

What is Moorean Non-naturalism?

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In *Principia Ethica*, G. E. Moore (1903) argued that *goodness* is a “non-natural” property and thereby sparked the so-called “naturalism vs. non-naturalism” debate in metaethics. This debate is still live, but unwell, today because, while much ink has been spilled defending both sides, there is a lack of consensus amongst parties to the debate (even within their own camps) about what exactly it would mean for normative properties to be non-natural in the first place. In fact, most naturalists and non-naturalists simply stipulate what they take “non-naturalism” to mean, rather than get bogged down in the tricky taxonomical question of what is the best way to characterize the view. For example, Jackson (1998), Shafer-Landau (2003), and Parfit (2011) stipulate that they take non-naturalism to be the view that some normative properties are *not identical* to descriptive properties, while Schroeder (2007), Chang (2013), Scanlon (2014), and Dunaway (2016) take non-naturalism to be the view that some normative facts are *not fully grounded in* – i.e. metaphysically explained by – non-normative facts.

But these competing stipulative definitions of “non-naturalism” have created a very confusing literature in which parties to the debate often seem to be talking past one another. For example, Shafer-Landau (2003) defends non-naturalism by arguing that, although normative properties are not identical to non-normative, descriptive properties, they are nonetheless fully constituted by such properties, just as a statue is not identical to, but fully constituted by, a lump of clay. But while this view is non-naturalist in Shafer-Landau’s sense, it’s not non-naturalist in Schroeder (2007) *et al’s* sense, because presumably if normative properties are fully constituted by non-normative, descriptive properties, the normative facts are thereby fully grounded in the non-normative, descriptive facts. So, Shafer-Landau’s defense of non-naturalism simply talks past those self-identifying naturalists who think of non-naturalism in terms of grounding, rather than in terms of identity.

In order to avoid talking past one another in this debate, then, we need to meet the taxonomical question of what Moorean non-naturalism amounts to head on, rather than just indulge in stipulations. That is the task of this paper. First, in §1, I identify the core pre-theoretical commitments of self-identifying Moorean non-naturalists and I lay out a few desiderata for characterizing the view in more precise metaphysical terms. Then, in §2 and §3, I argue that characterizing Moorean non-naturalism in terms of identity or grounding fails to meet at least some of the desiderata for a good characterization of the view. Whereas, in §4, I argue that characterizing

Moorean non-naturalism as a claim about the *essences* of normative properties does a good job of meeting all the desiderata. So, I conclude that we should understand Moorean non-naturalism in terms of essence. This conclusion is significant because, as I'll show, the Moorean non-naturalist's claim about essence is compatible with the claim that all particular normative facts are fully grounded in the natural, non-normative facts. It thereby suggests that the ways in which many contemporary metaethicists understand non-naturalism is misguided and overly restrictive.

Moreover, the fact that the notion of essence is most apt to capture what the debate between Moorean non-naturalists and their opponents amounts to is significant for metaphysical inquiry, more generally, because it provides justification for adopting essence into our ideology in the first place. What's at stake here is thus not just the taxonomical question of how to best characterize what non-naturalism amounts to, but it's what sort of ideology we should accept for metaphysical theorizing, in general.

1. The desiderata

In order to figure out what Moorean non-naturalism amounts to in precise metaphysical terms, we must first identify the core pre-theoretical claims that paradigm non-naturalists endorse and take to be at stake in the debate with their opponents. The first pre-theoretical claim that originated with Moore and is often echoed by his followers is that normative properties and facts are *sui generis* – i.e. that they are *entirely of their own kind*. For example, Shafer-Landau writes:

It appears that moral values are something very different in kind from anything else that we are familiar with. Faced with this appearance, we have three basic choices. We could take it at face value, and introduce into our ontology a *sui generis* category of values. Or we could seek to discredit the appearances...we might retain a belief in the evaluative realm, but eliminate the mystery by denying its distinctness. On this line – that of *ethical naturalism* – moral facts are a species of scientific facts, discoverable in all the ordinary ways, as motivating and as normative (or not) as ordinary facts. I am in the first camp. I think that moral facts are different in kind from any other.¹

And Enoch (2011) characterizes naturalism as the view that what there is in the world “is pretty much the kind of stuff our best science says (or will shortly say) that there is in the world,” which suggests that he takes non-naturalism to amount to the claim that the “normative stuff” is a distinct “kind of

¹ Shafer-Landau (2003) p. 55.

stuff” than that which our best science says exists.² Similarly, Parfit (2011) and Scanlon (2014) both claim that normative truths are “irreducibly normative”, which suggests that they, too, take normative facts to be entirely unlike other kinds of facts.³

So, while the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate is often characterized as a dispute regarding the question of whether normative properties are “natural” properties, this is not the whole issue that concerns Moore and his followers. They do not just think that normative properties are different in kind from paradigm scientific properties, but that they are different in kind from any other kinds of properties there might be. Moorean non-naturalists thus also oppose *supernaturalist non-naturalist* views like the Divine Command Theory, according to which all normative properties like *goodness* or *badness* are reducible to supernatural properties such as *being approved of (or disapproved of) by God*.⁴

The Moorean non-naturalist’s claim that normative properties are *sui generis* is a bit mysterious, though, because it’s not clear what kind-talk for properties amounts to in the first place. One might think that two properties are different in kind if they do not share any second-order properties. But any two properties always share some arbitrary property. For example, *being good* and *being an electron* share the second order property of *being a property* and *being normative or physical*.⁵ A better suggestion is that two properties are of the same kind only if they share an *elite* second-order property. That is, Lewis (1983) suggests that some properties are more *elite* than others in the sense that they make for more objective similarity and play a relatively important explanatory role – they are the “joints of nature”.⁶ Consequently, for Lewis, there are some ways of carving up reality with our concepts and terms that better carve reality at its joints than others. The notion of elite properties thus allows us to distinguish between more metaphysically significant and comparatively arbitrary similarities. So, one might take the issue of whether normative properties are of the same kind as, or different in kind from, any other properties to be the question of whether there is some elite second-order property that normative properties share with some other set of properties.⁷

² Enoch (2011) p. 134.

³ Parfit (2011: vol 2, part 6) and Scanlon (2014: ch 2).

⁴ McPherson (2012) makes this point of individuating Moore’s view from supernaturalist non-naturalist views. In what follows, wherever I simply use the term “non-naturalism”, it should be taken to mean Moorean non-naturalism, unless otherwise specified.

⁵ Leary (2017: 79).

⁶ Lewis calls such properties *natural* properties, but to avoid confusion in this context, I use the term ‘elite’.

⁷ The suggestion that second-order properties may be elite, however, is a bit bizarre and requires quite a large departure from Lewis (1983), since Lewis took the elite properties to be the properties of fundamental physics. It also may require a departure from even more permissive views of elite properties like Schaffer’s (2004), according to which some higher-level scientific properties may be elite.

But to say that normative properties are natural properties is presumably to say that they are *of the same kind* as paradigmatic scientific properties. So, according to this second interpretation of sameness-in-kind talk, all natural properties would have to share some elite property. But naturalists and non-naturalists alike take a quite diverse array of properties to be natural: *having negative charge*, *being in pain*, *being a toaster*, and *being a city*, to name a few. And it's highly implausible that there's some second-order property that all of these properties share, which makes for much objective similarity or enters into causal explanations. So, the relevant sense of sameness or difference in kind that is operative here cannot be that of sharing elite properties.

An important task for any specification of Moorean non-naturalism is thus to offer a precise metaphysical account of what it is for a property to be "different in kind" or "of the same kind" as some set of properties, in order to de-mystify the non-naturalist's core pre-theoretical claim that the normative is *sui generis*.

The second, but related, pre-theoretical claim that Moorean non-naturalists seem committed to (which aligns them with supernaturalist non-naturalists), is that countenancing normative properties is incompatible with an entirely scientific view of reality. Of course, some non-naturalists like Enoch (2011) and Scanlon (2014) point out that the non-naturalist's claim that there are non-natural normative properties is logically consistent with our best scientific theories, since these theories do not claim that there are no non-natural properties nor do they contain an "and that's all there is" clause.⁸ But so long as these non-naturalists take normative properties to be different in kind from all the "stuff of science", they presumably are committed to the claim that there is some sense in which the sciences cannot provide a full account of reality.⁹ A good specification of Moorean non-naturalism should thus also illuminate in what sense the sciences fail to provide such an account.

