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Normative Realism and Brentanian Accounts of Fittingness

Abstract: Brentano is often considered the originator of the fitting-attitudes analysis of value, on which to be valuable is to be that which it's fitting to value. But there has been comparatively little attention paid to Brentano's argument for this analysis. That argument advances the stronger claim that fittingness is part of the analysis of normativity. Since the argument rests on an analogy between truth and fittingness, its impact may seem limited by the idiosyncratic features of Brentano's later notion of truth. I argue, however, that the Brentanian argument is defensible even if fittingness is analogized to a more typical realist account of truth. The result is what I call the *worldly* Brentanian account of normativity. I defend this account as a form of naturalistic realism. I then show how the account can fare better than prominent alternatives against two kinds of error-theoretic arguments.

1. Normative Fundamentality

Philosophers have long wanted to know not only which features—like truth, justice, or pleasure—are good or fitting to pursue. They have also wanted to know the definitions of normative features themselves, or *what it is* to be good, or to be fitting, or to be a reason. For some, this question demands an analysis of concepts like “good” or “fitting”; in a more metaphysical key, it demands a real definition of normative properties, like *being good* and *being a reason*.

One common strategy is to define normative features in terms of each other. Brentano (1889/2009) is sometimes cited as an early exponent of this strategy, when he sought to analyze what it is to be good or valuable in terms of what it's fitting to value.¹ But in any case, similar approaches have become quite popular. Philosophers now often ask which (or whether) some feature is normatively fundamental, where the normatively fundamental feature is part of the grounds or definiens of all other normative features (McHugh and Way 2016; Snedegar 2016; Berker 2019b; Wodak 2020). Indeed, normative fundamentality is typically framed as being about which X-first theory—if any—is correct. An X-first theory is one that's named after

¹ See, for example, Danielsson and Olson (2007); McHugh and Way (2016); Kriegel (2018); Howard (2019). §2 discusses Brentano's fitting-attitudes account in detail.

the property it takes to be normatively fundamental (Wodak 2020). Thus we have reasons-first, value-first, and fittingness-first. The reasons-firster, for example, holds that reasons are normatively fundamental, and thus that value and the fittingness relation are grounded in or definable in terms of reasons (Schroeder 2007, 2010; Scanlon 1998, 2014).

Given the asymmetry of grounding and real definition (Rosen 2015; Correia 2017), the normatively fundamental feature may not be definable in terms of other normative features. If reasons are normatively fundamental, for example, then reasons wouldn't be definable in terms of value or the fittingness relation. But this raises another question: must the normatively fundamental property (if there is one) be a primitive, or can it be reduced to non-normative or *natural* features?

The nature of the distinction between natural and non-natural properties is itself up for debate. But natural properties are typically taken to be those that fit into a theory and ontology bounded by our best scientific theories (McPherson 2015; Leary 2017, 2022; Berker 2019b). Very roughly, to reduce the normative to the natural would then be to show that the normative properties are among those posited by our best scientific theories, or else that normative properties could be fully explained by or defined in terms of such properties (see §3).

Most often, normative fundamentality is discussed separately from the prospects of a naturalistic reduction of normativity. But sometimes these topics are addressed together. There is, for example, Schroeder's (2005) argument that the feature most likely to be normatively fundamental is the one that's most likely to be naturalistically reducible. (For Schroeder, this feature is the reason relation).² Indeed, one attractive strategy for the naturalist may be to first define normativity itself, or the property of *being normative*, in terms of a normatively fundamental property, through something like the following schema:

X-First Definition: For F to be normative is for F to be fully grounded by or defined in terms of the normatively fundamental feature.

² Subsequently, Schroeder (2021) suggests this may not be the most convincing argument for reasons-first, given the non-naturalist predilections of many meta-ethicists. But that doesn't mean that X-first Definition may not offer the best approach for a naturalistic reduction, for those already inclined to argue for such a reduction.

If reasons-first is correct, for example, then given X-First Definition, to be normative is to be (fully) grounded in or definable in terms of reasons. The naturalist can *then* try a naturalistic reduction of reasons, which would be normatively fundamental on reasons-first. Given that all other normative properties would be grounded or partly defined in terms of the normatively fundamental property, all the other normative properties would then (given transitivity) be reducible to natural properties (Schroeder 2005).

Still, there are few concrete examples of—and few arguments for—a naturalistic reduction of the normative using X-First Definition. Here I want to provide such a reduction, by drawing on and developing a historical argument stemming from Brentano (1889/2009). Brentano is often credited as the originator of the fitting-attitudes analysis, on which to be valuable is to be that which it's *fitting* to value (Danielsson and Olson 2007; McHugh and Way 2016; Kriegel 2018). But there has been relatively little attention paid to Brentano's *argument* for that analysis. That argument proceeds from broad considerations about the nature of normativity, particularly from an analogy between fittingness and truth. Accordingly, Brentano's argument is quite well-suited for a naturalistic X-first (specifically, fittingness-first) definition of normativity. Or so I try to show.

In §2, then, I set out the Brentanian argument for fittingness-first. The impact of the Brentanian argument may have been limited by the idiosyncratic features of Brentano's later notions of truth and evidence. But I argue in §3 that the Brentanian argument, and a Brentano-style analogy between fittingness and truth, is defensible even if Brentano's own later views of truth and evidence are replaced by more typical realist approaches. The result is what I call a *worldly* Brentanian account of fittingness. By taking fittingness to be normatively fundamental, the worldly Brentanian account can in turn provide an X-first (viz. fittingness-first) definition of normativity. After defending the realism of the worldly Brentanian account in §3, in §4 I explain how the account is naturalistic. Finally, in §5 I motivate the worldly Brentanian account over alternative forms of normative realism. I show how the worldly Brentanian account can fulfill normative realist intuitions, while also faring better than prominent alternatives against error-theoretic arguments.

2. The Brentanian Argument for Fittingness-First

2.1 In *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*,³ Brentano (1889/2009) couches his meta-normative project in terms of providing an analysis of goodness or value.⁴ The assumption is that value is not a primitive. There's a deeper ontological story to be told. In searching for this deeper story, however, it becomes clear that Brentano isn't merely interested in a *local* analysis of value—an analysis that's neutral as to whether the analysans (fittingness) of value can also be used to analyze additional normative properties. Brentano (1889/2009, 11) does say, of course, that “we call a thing good when the love relating to it is correct (*richtig*)”—an early example of the fitting-attitudes analysis of value (Danielsson and Olson 2007; Kriegel 2018). But as I'll explain, Brentano may be after something more like an X-first—or rather, fittingness-first—definition of *normativity*.⁵ This would be more ambitious than a fitting-attitudes analysis of *value* alone.

How, then, does Brentano come by his idea of fittingness being normatively fundamental? Brentano's argument for fittingness-first relies on two ideas: that normativity can be understood as a kind of success condition for evaluative attitudes, and that the nature of this success condition is given by an analogy between the success conditions of evaluative attitudes and those of judgment. The assumption behind the analogy is that both evaluative attitudes and judgment are representational—that is, they do not merely present an object, but represent it in a certain way.

Indeed, Brentano believes that attitudes have representational content. Attitudes, that is, represent their objects as good or bad, desirable or undesirable, wonderful or terrible (Kriegel 2019). More specifically, both judgment and evaluative attitudes are representational insofar as they both carry a value or valence—true or false in the case of judgment, pro or anti in the case of attitudes. In both cases, “In addition to there being an idea or presentation of a

³ *Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*, more literally translated as “On the Origin of Moral Knowledge.”

⁴ Brentano did not distinguish precisely between conceptual analysis and real definition in the way we might now do. Below, I'll couch my modification to the Brentanian project explicitly in terms of a real definition of fittingness and normativity.

⁵ Chappell (2012), McHugh and Way (2016), and Howard (2019) have all defended fittingness-first views. McHugh and Way (2016) in particular take fittingness-first in a metaphysical sense; namely, as holding that fittingness is part of the grounds or definiens of other normative features.

certain object, there is a second intentional relation which is directed upon that object” (Brentano 1889/2009, 10). In the case of judgments, “this [second] relation is one of either affirmation or denial—either acceptance or rejection”;⁶ in the case of attitudes, this second relation is one of “love or hate” (Brentano 1889/2009, 10).

