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Abstract: The distribution of moral properties supervenes on the distribution of natural properties, and this provides a puzzle for nonnaturalism: what could explain supervenience if moral properties are not natural properties? Enoch claims moral principles explain supervenience. But this solution is incomplete without an account of what moral principles and properties are, and what relation holds between them. This paper begins to develop such an account by exploring analogous issues for Realism about Laws of nature in philosophy of science. Appealing to Mumford's Central Dilemma for Realism about Laws, I argue that for moral principles to explain supervenience, moral properties must be ontologically dependent on the principles. I suggest that moral properties are relations between moral principles and natural properties. I also explore what it would take to adapt this explanation to a pluralistic theory of morality. Contributory reasons avoid the Cartwright Problem for Laws in a way component forces cannot.

1. Introduction

Property *A* supervenes on property *B* just in case the distribution of *A*-instances does not vary unless the distribution of *B*-instances also varies (though the distribution of *B*-instances may vary without variation in the *A*-instances). Supervenience can range over domains of varying sizes. For instance, in the domain of objects on an American continent, the property of *being in the southern hemisphere* supervenes on the property of *being in South America*. In this domain, you cannot hold fixed the distribution of the property of *being in the southern hemisphere* while changing the distribution of the property of *being in South America*. The reverse is not true; you can hold fixed the distribution of the property of *being in South America* while changing the distribution of the property of *being in the southern hemisphere*. Or you could have a wider domain. Perhaps the property of *being red* supervenes on the property of *being colored* in the domain that ranges over all of modal space; in no possible world could there be an object with the property of *being red* without also having the property of *being colored*. Supervenience in this sense is a merely formal, but nevertheless interesting, relation between two

properties.

It is generally supposed that moral properties (or normative properties more broadly) supervene on natural properties, and this is supposed to be true for every domain, up to that of all modal space. When supervenience obtains, this calls for explanation (on pain of metaphysical coincidence). Certain meta-ethical (meta-normative) theories can accomplish this more easily than others. Naturalism, for instance, seems to have no problem.¹ Since all ethical (normative) properties are just natural properties, it is not surprising that ethical properties cannot change without some natural properties also changing (namely themselves). There is nothing to be explained. But there does seem to be a more serious problem for the nonnaturalist. If ethical properties are not reducible to natural properties, what could explain the intimate connection between the two?

Some nonnaturalists attempt to explain supervenience by appealing to moral principles. This paper will evaluate the explanation offered by David Enoch in his recent book *Taking Morality Seriously*, but my analysis will apply equally to other similar theories.² I will argue that his account is only a first step towards a satisfactory explanation, due to being silent on the issues of what moral principles and moral properties are, and, most importantly, the relation between the two. Only when these are more fully addressed can an explanation be complete. This paper explores what I find to be the most natural and effective way of answering these questions, such that it remains plausible to say that moral

¹ For a clear presentation of why this is so, see Dreier (1992). But, the very basic point is that identity is sufficient grounds for the formal conditions of supervenience. There may also be distinct natural properties that the (natural) moral properties supervene on (such as the physical supervenience base for pain on a non-reductive physicalism, if wrongness supervenes on causing pain). But there are three important points to make about this. First, these instances of supervenience will be easier to deal with as there will be some independent explanation of why those properties co-vary (such as whatever explanation is offered for the supervenience of pain on its base). Second, it is not the responsibility of meta-ethical theories to explain supervenience relations between sets of non-normative properties (it's the responsibility of philosophy of mind, for example). Third (and related), these instances of non-normative supervenience will obtain (if they obtain) no matter the true meta-ethical theory, so it's a shared burden if a burden at all.

² Enoch (2011, 144, n. 29) cites several other authors, whom he says give similar (though less developed) accounts. The most obviously similar accounts are those of Shafer-Landau (2003, 80-115) and Scanlon (2014, 53-68). My challenges will straightforwardly apply to Shafer-Landau (2003), though it's hard to assess this for Scanlon, due to his metaphysical quietism. Other related approaches, such as Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014), are sufficiently developed in different directions as to warrant separate consideration. See the end of section 4 for my quick take on why their view is not one we should adopt.

principles explain the supervenience of moral properties on natural properties.³

In an attempt to make nonnaturalism more metaphysically respectable, Enoch attempts to explain the supervenience of normative properties on natural properties by appealing to the content of normative principles. In order for this to be a plausible explanation, the normative principles must regulate the distribution of the normative properties. If this is the case, then normative principles play a metaphysical role that is analogous to the physical role that laws of nature play on realist theories of laws. Because of their similar roles, the treatment of realism about laws in philosophy of science will provide some insights into what an account of normative principles must include if we hope to appeal to such principles in order to explain supervenience.⁴ By exploring Stephen Mumford's challenges for realism about laws of nature, we will see that there must be a compelling account of how exactly normative principles can regulate the distribution of normative properties (2004). Additionally, any such account must settle the ontological status of those principles. Fortunately for Enoch, we will see that a compelling solution is available when the challenge is applied to the relation between normative properties and principles: normative properties will be relational properties, as specified by the contents of the principles that exist independently of the properties.⁵

2. Enoch's Explanation

Enoch spends the majority of his chapter on metaphysical problems for nonnaturalism dealing

³ I should note that Enoch wants his defense of meta-normative nonnaturalism to be neutral on (most) metaphysical theories of properties and such. For instance, he does not want to take a stand on whether properties are fundamental or facts are fundamental. I believe that everything I say about properties could be translated into facts language. If this is not the case, then I suggest that Enoch's defense is not as neutral as he hopes it to be. Whether this means it is biased towards facts language or properties language I will leave up to the philosopher who discovers whether the story available in facts language is better or worse than the one in properties language.

⁴ Thanks to a helpful referee for bringing my attention to the work of some other philosophers who make similar appeals to laws of nature, namely, Mark Lance and Margaret Little (2007), Mark Murphy (2011), and Luke Robinson (2011). While these authors make use of similar methodological analogies, they do so in a way that makes their work competitors to my proposed solutions. See various sections below for particular discussion of their views.

⁵ I don't believe the analogous solution is available when the challenge is applied to laws of nature, but whether or not it is does not influence its viability for nonnaturalism. See section 4.

with issues related to supervenience. The remaining short section of the chapter is an attempt to show that “sheer queerness” worries are either properly understood as versions of supervenience problems, epistemological problems, or not problems at all. Thus it seems that he takes supervenience to be *the* metaphysical problem.

As he discusses it, supervenience poses two related problems. First is that supervenience might be taken to entail reduction. For any purported nonnatural property, there will be a set of instances of natural properties such that it is necessarily coextensive with the set of instances of this nonnatural property. Next, assume combinatorialism of properties, such that any conjunction or disjunction of two properties is itself a property (e.g., being blue and round, being heavy or translucent). By this assumption, the set of natural properties necessarily coextensive with the normative property is itself a natural property (or, more exactly, the extension of the instances of the properties in that set is the extension of this other natural property). Then, on the theory of properties where properties which are necessarily co-extensive are identical, the purported nonnatural property is identical with this new natural property. Enoch (2011, 138) avoids this conclusion of reductionism by denying that necessarily co-extensive properties are identical.⁶

The second problem is the problem of explaining supervenience. To reiterate, it seems odd that nonnatural properties would supervene on natural properties, and it is unpalatable (theoretically) to suggest that this might be a coincidence.⁷ So an explanation is in order. In fact, Enoch (2011, 142) believes two explanations are in order. There is a specific supervenience question: why do *these* ethical properties supervene on *those* natural properties?⁸ There is also a general supervenience question: why

⁶ Because of this, his defense of nonnaturalism is already not as neutral on theories of properties as he might (otherwise) like it to be.

⁷ This is the point of McPherson’s (2012, 217) “Modest Humean” principle: “Commitment to brute necessary connections between discontinuous properties counts significantly against a view.” While we can wonder just how significantly a brute necessary connection would count against a theory, the point is that we recognize that explained (non-brute) connections are preferable.

⁸ Enoch’s explanations are supposed to apply to the supervenience of normative properties more broadly. My discussion will focus on ethical or moral properties because they are what feature in Enoch’s specific examples.

do ethical properties supervene on natural properties at all?

The specific supervenience question can be settled, in a sense, only after a specific ethical theory has been established. Enoch's example is utilitarianism having the task of explaining why *being wrong* supervenes on *failing to maximize utility*. Since Enoch doesn't propose or argue for a first-order ethical theory, he doesn't address anything so specific, but instead a more general "specific supervenience problem." He asks, "What if anything can a Robust Realist say to explain the supervenience of normative properties on the natural properties that they do in fact supervene on?" (2011, 143).