Sometimes it's assumed that non-naturalists are also committed to the claims that normative properties are not causally efficacious, and that they are not knowable a posteriori. But, as McPherson (2012) points out, it's common for those who believe in non-natural entities like God and spirits to also take those entities to have causal powers (e.g. creating the universe, causing plagues and floods) and be knowable a posteriori (e.g. through divine revelation and testimony). So, a non-naturalist, too, should be able to claim that although normative properties are *sui generis*, they can nonetheless be causally efficacious and knowable a posteriori.

⁸ Enoch (2011) p. 135.

⁹ Even Parfit's (2011) quietist non-naturalist view seems to be committed to this claim, so long as we take reality to encompass everything that exists in what Parfit calls the "wide sense" of 'exists'.

I thus take there to be only two core pre-theoretical commitments of Moorean non-naturalism: (a) that normative properties and facts are *sui generis*, and (b) that countenancing normative properties and facts is incompatible with a purely scientific view of reality.¹⁰ The first and foremost desideratum for a good specification of non-naturalism is thus that it should be

ILLUMINATING: It speaks to and elucidates the non-naturalist's two core pre-theoretical claims.

But a good specification of the view should also be as following:

SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL: It renders non-naturalism to be a non-trivial, local claim about normativity.

FITTING: It correctly classifies paradigm non-naturalists in the literature and in a way that best captures the spirit of their views.

GENERAL: It provides a characterization of non-naturalism that encompasses the widest spectrum of views that speak to the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical claims.

I'll explain each of these desiderata in turn.

SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL is fairly obvious. Non-naturalism is supposed to be a view that is not trivially true or trivially false, and it's a view about normative properties in particular – it's not about biological properties or mental properties, or “higher order” properties in general. So, the right specification of non-naturalism should not be a trivial claim, nor one that can be settled by general metaphysical considerations.

FITTING requires more explanation. Since non-naturalism is often stipulatively defined in the literature, I take it that a good characterization of non-naturalism need not classify all self-proclaimed non-naturalists as genuinely non-naturalist. But a good characterization of non-naturalism should at least classify paradigm non-naturalists like G. E. Moore's as genuinely non-naturalist. And it should also do so in a way that best captures the spirit of those views. Consider an analogy: suppose

¹⁰ This is how I specify the core claims of non-naturalism in Leary (2017) as well.

that all the vegans in your class think wearing leather is disgusting, but everyone else in your class likes to wear leather. Then you might correctly taxonomize your vegan and non-vegan students into two groups: those who like to wear leather and those who don't. But this taxonomy doesn't capture the full spirit of the vegans' view: they don't just have an aesthetic preference, but an underlying moral view that it's wrong to consume animal products. A better taxonomy would be one along these lines. This illustrates that, for any taxonomy of a debate, we want it to not just correctly classify paradigm parties to the debate, but also do so in a way that captures the full spirit of those parties' views.

But when we're trying to specify what a particular philosophical view P amounts to we're not just interested in the contingent, historical question of what paradigm defenders of P have in common. We're also interested in a further conceptual question: what is it that all possible views that capture the spirit of P (regardless of their plausibility) have in common? This is what makes philosophical taxonomies more substantive and interesting: it's not just about categorizing existing literature, but it's about carving up the conceptual space of views into certain families of views that resemble each other, including those spaces that are not occupied by anyone thus far (and perhaps even for good reasons). So, a good characterization of non-naturalism should not only correctly classify paradigm defenders of the view, but also offer the broadest characterization that captures all possible views that seem to capture the spirit of non-naturalism – i.e. it should be GENERAL.

So, the task for the rest of the paper is to identify what metaphysical ideology is apt for specifying what Moorean non-naturalism amounts to in a way that best meets all the above desiderata. I argue that identity and grounding is not fit for the job, but essence is. But first, let me make something explicit about my methodology. The question I'm focusing on here is, "What is Moorean non-naturalism?" rather than, "what is the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate about?" Consequently, my desiderata are focused exclusively on capturing the pre-theoretical concerns and views of paradigm non-naturalists and are entirely unconcerned with how well the resulting taxonomy fits with the pre-theoretical concerns and views of *naturalists*. This is my focus because, given that Moorean non-naturalism has always been so ill-defined, it's possible that the naturalist reaction to Moore has been largely motivated by different pre-theoretical concerns. So, if we try to specify the debate in a way that captures the pre-theoretical concerns of naturalists, we might end up with a different characterization of the debate. If so, it would turn out that naturalists and non-naturalists have been talking past one another all along. I want to remain neutral about whether this is the case and simply make the first important step in diagnosing the debate by focusing on what Moorean non-naturalism amounts to.

2. Non-naturalism as a non-identity claim

One might think that non-naturalism is obviously just the following claim:

Non-Identity Normative properties and facts are not identical to any other kinds of properties and facts.

But the tricky part is specifying what the “other kinds of properties and facts” are in a way that makes Non-Identity ILLUMINATING and SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL.

First, one might specify the “other kinds of properties and facts” as simply the *non-normative* facts. But this makes Non-Identity trivially true: a property cannot be both normative and non-normative. Even naturalists do not deny this. Someone who takes the property *being good* to be identical to the property *being pleasurable* does not thereby take *being good* to be a non-normative property. Rather, one thereby takes *being pleasurable* to just be the normative property of *being good*.

Second, one might specify the “other kinds of properties and facts” as the *descriptive* properties and facts, where the descriptive properties and facts are simply those properties and facts that can be referred to by descriptive, non-normative terms, whereas the normative properties and facts are those properties that can be referred to by normative terms. Non-Identity, thus understood, amounts to the claim that normative terms don’t refer to the same properties as descriptive terms. But this claim seems obviously false. Consider Eklund’s (2017) alien linguistic community that introduces the term ‘thgir’ into their language to stipulatively refer to the property, whatever it is, that we refer to with our term ‘right’:

Suppose, for example, that one of them, when learning English, has overheard English speakers speaking of what is “right,” having only an unspecific or mistaken idea of what the word might stand for – and introduced into her community’s own language a new expression, “thgir,” with the stipulation that “thgir” is to ascribe the property, whichever it is, that “right” ascribes, and then uses “thgir” in accordance with that stipulation. “Thgir” is then meaningful, but the meaning with which it is endowed does not guarantee that it plays the role in deliberation characteristic of normative concepts. “Thgir” ascribes the same property as “right,” but it is hardly a normative predicate.¹¹

¹¹ Eklund (2017: 75).

Eklund uses this thought experiment to show that what makes a concept or term normative is not the property that it refers to, but the conceptual role that the term plays – namely, its connection to deliberation, motivation, and reactive attitudes. “Thgir” doesn’t seem to be a normative term, but a descriptive, non-normative term because it doesn’t play the right conceptual role. But since “thgir”, by stipulation, refers to the same property that “right” refers to, this thought experiment also shows that we can refer to normative properties with descriptive, non-normative terms. So, it’s false that normative terms don’t refer to the same properties as descriptive, non-normative terms.

Third, then, one might suggest that we simply list all the other kinds of properties and facts there are and specify non-naturalism as the claim that normative properties are not identical to any of those properties and facts:

Non-Identity_{List} Not all normative properties and facts are identical to natural, supernatural, or ... properties and facts.

But the problem with *Non-Identity_{List}* is that it presupposes that we have an independent grasp on whether certain properties are of the same kind, rather than elucidating what that amounts to. For example, *Non-Identity_{List}* presupposes that we have an independent grasp on which properties are of the same kind as paradigmatic scientific properties – i.e. the natural ones – and states that there are at least some normative properties that are not identical to any of those properties. But *Non-Identity_{List}* does not tell us what makes properties such as *having negative charge*, *being in pain*, *being a toaster*, and *being a city* all natural properties.

To see the problem, consider a view according to which every normative property is identical to some very long disjunction of paradigmatic scientific properties. Is this a view according to which *Non-Identity_{List}* is true or false? In order to answer this question, we need to know whether a long disjunction of paradigmatic scientific properties is a natural property. But *Non-Identity_{List}*, by itself, does not provide an answer here. Of course, it may seem intuitive that a disjunction of paradigmatic scientific properties is of the same kind as its disjuncts, and is thus a natural property.¹² But this intuitive judgment simply presupposes the pre-theoretical notion of properties being of the same kind. *Non-Identity_{List}* in no way helps elucidate what this pre-theoretical notion amounts to. So, in order for *Non-Identity_{List}* to be ILLUMINATING, it needs to be supplemented with an account of how a

¹² Jackson (1998) and Enoch (2011) assume as much.

property must be related to some set of properties in order for those properties to be of the same kind.

