NATURALISM AND NORMATIVITY

by David McNaughton and Piers Rawling, and Sabina Lovibond

I—David McNaughton and Piers Rawling

DESCRIPTIVISM, NORMATIVITY AND THE METAPHYSICS OF REASONS

ABSTRACT   Simon Blackburn can be seen as challenging those committed to *sui generis* moral facts to explain the supervenience of the moral on the descriptive. We (like perhaps Derek Parfit) hold that normative facts in general are *sui generis*. We also hold that the normative supervenes on the descriptive, and we here endeavour to answer the generalization of Blackburn's challenge. In the course of pursuing this answer, we suggest that Frank Jackson's descriptivism rests on a conception of properties inappropriate to discussions of normativity, and we see reason to reject descriptivism generally. We also discuss the views of David Brink, Jonathan Dancy and Bernard Williams in this area.

I

Even an ethical particularist as radical as Jonathan Dancy believes in moral supervenience—in his case the supervenience of the moral on the natural: 'Any object exactly similar to this one in natural respects must share [its] moral properties.'[1] Frank Jackson[2] poses a challenge (implicitly, at least) to those who believe in both such supervenience and *sui generis* moral facts: if the moral is *sui generis*, why does it supervene on the natural? Such supervenience appears a 'mystery'.[3]

Blackburn's challenge can clearly be generalized to the case of any purported *sui generis* properties that supervene on any descriptive properties (where descriptive properties comprise not

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1. Dancy 1993: 78. Although at the end of Dancy 1995 he tentatively denies this. See also Raz 2000.

2. Jackson 1998: 125, citing Blackburn 1985—hence we shall refer to this as 'Blackburn's challenge'.

3. Blackburn 1985: 53, 56. Blackburn's challenge is actually a challenge to explain a different form of supervenience than the global supervenience that is our central concern, and it is posed to any moral realist. See Section V for further details.

only natural properties, but also, for instance, supernatural ones;[4] and *sui generis* properties are non-descriptive). We hold a view not dissimilar to Derek Parfit's[5] according to which the fact that you have a practical reason to perform some action (or a theoretical reason to believe some proposition) is a *sui generis* normative fact.[6] And we also believe in the supervenience of the normative on the descriptive. But before giving our answer to Blackburn's challenge, we canvass alternative proposals.

II

Most obviously, one can evade Blackburn's challenge by denying that there are *sui generis* normative facts—either by denying that there are such facts or by denying that they are *sui generis*.

Richard Hare, Blackburn and other non-cognitivists take (roughly speaking) the former approach. Generalizing Hare's account from the moral to the full realm of reasons, for example, yields a view according to which all facts are descriptive, and normative language reflects our attachment of non-factual pre-scriptions to a descriptive base. Consider the claim that one has reason to conclude that *Q* from the pair of facts that *not P* and *P or Q*. The descriptive facts here are *Q*, *not P* and *P or Q*. There is no further fact that the latter pair provide a justification for concluding *Q*; there is (perhaps) merely something akin to the command 'Obey disjunctive syllogism!' Supervenience is 'explained' by claiming that prescriptive consistency just is simply a matter of prescribing similarly in similar descriptive circumstances.

One criticism of this view is that, by its lights, someone unfamiliar with our normative practices could discern them via their access to the descriptive facts: the normative patterns would be discernible from the descriptive perspective. But, as McDowell complains:

> However long a list we give of items to which a supervening term
> applies, described in terms of the level supervened upon, there may

4. See, e.g., Brink 1989: 22.

5. Parfit 1997.

6. We largely take for granted here the descriptive/normative divide. The claim that one has a reason to act or believe we take to be a normative claim. One point at issue is whether it is also a descriptive claim that can be expressed in non-normative vocabulary.

be no way, expressible at the level supervened upon, of grouping just such items together. Hence there need be no possibility of mastering, in a way that would enable one to go on to new cases, a term that is to function at the level supervened upon, but is to group together exactly the items to which competent users would apply the supervening term. Understanding why just those things belong together may essentially require understanding the supervening term.[7]

This 'pattern problem' has, then, been wielded against Hare and other non-cognitivists. The defeat of non-cognitivism is not our current concern, however: we mention the pattern problem only to set it aside here (as we do non-cognitivism). Suppose the attack on pattern does defeat non-cognitivism, and establishes that there are normative facts. It would still not establish that these facts are *sui generis*. Perhaps normative properties are just descriptive properties. Jackson contends exactly this for the case of ethical properties (see below), but acknowledges that the claim that moral properties are identical with descriptive properties is consistent with the absence of pattern: 'Ethical language may be needed in practice'[8] because, from the descriptive perspective, the ethical might be infinitely disjunctive and patternless.[9]

Our interest here is the problem of normativity. Perhaps the relation between reasonhood and the descriptive perspective is akin to that between the property of being, say, a tin (can) opener and physics. The grouping of the multitude of possible tin openers makes no sense from the perspective of physics, which is devoid of the notion of purpose. Tin openers are physical objects but their grouping escapes physics. Similarly, reasons might be descriptive facts (although, we contend, the fact that they are reasons is not descriptive), but their grouping into reasons might make no sense from the descriptive perspective. However, even if this is not so—even if there is no pattern problem—the problem of normativity remains. We maintain (along with many others, such as Parfit 1997) that there are irreducibly normative facts; and this latter claim is independent of the pattern problem.

