

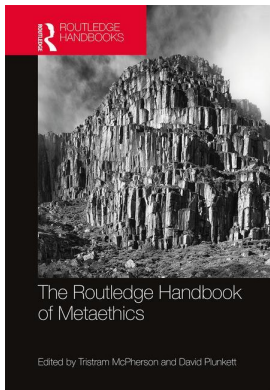
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Metaphysical Relations in Metaethics

Gideon Rosen

This chapter aims to clarify a question that can be vaguely put as follows: How are the normative facts related to the natural facts? As many philosophers have noted, the two domains appear to be distinct (Moore 1903; Enoch 2011; Parfit 2011). Comparing the fact that Sophie morally ought to feed the fish with the fact that the fish will die if she doesn't feed them, one has the palpable sense, not just that the claims are different, but that they concern categorically distinct subject matters: how things ought to be versus how things are. Of course, this appearance could be misleading. The normative facts could be natural facts in disguise. But however this may be, there is obviously some very close connection between the fact that Sophie ought to feed the fish and the various indisputably natural facts that underlie it. One central problem in metaethics is to say what that connection comes to.

Our discussion assumes that there are normative facts—facts about the normative properties of things and the normative relations in which they stand. It also assumes that some facts are clearly “natural,” e.g., the fact that the fish will die if they are not fed. The challenge is to say how facts of the first sort are related to facts of the second sort. But it must be conceded at the outset that this question is not exactly clear. When we ask how the normative is “related” to the natural, what sort of information are we seeking? The best way to clarify a question that is unclear in this way is to say what would count as an answer to it, so the plan for what follows is to do just that. Recent work in general metaphysics provides a vocabulary in which hypotheses about the relation between the normative and the natural can be stated with some precision. This chapter explains that vocabulary by putting it to work for the purpose of providing a taxonomy of answers to our target question.

WHAT IS A NATURAL PROPERTY?

Ideally, we would begin with explicit definitions of the key terms, “normative” and “natural.” But since the available definitions are controversial, and since it doesn't matter for

our purposes exactly how the lines are drawn, we rely for the most part on the usual informal explanation, according to which the normative features are features like *right* and *wrong*, *reason* and *obligation*, and the natural features include those with which the physical sciences are concerned along with everyday “descriptive” features like *red* and *round*. A complete account will say what the paradigms in each class have in common, but at least when it comes to the normative, no such account will be attempted here.

When it comes to “natural,” however, we face an ambiguity that needs resolving and which is best resolved with the tools that will be our focus. Some metaethicists use the word “natural” to mean what it often means elsewhere in philosophy, i.e., roughly: *of or pertaining to the causally efficacious features of spatiotemporal entities*, or perhaps, *similar in kind to the features posited by the natural sciences as we now have them* (Sturgeon 2007; Dowell 2013). When the word is used in this way, the main contrast is with “supernatural” and the paradigmatic alternative to Naturalism is theism. However, the word also has a broader sense, peculiar to metaethics, in which “natural” contrasts not with “supernatural” but specifically with “normative.” To see the difference, consider a version of the Divine Command Theory according to which for an action to be wrong is just for it to violate God’s commands, where the underlying facts about God and his commands are understood as straightforwardly descriptive, i.e., non-normative through and through. When “natural” is used in the narrow sense, this view is obviously not a form of naturalism since it posits an immaterial deity outside of nature. When the word is used in the broad sense, however, this view *is* (or easily could be) a form of Naturalism since it does not posit “non-natural” ethical features at the fundamental level.

For metaethical purposes, where our aim is to clarify the connection between the normative and *the rest*, it makes sense to adopt the broad usage in which “natural” contrasts with “normative” and means something like “descriptive.” But then we face a question about how to understand this contrast. The key fact is (1):

- (1) If a property is not normative, it is natural.

This what underlies our judgment that, insofar as the basic features of the deity are non-normative, they amount to “natural” (descriptive) features in the sense relevant to metaethics. But of course we don’t want to affirm the converse of (1), at least not at this stage. Ethical Naturalism is the view that normative properties are *also* natural, so we need a conception of the “natural” that leaves room for this possibility. And there’s the rub. Along with the illustrative examples, (1) is our main guide to what it means to call a property “natural” in the broad sense. But (1) tells us nothing about what it could possibly mean to call a *normative* property natural. If we want to use the word in this way, we must say something to close this gap.

A MODAL PROPOSAL

The simplest approach is (2):

- (2) A property F is natural iff for some non-normative condition ϕ , necessarily, for all x , x is F iff x is ϕ .

A property counts as natural in this view when there exist non-normatively specifiable, necessary, and sufficient conditions for its instantiation. (These conditions need not be finite or specifiable by us. It is enough that they exist.) If we take (2) as our account, then the question of whether the ethical facts are also natural facts reduces to the familiar question whether intensional truth conditions for normative claims can be given in non-normative terms.

This view is practically forced upon us if we embrace a widely accepted theory of properties:

Intensionalism: Properties F and G are identical iff necessarily, for all x, x is F iff x is G.

This is a “coarse-grained” conception of properties on which, for example, the property of being a triangle (a polygon with three angles) and the property of being trilateral (a polygon with three sides) are identical. Intensionalism is clearly adequate for many purposes (Lewis 1986); moreover, it has the great advantage of providing a perfectly clear account of what it takes for properties to be the same or different. The case for (2), given Intensionalism, is straightforward. Suppose that F is a normative property and that F is necessarily equivalent to a non-normative condition ϕ . It is as clear as anything can be in this area that if a condition ϕ contains only non-normative ingredients, then *being* ϕ is a natural property. But given Intensionalism, F just *is* the property of being ϕ ; so F must likewise count as natural. Now suppose that F is *not* equivalent to any non-normative condition ϕ . This means that it is possible for there to be two things that are alike in every non-normative respect, one of which is F, the other not. And surely that is enough to render F *non-natural* on any view.