In any case, judgments and attitudes aren’t only analogous insofar as they’re both representational, nor even insofar as they both assign values or valences. Rather, Brentano thinks it is the accuracy or success conditions of judgment and of attitudes that are analogous (Danielsson and Olson 2007; Kriegel 2018). As Brentano says, “One loves or hates correctly provided that one’s feelings are adequate to their object—adequate in the sense of being appropriate, suitable, or fitting (*entsprechen*)” (1889/2009, 48). Moreover, Brentano (1889/2009, 48) talks about *both* the standards of correctness for attitudes and judgments as a kind of “correspondence” (*Übereinstimmung*), in which the attitude or judgment is “adequate to” its object. It’s just that this correspondence is cashed in terms of truth in the case of judgment, and in terms of fittingness in the case of attitudes.

Brentano doesn’t elaborate much on what he means by “correspondence,” though he does eschew a standard realist view of correspondence as an “identity” (or more accurately, an isomorphism) (1889/2009, 48). Nonetheless, I’ll argue below that Brentano is wrong to eschew the standard view of correspondence. At least, the standard view is more plausible for purposes of defending Brentano’s own argument for fittingness-first.

But first, note that judgments in Brentano’s ontology, although they’re mental states, are otherwise more analogous to propositions than to beliefs. Indeed, on contemporary views, belief may count as an evaluative attitude. And beliefs are only true or false in virtue of being about true or false propositions, respectively. By contrast, Brentanian judgments—like propositions but unlike beliefs—are themselves truth-bearers. Such judgments carry a value of true or false without needing to take for their content some other representational entity that is it-

⁶ For Brentano, judgments count as any mental state that can carry a value of true or false. Brentano’s notion of judgment is thus rather different than a contemporary view that takes judgments to be occurrent beliefs. There are other interesting features of Brentano’s notion of judgment, such as that judgments are true in virtue of affirming or denying the existence of things (Kriegel 2018). But these other features of Brentanian judgment are not my focus here.

self true or false (as beliefs do vis-a-vis propositions). This distinction is important. It means that the Brentanian analogy isn't best characterized as applying between belief and attitudes other than belief, and their respective accuracy conditions. Rather, it applies between the accuracy conditions of evaluative attitudes, on the one hand, and of truthbearers, on the other. Accordingly, insofar as belief counts as an evaluative attitude, and the Brentanian account links evaluative attitudes with normativity, the Brentanian account needn't exclude epistemic normativity.

To summarize what I'll call the *Brentanian Argument* for fittingness-first:

- (1) The normatively fundamental property is the one that best explains the nature of normativity
- (2) The nature of normativity is given by the property that fulfills the objective⁷ accuracy or success conditions of evaluative attitudes⁸
- (3) The nature of the accuracy or success conditions of evaluative attitudes is given by their analogy to the (accuracy or success conditions of) truth-bearers
- (4) The property of evaluative attitudes that best accounts for this analogy is fittingness
- (5) So, fittingness best explains the nature of normativity
- (6) Thus fittingness is normatively fundamental

2.2 I think the Brentanian argument for fittingness-first is most plausible—and most consistent with a naturalistic realism—when both fittingness and truth are cashed in terms of a typical realist view of correspondence. But in order to motivate my claims, I first want to discuss a more orthodox Brentanian approach to cashing the analogy between fittingness and truth. The problems faced by such an approach can be avoided, I'll maintain, by adopting the realist view of correspondence.

⁷ Objectivity here indicates a kind of independence from prevailing social convention and context that Brentano likely would have endorsed; see §3.3 and §5.1 for further discussion.

⁸ My aim in §2.1 has been to summarize the classical Brentanian argument. To the extent that premise 2 may already favor a fitting-attitudes analysis, I think this reflects the nature of that argument. In later sections (§4 and §5) I offer something more akin to a serviceability argument for my modified Brentanian account of fittingness.

Insofar as truth and fittingness are analogous, one might look to the nature of truth to understand the nature of fittingness. Brentano's later theory of truth is closely tied up with the notion of evidence or *self-evidence* (*Evidenz*).⁹ True judgments are, roughly, those which are made with self-evidence or which correspond to judgments made with self-evidence (Brandl 2017).¹⁰ Accordingly, an orthodox Brentanian approach to the analogy between truth and fittingness might seek to analogize fittingness to self-evidence. What then is self-evidence?

Paradigmatic examples of self-evident states include inner perception and belief in certain logical axioms, such as the law of non-contradiction (Kriegel 2018, 136). Inner perception concerns one's awareness of one's mental states. So, for example, one might perceive a tree, but one would *inner-perceive* one's own perception of the tree. And even if one is mistaken that there is a tree, for Brentano one cannot be similarly mistaken that one is in a mental state of seeing (or seeming to see) that there is a tree. That's because judgments made on the basis of inner perception are infallible, in virtue of being self-evident. Self-evident judgments are characterized by a kind of demonstrative force, according to which they show or reveal themselves to obtain. If one sees that there's a tree, one's judgment that one is at least seeming to see a tree may seem not just glaringly obvious, but incontrovertibly so, or so obvious that nothing could show it to be wrong. Or so Brentano would think.

Perhaps, then, fitting attitudes are analogous to self-evident judgments. To further precisify the analogy, Kriegel (2018) suggests a notion of *self-imposition* that would play the same role vis-à-vis evaluative attitudes that self-evidence plays vis-à-vis judgments. A self-imposing attitude might carry a certain *imperative* force or felt authority analogous to the *demonstrative* force of self-evident judgments. That is, just as self-evident judgments might show themselves to be incontrovertible, self-imposing attitudes might seem to "command" our compliance (even if it's within our power not to follow such commands). So, for example, admiration of Mandela

⁹ As Brandl (2017) discusses, the difference between Brentano's earlier and later theories of truth is still contentious. What's less contentious is the nature of Brentano's later theory of truth.

¹⁰ Brentano recognizes that not all true judgments will be self-evident in the sense discussed below, given the constraints on what counts as self-evidence. By introducing the notion of "correspondence" to a self-evident state, Brentano can preserve the centrality of self-evidence to truth, while allowing for true judgments that aren't self-evident.

might seem to be self-imposing in this sense, whereas admiration of a person whose deeds are less striking or more ambiguous may not be similarly self-imposing.

To define fittingness in terms of self-imposition might thus secure the greatest consistency with Brentano's later theories of judgment and truth, given how Brentano cashes truth in terms of self-evidence. The problem is that self-evidence and self-imposition are features of our internal attitudes rather than features of the external world. These categories might thus seem better-suited to play an epistemic role, as opposed to an ontological one. Indeed, it's not implausible that one might *know* whether an attitude is fitting based on whether it's self-imposing—at least assuming one's own experience of self-imposition correctly presents, or reliably tracks, the fittingness facts. But that wouldn't explain, ontologically, what would *make* an attitude fitting—unless one took self-imposition itself to make attitudes fitting.

Suppose one did take self-imposition to make attitudes fitting. Facts about which attitudes are fitting would then be dependent on an internal phenomenological feature of those attitudes. But this might seem to get the order of explanation backwards. Indeed, the case is even starker when it comes to truth. It would seem strange, especially for a realist, to say that facts about what is true would depend on internal features of our doxastic attitudes. It seems much more intuitive for the realist to say that certain internal features of our attitudes might help us come to *know* what is true, not to ground the truth of what is true. What is true would depend on the external world itself, or the concrete states of affairs that are part of it. Insofar as fittingness is analogous to truth, then, similar intuitions should apply to both.

It's not as if Brentano doesn't want normativity to be objective. As Kriegel (2018, 253) writes, for Brentano, "whether something exists, is good, or is beautiful is not up to us." The tension in Brentano's thought comes from his trying to maintain such objectivity while cashing facts about truth and morality in terms of facts about our inner experience. For one could imagine subjects who experience as self-imposing certain attitudes which are (intuitively) quite unfitting. Such individuals might, for example, have self-imposing attitudes of admiration towards those who are cruel, greedy or stupid. Far from being implausible, such cases may not

even be terribly uncommon. And yet this is clearly an unacceptable result for those who want the facts about normativity to be objective, or *not* up to us.

