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# NONNATURALISM, THE SUPERVENIENCE CHALLENGE, HIGHER-ORDER PROPERTIES, AND TROPE THEORY

*Jussi Suikkanen*

ACCORDING to nonnaturalist realism, normative properties are unique kinds of stance-independent properties.<sup>1</sup> However, many metaethicists reject this view because of the *supervenience challenge*: the nonnaturalists arguably fail to explain why two otherwise identical actions cannot have different normative properties. Section 1 below outlines nonnaturalist realism and the supervenience challenge in more detail.

Mark Schroeder and Knut Olav Skarsaune have recently introduced an elegant nonnaturalist response to this challenge.<sup>2</sup> They suggest that nonnaturalists should take *action kinds* to be the primary bearers of normative properties.<sup>3</sup> The ascriptions of those properties to action tokens should then be understood to be about these tokens belonging to the kinds that instantiate the normative properties. Because two tokens that share the same base properties belong to the same kinds, the supervenience of the normative properties on the natural properties seems to follow, as section 3 explains.

This article develops the previous response in two ways. First, it gives additional support for Schroeder's and Skarsaune's thesis that normative properties are primarily instantiated by action kinds. Hence, section 2 explains two arguments for that thesis based on the work of H. A. Prichard.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 See, e.g., Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*; Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*; Fitzpatrick, "Robust Ethical Realism, Nonnaturalism, and Normativity"; Cuneo, *The Normative Web*; Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*; and Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*.
- 2 Schroeder, "The Price of Supervenience"; Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist." For a resembling strategy, see Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*, ch. 2. For objections to Scanlon's formulation of the response, see Schroeder, "The Price of Supervenience," 136–37. Skarsaune himself got at least a part of the idea from Kit Fine in discussion ("How to Be a Moral Platonist," 245n1).
- 3 Depending on the normative property, we could equally take the bearers to be outcome kinds, character kinds, and so on. For simplicity's sake, I focus on action kinds.
- 4 Prichard, "Duty and Ignorance of Fact."

Second, both Schroeder and Skarsaune recognize that their response works *only if* action kinds have their normative properties necessarily (section 3). In response to this problem, Skarsaune relies on transcendent realism about universals.<sup>5</sup> Section 4 argues that this proposal is problematic both (i) dialectically, as the defenders of the supervenience challenge will object to the additional metaphysical commitments the proposal requires, and (ii) because there are well-known reasons to reject transcendent realism about universals. Finally, section 5 develops Schroeder's and Skarsaune's response further in the framework of contemporary trope theory. This enables the nonnaturalist realists to respond to the supervenience challenge by relying on a plausible mainstream view of properties, the adoption of which does not require any further metaphysical commitments beyond the nonnatural properties themselves.

#### 1. NONNATURALISM AND THE SUPERVENIENCE CHALLENGE

Nonnaturalist realism consists of the following theses:

**PROPERTIES:** There are normative properties, and these properties are instantiated in the actual world.

**INDEPENDENCE:** Normative properties are stance independent.

**DISTINCTNESS:** Normative properties are of their own unique kind.<sup>6</sup>

**PROPERTIES** rules out error theory (the view that normative are not instantiated), expressivism, and quietism. According to the latter views, we can talk about normative properties and their instantiation, but such talk is to be understood in a deflationary way.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, nonnaturalist realists are committed to the existence of metaphysically robust normative properties that can do explanatory work.

**INDEPENDENCE** rules out constructivism, contextualism, constitutivism, relativism, subjectivism, and response-dependence theories. According to them, normative properties are grounded in the attitudes and judgments of

5 Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," sec. 10.7.

6 For similar understandings of nonnaturalist realism, see, e.g., McPherson, "Ethical Non-naturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," 207–10; Dreier, "Explaining the Quasi-Real," 277, and "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?," 1392–93; Leary, "Nonnaturalism and Normative Necessities," 78–79; Toppinen, "Nonnaturalism Gone Quasi," 25; and Väyrynen, "The Supervenience Challenge to Nonnaturalism," 171.

7 Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism*; Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*.

either actual or idealized agents.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, the central *realist* claim of non-naturalism is that normative properties are “stance independent.”<sup>9</sup>

DISTINCTNESS finally rules out different forms of naturalism. It states that normative properties are not themselves irreducible natural properties nor reducible to such properties, but rather they are wholly different kinds of properties.<sup>10</sup> This *noncontinuity thesis* requires that we can characterize the distinguishing features of natural properties. The most promising suggestions are that they are the subject matter of natural sciences, invoked in scientific explanations, known *a posteriori*, causally efficacious, and/or figure in the laws of nature.<sup>11</sup> Nonnaturalists thus claim that the normative properties lack the previous features.

The following then captures how normative properties are thought to supervene on the base properties:

SUPERVENIENCE: It is conceptually necessary that when something has a normative property *N*, it also has a base property *P* such that it is metaphysically necessary that anything else that is *P* also is *N*.<sup>12</sup>

SUPERVENIENCE refers to two kinds of properties and necessities. The normative property in it can be any normative property we ascribe to actions with normative predicates (“ought,” “good,” and the like). As we saw, nonnaturalists claim that these properties are unique kinds of properties, but SUPERVENIENCE itself is neutral about their metaphysical nature.

SUPERVENIENCE also mentions a base property *P*. It is neither a *sui generis* normative property nor a property the correct analysis of which ineliminably

8 Dunaway, “Epistemological Motivations for Anti-Realism,” sec. 1.

9 Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 49.

10 Thus, according to DISTINCTNESS, normative propositions are not entailed by propositions that ascribe natural properties. See Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, 116; and Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 247.

11 See, Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 40; Little, “Moral Realism II,” 26; Copp, “Why Naturalism?”; Lewis, “New Work for a Theory of Universals”; and Vallentyne, “The Nomic Role Account of Carving Reality at the Joints.”

12 See Dreier, “The Supervenience Argument against Moral Realism,” 14–17, “Explaining the Quasi-Real,” 275, and “Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?,” 1393; Wedgwood, “The Price of Non-Reductive Moral Realism,” sec. 2; Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 247–48; Leary, “Nonnaturalism and Normative Necessities,” 80; Toppinen, “Nonnaturalism Gone Quasi,” 28; and Väyrynen, “The Supervenience Challenge to Nonnaturalism,” 172–73. McPherson formulates a different, global supervenience claim for the purposes of the challenge (“Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience,” 210–17), whereas Schroeder outlines the challenge without the previous kind of full-fledged supervenience (“The Price of Supervenience,” 126).

mentions normative properties, i.e., not a normative property as understood by the nonnaturalists.<sup>13</sup> Roughly, we can take  $P$  to be a factual, natural, nonnormative property, though these characterizations are not metaethically neutral.<sup>14</sup>  $P$  can also be complex: a conjunctive property of having  $p_1, p_2, \dots$ , and  $p_n$  where these properties are intrinsic and relational nonnormative properties of a given action. SUPERVENIENCE then claims that a part of the meaning of normative concepts is that, when something has a normative property, it also has a base property, the having of which *metaphysically necessitates* having that normative property.

Consider Ann, who helps an elderly person across the road, and the conjunction of all the nonnormative properties of this action.<sup>15</sup> This property includes all the nonnormative features of the action, including Ann's motivations and the action's consequences. Intuitively we also think that Ann did something good. Imagine then that Ben accepts this but goes on to describe another action exactly like Ann's, which has all the same base properties and only those. Ben then, however, claims that even if Ann does something good, the other action is not good at all. Here we would think that Ben is confused, incompetent with the normative terminology. Ben cannot, for example, describe what makes Ann's action good and the second action not good, given that both actions are otherwise identical. Of course, Ann's action could have been not good too, but only in the sense that, if that action had been different, it would have been not good.

Cases like this illuminate and support SUPERVENIENCE. They suggest that two actions cannot have different normative properties unless they differ in some more basic respect, and they also illustrate the idea that the metaphysically necessary connection between the two different kinds of properties is required by conceptual necessity.

