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### MORAL DEPENDENCE AND NATURAL PROPERTIES

I explore the Because Constraint-the idea that moral facts depend on natural facts and that moral judgements ought to respect the dependence of moral facts on natural facts. I consider several issues concerning its clarification and importance.

#### I

*The Because Constraint.* If an act has the moral property of being bad, it has some non-moral property that *makes* it bad. And if we *judge* that an act has the moral property of being bad, we should think that it has some non-moral property that makes it bad. For example, if Caligula did a bad act, something made the act bad; perhaps it was bad because of Caligula's pleasure in causing pain for its own sake. And if people judge that Caligula's act was bad, they should judge the act was bad because of something, such as his pleasure in causing pain for its own sake. These non-moral bad-making properties are sometimes called 'natural' properties-more on this below. To abbreviate, to generalize to all moral properties, and to generalize away from actions: if something has a moral property *M*, then there is some natural property *N* such that it is *M* because it is *N*; and if people judge that something has a moral property *M*, they should think that there is some natural property *N* such that it is *M* because it is *N*. I call this conjunction of views the 'Because Constraint', and I maintain that it is essential to thinking in moral terms.

I shall use 'moral dependence' as the official label for the *making* and *because* relation indicated above. I will say that moral facts depend on natural facts. I will also sometimes say that natural facts are 'responsible' for moral facts, and that the moral facts hold 'in virtue of' natural facts. I mean the same thing by these expressions. I want to note, however, that such relations hold only where a natural fact is the *whole* maker, not just *part* of whatever is the maker of the moral fact.

This dependence relation binds moral property instantiations, such as an action being good or evil. This is one kind of moral fact. Not all moral facts are moral property instantiations. For example, it might be a negative existential moral fact that there are no natural rights. But the Because Constraint primarily concerns moral property instantiations. There are interesting issues about the natural facts that are the makers of negative, disjunctive and conditional moral facts.

The Because Constraint demands that we have in mind *some* natural basis for moral judgements. It does not require that we have some *moral theory* that explains a judgement or that unites different moral judgements. One might simply judge that *Ma* because *Na*, and have no idea why *Ma* depends on *Na*. For example, we might think that cutting up one person to save five is wrong, or that sex with animals is wrong, but have nothing further to say about why that is. We may judge that being an action of cutting-up-one-to-save-five or being an action of having-sex-with-animals makes an action wrong, and we might have no view about whether that is due to the truth of consequentialism, deontology, virtue theory, divine commandment theory, some other theory, or whether it is a basic moral fact.

All theorists who seek to respect moral thought as it actually is should acknowledge the Because Constraint. All varieties of moral realists should want to respect it and explain it. And expressivists and Kantians, in so far as they wish to account for actual moral thought, also need to respect and explain

it. (For more on the Because Constraint, see Zangwill 2006.)

In what follows, I explore several issues that are meant to help explain and to elucidate this principle. Moreover, much of what follows counts as a defence of moral non-naturalism, since the Because Constraint and moral non-naturalism fit well together. Perhaps expressivists and Kantians can say something similar. But the simplest idea is to anchor the Because Constraint in our grasp of the essence of moral properties. Moral naturalists might seek to explain moral dependence in terms of moral-natural identities, but moral dependence is not just a non-symmetrical relation- intuitively it is an asymmetrical relation. So moral naturalists have the onus of explaining how the intuitive asymmetry is an illusion.

## II

*Normative Properties.* I focus on concepts such as 'badness', 'wrongness', 'good', 'evil', 'obligation' and 'duty'. Some of these concepts, or some applications of these concepts, pick out properties classifiable as 'moral'. Some do not. I am interested in the ones that do. I will not take on the task of saying what makes properties, concepts or judgements moral properties, concepts or judgements, or even normative properties, concepts or judgements.

Despite this focus, it is worth noting that the Because Constraint applies with equal force to non-moral normative judgements such as aesthetic judgements or judgements of practical or theoretical rationality. I discuss these cases elsewhere (Zangwill 2001, 2018).

Functional judgements, such as the judgement that something is a good coffee-maker or a good wing, are also subject to the Because Constraint. We should think that there is something about a coffee-maker or a wing that makes it good.