The main difficulty with (2) is that it flattens the landscape in metaethics beyond recognition, conflating positions that are widely regarded as distinct and ruling out options that are widely regarded as viable. If we take (2) as our account of what it takes for a property to be natural, then

Ethical Naturalism: Every normative property is natural

is equivalent to

Supervenience: If two possible objects are alike in every non-normative respect, they are alike in every normative respect.

Ethical Naturalism entails Supervenience on any view. The trouble with (2) is that it yields the converse implication. To see this, let F be an arbitrary normative property and let a, b, ... be the Fs, actual and merely possible. Each possible F has a complete non-normative profile $D_i(x)$ that encodes the whole truth about its non-normative features, intrinsic and extrinsic. Given Supervenience, the disjunction of these profiles, $D_a(x) \vee D_b(x) \vee \dots$, is a non-normative condition equivalent to F. So given (2), Supervenience entails Ethical Naturalism. (This argument is due to Kim 1984; see also Jackson 1998. Wedgwood 2007 notes that it depends on non-trivial modal assumptions. See Schmitt and Schroeder 2011 for discussion.)

This means that if we adopt (2) as our account of what it takes for a property to count as “natural,” anyone who accepts Supervenience is a naturalist and anyone who rejects naturalism must reject Supervenience. But this is unacceptable. With a small handful of exceptions, every philosopher who has considered the question has endorsed Supervenience as manifestly obvious. The idea that there cannot be two actions that are alike in every

non-normative respect, one of which is right and the other wrong, is as close as we come to common ground in metaethics. Ethical Naturalism, on the other hand, is thoroughly controversial with committed partisans pro and con. Any interpretation of the vocabulary that collapses these two views is therefore to be resisted. So (2) won't do.

A DEFINITIONAL PROPOSAL

A promising alternative appeals to the ancient idea that properties and relations, like words and concepts, have definitions. For much of the history of modern philosophy, this idea was dismissed as a relic of bad metaphysics. But a commitment to **real definition** is arguably implicit in much contemporary philosophy. Consider the twenty-first-century metaphysician who wants to know what it is for an object to be green, or for one event to cause another, or for a system of rules to be a legal system. If our aim in asking these "What is F?" questions were to analyze our *concept* of an F, our answers would be constrained to employ only ingredients that anyone competent with the target concept already possesses. And yet in most philosophical contexts (and all scientific contexts), no such constraint applies. We cannot object to a proposed account of what it is for an object to be green on the grounds that it employs notions like *wavelength*, with which users of color concepts may be unfamiliar. This suggests that the object of philosophical analysis in these contexts is not our *concept* of an F, but the property for which that concept stands (Rosen 2015).

The real definition of a property is given by a statement of the form, "To be F is to be ϕ " or "Being F consists in/reduces to being ϕ ," where ϕ is a complex condition not containing F. Every real definition entails a claim of metaphysical reduction. If being F consists in being ϕ , then in general, the fact that x is F reduces to the fact that x is ϕ . (As we will see, this does not mean that they are the *same* fact.) Of course, there is a real question about what it takes for a putative definition to be correct. We certainly require that F and ϕ be equivalent:

- (3) If ϕ defines F then necessarily, for all x: x is F iff x is ϕ .

But this is clearly not enough. When the color theorist asks, "What is it for an object to be green?" the answer to her question is not: "For x to be green is for x to be either grue and observed or bleen and unobserved" (Goodman 1983). A correct real definition thus pairs a property F with a condition ϕ that is equivalent to F *and which satisfies further constraints, as yet unspecified*. We'll consider proposals for completing the account below. But for now, let us help ourselves to the notion in order to say a bit more about what it means to call a property "natural" in the broad sense.

The most important principle for this purpose is (4):

- (4) If F has a definition ϕ whose ingredients are entirely non-normative, then F is natural.

It's common ground in metaethics that one way to vindicate Naturalism about (say) moral rightness is to provide an explicit definition of *right* in non-normative terms. (4) is the principle that underwrites this common view. (1) and (4) together provide a strong sufficient condition for a property to count as natural. But of course they tell us nothing

about what it would take for an *irreducible* normative property to count as natural, and that's a lacuna.

Here it is tempting to endorse a stronger thesis:

- (5) F is natural if and only if F is either non-normative or definable in non-normative terms.

(5) is a straightforward definition of *natural property*. It gives clear content to the idea that “natural” contrasts with “normative,” while leaving room for the possibility that some normative properties are also natural. It would also put us in a position to see real daylight between Supervenience and Ethical Naturalism. Supervenience guarantees the existence, for each normative property F, of a non-normative condition ϕ modally equivalent to F. But there is no guarantee that ϕ *defines* F. To see why, consider an ordinary supervenient property like *house*. Each possible house has a complete description in the language of fundamental physics, so *house* is equivalent to the disjunction of these conditions: $H_1(x) \vee H_2(x) \vee \dots$ but we can't define *house* by means of this disjunction. It's simply false to say that being a house consists in being in *this* fully determinate physical state, or *that* fully determinate physical state, or ... This would imply that we cannot know *what it is to be a house* without knowing about quarks and the like, and that's clearly wrong. But more importantly, the definition fails to bring out what the houses have in common in virtue of which they count as houses. For analogous reasons, even if *moral rightness* is equivalent to a long disjunction of non-normative conditions, one for each right act, as it must be given Supervenience, we cannot define *right action* by means of this disjunction. Of course, this leaves it open whether *right* is definable by some other non-normative condition that brings out what the right acts have in common, but this is as it should be. (5) thus has the advantage of blocking the quick inference from Supervenience to Ethical Naturalism.

The main reason to resist (5) is that it entails that the only intelligible form of Ethical Naturalism is:

Reductive Naturalism: For every normative property F there is a non-normative condition ϕ that defines F.

And this is unfortunate. It is a familiar idea from the philosophy of science that the special sciences like biology and economics pose no threat to a broadly physicalist metaphysics, despite the fact that the features in which they traffic can't be defined in the language of physics (Fodor 1974). In a similar spirit, many philosophers have supposed that it should be possible for normative features to count as “natural,” even where they can't be *defined* in more basic terms (Miller 1985; Brink 1989; Sturgeon 2006). (5) may be a permissible way to sharpen the somewhat fluid notion of a “natural” feature. But it forecloses an option that many philosophers have found attractive, so let's not adopt it.

