

*Essentially grounded non-naturalism and normative supervenience**

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Normative non-naturalism may be usefully characterized, following Stephanie Leary (forthcoming, §1), as a view, according to which

- (1) Normative properties and facts exist; at least some of them are *sui generis*: they are different in kind from scientific and supernatural properties and facts.
- (2) Countenancing *sui generis* normative properties and facts is incompatible with a purely scientific worldview.

There are many ways to further elucidate these claims. As for claim (1), one could, for instance, say that normative properties and facts are *irreducibly normative*, and try to cash this out in terms of normative properties and facts having to do with *reasons* (e.g., Olson 2014). Claim (1) also involves rejection of the idea that normative properties and facts are ‘nothing over and above’ natural or scientific properties and facts. According to non-naturalism, being morally wrong, for example, is not identical, and doesn’t wholly consist in having some natural property. We may contrast this thought with the thoughts that the property of being water just is the property of being made of H₂O, and that being a parent may fully consist in having a daughter (see Enoch 2011, ch. 5.1; Parfit 2011, §87). As for claim (2), one could, for example, take it as the claim that “countenancing normative properties requires a further ontological or ideological commitment beyond that of our best scientific theories” (Leary, §1, n. 13).¹

Non-naturalism faces a difficult challenge with regard to explaining why it is that the normative features of things supervene on their natural features. My focus will be on Leary’s recent response to this challenge, which appeals to *hybrid properties*, the essences of which link them to both natural and *sui generis* normative properties in suitable ways. I argue that despite its ingenuity, Leary’s solution fails. This is so, I claim, because there are no hybrid properties of the sort that her suggestion appeals to.

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¹ In what follows, the source for all the quotations from Leary, as well as for the paraphrases of her views, is Leary forthcoming.

1 – THE SUPERVENIENCE CHALLENGE AND ESSENTIALLY GROUNDED NON-NATURALISM

I will assume that the normative strongly supervenes on the natural in that whenever something has a normative property, it also has some natural property such that it is metaphysically necessary that anything that has this natural property also has the normative property.² Why is it that certain natural features metaphysically necessitate certain normative features? These necessities are not just brute, it seems. They require explanation. On some views, they are easily explained. If normative properties were natural properties, then the necessitation of the normative by the natural would be no mystery. However, according to the non-naturalist, normative properties are radically discontinuous in relation to the natural. The question then is: why are there necessary connections between the natural properties and the *sui generis* normative properties? Non-naturalism doesn't seem to allow for any explanation for this, but rather seems to treat these necessary connections as brute. If that is correct, then this is plausibly a (big) minus for the view.³

Perhaps this is not quite the right way to push the challenge. Perhaps non-naturalists can explain the relevant necessities by appealing to the idea that certain natural properties have (perhaps given a suitable naturalistically specifiable context) the property of *making* things good, right, etc. (see Olson 2014). But the critics may insist that this is a bad, metaphysically queer, explanation. How can this kind of making- or grounding-relation hold between radically discontinuous properties?

Leary's response appeals to an *essentialist* metaphysics, according to which metaphysically necessary relations between properties are to be explained with reference to the essences of the relevant properties (e.g., Fine 1994, Rosen MS). The view she advances, *essentially grounded non-naturalism*, says that SUPERVENIENCE is true because the *sui generis* normative facts are fully *grounded* in natural facts – that is, roughly: obtain just in virtue of certain natural facts obtaining –, and the relevant grounding relations can be explained in terms of the essences of the properties involved.

Referring approvingly to Kit Fine (1994), Leary (§4) writes that for him,

[...] the essence of an object or property [is] the set of propositions that are directly definitive of that object or property, which thereby describe the very nature of that object or property. For example, it's directly definitive of *being a bachelor* that, if x is a bachelor, then x is unmarried. So, the proposition *if x is a bachelor, then x is unmarried* is part of the essence of *being a bachelor*. [...] We may thus say that the essence of F involves G just in case G is a constituent of some proposition that is directly definitive of F . For example, the essence of *being a bachelor* involves *being unmarried* [...].

