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Morals and Modals

I. Introduction

Conclusions properly drawn must be true when the premises are; events must unfold in accordance with natural law; people must obey the moral laws. Why do we find it so tricky to give a satisfactory philosophy of these necessities? In the first part of this essay, I suggest that it is because we have a rooted, and inadequate, conception of what is needed to establish such an understanding. This conception dominates the philosophy of modality, just as it does other areas, but it makes a genuine advance in understanding impossible. The diagnosis here is quite simple, but it is not so simple to disentangle ourselves from its influence, and to become practised with tools that are better suited to the problem.

What would a philosophical theory of logical, natural, or moral necessity be? By making judgements of necessity we say things, and these things are true or false. Perplexity arises because we think there must therefore be something which *makes* them so, but we cannot quite imagine or understand what this is. Nor do we understand how we know about whatever this is: we do not understand our own must-detecting faculty. Elucidating the truth-condition, and our access to it, is *the* goal of philosophy, to which its techniques and controversies are essentially directed. Not only is this so, but surely it has to be so, for the philosophical itch is that of finding the nature of the facts strange and incomprehensible, of failing to imagine what could make true the relevant judgements. The problem is that of the fugitive fact, and the solution is to capture the nature of the fact in an intelligible way. This answer would tell us what such truths *consist in:* the answer would be obtained by establishing the *truth-conditions* for such judgements. It would give us an 'account' of the states of affairs in which their truth consists, or of what it is that *makes* them true. The account would have an explanatory role as well: fully established, it would explain why it is necessary that twice two is four, or how it can be that natural laws exist, or why we must be nice to one another. The most direct technique would be analysis, showing, it might be hoped, that the judgements are made true by some state of affairs relatively familiar and unproblematic (by whichever standards prompted the perplexity). Another technique would be more aggressive: to suggest that the concepts involved in

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the judgements are defective and due for replacement, so that the fugitive 'facts' were not really such, not really worth chasing after all.

Within this conception of the philosopher's quest, there is room for disagreement over detail—for instance, whether the description of the state of affairs finally fixed upon as making true the original modal judgement has to be synonymous with that judgement; whether one range of arguments or another succeeds in showing some concepts to be defective, or over what would count as an admissible reduction class for the modal claims. It is to the twists of this detail that we naturally turn when faced with the embarrassment that the head-on search for truth-conditions for modal assertions has turned up nothing at all promising. Where else is there to turn? For rejecting the problem is too much like ignoring the itch.

The modal concepts need a theory. But I do not think that they need or could possibly get a theory described, however remotely, in the terms suggested so far. In other words, I think that we have completely misinterpreted the *kind* of solution the philosophical problem needs. This may seem surprising, for I posed the problem and the kind of solution in terms deliberately bland—the kind of terms that would go quite unremarked as a preface to discussions. But I shall argue that they mislead us, and that a better way to approach the matter exists.

II. The Quasi-Realist Alternative

Let us call the direct approach the truth-conditions approach. Here is a dilemma that attends it, and that I shall exhibit quite generally for moral, natural, or logical necessity. If we ask what makes it so that *A* must be the case, we may be given a local proof, a proof of *A* from *B*. This is satisfactory if we already understand why *B* must be so (if our topic is logical necessity, there is also the status of the proof to consider). But if our concern is with the whole area, then we turn to scrutinize that understanding. Attention shifts to why *B* must be the case, for our philosophical concern is with necessity in general, not with *A* in particular. Suppose an eventual answer cites some truth *F*, and so takes the form: '$\Box A$ because *F*'. ('Because' here is taken to include constitutive variants: the truth that $\Box A$ consists in *F*, is made so by *F*, etc.)

Now, either *F* will claim just that something *is* so, or it will claim that something *must* be so. If the latter, there is no problem about the *form* of the explanation, for one necessity can well explain another. But, as we have seen, there will be the same bad residual 'must': the advance will be representable as 'if we see why *this* must be so, we can now see why *that* must be as well'. And there is no escape from the overall problem that way. Suppose instead that *F* just cites that something *is* so. If whatever it is does not *have to be* so, then there is strong pressure to feel that the original necessity has not been explained or identified, so much as undermined. For example, suppose a theorist claims that twice two must be four because of a linguistic convention, or that particles must attract each other thus because of some ongoing cosmic

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setup, or that we must be nice to one another because that is what God wants. Suppose it is denied that there is any residual necessity, that we *must* make just those conventions, that laws determine the consequences and continuation of the cosmic setup, or that God's wants ought to be heeded. Then in each case there is a principled difficulty about seeing how the kind of fact cited could institute or be responsible for the necessity. This is because the explanation, if good, would undermine the original modal status: if that's all there is to it, then twice two does not have to be four, particles don't have to attract each other, and we don't have to be nice to each other, even if it would be unwise not to. This is, of course, a generalization of the famous Euthyphro dilemma. Either the explanandum shares the modal status of the original, and leaves us dissatisfied, or it does not, and leaves us equally dissatisfied.

So why is the truth-conditional approach so dominant—why is this dilemma not universally recognized? Partly at least because it leaves room for work. The circle can be virtuous and explanatory. In other words, there is no embargo on finding theories of the form '$\Box p$ because F' where F stays *within* the modal sphere in question—'$\Box p$ because in all possible worlds p'; '$\Box p$ because there is a relation of necessitation between certain universals', or '$\Box p$ because $\sim p$ is impermissible', for example. Such theories can and do uncover important aspects of our thought: making the logic of modality intelligible, for instance. But from the standpoint that prompts the original problem—the dissatisfaction with the fugitive fact—by staying within the family in question, the analyses cannot do more than postpone things. Of course, at one level this is perfectly well known, for everyone agrees that it is one thing to have a possible-worlds approach to modality, for example, and quite another to have a theory of the metaphysics or epistemology of the things we say about possible worlds.

The poor prospects of the truth-conditional approach would be easier to tolerate if there were another approach. Fortunately, there is. The truth-conditional approach looks for another way of characterizing the 'layer of reality' that makes true modal utterances. The alternative starts (and, I shall urge, ends) with our making of those utterances: the thing we intend by insisting upon a necessity or allowing a possibility. We could call it a 'conceptual role' or even a 'use' approach, but neither title is quite happy, for neither makes plain the contrast with truth-conditional approaches that is needed. The conceptual role of use of a modal idiom might be just that of expressing belief in the fugitive layer of fact! If the best that can be said about our commitments is that they are those of people who believe in particular distributions of possibilities—logical, natural, or moral—then we are silenced again. But this may not be the best that there is to say: we can approach the commitments differently.

This alternative is familiar under the heading of projectivism (or sometimes, which is worse, 'noncognitivism') in ethics: this is why in setting the scene I have includes moral musts. It has been pioneered in the philosophy of natural law by Ramsey and Ayer, and my aim is to made it a recognized option in the metaphysics of modality.