7. McDowell 1998: 202.

8. Jackson 1998: 124.

9. But see Jackson, Pettit, and Smith 2000 for an argument in favour of descriptive patterns in ethical discourse. See also McNaughton and Rawling 2000.

Consider the following six propositions:

(1)   A has reason to ϕ.
(2)   A's ϕ-ing fits a certain purely descriptively specified role R.
(3)   A's ϕ-ing increases the general happiness.
(4)   (1) if and only if (2).
(5)   (2) if and only if (3).
(6)   (1) if and only if (3).

Suppose that the pattern problem for practical reasons has a particularly simple solution in the form of (6). (We use (4), (5) and (6) for illustrative purposes only: we are not committed to any of them.) Following Parfit we can draw a tripartite distinction concerning (6)'s significance. (6)'s truth is consistent with each of the following three positions: (1) and (3) 'might mean the same, or report the same fact in two different ways, or report two very different facts'.[10] All three positions are forms of normative realism, but the first is 'analytically reductive', the second is 'non-analytically reductive', and the third is 'non-reductive'.[11]

Roughly speaking, (4) expresses a generalization to practical reasons as a whole of Jackson's 'moral functionalism'.[12] And, by analogy with this view, we shall suppose that (4) is something we would arrive at via *a priori* analysis. (5), on the other hand, might be contingent *a posteriori* (we shall suppose it is). (6), which is entailed by (4) and (5), is *a posteriori*, but its modal status, and that of (4), remain open until we fix the interpretation of (4).

If (4) is 'read as a piece of reference-fixing'[13] (call this view 'RF'), then (4) is contingent and (6) is necessary: when we look for reasonhood in a non-actual world, w, we locate there whatever it is 'that fills the [reason] role [R] in the *actual* world'[14]— i.e., increasing the general happiness. Thus (6) holds in all worlds, but (4) does not (what fills the reason role R in w might not be that which increases the general happiness in w: (5) is contingent). If, on the other hand, (4) is read as 'giving the meaning of [reason] in the traditional sense'[15] (call this view 'MT'),

10. Parfit 1997: 109.
11. Ibid.: 108.
12. Jackson 1998: 140 ff.
13. Ibid.: 145.
14. Ibid.: 144.
15. Ibid.: 143.

then (4) is necessary and (6) is contingent: when we look for reasonhood in a non-actual world, w, we locate there whatever it is that fills R in w (which, as just noted, might not be that which increases the general happiness in w).

On neither RF nor MT do (1) and (3) mean the same. But, to continue the analogy with Jackson's moral functionalism, both views are intended to be analytically reductive nonetheless, in the sense that, according to both, we can arrive via *a priori* analysis at the identification of the property of being a practical reason with the property of fitting a purely descriptively specified role: the fact that A has reason to ϕ is identical with the fact that A's ϕ-ing fits a certain purely descriptively specified role, all that remains open is the location of the fitting. And both the identity and the location of the fitting are matters to be determined by *a priori* analysis.[16] One of Jackson's disagreements with 'Cornell realists' (such as Brink 1989, whom we discuss below) is over the possibility of arriving at something like (4) by *a priori* analysis.[17] Oversimplifying somewhat, the Cornell realists appeal to Moore's open question argument to challenge the *a priori* status of (4), and Jackson responds by pointing out that *a priori* entailments can be 'unobvious'—'We can make sense of doubting the result of the complex story that ... functionalism says leads from the descriptive to the [normative].'[18]

Our primary concern is with the issue of reduction, *a priori* or not. And, in line with Parfit's tripartite distinction above, one might ask: what of interpreting (4) as true but non-reductive? Why might it not be the case that (4) holds, and yet (1) and (2) report very different facts? This is not ruled out by any part of Jackson's view that we have mentioned so far. Rather, it is Jackson's view of properties that drives his reductionism.

III

According to Jackson,[19] a descriptive term is (roughly) one that 'belong[s] to the "is" side of the famous "is-ought" debate'. (He acknowledges[20] that the divide between ethical and descriptive

16. See Jackson 1998: 144.
17. Ibid.: 144ff.
18. Ibid.: 151; see also Parfit 1997: 121.
19. Ibid.: 113.
20. Ibid.: 120.

vocabulary may not be sharp; we leave aside such complications here.) Granting that we also have a grip on what constitutes ethical vocabulary, we can understand Jackson's statement of the *a priori* unrestricted global[21] supervenience of the ethical on the descriptive:

(S)   For all [possible worlds] w and w*, if w and w* are exactly alike descriptively, then they are exactly alike ethically.[22]

