Bader's "The Grounding Argument against Non-Reductive Moral Realism"

Metaphysics Seminar, April 6th, 2016

Preview: The supervenience argument against non-reductive moral realism maintains that if normative properties supervene on non-normative properties, then normative properties are identical to certain non-normative properties. Thus, non-reductive moral realists cannot accept that normative properties supervene on non-normative ones. One way to respond to this argument is by distinguishing between normative and metaphysical supervenience theses. Bader thinks such a response won't work. Moreover, he offers another argument against non-reductive moral realism which employs grounding rather than supervenience. Bader formulates this argument and shows how the non-reductive moral realist can survive it by positing multiple grounding relations (in particular, by positing a normative grounding relation as well as a metaphysical grounding relation).

1   The Supervenience Argument against Non-Reductive Moral Realism

1.1   The Argument

P1. Normative Properties supervene on non-normative properties.

P2. The set of non-normative properties is closed under infinitary disjunction and conjunction.

P3. For every normative property there is a non-normative property that is intensionally equivalent.[1] (P1-2)

P4. Intensionally equivalent properties are identical.

C. Every normative property is identical to a non-normative property.

We're supposing P1 and P2. P3 is supposed to follow from P1-P2.

Let's see how P3 is supposed to follow:

World 1: Moral Property P supervenes on Non-normative base properties: N1, N2

World 2: Moral Property P supervenes on Non-normative base properties: N3, N4

P is intensionally equivalent to the disjunction of all the conjunctions of base properties: (N1 & N2) ∨ (N3 & N4) ∨ ...

It follows from P1-P4 that every normative property is identical to a non-normative property.

1.2   Responses to the Argument

1.3   Let's distinguish between normative and metaphysical supervenience.

If we do this, then we can deny P3. It isn't the case that there is a non-normative property that has the same extension in every metaphysically possible world. The properties will only be intensionally equivalent across normatively possible worlds. P4 demands that the properties be intensionally equivalent across all metaphysically possible worlds.

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[1]Properties are intensional;y equivalent when they exhibit extensional equivalence across all possible worlds.

1.3.1 Counter-Responses:

1. This allows for "objectionably brute and unexplained variation" (3) Why? Because it's (metaphysically) possible, on this view, for something to gain a normative property without gaining any descriptive property. **Counter Counter:** The variation *is* explained: the normative laws do the explaining!

2. The "Anything Goes" objection. Response: To accept that normative laws are metaphysically contingent isn't to claim that *anything* could have been good or right.

3. The Real Problem (according to Bader): Normative modality may coincide with metaphysical modality. Why think this?

   > "A theory that has to rely on the normatively possible worlds differing from those that are metaphysically possible does not adequately respect and capture the fact that these properties are different in kind and do not merely differ in extension across modal space. In short, it is the nature of these properties that should account for their distinctness (and that should also explain any differences in extensions across possible worlds), not the relation between normatively and metaphysically possible worlds." (5)

1.4 Let's reject P4 and go hyperintensional.

We may want to reject P4 for independent reasons (think triangular/trilateral.) But what do we replace P4 with? Bader's idea is to appeal to "hyperintensional equivalence":

Properties P and Q are *hyperintensionally equivalent* if they share the same basic grounds.

Now let's replace P4 with:

P4': If properties P and Q are hyperintensionally equivalent, then P = Q. (P. 7-8)

1.4.1 Questions (from Erica): Why do it this way?

1. What if there are no basic grounds?

2. What if this overgeneralizes? (Take a case of the mental being grounded in the physical)

3. What about that which P and Q ground?

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But whatever, let's say we accept Hyperintensional Equivalence. Is the Non-Reductive Moral Realist out of the woods? No, says Bader. She has to deal with the Grounding Argument against Non-reductive Moral Realism.

2 The Grounding Argument against Non-Reductive Moral Realism

P1'. Normative properties are grounded in non-normative properties.

P2': The set of non-normative properties is closed under infinitary disjunction and conjunction.

P3. Disjunctive properties are (individually) grounded in their disjuncts; conjunctive properties are (collectively) grounded in their conjuncts.

P4'. For every normative property there is a non-normative property that is hyperintensionally equivalent. (P1'-3')

P5. Hyperintensionally equivalent properties are identical.

C. Every normative property is identical to a non-normative property.

Here, like with the supervenience argument, we can see how P4' is supposed to follow. Say each instantiation m1, m2 of a normative property N is grounded in a plurality of basic natural properties, Γ1, Γ2. Out of the pluralities, we can get a disjunctive natural property D. We just take the conjunction of the properties in each plurality and disjoin them. This gives us a disjunctive property D with the same grounds as N.

3   Response to the Grounding Argument

Bader thinks we can respond to the grounding argument by positing different grounding relations. N (and its instantiations) are normatively grounded by the same properties that metaphysically ground D.

4   Objection from Plenitude

Plenitudinous Idlers: Why posit both N and D, isn't D enough? Perhaps N is an "ethical idler."

Bader's response: D is only ethically significant when and because it falls under a normative grounding principle.

> "In response we can note that the good-making features are ethically significant only on the basis that they ground goodness and that their doing so is dependent on the normative grounding principles. What matters is that the action has the relevant non-evaluative properties that give rise to the ethical property in question, e.g. those that justify the action. Precisely which non-evaluative properties are relevant and account for the normative status of the action is determined by the normative grounding principles." (16)