Enoch offers an analogy to the supervenience of legal drinking status on ages. Legal drinking status cannot vary without age varying (in the right way) within one legal jurisdiction, but could vary between jurisdictions, and could vary modally. What explains this local supervenience? The relevant laws do, or more precisely, the contents of those laws do (Enoch, 2011, 144.) Enoch suggests a similar explanation for the moral case: "What explains, for instance, the supervenience of wrongness (including, perhaps, degree of wrongness) on natural properties is the content of the moral norms or principles of right and wrong" (2011, 144).⁹ That is, the principle (along with the distribution of natural properties) explains the distribution of moral properties, and in virtue of this, explains supervenience. If this is satisfactory, then (just as in the legal case) moral properties won't be able to vary without the relevant natural properties also varying, at least within the "jurisdiction" of the moral principles. What is the jurisdiction of the moral principles? It is as wide as the modal status of those principles. That is to say, if the principles are modally necessary, existing in all possible worlds, then the jurisdiction is modally maximal and we have strong supervenience. If the principles are less than necessary, then the jurisdiction is more constrained and the supervenience is weaker. Enoch does not offer support for a

⁹ Scanlon's (2014, 36-42) similar suggestion is that pure normative facts in conjunction with natural facts explain mixed normative facts, such as the fact that donating to famine relief will cost me little but greatly improve the lives of many others is a reason for me to do so.

precise modal status for the basic moral principles. He claims that it should “be at least metaphysical necessity,” but that all that is needed for his purposes is that “whatever the modal status of the basic norms, it suffices for the explanation above to work as an explanation of the strongest plausible specific supervenience claims” (2011, 146)

Enoch thinks that the general supervenience problem must be dealt with separately. The general supervenience phenomenon is that ethical properties must supervene on some natural properties or others. Since different moral theories include different normative principles, each theory will identify a different group of natural properties as the supervenience base. While this allows each theory to answer why specific supervenience obtains in the way it does by the content of their principles, it does not help us explain the general phenomenon. Notice that if every moral theory (if it were the true one) would explain specific supervenience, this means that the fact that moral properties must supervene is independent of whichever theory is true. This means we cannot appeal to the contents of the principles, but have to appeal to some more general feature, as general supervenience is prior (in some sense) to the contents of any principles.¹⁰ There is a question of the domain for general supervenience as well. Enoch suggests that general supervenience involves conceptual modality, and that it is in fact a conceptual necessity. “It is conceptually impossible for there to be a normative difference without a natural one” (2011, 148-9). The evidence for this is our disposition to take someone rejecting general supervenience as using the terms non-standardly. Enoch claims that “once general supervenience is seen as a conceptual thesis, it is [hard] to see what [more] by way of explanation is called for here.” (2011, 149). Thus, according to Enoch, general supervenience is not a metaphysical thesis, and so is more easily dealt with.

¹⁰ Enoch thinks this shows that “nothing like general supervenience straightforwardly applies in the legal case” (2011, 148).

3. Explanations Evaluated

3.1 General Supervenience

These explanations are not sufficient, but they are a good first step. In this section, I will discuss the areas in which I find the explanations to be lacking. Enoch suggests that general supervenience is explained by the conceptual truth that moral properties cannot vary without natural properties also varying. Thus, any properties that *can* vary without some natural properties also varying are conceptually ruled out as moral properties. This means that the general supervenience claim just amounts to “if there are any moral properties, then those supervene on some natural properties.” This doesn’t claim that there are any such properties; if we found out that no properties supervene in this way, we would find out that there are no moral properties. However, this isn’t the claim that needs to be explained (regardless of whether Enoch is dialectically entitled to suppose that there are such properties, giving him the *modus ponens*).¹¹ Even if this conceptual claim is what Enoch wants to defend, it still leaves unanswered an important metaphysical question. Even if the conceptual claim is a conditional claim (whose antecedent is dialectically granted), the consequent still is a claim about a metaphysical relation between two (types of) properties, and we are owed an explanation for why this relation would obtain if there are moral properties.

To put this another way, suppose the conceptual claim is true and that there are in fact moral properties. The conceptual claim can only say that there is something in the world that answers to our concepts, but is silent about why those properties are the way they are. The properties answer to our concepts because of the way they are, and it is not the case that the properties are the way they are because they answer to our concepts. As such, we still have a metaphysical question of what is it about

¹¹ I do think, however, that the conceptual truth plus the assumption of successful reference (that there are properties that answer to our concepts) provides a good answer to an epistemic version general supervenience challenge. The epistemic version of the challenge is to say why we should think that moral properties supervene on some or other natural properties? Thanks to David Faraci for prompting me to make this clear. But for our purposes here the issue is not about justified belief, since Enoch presents the challenge as a metaphysical one.

moral properties that makes them supervene on natural properties.¹² Notice that this does not raise the specific supervenience question. The question this raises is still “why does supervenience obtain at all?” (but, now as a metaphysical question) and not “why does supervenience hold between these specific properties?” Until this question is answered, we do not have an adequate explanation of general supervenience. Call this the General Metaphysical Supervenience question.

Enoch might reply that there are cases in which appealing to concepts is sufficient to explain supervenience of properties. For instance, it seems to be required by the concepts that the property of *being a vixen* supervenes on the properties of *being a fox* and *being a female*. It is a conceptual truth that you cannot vary the distribution of *vixenhood* without varying the distribution of either *being a fox* or *being a female*. And as such, it may seem that there is no further question to be asked. But, either there is an important difference between this case and the moral properties cases that explains why there is a metaphysical question for one but not the other, or there is no difference and there are metaphysical questions in both cases (just in the case of *vixenhood* the answer is too obvious to ask for).

First, there is a question about what the concept ‘vixen’ refers to (however it is concepts refer). Either the concept refers to some conjunction of properties, such as *being a fox* and *being a female*, or it refers to a distinct property *vixenhood*. If ‘vixen’ refers to a conjunction of properties (as opposed to referring to a single conjunctive property), then there is no supervenience phenomenon to explain; there is no *vixenhood* that supervenes on *being a fox* and *being a female*.¹³ On the other hand, if ‘vixen’

¹² Driving this question is our reluctance to accept brute necessary connections, as captured by McPherson’s Modest Humean principle (see footnote 7). Enoch rejects Hume’s Dictum (the ancestor of Modest Humean), saying that asking how there could be necessary connections between the normative and the natural is “another way of asking how there could be moral (and other) norms that are of maximal jurisdiction. I do not have an answer to this question, but I do not feel the need to give one” (2011, 147). But he accepts the spirit of Modest Humean, and hopes to remove at least some worry of bruteness by way of his explanation of specific supervenience, while accepting that some bruteness might still remain (147-8). My points here are that the worry about bruteness applies to general supervenience as well, since the conceptual truth points us at an underlying metaphysical truth, and that by answering the metaphysical questions we can make the necessary connections even less brute, and thereby make the explanation more satisfying. I thank Enoch for pressing me on this point.

¹³ There will be supervenience of the property *being a referent of ‘vixen’* on the conjunction of properties, but this is very easily explained by the nature of concept reference and the nature of the concept ‘vixen’.

refers to the separate property *vixenhood*, then there is a supervenience phenomenon to explain. In fact I think there three. Our concept of ‘vixen’ entails the conceptual truth that if there are vixens, the property *vixenhood* supervenes on some properties or other. Add the existential assumption that there are vixens (entities that instantiate *vixenhood* and are proper referents of ‘vixen’), and we have a metaphysical truth that *vixenhood* supervenes on some properties or other. (The Robust Realist will of course want to make the two parallel assumptions about *wrongness* as were just made in this “robust” account of *vixenhood*, or else there won’t be genuine moral properties, just moral concepts.) This is a metaphysical truth about relations between actual properties, and I think it needs explanation beyond the conceptual truth and existential assumption.¹⁴

Fortunately, the explanation is very easy: *vixenhood* is (by its nature) a constituted property, and so it must supervene on its constituent properties, whichever those are. Notice that this is a general level supervenience phenomenon being explained. Next, we can ask a specific supervenience question: what specifically does *vixenhood* supervene on? The answer will be whatever properties constitute it. Unfortunately, I don’t know exactly what properties those are. The set of constituent properties will include *being a fox* and *being female*, but each of these may be constituted, so it isn’t clear how far this takes us. Additionally, there may be a third constituent, *having reached sexual maturity*, or others. This uncertainty serves to demonstrate that there is a distinct general supervenience phenomenon. I can know that general supervenience obtains and know why it obtains, without knowing on what *vixenhood* specifically supervenes.¹⁵

Now, replace “*vixenhood*” with “*wrongness*” and “constitution” with whatever metaphysical

¹⁴ This resembles McPherson’s challenge, which he summarizes as “it seems that appeals to conceptual connections are likewise explanatorily inert. This is because any such connection, if it is to help, must ultimately be underwritten by a necessary metaphysical connection, thus raising the question of whether the latter connection is brute” (2012, 223)

¹⁵ I think that the same can be said for ‘bachelor,’ at least by those who think that “all bachelors are unmarried men” is a conceptual truth, rather than a sentence that is true in virtue of the definitions of the terms. If there is a distinct concept ‘bachelor,’ it will either refer to *bachelorhood* or it won’t. If it does, then there are metaphysical questions about why *bachelorhood* supervenes on anything, and why it supervenes on what it does, that will be settled much in the same way as for ‘vixen’ above.

relation that holds between *wrongness* and the natural base properties is the one that grounds supervenience (I'll make my suggestion later), and we can ask all the same questions. Why does (or just “does”) our concept ‘wrong’ entail that *wrongness* supervenes on something? What about the metaphysics of the property *wrongness* makes it have to supervene on something? What metaphysically makes *wrongness* supervene on what it does? We can additionally ask about any particular action why it has the natural properties it does that make it wrong. The first question seems to get a simple “yes” for an answer. The next two require robust metaphysical enquiry. The final question may require examination of causal relations, intentions, or whatever particular explanations are available for why the action has the natural properties that it does.