A GROUND-THEORETIC PROPOSAL

A better option invokes a notion that is closely connected to a real definition but distinguishable from it: **metaphysical grounding** (Fine 2001, 2012; Schaffer 2009; Rosen 2010; Bennett 2011; Audi 2012; Correia and Schnieder 2012; for doubts, see Wilson 2014).

For present purposes, we may think of grounding as a relation among facts. The basic form of a grounding claim is “ Γ grounds p ” or “ p obtains *in virtue of* Γ ,” where p is a fact and Γ is a collection of one or more facts. The key fact about grounding is that it is meant to be a maximally intimate explanatory relation. If Γ grounds p , then p obtains *because* Γ obtains. Like any explanatory relation, grounding is asymmetric, hence irreflexive (cf. Jenkins 2011). Unlike some explanatory relations (e.g., causal explanation), grounding is a form of synchronic necessitation. If Γ grounds p then, as a matter of strictest necessity, if Γ obtains then so does p (cf. Leuenberger 2014); and if p concerns a restricted region of time or space, so do its grounds. The fact that Mary is smiling at t is presumably grounded in the spatial relations among the parts of her face at t . If so, then as a matter of metaphysical necessity, if the parts of Mary’s face are so arranged, Mary smiles.

The example illustrates the sense in which grounding is meant to be an especially intimate relation. The fact that Mary is smiling is not *identical* to the class of facts about how the various parts of her face are related. For present purposes, it is best to think of facts as structured entities, built up from objects, properties, relations, and other worldly items in roughly the sense in which a sentence is built from words. So conceived, facts are individuated by their constituents and the manner of their combination. To a first approximation, the fact that Mary is smiling at t has three constituents: Mary, the property of smiling, and t . The facts that ground this fact have very different constituents: the parts of Mary’s face and the spatial relations in which they stand. So we can’t *identify* the fact that Mary is smiling with the complex of facts in virtue of which it obtains. (That’s a good thing, since these underlying facts explain the fact they ground, and nothing explains itself.) And yet the fact that Mary is smiling is not a separate, free-floating fact. A fact and its grounds are as closely connected as distinguishable facts can be.

This is reinforced by the main principles connecting grounding with other notions. (Some of these principles may have exceptions; but if they don’t hold in every case, they hold in a significant range of cases.)

Disjunctive facts are grounded in their true disjuncts. If Mary is smiling, then the fact that Mary is smiling grounds the fact that Mary is either smiling or scowling.

Conjunctive facts are grounded in their conjuncts taken together. If Al is tall and Bob is boring, then the fact that Al is tall and Bob is boring is grounded in a pair of facts: the fact that Al is tall, and the fact that Bob is boring.

Existential facts are grounded in their instances. If Mary is smiling, then this fact grounds the fact that someone is smiling.

Determinable facts are grounded in their determinates. If the rose is scarlet, it is red in virtue of being scarlet.

One especially important principle for our purposes is the

Grounding-Definition Link (GDL): If ϕ defines F then necessarily, for all x , if x is F , then the fact that x is F is grounded in the fact that x is ϕ .

Suppose that being a vixen consists in being a female fox. GDL tells us that, whenever something is vixen, it is a vixen in virtue of being female and a fox. Since grounding is irreflexive, this means that we must distinguish *the fact that Sasha is a vixen*—an atomic fact of the form Fa —from the fact *that Sasha is female and Sasha is a fox*, which is of the

form $Ga \ \& \ Ha$. The first contains Sasha and *vixen*. The second contains Sasha, *female*, and *fox* (and other bits and pieces), but not *vixen*. So the two facts are distinct.

Again, as the examples show, the relation between a fact and its grounds is almost maximally intimate. The fact that the rose is red is not identical to the fact that the rose is scarlet. The fact that Sasha is a vixen is not identical to the fact that Sasha is female and a fox. And yet there is a palpable sense in which the grounded fact is not an “addition to reality” over and above its grounds. To employ a familiar metaphor: when God makes the grounds she ipso facto makes the facts they ground. No further creative activity is required.

Although metaethicists rarely put the point in quite these terms, it seems to me that the ethical naturalist’s key thought is that the normative facts stand to the non-normative facts in precisely this intimate relation. Normative properties may or may not be definable in non-normative terms. Ethical naturalists disagree about this. But they agree that the normative facts are not further facts, superadded to reality after the non-normative facts are fixed. This suggests the following account of what it takes for a property to be natural:

- (6) A property F is natural iff either F is non-normative or, necessarily, every fact of the form Fa is fully grounded in the non-normative facts.

Everyone who speaks the language of grounding will agree that normative facts about particular people and particular actions are always at least *partly* grounded in the non-normative facts. Oswald’s act was wrong, at least in part, because it caused the death of a human being. The debate over Ethical Naturalism, on this view, is a debate about whether it is always possible to complete such grounding explanations by adding further non-normative facts to the ground. The ethical naturalist says that every atomic ethical fact can be explained from below, citing only non-normative facts, in the same sense in which every disjunctive fact can be explained from below by citing its true disjuncts. The non-naturalist disagrees, maintaining that, in at least one case, the ethical fact either lacks a full ground or is such that every full ground for it contains a normative ingredient.

This account tells us what it takes for a property to count as “natural” in the broad metaethical sense. (The account is easily generalized to relations and items in other categories.) There are several ways to extend the taxonomy of properties to a taxonomy of facts, the most straightforward of which is as follows:

- (7) A fact is normative iff it contains a normative constituent.
 (8) A fact is natural iff it contains only natural constituents.

This leaves it open, as it should, whether some facts are both normative and natural, reducing this question to the question whether some normative properties (relations, etc.) are also natural.

A QUESTION ABOUT NON-REDUCTIVE NATURALISM

Given the principles of the last section, Ethical Naturalism may be formulated as follows:

Ethical Naturalism: For all normative properties F, for all x: if Fx then there exists a non-normative condition ϕ such that Fx is metaphysically grounded in $\phi(x)$.

