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Imaginability and Possibility

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Abstract. Recently there is a heated discussion on the puzzle of imaginative resistance, i.e. the puzzle of why it is difficult to imagine certain counterfactual scenarios. After examining Brian Weatherson's "In-Virtue-Of Hypothesis", I put forward an alternative hypothesis that all and only conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable. I argue that my account has some theoretical advantages over the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis. I consider some challenges to my hypothesis and then attempt to show that those objections are unsuccessful.

1 Introduction

Recently, there are a lot of discussions and debates centering around "the puzzle of imaginative resistance" (or "the imaginative puzzle", in short), i.e. the puzzle of why it is difficult to imagine certain counterfactual scenarios. Generally speaking, there are two central issues regarding the imaginative puzzle. The first is concerned with the characterization of the puzzle. The second is concerned with the explanation of the puzzle. When examining the two issues, people are always attracted by the relationship between imaginability and possibility.

In this article, I put forward a tentative hypothesis that all and only conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable. The goal of my paper is to consider some challenges to this hypothesis and give my responses to them. I will show that those objections don't succeed. But how to offer a positive argument for this hypothesis could be an essay on another occasion.

Except section 1, my paper is divided into five sections. In Section 2, I discuss the characterizations of imagination and compare different formulations of the imaginative puzzle. In Sections 3–4, I examine Brian Weatherson's "In-Virtue-Of Hypothesis", and then come up with my own hypothesis. I argue that my account has some theoretical advantages over the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis. In Section 5, I consider Tamar Gendler's refutation of the thesis that *all* conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable, and demonstrate that her refutation doesn't work. In Section 6, I discuss some challenges to the view that *only* conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable, and argue that these objections are unsuccessful.

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2 The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance

Before I introduce the puzzle of imaginative resistance, I want to give some characterizations of imagination as a cognitive capacity. First, the exercises of imagination exhibit intentionality. That is, imagination must be about something: objects, events, or states of affairs.

Second, imagination involves the entertaining of thoughts that are neither affirmed nor denied. This is different from belief. When you believe that there is a tree, your belief involves an affirmation that there is a tree. By contrast, when you are merely imagining that there is a tree, you will neither affirm that there is a tree nor deny that.

Third, imagination doesn't necessarily imply mental imagery. Mental imagery is involved only in some cases of imagination. For example, when you are asked to imagine a tree, you will form an image of a tree. But this is not always the case. For instance, suppose I invite you to imagine that gene is not DNA. Your imagination of the counterfactual state of affairs doesn't necessarily involve mental imagery.

Fourth, imagination is neither too abstract nor too specific. ([5], pp. 19–20) One can *understand* what the word "tree" means without representing a tree as being a specific kind of tree, but imagination cannot be so abstract. Consider your imagination of a tree. It must be a specific kind of tree: a willow tree, a maple tree, or a pine tree, etc. On the other hand, imagination doesn't have to be very specific. While a tree *perceived* must be flourishing or withered, your imagination of a tree need not have any of these specific traits.

All of these characterizations come from common sense and they are open to revision. Some of them may be just inappropriate and should be abandoned; or perhaps more characterizations should be added to the list. Nevertheless, the list above suffices to give us a starting point.

Originally, the imaginative puzzle arises from morally deviant cases. Kendall Walton gives some famous examples. For instance, it is hard to imagine that "in killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl". ([4], p. 37) It is also hard to imagine that "the village elders did their moral duty by forcing the widow onto her husband's funeral pyre". ([4], p. 37) It seems that we would encounter some impediments when we are asked to imagine moral judgments that we think are deeply false. Comparatively speaking, we might easily imagine that time travel occurs, that golden mountain exists, or that a snowman can sing a beautiful song. According to some philosophers, the puzzle of imaginative resistance is *equivalent* to "the puzzle of explaining our comparative difficulty in imagining fictional worlds that we take to be morally deviant". ([2], p. 3)

But this characterization of the puzzle seems to be too narrow; the range of the puzzle should be much broader. Here is a really dumb joke mentioned by Walton: "Knock, Knock. Who's there? Robin. Robin who? Robbin' you! Stick' em up!"