Legal norms are similar: if a car is parked illegally, it must be because of where and when the car is parked. What about sporting and religious norms, which many people might think have no bearing on them or which they may even reject (see Foot 1972)? Such norms must also have a basis. Consider sporting norms. We might think that a goal *should* be disallowed because the offside rule was breached in such and such a manner. Something made it offside. And if we make an offside judgement, we should have some basis for that. Similarly, if something is kosher or treif, halal or haram, then something makes it so. Even if it is said that God commands what is kosher, treif, halal or haram, God still commands it in virtue of something that makes it kosher, treif, halal or haram besides His commanding it; for example, being pork makes food treif and haram. (Whether there are, and we have, further reasons for such commandments is another matter; see Maimonides 1958, bk. III.) There are sporting and religious norms that may be alien to many of us. We may have no interest in the sport and we may not sign up to the religion, just as we may not respect the law of the land. Even so, those norms still hold in virtue of something, and if we make sporting, religious or legal normative judgements, they should have the appropriate basis.

There is perhaps a sense in which some norms give us reasons and some do not. Perhaps moral, rational and legal norms give me reasons, while most sporting and religious norms do not. There is then an interesting question, in the area of what Christine Korsgaard calls 'The Normative Question': we may ask in virtue of what some norms give us reasons while others do not (Korsgaard 1996). But this is not the same issue as considering whether the Because Constraint applies. The ascription of norms, whether or not they give us reasons, or whether or not we take them to give us reasons, must respect the Because Constraint.

### III

'Natural' Properties. How should we understand that on which moral properties depend? In particular, how should we conceive of what are called 'natural' properties?

Moore attempted a variety of ways of making the distinction between 'moral' and 'natural' properties. The variety is quite confusing if we are seeking something definite from Moore. This comes out in much of the critical commentary on Moore's work (see Dreier 2006). We do better to try to reconstruct this distinction without expecting reliable guidance from Moore.

One way would be to say that the 'natural' properties are knowable scientifically (Moore 1903, pp. 38-9, 110-11). But that epistemological characterization is dialectically unhelpful, as Nicholas Sturgeon pointed out (Sturgeon 2003). One reason is that some philosophers believe in moral-natural identities. If so, moral properties *are* natural properties, and there is no distinction between moral and natural properties. Furthermore, there are worries about God's psychological states: they are unlikely to be natural on this definition, because they are not in space and time and thus not empirically knowable. But presumably we want to say that God's moral properties depend on His mental states even if they are not empirically knowable.

Another characterization would be to say that natural properties are spatio-temporal and causal properties. But this characterization may include moral properties, given the plausibility of the idea that moral properties have causal efficacy (Sturgeon 2003, p. 538). This characterization also fails to classify God's mental states as natural.

In the philosophy of mind, there has been some agonizing among 'materialists' or 'physicalists' about what mental states depend on.

The issue was raised by Moritz Schlick in his 1918 book *General Theory of Knowledge* (Schlick 1985, §§32-3). Carl Hempel picked up Schlick's problem and cast the issue as a dilemma: either, on the one hand, we characterize 'physical' in terms of current physics, in which case the thesis about the mind is likely to turn out false, just as materialism turned out to be false. Because there is no 'matter' as previously conceived, or, on the other hand, we deploy an expansive conception of the physical as anything that future physics might come up with; but then it is difficult to exclude mentality from that expanding conception, since it is difficult to predict how the science will turn out. (See Hempel 1969.)