As a final attempt to push this point, I'll try a slightly different approach. Granting that it is entailed by our moral concepts that certain relations hold between their referents and other properties, and granting that our concepts refer, there remains an important metaphysical question. We should recognize that when our concepts entail that some relation holds between entities in the world (in this case, properties or distributions of properties), such entailment does not indicate that the concept *makes* it the case that the relation holds.¹⁶ Instead it licenses inference to, or confers justification on the belief that the relation holds between the things in the world. This means that a conceptual entailment can give us a justified belief (or perhaps knowledge, if it's a conceptual truth) *that* the relation obtains, but it cannot serve as an explanation of *why* the relation obtains. For that we need to look to the natures of the entities so related.

For example, there is a general conceptual truth that all causes have effects. There is a specific

¹⁶ Terrance Cuneo and Russ Shafer Landau (2014) explicitly deny this claim, at least regarding moral concepts. They suggest a picture that bears a certain similarity to the one I will develop below. However, on their view there are substantive conceptual moral truths which are responsible for particular moral facts (these truths make the facts obtain, rather than the facts making the propositions true). I deny that this is a plausible picture to adopt for non-moral concepts and facts (as I discussed above for ‘vixen’ and particular *vixenhood* facts), and think that we should not think anything is different in the moral case (or at least we need to be shown that there is a principled difference). Their view is discussed in some more detail below, as an alternative to my proposed view, at the end of section 4.

question for each event of causation, how the cause causes its effect. But just because we have the general conceptual truth about all causes having effects, doesn't mean that there isn't an important and distinct general metaphysical question that remains to be answered. The question is “how (or why) do causes have effects?” Or “how does causation work?” Or “what is causation?” The answer to these questions is a theory of causation: it may be that causation works through activation of powers, or causation may be counterfactually robust regularities. The conceptual truth that causes have effects doesn't answer this question for us; instead it raises it. The conceptual truth entails that there is some way in which causation works, but it doesn't tell us how.¹⁷ Then, once we have an answer to this general metaphysical question, we are able to give answers to the questions about specific instances. This cause had this effect because the appropriate power was activated; this cause had this effect because the pair was an instance of the right kind of counterfactually robust regularity. The same should be said for explaining supervenience. The conceptual truth that moral properties supervene on something raises but does not answer the metaphysical question “why would moral properties supervene on anything?” Then, when we have an answer to this, we can give answers about the specific instances, why this moral property supervenes on the natural property that it does.

That all being said, I believe that Enoch could still maintain that the conceptual answer is enough, or perhaps all that it is possible to give, but he should recognize that doing so comes at some cost of theoretical strength (or relative plausibility points). In other words, the version that includes a metaphysical explanation of general supervenience will be a stronger or more plausible view. Since the goal is to make the Robust Realist position as strong or as plausible as possible, we should want to take on the project of giving such an explanation, if possible. As we will see, not only do I think that

¹⁷ Of course, the conceptual truth entails that causation works in some way, only if there is causation. But to have the analogy to moral supervenience run both ways, where the Robust Realist is dialectically entitled to the assumption that our moral concepts refer, we'll grant the existential assumption in this case too. Thanks to Mark van Roojen for prompting me to clarify this point.

doing so is possible, I don't think that doing so requires any additional metaphysical commitments to those required by giving a complete explanation of specific supervenience. Thus, we can increase the strength or plausibility of Robust Realism in this respect without taking on any additional costs elsewhere.¹⁸

3.2 *Specific Supervenience*

Enoch's explanation of specific supervenience is moral properties supervene on the natural properties they do because of the contents of the true moral principles. This raises further questions. To appreciate the importance of these questions, it may help to notice what must be true for what Enoch has said so far to be an explanation at all. We should recognize that supervenience is an epiphenomenon. The primary phenomena are the distributions of normative moral properties and of natural properties. Any relations between those distributions are secondary phenomena. Thus, if moral principles are to explain the supervenience of the moral on the natural, it must be that moral principles explain the particular distribution of moral properties that there is. I will argue that that the only way that moral principles could *explain* the distribution of moral properties, is if moral principles *make it the case* that the property instances obtain where and when they obtain. However, not all (views of) explanations require that *X* make *Y* the case in order for *X* to explain *Y*. For instance the universal claim, "all dogs have veins in their toenails" may be a suitable explanation for why *this dog* has veins in his toenails (that is, it may be at very least a suitable answer to the why-question in some contexts). So, generalizations do sometimes serve to explain particular phenomena, even though the generalizations *do not* make it the case that particular phenomena obtain. And since I am suggesting that a generalization won't suffice in this case, the burden of proof is on me to say why not.

Consider an alternative view proposed by Lance and Little (2007). Moral principles still explain

¹⁸ See the end of section 4 for my brief discussion of Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's unified conceptual explanation of both specific and general supervenience.

the instances of moral properties, but moral principles are (defeasible) counterfactually robust generalizations. They construct their view by analogy to Marc Lange's (2000) account of laws of nature. On their account, "what it *is* for a given generalization to be a law just *is* for it to be a true generalization capable of serving the inferential functions" of receiving inductive confirmation from observed instances and having counterfactual implications (2007, 156). As an example of inductive confirmation, they contrast the generalizations of "all samples of salt dissolve in water" and "all the samples of salt belonging to Martha are in her dining room" (156). Each observation of salt dissolving in water increases our rational confidence in the truth of the generalization, whereas this is not the case for observations of salt in Martha's dining room.¹⁹ Regarding counterfactual implication, they contrast the generalizations that all authors of their paper have the initials 'ML', and "plants require light to grow" (156). (At the time of writing), the generalization about author initials would not have entailed that Wayne Davis could not have become a contributor, or that he would have changed his name if he had. In contrast, the plants generalization does imply that "if Wayne had planted an additional rose bush in his yard, it would have needed light to grow" (156). These counterfactual implications (and the degree of counterfactual robustness) are limited to a range of worlds determined by the domain of inquiry (157; 160). The rest are "don't care worlds." For example, the plant law doesn't license inferences about worlds in which plants absorb energy from vibrations rather than photosynthesis, but that's not a world that botany cares about. Such generalizations count as explanatory because they "tell us both what happens in conditions what are [theoretically] privileged *and* what compensatory moves are required by the ways in which one's situation may stand in distance

¹⁹ It seems to me that *enough* observations of salt would warrant the thought "wow, that's a lot of salt in here; maybe Mary keeps all her salt in the dining room." But observing far more samples would also warrant the thought "wow, maybe Mary compulsively hoards salt; there might be a lot more all over her house." The relevant contrast between the cases would then be that the epistemic significance of each observed instance fluctuates in mere generalization case, as opposed to being fairly stable in the lawlike case. There may be another confounding difference between the cases, which is the role of background assumptions, which may include other generalizations such as "most people keep only some of their salt in the dining room" and "there are no disconfirming instances of salt failing to dissolve in (unsaturated) water."

from the privileged ones” (152).

By analogy, moral principles would be generalizations with counterfactual implications (robust to the degree required by normative inquiry) that receive inductive confirmation from observed instances (presumably in thought experiments). Such generalizations will be explanatory as moral principles to the extent that they are explanatory as laws of nature. However, the way in which they are explanatory is not the kind of explanation that we are after when trying to explain supervenience.²⁰ When I wondered why this dog has veins in his toenails and was told “all dogs have veins in their toenails,” I was being given a license to make a good inference about this dog (although, *post hoc*). And if I wondered why cutting his toenails shorter was wrong and was told “cutting them shorter causes pain, and *causing pain is wrong*” this would give me license to make a good inference. I will make no claims about whether or not explanation as licensing inference is the sort of explanation appropriately sought by natural science, but this sort of explanation is not suitable in every case. When I wanted to know why this dog has veins in his nails, I wanted to know the reason (though not necessarily proximal) that he did, rather than to have epistemic justification for the belief (or the belief that he wasn’t unusual in this regard). Similarly, as we saw above, we aren’t after epistemic justification for our belief that moral properties supervene when we are concerned with explaining it. Most people are happy to grant that our moral concepts can provide that.²¹ Instead, we want to know what underwrites the good inferences licensed by the counterfactually robust generalizations, and what makes them so counterfactually robust. For this, we need the sort of explanation that gives an account for why things are the way they are.²²

²⁰ See Murphy (2011) and Robinson (2011) for additional objections to generalizations serving as explanations.

²¹ On the assumption that the concepts refer. A notable exception is Gideon Rosen (2012).

²² This objection will apply to Lewisian laws as well, since the only sort of explanation that a law qua axiom or theorem in a deductive system that “exhibits the best combination of simplicity and strength” (Murphy, 2011, 25) could provide is this same sort of inferential license or epistemic justification. They cannot tell us why ‘the mosaic’ is patterned as it is, just provide us with good beliefs about the rest of it. For more objections to a Lewisian laws account of moral principles, see Murphy (2011) and Robinson (2011).

So, in order for moral principles to explain supervenience, they must do so by providing a metaphysical explanation of the distribution of moral property instances, which they can only do if they are responsible for the distribution. This raises two questions. First, how do moral principles make the particular distribution of moral properties come about? Second, what must moral principles and moral properties be like for this to be possible? Without answers to these two questions, Enoch has not given a satisfactory explanation of supervenience. All that Enoch has provided is claim that a further fact (the content of moral principles) is relevant, but he has not explained *how* that fact is relevant or the (metaphysical) mechanism through which it operates.