The point is that Brentano's own normative ontology is likely too internalist to secure this objectivity. At any rate, the classic Brentanian picture is highly vulnerable to criticisms of this kind.

3. The Worldly Brentanian Account

3.1 I still want to argue here for the Brentanian idea of an analogy between truth and fittingness, and of fittingness as providing an X-first definition of normativity. But I also want to provide a more externalist account of fittingness itself, to address the problems posed by Brentano's own account. In particular, we might take fittingness to be analogous to a more traditional truth-as-correspondence relation, as opposed to a late Brentanian notion of truth as a property of self-evident judgment. As I'll argue, this wouldn't affect the Brentanian argument for fittingness-first. For that argument just relies on a structural analogy between truth and fittingness, rather than on an internalist conception of truth or fittingness (see §2.1).

Indeed, some have taken fittingness to be a kind of correspondence or accurate representation (D'Arms and Jacobsen 2000; Tappolet 2010; 2016, 20). On this view, roughly:

Evaluative Representation: For an attitude A to be fitting towards x is for it to be the case that taking A towards x accurately represents x, in virtue of x instantiating a certain value property, such as *being A-able*

Below I'll talk about correspondence in lieu of accurate representation. Indeed, I'll have much more to say about correspondence in §3, and in particular about what's necessary for *objective* correspondence. But for now, we can—at least heuristically—take correspondence and accurate representation to be roughly equivalent. And we can think of representation as involving a kind of mapping or isomorphism between the representing thing (e.g. the attitude) and the represented thing (e.g. the instantiated property).

Indeed, Evaluative Representation may presuppose certain facts, according to which certain types of attitudes accurately represent things that instantiate certain properties. For

example, an attitude of admiration accurately represents x if x instantiates the property of *being admirable*, desire accurately represents x if x has the property of *being desirable*, etc. (I use the conditional rather than the biconditional to allow the possibility that an attitude A might accurately represent properties in addition to being A -able). Given Evaluative Representation, an attitude (e.g. admiration) would then be *fitting* towards x if x instantiates the property (e.g. *being admirable*) accurately represented by that attitude.¹¹

In any case, the problem with Evaluative Representation is that it leads to circularity when conjoined with the fitting-attitude analysis of value (McHugh and Way 2016, 597).¹² Indeed, the fitting-attitudes analysis of value holds that for x to be valuable is for it to be fitting to value (or take a pro-attitude) towards x . As a result, there would be no irreducible value properties. For x to be A -able (desirable, enviable, etc.) would be nothing more than for it to be the case that it's fitting to take A towards x . Given Evaluative Representation, the result would be that for it to be fitting to take A towards x would be for it to be fitting to take A towards x !

Note, however, that the source of circularity in Evaluative Representation is the requirement that fitting attitudes correspond to some evaluative or normative property of their objects—that desire correspond to *being desirable*, for example. (Here I take value properties such as being admirable, being desirable, etc. to be a subset of the normative properties). Accordingly, one might wish to modify the criterion by eliminating the reference to evaluative or normative properties. Consider, for example:

Worldly Representation: For an attitude A to be fitting towards x is for there to be an objective correspondence between A and some *non-normative* feature or features of x

¹¹ In discussing Evaluative Representation, I've talked somewhat loosely of attitudes (e.g. admiration) representing both properties (e.g. being admirable) and objects that instantiate those properties (e.g. the admirable object). To be more precise, one might say: There are some properties $P_1...P_n$, such that, if any x instantiates some property P_j (e.g. being admirable) in $P_1...P_n$, then there is some attitude A (e.g. admiration) such that taking A towards x accurately represents x in virtue of x instantiating P_j , and (given Evaluative Representation) A is therefore a fitting attitude to take towards x . (The "in virtue of" locution is meant to explain why an attitude A (e.g. admiration) accurately represents x (e.g. the admirable thing)—it accurately represents x because x instantiates a certain property (e.g. being admirable)). This formulation is somewhat cumbersome, however, which may explain (if not excuse) the less precise talk above.

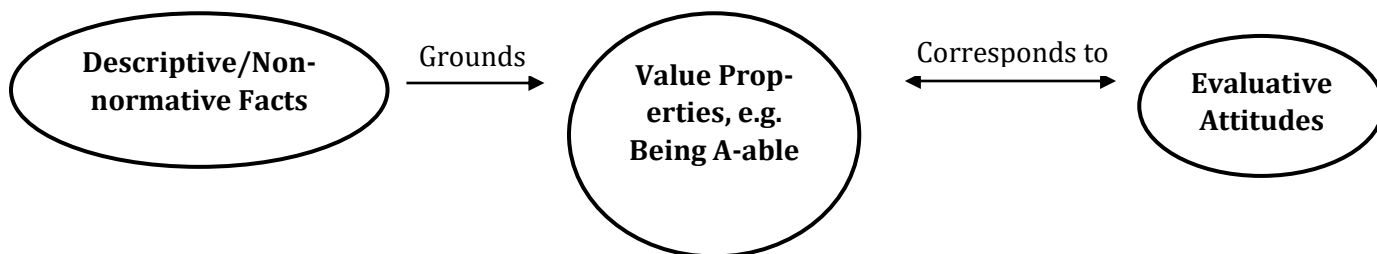
¹² And fittingness-firsters would seek to analyze or define value, as well as other normative features, in terms of fittingness.

The requirement that fittingness-as-correspondence be objective is intended to secure the realism of Worldly Representation. Realists, after all, hold that the normative facts are objective, or “not up to us”—not dependent on our social conventions and stipulations, but rather on facts about the world. Exactly how to secure the objectivity of fittingness-as-correspondence is discussed in §3.2 and §3.3.

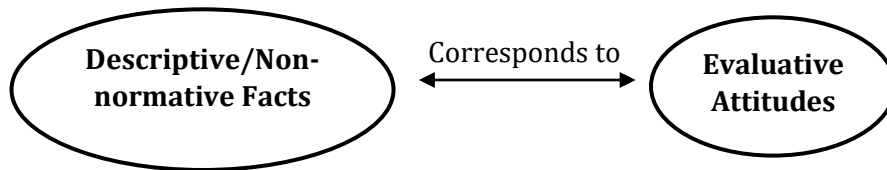
For now, we can clarify the distinction between Evaluative Representation and Worldly Representation. On Evaluative Representation, the fittingness of admiring *x* would consist in the (correspondence) relation between admiration of *x* and *x*'s property of being admirable. Of course, *x* might be admirable because of certain descriptive or non-normative facts. For example, *x* might be admirable because they are the sort of person who regularly devotes time to helping others. This disposition to help others is itself non-normative. But it might ground the (normative) property of *being admirable*, where grounding is understood as a non-causal, explanatory relation. Nonetheless, value properties like *being admirable* are not themselves reduced or eliminated on Evaluative Representation. As I've suggested above, the proponent of Evaluative Representation may need to retain value properties in order to avoid circularity.

By contrast, Worldly Representation eschews reference to value properties at all, and seeks to reduce fittingness itself to a non-normative relation. Indeed, given Worldly Representation, fittingness facts would themselves be reducible to non-normative facts about correspondence to attitudes. (Below this is explained in greater detail). As a result, the correspondence in Worldly Representation would obtain between *non-normative* facts and attitudes. That is:

Evaluative Representation:



Worldly Representation:



Accordingly, on Worldly Representation, value properties like *being admirable* play no role in explaining the fittingness facts. Rather, the fittingness relation obtains between the attitude and the non-evaluative features or facts themselves, with no value property as an intermediary. So, for example, the fittingness of admiring *x* would consist in the correspondence relation between admiration and some descriptive facts, such as being the kind of person who regularly engages in acts of charity.¹³

3.2 But what is this correspondence that Worldly Representation posits? For the Brentanian, the fittingness relation defines what it is to be normative, or the property of *being normative*. And fittingness is itself defined in terms of the correspondence in Worldly Representation. Insofar as the Brentanian account aims for a naturalistic definition of normativity, then, this correspondence relation can't itself be normative. For such a naturalistic definition requires that normativity be reducible to non-normative terms.