One candidate relation is *grounding*: one might think that the sense in which such diverse properties like *having negative charge*, *being in pain*, *being a toaster*, and *being a city* are all of the same kind is that facts about charge, pain, toasters, and cities are all ultimately fully grounded in paradigmatic scientific facts. And so, the disjunctive property *having negative charge or being in pain or being a toaster or a city* is also a natural property because facts about this disjunctive property are ultimately fully grounded in paradigmatic scientific facts too. So, one might think that by using the notion of grounding, we can specify Moorean non-naturalism in a way that illuminates the pre-theoretical idea that normative properties are different in kind from all other kinds of properties. Indeed, many contemporary metaethicists and metaphysicians claim precisely that. So, this is where we'll now turn.

3. Non-naturalism as a grounding claim

While the ideology of grounding and its prominence in metaphysical theorizing is a new development in contemporary metaphysics, it is meant to capture an old, intuitive idea. We often make claims about certain facts obtaining *in virtue of* other facts, where this “in virtue of” locution is not meant to capture anything causal, logical, or semantic. For example, I might say that I'm identical to the five-year-old in that photograph in virtue of the fact that we're psychologically continuous. Or I might say that Michelangelo's David has a six-pack in virtue of the fact that the hunk of marble in location L is shaped S-wise. These are not claims about causation, logical entailment, or meaning. I'm not saying that the fact that I'm psychologically continuous with the five-year-old in the photograph caused us to be identical, or that it logically entails that we are, or that it literally means that we're identical. Nor am I saying that the shape of the hunk of marble caused David to have a six-pack, or that it logically entails or literally means that he has them. Rather, I am saying that, in each case, the former fact metaphysically determines and explains (in a non-causal sort of way) the latter fact. Grounding is simply a notion that is meant to pick out that non-causal sort of metaphysical determination.

So, I take it that the ideology of grounding is familiar and intuitive enough to warrant using it in our metaphysical theorizing, even though there are many controversial debates about how to best

characterize it formally.¹³ For the purposes of this paper, I assume that grounding is a transitive relation of metaphysical necessitation, which holds between facts. But much of what I say here could be translated to accommodate alternative views of grounding. Since I take grounding to be transitive, I also take there to be *mediate*, as well as *immediate* grounds: if x immediately grounds y, and y immediately grounds z, then x mediately grounds z. Moreover, a fact may be a *partial* or *full* ground of another fact: for example, the fact that a particular liquid is beer is fully grounded in the fact that it's an IPA, whereas the fact that the beer is cold and hoppy is partially grounded in the fact that the beer is cold and partially grounded in the fact that it's hoppy. This minimal characterization of grounding will suffice for our purposes.

Most grounding enthusiasts like Fine (2012), Rosen (2010), and Schaffer (2009) claim that grounding is apt for characterizing the physicalism vs. non-physicalism debate in the philosophy of mind and the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate in metaethics. Indeed, as suggested earlier, grounding seems apt for illuminating kind-talk for properties. We can think of properties being of the same kind insofar as they are all ultimately grounded in the same set of facts: if all facts about some property F are fully grounded in the A-facts, where the A-facts involve properties G, H, and I, then F is of the same kind as G, H, and I. So, for example, *natural* properties are properties that are all ultimately grounded in paradigmatic scientific properties:

For any property F:

- (i) If F is a paradigmatic scientific property, F is natural.
- (ii) If all the F-facts are (mediately or immediately) fully grounded in facts involving only paradigmatic scientific properties, then F is natural.

We may thus understand the naturalist's view as the claim that all normative facts are either identical to or fully grounded in paradigmatic scientific facts. Whereas the supernaturalist non-naturalist claims that normative properties are non-natural because normative facts are either identical to or at least partially grounded in facts involving supernatural entities like God.

¹³ For example, Fine (2012) takes grounding to be a sentential operator, whereas Rosen (2010) takes it to be a relation between facts, and Schaffer (2009) takes grounding to be a relation between entities of any ontological category. Moreover, while many take the grounding relation to be transitive, asymmetric, and to involve metaphysical necessitation, the literature abounds with potential counterexamples to these formal features of grounding (e.g. see Rodriguez-Pereyra (2015) and Skiles (2015)).

What both the naturalist and the supernaturalist have in common, though, is that they both claim that all normative facts are ultimately fully grounded in some paradigmatic non-normative properties. To capture what the Moorean non-naturalist's opponents have in common, then, we can first recursively define up those properties that are of the same kind as paradigm non-normative properties, which I'll call the *fundamentally non-normative* properties:

For any property F:

- (a) If F is a paradigmatic scientific property, supernatural property, ... (where we fill in whatever other paradigm non-normative properties there might be), F is fundamentally non-normative.
- (b) If all the F-facts are (mediately or immediately) fully grounded in facts involving only paradigmatic scientific properties or supernatural properties or ..., F is fundamentally non-normative.

Then we can specify what the Moorean non-naturalist's opponents endorse as follows:

Full Ground All normative facts are fundamentally non-normative: they are either identical to or fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts.

On the other hand, the Moorean non-naturalist insists:

Anti-Full-Ground Some normative facts are not fundamentally non-normative: they are neither identical to nor fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts.

Unlike Non-Identity, Anti-Full-Ground is ILLUMINATING because it offers an account of what it is for normative properties to be different in kind from any other kinds of properties: it's for their instantiations to be not fully metaphysically explained in terms of the instantiations of any paradigm non-normative properties. Anti-Full-Ground also elucidates the non-naturalist's claim that countenancing normative properties is incompatible with a purely scientific view of reality: it's the claim that all facts are not ultimately fully metaphysically explained by the fundamental scientific facts.

As I explain in §3.1, however, Anti-Full-Ground is true in light of very general metaphysical considerations, which shows that Anti-Full-Ground is not SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL.¹⁴

3.1 Against Full Ground

Suppose that the fact that an action A is right is always fully grounded in the fact that A maximizes happiness. Now consider that very grounding-fact:

GROUND The fact that A maximizes happiness grounds that A is right.

GROUND itself is a normative fact because it involves the normative property *rightness*. So, in order for Full Ground to be true, GROUND must be fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts.

But what grounds GROUND is also most plausibly some further fact that involves *rightness*. This is because on the most plausible views about what grounds grounding-facts, the grounds of any grounding-fact involves both the grounding properties and the grounded properties. For example, on Fine (2012) and Rosen's ((2010), forthcoming) *essentialist view*, what grounds grounding-facts are facts about the essence of the grounded property. So, if GROUND is true, it's grounded by

ESSENCE It's essential of *rightness* that if A maximizes happiness, A is right.

On Wilsch's (2015) *nomological view*, on the other hand, grounding-facts are grounded in general metaphysical laws concerning various "construction relations", such as constitution, realization, set-formation, and so on. So, if GROUND is true, it's grounded in

LAW It's a metaphysical law that *maximizing happiness* realizes *rightness*, and that, if Fa and F realizes G, then Ga.

But both ESSENCE and LAW involve the property *rightness*. So, they are normative facts too, which must be fully grounded in non-normative facts for Full Ground to be true.

There is one competing view in the literature on grounding-facts that does not imply that GROUND is grounded in a further normative fact, though. Namely, on Bennett (2011) and

¹⁴ The argument in §3.1 is akin to an argument that Dasgupta (2014) attributes to Sider (2011) against using ground to characterize the physicalism vs. anti-physicalism debate.

DeRosset's (2013) "boot-strapping" view, if Fa grounds Ga, the fact that Fa grounds Ga is itself grounded in Fa. So, their view implies that, if GROUND is true, GROUND is itself grounded by

MAX A maximizes happiness.

But as Dasgupta (2014) argues, MAX seems like a worse explanation of GROUND than ESSENCE or LAW. The mere fact that A maximizes happiness does not explain why there is a connection between A's maximizing happiness and A's being right. On the other hand, if it's part of the very nature of *rightness* that right acts maximize happiness or it's a law of metaphysics that *maximizing happiness* realizes *rightness*, this surely explains why such a connection holds. Indeed, it seems to be a general feature of explanation, not just metaphysical explanation, that in order to explain why there's an explanatory connection between some property F and some property G, one must reference both F and G. So, any good metaphysical explanation for GROUND must be some fact that involves both *maximizing happiness* and *rightness*.