We then have all the elements of the supervenience challenge.<sup>16</sup> The non-naturalist realists claim that the supervening normative properties and the

13 McPherson, "Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," 213–14.

14 McPherson, "Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," 214–15, and "Supervenience in Ethics," sec. 1.1; Sturgeon, "Doubts about the Supervenience of the Evaluative."

15 This example draws from Hare, *The Language of Morals*, 81; and Dreier, "The Supervenience Argument against Moral Realism," 16, "Explaining the Quasi-Real," 276, and "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Realism?," 1395–96. See also Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, 116.

16 See Hare, *The Language of Morals*, sec. 10.2; and Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, essays 6 (esp. pp. 118–19) and 7. For the historical development of the argument, see Dreier, "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?," sec. 1.2. My presentation follows Schroeder's second way of formulating the challenge ("The Price of Supervenience," 127–28). See also Dreier, "The Supervenience Argument against Moral Realism," 16–17, and "Explaining the Quasi-Real," 274–76; Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, 20; Ridge,

nonnormative base properties are *discontinuous*. If SUPERVENIENCE is true, they also must grant that there is a metaphysically necessary connection between these discontinuous properties.

There are necessary connections between seemingly discontinuous properties elsewhere too. For example, it is metaphysically necessary that anything that is hot has the property of having high average kinetic energy of particles. Here, however, we have an explanation of the necessary connection: the former property is reducible to the latter. Philosophers, thus, generally tend to explain necessary connections between seemingly discontinuous properties by showing that one of the properties can be (i) analyzed in terms of, (ii) reduced to, or (iii) identified with the other property. However, the nonnaturalist realists cannot rely on these explanations because for them the normative properties are *sui generis* in a way that blocks analyses, reductions, and identities.<sup>17</sup>

The threat, then, is that the nonnaturalist realists must grant that the necessary metaphysical connection in question is *brute*—a connection that cannot be explained.<sup>18</sup> Yet, an attractive methodological principle is that a “commitment to brute necessary connections between discontinuous properties counts significantly against a view.”<sup>19</sup> The supervenience challenge, then, is that the nonnaturalist realists must provide an explanation of the necessary metaphysical connection between the normative properties and their base properties that is compatible with the normative properties being discontinuous, or otherwise, we have good reasons to prefer other metaethical views that can avoid similar brute connections.<sup>20</sup>

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“Anti-Reductionism and Supervenience,” sec. 1; McPherson, “Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience,” sec. 3, and “Supervenience in Ethics,” sec. 4; Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 249–50, 266; Leary, “Nonnaturalism and Normative Necessities,” 80–81; Toppinen, “Nonnaturalism Gone Quasi,” 28; and Väyrynen, “The Supervenience Challenge to Nonnaturalism,” 174. For a general discussion, see Van Cleve, “Brute Necessity.”

17 This is why there is no supervenience challenge for the naturalist versions of realism as natural properties supervene trivially on the natural base properties (Dreier, “The Supervenience Argument against Moral Realism,” and “Explaining the Quasi-Real,” 277; McPherson, “Supervenience in Ethics,” secs. 4.1–4.2). Expressivists have also argued that they do not face the challenge (Hare, *The Language of Morals*, 14; Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, 122, 137; Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, 90–98), but this is challenged by Dreier (“Explaining the Quasi-Real”). For a response, see Toppinen, “Nonnaturalism Gone Quasi.”

18 Gibbard, *Thinking How to Live*, 20.

19 McPherson, “Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience,” 217–18.

20 Some philosophers, such as Shoemaker (“Causality and Properties”) and Swyer (“The Nature of Natural Laws”), reject the previous Humean assumption and argue for brute metaphysical necessary connections between properties. If they are correct, the supervenience challenge for the nonnaturalist realists collapses and needs no answer. I merely

It is important to emphasize here that SUPERVENIENCE contains two necessities: one conceptual and one metaphysical. The supervenience challenge is to explain the second—metaphysical—necessity. The first conceptual necessity tells us only that if there are normative properties, they must be metaphysically necessitated by the base properties. This conceptual truth calls for a conceptual explanation, but those conceptual explanations will be metaethically neutral.<sup>21</sup> They are even compatible with error theory—the view that there are no normative properties that are so related to the base properties. What the nonnaturalists must then explain is the second metaphysical necessity—that is, how there can be normative properties that are related to the base properties as the conceptual truth requires them to be connected. For this reason, I focus below solely on explaining the second metaphysical necessity.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. NORMATIVE PROPERTIES AND KINDS

There are many nonnaturalist attempts to respond to the previous challenge.<sup>23</sup> This article explores Schroeder's and Skarsaune's suggestion, according to

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argue that, even if the previous philosophers were mistaken and the Humean assumption were a reasonable methodological principle, the supervenience challenge could still be responded to.

- 21 Stratton-Lake and Hooker, "Scanlon vs. Moore on Goodness."
- 22 See Ridge, "Anti-Reductionism and Supervenience"; McPherson, "Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience"; and Dreier, "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?," sec. 2.4. Many philosophers think, however, that there are no conceptual truths. Furthermore, others might at least argue that the fact that the instantiation of the relevant base properties necessitates the instantiation of the normative properties is not a conceptual truth even if there are others. Some of these philosophers might still think that the previous metaphysical necessitation relation both holds and calls for an explanation. For this reason, in responding to the supervenience challenge, we can remain neutral about the previous conceptual truth as long as we believe that the metaphysical necessitation relation holds.
- 23 It has been argued that (i) supervenience is a moral doctrine rather than a metaphysical or a conceptual claim in need of an explanation (Kramer, "Supervenience as an Ethical Phenomenon"; for objections, see Dreier, "Explaining the Quasi-Real," 278, and "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?," sec. 2.3; McPherson, "Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," 220–21, and "Supervenience in Ethics," sec. 4.5); that (ii) a conceptual explanation of the supervenience is sufficient and so the nonnaturalists do not have to provide a metaphysical explanation (Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 86; Stratton-Lake and Hooker, "Scanlon vs. Moore on Goodness," 164; Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, 149; Olson, *Moral Error Theory*, 90, 96; for objections, see McPherson, "Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," 221–2, and "Supervenience in Ethics," sec. 4.4; Dreier, "Explaining the Quasi-Real," 281, and "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?," sec. 2.4; and Väyrynen,

which nonnaturalist realists can respond to the challenge by claiming that normative properties are primarily instantiated by action kinds rather than action tokens.<sup>24</sup> I will explain how this idea helps with the supervenience challenge in section 3, but before that, this section provides additional support for one important element of the response.

One essential part of Schroeder's and Skarsaune's response is the conditional claim that "if the normative properties are primarily instantiated by action kinds, the nonnaturalist realists can respond to the supervenience challenge." Sections 3–6 below will focus on arguing for this claim. This claim is also the main focus of this article as it is important for the nonnaturalist realists to specify the conditions under which the supervenience challenge can be met—it can be met as long as action kinds are the primary bearers of normative properties, or so I will argue below. Yet, before that, I believe that this nonnaturalist realist's response to the supervenience challenge is even stronger the more plausible the antecedent of the previous conditional can be made: the more reasons can be given for thinking that action kinds, in fact, are the primary bearers of normative properties. In this case, we would not only know under which conditions the supervenience challenge would be met, but we would also have good reasons to think that those conditions are actually met. Thus, the aim of this section is to make Schroeder's and Skarsaune's response

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"The Supervenience Challenge to Nonnaturalism," 175–76); that (iii) a metaphysical "making-relation" to be captured in the fundamental normative laws is sufficient to provide the explanation (Enoch, *Taking Morality Seriously*, ch. 6; Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*, 40–41; Olson, *Moral Error Theory*, 97–100; Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics*, ch. 1; for objections, see Toppinen, "Nonnaturalism Gone Quasi," 29; and Leary, "Nonnaturalism and Normative Necessities," 87); that (iv) the normative facts are exhaustively constituted by nonnormative facts (Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, 87–88; for an objection, see McPherson, "Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," 226; Leary, "Nonnaturalism and Normative Necessities," 89–93; and Väyrynen, "The Supervenience Challenge to Nonnaturalism," 176–77); that (v) we should reject SUPERVENIENCE and so there is nothing for the nonnaturalist realist to explain (Fine, "Varieties of Necessity"; Rosen, "Metaphysical Relations in Metaethics"; for objections, see McPherson, "Supervenience in Ethics," sec. 4.3; Väyrynen, "The Supervenience Challenge to Nonnaturalism," 180–82; and Dreier, "Is There a Supervenience Problem for Robust Moral Realism?," sec. 2.5); that (vi) supervenience can be explained by relying on the essences of normative properties (Leary, "Nonnaturalism and Normative Necessities"; for an objection see McPherson, "Ethical Nonnaturalism and the Metaphysics of Supervenience," 223); and that (vii) the objection relies on flawed principles of modal logic (Wedgwood, "The Price of Non-Reductive Moral Realism"; for an objection see Schmitt and Schroeder, "Supervenience Arguments under Relaxed Assumptions").