([4], p. 43) We might find it really hard to imagine that this joke is *funny*. Another example. Let's try to imagine that alchemy is *good* science. Isn't it also hard? Maybe we can imagine that someone regards alchemy as good science. But that's different.

As Walton points out, the puzzle arises not only in connection with moral concepts. Rather, the puzzle can be connected with any *normative* concept such as "funny" and "good". As a result, the puzzle of imaginative resistance should be characterized more appropriately as the puzzle of explaining our difficulty in imagining fictional worlds that we take to be normatively deviant. This characterization strikes us as making a demarcation between normative concepts and non-normative concepts. It tells us that the puzzle only arises from cases concerning normative concepts.

However, is there indeed any significant difference between normative concepts and non-normative concepts as far as the imaginative puzzle is concerned? According to some philosophers (such as Weatherson), the imaginative puzzle can arise in some scenarios involving the use of non-normative concepts. For example, attributions of mental states can be imaginatively puzzling. Consider Weatherson's retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*. Suppose Romeo treats Juliet exactly in the same way as he does in the original story. But the end of the new story is: "Although he believed he loved Juliet, and acted as if he did, Romeo did not really love Juliet, and actually wanted to humiliate her by getting her to betray her family." ([5], p. 4) According to Weatherson, "given the full details of the story, it is impossible to imagine that Romeo mistakenly thought he had the attitudes towards Juliet he is traditionally thought to have." ([5], p. 4)

Attributions of linguistic meaning can also be imaginatively puzzling. Here is another story Weatherson tells. Suppose some aliens use the word "cat" in all the circumstances when we would, and the word "dog" in all the circumstances we would. It is very hard to imagine that in their language, "cat" means dog and "dog" means cat. ([5], p. 4) There are even more cases. Certain shape predicates can generate imaginative resistance. For instance, it is pretty hard to imagine a five-fingered leaf to be oval. ([6], p. 485) Moreover, statements involving constitution could be imaginatively puzzling. For example, we have difficulty imagining that a television looks exactly like a knife.([5], p. 5)

From these examples, it is safe to say that there is no difference between normative concepts and non-normative concepts as far as the puzzle is concerned. Philosophers provide different explanations of imaginative resistance in all of the cases (normative and non-normative). I will discuss this issue in the next section.

3 The In-Virtue-Of Hypothesis

Weatherson raises a hypothesis by which he intends to explain all of the puzzles

above. Let's call it the *In-Virtue-Of hypothesis*.[1] We can formulate the hypothesis in the following way:

> Higher-level facts hold in virtue of more fundamental or lower-level facts. The puzzles arise when we try to imagine scenarios where the in-virtue-of relations are violated.

In what sense do higher-level facts hold in virtue of lower-level facts? Let's consider some examples. The fact that "cat" means cat in English should be regarded as a higher-level fact. It must hold in virtue of further facts, say, the fact that English speakers use the word in such and such a particular way. The fact that a leaf is oval is also a higher-level fact, which holds in virtue of other facts, such as the fact that the leaf is shaped so and so. At first sight, the in-virtue-of relation is similar to the supervenience relationship. For example, Weatherson claims:

> "There can be no difference in whether the concept CHAIR applies without a difference in the underlying facts." ([5], p. 22)

However, on closer examinations, the in-virtue-of relation is different from supervenience in several ways.

First, while supervenience can be reflexive, the in-virtue-of relation is not.A's supervening on B is compatible with B's supervening on A. But if A holds in virtue of B, it is not the case that B holds in virtue of A.