Reductive Naturalism entails Ethical Naturalism so defined. (The reductive naturalist says that every normative F is defined by a non-normative condition ϕ ; but if ϕ defines F , then $F\alpha$ is always grounded in $\phi(\alpha)$, by the GDL.) On the face of it, however, the converse does not hold. Suppose, for example, that while every fact of the form $F\alpha$ is grounded in some non-normative fact involving α , the grounds for $F\alpha$ are heterogeneous, with $F\alpha$ grounded in $\Psi_1(\alpha)$ while $F\beta$ is grounded in some quite unrelated fact $\Psi_2(\beta)$, etc. (Perhaps α is wrong by virtue of being a killing while β is wrong by virtue of being a promise breaking, etc.) Then we cannot conclude without further assumptions that there is a *single* non-normative condition ϕ such that facts of the form $F\alpha$ are always grounded in facts of the form $\phi(\alpha)$. But Reductive Naturalism requires a *uniform* non-normative ground for every fact of the form $F\alpha$. So on the face of it, Ethical Naturalism does not entail Reductive Naturalism.

This suggests one way in which Non-Reductive Naturalism could be true:

Type 1 Non-Reductive Naturalism (about F): Facts of the form $F\alpha$ are always grounded in non-normative facts. But there is no non-normative condition ϕ such that every fact of the form $F\alpha$ is grounded in $\phi(\alpha)$.

There is also, at least in principle, another version of the view. Nothing we have said so far rules out a view according to which whenever an act is right, it is right by virtue of being ϕ , but which goes on to insist that nonetheless, being right is one thing, being ϕ another. This would be an instance of:

Type 2 Non-Reductive Naturalism (about F): There is a non-normative condition ϕ such that every fact of the form $F\alpha$ is grounded in $\phi(\alpha)$, but ϕ does not *define* F .

As the formulations suggest, mixed views are possible. In theory, at any rate, we can be reductive naturalists about *right*, non-reductive naturalists about *good*, etc.

We rejected (5) on the grounds that it ruled out the possibility of non-reductive naturalism by definition. The present account is clearly better in this respect since it allows for two formally coherent formulations of the view. Still, one may legitimately wonder whether these positions are really tenable. To see the problem, suppose that we are intensionalists about properties. (We noted earlier that Intensionalism flattens the landscape in metaethics by equating Naturalism with Supervenience. But for philosophers who are willing to bite this bullet, it's worth asking whether Intensionalism allows for non-reductive forms of Naturalism.) A quick argument seems to show that, for the intensionalist, the only coherent form of Naturalism is Reductive Naturalism. As we have seen, Naturalism entails Supervenience, which in turn entails that every normative F is intensionally equivalent to a normative condition Δ formed by disjoining the non-normative profiles of the possible F s: $\Delta(x) = D_a(x) \vee D_b(x) \vee \dots$. For the intensionalist, F just *is* the property of being Δ . But surely the property of being Δ is defined by the non-normative condition by means of which it was introduced. And from this, it follows that, on the intensional view, the only tenable form of Naturalism is Reductive Naturalism.

But this is too quick. The vulnerable premise is the assumption that the property of being D_1 or D_2 or ... is defined by the disjunctive condition that figures in its name. If this seems obvious that is because we are tempted by the

Abstraction-Definition Link (ADL): When $F =$ the property of being ϕ , and ϕ does not contain F , then ϕ defines F .

If I introduce G as *the property of being either green or red* and then ask what it is for something to be G , the answers seem automatic: being G consists in being either green or red. The ADL is a generalization of the principle at work in this example. It says that whenever a property is given as “the property of being ϕ ,” the abstraction term encodes a definition of the property.

Intensionalists, however, should reject the ADL. Take *the property of being either grue and observed or bleen and unobserved*. This property is intensionally equivalent to *green*, so for the intensionalist it is the property of being green. The ADL would then entail that we can give a real definition of *green*—the sort of definition philosophers interested in the metaphysics of color have been seeking—in terms of *grue* and *bleen*. But if the notion of real definition makes sense at all, that’s just not so. A real definition brings out what the instances of the property have in common. The bogus gruesome definition of green does not do that. So intensionalists should reject the ADL. They should say that, sometimes, the property of being ϕ is not defined by ϕ .

Of course, this does not show that the normative property F is *not* defined by the non-normative condition Δ . It simply blocks the most direct route to this conclusion. It is an obscure and open question whether there is some other way to show that on the intensionalist view, every normative property has a non-normative definition given Supervenience. The answer will depend on what it means to give the real definition of a coarse-grained property, and that is a question upon which light has not yet dawned.

HYPERINTENSIONALISM

The *hyperintensionalist*, by contrast, can happily agree that from Supervenience it follows that every normative property F is equivalent to a disjunctive non-normative condition Δ , and that *the property of being Δ* is defined by Δ . (The hyperintensionalist can accept the ADL, since she can distinguish the property of being *grue* and *observed or bleen and unobserved*, which is defined in terms of *grue*, from the intensionally equivalent property of being green, which is not.) Her distinctive claim is that, be all of this as it may, we can still distinguish the normative property F from the definable non-normative property with which it is equivalent. For the hyperintensionalist, from the fact that F is necessarily equivalent to a property that can be defined in non-normative terms, nothing follows about whether F can be so defined.

This is certainly what many metaethicists have wished to say. Non-naturalists like Parfit (2011) and non-reductive naturalists like Brink (1989) do not deny that it may be possible to find a definable natural property that applies to all and only the right actions. Their view is that if there is such a property, it is distinct from the property of being right.

The main challenge for views of this sort is to provide a concrete alternative to Intensionalism. Hyperintensional theories of properties have been explored in the philosophy of science, where it is sometimes said that fine-grained properties are individuated by their causal or nomic roles (Putnam 1975; Sober 1982). But this approach is unsuited to metaethics, where on most accounts, the relevant properties are causally inert.