24 Schroeder, "The Price of Supervenience"; Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist."



stronger by providing additional support for the claim that the primary bearers of normative properties are action kinds.<sup>25</sup>

The claim that normative properties are primarily instantiated by action kinds was first put forward by H. A. Prichard, which is why it has become known as “the Prichard point.”<sup>26</sup> There are two independent kinds of support for this claim. The first relies on our intuitions about what we ought to do, whereas the second relies on an argument first put forward by Prichard himself.

To get a sense of the first, intuitive type of support, let us focus on *ought* as a paradigmatic normative property. Here is an intuitive reason to think that this property is primarily instantiated by action kinds.<sup>27</sup>

If I owe you five dollars, I ought to pay you the money back when you ask for it. Yet, consider the different ways in which I could do so: either today or tomorrow, in cash or by check, graciously or churlishly, here or there . . . The intuitive thought is that, taken individually, none of these specific action tokens has the property of being what I ought to do. Rather, what has that property is the more general action kind—the kind to which most action tokens that consist of me paying you back belong.<sup>28</sup>

Prichard makes the second argument in the following passage:

But, as we recognize when we reflect, there are no such characteristics of an action as ought-to-be-doneness and ought-not-to-be-doneness. This is obvious; for, since the existence of an obligation to do some action

25 The fact that taking normative properties to be primarily instantiated by action types helps with the supervenience challenge already provides some reason to think that those properties really are primarily instantiated by action kinds as problem-solving and explanatory powers are arguably one reason to accept metaphysical claims such as this (see also Schroeder, “The Price of Supervenience,” 141; and Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 255). Skarsaune, in addition, refers to more general linguistic evidence and furthermore argues that the direction of epistemic justification usually proceeds from general normative judgments about action kinds and empirical information to normative judgments about cases (“How to Be a Moral Platonist,” sec. 10.3 and pp. 260–62). For a similar argument based on Price (*A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*) and Cudworth (*A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*), see Schroeder, “The Price of Supervenience,” 138–40.

26 Prichard, “Duty and Ignorance of Fact,” 98–100; Dancy, *Practical Shape*, 30–33. In addition to Prichard and Dancy, other notable defenders of this claim include Anscombe (*Intention*, 6) and Stocker (“Duty and Supererogation,” 54).

27 Dancy, *Practical Shape*, 31; Stocker, “Duty and Supererogation,” 54.

28 This argument, admittedly, relies on ought being “uniqueness entailing,” on the idea that in any situation at most one action is what you ought to do. Other normative properties, such as goodness, permissibility, or kindness, are not like this. It can be good both to pay your friend in cash and to pay them with a check. This is why this argument does not directly support the general conclusion that all normative properties are primarily instantiated by kinds.

cannot possibly depend on actual performance of the action, the obligation itself cannot be a property which the action would have, if it were done.<sup>29</sup>

According to Dancy, Prichard begins from assuming that we consider normative properties when we are thinking about what we are to do in the future.<sup>30</sup> He also needs another assumption—namely that, if there is something we ought to do in the future, we are already now under an obligation to act in that way then, even if that action has not yet been done.

Prichard's argument then is that, from the temporally antecedent perspective, an action token that does not yet exist but merely could exist in the future cannot now have the property of being what I am actually already now obliged to do in the future. This is because no such action token exists now, before I have done the action, to have that property. It could, of course, be suggested that an action token, when it becomes actual in the future when I do the action, will then have the property of being what I ought to do. However, as Prichard points out, this is not enough: it does not oblige me now that an action would in the future (if I were to do the action) be such that I ought to do it then.<sup>31</sup>

It is more plausible to focus from the previous antecedent perspective on just *how* we ought to act. When we do so, we are explicitly focusing on kinds of actions and what normative properties they have. To make sense of what we are actually obliged to do and of how we deliberate, we thus ought to think that normative properties are primarily instantiated by action kinds. One way to put this is that when I decide to pay back the money I owe to you, this is not choosing an action token like I would choose a chocolate from a box. Rather, it is just to decide that one of my future actions will be of a certain reimbursing kind, which is a kind of action I ought to do.<sup>32</sup>

There are then reasons to think that normative properties are primarily instantiated by action kinds. However, before we move on, I need to introduce a piece of terminology to make things simpler. Following Skarsaune, I will take being a certain kind of an action to be a first-order property, which an action token can have.<sup>33</sup> This enables us to understand normative properties,

29 Prichard, "Duty and Ignorance of Fact," 99.

30 Dancy, *Practical Shape*, 31.

31 This argument assumes that particular actions are concrete events, as most philosophers believe they are. An alternative view is that they are ordered triplets of agents, action types, and times (Goldman, *A Theory of Human Action*). On such a view, particular actions may exist before they are performed, but presumably, their normative properties would naturally, in this case, be instantiated by the action types that in part constitute the particular action.

32 Dancy, *Practical Shape*, 32.

33 Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 268.

given that they are primarily instantiated by action kinds (i.e., by the first-order properties) as higher-order properties.

### 3. THE HIGHER-ORDER PROPERTY SOLUTION TO THE SUPERVENIENCE CHALLENGE

We can then state the higher-order property solution to the supervenience challenge. Section 2 argued that normative properties are primarily instantiated by the first-order properties of action tokens belonging to certain action kinds. Yet, in ordinary language, we also ascribe normative properties to action tokens. We might say:

1. Ben should not have said that.

The key to understanding Schroeder and Skarsaune is to begin from how they suggest the nonnaturalists should analyze this claim, assuming that normative properties are primarily instantiated by action kinds.

The suggestion is that we should understand claims like 1 as “mixed” (or, in Schroeder’s terms, “bastard”) normative claims that are to be reductively analyzed in the following way:

$$\exists K (\text{token}(\text{Ben's utterance}, K) \ \& \ \text{should-not}_{\text{kind}}(K)).^{34}$$

This reductive analysis states that the truth conditions of 1 consist of there being some action kind to which Ben’s utterance belongs such that that kind of action has the normative property of being what one should not do. Utterance 1 is thus analyzed in terms of (i) the action token belonging to a kind (i.e., the empirical, contingent part) and (ii) that kind instantiating the relevant normative property (i.e., the pure normative part).<sup>35</sup>

34 Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 252, 260. See also Schroeder, “The Price of Supervenience,” 131, 141. Here the variable  $K$  ranges over descriptive kinds (of events, actions, outcomes, etc.) but not over haecceitic kinds (Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 252–53). For evidence for the claim that we should analyze normative claims about action tokens in this way rather than, in the other direction, normative claims about action types in terms of truths about tokens (that is, for the ascriptions of normative properties to kinds to be more fundamental than the ascriptions of normative properties to tokens), see Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” sec. 10.4, as well as section 2 above.

35 Structurally, this analysis of claims that ascribe normative properties to tokens is similar to Hare’s universal prescriptivism (*The Language of Morals*) and Gibbard’s norm-expressivism (*Wise Choices, Apt Feeling*) as they analyze normative predications to a particular in terms of general commitments (see Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 254).