Enoch may object here that he does not require such a deep sense of explanation for specific supervenience as I claim here that he does, and that he could use an alternative sense of explanation.²³ But, there are two reasons why we need a metaphysically deep explanation for specific supervenience. One is that this seems to be what is dialectically required to satisfy the challenge to explain supervenience raised by competing views. The naturalist is able to give an answer to the question “what makes it the case that moral properties supervene on the natural properties they do?” What makes it the case, according to the naturalist, is the numerical identity of the moral properties with those natural properties. The expressivist might say that moral “properties” are projections of a certain kind of reaction to certain natural properties, and that they are about those natural properties explains the supervenience.²⁴ Neither of these are answers in terms of generalizations; neither of these answers involve good inference or inductive conformability. As such it seems that the nonnaturalist is forced by the terms of the debate to give a deeper explanation (or lose some relative plausibility in this regard).

²³ In fact, Enoch has agreed that he needs a metaphysically deeper explanation (at least regarding specific supervenience), that appealing to generalizations won't suffice. But since there could be those who agree with Enoch's explanation of specific supervenience, but don't accept what I say about what sort of explanation is called for, this move in the argument still needs to be defended.

²⁴ Of course, many expressivists would not want to talk about moral properties, preferring instead to talk about extensions of moral predicates or moral facts. But since this paper has been focused on distributions of properties, this was the best way to keep the contrast straightforward.

The other reason is that appealing to principles as explanatory generalizations doesn't really explain the right thing. I said that in order to explain supervenience we need to explain the distribution of properties. I also said that generalizations could sometimes be offered as explanations of particular phenomena. So, if the generalization explains every one of the particular phenomena, then haven't we explained supervenience (by explaining the instances that constitute the distribution)? I think we have not. If the moral principle is a generalization, then this principle will be equivalent to the specific supervenience claim. The generalization is just a universal claim about the relative distributions of the two properties in question, namely that moral property's distribution tracks the natural property's distribution. But this is the supervenience phenomena that we wanted to account for in the first place. That is, if the content of the principle "causing pain is wrong" is a universal generalization describing the instances causing pain and wrongness, then we should not be surprised at all that if you keep the *causing pain* distribution the same that you will also keep the wrongness distribution the same. But that is just because the generalization is the fact that you don't get causing pain without also getting wrongness, which is specific supervenience. While there are diverse models of explanation, no model should be taken seriously that says something can explain itself.

One last objection is that we may not even need to expand on Enoch's explanations, even if we grant the incompleteness that I have argued for. Returning to the legal analogy, we can explain why legal properties supervene on non-legal ones by appealing to civil laws, and this is an acceptable answer *even if* we haven't provided the mechanism by which they do this (which would require a complete account of civil law).²⁵ Once we've ruled out that civil laws consist in counterfactually robust generalizations of instances of legal properties, which is easy,²⁶ then (granting that there are laws) we

²⁵ Thanks, again, to the anonymous referee for pressing this objection

²⁶ Notice how implausible this sounds as the *kind* of explanation we would be after if we asked "why is my legal drinking status connected to my age?" Someone who offered a generalization (no matter how counterfactually robust), "everyone's legal drinking status is related to their age in this way," would obviously be missing the point and be offering the wrong sort of explanation.

can say that civil laws explain supervenience (by explaining the instances) without having to provide a precise account of this explanation. It might be illuminating to say more, but doing so isn't required for an explanation of *supervenience*. So, why should it be any different when we're trying to explain moral supervenience by saying that moral principles are responsible (in some way or another) for the distribution of moral properties? If it is not different, then Enoch's explanation as he presented it is sufficient. This would mean that my elaborations to come may be illuminating but they aren't required to explain supervenience, and what's worse, they may be unnecessary commitments that the Robust Realist is not forced to adopt. There is something right to this objection, but the implications to not extend as far as they are pressed.

Part of the task of explaining supervenience by way of principles is to characterize what principles are like because not everything that principles could be like would be able to do this. Principles as generalizations won't be able to do this, as I've shown. But just having eliminated this option does not give us enough idea of what principles are to know whether they are the kind of thing that can explain the distribution of moral properties. As will come up again, naturalists don't take principles to be explanatory in the same way, and while it would be true to say that supervenience is explained by the principle's content, the identity relation, the content does not explain supervenience in the same way that it does for Enoch. This implies that what principles are for naturalism is different than what principles are on Robust Realism. *This* means that we need to give an account of what principles are on Robust Realism, to be clear what we're talking about. But more importantly, we need to do so to show that principles are able to play the role given to them. When doing this project, we may not be explaining supervenience when explanation is construed narrowly, but we are unpacking the ontological commitments of giving the narrow explanation, which is a part of explanation when construed broadly. Since dialectically we are concerned with the plausibility of Robust Realism, we are concerned with the plausibility of their explanation of supervenience. We can only evaluate the

plausibility of this by evaluating the plausibility of the ontological commitments of their explanation.²⁷

We don't have this same burden with civil laws because we have a much more refined (if not precise) and agreed upon sense of what such laws are and are not. No one takes laws to state identities between properties. No one takes laws to state generalizations. No one advances particularism or contextualism about legality.²⁸ Everyone takes laws to be the kind of thing that produces properties, namely legal properties. This means that there is a much higher default plausibility of this type of explanation when applied to civil law. But since things are not so clear with moral principles, since there is not so much agreement on what they are, we need to say more in order to achieve the same degree of plausibility.

4. Expanding the Explanations

So, there are remaining questions about the metaphysical basis of both general and specific supervenience of moral properties on natural properties. If they are not in fact the same questions (or do not amount to the same questions), then they should be at least settled by the same considerations. As mentioned above, this means that we can make explanatory progress for general supervenience in a way that does not take on any costs beyond those necessary to explain specific supervenience. In this section, I will attempt to make additional strides towards satisfactory answers to these questions beginning with the issues as raised for specific supervenience, next showing how those answers help provide a better answer to the general supervenience question.

Two things remain to be explained about specific supervenience: how moral principles can make it the case that moral properties accompany certain natural properties, and what moral principles

²⁷ As a related objection the referee suggests there could be a picture of laws that has them as neither generalizations nor as governors themselves. Instead they might "express a governance relationship, so that they are not true unless there is such a governing relationship, but it is not the laws of nature that do the governing." I do not find this option viable for our purposes here. See discussion of Murphy (2011) below.

²⁸ Using Lance and Little's terminology to distinguish particularists who think there aren't illuminating (defeasible) generalizations about moral properties from those who do (respectively).

must be like for this to be possible. In addressing these issues, it will help to compare moral principles to laws of nature, as the two seem to play similar roles in their respective theories. When certain phenomena are coupled with other phenomena, we often offer explanations in terms of laws of nature. When we observe a correlation between the masses of two objects and their gravitational attraction, we explain this by appealing to the law of gravity. In order for the law to be explanatory in the right way, we are committed to a certain picture of laws.²⁹ They cannot be Humean laws (which are not entities in their own right, but mere generalizations of coincident phenomena) since a generalization cannot explain its instances.³⁰ If the law of universal gravitation is just an expression of a generalization of the instances of attractive forces between massive objects, then it cannot explain the attractive force between any two objects. So too for moral principles: if a moral principle is just an expression of a generalization of the instances of wrongness, then the principle is incapable of explaining those instances. So, the analogy would have to be to laws playing a causal role in making the observed phenomena come about.³¹ The two objects attract each other with the force they do in part because of the masses they have and the distance between them, and in part because of the law of universal gravitation. And the role the mass of each (and the distance) plays is determined by the content of the law, which is described by $G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$.

Mumford (2004) proposes what he calls “the Central Dilemma” for such views about laws.³² In order for a theory to be realist about laws it must hold that laws play a governing or determining role in events. Otherwise, it is a “lawless” theory, like the Humeanism mentioned above. In any theory that holds that laws play a governing role, those laws must be either external to the things they govern,

²⁹ I am of course assuming here that we are concerned with metaphysical rather than epistemological explanation, as I argued was required above.

³⁰ This entails incompatibility with certain kinds of particularism. I will discuss this in more detail below.

³¹ Perhaps the language of causation is too strong, and I should only speak of metaphysical grounding. Either way, here the appeal is to laws that *make it the case*, in some robust sense, that the observed phenomena come about.

³² See chapter 9, “The Central Dilemma,” especially the full statement on 158.

or internal to them. For laws to be external to what they govern is for the laws to be ontologically independent of what they govern; they are entities in their own right. For laws to be internal to what they govern is for the laws to not be primitive elements in the theory's ontology, but instead ontologically dependent on what they govern.³³ If laws are external, then the theory must give an account of this external governing relation that is both plausible and avoids commitment to quidditism.³⁴ If laws are internal, then the theory must give a plausible account of this internal governing relation.

Mumford argues that neither horn can be satisfied by a theory of laws of nature. The "internal" horn cannot be satisfied because the direction of ontological dependence (of the laws on what they govern) implies reduction, supervenience or constitution (of the laws to/on/by what they govern) (155). But, something cannot govern or play a role in determining that which it is reducible to (or constituted by, or supervenient on).³⁵ "The law that ravens are black... cannot make it that ravens are black if the law is reducible to blackness being a characterizing attribute of ravens" (156).