² For some concerns, see Sturgeon 2009, Roberts MS, and Rosen MS. For some responses, see, e.g., Ridge 2007, McPherson 2012, and Dreier MS.

³ This problem, or something in its neighborhood, has been advanced by a number of philosophers (see, e.g., Dreier 1992, MS; McPherson 2012). For non-naturalist responses, see, e.g., Shafer-Landau 2003, Enoch 2011, Scanlon 2014, Rosen MS. For criticisms of these responses, see, e.g., Dreier 2015, MS; Leary forthcoming.

And here's Gideon Rosen (MS):

It lies in the nature of the number 2, let's suppose, to be a number, to follow 1, and so on. [...] By contrast, even though it is a necessary truth that the number 2 is not the moon, it does not lie in the nature of the number 2, considered by itself, to be distinct from the moon. Intuitively, one might know everything there is to know about the identity of this number – about what *makes 2* the number that it is – without knowing the first thing about astronomy.

Appealing to the 'ideology of essence', we may plausibly explain why, for example, closed three-sided figures necessarily are triangles (it is just in the nature of a triangle to be a closed three-sided figure), or why any stuff that is water is made of H₂O (that's just what it is to be water). However, at first sight, the essentialist framework seems hostile to a non-naturalist explanation of normative supervenience. Let us suppose – with the hedonistic utilitarian – that, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, maximizing happiness is morally right. Now, what in the essences of the properties involved is supposed to explain this necessity? It seems quite clear that even if maximizing happiness necessarily is morally right, it is not part of the very essence of maximizing happiness that it is morally right. It is possible to have full knowledge of happiness maximization itself, it seems, without knowing the first thing about (what we are assuming to be) the correct moral theory. But the essence of moral rightness does not seem to offer the *non-naturalist* any help either. Given that moral rightness is *sui generis*, it seems that even if it is necessarily true that an action is morally right if and only if it maximizes happiness, this does not follow from the very nature of rightness (see Rosen MS for a much more detailed argument). Leary (§4) agrees:

Within the essentialist framework, non-naturalism can be specified as the following view:

Essentialist Non-naturalism: the essences of some normative properties

- (i) cannot be specified entirely in non-normative terms, and
- (ii) do not specify any non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation.

[...] even a non-naturalist may presumably admit that, for example, it's part of the essence of *being right* that, if x is right, then x is an action. [...] a non-naturalist may [also] presumably admit that it's essential of *being right*, for example, that if x produces the most good, then x is right. But according to Essentialist Non-naturalism, there are some normative properties that have essences that cannot be fully specified in non-normative terms and do not specify any non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation.

Leary's thought is that non-naturalists should appeal to hybrid properties, whose essences "specify both naturalistic sufficient conditions for their own instantiation and sufficient conditions for the *sui generis* normative properties" (§4). She offers three examples of how this might work.

First, the non-naturalist could appeal to mental properties. She could claim, for instance, that "it's part of the essence of being in pain that (a) if one's C-fibers are firing, then one is in pain, and (b) that if x is a painful experience, x is bad" (§4). Given that the essence of being in a C-fibers-firing-state does not involve being in pain, being in a C-fibers-firing-state is a natural property. Yet (a) explains why C-fiber-firing facts ground pain-facts. Given that the essence of pain involves badness, pain-facts are normative, but they are not *sui generis* (because the essence of pain specifies naturalistic sufficient conditions for being in pain). And (b) explains why pain-facts ground badness facts. Thus, on this account, badness-facts are ultimately grounded in wholly natural C-fiber-firing facts, and we get an explanation for supervenience.⁴

Second, Leary suggests, the non-naturalist could appeal to 'thick' normative properties such as being courageous, being a promise, or being a friend: "For example, one might claim that it's part of the essence of *being a promise* that if certain natural conditions C obtain, then A promised B to do x , and that it's also part of the essence of *being a promise* that if A promised B to do x , then A has a reason to do x " (§4). The explanation for supervenience would work just as with the example of pain.

Third, the defender of essentially grounded non-naturalism "might take *being a reason* to be the single hybrid normative property" and say "that the essence of *being a reason* specifies all the naturalistic sufficient conditions for R 's being a reason for someone to do A and sufficient conditions for the *sui generis* normative properties" (§4). Again, the explanation for supervenience would work through the hybrid property of being a reason, just as before.