In response, there seem to be two main ways to go: the way of stipulation and the way of negation. In an effective, brief paper, Jack Smart opted to stipulate that biological or neurological properties are that on which mental states depend (Smart 1978). Basic physical science may change in unpredictable ways, but it is not going to deny that the brain exists or that we have neurological properties. David Spurrett and David Papineau opt for the way of negation; according to Spurrett and Papineau, physicalism says that mental states depend on *non-mental* states (Spurrett and Papineau 1999; compare Schlick 1985, p. 291). But Smart's stipulational response to Hempel's dilemma seems preferable to a negative account. First, if a mind-brain identity holds, the brain is not non-mental. Second, it does not matter how weird and wonderful basic physical science becomes in the future, even if it comes to include mental states in its posits. For there is still the brain, and Smart can argue that appeal to the brain and its states suffices for an interesting physicalist claim. By contrast, the way of negation is vulnerable to this eventuality; for it would turn out that there is nothing non-mental for the mental to depend on. Third, the way of negation leaves open the possibility that mind might depend on numerical facts, which is unsatisfactory for an aspiring materialist. Thus there is no getting away from the fact that we need a substantive stipulated conception of what mental states depend on.

There are similar options for the notion of the 'natural' as it figures in metaethics. We might take

the way of negation and say that the 'natural' just is the 'non-moral'. At one point Moore describes the 'naturalistic fallacy' as asserting the identity of the notion of good with *other* notions (1903), p. 58), which suggests a negative characterization of the 'natural'. Or we could stipulate a meaning for 'natural'; for example, that the natural includes mental states, or mental states or physical states, or mental, physical or sociological states. Either way, God's psychological states turn out to be 'natural', which is an improvement on the epistemological and spatio-temporal criteria. But the way of negation looks problematic. To say that moral properties depend on non-moral properties is surely not enough. Killing for fun surely could not be wrong in virtue of the mathematical fact that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and this is because of what it is to be a moral property. Perhaps we can just about imagine Pythagorean mystics disagreeing. But I hope that it is not too closed-minded to think that such Pythagorean mysticism is confused. What can the mathematical fact possibly have to do with the wrongness of killing? We do not only want to say that moral facts depend on *some* non-moral facts, where that might include mathematical facts, or other extraneous matters. But then we need to specify those facts further as being something like psychological, physical or social facts, which definitely excludes mathematical facts.

#### IV

*Natural as Psychological?* What exactly should we include? The trouble is that we want something that is acceptable to anyone thinking in moral terms, whatever their substantive moral commitments. To achieve this, the safest option might seem to be the way of negation. But surely we can have a richer conception of the natural-one parallel to Smart's conception of materialism.

Philippa Foot insisted, as I would put it, that good- and bad- makers must be certain specific kinds of natural facts, ones connected with human well-being (Foot 1958, 1958-9). In her early papers, Foot argued that moral properties have right-makers of specific kinds. And certain things cannot be right- or wrong-makers, such as running around trees anti-clockwise or looking at hedgehogs in the light of the moon (Foot 1958, p. 107). This would give the use of the word 'natural' a point, since it would narrow down the right-makers. It is a stronger claim than the Because Constraint, cast in the negative way. Foot's view assumes the Because Constraint negatively construed, but goes further. The trouble is that it is potentially controversial and so not plausibly something constitutive of thinking in moral terms.

The difficulty is to find a characterization of the 'natural' for the Because Constraint, such that all moral thinkers accept that there must be such natural makers for moral property instantiations. It needs to be non-controversial and maximally embracing. But once we get specific about the non-moral properties that are responsible for moral properties, it becomes a substantive matter over which moral thinkers may differ. Nevertheless, I believe that there are some restrictions that all moral thinkers must adhere to in so far as they are thinking about moral properties. I would call these categorial principles (see Lowe 2009).

*Many* makers include mental states, in particular intentional states. Remember Kant's dictum on 'the good will' right at the beginning of the *Groundwork* (Kant 1996). But there is a question about whether moral right or wrong makers are *restricted* to such a basis. Perhaps not. Believers in moral luck, for instance, think that mental states are not the full basis of some moral properties (Williams 1981). Perhaps some physical or sociological facts are also part of that in virtue of which some moral facts obtain. Nevertheless, it seems to me not to be too controversial to say that wrong- and right- makers always *include* intentional states of mind, in all cases. Moral ascriptions without commitment to some intentional states in their base are peculiar.