Regarding the "external" horn, Mumford says that the best purportedly external theory of laws, the Dretske Tooley Armstrong Theory (DTA) that laws of nature are relations between universals (and thus, universals themselves), fails to be entirely anti-Humean. Because DTA relies on properties being immanent universals, there is an instantiation requirement for laws (101-102). Importantly, there are laws regarding underived (or 'atomic') properties. Since on Armstrong's combinatorialism any property could fail to be instantiated, these underived properties could fail to obtain. Since the law, as a relation, is an immanent universal, the law does not exist "without its

³³ These laws would be anti-Humean in that they are taken to be genuine entities, rather than mere generalizations.

³⁴ Quidditism is the theory, due to Lewis, that universals have bare essences (like a haecceity) that can be paired with different characteristics or causal roles in different worlds. For example, the property that plays the role of "chairness" in this world, could *in another world* play the role of "blueness".

³⁵ In this context, "supervenience" is the metaphysician's supervenience, not the ethicist's supervenience. The ethicist's supervenience, as used up to this point, is merely a formal relation between property distributions and not a type of ontological independence. Supervenience in this context (in the company of reduction and constitution) is a particular sort of ontological dependence relation, and thus not merely formal.

instantiation in particular causal sequences” (101). Thus, if the properties it relates are entirely contingent, so is the law—only existing if an instantiation of the relation exists. Thus it is unclear how the law is properly said to govern the instances—that is, how they are not simply the reified generalizations.

But, suppose some better external theory could be developed. Mumford still suggests that there is a general problem for external theories of laws. If the laws are genuinely external to the properties they govern, then they could vary independently. That is, “where there is a property F , that features in law L_1 , the external conception allows that F could have not featured in L_1 yet still have been F ” (150). Similarly, L_1 may have featured some other property G while still being L_1 . This means that the identity of properties is not fixed by the causal roles they play, nor by anything else dependent on the laws (or else they would not be entirely independent). What remains to fix the identity of properties through a change in laws is a brute individual essence of a property, that is, a quiddity.³⁶ If the best theory of laws does not have laws governing properties, but instead governing something else (like events), then Mumford believes that an analogous form of quidditism would hold (149).

Murphy (2011) suggests a way of understanding DTA that is not vulnerable to the Central Dilemma, which should be examined before seeing if the dilemma poses a problem for moral principles. On his understanding on DTA, rather than have the law itself govern the universals “one can hold that what is crucial is that there is a governing relationship *between the universals*: on Armstrong’s view, for example, it is not $N(F,G)$ that governs; it is the F that governs G ” (34). This allows $N(F,G)$ to be ontologically dependent on F and G without triggering the worries of the internal horn, because $N(F,G)$ does not govern. He claims that, understood in this way, views of laws as governing hold that

³⁶ Mumford sees this as a decisive objection, but it may be more properly understood as a bullet to bite for such theories of laws. If this is the case, taking this strategy for moral principles would just be a plausibility cost. However, Alexander Bird (2005, 450-451.) has a good explanation of what quiddities are, as well as an argument that quidditism would entail total skepticism about our scientific theories (from ignorance of successful reference). This would be a much worse implication for Robust Realism.

“laws of nature *express* governing relationships” (34). On this reading, it is *F* that governs *G*. This allows Murphy to create a moral principles analogue that avoids the Central Dilemma (in a different way than my preferred solution). “A moral law holds when *F* morally necessitates *G*; *F* morally necessitates *G* when *F* morally selects *G* such that it is morally necessary that if *x* is *F*, then *x* is *G*” (38). It’s not clear what “moral necessitation” as a metaphysical relation amounts to, but leaving that aside for now, there is still reason to think this will not be suitable elaboration of Enoch’s view and unable to even be an alternative explanation of supervenience.

This view of laws as ‘governing’ would have laws be describers of metaphysical explanation, rather than themselves explanatory. Laws, by this view would be explanatory in the way an operator’s manual might explain the way a machine works. This is to play an epistemic role, but not the one played by laws as generalizations. This epistemic role is to direct towards the underlying metaphysics. While I cannot assess the viability of this characterization of laws of nature, the way we generally identify moral principles (and specifically in the kinds of examples Enoch uses) their contents are not suited to play this role. Instead of describing the mechanisms through which governance works (or the governance at all), the sorts of characterizations we get describe the results of whatever mechanisms are at work. “Causing pain is wrong” would be expressing that *causing pain* governs *being wrong*, or *causing pain* morally necessitates *being wrong*. This would be like the operator’s manual describing the effect of the machine, but not the way the machine produces the effect. We aren’t told how *causing pain* governs *being wrong*. (Compare again to civil laws: if they are describers as suggested here, what they describe are the legal effects but not the metaphysical explanations of those effects.) This means, those things we identify as moral principles (whatever else they are like) do not seem to have the sorts of contents that would allow them to play the role that Murphy offers. There could very well be such things suitable to play this role, but they aren’t a suitable candidate for filling out the metaphysical commitments of Enoch’s appeal to principles.

Murphy should object that I have mischaracterized the contents of the moral principles. His theory doesn't say that natural properties necessitate moral properties, but that certain natural properties morally necessitate other natural properties. For example, *being an action that causes pain* morally necessitates *being refrained from*. But this only serves to make things worse, at least if the goal is to explain supervenience. Notice that the only candidate for a moral property on this account is the moral necessitation relation. The law tells us that this relation holds between the two natural properties, but that is all it tells us. Importantly, it doesn't tell us how causing pain makes refraining morally necessitated; it doesn't tell us why moral necessitation holds between these two properties (that is, why it involves this ordered pair of properties). It is still only describing the effect, not the mechanism. This means that it will be unable to explain specific supervenience. The moral principle (whether it's expressed as "refrain from causing pain," "causing pain morally necessitates refraining," or "causing pain is wrong") won't be able to tell us why the distribution of moral properties varies only when the distribution of ordered pairs of these natural properties also varies. There may be a reason that it does, but this reason is not the moral principles nor is it described by them. So, while there may be a possible explanation of supervenience in the neighborhood, it would involve a very different strategy than Enoch's appeal to moral principles.

Murphy's alternative reading of DTA illustrates a point that is important to recognize: Mumford's Central Dilemma only has a narrow range of application, and does not rule out every possibility of explanation. The dilemma does not apply any time that there is a regularity between two kinds of entities (or events), but only when there is some *additional* entity (the law) that is supposed to be *responsible* for that regularity. The reason it did not apply to Murphy's version of DTA is that the additional entity he employs (the law, all *F*s are *G*) does not itself govern, but only describes the governance of *G* by *F*. Similarly, the dilemma does not apply to "laws" that are mere Humean generalizations, because there are no additional entities responsible for the regularity; there is only the

regularity. If we have arguments against either of these views (and we did above), they are separate from the Central Dilemma. Nor does the dilemma apply to views like Mumford's own, on which causation is explained by dispositions and particular instances of causation are explained by particular dispositions.³⁷ Because each individual event of causation is explained by a particular disposition rather than a law, there is no *additional* entity that explains any emergent regularity. If any regularity is to be explained, it will be explained by the collection of dispositions. But those are just part of the regularity, so there is no *additional* entity involved in the explanation. For example, particular breaking events are explained by instances of fragility and particular striking events. And the regularity fragile things break when struck is explained, not by a law governing these property types, but by the collection of instances of the properties. Thus, Mumford's Central Dilemma does not have an implausibly broad skeptical upshot: we can still have explanations that appeal to entities, so long as they neither are external to the phenomena (external horn) to be explained nor resultant from it (internal horn).

Before relating the Central Dilemma to Enoch's explanation, I should explain why it does not apply to naturalism.³⁸ If the Central Dilemma applied to naturalism, this would actually be a boon for Enoch because his explanation would be equally adequate as the naturalist's (or, maybe even as adequate as the scientist's explanations, given the considerations above). But the Central Dilemma cannot apply to the naturalist's view. Since this dilemma only applies when there is some additional entity (such as a moral principle) that is supposed to be responsible for the regularity, it would only apply if naturalists believe that contents of moral principles *make it the case* that certain moral properties are identical with certain natural properties. But with naturalism, it is more plausible that those identity relations just are the contents of the moral principles.³⁹ While it would be true to say that supervenience

³⁷ Robinson's view (2011) seems to be the moral analogue of this. If Mumford allows that there are entities which express the governing relations between disposition universals and manifestation universals, then this fits with how Murphy reads Armstrong. If so, Murphy's view about moral principles would be closely related as well.

³⁸ Thanks to David Sobel for pointing out this concern.