How does this help with the supervenience challenge? Let us assume that Charlie makes an utterance that has exactly the same nonnormative base properties as Ben's. Consider the following utterance:

2. Charlie should not have said that.

The model above reductively analyzes this claim as follows:

$\exists K (\text{token}(\text{Charlie's utterance}, K) \ \& \ \text{should-not}_{\text{kind}}(K)).$

Let us assume that 1 is true. The second conjunct in both analyses of 1 and 2 is the same—that there is a kind  $K$  that has the property of being what one should not do. So, if we assume that this element is true in one case, it should be true in the other case, too (though see below). The first part of the analysis of 1 states that Ben's utterance belongs to the kind  $K$  that has the relevant normative property. However, if Charlie's utterance has exactly the same nonnormative base properties, it must belong to the same action kind as Ben's utterance. After all, if two actions have the same nonnormative base properties, they cannot belong to different kinds.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, if the two action tokens had different base nonnormative properties, they could belong to different kinds, one which could have the relevant normative property and the other lack it. The supervenience thesis, however, only requires that there cannot be a normative difference without a difference in the nonnormative base properties, and so we have an explanation of why the normative supervenes on the natural.<sup>37</sup>

There is, however, a gap in this response, which both Schroeder and Skarsaune recognize.<sup>38</sup> It does not work if it is possible both (i) that Ben is in a possible world in which the relevant kind  $K$  to which his utterance belongs has the property of being what you should do and (ii) that Charlie is simultaneously in a different world in which  $K$  does not have that normative property. If that is a possibility, then even if Ben's and Charlie's utterances had the same base properties, 1 could be true and 2 false, and so the response would fail.

Both Schroeder and Skarsaune thus recognize that their suggestion works *only if* the relevant action kinds have their normative properties *necessarily*—always and across all possible worlds. Furthermore, the nonnaturalist realists

36 About this brute connection and the explanation for it, see Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 267.

37 Schroeder, "The Price of Supervenience," 132; Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 267. There is still a question of which action kinds have which normative properties. The nonnaturalists must take this connection to be brute (Schroeder, "The Price of Supervenience," 144; Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 268–69).

38 Schroeder, "The Price of Supervenience," 142; Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 263.

cannot just insist that this is the case as this would commit them to brute necessary connections between distinct existences. This is why it might look like no progress has been made.

#### 4. THE SUPERVENIENCE CHALLENGE AND TRANSCENDENT UNIVERSALS

Skarsaune addresses the previous problem in the following way.<sup>39</sup> Using the terminology of section 2, we can take belonging to the action kinds that instantiate the relevant normative properties to be first-order properties of action tokens. We can then understand normative properties as second-order properties instantiated by the previous first-order properties.

The first part of Skarsaune's proposal is that the nonnaturalist realists should take the previous two properties to be *universals*.<sup>40</sup> The fact that a certain action kind has a certain normative property can then be understood in terms of an instantiation relation between the two properties: the first-order property, as a universal, of being of a certain kind of an action instantiates a higher-order property, another universal, of being, say, wrong.

The second part is that the nonnaturalist realists should then adopt moral Platonism based on transcendent realism about universals.<sup>41</sup> On this view, the fact that one universal instantiates another is not a fact that obtains in virtue of what is the case in this or that possible world or even within all worlds. Rather, such a fact is "transcendent"—one that obtains independently of all worlds.<sup>42</sup> There is thus nothing in the possible worlds that makes it true that the action kind "helping others" has the higher-order property of goodness. Rather, the relevant universals are abstract entities, which exist in a transcendent realm outside space, time, and the possible worlds. They form an invariable framework of what can be the case within all possible worlds.<sup>43</sup>

This proposal provides a nonnaturalist response to the supervenience challenge. The initial gap in Schroeder's and Skarsaune's response was that nothing in it guaranteed that the relevant action kinds have their normative properties in all possibilities. However, the previous addition suggests that the fact that the instantiation relation between a first-order action kind universal and a second-order normative property universal obtains in the distinct transcendent

39 Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," sec. 10.7.

40 Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 268.

41 Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 270.

42 Fine, "Necessity and Nonexistence," 325–26; Skarsaune, "How to Be a Moral Platonist," 270.

43 For classic defenses, see Plato, *The Republic*, bk. 7; and Russell, "The World of Universals."

realm outside all possibilities explains why in all worlds, the relevant action kind instantiates the given normative property.

Here we do not need to add that the relevant action kind universal instantiates the normative property universal in the transcendent realm “necessarily.” This is because, in this realm, there are no different cases or *possibilia* in which sometimes the former universal instantiates the latter universal and sometimes it does not. There is just one action kind universal, one normative property universal, and an instantiation relation between them in one atemporal and aspatial realm where everything is immutable and indestructible. For this reason, there cannot be different *cases* where there could be variation in whether the instantiation relation holds between the two universals. Furthermore, what is the case in the transcendent realm then determines how things are within all possible worlds. We thus get an explanation of the necessary connection between an action kind and a normative property in terms of how these universals are related in the transcendent realm.<sup>44</sup>

If the previous metaphysical picture is acceptable, the nonnaturalists have a response to the supervenience challenge. The problem, however, is that we have been given little reason to believe that the relevant first-order and second-order properties should be understood as transcendent universals. This leads to two problems. First, the solution is dialectically problematic, and second, there are well-known objections to transcendent realism about universals.

In terms of the dialectic, the supervenience challenge objection to nonnaturalism is usually made by those who have deep naturalist sympathies.<sup>45</sup> The

44 According to nonnaturalist realism, which action kinds instantiate specifically which normative property universals cannot be explained further. For why this is not a problem, see Skarsaune, “How to Be a Moral Platonist,” 268–69. The inference above does not move from “immutable” and “indestructible” to “necessary” as this would be a fallacy (the date of my birthday is immutable and indestructible though not necessary). The key is that there is only one case of the instantiation relation between the universals that determines how things are in all worlds.

45 For the naturalist commitments of the key defenders of the objection, see, e.g., Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, 48–49; Gibbard, *Reconciling Our Aims*, 14–17; and Dreier, “Another World,” 158. It could be suggested that Hare had something like the objection in mind, even if he was a theist and thus a nonnaturalist (*The Language of Morals*). This would suggest that naturalist commitments are not essential to the objection itself. Here it is worthwhile to note that in his philosophy of religion, due to his empiricist and naturalist views of meaning, even Hare rejected transcendent God and so tried to find ways of understanding his own theism and religious beliefs and utterances in a way that would be compatible with his naturalism (Hare, “The Simple Believer”). It is true, however, that naturalism is not essential to the supervenience challenge as a person who is a nonnaturalist about something other than normative properties can object to nonnaturalism about normative properties on the basis of that challenge. Yet, given that almost all of the defenders of

objectors assume that everything (including all objects and properties) that exists must do so in time and space and be a part of the causal nexus of the world that can be investigated with the empirical natural sciences. The supervenience challenge captures, in a rigorous form, the skepticism these philosophers have toward views that posit some other kind of entities and properties, such as the *sui generis* normative properties. For them, one reason not to believe in such additional entities and properties is that it would be mysterious how they could be connected to the ordinary natural world in a systematic way as the supervenience challenge argues.

If in this dialectical situation the nonnaturalists' response requires both the discontinuous normative properties and an additional, distinct transcendent realm populated by a set of Platonic universals, the naturalists will reject the view. They will do so already due to the additional metaphysical realm and its entities, which the proposal requires. From the naturalists' perspective, a version of nonnaturalism that can respond to the supervenience challenge but is committed to those things is not any more plausible than a metaphysically more parsimonious version of nonnaturalism that cannot respond to the challenge.<sup>46</sup>

Second, transcendent realism concerning universals has fallen out of favor since Russell's defense of the view due to many well-known powerful objections to it.<sup>47</sup> To see this, consider a case in which an individual has a certain property, say when John has the property of being tall. The main problem for

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the supervenience challenge have been naturalists, I still do believe that dialectically the responses that do not require accepting any additional nonnaturalist elements beyond the normative properties themselves will be more effective. This is why, even if it is not a knockdown objection to Skarsaune's reliance on transcendent realism, I do think it is an advantage of and motivation for my trope-theoretic proposal below that it relies on a general view of properties that is acceptable for naturalists.