From this Jackson argues for descriptivism: the view that ethical properties are descriptive properties.[23] Let 'x is D_i' contain only descriptive vocabulary and fully describe act x and its world w_i. Suppose x is morally right in w_i. Then, by (S) conjoined with the principle that 'any act descriptively the same as a right world-mate is right,'[24] 'x is D_i' entails 'x is right'. Now run through all the right acts in logical space, and disjoin the relevant descriptions to yield an infinite disjunction: 'x is D_i or D_j or D_k or ...'— abbreviate this as 'x is D'. By the reasoning just given, 'x is D' entails 'x is right', and since we have run through all the right acts in logical space, 'x is right' entails 'x is D'[25]. Jackson contends that the account of properties germane here is one according to which necessarily co-extensive properties are 'one and the same property'.[26] We can think of a property in Jackson's sense, then, as 'the set of all its instances throughout the [possible] worlds',[27] and we can conclude that the property of being right is the descriptive property of being D. More generally, we can conclude that all normative (substitute 'normatively' for 'ethically' in (S)) properties are descriptive properties.

Given that D is infinite, Jackson acknowledges that 'ethical language may be needed in practice to capture the similarities

21. See also Jaegwon Kim 1993, e.g.: 68. There Kim notes (note 21) that he (Kim) borrows the term 'global supervenience' from Paul Teller 1986.

22. Jackson 1998: 119; 2001b: 654. Note that (S) permits talk both of ethical facts supervening upon descriptive facts, and ethical properties supervening upon descriptive properties—two worlds are alike, say, descriptively if and only if they contain the same entities bearing the same descriptive properties. Where unimportant, we shall be fairly lax about the distinction between fact and property supervenience. See also Kim 1993: 55, 69–70, 154.

23. Jackson 1998: 122–123; 2001b: 655.

24. Jackson 2001b: 655.

25. See also Kim 1993: 70–78, 151–155, 169–171.

26. Jackson 1998: 126.

27. Lewis 1986: 55.

among the various descriptive ways that ... constitute ethical nature,'[28] but, he continues:

> Ethical properties are, nevertheless, possibly infinite disjunctive descriptive properties—there is nothing more 'there' other than the relevant similarities among those descriptive ways. There is no 'extra' feature that the ethical terms are fastening onto, and we could in principle say it all in descriptive language (counting talk of similarities, including similarities made salient through a relation to we who use the ethical terms, as descriptive, of course).[29]

If this picture is correct, Jackson claims, we have met Blackburn's demand for 'an explanation of the supervenience of the ethical on the descriptive ... It is an implicit part of our understanding of ethical terms and sentences that they serve to mark distinctions among the descriptive ways things are.'[30] The implicit claim here is that those who contend that normative properties are *sui generis* cannot explain the supervenience of the normative on the descriptive: on their account, it seems, the supervenience is mysterious.

Naturalism is a form of descriptivism. According to Smith, '*Naturalistic* states of affairs ... are the subject matter of a natural or social science'[31] and 'Non-naturalists want to enrich our ontology with an extra property over and above those which earn their credentials in a natural or social science, neither constituted by nor analysable in terms of such properties.'[32] Questions arise here. Are we speaking only of contemporary science, for example? And leaving this question aside, it may not be trivial to formulate naturalism as an austere view: normative terms do appear in the sciences.[33] If, however, an austere naturalism is formulatable as the claim that normative properties are natural properties, then there may be descriptivist non-naturalists. For

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28. Jackson 1998: 124.
29. Ibid.: 124–125.
30. Ibid.: 125.
31. Smith 1994: 17.
32. Ibid.: 25.
33. But see Smith 1994, note 1 to Ch. 2: 203–4.

example, given that the property of being God is not natural,[34] naturalism rules out divine command theory. But a divine command theorist might be a descriptivist: she might identify moral properties with the relevant properties of being divinely commanded, proscribed or permitted;[35] and these latter would appear to be descriptive properties by Jackson's criterion.

Given Jackson's account of properties (and we know of no comparably clear account in this literature: see the discussion of Brink and Dancy below), his descriptivism is hard to deny. The picture, we take it, is this. Each possible world is populated with entities such as objects, actions and (other) events. These entities are then grouped into various properties (a property being its set of instances across the worlds), and we can divide them into descriptive equivalence classes: two entities belong to the same descriptive equivalence class if and only if the same descriptive terms are true of them. By the global supervenience of the normative on the descriptive, no two elements of the same descriptive equivalence class differ normatively. Thus any normative property is a union of descriptive equivalence classes—and this is all that Jackson's descriptivism amounts to. In order to deny it, it seems that one must deny global supervenience (which we do not) and maintain that there are two elements of the same descriptive equivalence class that differ in normative terms.

However, there is another route to its denial. Jackson's descriptivism rests not only on (S), but also on the view of properties as the sets of their instances. And this notion of a property we see as inappropriate for discussions of normativity. Furthermore our reason for rejecting this view of properties in this context gives us, we think, one reason to reject reductive descriptivism generally.

IV

For present purposes, we can agree that reasons are descriptive facts.[36] What is always a *sui generis* normative fact, we maintain,

34. We are not sure of this. Witches are not natural, but the property of being a witch is not ruled out as a subject of scientific study. Perhaps the same applies to the property of being God.