³⁹ One way to take this is that the "is" in a moral principle is the "is of identity," rather than the "is of attribution" (as nonnaturalists would have it). This is of course a little flat footed, since a naturalist can also employ principles with the

is explained by the principle's content, the identity relation, the content does not explain supervenience in the same way that it does for Enoch. It is not the case that the property 'causing pain' is identical with the property 'wrongness' *because* there is a true moral principle with the content 'causing pain is wrong.' For the naturalist, things should be the other way around. If there is a true moral principle, surely this would be *because* 'causing pain' is identical with 'wrongness.'⁴⁰

A meta-ethical theory that claims to explain the supervenience of moral properties on natural properties by appealing to moral principles will face a similar problem as realism about laws faces. However, there is a third fork available when talking about moral principles that may not be available when talking about laws of nature. The two forks given were that the laws/principles are ontologically dependent on what they govern, or that they are ontologically independent of what they govern. The "external" horn, as evidenced by Mumford's discussion of the implication of quidditism, requires that the ontological independence be mutual.⁴¹ The laws don't depend on what they govern, but neither does what they govern depend on the laws. This leaves logical space for that which is governed to be ontologically dependent. It's clear why Mumford ignored this option in the case of laws of nature. Taking again the example of gravitational attraction, it is highly implausible that what mass an object has depends on what the law of gravity is. There could have been a different law, one employing a

"is of attribution." But for the most general moral principle, the "is" would be the "is of identity." For example, suppose 'causing pain is wrong' is the fundamental moral principle, and 'pinching is wrong' is a derivative moral principle. The former would use the "is of identity," while the second would use that "is of attribution."

⁴⁰ Even if moral principles play a role in naturalist metaphysics that I would find surprising, we should not think that this gives Enoch's explanation a pass. He proposes a substantive metaphysical relation between moral principles and moral properties, but says nothing of what this relation is, how it works, or why we should think that it obtains. Enoch may be in a dialectically better position if the naturalist shares his problem, but it isn't true that in every case "a problem of all is a problem for none." Because more *can* be said, more *should* be said. Naturalists are not Enoch's only opponents in this debate; there are also expressivists, error theorists, and straightforward nihilists. If the naturalists are forced to hold a view similar to Enoch's—supervenience is to be explained, can be explained, and is explained this way—then they are, as realists, on the same team. The dialectical opponent of my dialectical opponent is (sometimes) my dialectical ally.

To put this in different terms, Enoch does not lose any less plausibility points if naturalism cannot explain supervenience either—instead the naturalists lose the same amount of points. While by the *relative* tally of points Enoch's view would be better off against naturalism if it has this problem as well, this doesn't affect the overall plausibility of the view (something we should be concerned with in addition to relative plausibility), nor does it change the plausibility relative to other views, such as expressivism.

⁴¹ Otherwise they couldn't vary independently, since the variation in the independent one would require variation in the dependent one.

different gravitational constant, or that didn't involve the inverse square law, without this changing how massive the objects are. Similarly, there being mass at all does not seem to depend on there being a law of gravity.⁴²

However, this third horn does not seem counter-intuitive when talking about moral principles and moral properties. It may be a substantive claim, but it is a natural one, to say that there being wrongness at all depends (in part) on there being moral principles. Thus, this position is incompatible with particularism, in the sense that particular moral properties are ontologically prior to moral principles (if there are any). But Enoch already acknowledges this when first suggesting that principles might explain supervenience (145, n. 30). As he points out, this only means that this explanation is not available to the particularist who is also a Robust Realist and thinks supervenience holds. Such particularists will need to find their own explanation of supervenience.⁴³

But it is not enough to claim, as if by fiat, that moral properties ontologically depend on moral principles. One must additionally (and this is the spirit of Mumford's argument) offer an account of

⁴² As I said in a note to the introduction, I don't think that the solution available to the nonnaturalist is available regarding laws of nature. But if it were available (if the property of mass were ontologically dependent on the law of gravity), this would be good news for realism about laws, though it is fairly unimportant for the purposes of this paper.

⁴³ One possible way to do this would be to accept the account offered by Robinson (2011). Robinson characterizes his view in terms of 'moral principles,' but he uses 'principles' nonstandardly. By 'principle' he means something to the effect of 'fundamental source' rather than something like a rule (290). I think this makes it trivial that principles explain the distribution of properties, and so it would be more helpful to call whatever plays this role the moral "generans," and argue about what 'ends up' being the moral generans. On Robinson's view dispositions to produce moral properties are the moral generans (291). Thus, while he claims to have moral principles that explain moral phenomena, he is really proposing a radically distinct view from the one that Enoch does. Individual dispositions will manifest particular moral phenomena, such as obligations to preform particular acts. Such manifestations can be generalized into generalizations with some degree of counterfactual robustness, which would likely be suitable to play the epistemological roles that Lance and Little wanted for laws (292). Because moral explanation (of the metaphysical stripe) starts at the level of instances and builds up, this will be a suitable fit for the particularist.

Supervenience could *begin* to be explained on this view if two conditions are met: natural properties are triggers of the moral dispositions, and the moral dispositions themselves supervene on natural properties. For instance, we would need to know why the distribution of *being a potential bearer of an obligation* cannot vary without there being a change in the distribution of some natural properties. The first condition seems plausible, though I don't know if it too would have to be explained (can we say why any dispositions are triggered by the properties they are?). The second condition also seems plausible, but that's just because it seems like one of the regular moral properties that intuitively supervene. Unfortunately, this seems harder to explain for a nonnaturalist. The potential to be obligated couldn't be a natural property, such as having certain mental capacities, because this would identify a moral (dispositional) property with a natural one.

this ontological dependence that is both plausible and genuinely has the principles governing the distribution of properties. One way to do this is to claim that moral properties are relational, not monadic properties.⁴⁴ For instance, wrongness would be the property of being an instance of an act-type that is prohibited by a moral principle.⁴⁵ This gives two complementary accounts of the ontological dependence of moral properties on moral principles. First, without a moral principle as a relata, the relation would not obtain, just as if my siblings didn't exist my instances of the "is a brother to" relation would not obtain. Second, and more importantly, it is the content of the principle, forbidding certain act-types, that grounds the relational property.

Since Enoch claimed that it is the content of moral principles that explains supervenience, now we have a more complete metaphysical picture of just how this happens.⁴⁶ General metaphysical supervenience is better explained: moral properties supervene on natural properties at all because of what moral properties and moral principles are like metaphysically; moral properties are specific relations between moral principles and act-types with certain natural properties; and, moral principles have act-types with natural properties and the appropriate normative relation or response (is prohibited, is required, refrain from, promote, etc.) specified in their contents.⁴⁷ Specific supervenience is then explained how Enoch suggested, but with some elaboration: *these* moral properties supervene on *those* natural properties because of the particular contents of the moral principles. So, if basic utilitarianism is true, why does wrongness supervene on failing to maximize happiness? Because there is a moral principle which specifies *failing to maximize happiness* and prohibits actions with that property;

⁴⁴ Alternatively, it could be the second order monadic property of "being the relata of an instance of the moral relation." This sort of alternative would piggy-back on the analysis that follows.

⁴⁵ This of course requires taking a view on what the bearers of wrongness are. If you don't think it is actions qua tokens of a type, then make the appropriate changes, as nothing should turn on what is particularly selected as the property bearer.

⁴⁶ Note that this is still not a complete solution at this point. See the conclusion for some issues I believe need to be addressed about the nature of normative principles in order to make the explanation of supervenience complete.

⁴⁷ The examples given are supposed to be neutral regarding whether principles are structured as indicatives or imperatives. But recognize that these are separate, and presumably incompatible, glosses on the nature of principles (how their contents must be structured). See section 6.

and since wrongness is just being prohibited by a moral principle, actions that fail to maximize happiness are wrong. Because the same metaphysical features (albeit at different levels of specificity) explain both supervenience phenomena we have a unified, metaphysically deep explanation.⁴⁸

In their recent paper, Cuneo and Shafter-Landau (2014) offer an equally unified explanation for general and specific supervenience (or at least they provide the resources to do so), with the important difference that they think substantive conceptual moral truths explain particular moral facts (and would there by explain supervenience). These substantive conceptual truths would be analogous to the moral principles I employ. They note that Enoch does not believe that there are such *substantive* conceptual moral truths (2), so technically their view is not a competing refinement of Enoch's view. But since I am advocating revision of the explanation of general supervenience to metaphysical from conceptual, their view may seem as close of a fit as my own by suggesting revision of the explanation of specific supervenience from metaphysical to conceptual.⁴⁹ However, as I mentioned before, the resources required to metaphysically explain general supervenience are just those that it takes to metaphysically explain specific supervenience. This means in refining Enoch's metaphysical explanation of specific supervenience we get for free, as it were, a metaphysical explanation of general supervenience. The parallel claim for a revision in the way of a unified conceptual explanation does

⁴⁸ An additional benefit to expanding Enoch's explanation in this direction is that it actually improves his analogy to legal properties. Just as it is not counterintuitive to take wrongness to be a relational property of being prohibited by a moral principle, it makes sense to take illegality to be a relational property of being prohibited by law. We might understand 'X is illegal' to mean 'X is (an action of type A that is) prohibited by a law.' We can understand laws to have as their contents certain natural (or at least non-legal) properties or act-types and certain responses to them (prohibited, required, refrain from, do, etc.). So, despite Enoch claiming that there is no general supervenience question to answer regarding legal properties, this is not the case. There may not be a general conceptual supervenience question to answer for the legal case, but there is still a metaphysical one. And the answer comes just as easily: legal properties supervene on non-legal properties because legal properties are relational properties, relational to legal norms (laws) with certain non-legal properties specified in their content.

