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Realist Ethical Naturalism for Ethical Non-Naturalists

1. Introduction

It is common in contemporary metaethics to draw a distinction between “naturalist” and “non-naturalist” versions of moral realism. Roughly speaking, moral realism is the metaphysical thesis that moral properties are real, objective properties of people, actions, policies, institutions, or any other things that are proper objects of moral evaluation.¹ Naturalistic versions of moral realism further claim that moral properties are natural properties, while non-naturalistic versions deny this, maintaining instead that moral properties are non-natural properties. What, though, are these realists really disagreeing about here? What does it mean to assert that moral properties are natural properties, or that they are non-natural ones instead?

Sometimes the disagreement here is an *epistemological* one. Properties are “natural” just in case they can be empirically discerned, while “non-natural” properties are those that can only be discerned a priori. So the distinction between “naturalist” and “non-naturalist” realism sometimes collapses into that between empiricism and non-empiricism with respect to our knowledge of, or justified belief in, moral properties (Shafer-Landau 2003). More commonly, however, the disagreement here is a *metaphysical* one.² While both sides generally agree that moral properties supervene on some set of lower-level natural properties, “naturalist” realism maintains that moral properties are in some sense *ontologically reducible* to (or “are nothing over and above”) the latter properties. One kind of such realism is what I shall call *identity-naturalism*, which comes in two basic varieties. Though both maintain that moral properties are identical to the lower-level natural properties on which they supervene, *analytic* versions ground this identity relation in the alleged fact that moral language can be reduced to non-moral language, while *synthetic* versions

1 By moral “properties” I mean property-tokens, or particular, concrete property-instantiations or property-instances, as opposed to property-types or abstract universals. And I intend the description of moral properties as being “real and objective” to convey the intuitive sense in which moral realism asserts the existence of moral properties that are on an ontological par with the genuine, non-moral properties that things possess independently of what any real or hypothetical agent might happen to think about those things. So for example, if we assume that each instance of torturing the innocent for fun is morally wrong, then a moral realist would say that each act-token here literally possesses the property of moral wrongness, where this is to be understood in the same way as we would understand each act-token’s possessing the property of causing the innocent severe pain: this causal property is a genuine property of each act-token, and each one has it independently of what any real or hypothetical agent might think about it.

2 For what I take to be a novel, *methodological* interpretation of the difference between “naturalist” and “non-naturalist” realism, see Cuneo (2007).

deny this semantic reductionism and instead maintain that the identity relation holding between moral properties and their basal properties is akin to the identity relations that hold between water and H₂O, or between heat and molecular motion. These identity relations do not hold between the relata because the concepts denoting them are synonymous; rather, they hold as a matter of synthetic fact. The other kind of “naturalist” realism, which has been dubbed “non-reductive naturalism” (Brink 1989; Shafer-Landau 2003; Sturgeon 1984) in order to distinguish it from the clearly reductive identity-naturalisms, is what I shall call *constitution-naturalism*. It maintains that moral properties are constituted by the lower-level natural properties on which they supervene. This second kind of “naturalist” realism is indeed non-reductive to a large extent: it’s semantically non-reductive by denying that moral language can be translated into non-moral language, and it’s ontologically non-reductive in a narrow sense by denying that moral properties are identical to the lower-level natural properties on which they supervene. However, because constituted things (e.g., bronze statues) are nothing over and above their constituents (e.g., bronze particles), this second kind of “naturalist” realism still ontologically reduces moral properties to their basal properties by postulating a constitution relation holding between them. Yet in contrast to all of this “naturalist” realism is “non-naturalist” realism, which denies that moral properties can be ontologically reduced in any way and instead maintains that they are *sui generis* and robustly irreducible (Enoch 2011; Huemer 2005; Oddie 2005; Parfit 2011).³

In this paper I present a novel version of realist ethical naturalism—a view I call *Emergentist Ethical Naturalism* (or EEN for short)—that reveals the second, more common way of understanding the distinction between ethical naturalism and non-naturalism to be flawed. As we’ve seen, on this understanding ethical naturalism is equated with ontological reductionism about moral properties, while ethical non-naturalism is equated with robust ontological non-reductionism about moral properties. EEN, however, allows one to be both an ethical naturalist and a robust ontological non-reductionist about moral properties, as it asserts that moral properties are natural properties *and* that they are *sui generis* and irreducible with respect to the lower-level natural properties on which they supervene. EEN, then, shows the equations made by the more common way of understanding the naturalism/non-naturalism divide to be flawed. It also allows the non-naturalist to have the robust ontological non-reductionism that he or she wants without having to couch this metaethical commitment in terms that

³ Labeling the kind of ontological non-reductionism that defines “non-naturalism” as “robust” ontological non-reductionism is intended to distinguish the strong kind of ontological non-reductionism that certain “non-naturalists” want from other views that call themselves “non-naturalist” yet don’t quite deliver a sufficiently strong kind of ontological non-reductionism. I’m thinking here of Shafer-Landau’s (2003) “non-naturalism,” which posits, along with constitution-naturalism, that moral properties are constituted by the properties on which they supervene.

are likely to invite automatic suspicion—if not outright dismissal—from naturalistically-minded others, or claim wholesale that metaphysical naturalism is false.

Moreover, EEN has other theoretical attractions that are worth highlighting. One is its ability to offer a unified account of several metaethical commitments from a rather simple theoretical foundation. For as we shall see, at the heart of EEN lie two emergentist postulates, which then generate EEN's distinctive bundle of metaethical commitments that includes a set of relatively uncontroversial commitments that any viable metaethical theory must respect, along with a set of controversial commitments that includes the novel combination of ethical naturalism and robust ontological non-reductionism regarding moral properties. EEN, then, not only demonstrates the compatibility of ethical naturalism and the robust ontological non-reductionism that typically defines non-naturalism, but it also shows that certain metaethical commitments that non-naturalists have found attractive can hang together in a non-arbitrary way. Additionally, EEN is theoretically attractive in virtue of its novel responses to supervenience challenges that plague moral realism. Responding to these challenges seems to be a standard requirement of defending moral realism these days, and one must respond to them by going beyond realism's constitutive metaphysical thesis and placing realistic moral properties in a larger metaphysical picture of such properties. And EEN, as the name suggests, postulates an emergentist picture of moral properties, which provides the metaphysical resources for responding to supervenience challenges without having to eschew the ethical naturalism that naturalists demand or the robust ontological non-reductionism that non-naturalists demand. I shall discuss EEN's responses to supervenience challenges after presenting the theory and addressing a few worries that one might have about my attempt to bring emergentism into the ethical realm.

2. The Emergentist Postulates of Emergentist Ethical Naturalism

Let's begin with the emergentist postulates that lie at the heart of EEN. Now the central postulate here is very complicated, so I will have to build up to it. As a first pass, then, EEN's emergentist postulates can be expressed as the following synthetic claims:

Ethical Emergentism: moral properties are emergent properties, where this fact obtains in virtue of a real metaphysical relation of emergence that holds between moral properties and the lower-level natural properties on which they supervene.

Emergentist Naturalism: emergent properties are natural properties.