Consequently, whatever fact grounds GROUND must be another normative fact. The truth of Full Ground thus requires that this further fact is itself fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts. But, again, this can't be. Suppose ESSENCE is what grounds GROUND. Either ESSENCE is just a brute fact about the nature of *rightness*, and thus does not have any ground at all, or ESSENCE is itself grounded in some further fact about *rightness*. How could any fact that isn't about *rightness* explain why *rightness* has the nature that it does? So, if ESSENCE has any ground at all, it must be grounded in some further fact about *rightness*, which is a further normative fact. Similarly, if LAW grounds GROUND, then it seems that either LAW is just a brute metaphysical law that has no ground at all, or LAW must be grounded in some further fact that involves *rightness*, since no fact that doesn't involve *rightness* could possibly explain why it is a metaphysical law that maximizing happiness realizes *rightness*.

So, Full Ground must be false and Anti-Full-Ground must be true.¹⁵ But the above argument has nothing to do with normative properties in particular. The exact same argument could be given to show that the biological facts or the mental facts are not fully grounded in the fundamental physical facts.¹⁶ So, the above argument doesn't show that non-naturalism is true. It simply shows that Anti-

¹⁵ This argument may seem like Vayrynen's (2013) "Moral Relevance Argument", but Vayrynen actually argues for something much stronger: that *no* normative fact is fully grounded in non-normative facts. The above argument only establishes that not all normative facts are fully grounded in non-normative facts.

¹⁶ Dasgupta (2014), Leary (fc).

Full-Ground fails to be SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL and thus that it's not the right way to specify what Moorean non-naturalism amounts to.

3.2 Restricting Full Ground

There are two natural responses to the previous argument. First, one might object that a fact's involving a normative property like *rightness* is not sufficient to make it a normative fact. While GROUND, ESSENCE, and LAW may involve the normative property *rightness* it might seem that they are not "really normative" in the same way that first-order normative facts like the fact that pleasure is good or the fact that maximizing happiness is right are normative. So, one might insist that Full Ground doesn't require that facts like GROUND, ESSENCE, and LAW be fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts.

Second, even if a fact's involving a normative property is sufficient to make it normative, one might insist that Moorean non-naturalists and their opponents are simply not concerned with such metaphysically "heavy duty" normative facts like GROUND, ESSENCE, and LAW, and thus that we should interpret Full Ground as not pertaining to those facts. After all, the sorts of normative facts that naturalists and non-naturalists seem to be preoccupied with are facts like the fact that A is right or the fact that x is good – facts of the form *Fa*. They do not discuss at all whether facts about what explains that x is good are themselves natural or non-natural facts, or whether, if *goodness* is identical to *being pleasurable*, that identity statement itself is a natural fact.

Both of these responses suggest that we should understand the claim that the Moorean non-naturalist's opponents endorse as a more restricted grounding claim:

Full Ground_{Fa} For all normative properties F and for all entities a: if Fa, then Fa is identical to or fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts.¹⁷

And we should understand Moorean non-naturalism as follows:

¹⁷ One controversial question about Full Ground_{Fa} is whether it concerns only particular normative facts of the form Fa (e.g. the fact that my donating to Oxfam is right or the fact that the pleasure I experience from doing so is good), or whether it also concerns *general* facts of the form Fa (e.g. the fact that maximizing happiness is right or the fact that pleasure is good). The answer turns on whether general normative facts of this form are actually best understood as metaphysical grounding claims (as Berker (2018a) argues). If this is right, and Full Ground_{Fa} is supposed to not apply to normative grounding-facts, then Full Ground_{Fa} only concerns particular normative facts. Rosen (2017b) understands Full Ground_{Fa} in this way, but I remain neutral about this here.

Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} For some normative facts Fa, Fa is neither identical to nor fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts.

Indeed, this is the sort of characterization of the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate offered by Rosen (2017b: 157). Whether facts like GROUND, ESSENCE, and LAW are fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts is irrelevant to this dispute. Anti-Full Ground_{Fa} is thereby SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL: it's not trivially true in virtue of general considerations about metaphysical explanation, but it can only be established by thinking about what grounds normative facts of the form Fa in particular.

But is Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} FITTING and GENERAL? Let's start with the former. Many contemporary self-proclaimed non-naturalists do explicitly endorse Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}. Enoch (2011), Rosen (fc), and Scanlon (2014) claim that all particular, contingent normative facts of the form Fa (e.g. the fact that my migraine is bad) are partially grounded in particular, contingent natural facts (e.g. the fact that migraines are painful) together with ungrounded general normative facts (e.g. that pain is bad). This view endorses Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}. And Bader (2017) and Fine ((2002), (2012)) claim that particular, contingent normative facts of the form Fa are not metaphysically grounded at all, but only *normatively grounded* in non-normative facts (where normative grounding is alleged to be a sui generis, distinctly normative kind of in-virtue-of relation). So, Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} fits nicely with the views espoused by contemporary self-proclaimed non-naturalists.

But Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} does not fit so well with the view of *the* paradigm Moorean non-naturalist – Moore himself. Moore (1903) seems entirely unconcerned with what *makes* something good. Instead, he seems concerned with both the concept of good and the property *goodness* itself and whether they can be defined. First, Moore states:

Definitions of the kind that I was asking for, definitions which describe *the real nature of the object* or notion denoted by a word, and which do not merely tell us what the word is used to mean, are only possible when the object or notion in question is something complex...¹⁸

He then uses the example of a horse to clarify the kind of definition that he has in mind. It's not a stipulative definition of what one means when using "horse", nor a definition of what competent speakers mean when using "horse", but the following:

¹⁸ Moore (1903: 7, Sec 7); emphasis is mine.

But (3) we may, when we define horse, mean something much more important. We may mean that a certain object, which we all of us know, is composed in a certain manner: that it has four legs, a head, a heart, a liver, etc., etc., all of them arranged in definite relations to one another. It is in this sense that I deny good to be definable. I say that it is not composed of any parts, which we can substitute for it in our minds when we are thinking of it... "Good," then, if we mean by it *that quality which we assert to belong to a thing*, when we say that the thing is good, is incapable of any definition.¹⁹

Moore seems concerned with both the concept of good and the property *goodness* itself (albeit he fails to distinguish between them), and he claims that both are simple and undefinable.

The only metaphysical issue that Moore seems concerned with, then, is not what grounds x's being good, but whether we can give a *real definition* of *goodness*. That is, a real definition of x states the very nature of x in the following form: "To be x is to be φ ," where φ is a "complex condition not containing [x]" (Rosen 2017b: 154). Moore seems to claim that there is no non-normative condition φ that defines what it is to be good, and that this is the sense in which he takes *goodness* to be *sui generis*.

Moreover, in his reply to his critics, Moore suggests that he actually accepts Full Ground_{FA}:

I should never have thought of suggesting that goodness was 'non-natural,' unless I had supposed that it was 'derivative' in the sense that, whenever a thing is good (in the sense in question) its goodness (in Mr. Broad's words) 'depends on the presence of certain non-ethical characteristics' possessed by the thing in question: I have always supposed that it did so 'depend,' in the sense that, if a thing is good (in my sense), then that it is so *follows* from the fact that it possesses certain natural properties, which are such that from the fact that it is good it does *not follow* conversely that it has those properties.²⁰

Moore explicitly states that he takes normative facts to "depend on" and "follow from" natural facts. The sense in which they follow from the natural facts, for Moore, cannot be logical or semantic entailment, since Moore (1903) famously argued that, given that something has certain non-normative features, it is always an open question whether it is good. Nor could Moore plausibly be taken to mean that the fact that a thing possesses certain natural properties causes it to be good. A natural interpretation of Moore, then, is that he takes a thing's natural features to ground its being good. And Moore doesn't claim that its normative features follow from its natural features together with other

¹⁹ Moore (1903: 8-9, Secs 8, 10); emphasis is mine.

²⁰ Moore (1942: 588); emphasis is from the original text.

normative facts (e.g. fundamental normative principles). So, Moore is plausibly making a claim about full grounding, rather than partial grounding, thereby endorsing Full Ground_{Fa}.²¹

Of course, there are alternative ways to interpret Moore's reply to his critics that are compatible with Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}. First, one might suggest that Moore implicitly assumed that fundamental normative principles play a partial grounding role, even though he doesn't explicitly say so. Since it's common to cite only part of an explanation when offering one, there's a simple pragmatic story to tell about why Moore may have left out part of the metaphysical explanation of a thing's being good. Or, one might suggest that we can interpret Moore as making a claim about *normative* grounding, rather than *metaphysical* grounding (like Bader (2017) and Fine (2012)).