⁴⁹ This conceptual explanation versus metaphysical explanation distinction may not be the most accurate characterization, because in a sense Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's explanation is a metaphysical one that appeals to concepts rather than the natures of the entities in the world (the moral properties and principles). But the division is an important one no matter what we call it. My preferred explanation appeals to the natures or essences of the properties and principles to explain any relations that must hold between those entities; Cuneo and Shafer-Landau's explanation appeals to the "essences of the concepts" alone to explain there being certain conceptual truths, which then can "fact-make" particular moral facts.

not hold. It is true that Enoch thinks that our concept of ‘moral properties’ entails that the referents of that concept must supervene on something. But since he does not hold that there are substantive moral truths that are conceptual truths, such a revision to explain specific supervenience requires adopting new commitments that are not required for explaining general supervenience (as such). In light of this, I think that my view is more in line with the spirit of Enoch’s original explanation, despite involving some revision as well. My revision requires accepting metaphysical commitments about the relation between moral principles and properties to explain supervenience, whereas the alternative requires metaphysical commitments about the relation between conceptual moral truths and moral properties, and additional commitment to substantive conceptual moral truths.

But Cuneo and Shafer-Landau’s account is a competitor view in general, even if it’s not a competitor as a refinement of Enoch (that is, it could be something Enoch moves to because of its own appeal or because of something found unattractive about my suggestion). But I of course find their view independently unappealing as a theory of moral explanation, and I will attempt to briefly say why without going too far astray from the project at hand. On their view, the essences of the concepts ‘wrong,’ ‘human,’ ‘torture,’ and perhaps ‘recreational,’ together make the substantial moral proposition ⟨recreational torture of humans is wrong⟩ conceptually true. This conceptual truth then makes particular instances of recreational torture wrong, or as they put it, the conceptual truth fact-makes the fact that this particular instance of recreational torture is wrong (20).⁵⁰ They admit that someone might hold that there is a worldly fact, corresponding to (but not truth-making) the conceptual truth, which also explains why the particular instances are wrong (22). We could take this to allow that both their theory and my theory are true in parallel. However, they reject this as a good view on grounds of parsimony, since we would have explanatory overdetermination that would be

⁵⁰ This is why their conceptual explanation is in a way a metaphysical explanation, and demonstrates the close similarity to my view. I would however want to hear more about how the metaphysics of fact-making works.

avoided by not positing the worldly fact (23).

However, unless they accept that every single particular moral fact is fact-made by a conceptual moral truth there will be some particular moral facts that are explained by more general (worldly) moral facts, perhaps using something like my picture.⁵¹ If this is the case, then when we grant that all particular facts are explained by general worldly moral facts and only some (even most) particular moral facts are made by conceptual truths, parsimony should recommend we reject the *conceptual* explanation as the redundant one. I believe that similar things could be said even if they assert that all particular moral facts are made by conceptual truths, if we accept what I said before about conceptual explanation regarding vixen or causation being implausible. Once they grant that there may be two parallel explanations for the moral facts and are forced to accept some sort of disjunctivism about explanation in general (conceptual explanation is fine here, but not over there), if there is over determination in the moral case we should reject the explanation type that is the one that fails to be universal. I hold that there will either be universal overdetermination (which seems implausible given cases like causation) or the conceptual explanations will be redundant and eliminable.

5. Pluralism, Explanatory Principles, and the Cartwright Problem

A complication arises if we want to adopt Enoch's explanation of supervenience while being pluralists.⁵² When we understand moral principles as doing metaphysical work comparable to the

⁵¹ While they are officially neutral on this point (see 37-38), as I read them they seem to need to reject conceptual fact-making for all moral facts. I think this is an implication of how they respond to the problem of moral disagreement (24-26). Because they say that "the fixed points have gained near-universal endorsement across times and cultures" (25), I infer that controversial general moral truths are not moral fixed points. So, hedonist act utilitarianism isn't a moral fixed point (on the assumption that it's true). Presumably this would explain some particular moral facts that the conceptual truths cannot, or else it would be likely to be a conceptual truth as well (having no additional implications). On the other hand, what they offer as an explanation for supervenience (30-33) seems like it would only work if conceptual truths fact-made all the particular moral facts. If there are particular moral facts that aren't fact-made by concepts (if there are instances of moral properties that obtain, but not because of any concepts), it is hard to see how supervenience could be explained by the concepts, given what I say about explaining secondary phenomena above.

⁵² Unlike particularism, this may be an important compatibility for Enoch to maintain. Shafer-Landau says that "the normative flexibility afforded by non-naturalism represents an important advantage of the theory.... Non-naturalism can allow for a plurality of descriptive properties that realize a given moral one. Traditional naturalism doesn't fare well in

physical work laws of nature are supposed to do, as we saw with Mumford's Central Dilemma, issues for theories of laws become issues for theories of principles. Any pluralistic theory of principles will be exposed to an analogous form of Nancy Cartwright's problem for laws of nature, in which there is a tension between having our expressions of moral principles describe the facts about reality on the one hand, and having explanatory force on the other (2004, 71-83). This will be a problem for pluralistic theories, regardless of whether or not Enoch accepts my proposed expanded explanation, or some possible alternative.

Cartwright tells us that "the fundamental laws of physics do not describe the true facts about reality. Rendered as descriptions of facts, they are false; amended to be true, they lose their fundamental, explanatory force" (71). The key example for this is the law of gravitation, $F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$, which claims that the force between any two bodies varies inversely with the square of the distance between them, and proportionally with the product of their masses. But this is not how bodies actually behave. If the two bodies in question are charged, then the force between them is not $G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$, but instead something higher or lower, depending on the particular electromagnetic force. This means that no charged massive objects behave as described by either the law of universal gravitation or Coulomb's law, $F = k_e \frac{q_1 q_2}{r^2}$. So, as formulated here, these laws are, strictly speaking, false.

The obvious first response is to say that these laws should properly be formulated as *ceteris paribus* laws: "if there are no forces at work other than gravitational forces, $F = G \frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$," and "if there are no forces at work other than electromagnetic forces, $F = k_e \frac{q_1 q_2}{r^2}$." However, the problem here is that laws containing *ceteris paribus* clauses, while perhaps true, are not explanatory for any

comparison" (2003, 92). And if we move from a traditional monadic naturalism to a more sophisticated pluralistic (or disjunctive) one, the supervenience question emerges. "We make no progress in this enquiry by announcing that the various underlying descriptive properties can be agglomerated into a single disjunctive property. For we can rephrase the supervenience question by asking, of any complex disjunctive property said to be identical to a moral one: why these disjuncts and no others?" (2003, 94).

non-ideal circumstances. Because in most (if not all) circumstances, there are in fact multiple kinds of forces at work, these laws don't describe or explain how objects behave in most circumstances. The problem is that *ceteris* is almost never *paribus*, so the conditions that the laws refer to do not often apply, and the conditions that generally do apply are not ones that the laws refer to. So, while *ceteris paribus* laws may explain what happens in the exceedingly rare ideal circumstances, as stated they may not claim about what happens in non-ideal circumstances, and fail to explain them.

Neither can we say that there is explanation by component forces, because laws formulated as such also fail to state the facts. This kind of explanation requires that combining the effects of two laws does not change how those laws behave. Thus, the form of the laws must be the same when acting alone as in combination. But this is not met, if the laws are to describe the actual behavior of objects, and so may be explanatory at the pain of being false.

The actual behavior is the resultant of the simple laws in combination. The effect which occurs is not an effect dictated by any one of the laws separately. In order to be true in the composite case, the law must describe one effect (the effect which actually happens); but in order to be explanatory, it must describe another. There is a trade-off here between truth and explanatory power. (Cartwright 2004, 75)

Similar things will be said about appealing to vectors. According to the vector addition story, there must be two forces produced: the force due to gravity, and the electromagnetic force. But in fact there are neither of these forces, but only the "resultant force," which is neither the force of gravity nor the electromagnetic force. That is, "on the vector addition story, the gravitational and the electric force are both produced, yet neither exists" (76). As Cartwright describes it, vector addition is only a metaphor for the way the world is. Vector addition is something we do when we do calculations, but not something that occurs in nature.

Cartwright tells us that "the failure of facticity does not have so much to do with the nature of physics, but rather with the nature of explanation" (74). How does this apply in the case of moral

principles? This will obviously depend on the flavor of pluralism adopted. Let's take as an example Ross-style pluralism, where there are multiple moral principles, each describing an irreducible duty.⁵³ Imagine that there are two moral principles that obtain: one says that we must keep our promises (*promise keeping is required*); the other says that we must refrain from doing harm (*doing harm is prohibited*). Because these two principles can come into conflict, such as when keeping a promise would result in causing harm, rightness and wrongness cannot be as simple as being required by and prohibited by a principle, respectively.⁵⁴ Recall Enoch's explanation: "What explains, for instance, the supervenience of wrongness (including, perhaps, degree of wrongness) on natural properties is the content of the moral norms or principles of right and wrong" (144). This only works as an explanation if the moral principles explain (in conjunction with the distribution of natural properties) the distribution of moral properties. But in this case, the contents of the principles are insufficient to do this. Our action will be required by one principle and prohibited by the other. So, we are in an analogous position to the first step of the Cartwright Problem. Regarding the action in question, at least one of the principles as formulated is strictly false. But this is no new problem for pluralism, and Ross believed he resolved it by claiming that our duties are *prima facie* duties, or *ceteris paribus* duties; when there are conflicts, one duty can be defeated by the other.

⁵³ This pluralism will be adapted so that there are supposed to be definite answers in the case of conflict between principles, otherwise there wouldn't be any supervenience to explain.