Yet this statement of Ethical Emergentism is a bit too crude because, as stated, Ethical Emergentism is compatible with many different metaphysical pictures of moral properties, whereas EEN intends for this postulate to present a rather specific metaphysical picture of such properties. I therefore need to modify this initial statement of Ethical Emergentism so that it expresses the exact metaphysical picture that this postulate is meant to present.⁴ However, before I can do that, I first need to specify what I understand emergent properties to be so that we can get a grip on what this initial statement of Ethical Emergentism is claiming.

Although there is no uncontroversial example of an emergent property, as a first step in understanding what such properties are, let's consider what is probably the most promising non-ethical example of an emergent property—namely, the brain's consciousness.⁵ An emergentist story of this property might go something like this. Brains are made up of billions of cells and some fluid, none of which are individually conscious. These objects only have non-conscious properties. However, when these things are joined together in a certain complex configuration and function in certain ways, they form complex brains that are conscious. So the overall picture is this: once billions of certain kinds of cells and certain fluids, each of which instantiates only lower-level, non-conscious properties, are arranged and function in certain ways to form complex brains, these objects instantiate brand new properties (consciousness), or ones that are genuinely novel compared to the lower-level, non-conscious properties that gave rise to them.

With this example on the table, we can step back and unpack what emergent properties are in more detail. As the example illustrates, the basic features of an emergent property are that it is (1) a *genuinely novel* property that (2) *arises from* lower-level properties (Bedau and Humphreys 2008; Hempel and Oppenheim 1965; Humphreys 1996; Kim 1999; Kim 2006; Mitchell 2012; Noordhof 2010; O'Connor and Wong 2005; O'Connor and Wong 2015; Wong 2006). Going deeper still, we must first recognize that emergent properties are *real, objective* properties. I have yet to see this point made explicit in discussions of ontological emergence, but it is, I presume, implicit in these discussions that when a property is considered to be an emergent one—and therefore a genuinely novel one—that there is *something really there* that is genuinely novel.

This brings us to this basic but vague idea of “genuine novelty”, which is meant to convey two important features of emergent properties. Such properties are supposed to be “brand new” additions to our ontology, where this means that they are both *distinct in kind* compared to their lower-level basal properties as well as *ontologically irreducible* with respect to those basal properties (Kim 1999; Kim 2006; O'Connor and Wong 2015; O'Connor and Wong 2005; Wong 2006). So emergent properties are “genuinely novel”

4 I am indebted to Kerry McKenzie for pointing out the need to address this issue.

5 I want to stress that I'm offering this example only for the purpose of illustrating what emergent properties are.

in the sense of being *sui generis* and irreducible. Furthermore, the idea of emergent properties “arising from” their basal properties is meant to convey that emergent properties are both *asymmetrically dependent on*, and *determined by*, those basal properties (Kim 2006; Wong 2006). For on the one hand, emergent properties theoretically cannot exist unless there are lower-level properties from which they can emerge, while anything at the lower-level that might give rise to emergent properties could theoretically exist without giving rise to any emergent properties. On the other hand, emergent properties are determined or fixed by their basal properties because the former arise strictly and specifically from the latter as opposed to anything else. It is the instantiation of the more fundamental basal properties in particular that *makes* the instantiation of the corresponding emergent properties occur.

There is a final ontological feature of emergent properties that cannot be gleaned from the earlier putative example of such properties. This is *their possession of causal powers* (Campbell and Bickhard 2011; Gozzano 2010; Kim 1999; Kim 2006; MacDonald and MacDonald 2010; Mitchell 2012; O’Connor 1994; O’Connor and Churchill 2010; Welshon 2002). Emergent properties are supposed to bring new causal powers into the world, where these powers go “above and beyond” the causal powers of the basal properties from which they emerge. And these causal powers are secured by the irreducibility and the causal efficaciousness of emergent properties.

In addition to these ontological features, emergent properties also have epistemic features, where these seem to follow from their *sui generis* and irreducible nature (O’Connor and Wong 2005). One of these epistemic features is *theoretical unpredictability*: emergent properties cannot be predicted from any amount of information about how things work at the basal level from which they emerge (Kim 1999; Kim 2006). In other words, from even a most complete knowledge of how things work at the basal level, one could not predict that emergent properties would arise from that level. This kind of unpredictability must be distinguished from a different kind of unpredictability—what Kim calls *inductive unpredictability*—that does *not* hold true for emergent properties. In other words, emergent properties *are* inductively predictable: if we have observed emergent properties and have a good idea of what basal properties constitute their emergence base (i.e., if we have empirical knowledge of Nagelian bridge laws that synthetically connect the instantiation of emergent properties with instantiations of certain basal properties), then we can predict further emergent property instantiations from further instantiations of the basal properties (Kim 1999; Kim 2006). However, emergent properties are not theoretically predictable: instantiations of them cannot be predicted from the basal level alone, even if we had complete knowledge of the laws that govern the entities, properties, and relations constitutive of that level (Kim 1999; Kim 2006).

Closely related to the theoretical unpredictability of emergent properties is their *theoretical inexplicability*: emergent properties cannot be

explained in terms of what goes on at the basal level from which they emerge (Kim 1999; Kim 2006; Campbell and Bickhard 2011). More specifically, no amount of knowledge about what goes on at the basal level allows us to explain why emergent properties arise from that level (Kim 2006). We can, of course, explain any given putative emergent property by citing its basal properties: if we again have empirical knowledge of the relevant bridge laws that synthetically connect emergent properties to their basal properties, we can answer the question, “Why does this thing have emergent property E?” by saying, “Because the thing also has this other set of properties, B, which gives rise to E.” However, we cannot answer the follow-up question, “But why does B give rise to E?” with anything other than, “It just does.” We cannot explain why E arises from B (or why the relevant bridge laws are true). The arising of E from B is a brute, inexplicable fact.⁶

The final feature of emergent properties, which is closely related to both their theoretical unpredictability and inexplicability, is their *theoretical non-deducibility*: emergent properties cannot, even in theory, be deduced only from the complete knowledge of the basal level from which they arise (Broad 1925; Kim 2006). We could of course deduce emergent property instantiations from other property instantiations if we again had empirical knowledge of the relevant bridge laws that synthetically connect the former to the latter, but we would *need* such laws to make these deductions.⁷

My understanding of emergent properties, then, can be summed up as follows. A property, P, of a thing, T, is an emergent property of T just in case the following conditions obtain:

- (1) P is a real, objective property of T.
- (2) There is some set of T’s more ontologically fundamental (“lower-level”) properties, B, such that P is both asymmetrically dependent on and determined by B.
- (3) P is *sui generis* compared to B.

6 This inexplicability of emergent properties is closely related to their theoretical unpredictability in that these two features appear to stand or fall together, with the former apparently explaining the latter. If it could not be explained why a property, P, arises from certain basal properties, B, then it seems that P-instantiations could not be predicted from the knowledge of the B-level alone (for what could be the grounds of the prediction?). Conversely, if P-instantiations could not be predicted from knowledge of the B-level alone, then it seems that it could not be explained why P arises from B, as P-instantiations could surely be predicted from the B-level alone if it were theoretically possible to explain why P arises from B.

