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## Moorean Moral Phenomenology

Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons

Inquiry into the what-it-is-likeness of concrete moral experience—moral phenomenology—has not generally been part of moral philosophy as practiced in the analytic tradition at least since G. E. Moore’s 1903 *Principia Ethica*.<sup>1</sup> Although there have been a few exceptions—including, most notably, Maurice Mandelbaum’s 1955 *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience*—and although analytic philosophers since Moore do sometimes appeal to considerations having to do with the what-it-is-likeness of concrete moral experience, nevertheless one finds almost nothing in this tradition that makes moral phenomenology an extended topic of inquiry.<sup>2</sup> We maintain that this should change—that an adequate ethical theory (including both normative ethics and metaethics) ought to be partially grounded on an adequate phenomenology of moral experience.

However, even if Moore and post-Moorean analytic moral philosophy did not pay much attention to moral phenomenology, one should not conclude that the works of Moore and others are not of phenomenological significance; far from it. In particular,

<sup>1</sup> For a useful discussion of this trend within the utilitarian tradition, see Dallas Willard, ‘Utilitarianism and Phenomenology’, in John J. Drummond and Lester L. Embree, (eds.), *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Theory* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Another notable exception is Bernard Williams, whose phenomenological observations about moral regret have been influential. See, e.g., ‘Ethical Consistency’ and ‘Consistency and Realism’, both reprinted in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). It is also worth noting that moral phenomenology is beginning to receive some attention by philosophers. Two very recent examples are Carla Bagnoli, ‘Phenomenology of the Aftermath: Ethical Theory and the Intelligibility of Moral Experience’, in Sergio Tenenbaum (ed.), *Moral Psychology* (details to be filled in later) and Peter Railton, ‘Normative Guidance’, in Russ Shafer-Landau, *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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Moore's open question argument has phenomenological significance, we maintain, and ought to be reflected in an adequate phenomenological characterization of moral experience. Explaining this remark is the main task of the present paper. Specifically, our aim is to focus on a certain type of moral experience that is intended to capture what we take to be the fundamental lesson of Moore's open question argument: the ineliminability and irreducibility of moral normativity. The result will be a decidedly Moorean moral phenomenology, even if Moore himself might not have endorsed our particular version of it.

Our plan is to begin in the next section with some remarks about moral phenomenology, followed in section II by a few observations about Moore's lack of explicit attention to the what-it-is-likeness of moral experience. Then, in section III, we turn to those aspects of Moore's metaethical position that we claim ought to be reflected in an adequate moral phenomenology, which we then (in section IV) incorporate into a phenomenological account of a central type of moral experience—experiences of moral obligation. In section V, we briefly consider the bearing of facts about moral phenomenology on the metaethical question of moral realism—a topic which, as we shall explain, requires greater attention than many have thought. Section VI is our conclusion.

## I Moral phenomenology

By 'moral phenomenology', we mean something narrower than the range of features to which this expression is sometimes applied. Used very broadly, the 'phenomenology' associated with moral thought and discourse, includes all of those deeply embedded features of moral thought and discourse including not only (1) the what-it-is-likeness of concrete moral experiences, but (2) features having to do with the grammar and logic of ethics, and (3) certain 'critical practices' including, for instance, the fact that people engage in what seem to be genuine moral disagreements. We do not mean to say that these features of moral thought and discourse lack a phenomenology (i.e., a what-it-is-likeness aspect) or lack phenomenological significance. For instance, since there is a what-it-is-likeness to inferring generally, there is a what-it-is-likeness to making moral inferences. But we take the phenomenology of concrete moral experiences—for instance, the what-it-is-likeness of judging that, in the circumstances one now faces, one ought to perform such and so action—to be of primary importance in developing a moral phenomenology. First person judgments of moral obligation are not the only type of concrete moral experience, of course—and among the types of such experience, we do not wish to commit ourselves here to the claim that such judgments are phenomenologically more basic than, say,

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experiences of judging the worth of someone's character. However, our focus in this paper will concern the what-it-is-likeness of those moral experiences that involve judging that one morally ought or ought not to perform some action in the circumstances one is presently in. To sharpen our focus, we need to engage in a bit of taxonomy.