Could something non-mental, such as a fatal virus, be morally significant, by affecting well-being,

irrespective of whether anyone is aware of it? It is true that no one needs to know of such an effect. Perhaps people are unhappier or live shorter lives than they would be without the virus. But that means that they have unhappier intentional mental states or that they have intentional mental states over a shorter period (which I take to be an intentional mental fact). So, I think that there is *always* a psychological good- or bad-maker. Surely the badness of the virus lies in part in its effect of people's psychologies, whether or not they know it or prefer it. Human well-being or flourishing may not be defined in terms of preferences or pleasures. But it must have something to do with people's psychological life; for example, they exercise psychological capacities of certain kinds. But how could something, such as a virus, be good or bad, but what makes it so have nothing at all to do with its effect on intentional mental states? Perhaps mental states do not exhaust the makers of moral property instantiations. But surely, they are always part of, or a constituent of, those makers.

It is worth noting that there are parallel issues in epistemology. Earl Conee and Richard Feldman defend a mental state conception of what makes for epistemic justification (Conee and Feldman 2004), whereas Alvin Goldman argues that justification-makers may transcend mental states (Goldman 2004). But both agree that mental states are part of the epistemic justification-maker, even if, as Goldman thinks, there is more to it than that.

So I will use 'natural' to mean intentional mental states, plus (perhaps) whatever else that is part of what is fully responsible for moral properties. On very many occasions, intentional states alone are the full makers for moral property instantiations. We should not forget that. For example, we may be a passive spectator of some disaster, or we may read about it; and the thoughts and feelings we have about the disaster are (full) makers of moral property instantiations. 'Natural' properties thus include intentional states plus whatever physical or sociological facts that (perhaps) are sometimes combined with intentional mental states as makers for moral facts.

I think that this is uncontroversial and quite neutral; but if you think that the mental state conception of the natural that I have suggested begs controversial substantive normative matters, please deploy the negative conception of the natural.

In cases of non-moral normative properties, there is an issue about whether we need a different conception of the dependence base. As I indicated, I think that epistemic properties require psychological makers, just like moral properties. And the same goes for practically rational normative properties. So I believe that something like the notion of the natural that is needed in moral philosophy also suffices for theoretical and practical rationality. What to think about aesthetic properties is less obvious, since we find beauty in inorganic nature. However, if we prioritize perceptual appearances of inorganic nature, then a psychological conception of aesthetic makers might be pre-served. Perhaps Branko Mitrovic's aesthetic formalism takes such a psychological form (see Mitrovic 2013; also Zangwill 2013a).

## v

*Dependence.* What about the dependence relation? Up until now I have been looking at the relation of the relation, but what about the relation itself?

The moral dependence relation itself is not one that is likely to be interestingly analysable. In particular, it should not be analysed in modal terms. This general claim about dependence is familiar from the work of Kit Fine (1995). Fine gives convincing examples of necessary connections without dependence, such as the relation between sets and their members: sets and their members stand in a biconditional necessitation relation, and yet sets depend on members, not vice versa. In moral philosophy, many have thought that goodness is independent of God and his actual or possible approvals; nevertheless, necessarily if something is good, then God does or would approve of it (see

Zangwill 2005a, 2012). Similarly, although being a member of the set of good things is necessary and sufficient for being good, that does not make a thing good.

Nevertheless, it is the other possibility, of dependence without necessity, which is of importance in normative philosophy. Moral-natural dependence relations are contingent. The natural property instantiations on which moral property instantiations depend need not suffice for the moral property, not even if the natural properties are conjunctive. For there are an indefinite number of non-defeaters, each of which is a necessary condition for the moral fact but which the moral fact does not depend on. (I defend this in Zangwill 2008; see also Stocker 1970, and Dancy 2004. I defend the parallel claim in epistemology in Zangwill 2018.)

Moral supervenience is a pattern of necessary connections between moral facts and non-moral facts; and its relation to moral dependence is controversial. Many necessities are explained by dependencies. The necessity that (pure) water is  $H_2O$  is presumably explained by water's depending on  $H_2O$  or water's being essentially  $H_2O$ . But moral dependence relations are contingent, like causal dependence relations. (Of course, we could talk of a special moral or causal 'necessity', which is metaphysically contingent, but I cannot see the benefit in that.)