Second, unlike supervenience, the in-virtue-of relation excludes identity. Something can supervene on itself, but it doesn't make sense to say that A holds in virtue of A. As Weatherson says, "whether x is good supervenes on whether it is good, but it is not good in virtue of being good." ([5], p. 16)

Third, and what's more important, the in-virtue-of relation is a relationship of single realization, whereas supervenience allows multiple realization. If a fact A obtains in virtue of another fact B's obtaining, two conditions should be satisfied:

(C_1) if A holds, then B must hold.
(C_2) if B holds, then A must hold.

By contrast, according to the standard formulation of supervenience, A supervenes upon B just in case there cannot be an A-difference without a B-difference — that is, supervenience only requires the truth of (C_2).

Thus, the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis can explain the imaginative puzzles in the following two ways that appeal to (C_1) and (C_2) respectively:

[1] It is worth noting that Weatherson himself mainly uses the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis to explain his so-called "alethic puzzle". ([5]) But he also holds that this hypothesis can be used to explain the imaginative puzzle in a similar way. Since I won't discuss the alethic puzzle in my paper, I will only focus on whether the hypothesis can explain the imaginative puzzle.

C_1-*explanation* : Suppose a higher-level fact F_H must hold in virtue of a lower-level fact F_L. It follows that, if F_H holds, then F_L must hold. Therefore, we cannot imagine that F_H obtains without F_L's obtaining.

C_2-*explanation* : Suppose a higher-level fact F_H must hold in virtue of a lower-level fact F_L. It follows that, if F_L holds, then F_H must hold. Therefore, we cannot imagine that F_L obtains without F_L's obtaining.

(C_1) can help explain some cases of the imaginative puzzle, such as the puzzle concerning constitution. If an item of furniture is a television, this must be in virtue of its filling a certain functional role. That is, if the higher-level fact that an item is a television holds, then the lower-level fact that it plays such and such a functional role must hold as well. But being indistinguishable from an ordinary knife probably precludes it from playing the functional role of a television. Thus, it is impossible to imagine that an item is a television but it is indistinguishable from an ordinary knife. It is worth noticing that this kind of cases cannot be explained by television holds, then the lower-level fact that it plays such and such a functional role must hold as well. But being indistinguishable from an ordinary knife probably precludes it from playing the functional role of a television. Thus, it is impossible to imagine that an item is a television but it is indistinguishable from an ordinary knife. It is worth noticing that this kind of cases cannot be explained by (C_2) (or supervenience).

On the other hand, (C_2) can help explain other cases of the imaginative puzzle that (C_1) fails to explain. In the example of linguistic meaning, we already know that "cat" means cat (or "dog" means dog) in English in virtue of a pattern of usage of the word by English speakers. So, if some aliens use the words "cat" and "dog" in the same way as English speakers do. It is impossible that in their language, "cat" means dog and "dog" means cat. Therefore, it is hard to imagine what kind of situation that would be. Moreover, (C_2) promises to explain imaginative resistance in normatively deviant cases. For example, Giselda's action is morally wrong in virtue of the natural fact that she is killing a baby. On this hypothesis, it is thus hard to imagine a possible scenario in which an action that has the exactly same natural properties is morally right.

4 The Conceptual Impossibility Hypothesis

In this section, I will compare my conceptual impossibility hypothesis with the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis and then highlight some theoretical advantages that my theory has over the competing approach. Here I'd like to emphasize that the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis is faced with two problems. First, this hypothesis is not powerful enough; it cannot explain some cases of imaginative resistance. Consider the following three statements:

(1) $2 + 3 \neq 5$.

(2) p & $-p$ can be true.

(3) Aristotle is not self-identical with himself.

It seems that none of the three statements is imaginable. But how can we explain the unimaginability of them by appeal to the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis? Weatherson does offer an explanation of the imaginative puzzle regarding (1) by appeal to his theory. According to him, "it is not primitive that various sums take the values they take". ([5], p. 25) Hence, (1) does not express a primitive fact. Rather, the sum of 2 and 3 is what it is in virtue of the relations between 2, 3 and 5. We cannot think about 2, 3, 5, and addition without thinking about those more primitive relations. ([5], p. 26) Therefore, we cannot imagine that $2 + 3 \neq 5$.

