

# Non-Naturalism: the Jackson Challenge

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## 1. Introduction

According to Russ Shafer-Landau (1995: 84), “realism is the claim that the alethic status [i.e., the truth-value] of propositions is determined independently of the intentional attitudes taken by actual or ideal persons towards such propositions or the states they represent.”<sup>1</sup> Moral realism is then realism about morals. It claims that the truth of moral propositions does not depend on anyone’s intentional attitudes towards them or the states of affairs they represent. Moral realism thus denies that the truth-value of the proposition *that torture is wrong* could be determined by our acceptance of the proposition or by our disapproval of torture.

This formulation of moral realism leaves an important question unanswered. What is the nature of the moral facts which make some moral propositions judgment-independently true? This metaphysical question divides moral realists into two camps – moral naturalists and moral non-naturalists.

When we make a basic moral judgment of the subject-predicate form ‘x is F’, we appear to attribute a moral property, Fness, to x. So, if I say that ‘torturing people is wrong’, I attribute the property of wrongness to the acts of torturing people. In the realist framework, if this judgment is true, it is true *because* the acts I refer to have the property attributed to them. In that case, it would be a fact that torturing people is wrong. This fact just consists of the acts of torturing people and them having the property of wrongness. It makes the given judgment true.

The disagreement between the moral naturalists and the non-naturalists is about the nature of the moral properties which in part

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<sup>1</sup> This intuitive conception of realism is controversial. Other alternatives are illuminatingly explored by FitzPatrick (2008: sec. 1). For instance, some quasi-realist non-cognitivists claim that they can accommodate moral propositions and the attitude-independence of their truth-value. On the criterion above, these views would count as forms of realism. To avoid this, perhaps it should be added that moral propositions should also be taken to be attitude-independent. On the quasi-realist views, the propositions expressed in moral statements often consist of plans which are attitudinal.

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constitute the moral facts. The naturalist begins from the ordinary natural properties of objects such as their weight, chemical constitution, location, shape, colour, and so on. These properties play a role in good scientific causal explanations or we can only know of them a posteriori by using our senses to empirically observe their instantiations.<sup>2</sup>

A moral naturalist then claims that moral properties are essentially of this very same kind. They may or may not be reducible to other natural properties. Irrespective of their reducibility, they in any case play a role in good scientific causal explanations or we can only know of them a posteriori through sense-experience.

A moral non-naturalist, in contrast, claims that the moral properties are *sui generis*, i.e., of a unique kind. I will later return to the allegedly distinct nature of these properties, but it suffices to say here that they are in some way essentially *unlike* the natural properties. The moral reality is on this view autonomous from the empirical world studied by sciences (FitzPatrick 2008: 171–172). It is an additional element of the furniture of the world. Consider the familiar (but problematic) illustration from metaphysics (Heil 2003: 171–172, Goff 2007).

Imagine God creating the first world from nothing. He creates all and only the objects and their natural properties that we

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<sup>2</sup> What exactly makes some property a natural one is controversial. Being the subject matter of natural sciences is emphasised by Moore (1903: 40) and Shafer-Landau (2006: 211), being used in scientific explanations by Little (1994), having causal powers by Lewis (1983: sec. 2), and a posteriori, empirical knowability by Copp (2003). On all these views, natural properties include physical, psychological, and sociological properties (Zangwill 2008: 110).

Others begin from natural, factual or descriptive terms and vocabulary. They then stipulate that a property is natural if it can be referred to by using these terms (Huemer 2005: 66, Parfit *forthcoming*: app. 1, sec. 7). Jackson (1998: 120–121) prefers to talk about descriptive properties, i.e. the properties to which descriptive terms refer. This allows him to investigate whether moral properties are reducible to descriptive properties even when the reduction-base could include other descriptive properties than the purely natural ones. I find the name ‘descriptive properties’ misleading – the relevant properties certainly do not describe anything.

In any case, my aim is to investigate Jackson’s argument as it could be used in the traditional naturalism-debate where it is assumed that there are no other relevant descriptive properties than the natural ones. For this reason, I use ‘natural properties’ where Jackson uses ‘descriptive properties’. Finally, I doubt that the best way to demarcate natural properties is to start from naturalist vocabulary. This seems to assume from the beginning that there is a metaphysical distinction between properties that matches the distinction in the kind of terms we have.

can now find from our world. After this, God stops to rest. In the non-naturalist framework, at this point, this first created world would still lack the non-natural moral properties. God would have to in addition create the further moral properties and the bridge-laws that necessitate that acts (including the ones in the rest of the worlds God will create) must have certain moral properties because of the natural properties they have.

The debate between the moral naturalists and non-naturalists is over a century old. There is, however, an interesting recent development. In his 1998 book *From Metaphysics to Ethics*, Frank Jackson (1998: 122–123) introduced a new argument against moral non-naturalism. This argument does not merely claim that non-naturalism relies on implausible or extravagant semantic, metaphysical, or epistemic assumptions. Rather, the argument attempts to settle the debate by showing how the basic commitments of the non-naturalists leave no logical room for the non-natural properties which the non-naturalists want to defend.

This possibly devastating argument is currently being criticised by many non-naturalists.<sup>3</sup> It has also found its defenders.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I hope to show that, even though the argument deserves attention, it fails on its own as an argumentative device against non-naturalist metaethical views.

In the next section, I will introduce Jackson's argument. In the third section, I look at the controversial counter-examples to one of its crucial premises. I then try to move the dialectic from these counter-examples to a more general, metaphysical question of how we should assess property-identities.

I will argue that, once we have an answer to this question, either the defenders of Jackson's argument must do more work to defend controversial nominalist views about properties or the argument threatens to beg the question. I hope to conclude that for these reasons, in itself, Jackson's argument creates no additional pressure against non-naturalism. This is not to claim that *therefore* moral non-naturalism is the right metaethical view. I want to remain neutral in this investigation about whether non-naturalism can ultimately be vindicated.