This seems really neat. It seems crucial, though, in order for the explanation of supervenience to go through, that the essence of the hybrid property captures not just naturalistic sufficient conditions, but – as Leary puts it in her characterization of the last of the examples above – *all* the naturalistic sufficient conditions for its instantiation. It is not sufficient that the essence of the hybrid property specifies some sufficient naturalistic conditions, C , for its instantiation. For suppose that there are also other naturalistic sufficient conditions, C^* , for the instantiation of the hybrid property, that are not captured by its essence. Two naturalistically speaking identical things, both in conditions C^* , but neither in conditions C , say, would then both have the hybrid property. But this would not be explained by the essence of this property.

⁴ Actually, it is not entirely clear how exactly this is supposed to work. The mere fact that it is part of the essence of some property, G , that if something has the property G , it also has a certain other property, F , does not explain why G -facts ground F -facts. For example, it is plausibly part of the essence of being a bachelor, that if someone is a bachelor, then he is also unmarried. But this doesn't explain why facts about bachelorhood would ground facts about being unmarried, as facts about bachelorhood do not ground facts about being unmarried. However, I set this issue to one side here.

So, the crucial idea here would be that there are hybrid properties such that their essences specify all sufficient conditions for their instantiation in naturalistic terms. Moreover, it is also crucial that the essences of the hybrid properties together jointly specify *all the possible grounds* for the instantiation of all the *sui generis* normative properties. If something could be bad (say), but not in virtue of having some hybrid property, then there would be no guarantee, thanks to the essences of the hybrid properties, that two individuals that are identical with respect to their hybrid properties would also be identical with respect to their badness. It is worth emphasizing that this means that responding to the supervenience challenge by appeal to hybrid properties involves extremely strong commitments with regard to how to understand the structure of normativity. The strategy only has a chance of working if the hybrid has an explanatory priority over the *sui generis*. (This is a point I will return to later.)

2 – THERE ARE NO HYBRID PROPERTIES

Some experiences are painful, some acts constitute making a promise, and many features of things provide us with a wide array of reasons to act, feel, and believe in various ways. But the relevant properties are not, I suspect, hybrid in the sense suggested by Leary. My case against hybrid properties is in two parts. In this section, I shall examine some of Leary's candidates for hybrid properties, suggesting that, intuitively, the essences of the relevant properties either fail to secure a link to *sui generis* normative properties, or, if they manage to do that, fail to determine naturalistic sufficient conditions for their instantiation. I then propose, in the next section, an explanation for why this should be so.

The non-naturalist could claim, again, that “it's part of the essence of being in pain that (a) if one's C-fibers are firing, then one is in pain, and (b) that if x is a painful experience, x is bad” (Leary, §4). On reflection, this seems problematic. It is useful to note, first, that one might sensibly deny, not only that pain is essentially bad, but also that pain would even necessarily be a bad thing. By ‘pain’ we may mean a certain kind of sensation, or the state of disliking a sensation of the relevant kind. Pain in the former sense is not necessarily bad. But some believe that when someone who has done something sufficiently terrible is in pain in the latter sense, there is nothing bad about this either. Rather, these people think, the world is made better by such painful experiences. Call these people ‘retributivists’. Of course pain is, also in these cases, bad *for* those who experience it. That is exactly why, retributivists think, their being in pain is good. However, I am assuming that the non-naturalist is, in the present context, interested in forging a link to ‘absolute’ badness – not to badness for someone or something, but to badness, period.