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Notice that this is *not* the alternative of saying that 'there are no laws of nature' (or no possible worlds), any more than projective theory of ethics involves the 'eccentric' view that there are no obligations. Instead, this approach gives its own account of what it is to say that there *are*, and, if the commitments are valuable, *why it is correct* to do so. The account has two stages. It starts with a theory of the mental state expressed by commitments in the area in question: the habits, dispositions, attitudes they serve to express. It is these that are voiced when we express such commitments in the ordinary mode: when we say that there exists this possibility, that necessity, this obligation. The second stage (which I called quasi-realism) explains on this basis the propositional behaviour of the commitments—the reason why they become objects of doubt or knowledge, probability, truth, or falsity. The aim is to see these propositions as constructions that stand at a needed point in our cognitive lives—they are the objects to be discussed, rejected, or improved upon when the habits, dispositions, or attitudes need discussion, rejection, or improvement. Their truth corresponds to correctness in these mental states, by whichever standards they have to meet. Such a theory only collapses back into realism if we are reduced to saying that correctness in modal or moral judgement is simply representing the modal or moral facts as they are. But according to my direction of theorizing, we can do better than that, and what we can do involves no irreducible appeal to a moral or modal reality. It is here that the opposition to realism lies, although I shall try to make it plain that the interest of the approach remains even if, as I also believe, there is no very coherent realism for it to be 'anti'.

It is tempting to characterize this anti-realism as an 'as-if' philosophy: we talk as if there exist moral or modal facts, when in fact there are none. This makes it sound as though, according to this approach, some *error* of expression or thought is involved in such talk—for we talk as if p, when in fact p is false. This consequence of an as-if characterization is especially tempting when we remember other areas in philosophy where such projections are supposed to be responsible for mistakes we make—pathetic fallacies, for instance. Spinoza, for example, believed that what we take to be contingency in the world is merely a reflection of our ignorance, and this diagnoses a *mistaken* belief that we have.[1] Most writers on projective theories of morals and modals mention Hume, of course, and then continue with some version of this:

> Hume's view is that we then make a mistake: we project something essentially 'inner' onto the external world, and come to the mistaken belief that the concept of necessity we have applies to propositions in virtue of the objective properties of ideas and, as a consequence of this, we mistakenly believe that modal judgements can be true or false.[2]

There is excuse for the interpretation, for Hume is not as clear as one might wish. The first passage in which he appeals to the metaphor of the mind

1. Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Part II, Prop. XLIV. I owe the reference to Al McKay.
2. Graeme Forbes, *The Metaphysics of Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 218.

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spreading itself on external objects is in the context of diagnosing a mistake—the 'contrary bias' that leads people to ridicule his philosophy of causation, to suppose that, by making the 'efficacy of causes lie in the determination of the mind', Hume is reversing the order of nature.[3] But this does not show Hume admitting that, by talking of causes (or obligations or necessary relations of ideas) as we do, we make any mistake. The theorist may misinterpret the nature of our judgements, their origins, and the standards that justify them. But the first-order user of the vocabulary makes no mistake: there is decisive evidence that Hume thought he made none. This is clearest in the moral case, of course, for Hume's philosophy of natural belief is infected by the background problem that our belief in the external world in any case involves a mistake—natural and inevitable propensities of the mind that must lead us to falsehood. But there is no further mistake involved in 'causalizing'—in finding causal order in the world we take ourselves to inhabit—any more than there is in moralizing as a reaction to characters and actions.

Hume's position is best explained by separating two different applications of the notion of projection. In the one use (which I prefer) we 'project' when we use the ordinary propositional expressions of our commitments, saying that there is this causal relation, that natural law, this other obligation. In the other we project only when we adopt, as philosophers, a particular 'realist' explanation of the sphere in question. This is a quite different thing, and it is what gave the contrary bias of which Hume is indeed complaining. The space between the two uses is easily missed, especially by philosophers coming with a realist bias in the first place. For they will be only too apt to suppose that the ordinary use has, as it were, done their work for them, so that a realist ontology is the only possible explanation of the first-order usage. But this, in Hume's view and mine, is not so. And this view must be given a hearing.

How can a projective theory accompany the view that no mistake is made in talking as we do? We would only make a mistake in saying that things ought to be done, or have to be so, if *these judgements have a false content*. But if their content arises as the projectivist + quasi-realist story maintains, they do not. No error occurs in moralizing or modalizing, even if philosophers have mistaken the kind of content these judgements have. Error exists only if there is a real *mismatch* between the truth about the nature of the claims, and their content, or what we make them do in our theories of things. But no mismatch exists in the thought that '1 + 1 = 2', that bees cause stings, and so on.

Quite apart from the implication that we make some kind of mistake, an as-if description of the theory makes it appear inadequate to the depth of our commitments. It looks refutable by a kind of phenomenological reminder of the strength of our belief that there *really are* possibilities, necessities, etc. Don't you believe that there *really are* natural laws, iron proofs, genuine duties? It is not just that we talk as if there are such things! But a quasi-realist will properly say: it is not simply that we think and behave *as if* there are

3. David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book 1, Pt. III, Sec. XIV, ed. L. A. Selby Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 167.

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necessities: there *are*. And we are right to think that there are. The commitment, and its correct expression, should not be in question.

What then is the mistake in describing such a philosophy as holding that 'we talk as if there are necessities when really *there are none*'? It is the failure to notice that the quasi-realist need allow no sense to what follows the 'as if' *except* one in which it is true. And conversely, he need allow no sense to the contrasting proposition in which it in turn is true. He no more need allow such sense than (say) one holding Locke's theory of colour need accept the view that we talk as if there are colours, when there are actually none. This is doubly incorrect, because nothing in the Lockean view forces us to allow any sense to 'there are colours' except one in which it is true; conversely, neither need it permit a sense to 'there are actually none' in which *that* is true. Theorists *may* construct such senses: for instance, a sense in which 'there are colours' implies that colours do some work of physical explanation, or could be apprehended by more than one sense, and of course the Lockean will deny anything implying such a thing. But if the words retain an uncorrupted, English, sense, then the Lockean, and similarly the quasi-realist, holds not just that we talk and think as if there are . . . , but that there are.[4]

Then the objection might be rephrased: according to the quasi-realist, we think and talk as if there were real moral and modal *facts*, but there are none. However, this too, although it points in a better direction, invites misunderstanding. It cannot stand as an accurate diagnosis of a position, for the word 'fact' also has an uncorrupted English sense: it is a fact that there are colours, and there are many facts about them. Certainly, there is a sense in which the quasi-realist is opposed to giving an ontological status to moral and modal facts, but according to him you cannot read off this status just from the nature of our commitments, their modes of expression, or their genuine place in our thinking, even if that thinking goes on invoking talk of facts. The appearance tempts philosophers to ontological quests, puzzles, and errors, but the mistake lies with the theorist who succumbs to the temptation.