The apparatus of grounding and definition provides for a number of better options. To fix ideas, consider the following proposal (Rosen 2015; cf. Audi 2012):

Hyperintensionalism: F and G are the same property iff:

- (a) F and G are indefinable and necessarily coextensive; or
- (b) F and G are definable and for all ϕ , ϕ defines F iff ϕ defines G.

Clause (a) is Intensionalism for primitive properties, and while it is not forced upon us, there is no clear reason to distinguish equivalent indefinable properties in metaethics. Clause (b), by contrast, is compulsory for anyone who accepts the idiom of real definition. If the correct account of *what it is to be F* is the same as the correct account of *what it is to be G*, then obviously F and G are the same property.

Of course, the account is only as clear as the notion of real definition upon which it relies. So far we have taken this notion for granted. But many philosophers will find this unsatisfactory, so we should say more. As our formulations all assume, the definition of a property (relation, etc.) is what we have called a *condition*: a complex item with argument places (free variables) matching the argument places in the property to be defined. The challenge is to say what it takes for a condition to define a property. The Grounding-Definition Link gives us a necessary condition. It says that ϕ defines F *only if*, necessarily, whenever x is F, $\phi(x)$ grounds Fx. The simplest account built from these materials holds that this condition (strengthened slightly) is not only necessary but sufficient:

Real Definition (provisional): ϕ defines F iff necessarily, for all x, if x is F or ϕ , then ϕx grounds Fx.

This captures the intuitive idea that to define a property F is to identify a condition the satisfaction of which invariably *makes the F-things F*.

If we adopt this view, space for Type-2 Non-Reductive Naturalism disappears. The type-2 naturalist about F holds that facts of the form Fa are uniformly grounded in complex non-normative facts of the form $\phi(\alpha)$, but that F is nonetheless irreducible. Such a theorist must therefore distinguish F from another property, G = the property of being ϕ . This latter property, after all, is straightforwardly reducible. By the ADL, it is defined by the condition ϕ . The proposed account of definition, however, forces us to identify F and G, since any fact that grounds Fa grounds Ga and vice versa. So if properties are individuated by the grounds for atomic facts involving them, it follows that F is identical to the reducible property G, and is thus reducible.

This is no great cost: Type 2 Naturalism is an odd view, and it would be no disaster if the best framework for sharpening these issues ruled it out. There are, however, independent reasons to prefer a more demanding account of definition, which turns out as an added bonus (?) to block this argument.

The improved account invokes a new metaphysical notion: a fine-grained notion of **essence** due largely, in its present form, to Kit Fine (1994a, b). The familiar modal account of essence has it that P is an essential property of S iff necessarily, S is P (if S exists). But this has odd consequences. Suppose it's a necessary truth that Socrates is not Napoleon. The modal account then entails that Socrates is essentially and *by his very nature* not Napoleon. But that sounds wrong. As Fine has emphasized, we have a notion of essence on which, whatever the essential nature of Socrates may be, we can be confident that it says nothing about Napoleon. To put the point in epistemic terms, you can know everything there is to know about Socrates' essential nature—*what it is to be Socrates*—without knowing the first

thing about Napoleon. By contrast, if you know what it is to be Socrates, then you must know that Socrates is a human being. As Fine would put it:

It lies in the nature of Socrates that Socrates is human; it does not lie in the nature of Socrates that Socrates is not Napoleon.

It would be nice to be able to say in more basic terms what it means for it to lie in the nature of x that p , but there is no known prospect for such an account. For present purposes, the notion of essence, along with the notion of metaphysical grounding, will be primitive.

The **essence of x** is the class of propositions p , such that it lies in the nature of x that p . Absolutely everything has an essence in this sense. It lies in the nature of *red* that whatever is red is colored. It lies in the nature of *disjunction* that if p is true then so is $p \vee q$. But as these examples show, from the fact that a thing has an essence, it does not follow immediately that it has a definition. There can be truths about the essential features of *red* and *or* even if there is no way to say in more fundamental terms what it is for an object to be red, or for it to be the case that p or q .

If this notion of essence is admitted, then it's clear that the connection between a property F and its definition ϕ should be grounded in the nature of F itself. When we say that being a vixen consists in being a female fox, we make a claim about the essence of the property, namely that it lies in the nature of vixenhood that vixens are vixens because they are female foxes. More generally:

Real Definition: ϕ defines F iff it lies in the nature of F that for all x , if x is F or ϕ then $\phi(x)$ grounds Fx .

The real definition of F is a condition, the satisfaction of which always makes the F -things F and whose status as such derives from the nature of F itself. The clear cases of real definition fit this account, and while there may be other ways to bring out what the clear cases have in common, this approach plausibly captures one important notion in the vicinity.

VARIETIES OF NATURALISM

This account revives Type-2 Non-Reductive Naturalism as a coherent possibility. The type-2 theorist agrees with the reductionist that there exists a uniform, non-normative condition ϕ such that whenever x is F , x is F in virtue of being ϕ . But, whereas the reductionist thinks that this amounts to a definition of F , sourced in the very nature of F , the type-2 theorist regards the link between ϕ and F as a *synthetic grounding law* which associates F with a grounding condition that is, as it were, external to it. This is still Naturalism, since it holds that the atomic F -facts are always grounded without remainder in the non-normative facts. But because the view construes the relation between ϕ and F as external in this way, it allows the type-2 theorist to say that, despite their intimate connection, being F is one thing, being ϕ another.

It must be stressed, however, that while this view is coherent in principle, it is inconsistent with an attractive thought. In the clear cases of grounding, whenever p grounds q we can point to an item whose essence *mediates* the connection. A grounds $A \vee B$. Why? Because it lies in the nature of *disjunction* that disjunctive facts are always grounded in their true disjuncts. X is red grounds X is colored. Why? In part because it

lies in the nature of red that whatever is red is thereby colored. Such examples suggest a principle: whenever p grounds q , there must be some item internal to p or q whose essence includes a general law to the effect that every p -like fact grounds a corresponding q -like fact. If a fact and its grounds must always be internally connected in this way, then Type-2 Non-Reductive Naturalism is in trouble. The view says that $\phi(\alpha)$ always grounds $F\alpha$, but denies that it lies in the nature of F that this is so. But if the nature of F doesn't mediate the connection, it's hard to see what could. So if grounding connections must be mediated, Type-2 Non-Reductive Naturalism is once again untenable.