Let us next suppose that retributivists are wrong, and that being in pain really is necessarily bad. It is still implausible to claim that the retributivists would be missing something about the *nature* of pain. They full well realize what pain is like. They know what it is like to dislike, in the relevant sense, a sensation of the relevant kind. Isn't that all there is to know about the nature of pain? Maybe not. Maybe we may find out more about the essence of pain by finding out about what grounds being in pain. Maybe to have a painful experience is to be in a brain state, whatever it is, that plays the ‘pain-role’. So, let us

suppose that the retributivists know their neuroscience, too. They know that pain is always realized in C-fibers firing (suppose that this is so). Are they still missing out on something when it comes to knowing the essence of pain? It doesn't seem so. But the retributivists do not know that pain is bad, period, even though it necessarily is. It seems, then, that it is not part of the essence of the property of being in pain, that if someone is in pain, this is bad. The property of being in pain does not seem to be hybrid in Leary's sense. (Not everyone will share my intuitions here, but this is okay.)

Let us next consider the property of being a reason. This is perhaps a somewhat surprising candidate for being hybrid. The property of being a reason is standardly counted among the paradigmatically 'thin' normative properties. Non-naturalists also often take it to be *sui generis*. Even though it is very plausible that it is part of the essence of being a reason that if there is reason to take a favorable attitude toward x , then x is good, or that if there is most reason to perform a certain action, then this action ought to be performed, it does not seem plausible that the essence of being a reason for action, say, would specify "all the naturalistic sufficient conditions" for something's being a reason for acting. One can fully know what it is to be a reason for action, it seems, without having any idea of the conditions that actually make it the case that some action has the property of being supported by reasons. To be a reason for performing some action is to count in favor of performing this action. Suppose that it is necessary that only the fact that an action promotes happiness counts in favor of performing the action in question. Still, in order to capture the essence of being a reason for action one is not required to mention the facts about being promotive of happiness.

It is of course not obvious that the essence of the property of being a reason does not specify sufficient naturalistic conditions for being a reason. Many philosophers think it does. For example, Mark Schroeder (2007) argues that for some consideration to be a reason for an agent to perform some action just is for the truth of this consideration to help to explain why performing the action promotes the satisfaction of the agent's goals. But Schroeder's view is a prime example of a naturalistic account of normative properties. If we can specify sufficient naturalistic conditions for reasonhood by appeal to its essence, it is not clear why we could not do this with the essences of the rest of the normative properties, too. It is hard to see what independent motivation there would be for a picture on which reasonhood is not *sui generis*, but some other normative properties are.

How about the properties picked out by 'thick' concepts? One of the examples used by Leary is the property of being a promise. The thought would be, again, that "it's part of the essence of *being a promise* that if certain natural conditions C obtain, then A promised B to do x , and that it's also part of the essence of *being a promise* that if A promised B to do x , then A has a reason to do x " (§4). It is plausible enough (although of course not obviously true) that the fact that one has promised to do something always gives some reason for one to perform this action. But even if this is correct, this does not seem to lie in the very nature of being a promise.

Derek Parfit (2011, Ch. 25), in his discussion of the attempts to challenge there being a "deep distinction" between the natural and the normative, argues that the fact that one has promised to do

something does not entail that one ought to act accordingly. What he says should apply equally well to the idea that the fact that someone has promised to do something would entail that she would have some reason to act accordingly. Let us begin with a conceptual point. An act consequentialist, for example, might very well believe that the mere fact that someone has promised to perform a certain action does not, in itself, give her any reason to act accordingly. Whether one has reason to keep the promise will, by the act consequentialist's lights, depend on whether the relevant action would promote the good. Plausibly, act consequentialism cannot be refuted by appealing to what follows from the concept of a promise. And so, if Parfit is right, there is at least no *conceptual* entailment from having made a promise to it being the case that one ought to act accordingly.

Parfit's conclusions would seem to be applicable also to what lies in the nature, or essence, of the property of being a promise. Plausibly, the act utilitarian, while perhaps making a normative mistake, need not have an incomplete grasp of the nature of a promise. The act utilitarian may have a full understanding of the kinds of circumstances and speech acts, the combinations of which result in promises having been made. She may full well understand that the practice of making promises is dependent on a widespread commitment to do what has been promised, and that certain expectations and sanctions must be in place in order for the practice of promising to continue to exist. Yet she may think that it is not necessarily true that there is reason to keep one's promises. She may be making a normative mistake, but what she is perhaps missing does not plausibly lie in the nature of promise itself.