7 This theoretical non-deducibility of emergent properties is closely related to their theoretical unpredictability and inexplicability in the sense that, at the very least, these latter features seem to entail the former. For if a property, P, were theoretically deducible from its basal properties, B, then P would certainly be theoretically predictable from B, which implies that P’s theoretical unpredictability entails P’s theoretical non-deducibility. And, since a deduction of P from B would presumably explain why P arises from B, the in-principle inexplicability of why P arises from B would rule out any explanation of why P arises from B, and therefore any deduction of P from B.

- (4) P is ontologically irreducible to B.
- (5) P is causally efficacious.
- (6) P cannot be theoretically predicted from B.
- (7) It is inexplicable why P arises from B.
- (8) P cannot be theoretically deduced from B.⁸

Accordingly, the initial statement of Ethical Emergentism effectively claims that moral properties meet all of these conditions. And yet, as we saw earlier, this statement is consistent with different metaphysical pictures of moral properties when Ethical Emergentism is supposed to convey a rather specific picture of such properties, which means that the initial statement of this postulate must be modified so that it conveys this specific picture.

To this end, then, consider the following picture of the correct moral metaphysics.⁹ Not only is the natural property of *maximizing the balance of overall pleasure to overall pain* the only right-making property, it is actually identical to the property of *moral rightness*. And, on the flip side, *failing to maximize the balance of overall pleasure to overall pain* is not only the only wrong-making property, it is identical to the property of *moral wrongness*. So on this picture, first-order moral theory fixes the lower-level natural properties on which moral properties supervene as those specified by classical utilitarianism, and there is an identity relation holding between moral properties and these basal properties. Now it just so happens to also be true that these basal properties are emergent properties, which in turn

⁸ This is, admittedly, a rather strong conception of emergent properties that might not sit well with other people. Some, for example, may want to count certain properties as emergent ones even though they don't count as emergent on the understanding of such properties provided here. And others may want to relax epistemic conditions 6 and 7 by relativizing the unpredictable and inexplicable nature of emergent properties *to our current knowledge or theories about the B-level* in order to allow properties to count as emergent in some sense while simultaneously allowing for the possibility of some day being able to theoretically explain and predict these properties from the B-level alone (or without the help of Nagelian bridge laws that synthetically connect emergent properties to B-level ones). Yet those who would count certain properties as emergent ones even though these properties don't count as emergent on the strong conception of emergent properties provided here are merely operating with weaker conceptions of emergence to begin with rather than pointing to any problem with my strong conception of it. And those who want to relax epistemic conditions 6 and 7 in the above manner want to do something that I resist here for the following reasons. One is that such relaxing of these conditions may require us to jettison ontological conditions 3 and 4 from our conception of emergent properties, which is certainly the case if, as suggested earlier, these particular ontological conditions imply the epistemic ones in their non-relaxed form. Another is that the motivation offered here for relaxing conditions 6 and 7 in the above manner arguably runs counter to the theoretical pessimism inherent in true emergentism. One is of course free to define emergent properties in a way that allows for the possibility of some day being able to theoretically explain and predict them from the B-level alone, but such a definition seems to water down emergence so much that it effectively rejects emergence in its true form (as one would do, for instance, by defining God as love instead of as a supernatural person that is, among other things, all-loving).

⁹ I owe this example to Kerry McKenzie.

implies that moral properties are emergent properties. As stated thus far, then, Ethical Emergentism is true even though there is an identity relation—which is a strongly reductive relation—holding between moral properties and their basal properties. However, Ethical Emergentism should *not* be consistent with such a reductive relation because this postulate is supposed to affirm an emergentist picture of moral properties that delivers the robust ontological non-reductionism about such properties that the non-naturalist wants. The initial statement of Ethical Emergentism, then, must be modified so that it delivers this non-reductionism and thereby rules out ontologically reductive pictures of moral properties such as the classical utilitarian, emergentist one just sketched.

It will be instructive at this point to acknowledge why Ethical Emergentism, as initially stated, is true on this rather wacky picture of moral properties: it's true because the supervenience bases of moral properties enjoy an independent emergence relation with the lower-level natural properties on which *they* supervene, and then moral properties become emergent properties—or “inherit” their emergence—by being identical to their supervenience bases. However, EEN intends Ethical Emergentism to assert an independent emergence relation holding between moral properties and their supervenience bases, where these bases consist of whatever properties the correct first-order moral theory specifies here. Moral properties are not emergent ones by inheriting that status from these basal properties, but rather have that status by directly emerging from them.¹⁰ Accordingly, EEN's postulate of Ethical Emergentism is better expressed as:

Ethical Emergentism: moral properties are emergent properties, where this fact obtains in virtue of a real metaphysical relation of emergence that holds between moral properties and the lower-level natural properties that the correct first-order moral theory specifies as the properties on which moral properties supervene.

Yet this statement of Ethical Emergentism, while an improvement compared to the original, does not quite capture the exact nature of the emergence relation that EEN posits. We know from the second condition of emergent properties that an emergence relation is by nature a determination relation, yet such a relation can vary along the following dimensions. First, such a relation can be either *diachronic* or *synchronic*, where the former relation is one in which the determination happens over time, while in the latter relation the determination happens instantaneously. When a diachronic determination relation holds between properties, there will be some time

¹⁰ To be clear, Ethical Emergentism does not take a position on what the correct first-order moral theory says these basal properties are (although an interesting question is whether it might be more compatible with certain moral theories). Ethical Emergentism just says that, once first-order moral theory fixes the basal properties, moral properties emerge from them.

when the relata are not simultaneously instantiated, and in particular a time when the properties doing the determining are instantiated without the properties that are determined. But when the relation is a synchronic one, the properties constituting the relata are always simultaneously instantiated. Second, a determination relation can hold either contingently or necessarily, and it can hold with varying modal strengths (e.g., metaphysically or nomologically). An emergence relation, then, can vary along all of these lines as well, and EEN specifically posits a *synchronic, metaphysically necessary* emergence relation that holds between moral properties and their basal properties.¹¹ We can thus state Ethical Emergentism in its final form as the following:

Ethical Emergentism: moral properties are emergent properties, where this fact obtains in virtue of a real, synchronic relation of emergence that holds with metaphysical necessity between moral properties and the lower-level natural properties that the correct first-order moral theory specifies as the properties on which moral properties supervene.

It is therefore *this* claim, along with Emergentist Naturalism, that lies at the heart of EEN and generates the theory's metaethical commitments. Let's now turn to these commitments, beginning with the controversial ones.

3. The Metaethical Commitments of Emergentist Ethical Naturalism

By claiming that moral properties are emergent properties, Ethical Emergentism implies that moral properties meet all of the above conditions that are definitive of emergent properties. Also, by grounding the claim that moral properties are emergent properties in an emergence relation that holds between moral properties and the lower-level natural properties that the correct first-order moral theory specifies as the properties on which moral properties supervene, Ethical Emergentism locates these lower-level

¹¹ Positing this particular relation is due to reflection on what an emergence relation between moral properties and their basal properties would have to look like. If it were true that moral properties emerge from whatever properties the correct first-order moral theory identifies as their supervenience bases, then moral properties would, on the one hand, have to emerge synchronically because their instantiation does not lag behind that of their basal properties. On the other hand, moral properties would have to emerge with metaphysical necessity because their basal properties necessarily give rise to them, where the necessity here is metaphysical (i.e., if certain properties ground moral ones, then they not only must do so, but they must do so in every metaphysically possible world in which they appear). Now this faces the immediate objection that emergent properties can only be *nomologically* necessitated by their basal properties (McLaughlin 1997; Noordhof 2010). However, this objection begs the question. Why think that emergent properties can only be nomologically necessitated by their basal properties? Is there a good reason to believe this?

natural properties as the B-properties that serve as the emergence base of moral properties. So, by implying that moral properties meet the first condition of emergent properties, Ethical Emergentism implies that moral properties are real, objective properties of things, which means that *Ethical Emergentism implies moral realism*.