Type-1 Non-Reductive Naturalism faces no such problem. This view says that facts of the form $F\alpha$ have heterogeneous non-normative grounds, with $F\alpha$ grounded sometimes in $\phi_1(\alpha)$, sometimes in $\phi_2(\alpha)$, etc. If these grounding connections must all be mediated by general laws sourced in the nature of some item, the type-1 theorist must accept that for each of these grounding conditions ϕ_i :

It lies in the nature of F that for all x , if $\phi_i(x)$ then $\phi_i(x)$ grounds Fx .

Given plausible assumptions, this will entail:

It lies in the nature of F that for all x : Fx iff [$\phi_1(x)$ grounds Fx or $\phi_2(x)$ grounds Fx or ...]

But—and here is crucial point—this does not entail:

It lies in the nature of F that for all x : if Fx then [$\phi_1(x) \vee \phi_2(x) \vee \dots$] grounds Fx .

This last claim says that F is defined by the disjunctive condition [$\phi_1(x) \vee \phi_2(x) \vee \dots$]. But the non-reductive naturalist can resist this, insisting that while there are many “ F -making features,” each certified as such by the nature of F , the disjunction of those features is not an F -making feature. And this is not crazy. A theorist, impressed by the diversity of wrong-making features, may say: some acts are wrong because they kill people, others because they break promises, etc. But when A is wrong because it's a killing, it would be a mistake to say that A is wrong *because it's either a killing or a promise breaking or ...*. To the contrary, if A is wrong because it's a killing of a certain sort, reference to promise breaking has no place in the complete account of what makes A wrong. As a general matter, it does not follow from the fact that p grounds q and r grounds q that [$p \vee r$] also grounds q . So it's open to the non-reductive naturalist to say that even though facts of the form α is wrong are always grounded in non-normative facts $\phi_i(\alpha)$, and even though each such grounding connection is mediated by a law sourced in the nature of *wrong*, there need be no single non-normative condition, not even a disjunctive one, in which facts about wrongness are always grounded.

The options for the ethical naturalist are thus as follows. The reductive naturalist says that the nature of each normative F yields a uniform non-normative ground $\phi(\alpha)$ for every fact of the form $F\alpha$. The non-reductive naturalist agrees that each particular fact $F\alpha$ is grounded in some such $\phi(\alpha)$, but insists either that this connection is non-uniform (type 1) or that it is not built into the nature of F (type 2) (Figure 9.1). Of course, we have said nothing about how one might choose among these views, but that is beyond our remit. The point of this exercise was to clarify the question we began with, namely, “What

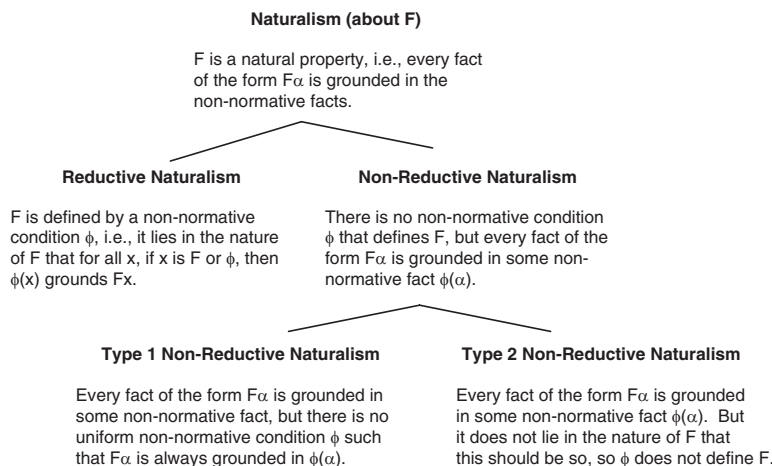


Figure 9.1

is the relation between the normative and the natural?,” and for that purpose it is enough to note that, given the apparatus we have adopted, these are the options for the naturalist.

VARIETIES OF NON-NATURALISM

If Naturalism is defined as we have defined it, then **Non-Naturalism** is the view that at least one normative fact of the form Fa is not fully grounded in the non-normative facts. The varieties of Non-Naturalism are defined by what they go on to say about how such facts *are* grounded.

One possibility is:

Brutalism: Some normative facts of the form Fa are completely ungrounded.

On this view, the normative features of actions and other particulars are like the basic physical features of fundamental particles: objects simply *have* them, but not in virtue of any of their descriptive features. Of course, this sounds preposterous to modern ears, and that’s worth noting. We have said next to nothing about what distinguishes the normative features as a class. And yet somehow we know in advance that the normative features of things are always grounded at least in part in their other features. Why should this be? This is a neglected question which any complete theory of these matters should address.

Brutalism aside, non-naturalists agree that atomic normative facts of the form Fa are always somehow grounded in the natural facts, while insisting that in at least one case, this connection does not amount to a full metaphysical ground. The challenge for the non-naturalist is to give some positive account of this connection, and here the most straightforward view is:

Bridge Law Non-Naturalism (about F): Every fact of the form Fa is grounded in some non-normative fact $\phi(\alpha)$, together with a bridge law connecting F and ϕ .

Views with this flavor are highly plausible in other areas. If you drive down Main Street at 80 mph, your act is *against the law*, in part because of its non-legal features and in

part because, in general, it's illegal to drive down Main Street at more than 30 mph. The grounding explanation of a particular legal fact must always include a general legal fact of this sort. According to Bridge Law Non-Naturalism, the normative facts are like the legal facts in this respect. Particular facts of the form Fa are grounded in the natural features ϕ of a , together with a general law that somehow bridges the gap between the two.