## 2. Jackson's Argument

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<sup>3</sup> See Kauppinen (2003), Dancy (2004b), Majors (2005), Shafer-Landau (2003, 89–98), and Parfit (*forthcoming*: app. 1, sec. 6).

<sup>4</sup> See Streumer (2008).

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The following presentation of Jackson's argument is somewhat simplified, but the omitted complications should not affect its assessment.<sup>5</sup> I will use the moral property of rightness as an example. I will also assume that only acts can be right. The following argument could be modified for any moral property, and applied even if that property can also be had by objects, persons, states of affairs, attitudes, facts, events, character-traits, and so on.

One commitment of non-naturalism is that (vagueness apart) of any possible act it is either true or false that it has the property of being right. There is then a set of all possible right acts. In principle, it is possible to give a complete (often called 'maximal') naturalist description of each of these possible acts that can be truthfully said to be right. Such description would tell us, for every possible natural property, whether the act has it or not. These natural properties would also include all possible relational natural properties. Thus, a complete naturalist description of an act would describe all the natural relations it has to everything else in the world.

Let us name each act-description (of the conjunctive form '... [is] F and G and not-H, ..., and Z') that gives a complete naturalist description of a possible right act by using the letter 'D' and a numeral in subscript. Now assume that we have a complete naturalist description of every possible right act. It is then true of

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<sup>5</sup> For Jackson's own presentation of the argument, see Jackson (1998: 118–125). Clear presentations of the argument are also given by Shafer-Landau (2003, 93), Streumer (2008: sec. 3), Majors (2005: sec. 1), Dancy (2004b and 2005: sec. 2), and Oddie (2005: sec. 6.3). Jaegwon Kim (1984) argued earlier in the same way that both strong and global supervenience entail that, for every moral property, there is a necessarily co-instantiated natural property. He accepted that this in itself does not reduce moral properties to natural properties. He only claimed that there would be some tension if the moral properties were not reducible to the natural ones.

Allan Gibbard (2003: 94–102, and 2006: sec. 1) uses a similar argument. He begins from a person who is fully decided about what she ought to do in each situation. She thus has a hyperplan – a thing to do for every possible situation. She will do act  $A_1$  in circumstances  $C_1$ ,  $A_2$  in  $C_2$ , and so on. The property of being what one ought to do is then necessarily co-instantiated with the natural property of being the act  $A_1$  in circumstances  $C_1$ ,  $A_2$  in  $C_2$  and so on. Gibbard then relies on the same crucial premise as Jackson: necessarily co-instantiated properties are identical. Thus, the property of being what one ought to do just is the naturalist property mentioned above. Even though his argument is couched in expressivist terms, as Gibbard notes, this is not essential for the argument (Gibbard 2006: 327). All expressivism gives for his argument is the supervenience of the normative on natural, but this is also accepted by the non-naturalist realist. Thereafter, the work is done by the crucial premise discussed in this paper.

every possible right act that it is either  $D_1$ , or  $D_2$ , or ..., or  $D_n$ . Furthermore, it is not true of any act that is not right that it is either  $D_1$ , or  $D_2$ , or ..., or  $D_n$ . Otherwise, there could be a difference in the moral properties of two acts without a difference in their natural properties. However, this would violate the types of supervenience-principles to which non-naturalists too are committed.<sup>6</sup>

Now, consider the predicate 'is  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ ' formed from the complete naturalist descriptions of every possible right act. It ascribes a property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  to acts. Presumably this property is a natural property.<sup>7</sup> It is had merely in virtue of satisfying the given naturalist description. Because this property is had by all possible right acts and by no possible act that is not right, it and rightness are necessarily co-instantiated.

Jackson's final premise is that there are no distinct necessarily co-instantiated properties. This entails that necessarily co-instantiated properties must be identical.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, because the moral property of rightness is necessarily co-instantiated with the natural property being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ , rightness just *is* (identical with) the natural property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ . Having the natural property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  thus makes our claims about the rightness of acts true. This reasoning seems to lead to moral naturalism from the commitments of the non-naturalists.

### 3. The Non-Naturalist Response

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<sup>6</sup> Jackson (1998: 119, 122–123) originally formulated the argument by using global supervenience, i.e., the thesis that any pair of naturally identical worlds must be also morally identical. My formulation of the argument makes use of strong supervenience, i.e., the thesis that if two individual actions are identical in terms of their natural properties, they must also be identical in terms of their moral properties. This is because Williamson (2001) shows that global supervenience is not enough to generate the required necessary co-instantiation of the moral properties and the natural base-properties whereas strong supervenience is. He also argues that global supervenience does not entail strong supervenience. This means that the non-naturalist could in principle try to reject the stronger supervenience thesis in order to resist Jackson's argument. I want to argue that the argument would fail even if we granted strong supervenience to Jackson.

<sup>7</sup> This assumption is questioned in Majors (2005).

<sup>8</sup> This formulation of the premise may sound somewhat misleading. It is odd to say that two properties are actually the same, i.e., one property. Metaphysically this claim really amounts to no more than that one property is identical with itself. The interesting semantic thesis is rather that all necessarily coextensive predicates ascribe the same property.

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In response, the non-naturalists deny that they are committed to the claim that there are no distinct necessarily co-instantiated properties.<sup>9</sup> In fact, a central non-naturalist strategy has been to give counter-examples that purport to show this principle false.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it has been claimed that being the only even prime number and being the positive square root of 4, being an equiangular triangle and being an equilateral triangle, being a closed straight-sided figure with three sides and being a closed straight-sided figure with three angles, and being necessarily co-instantiated with and being identical with are all pairs of intuitively distinct necessarily co-instantiated properties.<sup>11</sup>

Jackson and Streumer have not been impressed by these cases. Their intuition is that, in these pairs, the mentioned properties just are one and the same property.<sup>12</sup> They both also worry that accepting distinct necessarily co-instantiated properties leads to there being absurdly many properties (Streumer 2008: sec. 4, Jackson 2003: 573). In principle, we could create uncountably many different predicates which apply to same things across all worlds. If necessarily coextensive predicates pick out distinct properties, then, as a result, there would be similarly uncountably many necessarily co-instantiated properties.