⁵⁴ I am assuming that, when two options are exhaustive, at least one must be permitted (though perhaps not required). I see this as following from ought implies can. If it is wrong to do action A because it causes harm, but it is also wrong to refrain from A because this breaks a promise, the agent ought to refrain from A (because A is wrong) AND refrain from refraining (because refraining from A is wrong). But this is impossible, and so a violation of ought implies can. Enoch has pointed out that this consequence can be avoided if we deny (as I was not) agglomeration—that if one ought to A and one ought to B , then one ought to A and B . However, we can generate a different contradiction from the same case if we assume the Principle of Deontic Consistency—that if one ought to A , then it is not the case that one ought not A . As described, the agent ought to refrain from A and ought to refrain from refraining from A , or in other words the agent ought not refrain from A . This did not require assuming ought implies can, or agglomeration, or even "the Principle of Deontic Logic": $\Box (A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow (OA \rightarrow OB)$. (See McConnell (2014) for discussion of these principles.) Any of these principles could be denied, and is denied by some. But I don't think a Robust Realist would want the metaphysics underwriting pluralism to force our hand on this issue, if it is avoidable (and it is), and if we're trying to be meta-ethically neutral (I think we are). So, while it may not be devastating to Robust Realism if it were forced to deny the Principle of Deontic Consistency or agglomeration in order to be compatible with pluralism, it is better for the view if it is not.

But now, we are faced with the second step of the Cartwright Problem, trading facticity for explanatory power. The *ceteris paribus* moral principles may now be true, but as they only apply in ideal circumstances in which principles do not conflict, they do not explain the total distribution of instances of moral properties. Thus, they cannot explain the phenomena of supervenience. Because there are instances of moral properties unexplained by the *ceteris paribus* principles (in fact, most of them because we live in an ethically complicated world), those principles could not explain why *those* instances are paired with the instances of natural properties that they in fact are.

Could we say something to the effect that the causing-harm-ness counts towards the wrongness of the action, and the keeping-our-promise-ness counts against the wrongness? If we do this, then we are in an analogous position to the “component forces” step in the Cartwright Problem. The principles must have the same normative effect on the action (if I am permitted to talk this way) when acting alone as in combination, and so the form of the principles must be the same when acting alone as in combination. Just as this isn’t met by laws of nature if they are to be factual, this is not met by moral principles if they are to be factual. To adapt Cartwright’s previously quoted passage to fit the moral case:

The actual moral property is the resultant of the simple principles in combination. The normative effect which occurs is not a normative effect dictated by any one of the principles separately. In order to be true in the composite case, the principle must describe one normative effect (the moral property that actually obtains); but in order to be explanatory, it must describe another. There is a trade-off here between truth and explanatory power.⁵⁵

When evaluating an action that is *both* a promise-keeping and a harm-doing, the moral principles, if

⁵⁵ I should note here that this challenge does not straightforwardly apply to naturalism, since Cartwright’s problem is directed at theories that hold that there are additional entities that explain the regularities in the world. See my discussion of the relation between the Central Dilemma and naturalism above. If naturalism *does* have to appeal to moral principles as separate entities to help resolve the issue with pluralism, as discussed above (note 39), then the fact that the Cartwright Problem is a problem for naturalists does not undercut the intuitive idea that the naturalist has an easier time explaining supervenience. Why not? Because the naturalist has already given up their advantage by accepting pluralism, and even more so by saying that identity relations depend on moral principles.

they are to be true, must describe the moral property that the action actually has, whether that is prohibited, permitted, or required. But if each principle is supposed to have the same effect alone as in combination, then the principles under consideration could not be explanatory because of their particular contents: *promise keeping is required* and *doing harm is prohibited*.

So, if we are pluralists who are Robust Realists that believe that supervenience obtains, we may be faced with a choice. We either reject Enoch's explanation of supervenience for some yet to be developed alternative.⁵⁶ Or, we accept Enoch's explanation and find a solution to the moral Cartwright Problem. Fortunately, if the solution to Mumford's Central Dilemma is any indication, there might be moves available in the moral principles version of the problem that are not available in the laws of nature version.

One avenue that may prove fruitful, but that I can't develop here fully, takes the structure of the "component forces" story, with a twist of appealing to reasons.⁵⁷ Each principle provides the same amount of reason for or against the action whether or not there is another principle also providing reasons for or against it. Then, rightness and wrongness will be produced from the aggregations of all the reasons, as determined by some higher-order principle(s). Thus, we do not have a conflict between facticity and explanation. Each principle has to produce only one effect: whatever reason that comes with a given natural property. And it will do this regardless of whatever other reasons are produced by other moral principle-natural property pairs.

But, if we go this way, we would have to reformulate both the contents of the moral principles,

⁵⁶ Note that none of the accounts due to Lance and Little, Murphy, or Robinson would be sufficient to explain supervenience for a pluralist Robust Realism. This is because the complications they faced would not be lessened by adding additional moral principles. And because Cueno and Shafer-Landau don't discuss conflicts between moral standards (focusing on the clean cases), it isn't clear whether they have any advantage or disadvantage here.

⁵⁷ This development will look similar to Reasons Fundamentalism as described by Scanlon in *Being Realistic about Reasons*, Lecture 2: "Metaphysical Objections," sections 3 and 4, and Lecture 5: "Reasons and their Strength". Though, it may not quite be Reasons Fundamentalism, depending on whether having reasons be ontologically dependent on normative principles conflicts with the normative fundamentality of reasons. But Scanlon adopts a similar picture when making a distinction between "pure normative facts" and "mixed normative facts" (2014, 36-42), so the views may be compatible.

and the relational properties that moral properties are taken to be. For the Rossian pluralism above, there was a conflict between truth and explanatory power because the contents of the principles were forbiddings and requirements. Since the two principles picked out separate natural properties of a single action, at least one of them would be strictly false or fail to explain the actual normative property of the action. But if the contents of the principles don't directly specify *that* sort of normative relation (forbidding, requiring, wrong, right), there would not have to be any conflict. If the primary normative principles, the ones that specify certain natural properties and a normative response to them, instead include a counting-in-favor-of (or against) relation, no such conflict will occur.⁵⁸ Thus, *keeping a promise counts in favor of action A* and *causing harm counts against action A*, do not conflict and can both be true. They can also both have explanatory power by contributing as much weight for or against a given action when acting alone as in combination.⁵⁹

6. Conclusion

In an attempt to make nonnaturalism more metaphysically respectable, Enoch attempts to explain the supervenience of normative properties on natural properties by appealing to the content of normative principles. In order for this to be a plausible explanation, the normative principles must regulate the distribution of the normative properties. If this is the case, then normative principles play a metaphysical role that is analogous to the physical role that laws of nature play on realist theories of

⁵⁸ At least so long as there are no directly conflicting principles, ones that specify the same natural property but with opposing normative relations. Presumably this is not the case.

⁵⁹ This does not allow for canceling reasons, like those Jonathan Dancy believes there are (2014). Suppose, as is certainly true, that the fact that someone is your student is a reason to not have sexual relations with him or her. But this reason could be canceled (not merely outweighed) by other facts in rare circumstances, for instance, the fact that the student is (already) your wife. That she is your wife might be a reason for her not to enroll in your class, but nonetheless, the fact that your wife is your student does not count against you having sexual relations with her. We might avoid this by saying that what appear to be situations with canceling reasons are not that at all. We should say that it is not a basic normative principle *the fact that someone is your student counts against having sexual relations with them*, but that this is a generalization that expresses what typically results from genuine, basic normative principles, such as *causing harm counts against action A* (or whatever those may be).

laws. Because of their analogous roles, the treatment of realism about laws in philosophy of science provides some insights into what an account of normative principles must contain if we hope to appeal to such principles in order to explain supervenience. First, there must be a compelling account of how exactly normative principles can regulate the distribution of normative properties. Any such account must settle the ontological status of those principles. Fortunately for Enoch, a compelling answer is more easily available in the normative case than in the laws of nature case. Normative properties will be relational properties, as specified by the contents of the principles, which exist independently of the properties. Second, there are additional worries for pluralists, specifically a version of the Cartwright problem. When multiple principles can compete for effect on the distribution of normative properties, there is the risk of a trade-off between explanatory value and truth in our expressions of normative principles. There also seems to be a solution available in the normative case that is not available to realists about laws, involving aggregation of reasons, or some other *pro tanto* obligation.

But the picture offered here is still not a complete account of the metaphysics required for an explanation of supervenience in terms of normative principles. There are at least three issues that remain to be resolved. First, not every true general normative proposition will be a principle (or at least some won't be explanatorily fundamental), and many general normative propositions will be false. Something needs to be said to explain what differentiates the true moral propositions from the false ones, and the fundamental ones from the derivative ones, such that the true and fundamental ones are not arbitrarily privileged. Second, some theories that hold there are multiple distinct domains of normativity, such as epistemology or theoretical rationality, morality, and practical rationality. Something needs to be said about what would metaphysically distinguish the normative principles of each domain, such that they aren't treated as multiple competing moral principles were when discussing pluralism above. That is, we need an account that is able to respect the possibility of wrong kinds of reasons. Finally, to the extent that it may influence the nature of moral or other normative

properties, something needs to be said about the ‘mood’ of normative principles. Are they structured like indicative sentences, more like imperatives, or in some other way?

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