

# The limits of the just-too-different argument

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## Funding information

Vetenskapsrådet, Grant/Award Number: 2019-02828

## Abstract

According to moral non-naturalism, the kind of genuine or robust normativity that is characteristic of moral requirements cannot be accounted for within a wholly naturalistic worldview, but requires us to posit a domain of non-natural properties and facts. The main argument for this core non-naturalist claim appeals to what David Enoch calls the ‘just-too-different intuition’. According to Enoch, robust normativity cannot be natural, since it is just too different from anything natural. Derek Parfit makes essentially the same claim under the heading of ‘the normativity objection’, and several other non-naturalists have said similar things. While some naturalists may be tempted to reject this argument as methodologically or dialectically illegitimate, we argue instead that there are important *limits* to what the just-too-different intuition can show, even setting all other worries aside. More specifically, we argue that the just-too-different argument will backfire on any positive, independent specification of the distinction between the natural and the non-natural. The upshot is that the just-too-different argument can show significantly less than non-naturalists have suggested.

## KEYWORDS

David Enoch, Derek Parfit, just-too-different intuition, non-naturalism, normativity objection, parity

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Moral requirements seem to be imbued with an especially robust kind of normativity, reflecting the seriousness or gravity of moral issues. While it does not really matter whether we abide by the rules of etiquette or fashion, it does really matter whether we act rightly or wrongly. Put another way, moral normativity seems to have a kind of intrinsic authority or 'oomph' which makes it different from that of institutional norms.<sup>1</sup>

According to moral *non-naturalism*, such genuine or robust normativity cannot be accounted for within the confines of a wholly naturalistic worldview, but requires us to posit a domain of non-natural properties and facts. The main argument for this core non-naturalist claim appeals to what Enoch (2011) calls the 'just-too-different intuition'. As Enoch puts it, robust normativity cannot be natural, since it is just too different from anything natural. He writes:

[I reject] the naturalist claim that [...] normative facts are nothing over and above natural ones. Normative facts are just too different from natural ones to be a subset thereof. (Enoch, 2011, p. 4)

Normative facts sure seem different from natural ones [...]. No natural fact by itself can have normative force. Or so, at least, it seems to me. (Enoch, 2011, pp. 107–108)

This just-too-different intuition plays a pivotal role in Enoch's case against naturalistic accounts of robust normativity. Indeed, he concedes that it more or less constitutes his entire case against such accounts (Enoch, 2011, §5.1).

Similarly, Derek Parfit writes:

Rivers could not be sonnets, experiences could not be stones, and justice could not be [...] the number 4. [...] It is similarly true, I believe, that when we have decisive reasons to act in some way, or we should or ought to act in this way, this fact could not be the same as, or consist in, some natural fact, such as some psychological or causal fact. [...] Natural facts could not be normative in the reason-implying sense.<sup>2</sup> (Parfit, 2011, pp. 324–325)

[N]ormative and natural facts differ too deeply for any form of Normative Naturalism to succeed. (Parfit, 2011, p. 326)

Parfit says that this 'normativity objection', as he calls it, seems to him 'decisive' (2011, p. 328), and it plays a crucial role in his overarching case against naturalistic accounts.

Several other non-naturalists have said similar things,<sup>3</sup> and it seems fair to say that without recourse to the just-too-different intuition, the case for non-naturalism would be seriously impoverished.

One possible naturalist rejoinder to the just-too-different argument—JTD-argument for short—is to question the evidential value of the just-too-different intuition. Perhaps it rests on a confusion between normative thought and language on the one hand, and normative facts and properties on the other.<sup>4</sup> Or perhaps there is something methodologically or dialectically illegitimate about this kind of appeal to basic metaphysical intuition.<sup>5</sup> We will not pursue this more general type of objection, however, but are willing to concede for the sake

<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that etiquette and other institutional norms never matter indirectly, by being tied to moral reasons.

<sup>2</sup>The term 'reason-implying' is Parfit's label for robust or genuine normativity.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Huemer (2005, §4.5), Dancy (2006, §7), and FitzPatrick (2008, §7; 2014, §§7–8). For an overview of non-naturalists' appeal to the just-too-different intuition, see Paakkunainen (2018).