Furthermore, by (1) implying that moral properties meet the third and fourth conditions of emergent properties and (2) locating the lower-level natural properties that the correct first-order moral theory specifies as the properties on which moral properties supervene as the emergence base of moral properties, Ethical Emergentism implies that moral properties are sui generis and irreducible with respect to these lower-level natural properties. So besides moral realism, another of EEN's commitments, as advertised, is the kind of robust ontological non-reductionism that typically defines non-naturalism.

Next notice that Ethical Emergentism implies that moral properties meet the fifth condition of emergent properties, which means that moral properties have causal powers. So another of EEN's commitments is *ethical non-epiphenomenalism*. And the final controversial commitment of EEN, as advertised, is ethical naturalism. I take the synthetic claim that *moral properties are natural properties* to be the constitutive claim of realist ethical naturalism (Brink 1989; Copp 2012; Jackson 2012; Railton 1986; Sturgeon 1984; Sturgeon 2002), and this can be straightforwardly deduced from Ethical Emergentism and Emergentist Naturalism.

Then we have EEN's relatively uncontroversial commitments, beginning with what I shall call *ethical non-deducibility*. By implying that moral properties meet the eighth condition of emergent properties and locating their emergence base where it does, Ethical Emergentism implies that moral properties cannot be theoretically deduced from the lower-level natural properties that the correct first-order moral theory specifies as the properties on which moral properties supervene. Now this implication is very important because it captures the so-called "is-ought gap", or the fact that moral conclusions, which attribute moral properties to things, cannot be analytically deduced from non-moral premises, which attribute only lower-level natural properties to things (Brink 1989; Huemer 2005; Shafer-Landau 2003).¹² To make such deductions, we need to have synthetic moral bridge laws that connect the instantiation of certain moral properties to instantiations of certain lower-level natural ones.

Consider next that, by implying that moral properties meet the second condition of emergent properties and locating their emergence base where it does, Ethical Emergentism implies that moral properties are asymmetrically dependent on, and determined by, the lower-level natural properties that the correct first-order moral theory specifies as the properties on which moral properties supervene. This implication is also very important because, on the one hand, it captures an obvious fact about

¹² Sometimes this is referred to as "the autonomy of ethics."

moral properties that any viable metaethical theory must respect. This is what I shall call *asymmetrical ethical dependence*, or the fact that moral properties are asymmetrically dependent on the relevant lower-level natural properties. On the other hand, this implication also captures the obvious fact that moral properties are determined by those lower-level properties, although it does not quite capture the particular way in which the latter properties determine the former. As reflection reveals, the lower-level natural properties determine moral properties in the form of synchronically necessitating them, where this necessity is metaphysical necessity. Let's call this fact, which any viable metaethical theory must also respect, *ethical determination*. Now, by asserting a synchronic emergence relation between moral properties and their basal properties that holds with metaphysical necessity, Ethical Emergentism easily captures ethical determination. For an emergence relation just is a determination relation, so an emergence relation that holds synchronically and with metaphysical necessity will just be a determination relation that holds in the same fashion.

This brings us to EEN's final commitment of *ethical supervenience*, which is simply built into Ethical Emergentism. Unfortunately, this commitment is quite vexed, and indeed has been understood in different ways. It might even be more appropriate to say that there are multiple kinds of ethical supervenience that any viable metaethical theory must countenance, and that EEN is committed to them all. Rather than addressing these issues here, however, I will address them later when showing how EEN can offer novel responses to various supervenience challenges that plague moral realism. Through that discussion we will see what kinds of ethical supervenience must be accepted and how EEN can explain them.

4. The Grounds of Emergentist Naturalism

As we have seen, EEN's emergentist postulates have a rather impressive theoretical payoff: they offer, as advertised, a unified account of several metaethical commitments, including both ethical naturalism and the robust ontological non-reductionism that the non-naturalist wants. However, Ethical Emergentism is doing almost all of the theoretical work here; Emergentist Naturalism is only involved in delivering ethical naturalism, and even then Ethical Emergentism does half the work! So while the theoretical fruits of Ethical Emergentism are abundant (there are even more to come), those of Emergentist Naturalism are sparse. Also, since Emergentist Naturalism is only involved in generating ethical naturalism, and is indeed the theoretical link between Ethical Emergentism and ethical naturalism, it might seem like it has been cherry-picked to deliver ethical naturalism. I therefore need to say something to independently motivate Emergentist Naturalism.

Now some people think of emergentism as an inherently naturalist doctrine in the sense that it must be committed to a world without supernatural entities and to treating purely physical or material things as the only potential possessors of emergent properties (Stephan 2010). If emergentism were indeed such an inherently naturalist doctrine, then Emergentist Naturalism would be a conceptual truth. Unfortunately, Emergentist Naturalism cannot be delivered so easily because emergentism in general, and Ethical Emergentism in particular, are each consistent with supernatural worldviews. Focusing on Ethical Emergentism, it merely postulates a certain kind of emergence relation holding between moral properties and the relevant lower-level natural properties, and this does not foreclose the possibility of these emergent moral properties being instantiated by supernatural or spiritual entities (e.g., God, who is morally perfect by definition).

Instead of following from the nature of emergentism itself, Emergentist Naturalism is grounded in two further commitments. The first is an underlying commitment to metaphysical naturalism, while the second is the plausible assumption that anything that fits comfortably into the world as metaphysical naturalism construes it thereby earns a claim to being natural. The first commitment here is of course controversial, but I take it to be a respectable postulate for metaethical theorizing because (1) it's plausible in its own right, and (2) since a metaethical theory counts as a version of *ethical* naturalism if (and only if?) it's consistent or continuous with *metaphysical* naturalism, the theorist interested in advancing a conception of ethical naturalism can legitimately begin with metaphysical naturalism as a free theoretical building block and use it in constructing this conception because such construction, if carried out coherently, effectively demonstrates the conception's continuity or consistency with metaphysical naturalism and thereby secures its status as a version of ethical naturalism. Now I take metaphysical naturalism, in its barest form, to assert that we live in a purely natural world where all things and properties are (broadly speaking) natural, and I agree with Nicholas Sturgeon (2007) that such a natural world is minimally characterized by a lack of supernatural or spiritual entities.¹³ Accordingly, let's say that *minimal metaphysical naturalism* is the view that we live in a purely natural world, populated only with natural things and properties, where such a world is characterized by a lack of supernatural and spiritual entities. And let's also say that any ontological additions that fit comfortably into such a world thereby earn a claim to being natural.