35. See Brink, 1989: 22, 156.

36. We leave aside here the issue of whether reasons themselves might be normative. For example, that ϕ-ing would in part atone for my colleague's failure in his duty (Eve Garrard's suggestion), or would be the just thing to do, might seem to be reasons

is the further fact, on the occasions when there is one, that some fact is a reason.[37] Suppose it is a fact that

(E)   A would enjoy fell-walking.

Then there is a further fact: the fact that

(F)   (E) gives A a reason to fell-walk.

It is (F) that is a normative fact. Someone who insists that all reasons are descriptive facts might yet be committed to *sui generis* normative facts, as, indeed, might someone who insists that all reasons are natural facts. Consider, for instance, Smith's remark that his 'analysis will allow us to square our moral talk with a broader naturalism ... because it will tell us that our moral concepts, like rightness, are themselves concepts of reasons for action, *reasons that can in turn be identified with natural features of our circumstances.*'[38] One could agree that reasons are 'natural features of our circumstances'—that, say, A would enjoy fell-walking is one such—whilst denying that the following feature of A's circumstances is natural (or descriptive): that A would enjoy fell-walking is a reason for her to walk the fells.[39]

There is room to reject Jackson's descriptivism because of its view of properties as the sets of their instances across worlds. As Lewis notes,[40] some find this view objectionable because it has the consequence that, for example, triangularity and trilaterality are the same property (as are, by Gödel's completeness theorem, the properties of being syntactically and semantically valid arguments in first order logic). Lewis himself is fairly eclectic about the conception of a property: 'Don't we want to say that [triangularity and trilaterality] are two different properties? Sometimes

to ϕ. Our current (tentative) line is to suggest that, wherever there are reasons, there are basic reasons that are descriptive: in the case of my colleague's failure, for instance, the basic reason for me to atone might be the circumstance that constituted his failure and the fact that he is my colleague.

37. Cf. Parfit 1997: 124.

38. Smith 1994: 58 (our emphasis).

39. Note that the non-naturalist need not be committed to the existence of non-natural entities in the sense of non-natural beings, objects, acts or (other) events. But, as we have seen in discussing divine command theory, she could be, and remain a descriptivist in Jackson's sense.

40. Lewis 1986, p. 55.

we do, sometimes we don't.'[41] Our view is that in the arena of
normativity we have good reason not to view properties as their
sets of instances.

We have spoken of normative facts of the form:

> Circumstance C is a reason for A to ϕ.

We deny, whereas Jackson contends, that this is also a descriptive
fact (the pattern problem is irrelevant to this disagreement—see
below). And we can answer Blackburn's challenge to explain
supervenience.

Our dispute with Jackson can be brought out by putting mat-
ters in terms of properties in his sense. On his picture, reason-
hood can be thought of as a set of ordered triples across possible
worlds: $\langle C, A, \phi \rangle$ is an element of reasonhood just in case circum-
stance C is a reason for A to ϕ. The property of redness does
not vary from world to world because, although the set of red
objects in world w is not identical to the set of red objects in w*,
the set of red objects across all the worlds is fixed. Similarly,
although what A has reason to do in w might differ from what
she (or her counterpart, perhaps) has reason to do in w*, reason-
hood is fixed across the worlds.

Now suppose, for the sake of illustration, that the pattern
problem has the simple solution RF, suggested above—suppose,
that is, that necessarily C is a reason for A to ϕ just in case A's
ϕ-ing in C increases happiness, so that, across all the possible
worlds:

(7) $\{\langle C, A, \phi \rangle$: C is a reason for A to $\phi\} =$
      $\{\langle C, A, \phi \rangle$: A's ϕ-ing in C increases happiness$\}$.

For Jackson, this equality would indicate that we have only one
property here. Or suppose MT, which yields the trans-world:

(8) $\{\langle C, A, \phi \rangle$: C is a reason for A to $\phi\} =$
      $\{\langle C, A, \phi \rangle$: A's ϕ-ing in C fits R$\}$.

Again, for Jackson, there is only one property here.

But it seems that, granting (7), if C is a reason for A to ϕ this
is *because* A's ϕ-ing in C would increase happiness. Suppose the
situation is such that Anne's reading to Betty would please both

41. Ibid.

and is otherwise anodyne (i.e., does not decrease happiness elsewhere), then Anne has reason to read to Betty because of this. Or, granting (8), if C is a reason for A to ϕ this is *because* A's ϕ-ing in C would fit R. And if one property holds because of another, it would seem that, equations such as (7) and (8) notwithstanding, they are not the same property, at least on one relevant conception (cf. Plato's *Euthyphro*).

We deny, then, that equations such as (7) or (8) furnish property reduction. And, we contend, whatever putative identities the reductive descriptivist sends our way will fall prey to the same complaint: at best, the relevant normative property will hold because of, and thus be distinct from, the descriptive. Thus we have reason to reject descriptivism generally, if descriptivism is the claim that each normative property is identical with some descriptive property. (Brink 1989 sees his own view as naturalist, but proposes that moral properties may be constituted by, rather than identical with, natural properties: we discuss his view in Section VII.)