But even if one of these alternative interpretations is right, this wouldn't show that Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} is FITTING. Recall that this desideratum requires that a good characterization of Moorean non-naturalism not only correctly classify paradigm non-naturalists, but that it also do so in a way that best captures the spirit of their views. Given that Moore's (1903) original view is entirely unconcerned with what *makes* something good and is instead concerned with whether *goodness* itself can be defined, even if Moore's reply is compatible with Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}, that thesis just doesn't seem to capture the way in which Moore thinks the normative is *sui generis*.

Finally, regardless of how we should interpret Moore's view, what the above discussion brings to light is that there's a reasonable distinction to be made between *what some property is* and what it is *in virtue of which* something has that property. Even if *what it is* to be good is primitive and undefinable, we may nonetheless be able to give an account of what it is *in virtue of which* something is good in entirely non-normative terms. So, it's at least a conceptually possible view that basic normative properties like *goodness* have no real definition, even though all normative facts of the form Fa are fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts. (Indeed, I'll spell out such a view in detail in §3.3) And this view speaks to the pre-theoretical commitments of non-naturalism: if some normative properties have no real definition, then they are not "built up" out of any other properties, including scientific ones, and are in this sense *sui generis* and incompatible with a purely scientific view of reality according to which all the features of reality are ultimately built out of paradigm scientific features. Regardless of how well Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} fits with Moore's view, then, it's not sufficiently GENERAL because it doesn't make room for this conceptually possible view that speaks to the pre-theoretical commitments of non-naturalism.

²¹ I make this point in Leary (2017) and (fc) as well.

Of course, one might think such a non-naturalist view is not very plausible because it may seem impossible to explain why the normative facts are fully grounded in the fundamentally non-normative facts, if basic normative properties like *goodness* cannot be defined in non-normative terms. Indeed, this worry is essentially the supervenience objection to non-naturalism. But that's a worry about whether such a view is plausible, it's not a worry about whether such a view is conceivable or genuinely non-naturalist. So long as the view is coherent and speaks to the non-naturalist's core pre-theoretical claims, our taxonomy should make room for it, regardless of its plausibility.

In sum, then, Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} is an unsatisfactory characterization of Moorean non-naturalism because, while it is ILLUMINATING and SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL, it's not FITTING and GENERAL. Dasgupta (2014), however, has an alternative way of restricting Full Ground that actually makes room for the sort of non-naturalist view I've been describing, and thus might appear to do a better job of meeting all four desiderata.²² But I argue in §3.3 that even his alternative grounding characterization is neither FITTING nor GENERAL.

3.3 Dasgupta's alternative restriction of Full Ground

Whereas Rosen restricts Full Ground to only normative facts of the form Fa, Dasgupta proposes a more inclusive way of restricting Full Ground so that it concerns normative facts of the form Fa and normative grounding-facts like GROUND (i.e. the fact that A's maximizing happiness grounds that A is right).

Dasgupta first argues that all grounding-facts like GROUND must be grounded in *brute connective facts*: facts like ESSENCE or LAW, which explain the connection between the grounding properties and the grounded properties, but which are themselves ungrounded. But, according to Dasgupta, facts like ESSENCE and LAW are not ungrounded in the sense that they are fundamental, but rather in the sense that they are not even the sorts of things that can, in principle, have grounds. He makes an analogy with causation: the fact that $2+2=4$ has no cause, but it isn't uncaused in the same way that the Big Bang has no cause (in the sense that it's a first cause). The fact that $2+2=4$ is simply not the sort of thing that could, in principle, be caused. So, what caused $2+2$ to equal 4 is simply an inapt question.²³ Similarly, Dasgupta claims that the question of what metaphysically explains why a certain property or object has the essence that it does or why some metaphysical law holds

²² Dasgupta (2014) is primarily interested in whether grounding can be used to specify physicalism, but I carry over his arguments to the metaethical domain.

²³ Ibid: 576.

“does not legitimately arise”.²⁴ That’s simply what the property or object *is* or what the laws *are* – no further story can, in principle, be told.

So, Dasgupta suggests that we need to distinguish between facts that are *substantive* – facts for which the question of what grounds them does legitimately arise – and facts that are *autonomous* – those that are not the sorts of facts that can, in principle, be grounded. And Dasgupta claims that it is only substantive facts with which naturalists and non-naturalists should be concerned. So, he takes naturalism to amount to the following:

Substantive-Natural Ground All substantive normative facts are either identical to or fully grounded in paradigm scientific facts or autonomous facts.²⁵

Substantive-Natural Ground requires that all normative facts of the form Fa and normative grounding-facts like GROUND are identical to or fully grounded in paradigmatic scientific facts or autonomous facts (like ESSENCE or LAW). So, one way of being a naturalist, according to Dasgupta, is to claim that, for any normative fact Na , Na is grounded in some natural fact Da , and the fact that Da grounds Na is itself grounded in the autonomous fact that it’s essential of N that if x is D , x is N . Dasgupta takes this view to capture the spirit of naturalism because it says that there is nothing more to the nature of normative properties than that which underwrites naturalistic explanations of them.²⁶

A supernaturalist, on the other hand, presumably takes substantive normative facts of the form Fa to be identical to or at least partially grounded in supernatural facts (e.g. facts about what God commands), and thereby denies Substantive-Natural Ground. So, what the naturalist and the supernaturalist both endorse is the following:

Substantive Ground All substantive normative facts are identical to or fully grounded in paradigm non-normative facts or autonomous facts.

Whereas, on this construal, the Moorean non-naturalist endorses:

²⁴ Ibid: 580.

²⁵ This is the normative analogue of what Dasgupta (2014) calls “Weak Physicalism” (581). Dasgupta takes physicalists to also endorse the further claim that “all autonomous facts help underwrite the kind of grounding explanations required by Weak Physicalism”, since presumably the physicalist also wants to rule out the possibility of an autonomous God (584). But since naturalism is a local thesis about normativity, compatible with the existence of God, it doesn’t seem to require this further claim.

²⁶ Ibid: 584-5.

Anti-Substantive-Ground Some substantive normative facts are neither identical to nor fully grounded in facts that are non-normative or autonomous.

Unlike *Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}*, *Anti-Substantive-Ground* actually makes room for a non-naturalist view on which all normative facts of the form *Fa* are fully grounded in non-normative facts. This is because *Anti-Substantive-Ground* can still be true on such a view, if normative grounding-facts like *GROUND* are substantive, but fundamental. One might think that Dasgupta's alternative grounding characterization of Moorean non-naturalism is thereby more *FITTING* and *GENERAL* than *Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}*.

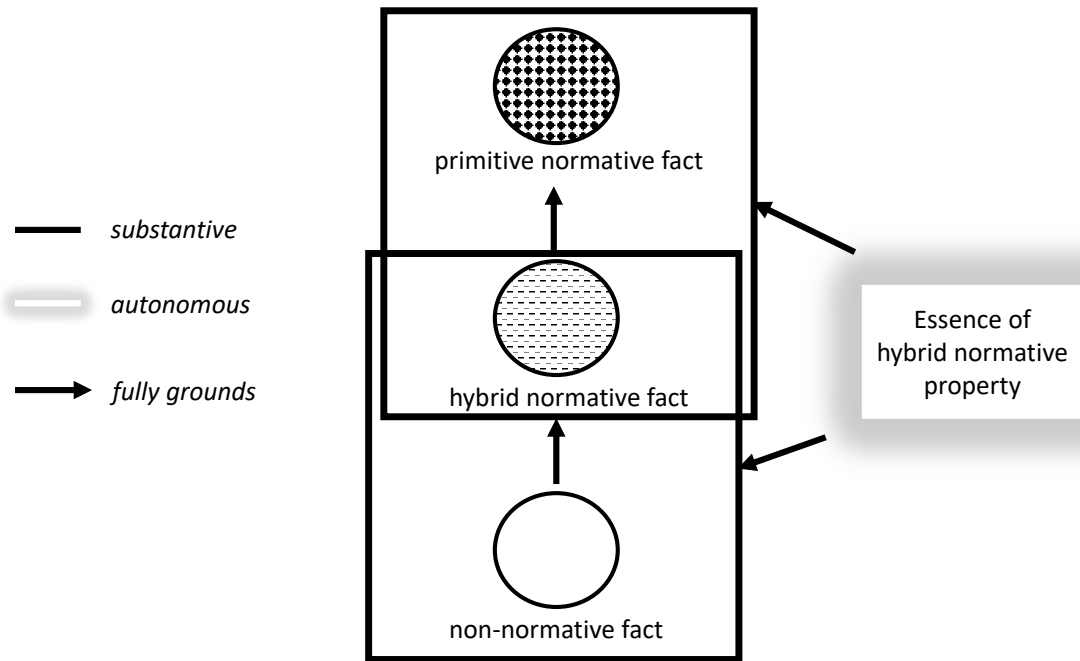
But the claim that Moore's view counts as non-naturalist because it allows that normative grounding-facts are fundamental is an even further cry from the reason why Moore himself took his view to be non-naturalist. As discussed earlier in §3.2, Moore seems solely concerned with what *goodness* is, not with what *makes* something good, let alone what *makes something make something* good. So, while *Anti-Substantive-Ground* may be more compatible with Moore's view than *Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}*, it's not any more *FITTING* because it still doesn't capture the spirit of his view.