Here again I think we can draw on the analogy between truth and fittingness. Indeed, a more orthodox conception of truth takes truth to be about a correspondence between propositions and concrete states of affairs (MacBride 2013). On this conception, it's propositions that are truth-bearers, carrying a value of true or false without needing to be about some other rep-

¹³ One might wonder, however, how Worldly Representation applies to belief. Belief is an evaluative attitude, and like other evaluative attitudes it's often considered to have fittingness or correctness conditions (see McHugh and Way 2016; Howard 2019). A common claim is that the standard of correctness of belief is truth, but at least insofar as propositions are distinct from beliefs, this isn't quite accurate. Rather, a belief is fitting just in case it takes as true a proposition that is in fact true. So, given Worldly Representation, the correspondence that determines the fittingness of belief would be between belief and a true proposition, or perhaps the fact of a true proposition's obtaining. This doesn't seem to me to be a problem for Worldly Representation, as truth is not a normative or value property.

representational entity. (This stands in contrast to beliefs, which are typically considered to be true or false only in virtue of being about true or false propositions, respectively).

Such truth-as-correspondence is often cashed out as a kind of formal mapping or isomorphism. This mapping would apply between a truth-bearer—such as a proposition—and some concrete entity (a property instance or state of affairs). As I’ll explain in §3.3, realist accounts of fittingness (and truth) may require more than a formal mapping. But for now, I want to focus on the correspondence relation itself, which I do take to be a mapping.

In any case, the correspondence between proposition and state of affairs is often quite intuitive. The proposition that there is a red cup on a table may be true, for example, if and only if there’s a cup that instantiates the properties *being red* and *being on a table*. These properties would be the worldly or concrete correlates of the predicates “is a red cup” and “is on a table,” predicates which constitute part of the content of the proposition. It’s in this sense that the proposition’s content would “map onto” the world.

Something similar could well be the case for fittingness-as-correspondence. Indeed, like propositions, evaluative attitudes are also typically taken to have representational content. Consider, for example, an attitude of admiration. One might think admiration represents its target as deserving of emulation, for example. The representational content of admiration may then be something like “x is deserving of emulation.” (On fittingness-first accounts, after all, there are no irreducible value properties; see §3.1). Intuitively, “x is deserving of emulation” might correspond or map onto persons who perform certain kinds of actions, such as regularly engaging in acts of charity or excelling in a particular discipline. By Worldly Representation, then, it would be fitting to admire such persons.

In considering the nature of attitudes’ content, however, another problem may arise. For one might think that the evaluative attitudes, at least in many cases, ascribe evaluative predicates. But on the fitting-attitudes analysis, evaluative features would reduce to fittingness facts. To be good, for example, may be to be that which it’s fitting to desire. If desire represents its target as good, then (on the fitting-attitudes analysis) that means it represents its target as fitting to desire. But this doesn’t tell us much about the content of desire itself. To carry for-

ward the analogy between truth and fittingness, we'd want to know what it is about the contents of attitudes that correspond to particular states of affairs or properties. We'd want to know, for example, what it is about the content of admiration that corresponds to being the kind of person who engages in acts of charity.

To the extent this is a problem, one might individuate at least some attitudes according to imperative content. Propositional content is typically indicative: it tells us what is the case. But evaluative attitudes are often taken to have a kind of motivational or action-guiding role. And this role is often cashed in terms of imperative content (Martinez 2011; Barlassina and Hayward 2019; Kauppinen 2021). For example, the imperative content of something like admiration may be: "Emulate x!"; the imperative content of anger might be "Condemn x!" or "Stop x!," etc. At least, it's plausible that *some* evaluative attitudes have such imperative content. (On the other hand, the representational content of belief may primarily be indicative: perhaps something like "it's true that p," where p is some proposition).

In the case of admiration, for example, the relevant correspondence (for determining fittingness) may be between "Emulate x!" and x's being the kind of person who regularly helps others—rather than between "x is deserving of emulation" and the latter property. Or consider a state of affairs in which x is being subjected to physical torment. On a typical correspondence theory of truth, there is some propositional content that in fact corresponds to and describes that state of affairs: for example, that x is being subjected to torture. On the proposal here, there would *also* be some imperative content or contents that likewise correspond to that state of affairs: namely, something like, "Avoid being subjected to what x is undergoing!" or perhaps: "Save x!"

Correspondence *per se* is just a formal mapping that imposes few substantive constraints, so it's necessary (for both truth and fittingness) to add further criteria to get a theoretically interesting kind of correspondence (see §3.3). But first, just what are these imperative "contents" that putatively correspond to some entity or state of affairs? One could view imperative contents analogously to how some realists view propositions—as being the (shareable) contents of certain attitudes or mental states. That is, just as the content of belief might be a

proposition—that such-and-such is the case—so the content of an attitude of admiration might be an imperative—e.g. “Emulate x!”. If one doesn’t want to think of imperatives as a kind of abstract “object,” one might view imperatives as abstractions from particular kinds of mental states.

Of course, the goals here are not expressivist; on Worldly Representation, there are objective normative facts. How then could we derive such facts from imperative content, if we are not to reduce the imperative to the indicative? Here we need to be precise about exactly which facts are being grounded or inferred. In particular, the fact that certain imperatives correctly correspond to certain things may ground the correct application of certain predicates to those things. (In §3.4, I suggest cashing this correctness in terms of joint-carvingness). E.g. the fact that “Emulate x!” correctly corresponds to x may ground the fact that “x is to be emulated.” To the extent there would be an inference here, however, the inference would be from the *fact* that “Emulate x!” correctly obtains to the fact that x is to be emulated—not from the imperative itself to the indicative content. The imperative and the indicative are thereby kept distinct. But it remains possible for imperative contents to play some role in objective representation, insofar as the fact of their correct correspondence may ground objective normative facts.

Finally, the recourse to imperative contents would allow us to individuate attitudes’ contents without referring to normative features (like desert or fittingness itself). That should put to rest concerns that the Brentanian reduction of fittingness is somehow incomplete. For fittingness would be cashed in terms of a correspondence between states of affairs and the (imperative) contents of attitudes, contents that don’t themselves refer to fittingness or normative properties that might be analyzed in terms of fittingness. And this in turn ensures that the reduction of fittingness remains cashed in non-normative terms, consistent with a naturalistic account (see §4.1).

3.3 Recall that, on Worldly Representation, fittingness-as-correspondence has to be objective, or obtain independently of social norms or prevailing attitudes. Such objectivity may be all the more important, given that correspondence relations are mappings between entities (concrete states of affairs) and bearers of representational contents (propositions or atti-

tudes). Since mappings themselves are purely formal, they come very cheaply. A mapping relation between relata does not by itself impose any substantive constraints. Here I'll start considering how to ensure the objectivity of fittingness-as-correspondence, by drawing on an analogy to recent accounts of truthmaking.

We want to capture the realist intuition that which attitudes correspond to which properties or states of affairs is not "up to us." That is, it wouldn't be because of our personal views or even social norms that it's fitting to admire someone like Martin Luther King. It would be because of certain facts about his life and actions, rather than what we happen to think or feel about his life or actions. The problem is that fittingness is to be reduced to a mapping or correspondence, on Worldly Representation, and any properties or states of affairs could be mapped onto any attitudes. There could just as easily be a correspondence between admiration and the mundane or even objectionable features of MLK as the qualities that, intuitively, would make him admirable. How, then, do we have a principled way of selecting which correspondence relation counts as fittingness? Any number of other correspondence relations might determine the fittingness* or fittingness** facts, where fittingness* and fittingness** are alternative features that purport to guide our actions by relating attitudes and states of affairs.

For one thing, fittingness wouldn't depend on any stipulative or even socially constructed definitions. Rather, fittingness would be cashed in terms of a *real* definition, which obtains as a matter of objective fact. Something like fittingness*, on the other hand, might be defined at least partly through stipulation, or perhaps (in some hypothetical community) as a matter of social convention. For realists, such contrasts between objective versus stipulative or constructed definition may be enough to explain the intuitive appeal of fittingness over fittingness*.