How do we answer Blackburn's challenge to explain supervenience? There are two cases. For those not of a particularist bent, there are fundamental normative principles concerning what is a practical reason for what, and these principles do not vary from possible world to possible world. Thus they cannot disrupt global supervenience. Other normative facts can vary from world to world, but never in the absence of descriptive variation. We have suggested that if A enjoys fell-walking, this is a reason to do it. Suppose this is true. Nevertheless perhaps there are possible circumstances under which the fact that A enjoys fell-walking is no reason to pursue it, or even counts against pursuing it (perhaps she enjoys fell-walking only because she believes that it destroys habitat). There is then debate over whether we can add factors to A's reason (e.g., she enjoys fell-walking *for its own sake*) so as to make it always favour fell-walking. But even if we cannot, any variation in the reason-giving force of enjoyment here is accompanied by descriptive variation. Of course, even keeping reason-giving force constant, what an agent has reason to do can change from world to world. But this is obviously consistent with global supervenience because her practical reasons are to be found among her descriptive circumstances—to alter her reasons under the constraint of constant reason-giving force is to alter some of her descriptive circumstances.

Particularists deny that there are basic invariant practical principles.[42] Nevertheless it remains the case that what one has reason to do can change only if descriptive circumstances change. Even if there are no modally invariant facts concerning what is a reason for what, all normative variation is still accompanied by a change in descriptive circumstance—if, say, enjoyment is a reason here but not there, there must be a descriptive difference between here and there. In line with our earlier remarks about the pattern problem, particularism is, as it were, orthogonal to the issue of global supervenience.

Supervenience also holds in the case of theoretical reason: what one has theoretical reason to conclude varies only with descriptive variation. If the quarry went left or right, but did not go left, one has reason to conclude that it went right. And this cannot be shaken without descriptive change. (In this case all that can be shaken are the reasons—we have a theoretical analogue of a basic invariant practical principle: its going left or right, but not right, is reason to conclude that it went left.)

Theoretical reasonhood is also irreducibly normative. Although your reason for concluding that the quarry went left— the fact that it went left or right, but did not go right—is descriptive, the fact that this is a reason to so conclude is irreducibly normative. You have reason to conclude that the quarry went left *because* it went left or right, but did not go right.

We introduce the theoretical here for two reasons. First, some authors see those who are committed to irreducible normativity in the practical sphere as 'incur[ring] an epistemological debt [that they] fail to [pay] in any plausible way'.[43] However, unless one is a reductive descriptivist about theoretical reason, a parallel debt would seem to be incurred in the theoretical realm—if we need a mysterious normative perceptual sense in the practical case then do we not need one in the case of apprehending the normative force of disjunctive syllogism? Furthermore, in our view, no particular excess debt is incurred in either case. Why is the epistemology of normative (and hence non-descriptive) propositions to the effect that we have reasons to act and believe any

42. See, e.g., Dancy 1993.
43. Smith 1994: 25.

more puzzling than (as opposed to being merely different to, in certain respects) the epistemology of descriptive propositions?

Second, some may worry about the fact that global supervenience bridges the gap between the descriptive and the practically normative without furnishing deductions (cf. Hume's complaint concerning the is-ought gap). But consider our simple deductive case: your reason for concluding that the quarry went left—the fact that it went left or right, but did not go right—entails that the quarry went left. But there is no deducing from your reason alone that it itself is a reason so to conclude—i.e., there is no deduction from your reason to the validity of disjunctive syllogism. We are riding Lewis Carroll's tortoise. In the simple deductive case, then, the subvenient fact (your reason) does not yield the supervenient fact (the fact that it is a reason) as the conclusion of a deduction. So why should the practical case be held to a higher standard?[44]

In the remainder of this essay, we discuss Simon Blackburn's challenge in more detail, Bernard Williams's internalism about reasons (he might be a non-reductivist),[45] David Brink's naturalism[46] (he is a Cornell realist who, despite his naturalism, resists identifying normative properties with natural properties), and Jonathan Dancy's 'token identity theory' of normative and descriptive properties.[47]

V

We begin discussion of Blackburn's specific challenge[48] by giving Jaegwon Kim's formulations of 'weak' and 'strong' supervenience.[49] (We shall not here pursue the issue of the

44. There is an important disanalogy between the theoretical and practical cases. Although normativity governs both practical and theoretical reason, in the theoretical case the conclusion may be non-normative—e.g., that the quarry went left is a non-normative proposition (as opposed to the proposition that there is reason to conclude that the quarry went left). The conclusion of a line of practical reasoning, by contrast, can only be expressed normatively—e.g., that A has reason to ϕ is a normative proposition. (See also Smith, forthcoming). This disanalogy, however, does not affect our current point.