Moreover, there's a way of fleshing out Moore's view that is compatible with *Substantive Ground*. Suppose Moore is right that *goodness* and other basic normative properties are primitive in the sense that they don't have a real definition. As I argue elsewhere, this is compatible with there being some *hybrid* normative properties, whose essences involve both natural properties and primitive normative properties; and the essences of these *hybrid* normative properties may explain the grounding connections between the natural and primitive normative properties.²⁷ For example, I propose that it may be part of the essence of *being in pain* that (i) if one's C-fibers are firing, one is in pain, and (ii) that if one is in pain, one is experiencing something bad, but *badness* is a primitive normative property (2017: 98). The property *being in pain* would then be a hybrid normative property whose essence explains why C-fiber-firing-facts ground pain-facts and pain-facts ground badness-facts. Regardless of how plausible this view is²⁸, it's at least a coherent one that is compatible with the spirit of Moore's view. And this is a view on which *Substantive Ground* is true: all the substantive facts are fully grounded in facts that are either non-normative or autonomous (see Figure 1).

²⁷ Leary (2017).

²⁸ See Faraci (2017) and Toppinen (2018) for criticisms.

Figure 1: Hybrid Property View



So, since Anti-Substantive-Ground rules out this conceptually possible view that captures the spirit of non-naturalism, it is not sufficiently GENERAL.

In fact, even Substantive-Natural Ground may be true on this picture: all the substantive normative facts may be fully grounded in paradigm scientific facts or autonomous facts. Herein lies the rub: the reason why Substantive-Natural Ground seemed to capture the spirit of naturalism is because we were assuming that it must always be the essence of the grounded normative properties that explain grounding connections between those properties and non-normative ones. For example, Dasgupta seems to assume that if pain-facts ground badness-facts, this must be because it's part of the essence of *badness* that pain is bad. And if this is all the essence of *badness* amounts to, then it seems that there's nothing more to the nature of *badness* than that which underwrites naturalistic explanations of it, which does sound like naturalism. But this is a claim about *essence* – it's not about grounding. On the other hand, while Substantive-Natural Ground may be true on the view sketched above, the essences of some normative properties like *badness* cannot be specified in non-normative terms, which sounds like Moore's view. This suggests that we should instead use the notion of essence, rather than grounding, to characterize the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate. And that's precisely what I propose in the following section.

4. Non-naturalism as an essence claim

Given the discussion in §3.2, it seems that Moore's own view is best characterized as the claim that basic normative properties like *goodness* do not have a real definition. Rosen (2017b) rejects characterizing the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate in these terms because he points out that non-reductive physicalists in the philosophy of science claim that the properties that feature in higher-level sciences are not definable in terms of fundamental physical properties. So, Rosen claims that a good characterization of the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate should make room for an analogous non-reductive naturalist view about the normative. This is why Rosen claims we should understand the debate as concerning not real definition, but grounding (specifically, about Full Ground_{ra}).

But this is too quick. First, it's not obvious that the pre-theoretical concerns in the philosophy of science debate match those in the metaethical debate. One striking difference between these two debates is that, while there's been long disagreement about whether mental properties, for example, supervene on physical properties, there's been a history of consensus that the normative supervenes on the non-normative.²⁹ So, it seems plausible that one of the pre-theoretical concerns in the former debate is whether science is "complete" in the sense that the physical facts determine all the facts there are, whereas this is not a central concern in the latter debate.

Second, recall that my main task here is to identify the best way of characterizing Moorean non-naturalism without paying attention to whether this captures the naturalist's perspective of the debate because it's an open question whether naturalists share the same pre-theoretical concerns. Consequently, it's an open question whether so-called "non-reductive naturalists" are engaged in a genuine disagreement with Moorean non-naturalists. So, the fact that characterizing non-naturalism in terms of real definition wouldn't allow room for a non-reductive naturalist opponent is not a reason to reject that characterization.

But I do think there's a way of characterizing Moorean non-naturalism using the related, broader notion of *essence*, which might leave room for a non-reductive naturalist opponent.³⁰ I take the essence of *x* to be simply the set of propositions that directly state the very nature of *x* (Fine (1994)).³¹ Whereas a real definition of *x* is a proposition that directly states the very nature of *x* in a particular form: "To be *x* is to be φ ", where φ is a complex condition not containing *x* (Rosen (2017b)). Essence

²⁹ Though, there's been a recent wave of detractors: Fine (2002), Roberts (2018), Hattiangadi (2018), and Rosen (fc).

³⁰ McPherson (2013) characterizes the naturalism vs. non-naturalism debate in terms of real definition and elite properties, and he attempts to make room for a non-reductive naturalist position. But I don't have room to discuss his proposal here.

³¹ Fine (1994) actually distinguishes between many different senses of essence. This is what he calls "immediate constitutive essence".

is thus broader than real definition because the essence of *x* may contain some proposition that directly states the very nature of *x*, but which cannot be put in the form of a real definition. For example, consider disjunction: we cannot define what it is for *p* or *q* to obtain in terms of a condition not containing “or”, but it nonetheless seems to be essential of disjunction that disjunctive facts are grounded in their disjuncts (Rosen (2010: 131)). This illustrates that, while a real definition of *x* is always at least part of *x*'s essence, *x*'s essence (or part thereof) may not be a real definition of *x*; and *x* may even have an essence, without having a real definition at all.

Since essence is broader than real definition, we might then distinguish between two different views according to which normative properties have no real definition. On the first view, while basic normative properties like *goodness* and *badness* lack real definitions, they nonetheless have essences that contain natural sufficient conditions for their instantiation. For example, on this view, the essence of *goodness* may include that if *x* is pleasurable, *x* is good, but since *goodness* is multiply realizable, being pleasurable does not define what it is to be good. On the second view, though, not only do basic normative properties like *goodness* and *badness* not have real definitions, but their essences also do not contain any non-normative sufficient conditions (natural or otherwise) for their instantiation. The former view seems to capture the spirit of non-reductive naturalism, whereas the latter view captures the spirit of Moore's view.

The ideology of essence thus affords us with a way of characterizing Moorean non-naturalism that potentially makes room for a non-reductive naturalist opponent. First, since essences are just a set of propositions, we may say that *F* is *involved* in the essence of *G* just in case *F* is a constituent of some proposition contained in the essence of *G*. Next, we may then specify what it is for a property *F* to be *of the same kind* as some other set of properties, the *A*-properties: it's for the essence of *F* to *ultimately involve* the *A*-properties, where this “ultimate involvement” is a matter of satisfying a recursive definition. For example, what it is for a property to be *natural* – i.e. of the same kind as paradigmatic scientific properties – is for its essence to ultimately involve scientific properties in the following way:

For any property *F*:

- (a) If *F* is a paradigmatic scientific property, then *F* is natural.
- (b) If the essence of *F* involves only paradigmatic scientific properties, then *F* is natural.
- (c) If the essence of *F* involves paradigmatic scientific sufficient conditions for being *F*, then *F* is natural.

- (d) If the essence of F involves only natural properties or natural sufficient conditions for being F, then F is natural.

With this definition of natural properties in mind, we may then construe the naturalist's view as simply:

Essentially Natural All normative properties are natural properties.

On this construal, a reductive naturalist claims, moreover, that for any normative property N, the essence of N contains a complex natural condition φ that *defines* N, whereas a non-reductive naturalist denies this.

The supernaturalist non-naturalist, on the other hand, presumably rejects *Essentially Natural* because she thinks that the essences of normative properties involve supernatural entities. But what the naturalist and the supernaturalist non-naturalist have in common, on my proposal, is that they both claim that the essences of all normative properties ultimately involve paradigm non-normative properties. That is, we can give a recursive definition for *essentially non-normative* properties:

For any property F:

- (i) If F is a paradigmatic scientific property, supernatural property, or ... (where we fill in whatever other paradigms there might be), F is essentially non-normative.
- (ii) If the essence of F involves only paradigmatic scientific properties, supernatural properties, or ..., then F is essentially non-normative.
- (iii) If the essence of F involves paradigmatic scientific, supernatural, or ... sufficient conditions for being F, then F is essentially non-normative.
- (iv) If the essence of F involves only essentially non-normative properties or essentially non-normative sufficient conditions for being F, then F is essentially non-normative.