Across the range of concrete moral experiences there are significant differences that merit distinguishing such experiences into distinct types. One important distinction is between moral experiences that include making or having a moral judgment—call them *judgment-involving* moral experiences—and moral experiences that do not include the making or having of a moral judgment—call them cases of *ethical comportment*.<sup>3</sup> Each of these types of moral experience calls for a brief explanation.

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The main point we wish to make about judgment-involving moral experiences is that as we are using the term 'judgment', a moral judgment is simply an occurrent psychological state with moral content. Given this fairly broad usage, such a state that occurs spontaneously as a result, say, of viewing an act of violence counts as a moral judgment, even though no process of deliberation preceded coming to have or make the judgment—i.e., even though no process of deliberative *judging* was involved. So, as we are using the term 'judgment', moral judgments could be arranged on a continuum with cases in which one reaches a moral conclusion as the result of long, thoughtful deliberation on one end and cases in which one finds oneself spontaneously thinking, for example, that the action one is witnessing is morally wrong, on the other. And, of course, in between these is a range of cases involving more or less deliberation that precedes one's forming, or finding oneself undergoing, a moral judgment.

Cases of ethical comportment, then, include cases in which one responds in a morally appropriate way on some occasion—say, by spontaneously extending a helping hand to someone who is about to slip on wet pavement—but where the experience does not involve making or having a moral judgment. We recognize that the issue of whether a moral judgment is involved in such cases of spontaneous action is delicate, but here all we wish to do is to acknowledge the prima-facie phenomenological case for recognizing such cases. Since our focus is on a species of judgment-involving moral experience, we may set aside this (possible) type of moral experience.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> We borrow this term from H. Dreyfus and S. Dreyfus, 'What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Expertise', in D. Rasmussen (ed.), *Universalism vs. Communitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> We suspect that virtually all cases of what the Dreyfus brothers call comportment really are judgment-involving, even though these judgments are spontaneous rather than deliberative—and even though they often issue in spontaneous action too. Non-judgment-involving ethical comportment

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More important for present purposes is a division within the category of judgment-involving moral experiences. Here, we follow Mandelbaum (1955, 45) in distinguishing *direct* moral experiences of obligation from *removed* experiences of obligation and value. Direct moral experiences are what Mandelbaum calls ‘reflexive’ experiences of obligation, and essentially involve what he describes as a felt demand:

It is my contention that the demands which we experience when we make a direct moral judgment are always experienced as emanating from ‘outside’ us, and as being directed against us. They are demands which seem to be independent of us and to which we feel that we ought to respond (1955, 54)

There are two important elements of direct moral experiences that Mandelbaum is calling attention to in this passage. First, the felt demand in question is experienced as a kind of vector force with an origin and a direction: phenomenologically, one experiences it as having its origin in the ‘outside’ circumstances and whose force is directed toward oneself. Second, as Mandelbaum says, these demands, phenomenologically emanating as they do from the outside circumstances in which an agent finds herself, are experienced as having an ‘independent’ authority because they have their source in features of the circumstances rather than in the agent’s desires. This sort of authoritative independence grounds the sense of objectivity we take our direct moral experiences to have. (Below, we provide an example meant to illuminate these elements.)

These ~~experiences of~~ first-person, reflexive, ~~moral judgment~~ judgment-involving are contrasted with cases in which one morally judges from the perspective of an essentially removed third-person observer. For example, cases in which one judges the conduct of one’s past self or that of someone else (removed judgments of obligation) and cases in which one judges one’s own character (past or present) or the character of others (examples of judgments of moral value) are cases where one, in effect, assumes the perspective of an observer and passes judgment on action and character. One essential phenomenological difference between direct and removed moral experiences is the ‘stirredupness and pressures’ (1955, 127) which are present in the former but absent in the latter.<sup>5</sup>

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Within this taxonomy, then, our focus is the phenomenology of direct judgment-involving moral experiences. Here is a relatively uncomplicated example that the

would be something like involuntary, reflexive, bodily movement which is none the less experienced (perhaps after the fact) as morally appropriate—an extreme case of comportment.