45. Williams 1981, 1995a, 1995b.

46. Brink 1989.

47. Dancy 1993: 74, 78.

48. Blackburn 1985.

49. Kim 1993: 79–80.

relation between global supervenience and the trio of super-
veniences below.)[50] Let A and B be two sets of properties closed
under Boolean operations. A 'weakly' supervenes on B if and
only if (where 'N' abbreviates 'necessarily'):

(W) $N(\forall x)(\forall F \in A)[Fx \supset (\exists G \in B)(Gx \& (\forall y)(Gy \supset Fy))]$

A 'strongly' supervenes on B if and only if:

(R) $N(\forall x)(\forall F \in A)[Fx \supset (\exists G \in B)(Gx \& N(\forall y)(Gy \supset Fy))]$

(R) captures Blackburn's '(?)' (1985: 50). But we have yet to cap-
ture Blackburn's '(S)' (1985: 49). This is accomplished by
inserting a clause into (W) thus:

(W+) $N(\forall x)(\forall F \in A)[Fx \supset (\exists G \in B)[(Gx \& (\forall y)(Gy \supset Fy)) \&$
$N[(\forall y)(Gy \supset Fy) \vee (\forall y)(Gy \supset \sim Fy)]]]$

The additional clause bans 'mixed worlds'[51]—worlds in which
some things are G and F and others are G but not F. It is these
mixed worlds that 'are ruled out by the supervenience claim (S):
they are precisely the kind of possible world which would falsify
that claim'.[52] Where A is the set of ethical properties and B is
the set of natural properties, Blackburn claims that (W+) is ana-
lytic—that 'it is constitutive of competence as a moralist to obey
the constraint [(W+)].' Furthermore, he claims, the 'realist [can
furnish] no explanation at all of why [this is so]'.[53]

   Assuming a univocal[54] interpretation of necessity across (R)
and (W+), the former entails the latter. One strategy for the
realist, then, is to establish and explain (R)'s analyticity. But
Blackburn denies that (R) is analytic, because competent moral-
isers can 'come to different [moral] verdicts in the light of a com-
plete set of natural facts'.[55] However, first, if this objection rules

50. See Kim 1993: 69, 82–85, 154, 169–171.

51. Blackburn 1985: 53, 56.

52. Ibid.: 53.

53. Ibid.: 56, 57.

54. Blackburn exploits the notion that there are differing necessities, but does not
countenance the possibility that there can be such a difference within a supervenience
claim—cf. Kim 1993: 66.

55. Blackburn 1985: 56.

out the analyticity of (R), why does it not also rule out the ana-
lyticity of (W+)? Second, and more importantly for us, as Black-
burn seems to see,[56] (R) could be analytic without it being the
case that competent moralisers agree on which particular G is
accompanied by a given F. They might agree that, although they
disagree over its identity, there is such a G and whatever that G
is, it is necessarily accompanied by F.

Let A be the set of descriptive properties (we do not think that
supernaturalism is analytically false), and B the set of normative
properties. Let the entities be circumstances, which can have
descriptive properties (such as being a circumstance in which A
enjoys ϕ-ing), and consider the normative property of being a
circumstance that is a reason for A to ϕ. If there is no upper
limit to the amount of descriptive information that can be incor-
porated into a descriptive property, even the particularist will
agree that (R) is analytically true—if by this it is meant that we
can see (R)'s truth *a priori*. (R) follows from the fact that if A
has reason to ϕ, this is because of his descriptive circumstance.
And if we build in sufficient detail (bearing in mind that there
may be no upper bound on its amount) into the description, then
in any circumstance fitting this description in any world, A has
reason to ϕ.

VI

Like Parfit we are not only 'non-reductive normative realists',[57]
but we also believe that there are external reasons, in Williams's
sense.[58]

On Williams's view, all reasons are internal, where an agent
has an 'internal' reason to ϕ only if she would arrive at a motiv-
ation to ϕ were she to deliberate rationally from her current
'motivational set', S, where the latter has been corrected to elim-
inate false beliefs and include all relevant true beliefs.[59] (S
includes not only ordinary desires, but also 'such things as dispo-
sitions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal

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56. Ibid.: 63–65.
57. Parfit 1997: 109.
58. Williams 1981, 1995a, 1995b.
59. Williams 1981: 102–103; 1995a: 36; see also Smith 1994:156 and Parfit 1997: 100.

loyalties, and various projects ... embodying commitments of the agent';[60] and reasons are not 'all-in':[61] one can have a reason to ϕ whilst having stronger reasons not to.)

We shall not argue here, however, that there are reasons that are not internal.[62] Rather, we wish to note that we might not disagree with Williams over the issue of reductionism. As Parfit points out, Williams rejects at least one form of analytical reductionism.[63] Williams agrees that an agent can arrive by correct deliberation at the belief that she has a reason to ϕ. But he (sensibly) denies that this is to arrive by correct deliberation at the belief that if she deliberated correctly she would be motivated to ϕ; hence, he argues, 'A has reason to ϕ' is not equivalent to 'If A deliberated correctly, he would be motivated to ϕ.[64]

Williams could perhaps maintain that despite their non-equivalence the two sentences report the same fact[65]—in which case, assuming that 'correctly' can be spelt out non-normatively, Williams would be a non-analytical reductionist. But if the sentences do not report the same fact, then by our lights he is on the right track vis-à-vis the irreducibility of normativity.