<sup>4</sup>This is a familiar critique of G. E. Moore's open question argument. See, e.g., Sturgeon (2003, pp. 533–535). For related critique of the JTD-argument, see Wedgwood (2013) and Copp (2020).

<sup>5</sup>For example, Michael Smith (2015, p. 198) responds to a related concern of Enoch's by saying that 'we should simply take note of his Moorean intuitions and move on'.

of argument that the just-too-different intuition has evidential value. Instead, we will argue that there are important *limits* to what the intuition can show, even setting all other worries aside. More specifically, we will argue that the JTD-argument fails for any *positive, independent* specification of the distinction between the natural and the non-natural. The reason is that such a specification will allow naturalists to turn the JTD-argument against non-naturalists themselves, in which case the argument ends up supporting normative nihilism, if anything at all. The upshot is that the JTD-argument can show significantly less than non-naturalists have suggested.

We begin in Section 2 by spelling out the JTD-argument in more detail. In Section 3 we add two premises to the argument, thereby setting up an argument for normative nihilism. The point of this nihilist argument is to serve as a constraint on the JTD-argument, in the sense that non-naturalists cannot rely on a precisification of the JTD-argument that would render the nihilist argument forceful as well. In Section 4, however, we argue that on any positive, independent characterization of the distinction between the natural and the non-natural, the nihilist argument will work if the JTD-argument does. Hence, non-naturalists cannot employ any such characterization. This, in turn, significantly limits the impact of the JTD-argument. In Section 5 we assess how much impact potentially remains, and in Section 6 we address a possible objection to our central argument. We end in Section 7 with some concluding remarks.

## 2 | THE JUST-TOO-DIFFERENT ARGUMENT

The JTD-argument has a very simple *modus ponens* structure:

- P1. Normative facts are just too different from natural facts.  
 P2. If normative facts are just too different from natural facts, then normative facts are not natural facts.  
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 C. Normative facts are not natural facts.

Let us make some comments and clarifications before we proceed. First, since the term 'normative' here denotes genuine or robust normativity, it is no objection to P1 that there are institutional norms, such as norms of fashion, etiquette, spelling or grammar, which seem highly amenable to naturalist reduction (cf. Paakkunainen, 2018, §3).

Second, note that the just-too-different intuition has to do specifically with the *normative inertia* of the natural. As Enoch puts it, '[n]o natural fact by itself can have *normative force*' (2011, p. 108, emphasis added). And as we noted above, Parfit calls his version of the JTD-argument the *normativity objection*, saying that '[n]atural facts could not be normative in the reason-implying [i.e., robust] sense' (2011, p. 325). This point about the specificity of the just-too-different intuition is important to keep in mind in what follows.<sup>6</sup>

Third, while we have followed Enoch and Parfit in formulating the argument in terms of facts, the argument might also be formulated in terms of properties, states of affairs or propositions, depending on more general metaphysical issues. The important point is that the argument is getting at a *metaphysical* difference between the normative and the natural, as opposed to a mere conceptual difference.

<sup>6</sup>Indeed, based on reactions when presenting this paper, we think that one reason some people initially resist our argument is that one can think of other ways in which normative facts seem just too different from natural ones. Such difference-claims can be the basis for other arguments against naturalism, and it should be kept in mind that in this paper we have no quarrel with those arguments. We only target the JTD-argument that focuses specifically on normativity. We return to this point at the end of Section 6.

Fourth, the phrase 'just too different from natural facts' should be taken to mean, roughly, 'just too different from *other* natural facts'. This is because normative facts are obviously not different from *themselves*, and it would be question-begging against naturalism to assume that they are not natural to begin with. Rather, the idea must be that normative facts are just too different from all known examples of natural facts whose normative status does not invite metaethical controversy, and that this, in turn, supports the conclusion that normative facts do not belong in the category of the natural. Thus, using the phrase 'sample natural facts' for the cumbersome phrase 'all known examples of uncontroversially non-normative natural facts', we can restate the argument as follows:

- P1. Normative facts are just too different from sample natural facts.
- P2. If normative facts are just too different from sample natural facts, then normative facts are not natural facts.
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- C. Normative facts are not natural facts.