<sup>5</sup> Mandelbaum has additional things to say about the contrast between direct and removed moral judgments. For more on the contrast between direct and removed experiences of *obligation* (rightness) see *Phenomenology*, 127, and for more on the contrast between direct moral judgments and removed experiences of *value*, see *Phenomenology*, 135.

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reader may recognize, and that will illustrate the sort of moral experience we have in mind.

It's Friday, the last day of the semester before finals and you arrive at the department headed for your office bright and early. In past weeks, you have been working furiously on a paper due yesterday which you managed to send off at the eleventh hour. As you walk through your building toward your office, you are experiencing a sense of calm as you reflect with relief on what you've managed to accomplish during the semester: a paper just completed and sent off; a large introductory course with 200 students that for you was a new preparation with many hours spent working up slide presentations; meeting every other week with teaching assistants; a departmental hire—not to mention the damaged roof at home and the time spent wrangling with insurance agents, scheduling repairs, training Sophie, your new Lab puppy, and so on. Over the past two weeks, you have had to ignore some things, including a flood of email which you plan to spend the morning sorting through. You really should not have ignored as much email as you did, but you find dealing with email a huge distraction, so, on occasion, you have to take draconian measures and ignore the urgent in order to tackle the truly important projects and tasks. Dealing with your inbox ought to take about three hours you think, then it's home again to pack for a short, much needed, vacation. The teaching assistants are giving the final examination on Monday, you'll be back to submit final grades the following Friday. With email out of the way, you will be able to relax. Ah, sometimes life is good; as you unlock your office door, you now feel positively cheery.

Ready to work, you turn on your computer and as always your weekly calendar pops up. You are about to minimize it when you notice an entry for today at 8:30 (in about half an hour)—and you now remember. Many weeks ago (so it seems) you made an appointment with a struggling student who had asked you to help him go over comments he had received from one of your TAs on his most recent paper. You allow students to re-write papers, and this one is due no later than Monday's final exam period. Your cheery mood is replaced by a mild sinking feeling as you begin to realize how much time it will likely take to provide useful help to this student. For one thing, you will need to ~~dig out his paper and~~ re-read it, and you can predict that meeting with *this* student is going to take quite a while. You could, of course, close your door, turn out the light, and just not answer the 8:30 knock. You feel ever so slightly tempted as you ask yourself whether the student will *really* benefit from the session, whether he just *might* pass anyway, whether he will be angry if you do not make yourself available . . . But you did arrange to meet the student, the student is in danger of failing, it is the student's last chance to meet with you . . . You feel the press of these competing demands, but think that you really ought to help the student. With a deep sigh, you begin clearing the books from a chair so your student will have a place to sit and then pick up his paper and begin to read.

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This example meets the above-mentioned characterization of Mandelbaum's direct moral judgments of obligation: (1) the agent experiences a felt demand directed at her to engage in certain activities whose origin or source is experienced as coming from the 'external' circumstances (as she takes them to be); and (2) this felt demand is experienced as having a kind of authority that provides a basis for the sense that such demands are objective.<sup>6</sup>

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## II Moral phenomenology and Moore

One certainly does not find any such descriptions of moral experience in the writings of Moore. He does refer to 'what is before our minds'—something to be determined by direct 'inspection'—when he discusses the issue of defining 'good' and when he presents his open question argument in defense of the claim that this term cannot be defined (see, for example, 1903, §8, 60, §13, 67–8).<sup>7</sup> One might construe these remarks as having to do with the phenomenology of grasping or understanding concepts, but they are not about the phenomenology of concrete moral experience.