But even if Weatherson is right in explaining the imaginative puzzles concerning mathematical facts, his theory has difficulty explaining the puzzles involving (2) or (3). The facts regarding non-contradiction and self-identity are primitive facts. We simply cannot imagine that they fail to obtain. This is not because some in-virtue-of relations are violated. It is neither a case in which we cannot imagine that F_H obtains without F_L's obtaining, nor a case in which we cannot imagine that F_L obtains without F_H's obtaining.

In order to solve this problem, I think we need a more general hypothesis. Now let me put forward an alternative hypothesis:

(H) All and only conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable.

What is conceptual possibility? Here I want to borrow Yablo's characterization of conceptual possibility. According to Yablo,

> "It is conceptually possible that S iff some world ω is such that it would have turned out that S, had ω turned out to be actual." ([6], p. 454)

Hence, it is conceptually impossible that S iff no world ω is such that it would have turned out that S, had ω turned out to be actual.

Some may wonder what the relation between conceptual impossibility and logical impossibility is. In my terminology, logical impossibilities are a subset of conceptual impossibilities. P is logically impossible in a narrow sense just in case P is ruled out by logical principles alone. For example, the proposition that bachelors are not bachelors is a logical impossibility (and hence a conceptual impossibility). In contrast, the proposition that bachelors are not unmarried men is not a logical impossibility in the narrow sense, but only a conceptual impossibility. For logic principles alone cannot rule out the proposition that bachelors are not unmarried men; in order to rule out this proposition, we must also rely on the semantic truth that the term "bachelors" and the term "unmarried men" have the same meaning. The distinction between logical impossibility and conceptual impossibility, nevertheless, has no bearing on the main thesis of this article.

The above three statements (1)–(3) are all conceptually impossible. My hypothesis explains why they are unimaginable. Moreover, the puzzles that can be explained by the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis can also be explained by the hypothesis (H). For instance, according to our definition of television, if an item of furniture is a television, this must be in virtue of its filling a certain functional role (such as the role of playing movie and music). An ordinary knife is characterized in terms of a different functional role (such as the role of cutting). An item's being indistinguishable from an ordinary knife conceptually precludes it from playing the functional role of a television. Since it is conceptually impossible that the functional role of a television is equivalent to the functional role of an ordinary knife, it is unimaginable that an item indistinguishable from an ordinary knife is a television.

Similarly, there is some conceptual connection between the fact that "cat" means cat in English and the fact that English speakers use the word in such and such a particular pattern. It is conceptually impossible that the former fact obtains without the obtaining of the latter fact. Therefore, it is unimaginable that the aliens use "cat" to mean dog and "dog" to mean cat if they use the words in the same way as English speakers do.

The second problem with the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis is that the hypothesis fails to explain why we can imagine some metaphysically impossible cases in which the in-virtue-of relation is violated. Suppose, for example, that someone is in pain in virtue of her physical state C-fiber firing. It is thus metaphysically impossible that a creature who instantiates C-fiber firing is not in pain. But it seems obvious that we can imagine a scenario in which a creature instantiating C-fiber firing doesn't feel painful.