46 It might be worried here that this sets the bar for the nonnaturalist solutions too high: that they must be able to convince the critics of nonnaturalism. My concern about Schroeder's and Skarsaune's proposal is more modest. I merely emphasize that adopting it seems to require a commitment not only to nonnatural properties but also to a separate Platonic realm of abstract entities. Insofar as metaphysical parsimony is a theoretical virtue, such a commitment is a theoretical cost and something that leads to additional objections from the naturalist perspective that go beyond the concerns about the existence of *sui generis* moral properties. One motivation of the view below is that it makes these additional commitments unnecessary.

47 See, e.g., Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, vol. 1, ch. 7; and Edwards, *Properties*, sec. 2.2.3. However, for sympathetic discussions, see Bealer, "Universals and Properties"; MacDonald, *Varieties of Things*; Jubien, *Possibility*; and Van Inwagen, "Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies."

the defenders of transcendent universals is to explain what the relation between John and the tallness universal is here.

The first suggestion is that each particular that shares a given property *participates* (or “partakes”) in the universal in question.<sup>48</sup> Yet, it is mysterious how concrete objects that exist in space and time could be “parts” of the universals that are abstract objects in the transcendent realm. Furthermore, because each individual sharing a property would be a different part of a given universal, we would need something further to explain what unifies all these individuals as bearers of the given property.<sup>49</sup> Yet, answering that question was the point of introducing the abstract universals in the first place.

The second suggestion is that the individuals that share a given property *resemble* the relevant universal in some way.<sup>50</sup> Yet, it is difficult to see how this could be, given that individuals are spatio-temporal, concrete, changeable, destructible, and sensible, whereas the universals are nonspatio-temporal, abstract, immutable, indestructible, and insensible.<sup>51</sup> Because of this, some defenders of transcendent universals argue that the relationship between individuals and the abstract universals is primitive—it cannot be explained in any other terms.<sup>52</sup> One important advantage of the trope theory introduced below, however, is that it can explain property instantiation in terms of an ordinary part/whole relation. Insofar as we then have reason to prefer views with fewer theoretical primitives, this is one reason to reject transcendent realism.<sup>53</sup>

##### 5. THE SUPERVENIENCE CHALLENGE AND THE TROPE THEORY

This section explores whether we could explain why the relevant action kind first-order properties have their higher-order normative properties necessarily without positing a distinct transcendent realm of abstract universals. Are

48 Russell, “The World of Universals.”

49 Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, 1:66.

50 Plato, *The Republic*, 597a.

51 Edwards, *Properties*, 23. The proposal also leads to several third-man-type regresses (Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, vol. 1, ch. 7; Edwards, *Properties*, 23–26).

52 Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference with Other Philosophical Papers*, sec. 148.

53 See Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 154. There is also a concern that transcendent realism threatens to make all higher-order properties to be instantiated necessarily. Yet, some higher-order properties are clearly contingent. The property of redness, for example, has the property of being Jo’s favorite color only contingently (see section 7 below; Egan, “Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties”; and Cowling, “Intrinsic Properties of Properties”). Transcendent realists, just like the trope theorists discussed below, would thus need to understand all such contingent higher-order properties as mere relations rather than as universals.



there general compelling views of properties that (i) many naturalists already accept, and that (ii) could also provide the missing piece of the puzzle for the nonnaturalist realists?

*Trope theory* is one of the leading metaphysical theories of properties in analytic ontology.<sup>54</sup> This section introduces it and applies it in the present context. The next section then concludes that, insofar as normative properties are intrinsic properties of action kinds, even in the framework of trope theory the relevant action kind first-order properties have their normative properties in all *possible worlds*, and so the missing element of Schroeder's and Skarsaune's nonnaturalist response can be provided.

According to trope theory, tropes are property instances: the tallness of John is an instance of the property of being tall. This instance is a concrete (it exists in a certain position in time and space), basic particular (it inheres in just one object)—simple, fundamental, and independent.<sup>55</sup> It is a primitive entity called “a trope.” Individuals, such as John, are then understood as *bundles* of compresent tropes.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, a given individual instantiates a prop-

- 54 Fisher, “*Abstracta* and Abstraction in Trope Theory,” 41. For overviews, see Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, vol. 1, ch. 8, and *Universals*, ch. 6; Edwards, *Properties*, ch. 3; Maurin, “Trope Theory”; and Moreland, *Universals*, ch. 3. For defenses, see, e.g., Stout, “The Nature of Universals and Propositions”; Williams, “On the Elements of Being, 1–11”; Campbell, “The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars” and *Abstract Particulars*; Simons, “Particulars in Particular Clothing”; Maurin, *If Tropes* and “Trope Theory and the Bradley Regress”; Ehring, *Tropes*; Schaffer, “The Individuation of Tropes”; and McDaniel, “Tropes and Ordinary Physical Objects.” For a more complete list, see Maurin, “Trope Theory,” sec. 1.
- 55 Some trope theorists have argued that the tropes are abstract as at least epistemically we abstract them from individuals (Campbell, “The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars,” 477–78). For reasons not to accept this view, see Simons, “Particulars in Particular Clothing,” 557. I follow Maurin in taking tropes to be simple in the sense that they are not constituted of entities belonging to some other categories (“Trope Theory,” sec. 2.2; see also Ehring, *Tropes*, 179–80). Furthermore, trope theorists could also think of individuals as bundles of both an individual substance and the compresent tropes (see note 56 below).
- 56 Campbell, “The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars,” 479, 482–83; Williams, “On the Elements of Being, 1–11.” Some trope theorists assume that an object consists of a substratum that instantiates the relevant tropes (see Martin, “Substance Substantiated,” 7–8). For objections, see Campbell, *Abstract Particulars*, 7; and Daly, “Tropes,” 258–59). Compresence is here to be understood as occupying the same point in space and time. This relation can be understood either as an internal or an external relation (see Maurin, “Trope Theory and the Bradley Regress,” 321–22, and “Tropes,” sec. 3.2). The former alternative seems to make all properties of objects necessary whereas the latter threatens to lead to vicious regresses (see Ehring, *Tropes*, 120–21). Simons suggests that, for this reason, we should think that the tropes that form “the essential kernel or nucleus” of the object are connected by internal relations (and so depend on their existence on the existence of other tropes of the same kind as now in the nucleus), whereas the nonessential property tropes

erty when an instance of that property in part constitutes the individual. The relationship between tropes and individuals is thus the part/whole relation.

Consider then the different instantiations of the same property, such as tallness<sub>1</sub> (in John), tallness<sub>2</sub> (in Paul), and so on. The trope theorists then claim that, as instantiations of the same property, these tropes are *exactly resembling* basic particulars.<sup>57</sup> The “universal” property of tallness can therefore be understood as *the set* of the exactly resembling tropes. Furthermore, to accommodate uninstantiated properties and to avoid the result that the identity of a property depends on how many individuals instantiate it at a given moment, we should think that the relevant trope set that constitutes a given property has as its members not merely all the actual exactly resembling tropes but also all such tropes from all possible worlds.<sup>58</sup> The relationship between the tropes and the corresponding “universals” can thus be understood in terms of standard set membership.

There are, of course, objections to the trope theory that continue to be debated.<sup>59</sup> However, here the theory has several theoretical advantages. First, it continues to be a popular view of properties (see note 54 above). Second, many of its defenders are explicitly metaphysical naturalists, who claim that everything that exists, including all tropes, exists in space and time and is a

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of the object are related to this core externally (“Particulars in Particular Clothing”). For discussions of whether this solves the problem, see Edwards, *Properties*, 61; and Maurin, “Tropes,” sec. 3.2. For other potential solutions to the problem, see Maurin, “Tropes,” sec. 3.2.