The main challenge for this view is to specify the form of the bridge laws. It is tempting to formulate them as universally quantified material conditions of the form $\forall x (\phi(x) \supset Fx)$. But on reflection, this can't be right. Any account of this sort will entail that when a is F ,

Fa is partly grounded in $\forall x (\phi(x) \supset Fx)$.

(p is **partly grounded** in q when p is part of a full metaphysical ground of q .) But exotic cases aside, universal generalizations are partly grounded in their instances. So if a is F ,

$\forall x (\phi(x) \supset Fx)$ is partly grounded in $\phi(a) \supset Fa$.

But just as a disjunctive fact is grounded in its true disjuncts, a material conditional with a true consequent is at least partly grounded in its consequent:

$\phi(a) \supset Fa$ is partly grounded in Fa .

But then it will follow, given the transitivity of partial grounding, that Fa is partly grounded in Fa . And while this may be tenable in special cases (Jenkins 2011), no metaethical view should have it as a general consequence that whenever an act is right, it is right because it is right. What this shows is that the bridge laws that figure in the grounding of particular normative facts must be proper *laws*, i.e., general principles that are not grounded in their instances and which are therefore fit to ground them.

One possibility is:

Strong Bridge Law Non-Naturalism (about F): Every fact of the form Fa is grounded in a non-normative fact $\phi(a)$ together with the fact that $\Box \forall x (\phi(x) \supset Fx)$.

(Here " \Box " means "It is metaphysically necessary that ...") On this view, when we ask what makes it the case that some particular act is wrong, a complete answer will take the form: the act is wrong because it's ϕ , and because as a matter of absolute necessity, whatever is ϕ is wrong.

This is a non-naturalist view because it locates a normative fact—the modal bridge law—in the ground of each particular normative fact. However, the contrast between this view and a corresponding naturalist view will be quite subtle. Whenever the strong bridge law non-naturalist explains a particular normative fact Fa by saying that Fa is grounded in $\phi(a)$ plus $\Box \forall x (\phi(x) \supset Fx)$, his naturalist counterpart will say that Fa is grounded in $\phi(a)$ all by itself and that the modal bridge law, while true, plays no role in making it the case that a is F . This is an intelligible dispute, but an arcane one. For an analogy, we might consider a dispute between two theorists who agree that the existence of a set is always at least partly grounded in the existence of its members, one of whom thinks

that the existence of $\{a, b\}$ is *fully grounded* in the existence of a and b , while the other insists that we get a full ground only if we add a principle to the effect that necessarily, if two objects exist, so does the set containing them. If the grounding idiom is clear, this is a meaningful dispute, but if the answer isn't obvious, it's quite unclear what sort of argument might resolve it. The same might be said about the dispute between the strong bridge law non-naturalist and his naturalistic counterpart.

The main challenge for this view arises when we ask for an explanation of the modal bridge laws. If they cannot be explained then the view posits the sort of unexplained necessary connection between the normative and the natural that naturalists have traditionally found repugnant (Blackburn 1984; McPherson 2012; see Pekka Väyrynen's chapter "The Supervenience Challenge to Non-Naturalism"). On the other hand, if they can be explained, then the explanation will presumably advert to essences. The claim will be that $\phi(x)$ necessitates Fx because it lies in the nature of F , perhaps together with other items, that whatever is ϕ is F . But then the view will entail that the nature of the normative property F encodes non-normative necessary and sufficient conditions for being F . And while that is not quite Reductive Naturalism as we have defined it, it is very close.

The great advantage of Strong Bridge Law Non-Naturalism is that, alone among the non-naturalist views to be considered here, it vindicates Supervenience. If every normative fact of the form Fa is partly grounded in a law of the form $\Box \forall x \phi(x) \supset Fx$, then given standard assumptions, it follows that if two things are alike in every non-normative respect, they are alike with respect to F . We close by canvassing some non-naturalist views that are inconsistent with Supervenience.

The first is a species of Bridge Law Non-Naturalism on which the bridge laws are *normative laws* marked by a distinctive modality all their own. The pertinent analogy is with laws of nature, understood, not as patterns in nature, but as superlative facts that explain those patterns (Armstrong 1983, Maudlin 2007). Such laws may be understood as facts of the form *It is nomically necessary that p* , where nomic necessity is a *sui generis* modality with which we are antecedently familiar. When you drop a rock and it falls, this is no accident: given the circumstances, the rock *must* fall. And yet there are metaphysically possible worlds with different laws in which you drop a rock in just these circumstances and it floats away. The *must* that figures in the laws of nature is therefore weaker than the *must* of metaphysical necessity (Sidelle 2002). By analogy, some philosophers have suggested that we have a similarly *sui generis* modality in ethics (Fine 2002). When Jones kicks Smith, his act is wrong, and that's no accident. Any act of this sort, in these circumstances, *must* be wrong. But this is not the metaphysical *must*. There may be remote metaphysically possible worlds in which the normative laws are different and acts with the same non-normative features are not wrong. Still, it's no accident that Jones' act was wrong. Given its non-normative profile, it had to be. But that is to say that there exists a normative law whose content may be put as follows: it is normatively necessary that an act with just those features is wrong.

It is an open question whether normative necessity can be defined in more basic terms (Rosen forthcoming). But so long as it's in good order, we have the following possible view:

Moderate Bridge Law Non-Naturalism (about F): Every fact of the form Fa is grounded in some non-normative fact $\phi(a)$ together with a principle of the form: it is normatively necessary that $\forall x (\phi(x) \supset Fx)$.

Since these bridge laws need not be metaphysically necessary, this view does not vindicate Supervenience as it is usually understood, namely, as the claim that whenever two *metaphysically* possible individuals are alike in every non-normative respect, they are alike in every normative respect (cf. Scanlon 2014). However, it does license a weaker Supervenience thesis. If we say that a world is *normatively possible* relative to w iff it shares the normative laws of w , then the moderate bridge law non-naturalist may affirm:

Normative Supervenience: If two normatively possible objects are alike in every non-normative respect, they are alike in every normative respect.