With many of the properties discussed in the thick concepts literature, it is not clear, at all, that they actually involve *sui generis* normative properties. Parfit (2011, §90), for instance, lists as examples of thick concepts the concepts expressed by the words 'cruel', 'kind', 'rude', 'unpatriotic', 'chaste', 'courageous', and 'dishonest'. In all these cases, it seems quite reasonable to hold that the properties picked out – the properties of being cruel, kind, etc. – can be reductively analyzed in entirely naturalistic terms. The relevant words certainly somehow carry evaluation, but perhaps merely as a matter of pragmatics (Väyrynen 2013).

Other properties discussed in the thick concepts literature seem different. To take another example from Parfit, let us consider the property of being retributively unjust. It seems plausible that it is part of the essence of being retributively unjust that if a punishment is retributively unjust, then it is wrong. However, while this is plausible, it is not plausibly part of the essence of being retributively unjust that there is a certain (perhaps disjunctive) set of natural properties such that if a punishment has these properties, it is retributively unjust. We may again begin with a conceptual point. Suppose someone argued from (A) to (B) to (C) (Parfit 2011, §90):

- (A) Blue has not committed any crime.
- (B) Blue's punishment would be retributively unjust.
- (C) Blue's punishment would be wrong.

Whereas we may coherently deny that chastity is good, or, perhaps, that cruelty is bad, it is less plausible that we could coherently deny that retributively unjust punishment is wrong, and so reject the move from (B) to (C). However, as Parfit points out, it is possible to coherently reject the move from (A) to (B). We might think that *no* punishment is retributively unjust, for example, because we might think (say) that no one has the kind of free will that would be required in order for a punishment to be retributively just or unjust. Now, let us suppose that this is indeed what we think, but that we have got things wrong. That is, let's suppose that it is true that if Blue has not committed any crime, then his punishment would be retributively unjust. One possibility would be that, despite the coherence of our view, we would be missing something that lies in the nature of retributive injustice. But this seems implausible. It seems as if we, who reject the move from (A) to (B), may know the nature of retributive injustice just as well as someone who (rightly, we are now imagining) is willing to make this move. We are aware of the links that hold between being retributively unjust and being wrong. We may also know that if a punishment were retributively unjust, then it would have to have certain kind of naturalistic properties, or even certain specific naturalistic properties, which would suffice for its being retributively unjust. And this might all be part of the essence of being retributively unjust. So, unlike with painfulness and the property of being a promise, the essence of being retributively unjust would involve *sui generis* normative properties in that if a punishment is retributively unjust, it is wrong. And unlike with the property of being a reason, the essence of being retributively unjust might involve certain naturalistic properties, in that if a punishment were retributively unjust, it would have certain naturalistic properties, *N*. But it still would not seem to lie in the nature of retributive injustice that if something has *N*, it is also retributively unjust.

We may also consider the following example. Someone might sensibly claim that it is part of the essence of being lewd, that if something is lewd, it involves overt display of sexuality, and also, that if something is lewd, it is bad. But it does not lie in the nature of being lewd that if something involves overt display of sexuality, it is lewd, and that if something is lewd, it is bad. We can know the essence of lewdness – what it is to be lewd – without thereby accepting the highly questionable view that anything that involves overt display of sexuality is on that account bad.

Someone might worry that I am perhaps making the following two assumptions: (i) If someone fully competent with concepts *A* (of property *F*) and *B* (of property *N*) may reject claims of the form 'If *x* is *B*, then it is also *A*,' then it cannot be part of the essence of being *F* that if something is *N*, it is *F*. And (ii) if someone fully competent with concepts *A* (of property *F*) and *C* (of property *G*) may reject claims of the form 'If *x* is *A*, then it is also *C*,' then it cannot be part of the essence of being *F* that if something is *F*, it is *G*. Making these assumptions would be a mistake. For example, someone fully competent with 'water', but lacking in empirical knowledge, could very well reject the claim that water is H₂O. We should not infer from this that it is not part of the essence of being water that if some stuff is water, it is made of H₂O. However, I am not making the relevant mistaken assumptions. The case of water is quite different from the case of hybrid properties. In the case of water, we have an explanation for why someone with complete mastery of the term 'water' may yet be less than fully acquainted with the essence of water.