Most non-naturalists will not admit that *all* necessarily coextensive predicates will refer to distinct properties. As a result, there will not be uncountably many necessarily co-instantiated properties. Thus, in the same way as the naturalist refers to her intuition about the cases that the necessarily co-instantiated properties are identical, the non-naturalist will refer to her intuition about the cases that some but not all necessarily co-instantiated properties are distinct.

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<sup>9</sup> This is most explicitly stated by FitzPatrick (2008: 199).

<sup>10</sup> This has not been the only reply. It has also been argued that there is no such property as being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  because there are no disjunctive or infinitely disjunctive properties. For this reason, rightness cannot be identical with that property. This objection is mentioned in Majors (2005: 481), and in (Oddie 2005: sec. 6.5), and replied to in Streumer (2008: sec. 5). Furthermore, it can be argued that even if the predicate 'is  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ ' is necessarily coextensive with 'is right', the property it ascribes is a moral property and not a descriptive one (Majors 2005: 482–485, Oddie 2005: ch. 6). Again, for a reply see Streumer (2008: sec. 6) which also replies to many other possible objections.

<sup>11</sup> See Parfit (*forthcoming*: app. 1), Majors (2005: 488), Shafer-Landau (2003: 92), and Sober (1982: 183).

<sup>12</sup> See Jackson (1998: 126 and 2003: 573), Streumer (2008: sec. 4), and Shoemaker (1980: sec. 4).

At this point, the debate about Jackson's argument seems to reach a stalemate. Both sides are happy with their intuitions. However, the identity of properties is such an abstract metaphysical issue that we should not rely merely on our intuitions about the cases. Streumer rightly insists that we need a principled reason for deciding when two necessarily co-instantiated properties are different – if ever (Streumer 2008, sec. 4). For this reason, we should turn our attention to the more general metaphysical question of when any apparently two things are one and the same. Once we have settled on a satisfactory answer to this question more generally, it is easier to assess the crucial premise of Jackson's argument.

#### 4. Leibniz's Law

The most widely accepted and the best criterion for assessing the identity of any things is Leibniz's law.<sup>13</sup> Even if there have been attempts to show it false, the law does seem to be a near platitude about identity. We certainly lack better ways of assessing identities. For these reasons, I will accept and use the law in the following.

Leibniz's law consists of the following two principles:

*Identity of Indiscernibles.* If, for all properties P, x has P if and only if y has P, then x is identical with y.<sup>14</sup>

*Indiscernibility of Identicals.* If x is identical with y, then, for all properties P, x has P if and only if y has P.

The first principle states that if two things share all their properties, they must be one and the same thing. The second principle, in contrast, states that, if two things are identical with one another, they must share all the same properties. By contraposition, it implies the following principle:

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<sup>13</sup> The law is called Leibniz's law because one of its first explicit formulations can be found from Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*, sec. 9. Note that, more properly speaking, these principles concern what is necessarily the case.

<sup>14</sup> This principle is more controversial of the two. The well-known problem is that there could be worlds in which only qualitatively identical objects (spheres or cones) existed in symmetrical positions in relation to one another (Black 1952, Ayer 1954). In this case, the principle threatens to give the wrong conclusion that these objects really are the same object. To avoid this conclusion, the defender of the principle seems to have to accept *thisness* as a property of objects or a conception of absolute space-time in which objects are uniquely located.

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*Diversity of Dissimilars.* If, for some property P, x has P and y lacks P, then x is not identical with y.<sup>15</sup>

Traditionally these principles have been used to assess the identity of things, i.e., the identity of *objects*. However, there is no reason why they could not also be used to assess the identity of properties (Sober 1982: 183, Kauppinen 2003, Oddie 2005: 147). Intuitively, there are higher-order properties. Some properties have properties of their own. For example, redness has the property of being a colour. This allows us to investigate whether two properties in fact are one and the same property by looking at whether they share all their properties.

One good thing about Leibniz's law is that both sides in the debate about Jackson's crucial premise can use it to their advantage. A defender of the argument can try to show that any two necessarily co-instantiated properties will have to share all their higher-order properties. This would entail that the property of rightness and the property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  also share all the same properties. Together with Identity of Indiscernibles this conclusion entails that rightness is identical with being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ . I will discuss this line of argument next.

In contrast, a critic of Jackson's argument can attempt to show that there are some necessarily co-instantiated properties which have different higher-order properties. This would enable her to argue that rightness too has some higher-order properties which the natural property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  lacks. Given Diversity of Dissimilars, this would entail that rightness is not identical with the latter property even if these properties are necessarily co-instantiated. I will follow this line of thought in the section 6.

### 5. The Naturalist Argument

To vindicate the premise that necessarily co-instantiated properties are identical, the naturalist could then argue that such properties will share all the same higher-order properties. How could one do this?

The obvious way would be to defend a view called *elementarism* (Bergmann 1957, Weinberg 1954). On this view, there are first-order properties like a certain shade of redness or a certain shape of sphericity. However, no such property has any

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<sup>15</sup> McTaggart (1921: sec. 99) called the contrapositive of Identity of Indiscernibles 'Dissimilarity of Diverse'.

properties of its own, because there are no higher-order properties. This view could be motivated with the thought that we can only ever be acquainted with the basic first-order properties, for example with *that* particular shade of red.<sup>16</sup>

A defender of Jackson's argument can in addition accept some higher-order properties. These are the ones that are necessarily shared by any necessarily co-instantiated properties. First, one could think that being instantiated by a given object is a property which a property can have. Being instantiated by a, being instantiated by b, and so on would each be properties of this type. Any two necessarily co-instantiated properties would share all the properties of this type. Second, there is one property that is had by everything – that of being identical with itself. This higher-order property would also be necessarily shared by any two necessarily co-instantiated properties.