- 57 Formally exact resemblance consists of an equivalence relation that is symmetrical, reflexive, and transitive. Here too there is a threat of a regress: this would be the case if two tropes were exactly resembling in virtue of having some more basic exactly resembling tropes (Edwards, *Properties*, 62). Campbell argued that we can avoid this problem by thinking of exact resemblance as an internal relation between tropes determined by their very nature (*Abstract Particulars*, 72). For an objection, see Daly, “Tropes,” sec. 3. Another way to avoid the problem is to take exact resemblance as a primitive notion (Campbell, “The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars,” 484; Edwards, *Properties*, 64) or to formulate trope theory in a way that does not rely on exact resemblance (Ehring, *Tropes*, 175).
- 58 Loux, *Metaphysics*, 83n28. This may seem to commit the view to Lewisian modal realism (see Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*) so that the merely possible tropes can be just as concrete entities as the actual tropes. Yet, we can also think of possible worlds as maximal, consistent descriptions of how the world could be. These descriptions include individual descriptions of particular property instantiations. In this case, the relevant trope set that constitutes a given property has as its members both the actual tropes and the previous descriptions of the merely possible tropes that would exactly resemble them.
- 59 For many of these debates, see the literature in notes 54–57 above. For an objection to the meaningfulness of trope talk, see Van Inwagen, “Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies,” 395. For an overview of these problems and solutions to them, see Maurin, “Trope Theory.”

part of the causal nexus of the world to be studied by empirical sciences.<sup>60</sup> Many naturalists, for instance, explicitly rely on tropes to explain the causal powers of objects.<sup>61</sup> In this situation, if nonnaturalists rely on the metaphysical framework provided by the trope theory, this itself cannot be objectionable. Adopting that framework does not bring with it any additional metaphysical commitments, which the naturalists would reject due to their naturalism.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, even if trope theory is metaphysically more parsimonious than transcendent realism, it can still avoid the objections to more austere forms of nominalism.<sup>63</sup> Given that on this view properties are sets of exactly resembling property instances, the view can allow properties to function as the referents of both the singular and predicate terms in sentences such as “Red is a color.” In contrast, more austere forms of nominalism need to paraphrase the previous kind of claims in a language that only refers to actual individuals and the sets of which they are members.<sup>64</sup> It is well-known how difficult finding such paraphrases is. Trope theory can avoid these problems as it recognizes that properties exist as a distinct metaphysical category.

60 For naturalism of trope theory, see, e.g., Campbell, *Abstract Particulars*; and Schaffer, “The Individuation of Tropes.”

61 Campbell, “The Metaphysics of Abstract Particulars,” sec. 3.

62 Here it could be objected that I have not given any reason that would be independent of naturalism to prefer trope theory over transcendent realism. This is because there are objections to both theories (see section 5 and notes 54–57 and 59 above), and both views continue to be defended (see notes 47 and 54). It could thus be objected that dialectically both views are on a par: either equally plausible or implausible. Personally, I do think that trope theory is both more widely accepted and has been developed further to respond to many of the objections to it, but defending the view over transcendent realism is beyond the scope of this article. More modestly, this article can be read as an attempt to show that nonnaturalist realism can be defended against the supervenience challenge not only by relying on transcendent realism but also in the framework of trope theory. This means that the supervenience challenge could have force only if some form of immanent realism about universals were true as the only other alternative, austere nominalism, is problematic for the nonnaturalists for other, more basic reasons (see Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics*, 118–25; and Suikkanen, “Nonnaturalism”). Thus, the more general lesson of this article is that, other than immanent realism about universals, it is difficult to think of any other plausible general account of properties in which the supervenience challenge would have force, which makes the objection less pressing as the objection would require defending immanent realism about properties. Accepting this lesson does not require taking a stand on whether trope theory or transcendent realism is more plausible (and, in fact, one reason that supports these views could be claimed to be that they can be a part of the response to the supervenience challenge).

63 For overviews of these problems, see, e.g., Armstrong, *Universals*, ch. 2; Loux, *Metaphysics*, 52–62; and Edwards, *Properties*, ch. 4.

64 Pap, “Nominalism, Empiricism, and Universals: 1”; Jackson, “Statements about Universals.”

Let us then apply trope theory in the present context.<sup>65</sup> Take Ben's and Charlie's identical utterances.<sup>66</sup> Let us assume that these utterance-tokens belong to the same action kind of deliberately insulting utterances (here, we could also choose a more or less fine-grained action kind). If we understand these action tokens as bundles of tropes, one of the tropes that constitutes Ben's utterance is the trope  $T_1$  of instantiating the property of belonging to the previous kind, and one of the tropes that constitutes Charlie's utterance is  $T_2$ , where  $T_1$  and  $T_2$  are exactly resembling tropes. The set of all the tropes both in the actual and other worlds that exactly resemble those two tropes is then the first-order property of being a deliberately insulting utterance ( $S_{\text{diu}} = \{T_1, T_2, \dots, T_n\}$ ).

Following Schroeder's and Skarsaune's suggestion, the previous first-order property,  $S_{\text{diu}}$ , is the primary bearer of the normative property of being wrong. Translated to trope theory, this is the claim that the set that has all the "being an insulting utterance" tropes as its members itself instantiates a further property of wrongness. In other words, the trope  $R_1$  of instantiating wrongness is one of the tropes that is compresent with the set  $S_{\text{diu}}$ —the first-order property of being an insulting utterance.<sup>67</sup>

65 Shafer-Landau responded to the supervenience challenge by relying on the idea that normative properties are realized by descriptive properties (*Moral Realism*, 77). Ridge translated this view to the language of trope theory ("Anti-Reductionism and Supervenience," 341–42). According to the resulting view, every normative trope is constituted by a cluster of descriptive tropes even if the normative types are not identical with the descriptive types. Ridge argued that this view fails because it will have to assume the kind of necessary connections between distinct entities that are problematic in the first place ("Anti-Reductionism and Supervenience," 343).

66 See section 3 above.

67 Here the nonnaturalist cannot claim, as many trope theorists would (see McKittrick, "Real Potential," sec. 1.1.1), that the higher-order property of wrongness is the set of the different first-order sets of being certain kinds of an action as then the proposal would collapse into naturalism. This is why the additional wrongness trope is needed at the second-order level (though some trope theorists are skeptical about such higher-order tropes—see, e.g., Heil, *From an Ontological Point of View*, 119). Furthermore, the trope theorists who rely on higher-order tropes to give an account of the higher-order properties have to adopt a level-specific account of how the higher-order tropes constitute higher-order properties via set-membership. This entails that, even if (i) the relevant higher-order trope is compresent with the first-order tropes that belong to the set of exactly resembling tropes that constitute the first-order property (so as to make sense of the relevant instantiation relation) and (ii) compresent first-order tropes generally bundle together to form objects, those higher-order tropes do not bundle together with the other compresent tropes of the lower level to become members of the set of the first-order tropes that constitutes the first-order property. For an objection to trope theory concerning higher-order properties, see Jones, "Nominalist Realism," and for a defense of a higher-order trope theory against this objection, Skiba, "Higher-Order Metaphysics and the Tropes versus Universals Debate."

Two further things need to be noted about this application of trope theory. First, there are also other action kinds that have the property of being wrong such as the actions of shoplifting for fun. Each of these actions, both actual and possible, is in part constituted by a trope of instantiating that very action kind. Call these tropes  $P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n$ . The set of these tropes,  $S_{\text{sfis}} = \{P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n\}$ , is then the property of being an action of shoplifting for fun. This property, too, instantiates wrongness, and so it would have the trope  $R_2$  as one of the relevant compresent tropes.

This means that the property of wrongness would be the set of all the instances of wrongness (i.e., wrongness tropes) that all the different action kinds that are wrong have. It would be the set  $S_{\text{wrong}} = \{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n\}$ . The previous metaphysical picture allows us also to formulate the metaethical disagreement between naturalists and nonnaturalists. The naturalists will claim that the relevant instances of wrongness (tropes  $R_1, R_2, \dots, R_n$ ) have general properties, such as belonging to the subject matter of sciences, being *a posteriori* detectable, having causal powers, and so on just like all the other ordinary natural properties. In contrast, the nonnaturalists will argue that the wrongness tropes do not instantiate those properties but rather their opposites, which makes the property of wrongness, i.e., the set  $S_{\text{wrong}}$ , a different kind of a property.