VII

Brink offers no explicit positive account of what he considers properties to be[66] (although neither do we: see Section IX below). But some of what he does say of them, we find hard to comprehend.

He distinguishes two forms of ethical naturalism. Both maintain that 'moral facts are nothing more than familiar facts about the natural, including social, world.'[67] But whereas one form claims that 'moral facts and properties are identical with natural and social scientific facts and properties [the other claims merely

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60. Williams 1981: 105.

61. Ibid.: 104.

62. See McNaughton and Rawling, forthcoming, for suggestions on that front.

63. Parfit 1997: 110, note 21.

64. Williams 1995b: 187–188.

65. cf. Parfit 1997: 123.

66. Brink 1989: 156 ff.

67. Ibid.: 156.

that] moral facts and properties are constituted by, but not ident-
ical with, natural and social scientific facts and properties [where]
identity implies constitution, but not vice versa.'[68]

Brink opts for constitution rather than identity naturalism
because, among other things, he worries that if moral properties
are identical with natural properties, then they are necessarily
identical, and this rules out even the possibility of a certain form
of ethical supernaturalism: there is no possible world in which
moral facts and properties are identical with supernatural facts
and properties.

One of Brink's models here is the distinction between identity
and constitution claims regarding physical objects:

> For example, a table is constituted by, but not identical with, a
> particular arrangement of microphysical particles, since the table
> could survive certain changes in its particles or their arrangement.
> Similarly, moral properties are constituted by, but not identical
> with, natural properties if, though actually constituted or realized
> by natural properties, moral properties can be or could have been
> realized by properties not studied by the natural or social
> sciences.[69]

It is the use of this model that we find hard to comprehend. We
can (more-or-less) make sense of the idea of moving from world
to world and re-identifying a table, or, indeed, identifying
instances of a given property. But we cannot make sense of re-
identifying a property *per se*: properties would seem to be trans-
world entities. It makes no sense to look, as it were, for an entire
property in one world, and then try to re-identify it in some alter-
native world—unless, one might think, we opt for trope theory,
with its tropes or 'abstract particulars'.[70]

But trope theory, at least in what Cynthia Macdonald
describes as its 'classic' form,[71] will not help:

> According to the classic theory, universals or properties, and
> relations are bundles ... of *exactly similar or resembling* tropes.
> Individual tropes (e.g. all the rednesses of all the red things) which

68. Ibid.: 157.
69. Ibid.: 157–158.
70. See, e.g., Macdonald 1998: 333.
71. Due to D.C. Williams 1953.

comprise the bundle ... of exactly resembling tropes with which a given property is identical are then understood to be instances of that property. For a substance to have or instantiate a property (universal, relation) is for one of its tropes to exactly resemble all of the tropes which comprise that property.[72]

Combining trope theory with the countenance of possible worlds talk might allow one to move from world to world identifying tropes of the same property, but, as before, this is simply to identify *instances* of the property in different worlds, not the property *per se*. The latter remains a trans-world entity, and the analogy with a table and its constituent particles remains hard to discern.

We agree with Brink that 'supervenience ... does not imply naturalism.'[73] But we find it hard to make sense of his naturalist claim that 'moral properties supervene on natural properties *because* moral properties are constituted by natural properties.'[74]

VIII

Another author who makes a (tentative) claim of identity between the normative and the descriptive is Jonathan Dancy.[75] But in his case also we find some of his claims difficult to apprehend.

Dancy distinguishes sharply between resultance and supervenience. We are familiar with the latter. The former

is the relationship which we are talking about when we say that one property of an object exists 'in virtue' of another or some others. For instance, we may say that a thing has the property of squareness in virtue of its possession of some other properties. A dangerous cliff is dangerous in virtue of some other properties it has, perhaps its steepness and the friability of its surface ... We often express this relationship using the word 'because'.[76]

Unlike supervenience, resultance, Dancy claims, 'resists analysis'.[77] And it is resultance that gives rise to the possibility

72. Macdonald 1998: 335.
73. Brink 1989: 160.
74. Ibid.; italics in original.
75. Dancy 1993: 73–79.
76. Ibid.: 73.
77. Ibid.

of a 'token identity theory'[78] of normative and descriptive properties:

> There are two important ways in which supervenience differs from resultance. The first is that supervenience is not concerned with the particular case. It is a relationship between classes of properties, not between whatever members of those classes happen to be present in the case before us. No sense is given to talk about the properties on which some supervenient property supervenes here ... The second difference between resultance and supervenience is that no token identity theory or constitutive account of the relation between supervening and subvenient properties is at all tempting. There is no prospect of identifying goodness with the class of properties on which it supervenes (the class of natural properties, probably), nor somehow with the sets of members of that class that collectively belong to the various objects that are instances of the supervenient property. The only identity theory that tempts is ... the one which concerns resultance.[79]

Dancy cites Hume's argument[80] against the claim that there is such a property as wrongness ('vice'), in which, to put it somewhat anachronistically, Hume asks us to look for, in addition to a wrong action's descriptive properties, its wrongness, and contends that we can find no such property. Dancy complains that the argument

> asks you to look hard at the properties from which [wrongness] here results, asks you if you discern another property like those, and then announces that since you do not there is no such property as [wrongness] in the object. ... [But the wrongness] is not another property by the side of those properties from which it results. They *are* that [wrongness] there, according to the theory of resultance.[81]

Given that supervenience does not involve property identity, whereas resultance might, it is hard to make out whether, on Dancy's view, the fact that an act is wrong is or is not identical to some descriptive fact.