Fifth, and relatedly, 'just too different' does not mean simply 'numerically different', since that would trivialize P1 and make P2 question-begging against naturalism. Rather, the phrase signifies an intuitive difference with respect to fundamental category. The idea is that we can intuitively see that normative facts are just so different from sample natural facts that we have to place them in a different fundamental category—that of the non-natural.<sup>7</sup>

Sixth, and finally, we will bracket the issue of how to more precisely understand the nature of the relevant intuition,<sup>8</sup> and as we mentioned earlier we will not interrogate its epistemic credentials.

With these clarifications in place, we can now set up the nihilist argument advertised above.

### 3 | A CONSTRAINT: THE NIHILIST ARGUMENT

We will argue that the following holds for each substantive characterization of naturalness: if it is true that normative facts are just too different from sample natural facts (on that characterization), it is also the case that normative facts are just too different from sample *non-natural* facts. Very simply put, the reason for this, to be developed below, is that the class of non-natural facts will also contain intuitively non-normative facts; these are the sample non-natural facts, and the normativity of normative facts makes them just as different from these as from sample natural facts.<sup>9</sup> If this is correct, it means that non-naturalists cannot use the JTD-argument without ending up in nihilism instead of realism. To see this, consider the following argument for normative nihilism, which simply adds two premises to the JTD-argument:

- P1. Normative facts are just too different from sample natural facts.
- P2. If normative facts are just too different from sample natural facts, then normative facts are not natural facts.
- C1. Normative facts are not natural facts.
- P3. Normative facts are just too different from sample non-natural facts.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Parfit (2011, p. 324): '[N]ormative and natural facts are in two quite different, non-overlapping categories.'

<sup>8</sup>For example, Parfit (2011, p. 325) suggests that the relevant intuition is based on *conceptual* competence. For discussion of how to best understand this idea, see Bedke (2020) and Howard and Laskowski (2021).

<sup>9</sup>But what if we understand non-naturalism as the view that normative facts are *sui generis*? Then that class of facts will not contain non-normative facts. We will argue in Section 5 that this way of understanding non-naturalism does not rescue the JTD-argument.

P4. If normative facts are just too different from sample non-natural facts, then normative facts are not non-natural facts.

C2. Normative facts are not non-natural facts.

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C3. There are no normative facts.

P2 and P4 appear to stand and fall together.<sup>10</sup> The question, then, is whether non-naturalists can characterize the distinction between the natural and the non-natural in such a way that P1 comes out as plausible, *but without also rendering P3 plausible*.<sup>11</sup>

Let us call the claim that P3 holds if P1 does *the parity claim*. Two parallel problems loom for non-naturalists if their characterization of naturalness does not avoid parity. First, even though their negative claim that normative facts are not natural facts would come out as true, their positive claim that normative facts are non-natural facts would come out as false. Further, due to the nihilist argument above, if they do not avoid parity, the JTD-argument implies that realism is lost since, if normative facts are neither natural nor non-natural, then there are no normative facts. Avoiding the parity claim thus functions as a constraint on how non-naturalists can understand naturalness, if they are to use the JTD-argument.

In the following section we consider several different ways of distinguishing between the natural and the non-natural, and we argue that on all of these the parity claim stands.

## 4 | THE PARITY CLAIM AND THE NATURAL

One influential approach goes back to G. E. Moore, who, among other suggestions, construed the natural as 'the subject-matter of the natural sciences and also of psychology' (Moore, 1903, p. 40). According to what Moore calls 'Naturalistic Ethics', ethical facts are accessible via these sciences, which he thinks of as *empirical* sciences. He writes:

According to [Naturalistic Ethics], Ethics is an empirical or positive science: its conclusions could be all established by means of empirical observation and induction. (Moore, 1903, p. 39)

On this proposal, then, the distinction between the natural and the non-natural should be understood in terms of *empirical accessibility*. More recently, William FitzPatrick makes a similar suggestion:

Non-natural facts are facts that cannot be cashed out in empirical terms, as by appeal to facts of psychology or biology, or to complex facts constructed entirely from such facts [...]. (FitzPatrick, 2008, p. 184, n. 63)

Thus, non-natural facts are inaccessible by means of 'empirical, scientific inquiry' (FitzPatrick, 2008, p. 183).<sup>12</sup>

With this understanding of the natural/non-natural distinction, how does the parity claim fare? To be clear, the issue is whether normative facts are just too different from sample empirically accessible facts, but *not* just too different from sample empirically *inaccessible* facts (where 'sample' denotes all known metaethically uncontroversial examples of such facts).

<sup>10</sup>But see Section 6 below.

<sup>11</sup>Peter van Inwagen (2015, pp. 233–240) raises an analogous challenge for Cartesian dualists about the nature of persons.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Shafer-Landau (2003, p. 59): 'Naturalism, understood as a metaphysical thesis about the nature of properties, claims that all real properties are those that would figure ineliminably in perfected versions of the natural and social sciences.'

It is indeed easy to see the intuitive pull of the claim that normative facts are just too different from sample empirically accessible facts: no facts discoverable by scientific methods seem to tell us how to act (even though they can of course be relevant to how to act). But what about sample empirically inaccessible facts? It seems that for all metaethically uncontroversial examples of empirically inaccessible facts or properties that one can think of, they appear just as normatively inert as empirically accessible ones. And therefore, it would seem, they too are just too different from normative facts or properties. First, there are various *logical* and *mathematical* properties, such as being contradictory and being a prime number, which appear just as different from normative properties as sample empirically accessible properties, such as being electrically charged or having four legs and a tail. Second, there might be *supernatural* properties, such as being omnipotent, of which the same can be said. Third, and relatedly, there are various kinds of *philosophical* properties, such as having free will, or having psychological persistence conditions, which are presumably not normative by non-naturalist lights. For any of these examples of empirically inaccessible properties, it will of course be controversial whether it exists; but as long as some such facts or properties exist, the point can be made that they are just as different from normative properties as sample empirically accessible properties are.

Thus, construing the natural as the empirically accessible will render the parity claim plausible, and so non-naturalists need to find a different characterization of the natural if they want to rely on the JTD-argument. This is unsurprising. Indeed, Moore himself emphasizes that his non-naturalistic view should be distinguished not only from naturalist views, but also from what he calls 'Metaphysical Ethics', according to which moral facts and properties can be captured 'in terms of a supersensible reality' (Moore, 1903, p. 113).<sup>13</sup>

A similar problem attaches to a different approach, which instead delineates the natural in terms of *causal efficacy* (Sturgeon, 2003, 2006; cf. Lewis, 1983). Again, there seem to be several examples of causally inert properties which appear non-normative by non-naturalist lights. While supernatural properties may be causally efficacious and thus excluded on the present proposal, various logical, mathematical and philosophical properties would seem to be rendered non-natural and yet just too different from normative properties.

Here is an illustration: Peter van Inwagen (1990, ch. 9) holds the mereological view that the only material objects that exist are elementary particles and living organisms. This thesis implies that there are no tables or chairs, for example, only elementary particles arranged 'tablewise' and 'chairwise'. Others disagree.<sup>14</sup> But no matter who is right, the causal implications would seem to be the same, i.e. none. For example, it is hard to see how the causal powers of chairwise arranged particles and the chair that they compose, taken together, could differ from those of the chairwise arranged particles, taken in isolation. Metaphysical facts about material composition, as opposed to physical facts about the arrangement of particles, would seem to be causally inert and thus non-natural on the present proposal. And few facts seem as clearly devoid of normativity as facts about material composition.

Similarly, the debate between nominalism and realism concerning the existence of abstract objects would also seem to be without causal implications. After all, it is hard to see how the goings-on of the physical world might be sensitive to the existence or non-existence of an utterly separate Platonic realm. And, again, the fact that there is, or that there is not, such an object as the number 7 seems completely devoid of not just causal but also normative import. In other words, normative facts are just too different from such facts.