Plausibly, anyone competent with ‘water’ is in a position to realize, *if she considers the relevant idea*, that water is stuff of some kind, or stuff that plays a certain kind of ‘watery role’. And of course one may, then, be completely in the dark when it comes to the identity of the relevant stuff. However, it is very unclear how a similar story would work in the case of hybrid properties. One cannot, for instance, simply appeal to the idea that the concept of being retributively unjust tells us that things are retributively unjust thanks to some naturalistic property, and that further substantial *a priori* reflection may then inform us about the identity of the relevant naturalistic properties. This may be true, but this does not give us any reason to think that it is part of the *essence* of being retributively unjust that if something has the relevant natural property, it is retributively unjust. The concept of water involves the idea that water *just is* whatever stuff plays a certain role. And so, being made of the relevant stuff lies in the very nature of being water. That things are retributively unjust in virtue of some naturalistic properties, by contrast, does not point us toward any potentially hidden essence of retributive injustice. It does not tell us that retributive injustice *just is* (or, say, *just consists in* having) some property, which we must then identify through means other than conceptual analysis.

I have now made my ‘intuitive case’ against the existence of hybrid properties. To the extent that these properties are considered as having essential links of the relevant kind to the natural (which admittedly often seems like an attractive idea), they are unlikely to have essential links to the *sui generis* normative; to the extent that these properties are considered as having essential links to the *sui generis* normative (which admittedly often seems like an attractive idea), they are unlikely to have essential links of the relevant kind to the natural. Before offering an attempt at a principled explanation for why this is so, I shall make just two more quick comments.

First, I have only considered a small sample of candidate hybrid properties. However, even if we cannot rule out the possibility that there might be some properties that really are hybrid in the relevant sense, we should remember that in order for Leary’s strategy for saving non-naturalism to succeed, the hybrid properties would have to do some really impressive explanatory work. For any *sui generis* normative fact, we should be able to explain it as grounded in some suitable instantiation of hybrid properties. The less there are credible candidates for hybrid properties, the more unlikely it seems that this could be done. And so it seems that, given the considerations offered above, the prospects of saving non-naturalism through deploying Leary’s strategy are dim, even if some properties would seem like good candidates for being hybrid.

Second, the lessons from considering the small sample of examples seem to generalize. It is perhaps useful to *very* briefly consider the standard menu of options from the thick concepts literature (see, e.g., Roberts 2013). With the thick properties, we either can, or we cannot, ‘disentangle’ the natural from the normative. That is, we either can, or we cannot, understand every instantiation of a thick property in terms of naturalistic properties and *sui generis* normative properties. If this cannot be done, there’s no naturalistic ‘shape’ to the thick properties. But if there is no naturalistic shape to the thick, then the essences of the properties picked out by thick concepts won’t specify all the naturalistic sufficient

conditions for their instantiation. So, if we are to pursue Leary's strategy in defense of non-naturalism, 'non-reductive' views, according to which we cannot disentangle, would seem to be off the table. However, if we can disentangle, then it seems that we can always pursue the Parfit-style strategy of arguing that one may fully grasp the essence of the relevant hybrid property, and yet reject the idea that it would lie in the essence of this property that if something has certain naturalistic properties, it also has the property in question. Also, finally, if the thick or hybrid properties can be reductively analyzed in entirely naturalistic terms, then they clearly won't be of any help for the non-naturalist in explaining normative supervenience.

3 – WHY THERE ARE NO HYBRID PROPERTIES, AND WHY IT MIGHT EASILY SEEM OTHERWISE

I have now raised doubts about the existence of hybrid properties. Is there something more principled that could be said on this score? Why are there no hybrid properties? Also, what explains the admittedly quite powerful temptation to think that such properties exist? In this section, I shall try to answer these questions, starting with an explanation for why it is no surprise that hybrid properties seem suspicious upon close examination.