Of what then is the quasi-realist suspicious? We can see now how the problem of characterizing either realism or anti-realism becomes acute. Suppose, for instance, we are satisfied with a quasi-realist construction of modality: we see what we are doing when we modalize, and why talking of possibilities or possible worlds is a legitimate form for these commitments to take. So when a writer such as Lewis maintains the irreducible nature of the modal idiom and expresses his commitments in that idiom, he is doing no more than a quasi-realist allows. What *more* does he intend by deeming himself a realist? How is there to be space, as it were, for some extra content in any such claim? One might see illegitimate content: if a theorist held that alternative possibilities are real in the sense that we can find them in space or hold them responsible for causing various results, or if he took comfort in the thought that he could model apprehension of possibilities upon sensory apprehension. But

4. I do not have a fixed opinion on what Locke himself thought about the existence of colour. See P.A. Boghossian and J.D. Velleman, 'Colour as a Secondary Quality', *Mind*, 1989.

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theorists, including Lewis, call themselves modal realists without accepting any such theses. It begins to look as if there is no way of framing an ontological or metaphysical opposition. Saying 'I believe in possible worlds, and I am (or: I am not) a realist about them' would amount to no more than accepting irreducible modal idioms, and in either form the last conjunct is quite idle.

Universal harmony is desirable, but it does not come quite so cheaply. The difficulty of characterizing the dispute shows that it is up to anyone who takes pride in announcing himself in this style to make sure that the last conjunct has a content. And in my view, many philosophers who take pleasure in calling themselves 'moral realists' have failed badly in this obligation. They have either been content to pour cold water on revisionary anti-realism of John Mackie's kind, or content to insist on the surface appearances, or content to generalize what is mistakenly seen as a late Wittgensteinian lesson, to the effect that every indicative sentence shares the same role—that of describing an aspect of the world ('our world'). The existence of the kind of theory I am describing should undercut this. But there is still room for disagreement, specifically about what in the commitments needs explaining, and about the kind of explaining modal and moral facts can themselves do.

Realist theorizing is apt to pay too little attention to the first and to make too much of the second. It worries too little about the curious place that moral and modal commitments have, about what notion of truth can be appropriate to them, about why it matters, and about how the commitments blend with others that we have. It worries less about these issues because if these commitments are beliefs, then their aim is simple truth, and this is proper depiction of the modal or moral realm. This is an application of the second tendency: to make much of the explanatory powers of the moral or modal states of affairs. A realist may betray himself, for instance, by relying upon metaphors of perception or vision to explain how we become acquainted with moral or modal fact, or by entering false theses about the creation or destruction of such facts and their dependence on others, or by supposing that the existence of such facts explains other genuine states of affairs, in the way in which one state of affairs can explain another. To suppose, for instance, that the world exists as it does because it ought to do so might be the privilege of the moral realist. To suppose that the world exists because God made it is the privilege of the theological realist. If this kind of belief is intrinsic to first-order theorizing (as in the theological case), then the kind of diagnosis of the commitments offered by a projectivist will indeed find error in the everyday practice, as well as in various philosophical interpretations of it; this is why a 'Wittgensteinian' protection of religious belief is a kind of cheat. Ordinary religious belief, thought of in an expressive way, involves the mismatch referred to above. This is also why there is very doubtfully any space for a genuine realist verses anti-realist debate about explanatory physics. But first-order theories are notably silent about the explanatory role of possible worlds or moral duties; it is left to the philosophers to inject good or bad views about that.[5]

5. Obviously, in this paragraph I ignore the possibility of the generalized quasi-realist move introduced in essay 1: the move that allows even the use of a concept in explanatory roles, but still

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Once the explanations are agreed, not much is left in the words. So the universal harmony is better approached in a case like that of colour, where we feel reasonably confident of the underlying facts and the way they relate to colour perception. And then indeed it is no great matter whether we say that there are colours (and I am a realist about them) or that there are (and I am not). The space for dispute has shrunk away and can only be resurrected if false implications are read into the parenthetical remarks. It is no great trick to announce oneself in either style; the work comes in earning a right to do so. But to achieve this harmony in the modal case involves the hard work of showing how to explain modalizing in the first place, and this remains to be done.

At the risk of appearing moralistic, I shall close this section by illustrating how truth-conditional theorizing dominates our philosophical imaginations. One of the clearest expressive approaches to commitment to natural law is that of Ramsey and Ayer. Here is Ayer:

> In short I propose to explain the distinction between generalizations of law and generalizations for fact, and thereby to give some account of what a law of nature is, by the indirect method of analysing the distinction between treating a generalization as a statement of law and treating it as a statement of fact.[6]

It is, however, a little unclear from this way of setting it up quite how Ayer conceives the step from a theory of what it is to treat something as a law of nature to giving 'some account of what a law of nature is'—the ontological overtone of this suggests that the truth-conditional theory is not quite exorcized. For if the expressive theory is successful, there is no last chapter to write on what a modal fact or state of affairs is. We would know what we do and why we are correct to do it when we commit ourselves to necessities of logic, nature or action, and that would be the end. Ayer's nod towards truth-conditional hankerings is wholesale prostration in other writers. A recent example is David Armstrong. After observing that inference from the observed to the unobserved is central to our whole life as human beings, and that if there were no laws those inferences would be unreliable, he continues: 'hence the notion of law is, or should be, a central concept for epistemology. If so we will also want to enquire into its ontology. We will want to know what a law of nature is'.[7] The grip of the truth-conditional approach appears when Armstrong considers the alternative to this, which he identifies as the 'truly eccentric view . . . which denies that there are any Laws'.[8]

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defends an anti-realist construction of it. It is not that I changed my mind between the two papers, or between then and now, but that for the purposes of this paper it is the different *direction* of a quasi-realist story that is important. Even if explanatory contexts eventually fall within the quasi-realist net, it is not right to start with them.

6. A. J. Ayer, 'What Is a Law of Nature?', *The Concept of Person* (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 231.

7. D. Armstrong, *What is a Law of Nature?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 5.

8. Ibid., p. 5.

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Even writers as cautious as Edward Craig and Crispin Wright find it straightforward to agree on the point that, in effect, closes off projectivism + quasi-realism. The context here is that Craig had demonstrated decisively the imaginative block that faces us when we try to conceive, in proper detail, of a counterarithmetical reality. The projectivist is then poised to see this imaginative block as something expressed when we insist upon the necessity of arithmetic. But Wright commented, 'If as Craig makes plausible, we are unable to conceive of how any alternative determination might be viable, then that is how things are with us; it is a further, tendentious step to inflate our imaginative limitations into a metaphysical discovery'.[9] And Craig, acknowledging that he and Wright agree that we should not ask the imagination to do too much, concedes immediately: 'It certainly is a further step'.[10] Is it so clear that there is this further step? Only if claims of necessity are 'metaphysical discoveries', and this the projectivist will query. Again, the position is clear if we revert to the moral case: a projectivist will see commitment to an obligation as a distinctive mental state—call it a sentiment—but he will not accept any charge that we tendentiously inflate our sentiments into metaphysical discoveries (discoveries about the independent structure of the world of obligations), precisely because he denies that in our awareness of duty and obligation we are in fact making any such discoveries. (I return later to Craig's reasons, which were good, for thinking there is *a* further step—only it is not this one.)