How could one argue that properties have no other sorts of properties? First of all, one could try to argue that any plausible explanation for what the properties of the given first-order properties are like must be based on the objects that instantiate those basic properties. If this were the case, then it would be tempting to think that necessarily co-instantiated properties would need to share all their properties. It would be interesting to see the naturalists to develop this line of thought further.

However, perhaps an easier way to argue for the same conclusion would be to accept a global view about properties which would entail that conclusion.<sup>17</sup> Austere forms of nominalism provide good candidates for a view that could play this role. They hold that fundamentally 'there is nothing *over and above* concrete particular objects' (Goff 2007: 45). They then try to explain how our talk about properties is made true by the concrete particular objects.

One can, for instance, think that properties are functions from worlds to sets of objects (Egan 2004, Gibbard 2006: 325–

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that the principle of acquaintance is a problematic criterion, inherited from the logical positivists, for the existence of properties. It is not clear that we cannot be directly acquainted with higher-order properties on occasion. For instance, in bad lighting conditions I may not be directly acquainted with the shade of the object's colour even if I am directly aware of the general colourfulness of that shade. Russell (1912: ch. 10) argued that we can be acquainted with universals that are not first-order.

<sup>17</sup> This strategy is pursued, I believe, by Gibbard (2006: 325–327). I don't believe it is Jackson's strategy as he wants to remain neutral about the nature of properties (1998: 15–16).

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326).<sup>18</sup> So, the property of being red is a function that maps each world to a set of things which in that world instantiate redness. Such functions can be thought of as sets of ordered pairs of worlds and specific sets of objects in those worlds.

This view would entail that any two necessarily co-instantiated properties can only have the same higher-order properties. Take any pair of such properties. Both of them would now be functions from each possible world to a set of things in that world. Because these properties are instantiated by the very same things in each world, they would essentially be *equivalent functions* from each world to a set of objects (or equivalent sets of ordered pairs of worlds and things in them). In this situation, it just could not be that equivalent functions from worlds to extensions both had and lacked some higher-order property (Gibbard 2006: sec. 3).<sup>19</sup> After all, they both consist of the same worlds, the same sets of objects, and the same mappings between the worlds and sets of objects.

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<sup>18</sup> This version of class nominalism is a modified version of Lewis's view. According to him, properties are sets of all their possible instances (Lewis 1983: sec. 2). They could not be sets of their actual instances. That would make being a cordate and being a renate the same property (Quine 1954). One consequence of Lewis's view is that individuals must be world-bound (Egan 2004: 49). Assume that this is not the case. Say that Elmer is a philosopher but he could have not been. In one world he is a philosopher and in another he isn't. This would entail that Elmer, the very same person, both belongs and does not belong to the set of beings that instantiate philosopherhood. Lewis avoids this contradiction by using his (controversial) counterpart-theory.

However, the modified account avoids a problem which Lewis's view has with contingent higher-order properties (Egan 2004: 50). Take the property of being green, i.e., on Lewis's view, the set of all possible things that instantiate greenness. It has contingently the property of being someone's favourite property. In some worlds, the set of green things is favoured by someone and thus it belongs to the set of all possible properties that are somebody's favourite. In other worlds, the set of green things is not favoured by anyone, and thus it also does not belong to the set of all possible properties that are somebody's favourite. This is a contradiction. It is avoided if the property of being somebody's favourite property is a function from each world to different set of properties – the ones favoured by someone in that world (Egan 2004: 53).

<sup>19</sup> The higher-order properties themselves too would be functions from worlds to a set of properties (i.e. a set of functions from worlds to sets of objects). It could be argued that two functions from each world to same sets of objects still could have different 'structures' (Lewis 1986: sec. 1.5). If this is right, then, even on the nominalist view, necessarily co-instantiated properties can be distinct because they have different properties. However, it is not clear how structural differences in the relevant functions could give rise to the required difference in kind between natural and non-natural properties.

Therefore, on this view of properties, any two necessarily co-instantiated properties would have to share all the same higher-order properties. This conclusion, together with Identity of Indiscernibles, entails that necessarily co-instantiated properties are identical.

However, note that using this strategy to defend the central premise of Jackson's argument requires a defence of a controversial nominalist view about properties. This requires doing substantial philosophical work.

First, this form of nominalism commits one to the existence of functions, possible worlds, and sets (Armstrong 1978: sec. 4.1–4.3). This creates the challenge of giving an account of the existence of such objects. This will become more difficult if the naturalist wants to remain a naturalist throughout.

The second challenge is a version of the so-called 'One over Many' problem. Say that we randomly pick out a set of objects from each world. We can do this infinitely many times. For each selection we end up with, there is a function that maps each world to the random set of objects we have selected from that world. If properties are functions from each world to a set of objects, then each such function of worlds and random objects would be a distinct, real property. That is, belonging to such a set of random objects would be a way in which an object could be.

This sounds like an absurd conclusion.<sup>20</sup> To avoid it, the nominalist must accept that only some functions from worlds to sets of objects are properties. These are the ones in which the sets of objects are not 'randomly' picked. But, what are the sets which are not randomly picked? In virtue of what do some objects but not others belong to the sets that constitute a property?

There is a temptation to explain the fact that certain objects constitute sets which play a property-constituting role by saying that these objects are similar in some significant respect – they share a common quality (Armstrong 1989: 15–17, 27–28). But, this comes

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<sup>20</sup> This objection was put forward by Armstrong (1978: sec. 4.6). See also Armstrong (1980: sec. 1, and 1989: 12–13). Stuart Hampshire (1950) bites the bullet as does Lewis (1983: sec. 2) and Gibbard (2006: sec. 4). Lewis and Gibbard accept that some functions (or sets for Lewis) are more natural than others because of the causal role they play. Admittedly, it is not clear whether this objection has much force in the present dialectic. The earlier premises of Jackson's argument already assume a fairly unrestricted view about properties. They assume, for instance, that there are properties corresponding to disjunctions of conjunctive descriptions. If we allow such properties, then it looks like we have to also accept properties like the property of being a member of a random set.