This objection to the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis also applies to Walton's theory. According to him, the reason why we cannot imagine normatively deviant cases is that supervenience is violated in such cases. Walton puts it this way,

> "What is crucial, I believe, is that being funny of not funny supervenes or depends in a certain way on the 'natural' characteristics of what is or isn't funny (the words of a joke and their meanings, the background and context, the joke teller's delivery); 'natural' characteristics determine what is funny and what is not." ([4], p. 43)

He also says,

> "What seems to me to be important is a very particular kind of imaginative inability, one that attaches to propositions expressing certain sorts of supervenience relations, which the imaginer rejects." ([3], p. 13)

However, this view is as problematic as the In-Virtue-Of hypothesis. It seems that we can imagine a lot of metaphysical impossibilities in which supervenience is violated. For instance, we can imagine that a snowman is singing a song, or that a frog

turns into a prince. In contrast, my theory (H) can accommodate the imaginability of metaphysically impossible scenarios. Though a scenario is metaphysically impossible, this scenario may be conceptually possible. Suppose that pain is in fact realized by C-fiber firing. That is, in every possible world in which a creature instantiates C-fiber firing, the creature is in pain. But it is conceptually possible that pain is not realized by C-fiber firing. Thus, it may be imaginable that a creature who instantiates C-fiber firing is not in pain.

5 Are All Conceptual Impossibilities Unimaginable?

(H) can be divided into two parts:

(H_1) All conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable.
(H_2) Only conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable.

Both of the two parts invite some criticisms. I will discuss them in the current section and the next section, respectively.

Here let's examine the first part of my hypothesis. Are all conceptual impossibilities unimaginable? Some philosophers, such as Gendler, contend that there are imaginable conceptual impossibilities. There may be other possible criticisms of (H_1) than Gendler's. But Gendler's criticism is the most influential challenge. Thus, I won't examine other criticisms and rather focus on this objection in this paper.

A famous story containing imaginable conceptual impossibilities provided by Gendler is "The Tower of Goldbach". In this story, it is supposed that three assumed conceptual impossibilities turn out to be imaginable. ([2], p. 66) They are:

(a) twelve is not the sum of five and seven.
(b) twelve used to be the sum of five and seven, but is no longer the sum of five and seven.
(c) twelve both is and is not the sum of five and seven.

The main idea of the story is as follows. Long long ago, every even number is the sum of two primes. Through labored efforts, some mathematicians discover the fact. God was angry that the mathematicians have unlocked the secret of nature. He decided that twelve would be no longer the sum of two primes. The distraught mathematicians beseeched God to make twelve once again the sum of two primes on the condition that they can find twelve persons among them who are still faithful to God. The mathematicians found seven righteous persons in one town, and five in another town. But since twelve was no longer the sum of two primes, they could not bring the persons together to make twelve. God felt pity for the mathematicians. He asked Solomon for help. Solomon's resolution of this dispute is: twelve both is and is not the sum of five and seven. ([2], pp. 67–68)

According to Gendler, though we do not believe in the three propositions above,

we could imagine them when we follow the story. However, it is controversial to say that there is *imagination* involved when we read this story. In my view, Gendler seems to confuse imagination with other mental states. First, Gendler may confuse imagination with *understanding*. Although, for example, the proposition (a) that twelve is not the sum of five and seven is conceptually impossible, we could understand what (a) means. A conceptually impossible proposition is still a meaningful proposition. This is why we could understand the semantic contents of conceptually impossible propositions. But imagination is different from understanding. We can understand a lot of things that we cannot imagine. Philosophers generally agree that it is unimaginable, for example, that a five-fingered leaf is oval, or that a television looks exactly like a knife. They don't deny that we surely can understand these propositions. It is one thing to say that one can understand the meaning of a conceptually impossible proposition, and quite the other to say that one can imagine the truth of a conceptually impossible proposition.

Second, Gendler may confuse imaginability with prima facie conceivability. How can we imagine the scenario in which 7 pious mathematicians in one town and 5 pious mathematicians in another town don't make 12? Gendler told us that if we focus our attention on certain aspects of the things, then we will imagine them. ([2], p. 68) She puts it this way,

> "When we imagine the things that, on reflection, we realize to be conceptually impossible, we imagine them in ways that disguise their conceptual impossibility." ([2], p. 69)

Genlder gives an example concerning the similarities between a banana and a gun.