Moral dependence and moral supervenience claims are distinct. Nevertheless, a commitment to moral-natural supervenience is *also* constitutive of moral thinking. This is revealed in moral argument, where we often argue from one case to another case, when we say that holding a view in one case commits us to holding a similar view in another, or when we challenge someone to explain a moral difference between two cases. Moral facts are somewhat like quantum particles, on some views, in that how it is with one moral/natural fact combination simultaneously affects other distinct moral/natural fact combinations. If you think that is too mysterious then you had better get used to it, since that is just what it is like to be a moral fact.

The two a priori claims are: if something has a moral property, then *it* has some natural property on which the moral property instantiation depends; and *if* something has a moral property, then it has some natural property on which the moral property instantiation supervenes. In most cases these two natural properties are different. In *some* cases, the natural property on which the moral property depends is a conjunct of the natural property on which it supervenes. In such cases, the right- or wrong-maker is a conjunct of a complex property, the instantiation of which suffices for the moral property instantiation. Putting aside issues of vagueness, there will be only one dependence base for a moral property instantiation, but that base does not suffice for the moral property instantiation. For that, the base natural property needs to be conjoined with the conjunction of the absences of all the properties that would defeat the moral property instantiation. But a moral property instantiation may also supervene on other properties, such as God's approval or being a member of the good set, which does not include the wrong-maker as a conjunct or part. Many supervenience bases of a moral property instantiation have nothing to do with what is responsible for the moral property instantiation. There is one maker, but there are many natural properties on which a moral property instantiation supervenes. Many very different natural property instantiations suffice for a particular moral property instantiation. But some of those sufficient natural property instantiations include the maker, while some do not.

Two points before I leave this section on the dependence relation. First, the Because Constraint says that typical moral judgements claim that moral facts hold in virtue of the natural facts. It does not say that the natural facts are the *epistemic grounds* for the ascription of the moral fact. (I worry that Debbie Roberts takes the relation that way in her suggestion (c) of Roberts 2017, §III.) Instead, a commitment to a dependence relation is partly constitutive of moral judgements, without the natural properties supplying epistemic justification for moral judgements. The use of the words 'ground' and 'reason' are particularly dangerous in this respect. The metaphysical 'ground' or 'reason' for asserting

the existence of the moral fact is not the epistemic 'ground' or 'reason' for ascribing the moral fact. Those words make for confusion. Second, I want to signal that there are important issues about the transitivity of dependence. (I argue that normative dependence is not transitive in Zangwill 2018. See also DePaul 1987, which denies the transitivity of moral dependence. I say a little more about transitivity below.)

## VI

*The Status of the Because Constraint.* Is the Because Constraint a constitutive or a normative feature of making moral judgements? That is, is it *constitutive* of judging that *Mx* that we think that *x* has some natural property *N* and *Mx* because *Nx*? Or is it that if we judge that *Mx*, we *should* judge that *x* has some natural property *N* and *Mx* because *Nx*? The idea of a conceptual constraint seems to fall somewhat across the constitutive/normative border. There is a difficult general issue about this. But I think that we need not be too concerned with the issue, because even if the Because Constraint is a normative feature of moral thought, there is general conformity to that norm. I cannot see that much turns on whether or not it is barely possible to judge that *Mx* without thinking that there is some natural property *N* and *Mx* because *Nx*.

Roberts finds a problem here. She distinguishes descriptive constitutive from normative interpretations of the Because Constraint claim. An *ad hominem* point is that it is good to see Roberts making a clean distinction between fact and value! But the right view is not represented in either of the options that Roberts then offers us (her (a), (b), (c) and (d) of Roberts 2017, §§II, III and IV). What I think we need is a certain combination of constitutive and normative claims: it is constitutive of making moral judgements that they are subject to certain normative requirements (see also Zangwill 2005b, 2010). There may be normative requirements that bear on us, in virtue of thinking certain thoughts, and that we tacitly accept in virtue of thinking those thoughts. But we may flout the norms bearing on us, just as people steal even though they know that they ought not to. Compare the transitivity of temporal relations: this a commitment of commonsense temporal thinking, although, no doubt, we sometimes transgress against it.