With this definition in mind, we may specify what the Moorean non-naturalist's opponents endorse as follows:

Essentially Non-normative All normative properties are essentially non-normative.

Whereas, the Moorean non-naturalist instead endorses:

In other words, the Moorean non-naturalist insists that some normative properties fail to satisfy all of (i)-(iv) above: some normative properties are neither identical to nor have essences that ultimately involve paradigm non-normative properties.

Before explaining how this characterization meets all four desiderata from §1, let me address one worry thus far. I've presented the above essence characterization of Moorean non-naturalism as having the virtue of making room for a non-reductive naturalist opponent, since the notion of essence is broader than real definition. But one might reasonably worry that even if essence is technically broader than real definition, a non-reductive naturalist view according to which the essences of basic normative properties involve natural sufficient conditions for their instantiation, but lack a real definition, is not really a coherent view. If the only difference between real definition and essence is that real definitions are propositions of a particular form – “To be x is to be φ ” where φ is a complex condition not containing x – it might seem that a normative property N cannot have a natural essence, but no real definition. This is because we should always be able to simply translate N 's essence into the form of a real definition. For example, suppose the essence of *goodness* is exhausted by propositions stating natural sufficient conditions for x 's being good: e.g. *if x is F , x is good*, and *if x is G , x is good*, and... We should then be able to translate this essence into the following real definition: *To be good is to be F or G or ...* So, it may seem that there really is no conceptual space for a view according to which some normative properties like *goodness* have essences that contain non-normative sufficient conditions, but have no real definition.³²

Perhaps someone could defend the coherency of such a view by supplying a more substantive account of the difference between essence and real definition. But I won't attempt that here because this worry doesn't actually suggest that there's anything wrong with characterizing Moorean non-naturalism in terms of essence. This is because, again, my aim here is to identify what Moorean non-naturalism amounts to, and then we can proceed from there to determine the various ways in which naturalists may disagree with them. If it turns out that there's no way to reject Moorean non-naturalism, while still accepting a non-reductive view about normative properties, then so much the worse for non-reductive naturalism. So, I'll leave it open whether this view is ultimately coherent.

³² This is a variation of Jackson's (1998) supervenience argument. Thanks to [redacted] for bringing this worry to my attention.

What matters is whether Essentially Normative meets our four desiderata. And it does. First, Essentially Normative is ILLUMINATING: it speaks to and elucidates the non-naturalist's two core pre-theoretical claims. The recursive definition of essentially non-normative properties above makes talk of normative properties being "of the same kind", or "different in kind", from other properties metaphysically precise. The basic idea behind this recursive definition is that normative properties would be of the same kind as other properties if they were somehow "built up" out of paradigm non-normative properties or properties that are themselves built up out of paradigm non-normative properties. But if a normative property like *goodness*, for example, is *not* built up out of such properties, then *goodness* is something "over and above" paradigm non-normative properties and any derivative properties that are built up from them. And since paradigm non-normative properties include scientific ones, this would imply further that there is some feature of reality that is not somehow built up out of scientific features. While this is metaphorical talk, it shows that Essentially Normative, together with the recursive definition of essentially non-normative properties, speaks to the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical claims that normative properties are *sui generis* and incompatible with a purely scientific worldview.

Moreover, and importantly, this way of specifying those pre-theoretical claims allows for the sort of non-naturalist view that I've attributed to Moore, according to which normative properties are *sui generis*, even though all normative facts of the form Fa are fully grounded in natural, non-normative facts. And Essentially Normative is not only compatible with this view, but it offers a diagnosis of why this view is non-naturalist that is very similar to Moore's, since essence is a close cognate of real definition. Essentially Normative thereby not only correctly classifies Moore's view as a non-naturalist one, but it does so in a way that captures the spirit of the view. So, it's FITTING.

But Essentially Normative also allows for a variety of other non-naturalist positions. First, Essentially Normative is compatible with the sort of hybrid property view sketched in §3.3 (Figure 1). What makes that view non-naturalist, according to my characterization, is that the higher-order normative properties, which are grounded by the hybrid normative properties, are *not* essentially non-normative.³³ So, Essentially Normative even allows for a non-naturalist view according to which not only are all normative facts of the form Fa fully grounded in non-normative facts, but the normative

³³ The hybrid normative properties are essentially non-normative because they satisfy condition (iii) or (iv) of the recursive definition. These properties are thus not *sui generis* normative properties, but they are nonetheless normative properties because their essences involve *sui generis* normative properties (Leary (2017: 97-8)).

grounding-facts themselves are grounded in autonomous facts about essences (on which Substantive Ground is true).

Essentially Normative is also compatible with Fine's (2002) more radical view according to which there are no metaphysically necessary connections, including grounding connections, between normative and non-normative properties.³⁴ Indeed, Fine actually claims that the reason why there cannot be metaphysically necessary connections between normative and non-normative properties is that there are no essential connections between them:

There would appear to be nothing in the identity of the naturalistic or normative features that demands that they be connected in the way they are. It is no part of what it is to be pain that it should be bad, and no part of what it is to be bad that it should include pain. There is a striking difference between the connection between being water and being composed of H₂O, on the one hand, and the connection between being a pain and bad, on the other. For the identities of the respective features require that the connection holds in the one case, though not the other.³⁵

So, even Fine takes the primary issue to be whether the essences of normative properties involve natural, non-normative properties.

Essentially Normative is also compatible with Enoch (2011) and Scanlon's (2014) non-naturalist views, according to which all contingent normative facts of the form Fa are grounded in some non-normative fact G together with a fundamental normative principle connecting F and G, which Rosen (2017b) calls "Bridge Law Non-naturalism".³⁶ Of course, one might worry that Essentially Normative doesn't really capture the spirit of Enoch and Scanlon's views because they do not invoke essence-talk at all. But it seems that they need to appeal to some ideology like essence in order to explain what makes the normative *sui generis* on their view. After all, other types of facts may plausibly have a similar grounding structure. The contingent mathematical facts, for example, are plausibly grounded in both contingent non-mathematical facts together with general mathematical principles: the fact that there are more species of dogs than species of rhinoceroses is grounded in the contingent fact that there are 340 species of dogs and 5 species of rhinoceroses and the general

³⁴ This view is radical because it denies that normative properties even metaphysically supervene on non-normative properties.

³⁵ Fine (2002: 271).

³⁶ One difference between Enoch (2011) and Scanlon (2014) is that Enoch claims that the fundamental normative principles are metaphysically necessary, while Scanlon suggests that the fundamental normative principles are *normatively* necessary, where this is distinct from metaphysical necessity (à la Fine (2002)).

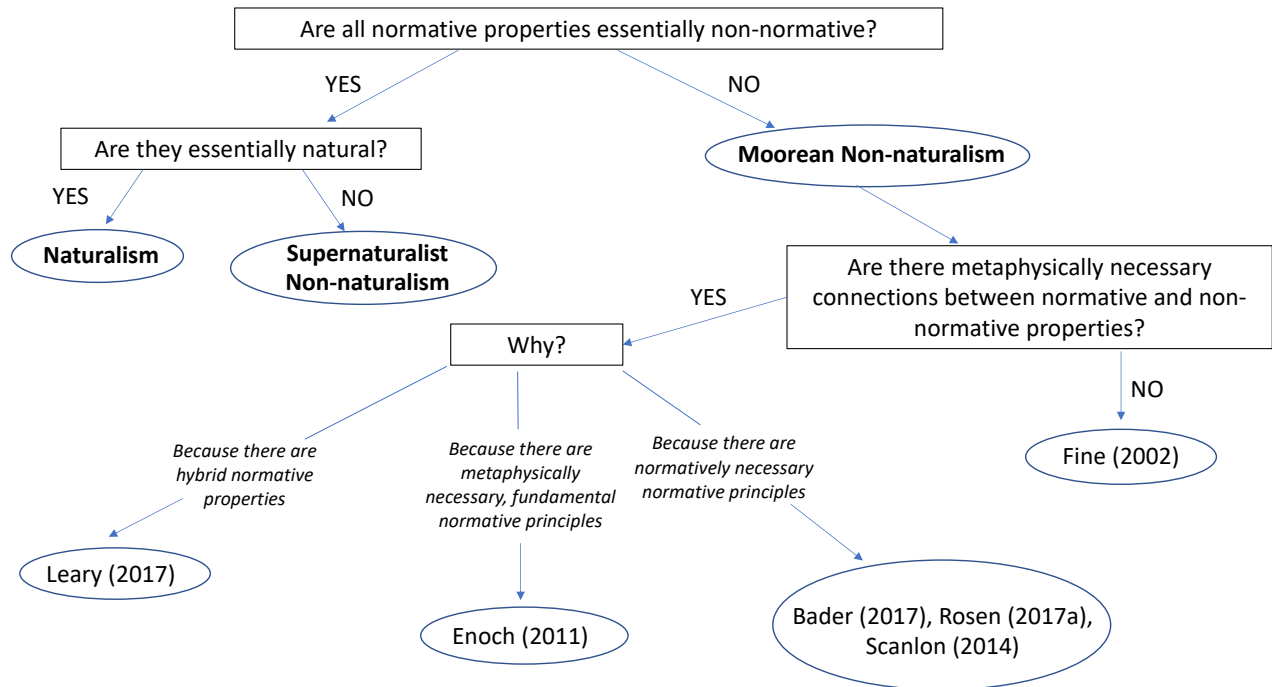
mathematical fact that 340 is greater than 5. So, the grounding structure for normative facts that Enoch and Scanlon appeal to does not explain what makes the normative *entirely of its own kind*.

