

Class 26 - Schneider

I. Schneider's argument

We have seen the arguments for HS, and the MRL version of laws, and how they arise most centrally from a desire for parsimony, to avoid commitments to spooky entities or anything other than local matters of particular fact.

We have seen criticisms of HS, in the form of counter-examples from Carroll, Tooley, Maudlin, and Earman.

We have also seen how the counter-examples are accused of being based in intuitions about the governance of laws of nature.

Schneider discusses three Humean replies to the counter-examples, though there are really two approaches.

First, Beebe denies the anti-Humean intuitions, and claims that they come from dubious sources. Schneider calls Beebe's response to Carroll et al. the Negotiability Reply, because of her claim that the intuitions are plastic.

Second, Loewer accepts the anti-Humean intuitions, but denies that the counter-examples suffice to reject HS.

That is, Loewer thinks that the question is whether, on balance, the Humean better captures our ordinary notion of the laws of nature (the van Fraassen characterization) than the anti-Humean.

Schneider opposes Beebe, and her claim that intuitions are negotiable.

She accepts Loewer's methodology, but rejects his conclusion.

II. Against Beebe

Beebe argued that the debate over the status of laws resolved to a debate about our intuitions.

The anti-Humean relies on intuitions about governance.

The Humean relies on intuitions about local matters of fact.

And, the counter-examples just re-state these intuitions in veiled ways.

Schneider responds that this way of viewing the debate is misleading, 311.

The point of the counter-examples is to show that the Humean can not account for pre-theoretic intuitions about laws.

The anti-Humeans think they have a stronger case than just that they offend against Humean intuitions.

Even Beebe acknowledges that she is biting a bullet in response to Carroll's argument.

See Beebe 593.

Schneider, following Loewer, urges that offending against pre-theoretic intuitions levies a burden on the Humean.

In particular, the Humean must provide some reason for abandoning those intuitions.

She makes explicit a principle C that the Humean must reject.

(C) *Ceteris paribus*, choose the philosophical theory of F that best accommodates our (relevant) pre-theoretic intuitions about F.

To make the burden on the Humean even more weighty, Schneider argues that the Negotiability Reply not only offends pre-theoretic intuitions, it offends the considered judgments of scientists, and the practice of science.

She appeals to Maudlin's argument that practicing scientists presuppose a more substantial notion of the laws, and physical possibility.

"Contemporary practice in physics not only makes heavy use of talk of laws of nature, but, quite significantly, it *precludes* a Humean account of laws" (314).

In my notes to the Loewer article, I pointed out that the question of how these philosophical debates over the laws of nature affect practicing science is moot.

But, Schneider's point goes in the other direction.

Her argument is not that the question of whether to be Humean or anti-Humean has some affect on how scientists work, but that the work of scientists should affect how we view the laws.

Schneider's argument is thus less contentious.

### III. Which intuitions?

Loewer had argued that the instability of our intuitions, their lack of robustness, undermines anti-Humean arguments.

I pointed out that there were different kinds of intuitions.

It is worse to offend against some intuitions, or intuitions of some people, than it is to offend against others.

Schneider's response to the Negotiability Reply depends, in part, on the difficulties that arise from offending against the considered judgments of scientists.

She also urges that Beebe's argument against the governing conception of laws attacks the wrong intuitions.

Consider the three principles Schneider discusses on p 315.

- i. What the laws at a world are is stable under minor counterfactual differences in boundary conditions.
- ii. The laws govern or guide the evolution of events at a world.
- iii. The laws do not supervene on non-nomic events.

Beebe's claim is that the anti-Humean relies on a conception of laws as governing, ii.

Schneider is certainly right that the anti-Humean does not commit to a contentious view of the laws as revealed or created by a divine lawgiver.

"It is important to notice that the mere fact that a metaphysical theory speaks of God 'setting up a world' to illustrate its position does not show that the appeal of the ontological primitive in question ultimately derives from the notion of divine law. Appeals to a divine force, setting up ontological shop, occur throughout the metaphysics literature, being employed in motivating views that clearly do not depend, for their plausibility, upon the notion of a divine lawgiver" (317-8).

Further, it is not the metaphors with civil law, or moral law, that support the anti-Humean thought experiments.

Those thought experiments rely merely on the intuition that laws of nature are ontologically basic, autonomous of local matters of particular facts rather than dependent exclusively on them.

Thus, the anti-Humean relies only on the weaker claim i.

So, it is not clear that the anti-Humean really offends against the Humean intuition that Beebee claims opposes ii.

On the other hand, as Schneider notes, the anti-Humean concludes iii, on the basis of i.

One possible response for the anti-Humean, then, is to deny that ii is a necessary part of the argument, the mirror argument, say.

Then, one might wonder how the anti-Humean gets from i to iii.

Furthermore, if the Humean can account for i, then the thought experiments which are supposed to support i won't serve as support for iii.

On the one hand, I want to say that it seems unlikely that the Humean can support i, despite the claims of the anonymous reviewer, 315-6.

On the other hand, if the Humean can't even justify i, then HS, and the whole MRL project, is fundamentally misguided.

#### IV. Against Loewer

Beebee's denies the anti-Humean intuitions that support the anti-Humean thought experiments.

Loewer accepts those intuitions, but thinks that the L-laws are defensible, anyway.

When we choose a theory, we try to find the one that best fits the evidence.

No theory will accommodate all our intuitions.

We have to look for the best fit.

Recall that I called Loewer's approach ironic, since its structure mirrored the MRL reliance on fit, simplicity, and strength to determine the best theory.

Now, Loewer argues that the intuitions should not be decisive against MRL.

He even alludes to Stich's work against intuitions.

Schneider rightly points out that worries about some intuitions may not infect other intuitions.

Worries about people's intuitions about force need not call into question the scientist's attitude toward the laws.

Schneider thus does not promote an anti-Humean position so much as she defends the anti-Humean from Loewer and Beebee's attacks on it.

But, in defending the intuitions which ground the various thought experiments, she is siding with the anti-Humeans.

#### V. Primitivism

So, what can we say about the laws of nature, if HS does not suffice?

We will want to say that the laws transcend the facts, that physical statism does not suffice to yield the laws.

Armstrong's positive approach was to call the laws of nature necessary relations among universals.

We did not pursue this approach, but you could.

Armstrong's defense of universals is complicated, but not impossible.

Alternatively, Carroll and Maudlin defend a concept of laws which Schneider calls primitive.

HS promoted a reductive view of the laws.

For HS, the local matters of particular fact were ontologically basic, and the laws derived from them.

For Armstrong, universals are ontologically basic.

Alternatively, one could take the laws themselves as ontologically basic, as fundamental furniture of the universe.