I prefer not to describe the Because Constraint by saying that it is an 'a priori conceptual truth' (see Roberts 2017, p. 198). The claim is that it is constitutive of moral judgements that when we ascribe moral property instantiations we ought to do so because we think that there is some natural property instantiation in virtue of which the moral property is instantiated. That is, it is a framework or categorial principle that moral facts depend on natural facts, of the sort Jonathan Lowe (2009) identified. Nevertheless, the fact that moral judgements make categorial framework assumptions would not by itself mean that judgements and assumptions cannot be rejected together (Churchland 1979). As it happens, I believe that there are distinctive self-refutation difficulties with rejecting all normative judgements plus their categorial assumptions (Zangwill 2010, pp. 16-18). So I would be open to an argument for a priori epistemic status. But the fact that moral judgements make categorial assumptions does not by itself secure for them the status of a priori knowledge. If the idea of an 'a priori conceptual truth' implies being immune to revision, it is not obvious that the Because Constraint has that status. Or at least, it does not have it just in virtue of being essential for engaging in moral thought.

## VII

*Generality?* I mentioned negative, disjunctive and conditional moral judgements in §r. There are also issues about general moral judgements that deserve mention. The Because Constraint is naturally thought of as applying to singular judgements, in the first instance: a particular moral property instantiation holds in virtue of a particular natural property instantiation; and claims about particular moral property instantiations should be made because the judge thinks that there is a particular natural property instantiation in virtue of which the moral property is instantiated. The question then arises: does the Because Constraint mean that someone making such a judgement does or should think that *other* things that have the same natural property also have the same moral property?

Well, if the natural property is a very specific natural property—a conjunction of many of the intrinsic and extrinsic natural properties of a thing—then it may do. But if the natural property is just the (full) dependence base property of the moral property instantiation in the initial case, then it may not do. For a non-maker natural property might defeat the moral property instantiation in other cases, despite its instantiation undefeated in the initial case.

What impact does this have on the issue over particularism (Dancy 2004)? The basic claim of the Because Constraint is compatible with many versions of particularism. *Ma* because *Na* does not imply an exceptionless generalization—for all *x*, if *Nx* then *Mx*—which a strong form of particularism would require. But surely *Ma* because *Na* does imply an unquantified conditional: if *Na* then *Ma*. If so, the argument might be that if *Na* is really the full basis of *Ma* in that particular case, and that basis explains the unquantified conditional, then that does commit us to other cases. What we can point to, again, is the fact that moral argument depends on being able to argue from one case to another. Of course, argument often runs out. And sometimes the two cases that are connected in the argument are in fact naturally dissimilar in a way that blocks an argument from one to the other. But moral argument exists, and it would not do so on extreme particularist views that block any inference from one case to another. So, while the Because Constraint does not entail it, I think that reflection on moral thought, including that part of it that is moral argument, reveals that committing ourselves in one case commits us to other cases. This may not be true of all normative areas of thought where we deploy the Because Constraint (I am thinking of aesthetics), but it is characteristic of moral thinking. (See Sibley 1974 for a discussion of the situation in aesthetics.)

Allowing this sort of generalization from one case to another should be combined with the fear of defeat from other natural properties. Such an argument from one case to another is risky since it assumes a negative existential fact that there are no natural facts in virtue of which the cases are morally dissimilar.

## VIII

*Moral-Moral Dependence.* Some moral properties depend on others. G. E. Moore thought that rightness depended on goodness (Moore 1903, pp. 23-7). (He also thought that beauty depended on goodness; see Moore 1903, pp. 201-2.) Even if we do not agree with Moore about that, there are plenty of other cases, such as the rightness of apologizing or punishment depending on previous wrongdoing. And some dependencies might span two instantiations of one moral property, such as the wrongness of lying depending on the wrongness of misleading people. The Because Constraint allows that some moral properties depend on others, and that we can make moral judgements relating moral properties to other moral properties. Nevertheless, according to the Because Constraint, structured stacks of moral properties of a thing must depend on natural properties of that thing at some point. Moral explanation comes to a naturalistic end.