There are several other suggestions in the literature about how to draw the natural/non-natural distinction. Michael Ridge provides the following handy list, parts of which overlap with the above suggestions:

<sup>13</sup>In response to related worries, Enoch modifies the Moorean approach somewhat, suggesting that '[f]acts and properties are natural if and only if they are of the kind the usual sciences invoke' (Enoch, 2011, p. 103, emphasis added). The idea is thus that the class of natural properties includes not just scientific properties, but also properties that are of the same kind as scientific properties. Since Enoch does not really tell us which kind that is, however, his suggestion is vague almost to the point of vacuity. Is being divinely created, for example, a property of the same kind as being electrically charged, being virally infected, being a presidential election, etc.? How can we tell? Due to this vagueness, Enoch's suggestion is unhelpful with respect to the present issue.

<sup>14</sup>See van Inwagen (1990, chs. 6–8) for an overview of alternative theories.

Natural properties have variously been characterized as properties that

- (i) are the subject matter of the natural sciences,
- (ii) are invoked in scientific explanations,
- (iii) would be identified by the best scientific theory and can be described in conceptual terms available to a being occupying a non-local point of view on the world,
- (iv) can be known only a posteriori,
- (v) can exist by themselves in time,
- (vi) confer causal powers,
- (vii) figure in the laws of nature, or
- (viii) explain similarity relations, e.g. why a black cat is more similar to a white cat than to a black dog. (Ridge, 2019, references omitted).

None of these suggestions seems to be of any help to non-naturalists in terms of repudiating the parity claim, however. For all these ways of drawing the distinction between the natural and the non-natural, the sample facts on *both* sides of the distinction will appear just too different from normative facts.

Note that we are not claiming that *no* substantive just-too-different argument could ever succeed. Consider the following argument, inspired by one of Parfit's examples (see the quote in Section 1 above):

- P1. Rivers are just too different from sample sonnets.
- P2. If rivers are just too different from sample sonnets, then rivers are not sonnets.
- 
- C1. Rivers are not sonnets.

This argument does manage to establish its conclusion without rendering the following 'river nihilist' argument equally forceful:

- P1. Rivers are just too different from sample sonnets.
- P2. If rivers are just too different from sample sonnets, then rivers are not sonnets.
- C1. Rivers are not sonnets.
- P3. Rivers are just too different from sample non-sonnets.
- P4. If rivers are just too different from sample non-sonnets, then rivers are not non-sonnets.
- C2. Rivers are not non-sonnets.
- 
- C3. There are no rivers.

While P1 is clearly true, P3 is clearly false. There are lots of known examples of non-sonnets that are *not* just too different from rivers (such as brooks, creeks, and waterfalls). Thus, in this case parity fails. And yet the argument is substantive, in that our understanding of sonnets is independent of our understanding of rivers.

The non-naturalists' just-too-different argument is not analogous to the rivers-are-not-sonnets argument, however. Assuming a substantive characterization of the natural (in terms of empirical accessibility, causal efficaciousness, etc.), we will not find any examples of non-natural facts (except for putative normative ones) that non-naturalists would not find just too different from normative facts, and for precisely the same reason that they find natural facts just too different from normative facts—i.e., lack of *normativity*. In other words, there will be nothing analogous to brooks, creeks, and waterfalls in the case of the rivers-are-not-sonnets argument. And that is what sets the limits of the just-too-different argument.

## 5 | THE PARITY CLAIM AND THE SUI GENERIS NORMATIVE

We have argued that the JTD-argument will backfire on all substantial ways of characterizing the natural. But even if this is right, it does not show that there is no merit at all to the argument. For all we have said, the JTD-argument might still support the idea that normativity is *sui generis*. The reason why non-naturalness as empirical inaccessibility, causal inertia etc. fail to substantiate the JTD-argument is that sample empirically inaccessible, causally inert etc. properties seem just as devoid of normativity as sample empirically accessible, causally efficacious, etc. properties. Hence, on these characterizations of the natural/non-natural distinction, the nihilist argument will have force if the JTD-argument does. But there is presumably no corresponding parity in the case of non-naturalness understood as *sui generis* normativity. In other words, there are presumably no examples of *sui generis* normative properties which seem just as devoid of normativity as various properties which are not *sui generis* normative. Thus, understanding the non-natural as the *sui generis* normative does seem to repudiate the parity claim.<sup>15</sup>