Applying the trope theory to action kinds and their normative properties then provides a new framework for formulating Schroeder's and Skarsaune's nonnaturalist response to the supervenience challenge. On this view, the first-order property of being an action of a certain kind is one transworld entity spread across all possible worlds. It is the set of all the "being that specific kind of an action" tropes that can be found from different possible worlds where that kind of action is done. As the members of that set—the relevant action kind tropes—are spread across all possible worlds, the resulting set that constitutes the property of being that kind of an action, too, is a single entity spread across all worlds. Now, either this first-order property (i.e., the action kind as the set of the relevant tropes) instantiates a given normative property, or it does not. If it does, there is only one case to consider: the one set spread across all *possible worlds*. This means that it cannot be that a given action kind, say being a deliberately insulting utterance, only in some possible worlds has the property of being wrong. The fact that, if the kind has that normative property, it has it in all worlds hence follows from the account of the nature of the relevant first-order action kind property—from it being one set of property instances spread across all worlds.

This feature of set-theoretic accounts of properties according to which the members of those properties are spread across all worlds is well-known. Lewis, for example, thought that, instead of property instantiations, different

properties are sets of both actual and possible individuals. He was aware that, because properties are as a result transworld entities—literally identical across all worlds—properties have their higher-order properties necessarily.<sup>68</sup> As Lewis puts it, “[a] universal can safely be part of many worlds because it hasn’t any accidental intrinsics.”<sup>69</sup>

The set-theoretic trope theory thus entails that if a first-order property has a certain second-order property, it has that property necessarily. Together with Schroeder’s and Skarsaune’s proposal, this enables the nonnaturalists to explain supervenience. Claims about the normative properties of action tokens are mixed claims according to which (i) the token belongs to a certain kind and (ii) that kind has a certain normative property. We know that action tokens that share all the same nonnormative base properties must belong to the same action kinds, and the previous account of properties entails that if an action kind has a normative property, it has it necessarily.

## 6. TWO OBJECTIONS, RESPONSES, AN AMENDMENT, AND A CONCLUSION

There are, however, two important objections to the previous proposal, and the response to the second one especially has an interesting consequence for how nonnaturalist realism should be formulated. The nonnaturalists will have to take normative properties to be intrinsic properties of action kinds.<sup>70</sup>

### 6.1. An Alternative Account

The first objection is based on an alternative trope-theoretic account of normative properties.<sup>71</sup> On this view, the primary bearers of the normative tropes are particular first-order descriptive tropes. Ben’s utterance, for example, would, according to this view, have as its part a descriptive trope of deliberately insulting someone, which would then bear the second-order normative trope of being wrong. The generalization expressed by “deliberately insulting someone is wrong” would then be true because all actual and possible tropes

68 Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 205; Egan, “Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties,” 49–50.

69 Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 205n6. Lewis did not think that this was a problem because he did not think that there were any good examples of accidental intrinsic higher-order properties, whereas accidental relational higher-order properties can be dealt with in a way discussed below.

70 Schroeder, “The Price of Supervenience,” 141–42.

71 I thank an anonymous referee of the *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* for raising this concern. In outlining the objection, the first four paragraphs of this section draw heavily from his or her comments.

of deliberately insulting someone would bear a second-order trope of being wrong.

It could furthermore be argued that there are three good reasons to accept this trope-theoretic view of normative properties rather than the one outlined in section 5 above. First, it arguably better fits the idea that the fundamental wrong-making features of actions are their descriptive qualities (i.e., first-order tropes) rather than any facts about to which sets they belong. The ground of Ben's having acted wrongly seems to be his having insulted someone rather than him doing an action of a certain category.

Second, the view seems supported by what many trope theorists claim about the relata of causal relations.<sup>72</sup> According to them, the first-order tropes themselves are the basic relata in causal relations directly and not in virtue of what kind of tropes they are, and causal generalizations are derivative of the facts about these relations. If we then agree that tropes themselves (rather than sets thereof) do the primary causal work throughout the universe, it seems tempting to suppose also that the first-order tropes do the primary wrong-making as well (notwithstanding the greater modal strength of the latter kind of relation).

Finally, it could be argued that the idea that a set could be a bearer of wrongness in anything other than a derivative sense is a category mistake. After all, it is awkward to say that the property (which is a set of tropes) of being a deliberative insult is wrong, whereas it is not awkward to say that deliberate insults are the kind of actions that are wrong. It could be suggested that we should thus prefer this alternative trope-theoretic view to my proposal, and so that proposal cannot be used in a compelling nonnaturalist response to the supervenience challenge.

There are several things to be said in response to this objection. The first is that the previous proposal can explain neither strong nor weak supervenience. It cannot explain strong supervenience as each of the descriptive tropes of different actions are world-bound phenomena. It also cannot explain weak supervenience because each trope is numerically distinct from the other members in its resemblance class, and the nonnatural normative properties (and tropes) are distinct existences from the descriptive properties (and tropes). In this case, there would be no explanation of why it could not be that one trope of being a deliberative insult bears the wrongness trope while another would not. It could then be argued that philosophical hypotheses are supported by their problem-solving and explanatory power. That my proposal can help the non-naturalist realist to explain how normative properties supervene on the base properties is itself at least some reason to prefer that proposal over the alternative trope-theoretic proposal that cannot do so.

72 Campbell, *Abstract Particulars*, 113; Ehring, *Causation and Persistence*, ch. 3.

Second, the proposal is also supported by section 2's independent arguments (and the arguments provided by Schroeder and Skarsaune—see note 25 above) for the conclusion that the primary bearers of normative properties are action kinds. These general arguments are neutral about how we should understand properties, but if we want to capture how they instruct us to understand the bearers of normative properties, then within the trope theory, the only consistent option is to think that the bearers of normative properties are to be understood as sets of tropes.

Third, the proposal outlined in section 5, too, is compatible with the idea that the fundamental wrong-makers are their descriptive qualities, the first-order tropes, rather than any facts about which set they belong to. This is because, insofar as we understand wrong-making in terms of metaphysical grounding, it, too, will be a transitive relation.<sup>73</sup> Thus, if a particular action belongs to the kind of deliberative insults in virtue of its first-order descriptive properties, and belonging to that kind makes the action wrong, then by transitivity, the fundamental wrong-makers of the action will be its first-order descriptive qualities.

In responding to the disanalogy of the causal relata objection, there are two options. First, it is possible to defend the idea that the causal and normative realms are genuinely different in structure. This is because, even if the arguments in section 2 give us good reasons to think that the primary bearers of normative properties are action kinds, there are no corresponding arguments with respect to causal relata. There we have better reasons to think that the causal relata are basic first-order tropes unmediated by any set membership.<sup>74</sup> And so, given how these arguments point in different directions, we should recognize differences where they exist.

The second alternative is to argue that the two realms are, in fact, more analogous than the objection suggests. Consider Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit's example of a glass cracking because it contains hot water.<sup>75</sup> In this case, we can think of the temperature of the water as a higher-order property that is realized in this case by certain water molecules having a certain momentum. Here, even if the momentum of these molecules, rather than the higher-order property, causes the glass to crack, the temperature property is still causally relevant as it can be cited in a good causal explanation. This is because the presence of the temperature property ensures that "there would be some property there to exercise the efficacy required."<sup>76</sup>

73 Fine, "Guide to Ground."

74 Ehring, *Causation and Persistence*, ch. 3.

75 Jackson and Pettit, "Program Explanation," 110.

76 Jackson and Pettit, "Program Explanation," 114.



The proposal made in section 5 can be formulated to be analogous to this model of higher-order program explanations in nature. We can think of the property of belonging to an action kind to be like the temperature property in the previous case. In the same way as the action kind is the primary bearer of the normative property (say, wrongness), the temperature property can be thought of as the bearer of the property of explaining why the glass cracked. In addition, just as the temperature property does not itself cause the glass to crack but rather ensures that there is some more basic first-order momentum property that does so, similarly it could be claimed that the belonging to the action kind property itself does not make the action wrong, but rather it merely ensures that the action has some more basic, first-order descriptive property that does so. We can make this claim if we think that the action kind bears its normative property in virtue of the first-order properties of all its instances. With this picture, it could be argued that the causal and normative realms turn out to be analogous in a way that blocks the previous objection.