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close to attributing a property to them prior to any talk of sets and functions. This is something a nominalist cannot do. Of course, a nominalist will insist that there is nothing to explain here. It just is a brute, primitive fact that certain sets of objects are such that functions from worlds to them are real properties (Devitt 1980: sec. 2, Quine 1954, Quinton 1957: 10, Lewis 1983: sec. 3). Others are not as certain that this is the right place for the explanations to come to an end.

The third problem of nominalism worth mentioning is the so-called paraphrase problem (Pap 1959, Jackson 1977). It starts from the observation that we use sentences in which we seem to refer to properties as entities and in which we then say things of them. We say things like:

- (1) Courage is a virtue.
- (2) Ann prefers kindness over honesty.
- (3) She has the same virtues as her cousin.
- (4) Sincerity resembles honesty more than humility.

Intuitively we think that these claims are true. A nominalist cannot explain their truth with what is true of the properties as named entities. Instead she has to either translate these claims to claims about objects (and sets, functions, and so on) or to claims about the property-words (or their token-uses).<sup>21</sup> Thus, the claim ‘courage is a virtue’ would correspond roughly either to the claim ‘other things being equal, courageous persons are virtuous persons’ or to the claim ‘“has courage’ is a virtue predicate’.

It has proved out to be difficult to provide translations of all the common-sensical claims which mention properties by using the means allowed for the austere nominalist. The new translations should be arrived at in some systematic fashion and they should have similar truth-conditions as we take the original claims to have. The debate about whether this can be satisfactorily done is certainly still a live one.<sup>22</sup> Nominalist views therefore risk leaving unexplained what makes certain intuitive statements true.

The aim of this section, however, is not to make a conclusive case against austere forms of nominalism. Rather, I hoped to explain how a moral naturalist can use Identity of

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<sup>21</sup> The first strategy is pursued by Goodman & Quine (1947), and Lewis (1983: sec. 2); and the second by Carnap (1959: 284–314), and Sellars (1963).

<sup>22</sup> For useful introductions to the state of play of these debates, see Armstrong (1989, 32–36), and Loux (2002: 60–83). Goff (2007) denies that the nominalist can be required to provide this sort of translations. However, even if this were true, the nominalist should be able to give some sort of a story about what makes these kinds of sentences true.

Indiscernibles to argue that any two necessarily co-instantiated properties are one and the same property. This requires showing that such properties cannot have different properties of their own. Austere forms of nominalism provide the best argument to this conclusion I know of.

So, by arguing for austere nominalism, a naturalist can provide a positive argument for Jackson's crucial premise. This requires solving the problems of nominalism and giving positive arguments for why we should be nominalists in the first place.

## 6. The Non-Naturalist Argument

If nominalism is false, then it's not the case that only concrete particular objects exist. There would also be either *tropes* (i.e., particular 'attributes', 'aspects' or 'instantiated properties' of objects) or *universals* (*sui generis* entities that are qualities or ways of being that can be wholly present in many objects).<sup>23</sup> These tropes or universals would have existence of their own. Our talk about the properties of objects would then be about either ones of these entities which would serve as the truth-makers of our claims. For the sake of simplicity, in the following, I will just talk about properties. This can be understood as either trope-talk or universal-talk depending on which view you find more plausible.

If properties have independent existence, the moral non-naturalist has a way of using the Diversity of Dissimilars principle to resist Jackson's argument. In this case, there would be no prior reason to assume that there could not be two distinct properties that are necessarily co-instantiated. One could then try to show that two necessarily co-instantiated properties (i.e., a pair of trope-classes or universals) have different properties of their own. This conclusion together with Diversity of Dissimilars entails that there actually are distinct necessarily co-instantiated properties.

This is where the previous counter-examples to Jackson's premise have most of their force (Oddie 2005: 148). Return to the necessarily co-instantiated properties of being a closed straight-sided figure having three sides and being a closed straight-sided figure having three angles. Sober argues that these properties have different causal powers and hence they are different properties (Sober 1982, see also Achinstein 1972).

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<sup>23</sup> For classic defences of the trope theory, see Williams (1953) and Campbell (1981); for classic defences of realism about universals, see Russell (1912) and Armstrong (1978).

### *Non-Naturalism: the Jackson Challenge*

We can build two machines – a closed-straight-side-figure detector and a three-angle detector. The first machine picks out all closed figures with straight sides no matter how many angles they have. The second machine picks out all objects that have three angles independently of whether or not they are closed figures or straight-sided. All objects that have the property of being a closed straight-sided figure having three sides and the property of being a closed straight-sided figure having three angles will be picked out by both machines. And, of course, no object could have one of these properties without the other.

The question, however, is which property of a triangle causes these machines to react to the object? Sober's reply is that the property of being closed straight-sided figure having three sides sets off the closed-straight-side-figure detector but not the other machine. In contrast, the property of being a closed straight-sided figure having three angles sets the second machine off but not the first one. The two necessarily co-instantiated properties thus have distinct causal powers and therefore they are distinct properties by Diversity of Dissimilars.

Even if I find this example appealing, it is fair to say that it remains controversial. It hadn't convinced Jackson when he claimed that necessarily coextensive predicates cannot ascribe distinct predicates (Jackson 1998: 126–127). Rather than discussing the details of this case or others like it, I want to return to the main line of argument.

The moral non-naturalist accepts that rightness and being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  are necessarily co-instantiated properties. However, she believes that these are distinct properties because they have different properties. She has, after all, been claiming from the beginning that the moral property of rightness has properties which the natural property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  lacks (FitzPatrick 2008: 199).