But even if the JTD-argument can potentially establish that normativity is *sui generis*, this leaves it entirely open whether normativity is natural or not in any substantive sense. Thus, for all that the JTD-argument can show, normativity might still be empirically accessible, causally efficacious etc. This means that the JTD-argument fails to rule out several versions of naturalism, according to which normative properties, although *sui generis*, are natural in one or more of these senses.

It might be objected that, if normative properties are truly *sui generis*, they cannot belong to the class of empirically accessible and/or causally efficacious properties – if they did, they would not really be ‘of their own kind’. So, if the JTD-argument shows that normative properties are *sui generis*, then it also shows that they are not empirically accessible or causally efficacious. We agree, of course, that *given* this understanding of ‘(truly) *sui generis*’, this follows. But when we say that the JTD-argument might, for all we have argued, show that moral properties are *sui generis*, we do not understand the notion this way. Instead, what we agree that the argument can possibly show is that, no matter which overarching class of properties normative properties belong to – the empirically accessible vs. inaccessible, or causally efficacious vs. inefficacious – they are, within this class, a subclass of their own kind, due to their normativity. (Indeed, non-naturalists need to understand ‘*sui generis*’ in this way rather than as ‘not belonging to any other class’. For they hold that normative properties do belong to other classes—e.g., the classes of causally inefficacious, or empirically inaccessible, or a priori accessible properties).

Perhaps someone will object that there is something dialectically odd with an understanding of the natural that allows for naturalistic *sui generis* normativity. Not only non-naturalists but also naturalists usually assume that a purely naturalist metaphysics excludes *sui generis* normativity. So, it would seem that non-naturalists have the right to assume such an understanding when they argue against naturalism. There is *something* to this objection. Perhaps most naturalists do think that we should assume that nature does not contain *sui generis* normativity, and therefore think that, e.g., moral facts (to the extent that they exist) must ultimately be understood as not being *sui generis* normative facts. Against naturalist views of this sort, non-naturalists can complain that they fail to capture the genuinely normative nature of moral facts. So, for all we have argued in this paper, the JTD-argument might have bite against the naturalist views defended by most naturalists. However, and now we are repeating our point, the JTD-argument still tells us nothing about whether moral facts are natural or non-natural, given any of the substantial understandings of naturalness that are often used in this debate. This is because it is hard to see why *sui generis* normative properties would have to be empirically inaccessible rather than empirically accessible, or causally inefficacious rather than causally efficacious, etc. We think that most non-naturalists and naturalists alike have failed to recognize this point, and the importance of it. There may of course be more direct reasons to think that moral properties are causally inefficacious and empirically inaccessible; but it is hard to see that the fact that they are robustly or *sui generis* normative gives us any such reason.

<sup>15</sup>But see Jackson (1998, p. 127).

## 6 | AN OBJECTION: THE NON-UNIFORMITY OF THE NON-NATURAL

Even if we are right that the parity claim holds for all substantive ways of characterizing the distinction between the natural and the non-natural, there may be another way of challenging our argument. Consider again the nihilist argument from Section 3:

- P1. Normative facts are just too different from sample natural facts.
- P2. If normative facts are just too different from sample natural facts, then normative facts are not natural facts.
- C1. Normative facts are not natural facts.
- P3. Normative facts are just too different from sample non-natural facts.
- P4. If normative facts are just too different from sample non-natural facts, then normative facts are not non-natural facts.
- C2. Normative facts are not non-natural facts.
- 
- C3. There are no normative facts.