If we were to then add emergent properties to such a world, they would not emerge from lower-level natural properties by any supernatural or spiritual means. Instead, they would emerge exclusively and naturally

¹³ This characterization is bound to receive complaints, but it is intuitively appealing insofar as it seems to capture what it fundamentally means to be a metaphysical naturalist. Also, according to Fales (2007), Alvin Plantinga has characterized metaphysical naturalism along similar lines as the view denying gods or anything very much like a god.

from those lower-level properties. In other words: if certain lower-level natural properties gave rise to emergent ones, it would be in their very nature to do so; no supernatural or spiritual entities would be involved. Emergent properties, then, would fit comfortably into the world as minimal metaphysical naturalism envisions it by emerging naturally from the lower-level natural properties of things. Emergent properties, therefore, have a claim to being natural properties.

5. Emergentism in Ethics?

Before moving on to EEN's responses to the supervenience challenges that plague moral realism, I want to address two worries that one might have about my attempt here to bring emergentism into the ethical realm.¹⁴ As I mentioned in my discussion of what emergent properties are, there are no uncontroversial examples of such properties. Things that were once plausibly construed as emergent properties (e.g., the biological property of being alive) are no longer thought to be emergent given advancements in science, and even mental properties, which are perhaps the most promising candidates for non-ethical emergent phenomena, cannot be clearly taken as such. In fact, it's probably safe to say that the orthodox position on the mental in philosophy these days is non-emergentist, "non-reductive physicalism," which is the analogue of (and inspiration for) constitution-naturalism in metaethics. Yet in the absence of compelling models of emergence outside the ethical realm, how attractive could it be to bring emergence into the ethical realm?

As understandable as this worry may be, it seems to mistakenly assume that the attractiveness of emergentism in ethics depends on the reality or plausibility of emergence in other, non-ethical realms. However, the attractiveness of emergentism in any realm doesn't depend on compelling models of emergence in other realms. The attractiveness of mental emergentism, for instance, doesn't depend on whether emergence is plausibly found elsewhere, but is rather a function of how well mental emergentism accounts for the relationship between the mental and the physical (broadly construed) compared to its theoretical rivals (O'Connor and Wong 2005). Similarly, the attractiveness of emergentism in ethics isn't held hostage to the reality or plausibility of emergence in other, non-ethical realms, but is instead a function of emergentism's theoretical benefits and costs compared to those of its metaethical rivals. And though I cannot attempt any comprehensive inquiry into the overall attractiveness of emergentism in ethics here, so far I have tried to show that EEN is an attractive theory insofar as it (1) offers a unified account of several metaethical commitments from a modest emergentist foundation, and (2)

¹⁴ I'd like to thank an anonymous reviewer for directing me to address these worries.

demonstrates that emergence can be used to naturalize robustly irreducible, realistically construed moral properties because emergence can be used to comfortably fit such properties into a naturalistic world.¹⁵ And in the next section I intend to show how EEN is even more attractive insofar as it can deal with supervenience challenges to moral realism. This attractiveness may of course end up evaporating once a more comprehensive inquiry is undertaken, but we shouldn't be skeptical of its attractiveness just because emergence cannot be clearly located anywhere in the non-ethical realm.

A much more troublesome worry for me, however, is that an emergentist conception of moral properties may not make any sense. For the basic idea of an emergent property is one of a real property that a complex object (broadly construed) instantiates because it has reached a certain level of complexity in the number and arrangement of its parts, where the property in question is genuinely novel compared to the lower-level properties of the object that give rise to it. But if there are real moral properties attached to people, actions, policies, institutions, or other proper objects of moral evaluation, then they are merely the result of certain lower-level properties that those things have, which doesn't seem to have anything to do with the arrangement of their parts or their having reached a certain level of complexity, or even with the arrangement of the lower-level properties that ground the moral properties. Take, for example, the simple claim that *pain is bad*.¹⁶ If true in the moral realist's sense, this means that pain has the real, objective property or feature of being bad. Yet the badness here doesn't seem to emerge from some sort of complex thing, or from some sort of complex arrangement of parts or properties. It's just a property or feature of the pain sensation itself. It therefore doesn't seem to make sense to think of moral properties as emergent properties.

Although this is a deep issue that, I suspect, requires a thorough investigation into realist moral ontology (and perhaps the nature of emergence as well) to be fully resolved, I still think that there are good grounds for being optimistic about an emergentist conception of moral properties. In the first place, even if emergent properties are instantiated by complex objects because they've reached a certain level of complexity, the emergence relation is one that nevertheless holds between *properties*—

15 And here is how this supposed to work. As I argued in the previous section, emergent properties would fit comfortably into the world as minimal metaphysical naturalism envisions it by emerging naturally (i.e., without supernatural or spiritual aid) from the lower-level natural properties of things. Consequently, robustly irreducible, realistically construed moral properties would fit comfortably into the world as minimal metaphysical naturalism envisions it—and thereby earn a claim to being natural properties—by being emergent properties. It isn't, then, the emergence of moral properties from lower-level natural properties *per se* that can give them a claim to being natural. These moral properties instead earn this claim by fitting comfortably into the world as minimal metaphysical naturalism envisions it, and having such properties emerge is a way, I am suggesting, of getting them to so fit.

16 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this troublesome example.

namely, an emergent property and some set of the object's lower-level properties (or the "B-properties" from the definition of emergent properties in section 2 above). But insofar as an emergence relation holds between properties, it does make sense for an emergentist conception of moral properties to postulate such a relation holding between moral properties and their basal properties.

Moreover, the potential bearers of real moral properties—people, actions, policies, institutions, and so on—seem to be pretty complex things. They may not all be exactly like the complex material objects or systems that have driven other discussions of ontological emergence, but they seem to be similar enough in that they appear to be complex things made up of parts arranged in certain ways. People, for instance, are surely complex things made up of parts arranged in certain ways, while actions are presumably some complex hybrid of mental and physical components arranged in certain ways. And policies and institutions, though too ontologically mysterious at this point to say for sure, could be ontologically reducible to collections or series of actions performed by individual or plural agents, or else plausibly regarded as their own kind of irreducible, complex phenomena made up of parts arranged in certain ways. And to return to the troublesome example of pain being bad, pain itself could be a complex arrangement of parts or properties (although you'll have to consult the philosophers of pain on this issue); and even if pain is not a complex thing, if we were speaking more precisely about the locus of badness here, we would say that it's objectively bad *for sentient beings to be in pain*. In other words: it isn't the pain that's objectively bad, but rather sentient beings being in pain that's objectively bad. Accordingly, it's the *events* or *states of affairs* of sentient beings being in pain that instantiate badness, and such things appear to be complex things composed of parts or properties arranged in certain ways. The potential bearers of real moral properties, then, are at least good candidates for the kinds of complex things that can instantiate emergent properties.

And finally, given any of these potential bearers of real moral properties, any such moral properties that these objects could instantiate would be instantiated by these objects because of their complexity. So for example, given a realist conception of moral properties, it's because certain actions instantiate certain lower-level natural properties that they have the genuine moral properties that they have. However, it also seems true that these actions have the relevant lower-level natural properties as part of, or as the result of, their complex nature. And yet if (1) actions have certain genuine moral properties because they also have certain lower-level natural properties and (2) these actions have these lower-level natural properties because of their complex nature, then it follows that (3) actions have genuine moral properties because of their complex nature. And once we combine this result with that from the previous paragraph, it looks like an emergentist conception of moral properties does respect the basic idea of

emergent properties as belonging only to complex things because of their complex nature.