What are these properties? The first candidate sometimes mentioned is supervenience. A non-naturalist could claim that rightness is a property which supervenes on the natural properties whereas being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  is not. This would not do. A property, F, supervenes on a set of properties, N, in the case that two objects cannot differ in whether they are F without also differing with respect to their N-properties (Hare 1952: 145). On this conception of supervenience, being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  is also a supervening property. If one action has this property and another does not, then there must be some difference in the basic natural properties of these actions.

A better proposal is that rightness has the property of being unitary, of having its own distinct ‘shape’ (Dancy 2004b: 235–236, Kauppinen 2003, McDowell 1998: 202–203). In contrast, the property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  lacks this property. It has the properties of being disjunctive and ‘shapeless’.<sup>24</sup> After all, whether or not an action has this property is determined by whether it satisfies one of the infinitely many disjunct-descriptions that relate the action to a whole world. On this level of description, the actions that have this natural property needn’t share any other, more basic natural properties.

Even though there is a lot to be said for this proposal, it may not reveal a decisive difference in the properties of the two necessarily co-instantiated properties. Showing that there is a mismatch in the unity of the two properties requires two further arguments. This is because how unitary a given property is cannot be read from the composition of the corresponding predicate (Streumer 2008, sec. 5). In principle, a unitary predicate could refer to a disjunctive property and a disjunctive predicate to a unitary property.

A defender of the difference in the unity of the two properties must then first argue that there are no different rightnesses (or at least not very many of them). Perhaps this could be argued on the grounds that the unity of this property is required for there to be an appropriate rule for the use of the predicate (McDowell 1998: 203).

She will also have to be able to argue that the property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  lacks similar unity.<sup>25</sup> This would require defending pluralism or particularism in normative ethics. Only the truth of these views would rule out the possibility that the actions which are  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  share also some other, more basic natural property (for instance, happiness-conduciveness) which unifies the property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ .

Be that as it may, a moral non-naturalist typically claims that moral properties have at least three properties which natural

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<sup>24</sup> Oddie (2005: ch. 6) argues in a similar way that value properties are ‘convex’ whereas their supervenience-bases are disjointed. For this reason, he denies that evaluative properties are reducible to the base-properties.

<sup>25</sup> Jackson (1998: 124–125) assumes that there could be communalities or patterns shared by the instantiations of this property on the level of the simple natural properties. Dancy (2004b: 235) claims that Jackson occasionally identifies rightness with those patterns or communalities rather than with the disjunctive property. The arguments of this investigation could be repeated with regards to that identification.

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properties like being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  lack. Firstly, they claim that we can gain knowledge of the moral properties *a priori* whereas our knowledge of natural properties must be *a posteriori* (Huemer 2005: 84–92, ch. 5, Shafer-Landau 2006: 212). Consider the two properties of our discussion.

Take my current act of typing this paper. It seems plausible that we can conclude *a priori* that what I am doing is right in the sense of being morally permissible. Before we can make this conclusion, we might first need to know *a posteriori* that certain disabling conditions are not present – that I have not promised to not write this paper and that writing this paper will not cause a significant disaster. But, once we have this knowledge, it seems like I can know *a priori* that what I am now doing is permissible.

Imagine then that we consider whether this act has the property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  (when we do not know that this property and rightness are necessarily co-instantiated). In this case, figuring out whether my act has the property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$  would require a lot more of empirical research. It would require discovering all the natural properties of my act.

There is also another way of illustrating the difference between the epistemic properties of moral properties and natural properties in the non-naturalist framework. The non-naturalist will bring up the conceivable case in which we have come to the ideal end of empirically investigation of some act. In this situation, we would know all the natural properties of that act. The non-naturalist claims that, in this situation, even if we in addition knew what the moral term ‘right’ means, we would still not be able know whether the act was right just on those grounds. We would still miss a piece of substantial, synthetic knowledge of the moral properties of the act which we could only get to know by doing further *a priori* moral reflection. This would entail that we could not know the moral properties of an act by only doing *a posteriori* investigation whereas we can know the natural properties of an act in this way.

Secondly, non-naturalists tend to claim that moral properties are *resultant*, *dependent*, or *consequential* properties whereas natural properties are not (Broad 1952, Dancy 2004b, Dancy 2005, Dancy 1993: ch. 5, Parfit *forthcoming*: app. 1, sec. 6 and 9, Zangwill 2008). This means that some actions are right *because* some subset of their natural properties *makes* them right. No subset of natural properties of an action can make it in the same way  $D_1$ -

or-D<sub>2</sub>-or-...-or-D<sub>n</sub>. With regards to an act having that property, every natural property of the act plays an equal role.<sup>26</sup>

Admittedly, an act is D<sub>1</sub>-or-D<sub>2</sub>-or-...-or-D<sub>n</sub> ‘because’ it either has all and only the natural properties specified in D<sub>1</sub> or the properties specified in D<sub>2</sub>, and so on. But, ‘because’ here denotes a merely logical relation of entailment between the act having a set of natural properties and a disjunction being true of it because one of the disjuncts is a specification of those properties. This is the same ‘because’ as in grass is green or blue because it is green.

In contrast, take the statement ‘the act was right *because* it made others happy’. A non-naturalist takes ‘because’ here to name a metaphysically robust, wordly making-relation between the act’s property of making others happy and its rightness to which that natural property gives rise. It is not a relation of entailment. In some situations an act could make others happy without this making the action right. For this reason, there is a difference in the properties of moral and natural properties. The former are resultant whereas the latter are not.