When we presented the nihilist argument we said that P2 and P4 appear to stand and fall together. But perhaps there is an asymmetry between the class of natural facts and the class of non-natural facts, such that, while P2 is plausible, P4 is not. On all suggestions we have considered above, 'natural' is positively characterized (as, e.g., being causally efficacious or empirically accessible), while 'non-natural' is negatively defined as *not* being natural. Given that 'non-natural' is negatively defined, it might be objected that the class of non-natural facts is (or at least might be) much less *uniform* than the class of natural facts. And if it is non-uniform, we cannot assume that a sample of non-natural facts is representative of the class as a whole. So even if normative facts are very different from (all) other non-natural facts, they might still belong to this class. And if so, P4 might fall even if P2 stands, potentially allowing non-naturalists to escape the nihilist argument while retaining the JTD-argument.

However, it seems to us that, e.g., the class of causally non-efficacious facts is *not* less uniform than the class of causally efficacious facts *in the relevant way*. Consider the following analogy. Suppose you have evidence that there is a kind of animal that can breathe fire, but that this is all you know about the matter. You want to know whether such animals are mammals or not. Your friend tells you: Of course they are not mammals, they are way too different from all (other) mammals we know of—they can breathe fire! You counter: But in this way they are also too different from all (other) *non*-mammals (i.e., non-mammal animals) we know of. So your friend's just-too-different argument cannot determine whether it is a mammal or not. But your friend replies: The class of non-mammals is negatively defined, and thus potentially so non-uniform that we cannot assume that sample non-mammals are representative of other non-mammals (e.g., with respect to their fire breathing capacity). At first you find this move clever, but then you realize that both classes (mammals and non-mammals) are *equally* non-uniform in the relevant way. After all, the property of being a mammal is such that the claim that *x* is a mammal is by itself completely silent on whether *x* can breathe fire. So both classes are *potentially non-uniform* in that there is nothing about what defines the classes that excludes that either of them contains fire breathing animals. This means that we cannot assume that what holds for a sample of mammals with respect to this latter property (e.g., that they cannot breathe fire) holds for all mammals. Even if all other mammals that we have encountered lack fire-breathing capacity, we cannot conclude that this holds for all (existing) mammals. Hence, the just-too-different argument cannot determine whether the fire-breathing animal is a mammal or not.

Likewise, the property of being causally efficacious is such that, the claim that a certain fact *F* is causally efficacious is by itself totally silent on whether *F* is also genuinely normative (authoritatively telling you how to act). The causal efficaciousness of *F*, it seems, does not preclude that it is genuinely normative. This means that the class of causally efficacious facts is potentially non-uniform in the relevant way: it is such that even if all

causally efficacious facts that you have encountered are non-normative, we cannot assume that this holds for all causally efficacious facts; and hence, when we encounter some fact of which we know (only) that it is normative, we cannot assume that it does not belong to the class of causally efficacious facts. Consequently, this class and the (negatively defined) class of causally non-efficacious facts are equally non-uniform in the relevant way. This means that there is no asymmetry between natural and non-natural facts of the kind that the objection under consideration assumed. Furthermore, we have an explanation of why the JTD-argument does not work, given substantial characterizations of naturalness. It is because, given such characterizations of naturalness (e.g., in terms of causal efficaciousness), the claim that *F* is a natural fact (just like the claim that it is non-natural) is silent on, or irrelevant to, whether the fact is also normative.

We take these considerations to show that the non-uniformity objection fails to undermine the impact of the parity claim. However, it seems to us that even if the non-uniformity objection had been successful, this would have spelled trouble also for non-naturalists. It is a bit arbitrary, after all, that the dialectic is set up in terms of the natural/non-natural distinction in the first place. We might just as well have started with, say, a metaphysical/non-metaphysical distinction, where metaphysical facts are understood in terms of (in principle) a priori accessibility. If so, normative naturalists could give the following just-too-different argument:

- P1. Normative facts are just too different from sample metaphysical facts.  
 P2. If normative facts are just too different from sample metaphysical facts, then normative facts are not metaphysical facts.  
 -----  
 C. Normative facts are not metaphysical facts.

P1 can be supported by pointing to the intuitive normative inertia of, e.g., mereological facts, or facts about the existence and nature of abstract objects. And since non-naturalists think of normative facts as metaphysical facts, C implies that non-naturalism is false.