There are aspects of the work of making quasi-realism attractive that I shall not repeat in this paper. These include its distinction from naive subjectivism, its moves to accommodate the propositional nature of ethical claims, its explanation of the syntax and semantics that go with that, and the basis for constructing a working notion of truth. My concern here is to see how this shape of theory fares with one of the other two 'musts': that of logic.

III. Policies versus Needs

We allow possibilities, rule out impossibilities, and insist upon necessities. This is not describing anything. As in Wittgenstein, attributing necessity to a proposition is not making a true or false claim about it—or at least is not to be understood that way.[11] It is more like adopting a norm, or a policy or a rule that a thesis be put 'in the archives', above the hurly-burly of empirical determination. The decision dictates how we shall treat recalcitrant evidence. This accords with the parallel with morals. The one kind of rule makes courses of thought intellectually obligatory; the other makes courses of action so. But

9. Crispin Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics* (London: Duckworth, 1980), p. 439.

10. E. J. Craig, 'Arithmetic and Fact', in *Exercises in Analysis* ed. Ian Hacking (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 90.

11. For example, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956), V. 6, 4–5, p. 163. Wittgenstein *constantly* appeals to hidden difference of role underlying superficial descriptive appearances. See also essay 8, note 13.

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there is a major problem: to identify any space for this rule-making. Modalizing, like moralizing, does not feel optional: it feels as though we regard '1 + 1 = 2' as necessary simply because we *must* do so, not because we have chosen to do so. Its status is more naturally seen as a product of our inability to conceive otherwise, or to *do* anything with a counterarithmetical judgement. If the necessity of propositions is in any sense conferred by us, it is still unnatural to see it as reflecting anything in which we had a choice. So notwithstanding Wittgenstein, a projectivist will be wise to look for the mental set that gains expression outside the realms of the optional (and it is vital to notice that he can do this—the denial of metaphysical realism does not usher in a 1950s embrace of free choice and conventionalism).

If attributing modal value reflected free policies and choices, it would be unclear why we should go in for it. The right attitude would seem to be that which Wright attributes to his imagined 'Cautious Man'.[12] This is the character who agrees with us on all empirical truth. He agrees with us too in accepting proofs; in arithmetic or logic, or in any more apparently metaphysical commitments, such as those determining our basic ascriptions of temporal, spatial, or causal categories, this character agrees with us. But he refuses to make modal assignments. As far as he is concerned, it is enough that we accept, say, that 1 + 1 = 2. It is unwise to go further and ascribe necessity to the proposition.

The challenge is reminiscent of Quine: would it not be better simply to register our stronger attachment to some propositions than others, and then to leave market forces to determine which ones maintain our loyalty? Even if we abandon the self-image of decision makers, we confront essentially the same problem. What would be lost if we simply did not modalize? Is it not foolish to elevate mere imaginative limitations into iron necessities?

Quine thinks that even in the case of logic we would be better off doing no such thing. Of course, in the context of positivism, Quine's strength lay not so much in opposition to modal discrimination in itself, as in his insistence that coming to the problem with notions of meaning or convention is coming with dirty hands: there can be no modally innocent appeal to conventions, or concepts or meanings or rules or languages, giving us an anterior understanding from which to explain or justify those discriminations. In other words, even if we can *say* things like 'analytic propositions are true in virtue of meaning/concepts/constraints on the application of concepts . . .' this is no help. It is no help because there is no identification of concepts, meanings, etc., which does not itself involve knowing the modal liaisons of propositions in which the concepts occur—what must be, may be, or cannot be true, if they are so. Hence, any such appeal cannot explain or justify our modal commitments: in a frequent metaphor, it keeps us within the same circle.

It may have been naive of the positivists to think that by retreating to questions of meaning we obtained a cleanhanded empiricist aproach to modality. But overthrowing that is not the same as overthrowing the modal. Indeed, the 'dirty-hands' argument is entirely two-edged: by showing how deeply the

12. Wright, op. cit., chapter 23.

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modal is entrenched in any 'conceptual scheme' it makes it less likely that modalizing is left an unprotected optional extra in our thought. But so far as the present essay goes, the point to insist upon is that there is clearly an antecedent problem for any naturalistic sanitizing of the modal. This is to explain the way in which we make modal judgements—the ease with which we noncollusively agree upon them. Obviously, before we recommend that we abandon modalizing, we want to know what it involves and why we do it. Our capacity to make noncollusive modal discriminations requires explanation, whether or not it is regrettable that we do so. But curiously enough (since the task is one of naturalized epistemology), Quine's philosophy of the modal is incapable of meeting this eminently naturalistic request, and when it is buttressed to do so, it loses its appeal, doing better by becoming quasi-realistic. Or so I shall argue.

IV. Explaining Modalizing

Quine's consistent position has been that even when we think of the most elementary trivialities of truth-functional logic, the best we can say is that they are *obvious*. It is sometimes said that he changed his mind about this, and that, discussing translation from allegedly pre-logical or alternative-logical tongues, he conceded some very special status to truth-functional logic, in the determination with which we would reinterpret others as conforming to it. But in Quine's view this is no shift. It is just a consequence of the fact that we always translate so as to save the obvious.[13]

Of course, not all truths naively called necessary are at all obvious, but Quine can and does extend the explanation to those which can be proved by obvious means from obvious starting points. Here we have the famous Quinean picture in which the truths naively called necessary are those which are obvious enough to lie far away from the theatres of war in which empirical forces mould and break theories. It substitutes the one-dimensional web of

13. In 'Carnap and Logical Truth' (1954; reprinted in W. V. Quine, *The Ways of Paradise and Other Essays*, New York: Random House, 1966, pp. 105–106) promoting the dirty-hands argument, he wrote "The considerations which were adduced in *1, to show the naturalness of the linguistic doctrine, are likewise seen to be empty when scrutinized in the present spirit. One was the circumstances that alternative logics are inseparable practically from mere change in usage of logical words. Another was that illogical cultures are indistinguishable from ill-translated ones. But both of these circumstances are adequately accounted for by mere obviousness of logical principles, without help of a linguistic doctrine of logical truth. For, there can be no stronger evidence of a change in usage than the repudiation of what had been obvious, and no stronger evidence of bad translation than that it translates earnest affirmations into obvious falsehoods." And in *Philosophy of Logic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), in the same context, again insisting upon the inevitability of our imputing classical logic to a translatee, he offers almost identical terms: "Being thus built into translation is not an exclusive trait of logic. If the natives are not prepared to assent to a certain sentence in the rain, then equally we have reason not to translate the sentence as 'It is raining'. Naturally the native's unreadiness to assent to a certain sentence gives us reason not to construe the sentence as saying something whose truth should be obvious to the native at the time. Data of this sort are all we have to go on . . ."

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belief, with only a vague and pragmatic boundary between propositions that face the test of experience routinely ('contingent') and those that at worst would only face it in periods of exceptional theoretical turbulence ('necessary'). And at first sight it gives Quine his answer to the problem of explaining our noncollusive application of the notion. When we deem a proposition necessary we express our apprehension of its obvious character.