Of course, the claim is that fittingness is objectively privileged over fittingness*, and one might want some further account of this notion of privilege (and not just objectivity). Moreover, one might worry there are other relations to actions or attitudes that exist objectively or have real definitions, even real definitions cashed out in objective terms. That is, our ontology of action-guiding properties could turn out to be abundant rather than sparse (Eklund 2017). Per-

haps the simplest way to address these concerns is to resort to joint-carvingness (see McPherson 2018, 272). As discussed by Lewis (1986) and Sider (2011), joint-carvingness (or eliteness) is an ordering of features on which the most joint-carving features are those that are needed to characterize the world “completely and without redundancy” (Lewis 1986, 60). The less joint-carving features are “gerrymandered,” or unnecessary for an objective and parsimonious characterization of the world. *Being green* is thus more joint-carving than *being grue*, and *being an electron* is more joint-carving than *being an electron OR a cow*. Likewise, we can say, the truth and fittingness relations are more joint-carving than the truth* and fittingness* relations. Indeed, we might *define* the fittingness relation as being the most joint-carving correspondence relation, out of all the correspondence relations between entities or states of affairs and attitudes. For example, the correspondence relation that exists between MLK and an attitude of admiration would be more joint-carving than the correspondence relation that might exist between green-colored things and admiration.

There are, of course, challenges to joint-carvingness itself (see §4.2 and 5.1). Even if there is such a thing as joint-carvingness, one can ask: Why care about joint-carvingness rather than joint-carvingness*? These challenges touch upon some of the most vexed questions in contemporary meta-metaphysics, and I can’t do them justice here. I’ll only point out that the most notable of these challenges—by Dasgupta (2018)—rests on a demand for explanation which the realist may not need to answer. Dasgupta’s (2018) claim is that the realist can’t *explain* why we should care about joint-carvingness or privilege joint-carving features. But I’m not sure the realist needs such an explanation. The realist may just say that the joint-carving features are what’s needed for objectively characterizing the world, and that we should represent the world objectively. It’s not clear why there must be any deeper explanation than this; it’s no part of realism that there must be always be an explanation of why the facts are what they are. Of course, a reliance on brute facts may be a cost for realism. But the realist doesn’t need to claim that realism is without cost—only that the cost is worth paying, at least for those with certain intuitions.

In any case, we might further qualify Worldly Representation to incorporate joint-carvingness:

Objective Representation: For an attitude A to be fitting towards x is for it to be the case that (i) there's a correspondence between A and some non-normative feature or features of x, and (ii) the correspondence relation in (i) is more joint-carving than any other correspondence relations between entities and attitudes

Accordingly, the fittingness relation is defined as that correspondence relation which is more joint-carving than any other correspondence relations between entities or states of affairs and attitudes. This in turn may address concerns about the objective *privilege* of fittingness over alternative relations like fittingness*.

3.4 One might intuit that fittingness facts should obtain in virtue of the external world, or of certain concrete states of affairs in the world. To take fittingness as a mapping may seem not to address this concern, given that mappings are formalisms. Of course, fittingness isn't merely a mapping. Fittingness would be the most joint-carving mapping or correspondence relation between actions and attitudes, and joint-carving features are objectively privileged in the sense discussed above. Nonetheless, joint-carvingness alone may not account for the intuition that fittingness is anchored in the external world. For example, it may be fitting to admire a person in virtue of certain worldly states of affairs, e.g. her giving time and money to charity. (The "in virtue of" locution may indicate a grounding relation, as I discuss below).

Insofar as the essential point is to distinguish fittingness from ersatz alternatives like fittingness*, one might think nothing beyond joint-carvingness is needed, at least not for *defining* fittingness. But if one wants a deeper story about how fittingness relates to the world, one might posit something like a fit-making relation. This might further extend the analogy between truth and fittingness, insofar as fit-making would be analogous to truthmaking.

So what then is truthmaking? The truthmaking relation obtains between a truthmaker—some worldly entity or entities, such as a property or concrete state of affairs—and a truthbearer, some representational vehicle such as a proposition (Armstrong 2004). The obtaining of a truthmaking relation between maker and bearer explains why the truthbearer is true (Heil 2003; MacBride 2013). So, for example, the obtaining of a truthmaking relation between the concrete state of affairs <there is a cup on the table> and the proposition 'There is a

cup on a table¹ explains why the latter is true. The truthmaker relation, in contrast to a correspondence relation, may thus be asymmetric: the truthmaker makes true the truth bearer, but not the reverse.

Of course, the truthmaking relation isn't identical to truth; one wouldn't want to define truth by saying that for p to be true is for p to be made true. So truth could still be a mapping or correspondence relation between entities or states of affairs and propositions. But the truthmaking relation would explain why some such mappings constitute truth, whereas others do not. At least on a maximalist view (where every truth has a truthmaker, though not necessarily a unique one), only if some entity x (or entities $x_1 \dots x_n$) make true some proposition that p would it be the case that p is objectively true, or that there is a relation of truth-as-correspondence between x and p .

In contrast to formal mappings, the truthmaking relation itself is not simply a bit of mathematics. The truthmaker relation has to do with the world or concrete reality, in the same way that the relation between the properties *being H₂O* and *being water* has to do with concrete reality rather than being a mere formalism. This may preserve objectivity. Which propositions are made true by which states of affairs would not be "up to us," but dependent on facts about the world—namely, on which truthmaking relations obtain between which states of affairs and which propositions.

The general structure of the truthmaker relation could plausibly be extended to fittingness. Indeed, as with the truthmaking relation, the fit-making relation would obtain between worldly states of affairs (fit-makers) and bearers of representational content (fittingness-bearers). And the function of the fit-making relation—to underwrite an objective, concrete (as opposed to purely formal) connection between content-bearers and states of affairs—would be the same as that of the truth-making relation. It's just that, in the case of fittingness, the fittingness-bearers would be evaluative attitudes rather than propositions, and fittingness would be a correspondence between states of affairs and imperative contents rather than between states of affairs and indicative or propositional contents.

The objectivity of fit-making can be further secured, or guarded against charges of ad-hocness, by taking fit-making to be a form of grounding. Indeed, some theorists have taken truth-making to be a form of grounding (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005; Griffith 2014; Correia 2014). Grounding is a form of metaphysical explanation that implies (but isn't reducible to) a necessary conditional. *Being some particular microstructure M of H₂O molecules* might ground *being water*. Such a grounding relation would then explain why, necessarily, if x consists of H₂O molecules in microstructure M, then x is water.¹⁴

Still, what's essential to ensuring the objectivity of fittingness is that it has a real definition and that it's more joint-carving than alternative relations. Or so I've argued. One might think fittingness relations obtain as a matter of brute fact, or else are accounted for through something other than fit-making. Fit-making is only one means of explaining the relation between fittingness and the world, though it may appeal to those already attracted to the analogy between truth and fittingness.

3.5 Finally—and perhaps most importantly—fittingness would be reducible to non-normative terms. Indeed, fittingness would be a joint-carving, objective correspondence. This correspondence isn't normative. Objective Representation would then allow for a non-normative reduction of normativity (not just of fittingness), given the following further claim:

Fittingness-First Definition: For F to be normative is for F to be grounded by or defined in terms of fittingness

Fittingness-First Definition follows from the Brentanian argument for the fundamentality of fittingness. Indeed, that argument relies on the claim that fittingness is what best explains normativity, insofar as normativity is about the fulfillment of objective success conditions for evaluative attitudes, and fittingness is the feature that best explains how this fulfillment works (see §2.1). Accordingly, on the Brentanian view, fittingness is normatively fundamental *because* it's what best explains normativity. And Fittingness-First Definition precisifies the claim

¹⁴ Others object to accounting for truthmaking in terms of grounding (Audi 2020; Heil 2021). Either way, truth-making would be a worldly relation in the sense I've been discussing.

that fittingness explains normativity, assuming that the definiens grounds or explains the definiendum.¹⁵

Let's say, then, that the *worldly Brentanian* account is the conjunction of Fittingness-First Definition and Objective Representation. On the worldly Brentanian account, all normative features would be reducible to non-normative terms, since all normative features would be reducible to facts about fittingness, and facts about fittingness would be cashed out in non-normative terms.