Non-naturalists may object that normative facts are just too different also from sample non-metaphysical facts, i.e., various facts which are not a priori accessible. But naturalists could reply that while 'metaphysical' is positively characterized, 'non-metaphysical' is negatively characterized as not being metaphysical. Thus, the metaphysical facts form a kind, whereas the non-metaphysical facts do not, and so we cannot assume that a sample of non-metaphysical facts is representative of the class as a whole. So even if normative facts are very different from (all) other non-metaphysical facts, they might still belong to this class.

Hence, if the non-uniformity of the non-natural should save the non-naturalists' just-too-different argument from the parity claim, this would still not be good news for non-naturalists, since the non-uniformity of the non-metaphysical would then leave them without a reply to an analogous, naturalist just-too-different argument. In this way, then, a troubling parity would remain.

Note also that non-naturalists cannot object to P1 by saying that normative facts are not really all that different from metaphysical facts, since both types of facts are a priori accessible. That may well be true, but remember that the just-too-different intuition in play is a specific intuition, having to do with the *normative inertia* of the natural. That the JTD-argument as we have understood it backfires is quite compatible with there being *other* arguments for the claim that normative facts are not natural.

This last point is an important one. Some non-naturalists may think of the JTD-argument as best construed in some other way than the one we target here. For example, they may have the idea that normative facts apparently have many features that together make them seem very different from natural facts. One feature may be that it is not obvious that normative facts ever cause anything to happen; another might be that we do not seem to use empirical methods to gain knowledge in normative matters. All things considered, they may hold, such features seem to make normative facts very different from natural facts. If this is how one construes the JTD-argument, then it may well speak in favor of normative facts not being natural, given some

of the substantive understandings of naturalness. But such arguments are not the target of our objection. Of course, if this had been how all non-naturalists understood the JTD-argument, then the target of our objection would have been a strawman. But the quotes in the beginning of this paper show that at least some leading non-naturalists point specifically to the normative inertia of the natural as the basis of the JTD-argument. It is their claim that our objection targets.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

We have argued that the JTD-argument will backfire on all substantive ways of characterizing the distinction between the natural and the non-natural. Admittedly we have not attempted anything like an exhaustive survey, and so the upshot of our argument is perhaps best construed as a challenge for non-naturalists—to provide an account of naturalness on which the JTD-argument will not backfire. Until then, the JTD-argument will not support the idea that normativity is non-natural in any substantive sense.

Let us close with a thought about the approach we have taken in this paper. We have assumed with non-naturalists, for the sake of argument, that we have some intuitive understanding of what robust normativity is. And we have argued that, given such an intuitive understanding of robust normativity, the parity claim holds: it is not clear why robust normativity should fall on either side of the natural/non-natural divide, given the common substantive characterizations of this divide. Another way to challenge the JTD-argument would be to demand that non-naturalists provide a more precise characterization of robust normativity, and that they show that, given that characterization, robust normativity cannot be understood in natural terms (cf. Paakkunainen, 2018, p. 9). We are unsure whether this is a fair way to challenge the JTD-argument, however: it will probably be part of the non-naturalist view that no such characterization can be provided—we have an intuitive understanding of what the kind of normativity in question is (an understanding that can be teased out with various metaphorical descriptions), but it cannot be more precisely characterized, and certainly not in non-normative terms. Irrespective of whether that challenge is fair, however, ours is different—it argues that the JTD-argument has significant limits, even given an intuitive and non-naturalism-friendly understanding of robust normativity.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the ‘Umeå-Göteborg workshop in practical philosophy’, held at the University of Gothenburg in November 2021, and at the workshop ‘Normative nihilism and its implications’, held at Stockholm University in December 2021. We are grateful to the participants for their comments and suggestions. We owe special thanks to Martín Abreu Zavaleta, Karin Enflo, John Eriksson, Daan Evers, Johan Jacobsson, Jens Johansson, Nicholas Laskowski, Jonas Olson, Olle Risberg, and Frans Svensson.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

Moberger's work on this article was funded by the Swedish Research Council (project id: 2019-02828).

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**How to cite this article:** Francén, R., & Moberger, V. (2024). The limits of the just-too-different argument. *Ratio*, 37, 64–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rati.12391>