For the sake of argument, though, let's assume that the instantiation of genuine moral properties is merely the result of certain lower-level natural properties being instantiated, where this indeed has nothing to do with the relevant object's complexity or with any complex arrangement of its parts or properties. In fact, let's assume that there's some moral property, M, that may genuinely be instantiated, and also that there's some single, simple, lower-level natural property, N, that constitutes M's supervenience base. Would this automatically rule out an emergentist conception of moral properties? Not necessarily. For even though this would, for sure, rule out the *standard* picture of emergent properties as the result of complexity at the basal level, it's not entirely clear that it would rule out a non-standard emergentist picture of moral properties. For if the emergence relation holds between a property, P, and a set of more ontologically fundamental properties, B, just in case they satisfy the eight conditions definitive of emergent properties laid out above, then it looks like M could still emerge from N so long as they satisfy those eight conditions. This of course would not be a standard case of emergence as the result of complexity at the basal level, but it would surely still be a case of emergence if the metaphysical relation between M and N were indistinguishable from the metaphysical relation obtaining between the relevant sets of properties in standard cases of ontological emergence. Therefore, even if it is true that genuine moral properties do not conform to the standard picture of emergent properties as the result of complexity at the basal level, it looks like an emergentist picture of moral properties can still be a viable one.

6. Emergentist Ethical Naturalism and the Supervenience Challenges

With the previous worries now addressed, we can finally move on to EEN's responses to the supervenience challenges that plague moral realism, especially non-reductive moral realism (Ridge 2012).¹⁷ The original challenge here comes from Simon Blackburn (1971), who charges such realism with facing the following difficulty. On the one hand there is what he calls *lack-of-entailment*: the moral properties of things are not entailed by their lower-level natural properties. On the other hand there is *supervenience*: if something has moral property, M, because it has lower-level natural properties, N, then any other thing with N must also have M,

¹⁷ Ridge claims that the non-naturalist, understood as a robust ontological non-reductionist about moral properties, still cannot plausibly explain supervenience. But as this section aims to show, the non-naturalist can explain supervenience with Ethical Emergentism (and legitimately claim to be a naturalist while doing so).

such that there can be no difference in moral properties without a corresponding difference in the lower-level natural properties. But how, Blackburn wonders, can the realist make sense of these two features of moral properties? If lack-of-entailment holds, then how does supervenience hold as well? If moral properties are not entailed by their basal properties, then how could a moral difference without a corresponding lower-level difference be impossible? The challenge to the realist is to explain the mystery of how supervenience holds provided that lack-of-entailment holds.

Now the emergentist ethical naturalist has two different emergence-based responses depending on how lack-of-entailment is interpreted. If this is interpreted to mean that the moral properties of things are not *analytically or semantically* entailed by their lower-level natural properties, then this just amounts to the “is-ought gap”, or the theoretical non-deducibility of moral properties from lower-level natural properties alone. But then the emergence of moral properties explains why both lack-of-entailment and supervenience hold. On the one hand, the mere emergence of moral properties straightforwardly entails their lack-of-entailment because, by their very nature, emergent properties cannot be theoretically deduced from their basal properties alone. Going a little deeper, since emergent properties are, by their very nature, genuinely novel (i.e., *sui generis* and irreducible), they require *conceptual novelty* as well—they must be denoted with new concepts compared to those used to denote the natural properties at the basal level. And it is this required conceptual novelty of emergent properties that explains their theoretical non-deducibility. On the other hand, the synchronic, metaphysically necessary emergence of moral properties explains their supervenience. Suppose that something has moral property, M, because M so emerges from some set of that thing’s lower-level natural properties, N. N then determines M synchronically and with metaphysical necessity, from which it follows that anything with N must also have M, and that N will never be present without M. But since N must give rise to M, and will never be present without M, there can never be an M-difference without an N-difference.

However, if lack-of-entailment is interpreted to mean that the moral properties of things are *in no way* entailed by their lower-level natural properties, then the emergentist ethical naturalist can follow Russ Shafer-Landau (2003) and deny lack-of-entailment. He holds that there is a *metaphysical* entailment relation holding between moral properties and their basal properties, where this is weaker than analytic or semantic entailment (the latter entails the former, but the former doesn’t entail the latter, and is consistent with the latter failing to obtain). He also holds, along with David Brink (1989), that moral properties are constituted by the lower-level natural properties that fix them, and that this constitution relation explains the metaphysical entailment relation. Now the emergentist ethical naturalist can agree that there is such a metaphysical entailment relation, but she will deny that a constitution relation explains it. She will

instead explain it with an emergence relation that, like the constitution relation, holds synchronically and with metaphysical necessity.¹⁸

Besides Blackburn's original supervenience challenge, there are at least three more, including his modified supervenience challenge (Blackburn 1985). As I understand it, it sharpens the original by specifying the modalities of both lack-of-entailment and supervenience (only when the modalities are the same does realism have a challenge). On the one hand there is *analytic* lack-of-entailment: the moral properties of things are not *analytically* entailed by their lower-level natural properties. No matter what lower-level natural properties a thing has, it is always *analytically* possible for it to either have, or to lack, any given moral property. On the other hand there is *analytic* supervenience: it's an *analytic* truth that if a thing has moral property, M, in virtue of lower-level naturalistic properties, N, then any other thing with N must also have M, such that there can be no difference in M without a corresponding difference in N. But how can the realist make sense of these both being true? If analytic lack-of-entailment holds, then how does analytic supervenience hold as well? If moral properties are not analytically entailed by lower-level natural properties, then how is a moral difference without a corresponding lower-level difference analytically impossible?

The emergentist ethical naturalist again has a few emergence-based responses to this new challenge. One is to follow Michael Huemer (2005) and deny that supervenience is an analytic truth. More specifically, the emergentist ethical naturalist can begin by again maintaining that even though there is no analytic entailment relation holding between moral properties and their basal properties, there is nonetheless a *metaphysical* entailment relation holding between them in virtue of the emergence relation that EEN posits. Therefore, supervenience is not an analytic truth, but is instead a synthetic, metaphysically necessary one. Of course, as Blackburn notes, supervenience does seem to be a conceptual truth because anyone who fails to obey it as a constraint on the use of moral concepts would be lacking something constitutive of competent moral practice. But even though there is *something* missing here in terms of competent moral practice, is the failure here one of conceptual misunderstanding? Would someone have to lack an appropriate understanding of moral concepts if he or she failed to respect supervenience when applying them?

¹⁸ An ethical naturalist's third option here is to posit an identity relation (which also holds synchronically and with metaphysical necessity): there is a metaphysical entailment relation holding between moral properties and their basal properties because the former are identical to the latter. However, this option appears to founder on the fact of asymmetrical ethical dependence. First of all, it sounds odd to think of moral properties as dependent on their basal properties if they are actually identical (isn't it odd to think that something is dependent on itself?). Second, even if an identity-naturalist could make sense of this dependence of moral properties, an identity relation between them and their basal properties delivers *symmetrical* dependence between these properties rather than asymmetrical dependence.