Roberts seems to claim that the Because Constraint means that there are no intra-moral dependencies or claims about intra-moral dependencies, because the idea is that all moral judgments link the moral to the natural (see Roberts 2017, pp. 204-5). But that would mean that 'Right actions depend on promoting the good' and 'One ought to apologize for bad deeds' are not moral claims, which is implausible. I do not think any defender of anything like the Because Constraint has wanted to be committed to that, or needs to be committed to that.

Is saying this consistent with the statement of the Because Constraint given in §1? I hope so. I did not say that all moral judgements link moral and natural properties, but that when someone makes a moral judgement and ascribes a moral property to something, then they should think that there is some natural property that the thing instantiates in virtue of which it instantiates the moral property. It does not mean that those are the only moral judgements that we make. If we make a moral judgement, we *should* have in mind a natural basis for it, even if not every moral judgement claims such a basis.

Nevertheless, there are some tricky issues here. One concerns how mutually dependent moral properties depend on natural properties. Perhaps each of the moral property instantiations holds in virtue of a natural property instantiation. Or perhaps the situation is like being brothers or spouses, and only the instantiation of the conjunction of moral properties holds in virtue of natural properties.

A second issue is this. Consider the claim that we should apologize because we did something wrong. The rightness of apologizing depends in part on the wrongness of the original act. What is controversial is whether the rightness of apologizing also depends on what made the original act wrong. If so, transitivity would seem to hold in such cases. But we can imagine the transitivity of dependence being denied, and it being claimed that the rightness of apologizing depends on the wrongness of the original act, but not on what the wrongness of the original act depended on.

We might also want to say of pairs of *properties*, such as rightness and goodness, that one depends on the other. Suppose someone then asks: on what natural fact does that dependence depend? Perhaps there is no natural maker for that property dependence. Is that a problem? A divine commandment theorist might say that moral- natural dependencies depend on God. We might then ask: what does *that* dependence depend on? It seems that some moral property dependencies are brute. But *instantiations* of moral properties are another matter; they cannot be brute.

Despite these complications, it is clear that there cannot be a holistic circle of moral fact dependence that is never grounded (compare Roberts 2017, p. 209). There is moral gravitation. Moral properties of things cannot float weightlessly; they must stand on solid naturalistic ground.

## IX

*Thick Concepts.* It is sometimes thought that what are called 'thick concepts' make a difficulty for the Because Constraint. Roberts pursues this line of thought in her paper in this symposium. She writes, 'thick normative judgements and properties are to be found *all the way down* the grounding chain ...' (Roberts 2017, p. 216, her emphasis), which suggests a rejection of the truth of a Because Constraint that deploys my conception of the natural, not merely a rejection of its conceptual status. Some think that thick concepts make a difficulty for non-naturalism. I am sceptical about both these lines of thought.

The concepts of 'kindness' and 'rudeness' are common examples of thick concepts (Foot 1958). The idea is that these concepts contain both evaluative and descriptive contents; and sometimes it is added that these contents are not separable (Roberts 2017, pp. 204-05). My view, which I will not defend here (but see Zangwill 2015),

is that the usual examples are more plausibly interpreted as purely psychological descriptions with no evaluative content, where those making public linguistic descriptions using these words often (

but not always) reveal moral evaluation to an audience. The evaluation is not *semantically* implied by such descriptions (see Zangwill 1995 for this idea). This is sometimes called 'conversational implicature'. In such a linguistic transaction, speaker and audience typically assume a background principle that there is something good about kindness or bad about rudeness. However, we can easily imagine someone being criticized for being too kind to be a lion tamer or for being not being rude enough to be a political journalist.

Suppose we ask: in virtue of what is a person kind? That is a difficult question. But it is not difficult because of an alleged normative content of kindness, or an entangled mix of normative and descriptive contents, but because it is a difficult question about human psychology; it *is* hard in the way that asking in virtue of what someone believes something is difficult: it is difficult to describe what believing is in other terms.

Nevertheless, we need not fight over the usual examples. Although I am sceptical about them, there are better examples of thick concepts.