Leary gives a nice characterization, herself, of what I take to be the basic problem with hybrid properties:

[...] one might think that non-naturalists cannot, in principle, offer an explanation for why there are necessary connections between natural and normative properties. This is because any explanation for why there are metaphysical necessities involving the natural and the normative must posit some fairly intimate metaphysical connection between the natural and the normative. But positing such a connection seems to be in tension with the non-naturalist's claim that the normative is entirely distinct and deeply different in kind from the natural.

Leary proposes that we bridge the gap between the natural and the normative by appealing to hybrid properties. However, this seems unlikely to succeed. For if we secure a necessary connection with the normative by understanding the hybrid properties as intimately connected to the normative ones, we lose intimacy in relation to the natural; and if we secure a necessary connection with the natural by understanding hybrid properties as intimately connected to the natural properties, the normative slips out of our reach. I will now try to explain this in somewhat less metaphorical terms.

Leary's proposal can be illustrated with the idea that the fact that an experience is painful might ground its being bad. While Leary grants that this grounding relation could not be explained by the essence of the grounded *sui generis* normative property of badness, it could perhaps be explained, she suggests, by the essence of the grounding property of being painful. The property of being painful is just an example, of course. Leary isn't committed to painfulness being a hybrid property. But on her account,

all the explanations of the instantiations of the *sui generis* properties have the same structure. What is involved in the essence of a property is a matter of *what it is to be* the relevant way. The truths that obtain in virtue of the essence of a certain property are truths that “lie in the nature” of this property (e.g., Rosen MS, sec. 3). Here are some necessary truths that are plausibly explained in terms of the essences of the properties involved:

WATER	If something is made of H ₂ O, it is water.
TRIANGLE	If something is a closed three-sided figure, it is a triangle.
DAUGHTER	If someone has a daughter, she or he is a parent.
CAT	If something is a cat, it is a mammal.
RED	If something is red, it is colored.

One could also make the following, corresponding claims about grounding relations:

WATER*	If something is made of H ₂ O, it is, in virtue of this, water.
TRIANGLE*	If something is a closed three-sided figure, it is, in virtue of this, a triangle.
DAUGHTER*	If someone has a daughter, she or he is, in virtue of this, a parent.
CAT*	If something is a cat, it is so in virtue of being a certain kind of mammal.
RED*	If something is red, it is, in virtue of this, colored.

The truth of RED* plausibly lies in the nature of the *grounding* property, redness: to be red just is to be colored in a certain *way* (in the red-sort-of-way). Likewise, the truth of CAT* seems to lie in the nature of catness. For some creature to be a cat just is for it to be a certain *species* of mammal. The truth of DAUGHTER* lies in the nature of the *grounded* property: to be a parent is to have a child, and since having a daughter is having a child, parenthood may fully *consist in* having a daughter. Some think that WATER* and TRIANGLE* are also true. I am not so certain. It seems that WATER and TRIANGLE are true because the relevant properties are identical, and it also seems that something cannot have a property in virtue of having this very property. Grounding is explanatory, I take it, and having a property does not explain itself. Still, at least WATER and TRIANGLE are true. It is perhaps most natural to think that their truth lies in the natures of the property of being water and of the property of being a triangle. But, then, if these are just the same properties as the properties of being made of H₂O and of being a closed three-sided figure, we should be able to pick out the relevant essences (in which the truth of the relevant claims lie) also in these terms – which does, indeed, seem possible.

Leary’s case of being painful and being bad seems very different from all these cases. Unlike in the cases of WATER and TRIANGLE, there is no relation of identity between being painful and being bad.

The non-naturalist will also insist that being bad cannot *consist in* being painful, like being a parent may consist in having a daughter. Neither is being painful a *way of being bad*, like being red is a way of being colored – the idea that the relationship between these properties would be that of a determinable and a determinate is not compatible with the thought that being bad is *sui generis*, and something ‘over and above’ being painful (cf. Schroeder 2014). Also, being painful is not a *species* of the genus, badness, and so the cat-mammal relationship does not work as a good model for what would be needed. It is true, again, that grounding relations may be explained with reference to the essences of the properties involved. But explanations of this sort work because the relevant properties are intimately metaphysically linked – because having the grounded property is not something over and above having the grounding one. And so explanations of this kind do not seem to be available for a non-naturalist about normativity.