One might think it's the content of the principles in the case of the normative facts that makes the normative *sui generis*: it's the fact that the general principles involve normative properties that makes the normative facts that these principles ground different in kind from mathematical facts. But this assumes the very thing in need of explanation. The fact that the general principles involve normative properties explains why the normative is of its own kind only if we assume that there is something different and unique about normative properties themselves. And that is not an assumption that we are entitled to make, since the very task at hand is to explain what makes normative properties different in kind from all other properties.

If Enoch and Scanlon adopt the ideology of essence and endorse Essentially Normative, however, this would allow them to explain what makes the normative *sui generis*. They could say that what makes the normative facts different in kind from other kinds of facts that have a similar grounding structure is that the general principles that partially ground all normative facts involve properties whose essences do not ultimately involve non-normative properties.

So, unlike the earlier grounding characterizations of Moorean non-naturalism, Essentially Normative is sufficiently GENERAL: it provides a characterization of the view that encompasses the widest variety of views that speak to the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical claims. The central metaphysical claim held by Moorean non-naturalists, according to my proposal, is that the essences of at least some normative properties do not ultimately involve paradigm non-normative properties (in the sense defined above). But this leaves open several further downstream questions about which non-naturalists may disagree. First, they may disagree about whether there are any metaphysically necessary connections (including grounding connections) between normative and non-normative properties. And even non-naturalists who agree about that may still disagree about why such connections hold: some might claim that it's because there are fundamental, metaphysically necessary normative principles (Enoch (2011)), while others might claim that it's because there are normatively necessary normative principles (Rosen (2017a), Bader (2017), Scanlon (2014)), while others might claim that it's because there are some hybrid normative properties (Leary (2017)).

Figure 2: Varieties of Non-naturalism



Finally, Essentially Normative is SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL. Whether all normative properties ultimately involve paradigm non-normative properties is not a trivial question that can be settled by general metaphysical considerations. It’s a question that can only be settled by theorizing about normative properties in particular.

One might wonder, however, how one may go about settling this question. As the above passage from Fine (2002) suggests, he seems to think that we can know the nature of *being in pain* and the nature of *badness* through acquaintance, and just “see” that their essences do not involve one another. But such an epistemological claim seems mysterious and suspect, especially since others may just as easily claim that, through acquaintance, we can just “see” that the nature of *being in pain* does involve *badness* (Leary (2017)), or that *badness* involves *being in pain*. If there’s no available method for resolving such disputes, then even if Essentially Normative is a fitting characterization of Moorean non-naturalism, perhaps it’s not what the debate *should* be about.

In other words, one might think that an additional, important desideratum for a good characterization of a philosophical view is that it should be *tractable*: it should characterize the view as a thesis for which there is some available methodology for determining whether it’s true. And one might think that a grounding characterization of Moorean non-naturalism like Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} or

Anti-Substantive-Ground is much more tractable than Essentially Normative. So, even if Essentially Normative is more FITTING and GENERAL than these grounding characterizations, this might be an overriding reason to characterize the view in terms of grounding, rather than essence.

I think this further tractability desideratum is appropriate and I submit that, unfortunately, I cannot offer a straightforward story about how to resolve disputes about the essences of normative properties. But importantly, Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} and Anti-Substantive-Ground are no more tractable than Essentially Normative. Let's start with Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa}. As Rosen himself notes, most contemporary non-naturalists who endorse Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} do not do so because they think that some normative facts of the form Fa are completely ungrounded; they merely endorse something like Enoch (2011) and Scanlon's (2014) "Bridge Law Non-naturalism" (Rosen (2017b: 163)). So, the main issue, for them, is whether all normative facts are fully grounded in non-normative facts or partially grounded in fundamental normative principles. But how do we go about settling *that* question?

It's particularly mysterious how we go about settling that question in a way that doesn't appeal to overly general metaphysical considerations, which would show that Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} is not SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL. For example, Berker (2018b) offers a dilemma for the view that normative principles play a partial role in grounding particular normative facts. To illustrate, consider the principle of utility: Berker claims that either this principle is a grounding-claim (i.e. necessarily, an action is right if and only if, and *because*, it maximizes happiness) or it's just a necessary biconditional (i.e. necessarily, an action is right if and only if it maximizes happiness). If the principle of utility is a grounding-claim, Berker argues, then the claim that it partially grounds a particular act A's being right involves redundant, circular grounding, since the principle itself states that maximizing utility is by itself sufficient to ground A's being right. But if the principle of utility is a necessary biconditional, Berker argues that it's extremely implausible that they partially ground a particular act's being right, since non-normative facts are not grounded in this way. For example, the fact that a ball B is red is not grounded in the fact that B is red and round together with the fact that, necessarily, if an object is red and round, then it's red (Berker (2018b: 9)). But Berker's argument generalizes: the very same argument could be used to argue that "bridge laws" don't play a partial role in grounding particular mental or biological facts. So, even if Berker is right that there's a way of settling whether so-called "Bridge Law Non-naturalism" is true by appealing to general metaphysical considerations, this would actually show that such a view is not sufficiently local, and thus that Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} is not the right characterization of non-naturalism.

It's equally mysterious how we could settle whether Anti-Substantive-Ground is true. Recall that Anti-Substantive-Ground is the claim that some substantive normative facts are neither identical to nor fully grounded in facts that are non-normative or autonomous. One way in which this might be true is if Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} is true, but for the reasons just mentioned, that is difficult to settle. Another way in which Anti-Substantive-Ground may be true is if normative grounding-facts are fundamental. But how do we settle whether that's the case without appealing to overly general considerations about what grounds grounding-facts, thereby rendering Anti-Substantive-Ground not SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL?

So, while it may be true that Essentially Normative makes Moorean non-naturalism out to be a claim that is difficult to get traction on, it does no worse on this measure than the alternative grounding characterizations. Indeed, I think the lesson to take away from this is simply that doing local metaphysics is hard. It's unclear how to go about settling metaphysical questions about particular kinds of properties and facts (normative, mental, or whatever), rather than doing general metaphysics. I suspect that the only way to make progress in the debate between Moorean non-naturalists and their opponents, then, is to assess each view in a holistic way by asking which view best explains various normative phenomena: e.g. the supervenience of the normative on the non-normative, the degree of "realism" enjoyed by normative facts, how we can come to refer and think about normative properties, and so on. This is our best way of resolving the debate, rather than adjudicating claims about essence directly.

5. Conclusion

I take my arguments here to show that the ideology of essence is better suited to capture what Moorean non-naturalism amounts to than mere identity or grounding. Characterizing the debate in terms of identity alone is at best not ILLUMINATING, and characterizations of the debate in terms of grounding are either not SUBSTANTIVE & LOCAL (Anti-Full-Ground) or not FITTING and GENERAL (Anti-Full-Ground_{Fa} and Anti-Substantive-Ground). On the other hand, the essence characterization of the debate that I have offered here meets all four of these desiderata: it speaks to and elucidates the non-naturalist's pre-theoretical commitments, while also keeping it a substantive, local claim about normativity, and it provides the most general characterization of non-naturalism that also fits well with the spirit of Moore's view. This suffices to show not only that we should understand Moorean non-naturalism in terms of essence, but consequently, that we have good reason to adopt the ideology of essence into our metaphysical theorizing in the first place.

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