> "When we pretend that a banana is a gun, we focus on certain similarities, such as shape, while ignoring others, such as internal complexity." ([2], p. 69)

Gendler's view of imagination here is pretty much like what David Chalmers has called "prima facie conceiving". According to Chalmers, an object is prima facie conceivable to a subject when it is conceivable for that subject on first appearance. Prima facie conceivability may be undermined by further reflection. By contrast, an object is ideally conceivable when it is conceivable on ideal rational reflection. Ideal conceivability can be characterized in terms of the capacities of an ideal agent-an-agent free of all contingent cognitive limitations. ([1], p. 147)

Gendler acknowledges that there is one such distinction. She admits that conceptual possibility is tracked by ideal conceivability rather than prima facie conceivability. But she contends that ideal conceivability is not the one we talk about in the issue of imaginative resistance. ([2], p. 69) However, I find that Gendler's view is mistaken. Prima facie conceivability is agent-relative. What is prima facie conceivable to me may not be prima facie conceivable to you. If imaginability is understood

in terms of prima facie conceivability, the issue of imaginative puzzle would be philosophically uninteresting. We can imagine in the prima facie sense a lot of things. But after ideal reflection, we may find that some scenarios are not truly imaginable. What matters is imaginability understood in terms of ideal conceivability. Thus, in order to provide some examples of imaginable conceptual impossibilities, Gendler needs to show that there are some conceptual impossibilities that are imaginable under ideal reflection. But Gendler hasn't provided such kind of cases. Therefore, her criticism of (H_1) is unsuccessful.

6 Are Only Conceptual Impossibilities Unimaginable?

In this section, we will examine the second part of our hypothesis. Is it really the case that only conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable? Some philosophers contend that although cases involving normatively deviant statements are unimaginable, there are no conceptual impossibilities involved. For instance, it is hard to imagine that "in killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl", or that "the village elders did their moral duty by forcing the widow onto her husband's funeral pyre". But those scenarios seem to be conceptually possible.

There are two ways to respond to this challenge. First, one might want to say that these cases involving normatively deviant statements are in fact imaginable. Second, one might reply that normatively deviant statements also involve conceptual impossibilities. Consider the first response. Some philosophers (such as Gendler) make a distinction between being *unable* to imagine a scenario and being *unwilling* to imagine a scenario. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the puzzle of imaginative resistance originally arises from some scenarios containing morally deviant statements. According to Gendler, in certain circumstances, people simply don't want to, or are unwilling to, imagine something, though they *can* imagine it.

Take the Giselda case as an example. We might construct a possible way in which people can imagine the scenario, but they don't want to. Consider the following fictional world. On a very small planet, there is limited resource. And the population is far beyond the threshold that the planet can sustain. Especially, there are too many female persons. Suppose there is no other way to preserve the planet unless female infanticide is permissible. Someone might think that in that world, in killing her baby on the ground of the baby's gender, Giselda is doing the right thing. Nevertheless, we don't want to imagine such circumstance, because we might feel uncomfortable in imagining it.

However, Gendler's view is open to question. Suppose that moral wrongness is realized by killing a baby girl in such and such circumstances C in the actual world. The question is whether it is imaginable that killing a baby girl *in the same circumstances* C is morally right. It is irrelevant whether we can imagine that killing a baby girl in *different* circumstances is right. Moreover, Gendler's approach cannot accom-

modate other normatively deviant scenarios that don't involve moral properties. For example, it is implausible to suggest that we are unwilling to imagine that a dumb joke could be funny in some possible scenarios.

The first response seems to be untenable. Let's turn to the second response. For the sake of argument, we can grant that it is unimaginable, for example, that killing a baby just for fun is morally right. The second response is to argue that it is conceptually impossible that killing a baby just for fun is morally right. If this is correct, then (H_2)—the thesis that only conceptual impossibilities are unimaginable—can still stand.