Some might worry that I am just rehearsing here a familiar Humean prejudice against necessary connections between very different, or fully distinct, properties. But this is not so. My claim is not that there could be no necessary connections between natural and *sui generis* normative properties. My claim is, much more guardedly, that the *essences* of the hybrid properties do not allow us to explain such connections. Essentialist explanations must work through intimate metaphysical relations. And we have no such relations obtaining in the present case, it seems.

Some might also think that my claims here can be counter-exemplified. Let us consider the properties of being colored and being extended in space. It seems natural to think that these are “quite different kinds of properties,” as Leary (§1) puts it, and yet it is plausibly part of the essence of being colored that anything that is colored also occupies some volume in space.⁵ Leary (§1) suggests that the fact that the necessary relation between being colored and being extended in space has an obvious explanation: “in order for something to be colored, it must reflect or emit light, and in order for something to reflect or emit light, it must occupy some volume in space.” We may give this kind of explanation an essentialist twist. We could say, for example, that to be colored just is to have some property that grounds a disposition to look a certain way to normal observers. Plausibly, having a property of this kind just is a matter of having a suitable surface reflectance property. And having such reflectance property, in its turn, is nothing over and above having a molecule structure of an appropriate kind – that is, a matter of being extended in space in a certain way. It is not uncontroversial, of course, that this would be the right kind of account of color. But on this sort of view, for instance, it would turn out that although being colored and being extended in space seem to be quite different properties, having a certain color nevertheless is nothing over and above being extended in space in a certain way. An essentialist explanation for the necessity of colored things having spatial extension might, then, be within our reach. This is of course just one attempt at a counter-example to the idea that essentialist explanations for necessary links between properties are only available given that having one property is nothing over

⁵ Leary uses this as an example of a necessary relation between two seemingly quite different kinds of properties, which nevertheless is explainable. Krister Bykvist (in personal communication) has independently proposed this as a counter-example to my claims in this section.

and above having the other. But this idea seems quite irresistible, really. The relevant, essentialist, explanations for necessary links between properties are meant to flow from the essences of the properties at issue – simply from what it is to be this way or that. A genuine counter-example would need to involve two properties that are quite distinct, and yet necessarily linked by virtue of their very essences. It is difficult to think of this kind of example.

It is also important to keep in mind that none of this is to suggest that a non-naturalist cannot hold that there are properties the essences of which involve both natural and *sui generis* normative properties. One could hold, for instance, that to be retributively unjust is, in part, to be wrong. Or, contrary to what I have suggested above, that to be in pain just is to be in a certain naturalistically describable state, *and* to be, on that account, in a bad state. It is not implausible that many properties picked out by thick concepts should be explained along these lines (Elstein & Hurka 2009). But this kind of proposal is of no help in the present context. According to Leary's proposal, the 'thin' *sui generis* properties should be grounded in the hybrid ones, and this is incompatible with the thought that we can analyze the thick in terms of the natural and the thin.

This may also point toward at least one reason for why Leary's proposal is quite alluring. What we need, on this proposal, is properties, the essences of which involve both the natural and the *sui generis* normative. Properties such as being retributively unjust are indeed like this, if they are to be explained reductively in terms of the natural and the thinly normative. On this picture, these properties are such that to have them is to have certain *sui generis* normative properties. And it is also very tempting to think that the essences of these properties specify naturalistic sufficient conditions for their instantiation. For *if* something is retributively unjust, for instance, then it will have natural properties of a certain sort. This much is guaranteed by the essence of being retributively unjust (according to the kind of proposal that we are now considering). It is easy to mistake this thought for the thought that it would be part of the essence of this property that if something has the relevant natural properties, it is also retributively unjust.

4 – CONCLUSION

I have argued that Leary's explanation for the supervenience of the normative on the natural, given in terms of hybrid properties, does not work. Given that the critics of the other existing attempts at explaining supervenience in a non-naturalism-friendly way are correct, this might be taken to be very bad news for non-naturalism. But of course, for all I have said, some of the criticisms of the other attempts may be wrong. And – more importantly, to my mind – there may be ways of responding to the challenge that are yet to be articulated.

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