The worldly Brentanian account would differ from the classical Brentanian account in taking fittingness to be a worldly correspondence relation rather than a property of mental states, but would otherwise follow the Brentanian analogy between fittingness and truth. The result would better account for the objectivity of fittingness, and would thus vindicate the realist spirit of the Brentanian argument.

4. Naturalism and the Worldly Brentanian Account

4.1 I want to say that the worldly Brentanian account is a form of normative naturalism. Naturalists, as I'll discuss, aim to cash normative properties in terms of features continuous with our best scientific theories (Boyd 1988; Schroeder 2005). But this means a naturalistic reduction of the normative could come apart from a non-normative one. For example, as McPherson (2015, 127) notes, a divine command theory—on which to be normative is to be grounded in a deity's command—would reduce normative features to non-normative terms, but would still fail to be naturalistic (on most accounts, anyways). Accordingly, we can't just *assume* that the worldly Brentanian account is naturalistic because it reduces the normative to the non-normative.

To explain how the worldly Brentanian account is naturalistic, we should first say a bit more about what normative naturalism is and how it's distinct from non-naturalism. While there's little consensus on the *definitions* of normative naturalism and non-naturalism, the broad contours of the distinction are less unsettled. I've said that naturalists typically take

¹⁵ This assumption is typical for real definitions; see Rosen (2015) and Correia (2017).

normative properties to be “continuous” with our best scientific theories, but what does “continuous” mean here?

One approach would be to say that such “continuity” means the normative properties must be reducible to properties that are regularly quantified over in our best first-order scientific theories, or in the scientific literature. This is a rather stringent account—too stringent to capture normative naturalism, I’ll argue. But even on this account, the notion of a correspondence or mapping relation ought to count as naturalistic. (And fittingness would be such a relation, on the worldly Brentanian account). Indeed, notions of representation *qua* formal mappings are still widely employed in cognitive science (Morgan 2014). *Formal* mappings are just that—they are a “bit of mathematics” (to quote Schaffer 2016, 64), and it seems unreasonable to deny that science can avail itself freely of any formalism that might prove useful.

Nonetheless, the worldly Brentanian account also makes use of joint-carvingness claims. Joint-carvingness is something more than a bit of mathematics. Indeed, joint-carvingness may seem like a distinctively *metaphysical* feature, insofar as most scientific theories don’t explicitly refer to joint-carvingness or make use of it. And one might think that posits that aren’t explicitly referred to in scientific theories aren’t “naturalistic.”

Nonetheless, intuitions about joint-carvingness might accord with a kind of scientific realism, or the view that certain categories (typically scientific ones) are objectively better or more accurate for representing the world than others. Indeed, some scientific realists—even those who are otherwise averse to metaphysics—might be inclined to accept that *being an electron* is an objectively better category for representing the world than *being an electron OR a cow*. So even if scientific theories themselves do not refer to joint-carvingness, joint-carvingness is still plausibly part of a package of concepts and intuitions that are consistent with a broadly scientific worldview. That’s not to say that all scientists must accept something like joint-carvingness. Some might have more conventionalist intuitions, or be suspicious of anything that seems too metaphysical. The point is rather that accepting a posit like joint-carvingness doesn’t disqualify one from being a naturalist—at least not on a view of naturalism which accepts posits that have explanatory upshot for science or a scientific worldview,

even if they aren't quantified over in first-order scientific theories. And indeed, the elements in the worldly Brentanian account of fittingness—imperatives, mapping relations, joint-carvingness—are all plausibly part of the philosophers' toolkit for explaining science and cognitive science. There's nothing here like a divine command theory, which would draw on posits (God, divine commands) whose explanatory value is questionable at best outside of religion.

It's unclear, then, what the basis would be for saying the worldly Brentanian account is *not* naturalistic. One might object that joint-carvingness is not directly observable, and only what's directly observable counts as naturalistic. But this objection may require a very stringent empiricism, one that's too stringent for much contemporary science. Indeed, science posits unobservable entities and phenomena (especially at the sub-atomic level). Of course, none of this is to say that a naturalist must accept fittingness-as-correspondence, or that naturalistic realist accounts of normativity must be correct. It's only to say that the worldly Brentanian account plausibly counts as naturalistic.

4.2 Still, there are several reasons one might think the worldly Brentanian account fails to be normative at all. As I'll explain, however, I don't think any of these reasons present a unique challenge to the worldly Brentanian account (as opposed to naturalist accounts in general).

First, it may be unclear how, on the worldly Brentanian account, the definition of fittingness could account for normativity.¹⁶ That definition has a few parts: the correspondence relation and a fact about joint-carvingness. None of these, as I've discussed, is normative. Indeed, it's because neither of these is normative that the worldly Brentanian account counts as naturalistic. But it may seem ad hoc to say that a relation defined in terms of two non-normative parts—correspondence and joint-carvingness—could in turn define normativity. At least, it may seem ad hoc without further explanation, or without some plausible desideratum for normativity that the worldly Brentanian account fulfills.

Even if that's so, however, there may be such a desideratum. Indeed, one heuristic for normativity is a kind of objective action-guidance or prescriptivity (Railton 1989). (This is the

¹⁶ As the normatively fundamental property, fittingness would in turn be part of the definiens in the definition of normativity; see §1 and §3.5.

heuristic Mackie (1977) himself prefers). I've defended the objectivity of the worldly Brentanian account above. And the action-guiding import of the account might be explained by the fact that attitudes are a relatum of the fittingness relation, and many attitudes plausibly have imperative content. This content can in turn play a motivational or action-guiding role. If, for example, an attitude of fear has the imperative content: "Avoid x!", this attitude plausibly has an action guiding-role. It "tells" one to perform a certain action, namely to avoid something.

It may still seem, however, that the correspondence relations on which the worldly Brentanian relies are ill-suited to capture a normative relation to attitudes. For while normative relations may be relations to actions and attitudes, not all relations to actions and attitudes may count as normative. (Indeed, consider the example given above about a relation between attitudes and green-colored things). Perhaps there must be something distinctive about the nature of a relation—something a correspondence relation lacks—for that relation to be normative.

There is, however, something distinctive about fittingness—at least on the worldly Brentanian view. Namely, fittingness would have a real rather than a stipulative definition, and it would be more joint-carving (by real definition) than any other relation between entities and attitudes (see §3.3). The joint-carving features, on Lewis (1983, 1986) and Sider's (2011, 2020) views, are those needed to accurately and completely represent the world. What would qualify fittingness as normative (rather than normative*), then, is that it's a *joint-carving* relation to attitudes, or more joint-carving than alternative relations to attitudes.

But what distinguishes joint-carvingness itself from joint-carvingness*? Here I'd draw on some realist intuitions: that joint-carvingness is real, and it's what one draws on in explaining that *being green* is (objectively) better for representing the world than *being grue* (see §3.3). Similarly, I'd suggest, the relations to actions and attitudes that best characterize the world are the normative (as opposed to the normative*) ones. Insofar, then, as joint-carving features are those that best represent the world—and fittingness is joint-carving—fittingness would be normative. Perhaps this view seems to assume too many theoretical commitments.

But since the worldly Brentanian account already relies on realist intuitions, I don't think it's a serious cost to draw on further realist intuitions about joint-carvingness.

One might worry that the account emphasizes fittingness to the exclusion of other normative properties. However, we needn't exclude features like reasons and oughts from our normative ontology. The claim is that these other normative features are *grounded* in fittingness, not that these features don't exist. Indeed, the aim of the worldly Brentanian is to account for normative features while avoiding any appeal to irreducible normativity. This is done through a naturalistic account of fittingness, together with the further claim (of fittingness-first) that other normative features are grounded in fittingness.

