to identify something in our environment. We later cultivate some **theoretical concept**, T, which we think helps explain the underlying nature of the property or substance that we previously picked out with O. As a result of all this, we conclude that O is T (note: not that 'O' is 'T' or that 'O' means 'T').

For instance, "we identified water originally by its characteristic feel, appearance and perhaps taste" (Kripke N&N, p. 128). That is, we identified it as the clear, tasteless, odorless potable liquid that fills the lakes and rivers and falls from the sky as rain. We came to the

conclusion that water is H2O because the presence of H2O would explain certain observations, including those we make when applying an electric current to a sample of water. Modern chemistry provided us with the concepts of oxygen, hydrogen and chemical bonds.

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3. Huemer's challenge

We seek to explain the nature of goodness, just as we explained the nature of water. So for this strategy to carry over into ethics, we'll treat 'good' as the observational term. Says Huemer:

The reason why we believe, for example, that water = H2O is, roughly, that (i) we have independent (that is, pre-theoretical), direct awareness of the presence of water, and (ii) the theory that this substance of which we are aware is composed of H2O molecules helps explain many of its observable features (again, features of which we know independently of our scientific theory). If we are to take the synthetic reductionist's analogies seriously, then, we should say that we have independent, direct awareness of the presence of goodness, and that the theory that goodness is identical with N helps explain many of the observable features of goodness. (p. 85)

Huemer proceeds to argue that the model simply cannot work as the reductionist envisions. We can represent his argument as follows. (Huemer indicates that he's willing to run an exactly parallel argument for evaluative facts, so everywhere we read 'evaluative properties' we could substitute 'evaluative properties or facts'.)

- 1. The model works only if evaluative properties are observable. (Premise)
- 2. Evaluative properties are observable only if there is a way that evaluative properties look. (Premise)
- 3. Therefore the model works only if there is a way that evaluative properties look. (From 1 and 2)
- 4. But there is no way that evaluative properties look.

(Premise)

5. Therefore the model does not work. (From 3, 4)

Huemer supports 1 by pointing to the way the model works for water, light and heat. In addition to the previous block quote, consider: "We were able to discover that heat = molecular kinetic energy, only because we could first identify which things were hot by observation. If we have no pretheoretical knowledge of which things are good, then we cannot discover that Good = N in any analogous way," 87.

He defends 2 with examples. Consider: "Suppose I am superstitious and whenever I see a black cat, I immediately (without thinking about it) believe that an airplane is going to crash the next day. I am now seeing a black cat. Do I thereby observe a plane crash? No," 86. Why not? A plane crash does not satisfy the content of my sensory experience. Elsewhere Huemer explains his theory of perception. You perceive X only if (i) you have a perceptual experience E, and (ii) X approximately (or better) satisfies E's content, and (iii) X causes E. (See *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 57.)

He thinks 4 is obvious. He does defend it against two arguments, but offers no positive argument favoring it.

4. Some responses

Reject 1. Why think that evaluative concepts must be *observational*? The model seems to require only that they be **pretheoretical**, or that we pretheoretically have some grip on at least paradigm instances of the relevant phenomena. Consider mental concepts. We have pretheoretical concepts of belief, desire, intention and so on. But these are not observational concepts. Yet the model could work for them. Conceivably cognitive science could one day identify a neural (or other non-mental) basis for belief.

Reject 4. Beauty is an evaluative property. Anyone with eyes can observe that Aishwarya Rai is beautiful. You can literally see her beauty.

Huemer could restrict the argument to moral properties and it

would still be interesting. Is there a way that moral properties or facts look?

Consider what happens when I see a squirrel. The squirrel appears to me—it causes me to have a distinctive experience. The experience has distinctive phenomenal content—various colors and shapes (brown, bushy, curved, etc.) It's difficult for me to characterize the content very well, other than to say it's an experience as of a squirrel.

Now consider what happens when I see a thuggish brute backhand a young child across the mouth. This action is bad and wrong. Does it cause me to have an experience with distinctive content? Yes. It causes me to have an emotionally charged experience, characterized by the feelings of distress and outrage. Had the brute instead carefully presented the child with a gift, it would have caused me to have an experience characterized by the feeling of admiration or delight. And if the brute had simply walked passed the child, my experience would have been unemotional.

If we focus only on colors and shapes distinctive of perceiving squirrels and such, we might neglect other important qualitative features of experience, such as the raw **emotional content**. Emotional content is just as real and noticeable as color content. So why not think we observe moral properties (facts) by having emotional experiences?

You could understand this as a challenge to either 4 or 2, in their restricted or unrestricted versions. Regardless whether we want to count the emotional appearance as a "look," the point is that the property's appearing a certain way makes it observable.