But a little thought shows that this is quite inadequate. For a great many truths are in Quine's central reservation, but would simply be classed as contingent. These are truths that are *central, certain, obvious* to everyone—that there exist trees and rocks, that houses keep off the rain, and so on. There is no prospect of these being rocked by scientific change, nor of recalcitrant experience casting doubt upon them. But we unhesitatingly class them as contingent. How is Quine to explain this difference in the modal reaction, if they are in the scientific archive, beyond the struggles of falsification and modification?

Quine admits that logic is 'built into translation more fully than other systematic departments of science. It is in the incidence of the obviousness that the difference lies . . .'.[14] It looks as if this is to be developed when he contrasts '1 + 1 = 2', which is 'obvious outright', with 'it is raining', which is 'obvious in particular circumstances'. But the point he apparently has in mind is just that 'every logical truth is obvious, actually or potentially: each, that is to say, is either obvious as it stands or can be reached from obvious truths by a sequence of individually obvious steps'.[15] This is the extension referred to above. But it is not at all clear how it relates to the incidence of the obviousness. And in any event, in a well-developed theoretical science, obviousness can similarly transmit from obvious data through obvious principles of interpretation and explanation, to bring hitherto unobvious conclusions into the fold. There is no diagnosis of our different reactions to '1 + 1 = 2' and 'there exist trees and rocks' here.

Quine's first thought about the contrast was the best: it is indeed in the incidence of the obviousness that the difference lies: 'it is raining' is obvious *only* in particular circumstances; '1 + 1 = 2' is 'obvious outright'. But 'obvious in particular circumstances' versus 'obvious outright' is a dangerously suggestive contrast: not far from 'assertible only in the light of particular experience' versus 'assertible by conceptual means alone', or *a posteriori* versus *a priori*. If the best theory of the incidence of the obviousness is that in the one case but not the other it varies with particular *contingencies*, we are left with our judgement that the truth of the one does so vary, and the truth of the other does not. This once more is what common sense would say: 'there are trees' is obvious in the light of something that, we know, could have been otherwise; not so '1 + 1 = 2'. Another way of putting it is that common sense allows that recalcitrant experience is *possible* in the one case but not the other: we could tell a story in which it came to appear to us as if there were not trees, but not

14. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, p. 82.
15. Ibid., pp. 82–83.

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one in which 1 + 1 is anything other than 2. But Quine cannot appeal to entrenched modal intuitions to explain the division within the obvious.

The problem, remember, is that Quine is to *explain* our modal tendencies before dismissing or sanitizing them—showing that nothing in the making of them licenses epistemology to draw any grander distinction than his. He is therefore quite within his rights to call upon his list of theoretical defects here. Perhaps it is because we are in the grip of mythical theories of ideas, or molecular theories of meaning, or use-mention confusion, that we distinguish between equally certain or obvious judgements, identically remote from the threat of overthrow: there being trees and 1 + 1 being 2. But is it clear from a naturalist perspective that *only* a defect is involved—that there is no legitimate point and purpose in the distinction, within the overall class of certainties, between those that are necessary and those are are contingent? Surely not, and a better explanation of our propensities is easy to produce. Let us consider the matter from the opposite point of view. It is usually necessity that is the bugbear, but if we suppose that it is the distinction between the necessary and the contingent that requires understanding, we also can ask what we miss if we lack the capacity to deem propositions contingent. This direction of approach must be equally legitimate. In fact, I suspect there is some evidence that contingency needs more explanation to children than necessity: the initial tendency is to take everything that is so as having to be so. Suppose someone who is modally blind in this way: he sees no point or purpose in accepting any notion of *contingency*. Running the metaphysics and the epistemology in tandem, we can suppose that epistemologically he can make nothing of the idea that a particular judgement is *a posteriori*.[16] So he can make nothing of the idea that although there are trees there might not have been, nor that there being trees is obvious only in the light of particular experience, so that if the experience were different (or had been different), as it might be, the opposite judgement would have seemed right.

What does he miss? The case is still underspecified. This person may, perhaps like Leibniz or Spinoza, have a background theory that all apparent contingency is disguised necessity. In that case, in the marketplace, or talking with the vulgar, he could use a perfectly good surrogate for contingency—perhaps one that he may regard as suited for finite beings. Or perhaps he is like the Cautious Man, and claims to find some kind of hubris in expressing verdicts in modal language, although he makes the same distinctions and the same use of them (for instance, in distinguishing valid from invalid proofs, or reflecting on alternative possibilities) that we do. This is theoretical or philo-

16. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the distinction between necessity and *a prioricity*, where the one is thought as logical or metaphysical, and the other as epistemological. I believe that an 'attitude'-based theory of necessity is able to explain Kripkean intuitions about the distinction, although the story is not altogether straightforward. The difficult phenomenon to explain would be the alleged conferring of necessity upon truths that were clearly arrived at *a posteriori*. But it should be all right that, after we have discovered something ('water is H_2O') we should 'archive it' at least for *some* purposes: we do not of course regard such things as truths of logic, nor can we 'make nothing of' the thought processes of one who would deny them.

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sophical scepticism, and, like its counterparts elsewhere, is supposed to co-exist with normal living. Such theorists draw the same distinctions as the rest of us, except that when they think such things as that there might not have been trees, they will (as it were) preface their assent with a universal qualification: contingency becomes some species of *apparent* contingency, or not the real thing. This is scepticism, or perhaps idealism, about modality, and not what I intend. I want instead someone who does not even recognize the need for a reinterpretation, for he cannot begin by recognizing even apparent contingency as such.

It seems plain that blindness to the *a posteriori* status of propositions is catastrophic. To such a person, failure to realize that it is raining here now is *like* failure to realize that $1 + 1 = 2$, an incomprehensible defect. He is unable to make anything of a mode of thinking in which it is not realized that p, when p is true, in just the way that we are unable to when p represents an elementary necessity. But what does he make of (for instance) sleep, of blindness, of his own need for telephone directories or testimony, or of the difference that different spatial and temporal position causes to his own information gathering? How does he think of his own failures of omniscience or conceive of his own changes of knowledge as he goes about the world? There seems no way of answering these questions without stripping the subject of massive quantities of ordinary, nonmodal, *empirical* understanding—simple understanding about the variation of belief with circumstance. It would be possible to fill out the way in which the deficiency disqualifies him from interpreting others reliably: he cannot rationalize them, seeing why various beliefs seem right to them because he has no way of seeing how belief varies with point of view, with use of the senses, with skill or luck. But ignorance of these things in this context is just a *species* of ignorance of the way one thing varies with another. The person who cannot understand how the cat's awareness of the bird varies with whether it can see it seems little better than one who cannot understand how the leaf's motion varies with the wind.