Some philosophers might suggest that normatively deviant cases involve conceptual impossibilities only if analytic naturalism is true—that is, only if the meanings of normative terms can be reduced to the meanings of natural terms. According to analytic naturalism, the moral term "being morally right", for instance, has the same meaning as some natural term, say, the term "maximizing the overall happiness". If analytic naturalism is true, then the assumed conceptual impossibility could be explained easily. Suppose that killing a baby just for fun will not in fact maximize the overall happiness. Since "maximizing the overall happiness" has the same meaning as "being morally right", it is conceptually impossible that an action that doesn't maximize the overall happiness is morally right.

However, analytic naturalism is an indefensible position. In contemporary metaethics, most philosophers reject analytic naturalism, owing to Moore's open question argument. According to Moore, normative statements about goodness (say) cannot mean the same as any statements about natural facts. This is because we could affirm the latter but intelligibly question the former. For instance, a competent user of moral terms might believe that an action promotes an agent's happiness, but meanwhile can intelligibly doubt that the action is really good. In contrast, a competent English speaker cannot intelligibly doubt that you are an unmarried man if she already believes that you are a bachelor. Moore's argument includes two steps. First, it is claimed that, as a matter of fact, competent speakers can intelligibly question the truths of the relevant normative statements. Second, it is argued that the best explanation of this "open question" phenomenon is that normative concepts and non-normative concepts are not equivalent in meaning.

But fortunately, the second response doesn't need to rely on the truth of analytic naturalism. On closer examinations, we will find that normatively deviant cases could involve conceptual impossibilities even if analytic naturalism is false. To argue that normative falsities are conceptually impossible, we should rather appeal to the conceptual truth of normative-natural supervenience:

> (S) It is a conceptual truth that there can be no normative difference between two possible entities without there being some natural difference between them.

It is important to note normative-natural supervenience is widely regarded as a con-

ceptual truth, whereas other kinds of supervenience (such as mental-physical supervenience) is probably not. There are some fundamental principles that characterize the essential features of normativity and morality. For example, Kant maintains that universalizability is a principle that defines the very nature of morality. Similarly, we can say that normative-natural supervenience is conceptually constitutive of normativity (and morality in particular). If a person believes that it is in fact morally wrong to do x but at the same time believes that doing x could be right in the exactly same circumstances in other possible worlds, we would say that she misunderstands what we mean by "morally right" and "morally wrong". But in contrast, if someone believes that pain is actually realized by C-fiber firing but believes that a creature instantiating C-fiber firing is not in pain in some possible worlds, we won't say that she makes a conceptual mistake about the mental and the physical.

If normative-natural supervenience is a conceptual truth, it is easy to explain why normative falsities are conceptually impossible. Suppose that killing a baby just for fun is in fact morally wrong. Given that normative-natural supervenience is a conceptual truth, it is conceptually impossible that killing a baby just fun is morally right. Here we are not assuming that analytic naturalism is true. Even if normative-natural supervenience is a conceptual truth, it doesn't follow that any particular normative concept is reducible to a natural concept. It may well be the case that the only way to denote normative properties is by normative terms.

Thus, if the normative supervenes on the natural as a conceptual truth, we can explain the unimaginability of normatively deviant cases by pointing to their conceptual impossibilities without assuming analytic naturalism. The second part of my hypothesis (H_2) remains unchallenged.

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可想象性与可能性

唐英英

摘　要

本文的讨论围绕着“想象障碍迷思”这一议题，即为什么人们对某些反事实情境存在想象障碍，而展开。本文首先对 BrianWeatherson 的“In-Virtue-Of Hypothesis”给出了批评，并提出人们对某些反事实情境存在想象障碍是因为那些反事实情境在概念上是不可能的——概念上不可能的情境，也仅有概念上不可能的情境才是不能被想象的。针对这种对可想象性与可能性关系的理解，本文也讨论了一些可能的反驳并指出这些反驳的不成功之处。

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