It doesn't seem like it. Consider, for instance, the concept of moral obligatoriness, and suppose that Jack judges two distinct instances of promise-keeping to be identical with respect to their lower-level natural properties and yet different with respect to their moral properties, such that one instance is morally obligatory while the other is not. Here Jack clearly fails to respect supervenience when applying the concept of obligatoriness, but is his problem one of conceptual misunderstanding? So long as Jack believes that one instance of promise-keeping must be performed on pain of moral failure, but that the same is not true of the other instance, it is difficult to see him as guilty of conceptual misunderstanding. He knows what it means for something to be morally obligatory, and he knows that it applies to actions. Of course, Jack is guilty of incompetent moral practice, but his incompetence here is due to a misunderstanding of moral *metaphysics* as opposed to moral concepts. Overall, then, Jack seems to be morally incompetent, yet guilty of no conceptual misunderstanding, by failing to respect supervenience in his use of moral concepts. And so the fact that such failure implies incompetent moral concept usage appears not to establish that supervenience is an analytic truth.

But let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that supervenience is an analytic truth. The emergentist ethical naturalist could again respond similarly to the way that Shafer-Landau (2003) responds. He seems to think that analytic supervenience is still explained by a constitution relation holding between moral properties and their basal properties. And though he does not provide the details of how this *metaphysical* relation is supposed to explain the *analytic* truth of supervenience, we may suppose that there is some explanation in the offing that is similar to those explaining why other metaphysical realities become analytic truths (e.g., why the fact that being a cat necessitates being an animal has become the analytic truth that "cats are animals"). Instead of a constitution relation, then, the emergentist ethical naturalist will postulate an emergence relation holding between moral properties and their basal properties as the first domino in the explanation of analytic supervenience.

In addition to Blackburn's challenges, there are two other, slightly different supervenience challenges to moral realism.¹⁹ One is that of explaining what David Enoch (2011) calls *general supervenience*, or the general fact that the moral properties of things are possessed in virtue of their lower-level natural properties. The other is that of explaining what Enoch calls *specific supervenience*, or the fact that any given moral

19 And perhaps even a third: Ridge (2012) claims that the supervenience challenge is to explain how there could be "non-natural" moral properties given the truth of analytic supervenience. But the answer to this is easy for the emergentist ethical naturalist: "non-natural" moral properties are just *sui generis* and irreducible moral properties, and there can be such properties because they can emerge synchronically and with metaphysical necessity from the lower-level natural properties that the correct first-order moral theory specifies as the supervenience bases of moral properties.

property of a thing is possessed in virtue of some specific, particular concatenation of its lower-level natural properties.

Let's begin with general supervenience, and let's first take a look at Enoch's response to it. As I understand it, it begins by maintaining that general supervenience is a conceptual truth: it is conceptually true that, generally speaking, moral properties obtain in virtue of lower-level natural properties. And this is supported, Enoch maintains, by reflecting on a hypothetical user of moral concepts that fails to respect general supervenience: such failure seems to indicate that this hypothetical user is using them in a non-standard way. But, the response continues, if general supervenience is a conceptual truth, then it is hard to see why the realist has to explain anything because general supervenience, as a conceptual truth, is no more mysterious than other conceptual truths that stem from our conceptual practices.

Now the emergentist ethical naturalist has nothing to add to Enoch's response, and so she could use it to meet the general supervenience challenge. In that case EEN has nothing unique to offer the realist when it comes to responding to this challenge. However, I think that the moral realist should not rest content with Enoch's response, as it is far from clear that a hypothetical user of moral concepts who fails to respect general supervenience is guilty of using these concepts in a non-standard way as opposed to being ignorant of, or very confused about, moral metaphysics. For example, let's consider Jack's friend, Jill, who for some reason has come to believe that moral properties are randomly distributed among things. Because of this false belief, she will not respect general supervenience. But does this mean that she cannot use moral concepts in the standard way? Suppose that, like Jack, Jill judges two distinct instances of promise-keeping to be identical with respect to their lower-level natural properties and yet different with respect to their moral properties, such that one instance is morally obligatory while the other is not. Like Jack, Jill is using "obligatory" in the standard way: she is using it to refer to an action that must be done on pain of moral failure. She is certainly a non-standard, confused *user* of moral concepts, but she seems to be using "obligatory" in the standard way insofar as she is applying it to an appropriate object and is trying to say, by so applying it, that the action must be done on pain of moral failure. This case thus suggests that the reasoning Enoch offers in defense of general supervenience being a conceptual truth is suspect.

A better response to the general supervenience challenge, I think, is to begin by maintaining that general supervenience is a generalized, synthetic truth about moral metaphysics. Understanding it is undoubtedly required for competent moral concept usage, but this does not make it a conceptual truth. And from here the emergentist moral naturalist can take the response further by grounding the truth of general supervenience in that of *general emergence*: moral properties, generally speaking, supervene on lower-level natural properties because moral properties, generally

speaking, emerge synchronically and with metaphysical necessity from lower-level natural properties.

Finally we have the specific supervenience challenge, which again asks the realist to explain why moral properties supervene on the specific lower-level natural properties that give rise to them. Once again, I think that the emergentist ethical naturalist has a better response than the one that Enoch offers. He responds to this challenge by claiming that specific supervenience is explained by whatever the first-order moral norms happen to be, and he defends this claim with a brilliant analogy. Consider first the fact that drinking status specifically supervenes on age: whether any given person can legally drink is determined by his or her particular age (and so there can be no difference in drinking status without a difference in age). But what explains the specific supervenience between drinking status and age? Whatever the relevant legal norms are. It is true, Enoch notes, that there are some significant dissimilarities between legal and moral norms, but these do nothing to weaken his point, which is that specific supervenience can be explained by the content of the relevant norms. Analogously, then, the specific supervenience between moral and lower-level natural properties is explained by the content of moral norms.

However, Enoch's response here is problematic in a few respects. As Enoch himself notes, his response is not available to the moral particularist who denies the existence of moral norms because it effectively presupposes that this denial is mistaken. And yet it is far from clear that this denial is mistaken, so it would be better for a response to specific supervenience to remain neutral on this issue. Furthermore, and more importantly, Enoch's explanation of specific supervenience seems to get things backwards: it is not the moral norms that explain anything about moral metaphysics; rather, it is the moral metaphysics that explain the norms. To see why, let's consider a few examples.

Suppose first that some version of maximizing act-consequentialism is true, and so the following norms obtain:

CN-1: X is morally right just in case X maximizes some privileged class of consequences, C.

CN-2: X is morally wrong just in case X fails to maximize C.

Accordingly, the moral properties on the left of these biconditionals will specifically supervene only on the natural properties on the right. However, these norms do not explain this specific supervenience relation. As biconditionals they merely assert relations of necessary co-extensiveness holding between the properties on the left and those on the right; they do not specify that the latter properties exclusively determine the former instead of the other way around. In other words: the truth of these norms does not settle the metaphysical question of whether the natural properties on the right exclusively determine the moral properties on the left, or vice versa, because either possibility is consistent with the truth of these norms.