Finally, with respect to the category mistake charge, it is important to keep in mind what the proposal is a proposal of. It is true that, in everyday life, claiming that it is wrong to deliberately insult someone sounds natural, whereas any claims about the property of being a deliberative insult (or a set of tropes) being wrong sounds just confused. But, to some degree, this reaction is to be expected. The whole point of the proposal is to make sense of the former type of ordinary claims by making explicit their truth conditions. This is done in two stages. In the first stage, the ordinary claim is analyzed in terms of the action token belonging to an action kind and the kind instantiating the relevant normative property. Then, in the second stage, we attempt to provide a trope-theoretic metaphysical theory of what it is for the action kind to be instantiating that normative property in a way that can also explain supervenience. It is not surprising that at this point we may end up saying things that do not sound right in the ordinary language, but this happens in metaphysics relatively often anyway.

To see this, consider ordinary modal claims such as “Tim can open the door.” According to Lewis, the truth conditions of this claim are provided by whether Tim has a counterpart, a person very much like him but not numerically identical to him, in a different possible world who opens a similar door there.<sup>77</sup> At this point, it could be objected that this analysis commits a category mistake as the original claim is about Tim and what he can do in this world, whereas the latter claim is about what a different person altogether can do somewhere else.<sup>78</sup> But, here too, we should expect that the account of the truth conditions

77 Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, 39–40.

78 Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 45n13.

of the ordinary claims themselves might not be intuitive, and yet whether we should accept the view should depend more on the explanatory power of the account overall.<sup>79</sup>

### 6.2. *Intrinsic and Relational Higher-Order Properties*

The second objection begins from the thought that intuitively there are contingent higher-order properties, which first-order properties have in some worlds but not in others.<sup>80</sup> Yet, we cannot make sense of such properties in the previous framework. One example is the property of being somebody's favorite color.<sup>81</sup> In our world, greenness has this property, but there are worlds where green is not anybody's favorite color. According to the previous proposal, the property of being green is the set of all actual and possible instantiations of greenness. This set is one transworld entity—identical in every world. To say that this one entity would both have and not have the property of being somebody's favorite color would be a contradiction.

This means that, according to the previous framework, even this higher-order property could not be contingent, and yet clearly it is. Furthermore, if we respond to this objection by amending the trope-theoretic framework in a way that it will be able to accommodate contingent higher-order properties, the original concern returns. The opponents of nonnaturalism can argue that the set of tropes that constitutes a certain action kind will be a first-order property that could well have its higher-order normative properties contingently, and so Schroeder's and Skarsaune's response would fail in the way explained in section 3.

Trope theorists have one strategy for making room for contingent higher-order properties. It begins from recognizing that there are both instances of monadic properties and relations, i.e., instances of relational properties. The former instances give rise to monadic properties (sets of monadic tropes), whereas the latter to relational properties (sets of relational tropes). We can then think of the relational tropes as mere relations in disguise—they are roughly the relations that in some way connect entities that are not dependent on one another.<sup>82</sup> More precisely, the existence of relational tropes depends on the very tropes they relate, whereas the existence of monadic tropes does not depend on the existence of some specific tropes, be they relational or not.<sup>83</sup>

79 Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, ch. 4.

80 Cowling, "Intrinsic Properties of Properties," 244.

81 Egan, "Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties," 49.

82 Because of this stipulation, relational tropes cannot connect the tropes of a bundle that constitutes a certain individual.

83 See, e.g., McDaniel, "Tropes and Ordinary Physical Objects," 271–72.

Consider then the previous example.<sup>84</sup> Here we are understanding the property of greenness as a transworld entity, as a set of all actual and possible instances of greenness. This property has two relational properties: being somebody's favorite color in the actual world @ and not being anybody's favorite in world  $w_n$ . We can then understand these relational properties as relational tropes (which are really relations in disguise). The one transworld entity of greenness has the relational trope of being suitably related to the favoring attitudes of different individuals in @ and the relational trope of not being suitably related to anyone's color preferences in  $w_n$ . What we then mean when we say that green is somebody's favorite color when we take this to be a contingent claim is that greenness is suitably related to some people's color attitudes in our world but not in others.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, it could be argued that, instead of consisting of relations to other things, monadic tropes are intrinsic to an individual (that itself is a bundle of tropes). According to one attractive version of this type of a trope theory, these intrinsic tropes are either (1) one of the mutually dependent tropes that constitute the "nucleus" of the individual or (2) one of the tropes that constitute the "halo" of the individual that the individual has in virtue of only the previous tropes that make up the nucleus (the tropes of the nucleus can at most depend on the existence of the same kind of tropes as the ones in the halo of the bundle but not on those specific tropes).<sup>86</sup> The existence of these types of individuals constituting monadic tropes then does not depend on the existence of the tropes that constitute any other individual.

Return then to the action kinds as first-order properties of action tokens and the normative properties as their higher-order properties. Consider the property of being a deliberately insulting utterance. Within the framework provided, this property is the set of both actual and possible tropes of being that kind of an action. If we take normative properties, such as wrongness, to be relational properties of the previous type of a set, then whether the action kind instantiates the property of wrongness is contingent. For example, if we thought that the wrongness of uttering insults depends on which moral code is accepted in

84 Here I follow Egan, "Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties," 50–51; and Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 201.

85 Egan objects that this way of understanding the semantic content of the claim will still make the content come out objectionably as necessarily true ("Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties," 50–51). He argues that if we think of properties as functions from worlds to extensions, this problem is avoided ("Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties," sec. 3). The view below can be translated to this language if we think of the relevant extensions as the transworld sets of tropes.

86 See, e.g., Simons, "Particulars in Particular Clothing." Here in 2 I rely on a hyperintensional view of intrinsicity based on the "in virtue of" relations, as defended by Bader ("Towards a Hyperintensional Theory of Intrinsicity").

a world, the provided framework would have room for the way in which the wrongness of insulting would be a contingent higher-order property. The transworld set of actual and possible instances of being an insulting utterance would in this case instantiate one relation to the conventional morality of the actual world (the relation of being forbidden by) and a different relation to the conventional moralities of some other worlds (the relation of being authorized by).

Of course, the nonnaturalist realists do not accept that account as they think that whether it is wrong to make insulting utterances is a stance-independent fact. On their view, for something to instantiate a normative property is not a question of being related in some way to the conventional morality of a community. Nonnaturalist realists thus think that whether a certain action kind instantiates wrongness depends only on the qualities of that action kind (the first-order tropes that are the constitutive members of the action kind set) and whether those qualities are wrong-makers, and not on anything else. They thus think that normative properties, such as wrongness, are intrinsic monadic properties of action kinds.

Yet, fortunately for the nonnaturalist realists, according to the outlined trope-theoretic framework, first-order properties have their intrinsic second-order properties necessarily simply in virtue of the general nature of properties (i.e., in virtue of the nature of the first-order exactly resembling tropes that are the members of the set that is the given first-order property). Hence, insofar as the nonnaturalists take normative properties to be intrinsic properties of action kinds, they have a response to the supervenience challenge. They can argue that the first-order property of belonging to a certain kind of actions is a single transworld entity, a set of the first-order tropes, that instantiates a given intrinsic higher-order intrinsic normative property (in virtue of the second-order normative property trope being compresent with a relevant set of the first-order tropes). As a result of this trope-theoretic framework, the action kind will have the normative property necessarily (across all *possible worlds*), and so it cannot be the case that different action tokens that have the same base properties (and thus ones that belong to the same action kinds) could have different normative properties.

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