Finally, non-naturalists tend to claim that an essential property of moral properties is normativity whereas no natural property has this property (Dancy 2005: sec. 5, FitzPatrick 2008, Nagel 1986: 147, Parfit 2006: sec. 2, and *forthcoming*: app. 1). As Dancy rightly points out, it is notoriously difficult to spell out what the normativity of moral properties might consist of. On his proposal, the normativity of, say, rightness consists of the intrinsic, necessary practical relevance of an act having that property. In contrast, practical relevance is always an extrinsic, further feature of the fact that an act has some natural property.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In Zangwill’s (2008: 111) terminology, for a moral property, there is always in each particular case a set of natural properties that is *responsible for* the act having that moral property. These properties are not all the properties given in the act’s complete naturalist description. Many of those properties are merely *relevant for* the act having the given moral property by being a part of its supervenience-base. Zangwill argues that one difference between the responsible properties and the relevant properties is their different modal consequences. See also Dancy (2004a: ch. 3, and 2004b: 230–231, and 236). Thus, not all acts that share the right-making properties of an act are right whereas all actions that share all the right-making properties *and* morally relevant properties must be. The morally relevant properties include the properties that serve as enablers and disablers for the right-making of the other properties.

<sup>27</sup> According to Wedgwood (2007: 145), the *extrinsicness* of something like the practical relevance is the defining feature of natural properties. According to him, ‘a constitutive account of [a natural] property need not refer to any normative or evaluative property or relation.’

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Of course, the non-naturalist needs to be able to also specify what having practical relevance amounts to. It is tempting to say that a property of an act has practical relevance when its instantiation *entails* either reasons to do the act, or that one ought to do it, or that it is the thing to do, or the like. But, this only gets as far as the discussion about the metaphysical nature of the reason-relation, oughts, and so on (Schroeder 2005). I believe that the dialectic of this paper could be repeated about reasons, oughts, and so on too (see Streumer 2008, sec. 9).

It should be noted furthermore that there is a worry that using the notion of normativity to distinguish moral properties from natural properties within a response to Jackson's challenge threatens to beg the question. This would happen if normativity of moral properties were taken to consist of nothing but their not being natural properties. Thus, in order to make progress, the non-naturalist must be able to say something informative about why the normativity of moral properties is the kind of a second-order property which natural properties cannot have.

At this point, I will set aside the precise nature of these three properties (*a priori* knowability, being resultant, and normativity) which the non-naturalists claim moral properties have but natural properties lack.<sup>28</sup> I also set aside the question of whether any existing property actually has them. This is because I want to concentrate on the dialectic between the non-naturalist and the naturalist.

We begin from the situation in which the non-naturalist believes that moral properties are distinct from all natural properties because of the different higher-order properties. Consider then Jackson putting forward the premise that necessarily co-instantiated properties are identical. There are only two scenarios in which making this move would make some sense. In the first, one assumes that Leibniz's law is false and properties can be identical even when they have different properties. This view hardly makes sense though.

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<sup>28</sup> It is also worth noting that these three properties may not be the only distinguishing features of moral properties. It could, for instance, be argued that natural properties have the property of being causally efficacious whereas moral properties lack this property (Shafer-Landau 2006: sec. 6). Furthermore, it could be claimed that all the mentioned possible differences between the properties of moral and natural properties reveal a deeper difference in the *structure* or *constitution* of these two types of properties. Non-naturalists would claim that there is no successful constitutive account of the nature of moral properties in terms of natural properties – not even in terms of the necessarily co-instantiated ones (see Schroeder 2007: ch. 4).

In the second scenario, one assumes that the non-naturalist is wrong about the properties of moral properties. In fact, moral properties are not knowable *a priori*, resultant, or normative in the way the non-naturalist believes.<sup>29</sup> For this reason, moral properties do share all their properties with the natural properties with which they are necessarily co-instantiated. As a result, it can still be that all necessarily co-instantiated properties are identical.

Unfortunately, making this assumption – that the non-naturalists are mistaken about the properties of moral properties – is to beg the question against the non-naturalist. Whilst putting forward a premise in an argument to the conclusion that moral properties are not non-natural properties, one cannot assume that moral properties lack the very properties that would make them non-natural. This is to assume the conclusion one wants to establish.

Of course, Jackson, as a brilliant philosopher, does not just assume this. In order to not do so, he provides three other arguments to the conclusion that moral properties are not non-natural properties (Jackson 1998: 127). If any one of them is effective, then Jackson can believe for a reason that moral properties have the same properties as the natural properties with which they are necessarily co-instantiated. This would save the premise that necessarily co-instantiated properties are identical.

However, the success of these arguments would also make the main argument redundant.<sup>30</sup> If they were effective, we would already have independent reason to believe that moral properties are not non-natural properties. This means that unless the naturalist uses Jackson's argument with the controversial nominalist view about properties outlined above, it fails as an argumentative device against non-naturalism by being either question-begging or redundant.

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<sup>29</sup> Streumer has suggested to me in correspondence that this is just how we should see the situation. He proposes that these three properties are properties of the *concept* of rightness rather than higher-order properties of the property of rightness like the non-naturalist claims. This seems like a category mistake to me. It is not that the concept of rightness is practically relevant in the sense of having properties which justify acts. Neither is it the case that, when I know a priori that writing this paper is right, this knowledge is conceptual knowledge about the concept 'rightness'. Finally, I do not see how the resultance-thesis could be formulated with regards to the concepts. Acts do not have the concept of rightness in virtue of some sub-set of natural properties they have.

<sup>30</sup> I believe that Jackson (2003: 573) recognises this when he writes that his case against non-naturalism 'does not depend on the doctrine that necessarily coextensive predicates ascribe the same property'.

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### 7. Jackson's Other Arguments

Let us then look at Jackson's other arguments to the conclusion that moral properties cannot be non-natural properties. He first claims that there is no empirical evidence that our ordinary uses of 'right' pick out a property that is distinct from the natural property which the necessarily coextensive predicate 'is  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ ' picks out. There is no such evidence especially when a complete naturalist story can be given about speakers' use of the term.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, there seems to be some empirical semantic evidence for that our uses of 'right' do not pick out the natural property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ . Consider the following thought-experiment (Horgan & Timmons 2009). Let us assume that there would be a mechanism which fixed the reference of 'right' to the natural property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ .<sup>32</sup> It seems likely that, in another community living in slightly different circumstances, this same mechanism could fix the reference of 'right' to a slightly different natural property of being  $E_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_{n-1}$ .

