Blackburn on the Ban on
Mixed Moral Worlds*

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【Abstract】This is a realist response to Blackburn’s version of the
explanatory inadequacy of the moral thesis based on the ban on mixed
worlds, and to its possible explanatory reductionism version. First, the
moral supervenience relationship is made explicit, for the ban on mixed
worlds has been expressed most commonly by employing the notion of
moral supervenience. This is done to clarify the implications of the ban.
Second, it will be argued that the dependence relationship between the
two is self-explanatory, given the dependence relationship expounded
here. This will allow us to show that there is no such modal fact as the
ban on mixed worlds for projectivists such as Blackburn to explain.
Third, I shall consider and reject a possible rejoinder from Blackburn:
explanatory reductionism. A nonreductive physicalistic type of moral
realism can still fail if it can be shown that all of the explanatory power
possessed by the supervening properties is reducible to the explanatory
power provided by the subvening properties. This is especially so when

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the explanation is understood as closely related to causation. It will be shown that the causal power of supervening properties is irreducible to their subvening properties, while it is acknowledged that further work has to be done in establishing the falsity of the explanatory reductionism of moral facts to nonmoral facts.

We offer and accept everyday explanations that appeal to putative moral facts without ever questioning their explanatory adequacy. There are plenty of everyday examples of this moral practice. “Injustice done to people brought about pro-democracy demonstrators in and around Tiananmen Square,” “Archbishop Gilday’s sneaky and deceitful actions to swindle the Vatican Bank got himself killed,” “Sherron Watkins blew the whistle on Enron because it was the right thing to do,” and so on, and so forth. Nonetheless, moral antirealists maintain that folk moral explanations are suspect: those everyday explanations that appeal to putative moral facts, according to them, lack physicalistic respectability. They argue that such a lack of physicalistic respectability of the folk moral explanations is evidence that there are no moral facts, notwithstanding the everyday practice of offering and accepting folk moral explanations. I shall call the thesis which is the basis for the antirealist argument, the “explanatory inadequacy of moral fact thesis,” or the ‘EI’ thesis. This paper is a realist response to Simon Blackburn’s version of the EI thesis, the ban on mixed moral worlds.

1) The EI thesis comes in at least three variants: the comparative explanatory superiority of nonmoral facts over moral facts, the total lack of explanatory power of moral facts, and explanatory reductionism of moral facts to nonmoral facts.