The resulting account may be unattractive to those with non-naturalist intuitions, but for naturalists that's par for the course. Admittedly, I can't do justice here to the dialectic between naturalism and non-naturalism. My focus has just been on motivating the worldly Brentanian account. I don't claim the worldly Brentanian account incurs none of the costs of naturalism.

5. Responding to Error-Theoretic Arguments

5.1 Still, there are many realist accounts of normativity, both naturalist and non-naturalist. Why prefer the worldly Brentanian account? I want to argue here that the worldly Brentanian account responds well to two notable challenges to normative realism: symmetry arguments (Eklund 2017; Dasgupta 2017, 2018) and queerness arguments (Mackie 1977; Olson 2016). As I'll explain, some other normative realist accounts may have difficulty responding to *both* these challenges together.

Start, then, with symmetry. Symmetry arguments don't deny that there are (or could be) normative features that exist objectively, or independently of convention, stipulation and personal or societal attitudes. Rather, symmetry arguments posit disjoint sets of alternative concepts or features that could all plausibly qualify as normative or action-guiding (Dasgupta 2017, 2018; Eklund 2017; McPherson 2020). Suppose, for example, that community A thinks they ought to do what it's fitting to do; and community B thinks think they ought* to do what

it's fitting* to do (where the asterisk indicates a different feature with a similar purported role). Suppose, further, that both fittingness* and fittingness exist objectively, and that what it's fitting to do is incompatible with what it's fitting* to do. In that case, the normative realist would still hold that there's some objective fact about which feature (fittingness or fittingness*) is *really* normative. At least, it would be hard to motivate normative realism if there were no such fact.

Naturalistic realists may struggle with symmetry arguments. Unlike non-naturalists, naturalists can't posit something like an *irreducible* property of *being normative*, which only normative (rather than normative*) features would instantiate. As a result, it may be difficult for the naturalistic realist to find a principled basis for distinguishing the objectively normative features from the ersatz ones. This is particularly the case for Boyd-style accounts (Boyd 1988). Very roughly, on a Boyd-style account, certain concepts are normative in virtue of picking out properties that are causally connected with some suitably action-guiding aim, such as regulating well-being. The problem, as Eklund (2017, 144) points out, is that there might be many properties, even many mind-independent or objective properties, that are connected with regulating well-being. So if the Boydean version of value is defined in terms of regulating one aspect of well-being, value* might be defined in terms of regulating another aspect. And it's not clear which objective facts one could appeal to, for deciding whether value is privileged over value* or vice versa.

As I've argued (in §4.1), the worldly Brentanian account is also naturalistic, though it does make use of metaphysical machinery to which some (but not all) naturalists might object. The offsetting benefit, I would argue, is that worldly Brentanian account is better able to mount a realist response to symmetry arguments than Boyd-style naturalistic accounts. Indeed, I've argued (in §3.3) that worldly Brentanian account has at least two features that objectively privilege fittingness over fittingness*: namely, (1) that fittingness has a real rather than a stipulative definition, and (2) that the correspondence which defines fittingness is more *joint-carving* (by real definition) than alternative relations (like fittingness*). The joint-carving features, very roughly, are those needed to completely and accurately characterize the world

(Lewis 1983, 1986; Sider 2011) (see §3.3). (Thus being green is taken to be more joint-carving than being grue).

But couldn't the Boyd-style naturalist also say, for example, that value is more joint-carving than value*? Maybe so. Still, a reliance on joint-carving raises several problems for Boyd-style naturalists. For one thing, joint-carving may sit awkwardly with one of the plausible motivations for Boyd-style naturalism—namely, to secure realism with the minimum of metaphysical machinery. For another, Boyd-style accounts often make explicit use of causation (e.g. taking value as being causally connected with properties that regulate well-being); and some realists may entertain concerns about the joint-carvingness of causality (e.g. Sider 2011, 15-16). The Worldly Brentanian account, by contrast, does not rely on causation at all, given that correspondence is distinct from causation (see §3.2-3.3).

Perhaps most importantly, to fully answer symmetry arguments, it may not be sufficient to explain the privilege of the normative over the normative*. One might also need a principled, objective way of demarcating which properties are normative in the first place. The worldly Brentanian, for example, says not only that the normative properties are joint-carving, but provides a clear, unified definition of normativity. Namely, what it is to be normative is to be fully grounded by or (partly) defined in terms of the most joint-carving correspondence between evaluative attitudes and states of affairs.

By contrast, even if the Boydean realist can say that some putatively action-guiding properties are more joint-carving than the alternatives, that doesn't provide an objective or observer-independent way of distinguishing which properties are *normative*. The Boydean might claim that the most joint-carving of the scientifically useful action-guiding properties are normative, but this is a rather vague formulation. Moreover, it introduces an element of observer-dependence to which some realists might object, even if the notion of "scientific usefulness"—to say nothing of "action-guidance"—could be further precisified. The upshot is that, in order to demarcate the normative, the Boydean might either have to compromise their realism to some extent by drawing on observer-dependent categories, or else add yet more metaphysical machinery to try to preserve as much realism as possible. I don't claim that the challenge is

unanswerable by the Boydean realist; but I have suggested the worldly Brentanian's unified definition of normativity is less vulnerable to such a challenge.

Indeed, this definition allows the worldly Brentanian to respond to symmetry arguments without relying on features that are observer-dependent or conventional. For naturalists who prioritize realism, this may be an advantage. Those naturalists who are less attracted to robust realism, of course, might still prefer Boyd-style accounts. Some naturalists might consider some observer-dependence to be a price worth paying, in order to avoid further metaphysics—although any invocation of joint-carvingness might undermine the Boydean's claim to be minimizing metaphysics.

In any case, the worldly Brentanian's appeal to notions such as real definition and joint-carvingness doesn't rob the account of its naturalistic credentials. (Or so I've argued in §4). Perhaps this still adds theoretical complexity, which comes at a cost. If so, however, that cost should be counterbalanced against the attraction of a naturalistic account of normativity that—insofar as it's fully objective—is no less realist than non-naturalist accounts.

5.2 One additional issue concerns the possibility of alternative *attitudes*. The examples I've been using to illustrate fittingness involve the attitudes common to *our* moral psychology (admiration, desire, pity, etc.). But there might be other attitudes (admiration*, desire*, pity*, etc.) that could characterize different moral psychologies. Why should a relation to admiration be objectively privileged over a relation to admiration*? (Presumably, it's not enough that admiration be characteristic of *us* for it to be objectively, rather than subjectively, privileged over admiration*¹⁷).

Nonetheless, I'm not sure that an abundant ontology of attitudes—one that allows for admiration* and desire* as well as admiration and desire—need be a problem for the worldly

¹⁷ Perhaps it's not clear that this is a problem *solely* for the worldly Brentanian account. Even the normative non-naturalist may hold that reasons and fittingness are relations to actions and attitudes. Why shouldn't the non-naturalist then face a similar symmetry challenge? Perhaps it's a problem for the worldly Brentanian because the worldly Brentanian claims they can better respond to symmetry arguments. But I'm not sure I want to say the worldly Brentanian can respond better than non-naturalists to symmetry arguments—only that she can respond better than other *naturalists*. I do claim, however, that the worldly Brentanian can address queerness arguments more convincingly than non-naturalists (see §5.3).

Brentanian. What matters is that there be some *objective* fact about which attitudes are fitting, whatever these attitudes may be. If there were objective facts about which entities or states of affairs it would be fitting to take an attitude of admiration* towards, the worldly Brentanian account should be able to accommodate this.

A problem might arise if there were *conflicting* normative imperatives—say, that what it's fitting to admire could not *also* be what it's fitting to admire*. But this doesn't seem to me to be an issue specific to the worldly Brentanian account. In any case, the worldly Brentanian could say that fittingness grounds reasons and reasons have gradeable weights. So if there were a conflict between what it was fitting to desire* and what it was fitting to desire, this could be resolved based on which fittingness fact grounded weightier reasons. (Of course, one could then question the distinction between reasons and reasons*. But here I would appeal to what I've said before—in §3.3 and §5.1—concerning the objective privilege of joint-carvingness, fittingness and normativity).