78. Ibid.: 74, 78.
79. Ibid.: 78.
80. Hume 1978: 468–9.
81. Dancy 1993: 75.

Maggie Little tentatively suggests that Dancy's resultance token–token identity theory might appeal to tropes.[82] But, as in the case of Brink, we do not see how a resort to tropes will help. The property of wrongness, being a bundle of exactly resembling tropes, is not fully present in any particular action. So it seems Dancy would have to claim that the wrongness trope in this action—i.e., the particular wrongness of this particular action—is identical with one or more of the other tropes present in the action. According to the classic account of trope theory, 'Individuals are bundles of compresent or concurrent tropes; tropes which are, so to speak, "bundled" together by relations of compresence.'[83] In identifying the wrongness of an action with other tropes constituting the action, Dancy would surely remove wrongness as a property: there is now no bundle of exactly resembling tropes that constitute the property wrongness. Wrongness would turn out to be, as it were, a bundle of *non-*exactly resembling tropes—i.e., no property at all.

In our view the fact that 'we often express [the resultance] relationship using the word "because" is a mark that a resultant property is distinct from its "resultance base".'[84] Furthermore, we do not need to appeal to some form of property identity in order to respond to, say, Hume's argument above. Old fashioned instantiation is sufficient. One and the same act may be an instance of various descriptive properties, and an instance of wrongness. If so, then it is wrong *because* of some of its descriptive properties, and hence wrongness is distinct from those properties.

We do not deny, however, that there may be a useful notion of resultance distinct from the various forms of supervenience. Resultance appears intended to capture a kind of dependence, and the relation between supervenience and dependence is tricky.[85]

IX

Two of our central points have been that, first, the fact that we have a (practical) reason to ϕ, or a (theoretical) reason to believe

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82. Little 2000: 299, note 36.
83. Macdonald 1998: 334, laying out the view of D.C. Williams 1953.
84. Dancy 1993: 73, 74.
85. See, e.g., Kim 1993: 142–149, 165–169.

P, is a *sui generis* fact distinct from the reason itself, which is our (descriptive) circumstance, since when we have a reason, this is *because* of our circumstance. Suppose that *P or Q* and that *not P*. Because of this conjunction you have reason to conclude that *Q*, the conjunction being your reason (as distinct from the fact that you have a reason). Or suppose Eve has a headache, and Al has an aspirin that will relieve it. Because of this circumstance, Al has a reason to give Eve an aspirin: the circumstance is this reason (as distinct from the fact that Al has this reason).

And second, we can explain the supervenience of the *sui generis* normative facts upon descriptive facts: the reasons themselves are descriptive facts (or circumstances), and the normative facts concerning what is a reason for what change, when they do, only with a change in circumstances.

We have suggested that the appropriate view of properties for the discussion of normativity is not that employed by Jackson (if Jackson's view of properties held, we might well tentatively[86] agree that descriptivism would follow). And we have taken Brink and Dancy to task in part because they present no well-developed account of properties in their discussions of property constitution and identity claims. We have proffered no account ourselves, however, but have merely made much of the importance of 'because'. We confess that we have no positive account to offer. Attempts to analogize properties to physical objects fail to treat properties as 'universals' under which objects fall. And Jackson's view of properties is, we claim, too crude to capture normativity. However, more needs to be done lest we be accused of simply dismissing Jackson's view of properties on the basis of *modus tollens* and a prior prejudice against descriptivism.

In the end, perhaps descriptivists will find all arguments for *sui generis* normative properties uncompelling because they find the very notion of a *sui generis* normative property incomprehensible, just as we see as a form of category mistake[87] the claim that normative properties could be descriptive.[88] Maybe we can

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86. We hesitate because of concerns over two related issues we touched upon above: the sharpness of the descriptive-normative divide and the possibility of normative reasons.

87. Cf. Parfit 1997: 122–126.

88. In the relevant sense—we agree of course that they are descriptive if 'descriptive' is simply used as synonymous for 'factual'.

do no more than exchange 'incredulous stares' (to borrow an expression from David Lewis). But here is a parting shot.

Jackson contends[89] that if, say,

(9)   x is right if and only if x maximizes expected hedonic value

then 'We should identify rightness with maximizing expected hedonic value ... because [it] will then be *what ... we ought to aim at*.' But what is the status of this 'ought'? It looks like a normative surrogate for the now descriptive 'right'. If we make 'rightness' a descriptive term, we will need normative surrogates. These surrogates will no doubt be subjected to attempts at descriptive reduction. But we contend that other normative surrogates will then be required, and so on. Why start down this path? Non-descriptive normativity cannot be stamped out.[90]

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89. Jackson 1998: 142.

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