Conversely, if the subject has this understanding, he is in a position at least to *imitate* modal discriminations. Crucially, he can do better than Quine suggests in making distinctions within the class of the obvious. He can make something of a way of thought in which it is not realized that there are trees, just as he can make something of a way of thought in which it is not appreciated that it is raining here now. Long-term confinement to treeless zones is a kind of position he can understand, and whose impact upon a belief system he could appreciate. He can say something *better* about 'it is raining here now' and '$1 + 1 = 2$' than that they are equally obvious. He can say something of what makes the former obvious, and describe people to whom it would not be obvious; he can appreciate how there could be, or make something of, a way of describing the world in which it is denied. Suppose he is set our task of discriminating, among obvious truths, between those which are intuitively necessary and those which are contingent; then he can at least approximate to our division, by simply classing as contingent those which satisfy this condition: he can make something of ways of thought in which, for various reasons,

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they are either not accepted or are even denied. Here 'make something of' will include being able to explain how such a way of thought might arise, knowing how it might be rectified, understanding the practices of those whose thought it is, and so on. This will give the subject a sense of what would count as recalcitrant experience, and what would have counted as such, even for entrenched, obvious, but contingent, certainties. And, given that there is a residual class of apparent beliefs where he cannot do this, he will have a working substitute for the necessary and the impossible.

The upshot is that blindness to the *a posteriori* character of beliefs seems impossible in subjects who have virtually any comprehension of the world. Now naturalized epistemology is largely a study of the variation of belief with circumstance. It can be done by us only when we can make something of the variation of belief involved. In some cases we can; in residual cases such as logic and mathematics we characteristically cannot. This difference can be used naturalistically to explain our tendency to make modal divisions, and it gives the explanation that Quine left himself without.

Is it an explanation that can be taken over by Quine? I believe so. Quine has no reason to oppose our discrimination of contingency; it is the remainder he dislikes. So his best path would be to accept the explanation of our propensity to modalize, but to warn us against making too much of the imaginative differences it cites. This would be to join forces with Wright's Cautious Man: our imaginative limitations are facts about us; they may gain expression in our modalizing and explain our discriminations, but they ought not to be taken as any guide to what is necessarily the case.

V. Refining Imagination

The players, then, seem to align themselves into two teams. Both admit the existence and centrality of imaginative blocks—of the fact that there are propositions of whose falsity we can make nothing. The one side, encompassing Craig, Wright, this new Quine, Forbes, and probably most others, finds something distinctive about the Cautious Man, who goes this far, but refuses to modalize. Quine recommends his modesty; Forbes thinks it would be a mistake to project imaginative limitations. Craig does not go quite so far. He indeed thinks there is a further step if we take our imaginative limitations as guides to what must be the case, namely the step of supposing that the world is transparent to our intelligence. He points out that in particular philosophical climates the belief that the world is thus transparent, or the goal of making it thus transparent, may be much more appealing than in others. In particular in the twentieth-century pragmatic climate that Quine inhabits, this belief is less prominent: it becomes enough that theory should enable us to 'anticipate and control perceivable events', and genuine intelligibility is no longer a first priority.[17] In modalizing we are being Incautious, and even if Craig finds much

17. Craig, 'Arithmetic and Fact', p. 92.

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to admire in the old ideology that prompted us to be so, the sense remains that sobriety requires the more Quinean attitude. This side then thinks that the Cautious Man is distinctive in not modalizing. Either he does not possess a set of concepts that we, somewhat unaccountably, do, or he exercises proper caution in not making judgements with them.

The other side, where I feel rather isolated, queries the central doctrine of these thinkers. When we understand what the Cautious Man lacks, we shall be pleased that we have it. The central doctrine of the other team is, in Craig's words, that 'we should not infer any absolute impossibility from the limitations of our own imaginations.[18] With modifications, I suggest that there is a quite proper move or inference here; that what looks like intellectual hubris is in fact not so. The shared doctrine of the other team is that there is a chasm which the Cautious Man is admirable for not crossing. My claim is that it is only in the shadows cast by illicit hankering after a realistic, truth-conditional account of modalizing that the crossing seems so dangerous.

Craig thinks that there might be two sources for the idea that the crossing can be made. One is that meanings are sufficiently transparent to our minds, that we can know just by introspection that what we mean by some sentence can never come out false. As he rightly says, nobody can succumb to that with a clear conscience these days. The other is the assumption that our mental powers are perfectly in tune with reality, and as he again rightly says, that can only be credible within a specific philosophical climate. My source is different: I am sceptical about the assumption that we know what we mean by 'absolute necessity', or the real distribution of possibilities, in a way that allows us to contrast them wholesale with the blocks that our only ways of thinking meet. I am sceptical because I detect the influence of realism at just this point.

This scepticism will, I hope, appear less extravagant if we remember the other, easier, fields on which projectivism + quasi realism fought. The equivalent of the Craig-Wright-Quine team over morals would say: 'we should not infer any ["absolute"] obligations from the direction of our own sentiments' (for example). The equivalent of the Cautious Man would be someone who, while conducting his practical reasoning in every respect as the rest of us do, eschews the 'inference' to the proposition that we have, for instance, an obligation to our children. He can make the same deprecatory remarks about our right to think ourselves in tune with metaphysical moral reality. He can even cite theological and philosophical climates in which this pride would have seemed natural, but which no longer obtain. My reaction is that he has mistaken the nature of the judgement: by thinking of it as 'made true' by some possibly alien state of affairs he has made his scepticism inevitable; by seeing the proper function of the proposition we avoid it. On a realist account, his caution is correct, as is his refusal to moralize. But as it is he is actually missing nothing (as I put it in essay 8, 'shmoralizing'—conducting practical reasoning properly without a realistic backdrop—is just moralizing). Again, the colour case provides an easier but slightly more distant analogy: we would be wrong

18. 'Arithmetic and Fact', p. 110.

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to be cautious over whether using our eyes tunes us to the real divisions and distributions of colours, because our only concept of the reality of those divisions comes from proper use of our eyes.

However, the other team has another weapon, again wielded powerfully by Craig. Following the passage agreeing with Wright that it is a 'tendentious step' to inflate our imaginative limitations into a metaphysical discovery, Craig writes:

> It certainly is a further step. In the first place, it is clear that there is a group of possibilities which no argument from premisses about what we can and can't imagine could ever rule out. We might, for instance, come to be able to imagine what we can't now imagine, there may be other beings who can imagine what we can't and never will be able to imagine, and so on. . . . [I]f we close our minds to these possibilities then we make assumptions about our present imaginative capacities for which we have no warrant.[19]

To address this, we need to make distinctions within the class of the 'unimaginable'. I wrote above of propositions whose truth we cannot imagine in the sense that we could make nothing of ways of thought in which they are asserted. Now this is to be taken fairly strictly, and so taken it does not quite correspond to 'unimaginable' on an untutored reading. Suppose, for instance, I announce that I am able to show you a new primary colour, quite distinct from any mixture or shade of previous colours. You may doubt me, and you would certainly be unable to imagine what I was going to show you, if my claim is true. You might even express yourself by saying that it is impossible. but you would be unwise to have much confidence in this claim, for in some sense you can 'make something of' the possibility that I am going to do what I said. It is not as if I had said I would show you a circle with straight sides, or a true contradiction.