Imagine then that we visited such a community. An act that has the natural property of being  $E_1$  takes place. Our hosts say that this act was 'right'. If Jackson is right, we would not have reason to disagree with this claim. Our hosts would be claiming that the act has a natural property which it clearly has. If we were to contest the rightness of this act, we would only talk past our hosts. We would be claiming that the act has another natural property which it clearly lacks. Thus, moral disagreements with our hosts would be impossible.

Horgan and Timmons claim that this is unintuitive. The act we are talking about can relate to a significant moral issue – to whether it is, for instance, right to sacrifice an individual for the sake of the many. Perhaps they say that in this case it would be right. If the other community's term plays the same role in their moral practice, we intuitively would contest their judgment about the rightness of the relevant act. This semantic intuition fits better the view that our and their term 'right' refers to the same moral property which is distinct from natural properties – even from the one with which it is necessarily co-instantiated (Sayre-McCord

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<sup>31</sup> According to FitzPatrick (2008: 200), we should not only consider the empirical evidence of speaker's behaviour when ask what their terms refer to – philosophical reflection is relevant too.

<sup>32</sup> For Jackson (1998: 129–144), this mechanism is based on the large network of moral platitudes which constitute our folk morality. Smith (1994: 54–56) contests the idea that such a network would be sufficient for fixing the reference.

1997). Our disagreement in this case can be understood in part to be about what that natural property is.

Jackson's second claim is that moral properties as distinct from the necessarily co-instantiated natural properties would lack moral significance. They would be 'moral idlers'. I take it that by this he means that they would be redundant as reasons which could justify acts. As he points out, that my act will kill many and save no-one is good enough reason not to do it. There is no need to claim that furthermore I should not do the act because it is right not to do it.

This seems true. But, notice that this same argument makes the property which Jackson claims rightness to be just as insignificant. If my act is justified by the fact that it doesn't kill anyone and it might save someone, there is no need for it to be justified by its having the property of being  $D_1$ -or- $D_2$ -or-...-or- $D_n$ . This means that if moral properties cannot lack moral significance, they cannot be the sort of properties Jackson has in mind either.

Do moral properties need to be morally significant by providing justification for our acts? It is not clear that they do. In fact, many non-naturalists accept that moral properties are not morally significant themselves (Dancy 2006: sec. 6). On this view, it is part of the essence of moral properties like rightness that they are had in virtue of more basic properties which make it the case that the act is justified and that there is a reason to do the act.

It is then not required that the moral properties themselves justify acts by providing reasons for them. But, it is intrinsic to having these properties that their bearers have other properties that provide the required reasons. Note that, on this view, the same cannot be said of any natural properties. Even though many such properties can justify acts and provide reasons for them, that they so do is not part of the property itself but rather an external fact about the property and its relation to the act. If this view is plausible, then Jackson's claim that distinct moral properties would be ethical idlers fails to count against them.<sup>33</sup>

Jackson's last argument against non-natural moral properties begins from the observation that, in principle, there are infinitely many natural properties corresponding to the different disjunctions of naturalist descriptions of actions. It would be implausible for the non-naturalist to claim that, on top of each such natural property, there is a distinct non-natural moral property. This means that the

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<sup>33</sup> I thank Mark van Roojen for pointing this out to me. See also FitzPatrick (2008: 200).

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non-naturalist needs a principled explanation for why only for some natural properties there is a distinct necessarily co-instantiated moral property. Furthermore, it would be too much of a coincidence if this sort of duplication has occurred so that there is a one-to-one correspondence between our moral terms and the moral properties.

Given that non-naturalists are moral realists, they can admit that it can turn out that *some* of our moral terms fail to refer to moral properties. It was thought that the virtue term ‘chastity’ refers to a distinct evaluative property for which there is a corresponding necessarily co-instantiated natural property. However, more recently, whether such a property exists has been questioned. Some believe that we should for this reason revise the meaning of this term so that it would refer to the underlying natural property. The non-naturalist can also accept that there could be moral properties which we still have not discovered and for which there is yet no moral term for that reason.

Why isn’t there a distinct, necessarily co-instantiated moral property for every possible natural property? Above, the non-naturalist was taken to claim that partly constitutive of being a moral property is that having the property entails that the property-bearer has some morally significant natural properties. A natural property is morally significant if it can justify an action by being a reason, if it can make the action the thing to do or what one ought to do, and so on. It is not plausible that all natural properties are like this. That my action is that of saving someone is morally significant in this way but not that it will last 28 seconds.

The question which particular natural properties are significant is the fundamental question of normative ethics. But, once we have done our normative ethics the best we can, we can hopefully reach a justified view about which natural properties are morally significant.<sup>34</sup> We can then use these properties to explain which natural properties are such that there is a distinct moral property which is necessarily co-instantiated with them.

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<sup>34</sup> Sidgwick (1884: 339–342) claimed that this is when (i) we have clearly understood the concepts and propositions of our theory, (ii) our theory is stable under reflection and its acceptance is not based on distorting factors like social pressure or emotional reactions, (iii) the theory is coherent and fits with our other well reflected beliefs, and (iv) there is interpersonal agreement between people who are equally well epistemically situated. FitzPatrick (2008: 200) emphasises the role of the value experiences of moral agents who have the right sort of upbringing, sensitivities, and the like.

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These are the disjunctive natural properties which are such that an act can have them only in virtue of having other natural properties which are morally significant in a unified way. In contrast, if the disjunctive natural property is such that an action can have it without having any morally significant natural properties, then there is no distinct moral property for that natural property.

## 8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to argue that Jackson's argument against moral non-naturalism fails. His argument will be a more effective one if an austere form of nominalism can be defended as the right global theory about properties. If this cannot be done, then the non-naturalist will be able to argue that moral properties are distinct from the necessarily co-instantiated natural properties because these two types of properties have different higher-order properties. It is not clear whether Jackson's argument, at least in the form it was originally stated, can do much more than to assume that such a position must be false.

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