It is arguable that the intuition that supports the near consensus about Supervenience in fact only supports this weaker claim. When we are invited to imagine an act that is just like A in all non-normative respects but which is (say) right when A is wrong, we balk. This suggests that *in some sense* there could not possibly be such an act. But when we are explicitly invited to consider a world in which A has the non-normative features it actually has, but in which the *moral laws are different*—e.g., a world in which Act Utilitarianism is true—we may well say, “Fine. If things had been like *that*, then A , which is in fact wrong, would have been right, despite the fact that it’s non-normative features would have been no different.”

Bridge law non-naturalists of every stripe hold that particular normative facts are metaphysically grounded in the natural facts together with general normative principles. An alternative and seemingly quite different view holds instead that the relation between the normative facts and the natural facts that underlie them is not a matter of *metaphysical* grounding at all, but rather involves a different relation: **normative grounding** (Fine 2012). Normative grounding resembles metaphysical grounding in some respects. Both are non-causal explanatory relations between a fact and the facts in virtue of which it obtains. Moreover, both have modal implications: if Γ grounds p in either sense, then Γ necessitates p in a corresponding sense. The difference is that while relations of metaphysical grounding yield maximally stringent metaphysically necessary connections between the underlying facts and the facts they ground, relations of normative grounding are looser: when p normatively grounds q , p entails q only as a matter of *normative* necessity.

If this notion is admitted, we have another view:

Particularist Non-Naturalism (about F): Every normative fact of the form Fa is normatively grounded in some non-normative fact of form $\phi(\alpha)$. However, Fa is not metaphysically grounded in $\phi(\alpha)$, nor in $\phi(\alpha)$ together with a general law.

The contrast between this view and Moderate Bridge Law Non-Naturalism is (once again) real but subtle. Given a normative fact Fa , both views hold there is a sense in which Fa is grounded in a normative fact $\phi(a)$ that entails Fa as a matter of normative necessity. To this, the moderate bridge law non-naturalist adds two claims: that in every such case there is a general law according to which it is normatively necessary that whatever is ϕ is F , and that $\phi(a)$ conspires with this general law to provide a complete metaphysical ground for Fa . The particularist can reject the first claim, holding that while it may be true in this particular case that $\phi(a)$ grounds Fa , there are normatively possible cases in which $\phi(b)$ fails to ground Fb . Or he can accept the first claim while insisting that the normative law connecting ϕ and F , though genuine, plays no role in grounding the normative fact Fa .

The first view is an extreme form of particularism, and it is not clear whether it is tenable. One is powerfully tempted to say that, if there are normatively possible cases in which $\phi(b)$ does not ground Fb , then $\phi(a)$ does not ground Fa *all by itself*, but rather only in conjunction with some further fact about a 's identity (e.g., the fact that a is a). But in that case there will be a general law in the vicinity, namely, that as a matter of normative necessity, for all x , if $\phi(x)$ and $x = a$, then Fx . The second view amounts to a more plausible form of particularism according to which general laws, such as they are, play no role in grounding the atomic normative facts but rather emerge as consequences of the grounding relations among the atomic facts and their grounds (Dancy 1981).

Again, we have said little about how we might choose among these views. But since the aim was simply to canvas the possibilities, it suffices to say that, given the framework we have adopted, the options for the ethical non-naturalist include the following (Figure 9.2):

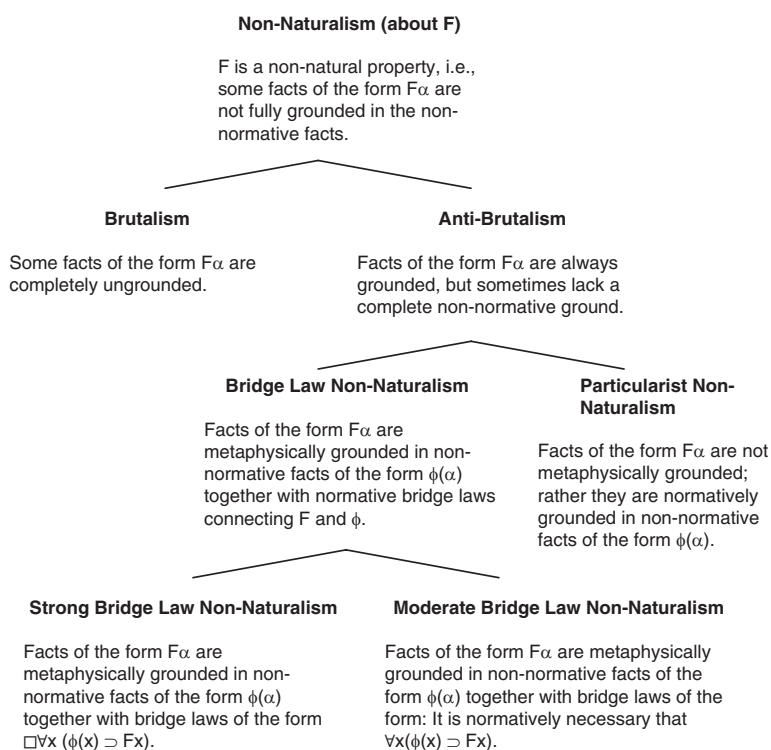


Figure 9.2

CONCLUSION

We began with a vague question—What is the relation between the normative and the natural?—and the idea that the best way to clarify a question is to enumerate the possible answers to it. The rough survey we have provided appeals to a number of “fine-grained” metaphysical notions—grounding, essence, and definition. If one rejects these notions and their ilk, as many philosophers are wont to do, then our question really only has two

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answers: the naturalist view that the normative facts supervene on the non-normative facts and the non-naturalist view that they do not. (Naturalists may disagree about whether statements connecting the normative and the natural are to be reckoned analytic or synthetic, a priori or otherwise, but these are not metaphysical disagreements.) If one accepts the fine-grained vocabulary, an impressive landscape of possibilities opens up. Reductive Naturalism contrasts with two varieties of Non-Reductive Naturalism, all of which contrast with Non-Naturalism in its many forms. This proliferation of possibilities is neither good nor bad. It simply follows if the fine-grained idioms we have adopted are in good order.

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