Let us distinguish a proposition's being 'unimaginable', in the sense that we cannot present to ourselves a sense of what it is like to experience it as true, from its being 'inconceivable', where this involves the kind of block just indicated, in which we can do nothing with the thought of its truth. It is frequently pointed out that unimaginability is a poor symptom of inconceivability, and this is correct. The cases one would adduce include these: the extra colour, the existence of infinite totalities, the bounded and shaped nature of space or time, the existence of extra dimensions, perhaps the operation of backward causation. Then there is the unimaginability of entities like the self, or of the will, and in some frames of mind, we cannot imagine the possibility even of rule-following, intentionality, and so on. The lack of fit works the other way round as well—propositions might be properly classed as impossible, although the imagination freely allows them: notoriously, the alleged possibility that I might have been Napoleon, or that Fermat's theorem might be true (or false), one of which is imaginable, although impossible.

19. 'Arithmetic and Fact', p. 90.

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Our imaginative powers change and develop. The child cannot imagine the beliefs of the adult; those unacquainted with them cannot imagine the taste of claret or the work of Rembrandt. These conditions can be altered, which immediately gives us a sense of potential ways in which our own imaginations are partial. Our experience is limited, and our imaginations not much better. Just as people of limited experience have impoverished imaginations compared with us, so we must accept that there are many things of various kinds which we cannot now imagine—tastes, smells, insights, and presumably truths. This, of course, accords well with Craig's caution: it is not just a modal sceptic, but all of us, who will beware of inferring impossibility from just any imaginative failure.

Using unimaginability as a good indication of impossibility is also a mistake because it depends upon too simple a notion of the relation between experience and thought. It asks, as it were, that we should be able to see any truth in a single picture. So, for instance, if we want to think of a theoretical notion, such as that of force acting at a distance, we try to visualize the process, and, failing, are apt to find the notion suspicious. We find it hard to accept that full intelligibility can be earned by a proper place in a theory, even if we cannot visualize the happenings of the processes. Consider, for another example, the shape of space. Children find it incredible to think that space has a shape, because they try to visualize it, or in other words imagine themselves *looking* at it, which is what we normally do to observe the shape of things, and the thought experiment collapses, for the observer cannot find a standpoint from which the whole of space can be observed. But using that failure as a reason for concluding that space must be infinite would be a mistake, for it would ignore other ways in which a shape of space might be certified—ways like those a man might use to find the shape of a container in which he is confined. If these procedures certify that only certain routes in space are possible, then the right conclusion may be that space is bounded and has a shape, and we can explain why the enterprise of trying to visualize it fails. Visualizing is a poor guide to states of affairs, because not all states of affairs reveal themselves in a picture. Similarly, things may be impossible although naive imagination allows them, because naive imagination does not tell us how to describe the scenes it recreates; this is why it is so dangerous to use imagination as a guide to the metaphysics of the self.

Here we have explanations of failures of imagination. And we can conceive of superior positions from which some of our imaginative limitations could analogously be explained. When we can do that, we will not take imaginative limitations as a guide to impossibility. Now Craig in particular notices all this. This is a difference, he writes, between the case of the extra colour or difficult intermediate cases like that of extra spatial dimensions, and full-blown cases like that of a deviant arithmetic: 'An explanation of our inability to imagine the arithmetically deviant along the lines that served for colour and spatial dimensions doesn't get started; so nothing checks our tendency to project our incapacity and suppose that reality just *couldn't be like*

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that'.[20] But Craig does not highlight the good use the projectivist can make of this difference.

Consider again the parallel with moral projectivism. We do not find it trivial to cross from a sentiment to a moral judgement. Only certain sentiments—those of a certain strength, or with certain objects, or those accompanied by sentiments about others who do not share them—form a jumping-off point. We are also conscious that there are doubtless flaws and failures in our sentiments, which are perhaps capable of explanation in the same way that we explain the defects of those who are worse than ourselves. But when the sentiments are strong and nothing on the cards explains them by the presence of defects, we go ahead and moralize. We may be aware that our opinion is fallible, but that is because we can do something with the thought of an improved perspective, even when we are fairly certain that one will not be found, and here as elsewhere commitment can coexist with knowledge that we may be wrong. The 'step' from a fully integrated sentiment of sufficient strength to the moral expression now becomes no step at all: the moral is just the vocabulary in which to express that state. Avoiding it would not be an exercise in modesty, but an impoverishing idiosyncracy of expression.

Why should it not be like this with logical necessity? We have arrived at the residual class of propositions of whose truth we can make nothing. We cannot see our failure to make anything of them as the result of a contingent limitation in our own experience, nor of a misapprehension making us think that their truth should be open to display in a way in which it need not be. We express ourselves by saying that they cannot be true—that their negations are necessary. There is the bare possibility of being shown wrong—perhaps our search into the causes of our imaginative block was inadequate, or perhaps we were under a misapprehension of what it might be for the proposition to be true. We may be uncomfortably aware of even great philosophers who mistakenly projected what turned out to be rectifiable limitations of imagination—the *a priori* has a bad history. But as Wright notices, we should have no wish to make ourselves infallible when deeming things *a priori*. We make the commitment in the light of the best we can do. There is no step, and no illusion.

VI. Naturalism and Quasi-Realism

On this account, part of what it is for us to make nothing of the truths that we deem impossible is that we cannot explain *naturalistically* our own failure to see what it would be for them to be true. When we can see how, if a proposition were true, we might nevertheless be in bad circumstances to appreciate how it might be, we release it from impossibility. It does not deserve ruling out any more. But we cannot see how, if contradictions were true or if $1 + 1 = 3$, we might be in bad circumstances to appreciate how it might be. We could

20. 'Arithmetic and Fact', p. 106.

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have not even a sketch of a natural story of the block we face, because we can make nothing of the starting point.

This provides a kind of Catch 22 in our attempts to theorize about the modal. If we can see our tendency to rule out *p* as the outcome of a contingent limitation, we are already making something of the thought that *p* might be true, but that if it were, nevertheless we would not appreciate it because of something or other. And this undermines any original commitment to its impossibility. When someone starts: 'if there were an extra colour then . . .' perhaps we can understand how it might be contingent limitations that make the hypothesis hard to contemplate—but if that is all there is to it, we lose any right to regard it as impossible. On the other hand, when someone says 'if 1 + 1 = 3 then . . .' and essays to show how, if this were true, we would be in a bad position to appreciate it, the thought experiment breaks down, for we cannot properly work through what is being supposed and how we might be in a world of which it is true. But this means that there is bound to be a residual 'surd': our incapacity to make anything of the thought that some propositions are true has to be resistant to natural explanation, if it remains a good candidate for modal commitment.

The fear of an inexplicable core motivates attempts, such as the positivists gave, to remove any content from necessary truths. But we have accepted that the dirty-hands argument shows that we will not explain this incapacity by invoking uncontaminated knowledge of meaning, concepts, rules. We now find that if *any* natural explanation of our imaginative block can be given, this attacks our right to make the commitment. I think that here we get an alternative, or perhaps supplementary, explanation to that offered by Craig, of the late twentieth-century opposition to the modal. It can arise not only from a changed conception of what theories need to do, but also from a conviction that nothing escapes naturalistic explanation.