5.3 I want to say that the worldly Brentanian account is notable insofar as it resists *both* symmetry and queerness arguments against normative realism. Here, then, I'll argue that the error theorist would have to adopt an unreasonably broad view of queerness, for the worldly Brentanian view to count as queer. More particularly, for the worldly Brentanian account to count as queer, a plausible realist view of truth would likewise have to count as queer. This shows how the Brentanian analogy between truth and fittingness can do yet more work.

First, a few words about queerness. One might think queerness is merely a kind of intuitive strangeness. If that's so, however, then surely something like quantum mechanics would count as queer. (And moral error theorists presumably don't want to target our best physics!). A narrower conception of queerness might thus be more plausible. One such account involves a kind of strong *sui genericity*. Very roughly, normative features might be queer in virtue of being "utterly unlike any other facts with which we are acquainted, including mathematical facts" (Hattiangadi 2007, 50; Taylor 2020). What it means for the Fs to be "utterly unlike" anything else is controversial, of course. But, as a heuristic, one might try something like the following: F

is queer insofar as F is posited by a theory T_F , where the features posited by T_F are causally and constitutively discontinuous with the features posited by all our other theories of the world (see McPherson 2012).¹⁸

In this sense, quantum mechanics isn't queer, for it draws together facts about fundamental physics, chemistry, nanoscience, and even biophysics. At least from the standpoint of constructing a stronger queerness argument—one where we have reason to think queer properties are less likely to exist, in virtue of being queer—this seems like the right result. Of course, this heuristic may classify some intuitively strange things (like subatomic particles and perhaps consciousness) as *not* being queer. But given that we have good reason to think some intuitively strange things exist, if they do important theoretical work, I'm not sure this is a problem. And in any case, the heuristic for queerness is just that—a heuristic, not a definition. It's only intended to help get a grasp on the concept of queerness.

Consider, then, the queerness argument against normative realism in its simplest form:

- (1) Objective normative properties are queer
- (2) For any F , if F is queer, we have good reason to doubt there are F s
- (3) Therefore, we have good reason to doubt there are any objective normative properties¹⁹

Non-naturalist responses to queerness arguments typically reject something like premise (2) (Enoch 2011; Parfit 2011). Naturalist responses may target premise (1) instead, while conceding premise (2). This may seem to give naturalism an advantage, especially insofar as naturalists can explain *why* objective normative properties aren't queer. Indeed, for the naturalist, normative properties are just defined or constituted by natural ones, and natural properties are typically poor candidates for being queer. (Many natural properties, that is, are

¹⁸ Given this conception, one might still think that mathematical entities would count as queer on mathematical platonism (McPherson 2012, 229). But that's not clear. For one thing, of course, we might be able to have mathematics without platonism. Even assuming platonism, however, the fact that mathematics is vital to natural science, and is applied with considerable uniformity, suggests that mathematical entities themselves would be studied by a broad variety of theories (physics, chemistry, etc.) in addition to "pure" mathematics.

¹⁹ One could remove talk of "good reason to doubt," and instead say flatly that there are no queer properties. But this could be false, depending on our understanding of queerness; it is at any rate quite a strong claim.

observable through one means or another, and even those that aren't can often be clearly integrated into a scientific worldview).

The advantage of the worldly Brentanian account is that it allows normative properties to be objective *without* being queer, at least not queer in the sense discussed above. As a result, a response to queerness arguments, for the worldly Brentanian, does not have to weaken normative realism. Or so I argue. By contrast, I've suggested that Boyd-style naturalistic accounts may not take normative properties to be fully objective (in §5.1). If premise 1 doesn't apply to less-than-fully objective normative properties, then Boyd-style arguments may thus be able to avoid queerness arguments. But this involves sacrificing some degree of realism. And queerness arguments are typically directed against *fully* normative realist views. Indeed, complete accounts of the error theoretic argument typically hold that normative properties would need to be objective, in order to fulfill the roles attributed to them (e.g. objective action-guidance) (Mackie 1977; Berker 2019a). It's because no such action-guiding properties are objective that there are no normative properties at all—or so the error theorist may hold (Mackie 1977; Olson 2016).

Accordingly, the worldly Brentanian can concede *arguendo* that we have reason to doubt the existence of queer properties (premise 2), and instead rebut the claim that objective normative properties are queer (premise 1).

On the worldly Brentanian account, fittingness is defined as a correspondence relation between attitudes and states of affairs that's more joint-carving than other relations between attitudes and states of affairs. So there are two parts to the account: the correspondence relation and joint-carvingness. I don't believe either of these is queer. Independently of further substantive features (such as joint-carvingness or grounding), correspondence relations can be taken as mappings, and mappings are just formalisms. Joint-carvingness itself is merely a way of explaining realist intuitions that certain categories—often, scientific ones—are better for

representing the world than others (see §3.3). Indeed, joint-carvingness is the simplest way to explain why we should theorize with *being green* rather than *being grue*.²⁰

Of course, one might think that taking these two parts *together*—as in a correspondence relation that’s joint-carving—is queer. But here again we can draw on an analogy to truth. Some of those keen to defend realist or “inflationary” theories of truth have characterized truth through joint-carvingness or similar features, such as eliteness or sparseness (Edwards 2013; Eklund 2021). Dasgupta (2020) has recently used symmetry arguments to argue against realist conceptions of truth, as he has done for normative and metaphysical realism. An analogous realist rejoinder—that truth is distinguished by its joint-carvingness, and it’s an objective fact that we should represent the world in joint-carving terms—may thus be well-motivated, as it would be for fittingness (see §3.3).²¹

Accordingly, the worldly Brentanian could mount a kind of companions-in-guilt response to charges that fittingness is queer. For if realist views of truth and fittingness both rely on correspondence and joint-carving, it may seem strange (and ad hoc) to say that fittingness is queer and truth is not. To argue that fittingness is queer, the error theorist would then either have to admit that a realist view of truth is likewise queer, or point to a relevant difference between fittingness and truth—despite their structural similarities.

Perhaps the error theorist wouldn’t mind saying that a realist or inflationary account of truth is queer. But this would add a further theoretical commitment to the error theorist’s argument, one that might seem to deviate from the core intuition of normative error theory. That intuition is that objective normativity is *uniquely* implausible, not that other kinds of objective relations (such as a realist truth relation) are also implausible. Indeed, if normative error theory requires that plausible ways of vindicating realism about truth also be queer, one might ask

²⁰ The utility of joint-carvingness extends far beyond normative realism. Indeed, joint-carvingness has typically been used for other theoretical goals, such as determining the content of laws, the semantic values of terms, and the objective similarities between things (Lewis 1983, 1984; Sider 2012)).

²¹ One might think that my use of “should” is itself vulnerable to a symmetry argument—what, after all, distinguishes should from should*? But there’s still a realist intuition that certain features are “objectively privileged” or “objectively to-be-preferred” over others. Even if it’s difficult to express this intuition precisely—and even if the most “neutral-sounding” formulations can still be given asterisks of their own—I don’t think that means we must disregard the intuition itself.

what justifies this view of queerness. If the answer is that any features are queer that aren't explicitly referred to in our best scientific research, this would seem to lead to a much narrower view of naturalism—one with little space not only for normativity, but for metaphysics in general. Note that the question here isn't about whether realist truth relations obtain, but whether such relations would be queer.

There could well be a more targeted way to save metaphysics while conceding the queerness of joint-carving-based accounts truth and fittingness. But the error theorist owes an explanation of how this is to be done. Such companions-in-guilt arguments may put pressure on the error theorist to offer an account of queerness that doesn't require all (or much) of metaphysics to be queer.

In any case, I've argued that the worldly Brentanian view offers both a definition of fittingness and an argument for its normative fundamentality, an argument that already lends itself to naturalistic reduction via an analogy between truth and fittingness. This provides a concrete example of a general strategy for naturalistic reduction, in which an X-first definition of normativity is conjoined with a naturalistic reduction of the normatively fundamental property. Insofar as the resulting account can respond to both symmetry and queerness arguments, it may have an advantage over normative realist accounts that struggle with one or the other.

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