It is common, very common, to describe people in terms of animals-something that has gone unnoticed among those interested in moral language. For example, it is common to describe a person as a 'snake', a 'cow', a 'wolf', a 'pig' or a 'mule'; and people are called 'reptilian' or 'bovine'. These surely express and convey evaluations to particular audiences-and of course there *is* considerable cultural variation there. The same is true of descriptions in terms of body parts, such as 'dick' and 'cunt'. Bodily product descriptions such as 'shit' and 'piss' are also commonly used to express and convey evaluative thoughts. People say that something was 'a shitty thing to do'. And then there are descriptions in terms of bodily activities: 'tossler', 'bugger' and 'cocksucker'-and let us not forget the very popular and adaptable word 'fuck'. ('Shit' and 'piss' may refer to both products and activities.) Animal and body descriptions reveal a rich source of thick concepts! There are many other colourful examples and I doubt that anyone is utterly unfamiliar with such terminology.

These are examples of language used non-literally. The *words* 'pig' and 'dick' have their primary application elsewhere in non-moral description. But the *thoughts* they express are thick thoughts, and the *concepts* that are deployed in the thought that someone is a pig or a dick are evaluative, and also such that evaluation and description cannot be separated.

Of course, these words often figure in exclamations-the sort of thing that one says when one hits one's thumb with a hammer. There are also imperatives, for example, when one tells someone to 'piss off'. But we also describe in such terms.

Consider the word 'mule'. That *word* is not thick, since its primary function is to refer to mules (see Millikan 2005). But it is used as a metaphor when conveying in conversation that a person is stubborn or stupid-to a culturally specific audience. There the *concept* in play is thick. It is similar with the use of the phrase 'motherfucker' (which is particularly common in the cultural context of New York). This use is thick, surely. *What* is thick, primarily, is the *thought*, not the *word*. In a sense, the *use* of the word may be thick, but only because it expresses a thick thought. There is a thick *concept* of a mule, motherfucker, cow, arse, pig, dick, and so forth, even though there is nothing thick about the primary application of these words. Perhaps we should note that there are positive moral metaphors too: 'brick' is an old-fashioned one. (For a defence of a broadly Davidsonian view of metaphor that fits the phenomena of evaluative thought, see Zangwill 2014.) Are there *thick words* in the sense that expressing a thick concept is their primary function? This is common in aesthetic discourse. One source of moral examples might be where a moral metaphor has died: 'brutal' might be an example.

All these derogatory uses of words can also be used without their usual evaluative force. The concepts, by contrast, cannot. I have been told that the word 'cunt', when used in Aberdeen, is non-evaluative, and that it can even be positive in some Australian contexts. I suppose, though, that it

might also depend on tone of voice in a particular situation. Some North American feminists have attempted to reclaim the word 'cunt' in order to use it without its usual negative evaluative content and with a positive evaluative valence instead (see Zangwill 2015). We can imagine people who deny that the incest taboo reveals moral values, and who want to reclaim the word 'motherfucker' as a celebratory word. Someone might say: 'Yes, so what? I'm a motherfucker and proud of it!' Still, what is thought when people use these words, and others like them, is usually derogatory, not an affirmation. The thought is thick. Being a motherfucker, cunt, dick, pig, snake, cow or mule is a way of having negative value.

So, let us recognize thick thought and concepts, and the non-literal use of language to express thick thoughts and concepts. The use of metaphor in aesthetic thought has been much explored (Zuckerlandl 1956, Scruton 1997, Zangwill 2015). However, it is also an important aspect of our moral thought (see Musolf 2007, for example).

I presume that I do not need to say that I do not endorse the excessive use of such offensive swear words. But it is very common, like it or not. It is also interesting (see Pinker 2007, ch. 7). Their unsavoury and offensive nature is part of the phenomenon, one that is clearest in the stronger ones, which is why I have not shied away from using these as examples. Metaphorical moral description- using body part or animal words, for example- reveals much about moral thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the ideas in this paper were presented at Delft University, Di Tella Law School in Buenos Aires, Ritsumeikan University and Osaka University, where I learned from the questions. Many thanks to Pekka Viikari and Kevin Toh for helpful written comments, and to Tim Crane for discussion.

NORMATIVE DEPENDENCE

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