When we have thoroughly tested the sense of a hypothesis and make nothing of it, this is, in Wright's words, how things are with us. As Craig says, if the quasi-experiment of working through how it would be if *p* is done on ourselves, now, and if our attempts to work with *p* being true fail, then 'for any logical guarantee we have, that may be as far as it goes'.[21] But it goes a little further, for in the light of what we have said, it will also be so that we cannot see the incapacity as *just* one we happen to be subject to; we cannot deem it a *mere* fact about ourselves, here, now. If we could see it in that light, then that itself would destroy the modal commitment. This is why there is something bogus in Kant's theory that it is the forms of inner and outer sense that determine our *a priori* commitments. This looks illuminating because it looks sufficiently parallel to the natural explanation we might give of the imaginative limitations we can accept as no indication of impossibility—the colour limitation, for example. But it is not really parallel, for if we can make nothing of the possibility of other forms of sense, the 'fact' that ours is one way or another is not intelligible as a genuine explanatory truth. Seeing it like

21. 'Arithmetic and Fact', p. 91.

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Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, 1993. p 71.
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that would require thinking the other side of the boundary: understanding how it might be, for instance, that although it is compulsory for us to use classical arithmetic, with a different cast of mind it might have been compulsory to use another arithmetic. And this we cannot do.

The residual surd marks a large asymmetry between the moral and the modal. In the case of moralizing, nothing stands in the way of a complete naturalistic story of what it is, why we do it, and, quasi-realistically, why we are right to do it. But the genesis of the way of thought is similar. The moralist insists upon obligations. He rules out those who flout them, refusing approval, ignoring contrary temptations, bending his actions to conform. The modalist insists upon necessities. He rules out ways of thought that flout them, refuses theories that involve them, bends his thoughts to conform. The moralist could just issue rules and penalties, but if he becomes self-conscious he needs the moral proposition to stand as a focus for discussion and reflection, and he contemplates its truth as a way of doing so. The self-conscious modalist needs the same. But the moralist can be quite completely aware of the genesis and justification of his activity, whereas if what we have just said is true, the modalist cannot be. In the case of the modal, the phenomenon is antinaturalistic at its core.

Or is this unduly pessimistic? Some relief might be got by teasing out more aspects of the core inability to 'make anything of' a way of thought that accepts a putative impossibility. Obviously, there are enterprises of thinking through what modifications in logic are possible or what would be missing in a way of thought that consistently tried to make $1 + 1 = 3$. The business, for instance, of thinking through how a science might be built around denial of double negation, or of the distributive laws of logic (from P and $Q \vee R$, infer $(P \& Q) \vee (P \& R)$) proceeds under the stimulus of constructivism, or of quantum mechanics, respectively. So it ought to be possible to hold both that these laws are necessarily true and that we *can* 'make something of' ways of thought that lead people to deny them. This is not a serious obstacle to the direction of this essay. What we do is take a proposed deviation and follow it until either the way of thought seems possible—and we no longer modalize against it—or it breaks down. But 'breaks down' will mean: offends against something that we suppose essential to any scheme of thought (such as some distinction of truth and falsity, some stability of content, some embargo on contradiction). Eventually we voice an inability to make anything of transgression against these norms: this is the surd that remains. If the thought processes of the deviants are eventually seen to break down, then we can get a deeper understanding of our own commitments: it is no longer so that we face an entirely blank wall when we try to explain our own attachment to these laws. This reveals the genuine scope for explanatory work, and it may do a little to moderate the antinaturalistic pessimism. We can certainly hope to show why a way of thought that is committed (say) to noncontradiction, or to supposing that not all propositions are true, or to other elementary necessities, is also committed (say) to '$1 + 1 = 2$', since we can hope to prove (relying, inevitably, on moves that we find inescapable) that if they are necessary, then so is

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this. This would give a complete bill of health to the modal if, as the positivists hoped, the propositions finally bearing the burden were free of genuine content, or owed their truth to some naturalistically explicable fact about us—a decision or convention, for instance. But these escapes no longer appear, and in default of a leap outside the system of necessities, the final surd seems set to remain.

Addendum

In this essay I do not press an argument against Lewis's modal realism that I did express in *Spreading the Word;* this argument nevertheless hovers in the background. This argument is that, as well as problems of saying how we get as far as possible worlds, the realist has a problem of getting us back from them: when we use a counterfactual, for instance, in pursuit of a concern with the actual world, why should we be interested if things are thus and so in a neighbouring world, or in all neighbouring worlds? It sounds like a change of subject. This argument was assailed by Bob Hale in his review ('The Compleat Projectivist', *Philosophical Quarterly* 1986). Hale in effect plays the equation between 'this wire might have been live' and 'there is a possible world in which this wire is live' backwards, pointing out that since we have excellent reason to be interested in the former, and since according to the modal realist the latter means the same, we have excellent reason to be interested in the latter.

This mistakes the nature of the problem. My concern, as usual, was explanation, and the point is that a realist construction of the neighbouring-possible-world proposition plays absolutely no role in explaining why we should be interested in the 'might have been' proposition with which it is identified. If anything, it seems to make such an interest strange or even inexplicable. It is no good replying that we are after all interested in the 'might' proposition, so we can expect the possible-world proposition to inherit that interest: the point is that the interest is not explained, and becomes harder to explain, if we give each of the claims other-worldly truth conditions. There is an immaculate treatment of this by the late Ian McFetridge in the collection of his papers, *Logical Necessity* (London: Aristotelian Society Monographs, 1990), pp. 144–46. McFetridge also correctly breaks the alleged parallel with Kripke's notorious argument against Lewis's counterpart theory.

Another puzzle with modal realism that I do not develop is that the realism seems to take the modality out. 'Necessarily $2 + 2 = 4$' and '$2 + 2 = 4$ *everywhere*' do not mean the same. But, says the realist, what if 'everywhere' means 'in all possible worlds'? The question is ambiguous. If the collection of all possible worlds were given extensionally (w_1, w_2 . . .), then again the identity would be lost: someone might think that $2 + 2 = 4$ in all those worlds, without thinking of 'all those worlds' as exhausting the possible worlds. If the totality were given under some other heading than modality, the modal content would be lost. It is only if the collection is given *under the heading* of

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modality that the two mean the same, but we are not any further in understanding what it is to think of a set of worlds under that heading. This is no objection to using possible-worlds talk, but it shows that the idea that when we do so we refer to real things just like the actual world provides no explanation of the nature of modal commitment.

It is natural to worry whether the use of the idea of an imaginative block is a fig leaf, disguising what must ultimately be thought of in more conventionalist terms, as for example adherence to a rule of language. In a way, and for the purposes of this essay, I do not mind very much whether this is so (it would matter much more to Craig, whose campaign has been directly concerned with refuting conventionalism). In the last few lines of the essay I do indeed express pessimism for the prospects of *any* theory of why we face the blocks we do when we set about thinking in terms of impossibilities. But for my purpose it is more important that this block is identified and properly located as the source of our propensity to modalize.

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