But since this question is left open by the truth of these norms, they cannot explain why moral properties specifically supervene on the natural ones that they do. In fact, the explanatory relation here runs in the opposite direction: that the moral properties on the left specifically supervene only on the natural properties on the right explains why the norms are true in the first place!

But let's now suppose that a Rossian deontological theory is true, such that moral rightness and wrongness are each determined by different sets of natural properties across cases (as opposed to only a single natural property according to maximizing act-consequentialism). Put differently: the moral properties of actions are determined, in each case, by the balance of their particular right-making and wrong-making properties, where these may include, but are not necessarily exhausted by, the promotion of some privileged class of consequences. If such a theory is true, then our moral norms may look like either of the following (or perhaps both). They might parallel the norms we just saw with maximizing act-consequentialism by asserting that things have certain moral properties just in case they possess some set of natural properties from a long disjunction of possible sets:

DN-1: X is right just in case it possesses N1, or N2, or N3, or...

DN-2: X is wrong just in case is possesses N4, or N5, or N6, or...

Yet these norms, although different in content from the consequentialist norms above, would do no better in explaining specific supervenience, and would indeed fail for the same reasons as the consequentialist norms did.

Alternatively, there might be a large, complex set of moral norms, with the most basic ones each stating something like "X-ing is *pro tanto* M", where "X" stands for a specific kind of action and "M" for a moral property (e.g., lying is *pro tanto* wrong). These would then need to be supplemented with further norms that specify when *pro tanto* M-ness becomes full-blown M-ness—perhaps something along the lines of "something is M just in case it has a greater balance of *pro tanto* M-ness compared to its *pro tanto* not-M-ness". And there would also need to be even further principles specifying when particular combinations of *pro tanto* rightness or wrongness result in a greater balance of either. However far we go with specifying what these deontological norms might be, though, these norms would still only be a *reflection* of the moral metaphysics and, therefore, would be explained by the moral metaphysics instead of explaining any of it. Take the most basic norms here, for instance. If true, they would be a reflection of, and thus explained by, the metaphysical fact that certain natural properties are partly determinative of moral properties. So for example, the norm "lying is *pro tanto* wrong" would be a reflection of, and thus explained by, the fact that a lie has certain natural properties that make the action *pro tanto* wrong. The same thing would be true of the other basic norms, and so it would not be the norms that explain why certain natural properties determine certain moral ones, but rather the other way around.

Enoch's non-reductive explanation of specific supervenience, then, appears to fail. But how can the emergentist ethical naturalist do better? She will, like her realist-naturalist comrades, refer to a metaphysical relation holding between moral properties and certain natural properties to explain why specific supervenience holds between them as well. However, while her comrades will postulate a reductive relation here—either one of identity or constitution—she will of course postulate the non-reductive relation of emergence. More specifically, she will non-reductively explain specific supervenience with *specific emergence*: there is a synchronic, metaphysically necessary emergence relation that holds between specific clusters of lower-level natural properties and certain moral properties, which is why the latter hold in virtue of the former. And this explanation, besides not getting the explanatory relation backwards, is something that remains neutral between particularists and generalists. It therefore succeeds in providing a non-reductive explanation of specific supervenience while avoiding the problems with Enoch's non-reductive explanation.

Before closing I need to address the following worry that one might have about these emergence-based responses. Each one tries to explain the relevant explananda with an emergence relation holding between moral and certain lower-level natural properties, but doesn't this merely push the explanatory challenge back a step instead of truly answering it? For instance, even if specific emergence explains specific supervenience, doesn't this leave specific emergence itself unexplained, and thereby call for a further explanation?

While it is certainly the case that each of these emergence-based responses leaves the postulated emergence relation unexplained, this does not merely push each challenge back a step instead of truly answering it. In fact, these emergence-based explanations not only answer these supervenience challenges, but they do so in a theoretically ideal way. For recall that one of the definitive features of emergent properties is that they arise from their basal properties inexplicably, which means that an emergence relation that holds between properties is one that is *in-principle inexplicable*. Accordingly, these emergence-based explanations do not merely give rise to a new explanatory demand, but instead put an end to them by explaining the relevant explananda with a metaphysical relation that, by its very nature, does not admit of further explanation. The situation here is analogous to that of EEN's realist-naturalist competitors, who would offer identity-based or constitution-based explanations in response to the various supervenience challenges instead of emergence-based ones. Like the emergentist ethical naturalist, the identity- or constitution-naturalist will explain the relevant explananda with a metaphysical relation that also appears, by its very nature, to admit of no further explanation. Yet such explanations are theoretically ideal precisely because they account for the relevant explananda while simultaneously putting an end to all legitimate demands for further explanation. After all, all explanations must end somewhere; there are not turtles all the way down. And so the best that we

can hope for in an explanation is that it accounts for the relevant explananda while simultaneously putting an end to any further need for explanation, which is precisely what these emergence-based explanations here do.²⁰

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have presented a novel conception of realist ethical naturalism—Emergentist Ethical Naturalism—that combines several metaethical commitments on the basis of two emergentist postulates, Ethical Emergentism and Emergentist Naturalism. Some of these metaethical commitments are uncontroversial ones, and are indeed ones that any viable metaethical theory must respect. Others, however, are controversial, and when combined they serve to distinguish EEN from other metaethical theories. Perhaps most notable among these commitments is EEN’s novel combination of realist ethical naturalism and the kind of robust ontological non-reductionism that standardly defines ethical non-naturalism, for such a combination sinks the common distinction between ethical naturalism and non-naturalism and thereby calls for a more expansive understanding of realist ethical naturalism than what this distinction allows. Such ethical naturalism need not be understood as an inherently reductive doctrine, where moral properties are either identical to, or constituted by, the lower-level natural properties on which they supervene. There is instead a third, robustly non-reductive option for the realist-naturalist: she can maintain that moral properties *emerge from* the lower-level natural properties on which they supervene in the way that EEN envisions. Taking this option would give the realist-naturalist the metaphysical resources to respond to various supervenience challenges that plague moral realism without having to resort to a reductive form of such realism and thereby give up on the intuition that moral properties are just too different from their supervenience bases to be reducible to them in any way (Enoch 2011; Huemer 2005; Parfit 2011). To be sure, much more needs to be said in defense of this option, but I hope to have made a decent opening case with what I’ve argued here. At the very least I hope to have shown that this option is an interesting and attractive one that deserves to be taken

20 The response I offer here to the above worry may seem to generate another one—namely, that EEN implausibly rules out the theoretical possibility of ever achieving a deeper understanding of why moral properties arise from certain lower-level natural properties. But this worry begs the question against EEN in asserting that this is an *implausible* feature of the view. What’s so implausible about EEN’s theoretical pessimism? Why not regard it as a theoretical virtue rather than a cost? Also, even if this were a genuine cost of the theory, there may be plenty of other benefits of the theory that, at the end of the day, still render EEN acceptable. As Enoch might put it, EEN might be implausible in its theoretical pessimism and yet earn enough “plausibility points” through its theoretical virtues to sufficiently counterbalance the implausibility.

seriously, and that indeed calls for further exploration. It certainly forces us to step back and re-think what ethical naturalism in general—and realist ethical naturalism in particular—could be.²¹

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