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Moore also makes claims about the contents of certain kinds of moral judgments. For instance, he writes: 'Whenever we judge that a thing is "good as a means," we are making a judgment with regard to its causal relations: we judge *both* that it will have a particular kind of effect, *and* that that effect will be good in itself' (1903, §16, 73). One might interpret this remark as phenomenological—an attempt to report what is going through one's head when one makes a judgment about positive instrumental value. But there are other remarks Moore makes about what one is asserting when one makes certain other types of moral claims that are probably not best construed as phenomenological. For instance, he claims that 'to assert that a certain line of conduct is, at a given time, absolutely right or obligatory, is obviously to assert that more good or less evil will exist in the world, if it be adopted than if anything else be done instead' (1903, §17, 77). Interpreted as a remark about phenomenology that is supposed be common to ~~people's~~ deontic moral judgments, this claim is extremely dubious at best. For one thing, considerations of the comparative values of the consequences of alternative lines of action (which is what Moore is here talking about) are probably not often part of the phenomenology of most people when they judge, for example, that they ought to show gratitude toward someone who has done them a huge favor. And the same goes for other 'special' obligations that focus on past actions

<sup>6</sup> This characterization, as we shall see below in section IV, is only a partial phenomenological description of direct judgment-involving moral experiences.

<sup>7</sup> All references to Moore's *Principia* include the section number followed by page number(s) from the 1993 revised edition.

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of oneself and others.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Mandelbaum (1955, 99–105) argued that the sort of consequentialist phenomenology that Moore's remark might suggest is not even an adequate description of the common phenomenology of moral judgments generally, even in those cases where one takes into account the actual or intended states of affairs associated with actions. Thus, the quoted remark from Moore is probably best understood as a claim about what one is committed to claiming (given the correctness of Moore's brand of consequentialism) in making such a claim. And, so interpreted, the remark is officially non-committal about the phenomenology involved in thinking that a line of conduct is absolutely right or obligatory.

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So, even if one looks hard at Moore's writings for signs of any phenomenological description of moral experience, one finds very little. Why is this?<sup>9</sup> After all, one would think that moral experiences are an important source of information that would bear on questions of the content, status, and, hence, justification of moral judgments.

One obvious reason Moore might have had for thinking (if he did so think) that moral phenomenology was not important for ethical inquiry is his rejection of all versions of ethical naturalism, understood as attempts to define fundamental moral terms in exclusively naturalistic vocabulary. Moore famously argued that 'good' (which he took to be fundamental in ethics) and the concept this term expresses cannot be defined—and, in particular, that it is always fallacious to attempt to define it via the 'natural' terms and concepts featured in the sciences. Phenomenological description is a matter of descriptive moral psychology, and Moore considered the subject-matter of psychology to be something 'natural' (1903, §26, 92). So, just as Moore thought that facts about biological fitness (in terms of which Spencer tried to define the notion of 'better than') are irrelevant for understanding the primary subject-matter of ethics (namely, goodness), so he would have thought the same thing about trying to define basic moral terms and concepts by terms and concepts from psychology. Thus, the idea that considerations of psychology are irrelevant to the task of understanding the concept of goodness—a task that he held is basic for the enterprise of ethical theorizing—is one possible explanation for the fact that Moore was not concerned with moral phenomenology.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> According to W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 27, basic prima-facie duties of special obligation include fidelity, gratitude, and reparation.

<sup>9</sup> The question is particularly interesting since, as Willard, 'Utilitarianism and Phenomenology', explains, some of Moore's philosophical predecessors in the utilitarian tradition, including Hume, Mill, and Sidgwick, developed their views in light of phenomenological considerations.

<sup>10</sup> Moore did, however, think that 'natural' causal facts about the consequences of actions are relevant for answering questions about the rightness and wrongness of actions. In *Principia* he defines 'right action' (in the sense of obligatory action) partly in terms of intrinsic value (§17, 77). And so, to be justified in believing of some action that it is right, one needs to know which sorts of possible consequences have intrinsic value (something known by intuition) and also which consequences

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There is another possible source of skepticism about the importance (if not the relevance) of matters of moral phenomenology that is worth mentioning here. One might think that all of the really philosophically interesting and important features of moral thought and discourse have to do with the meanings of ethical judgments (and the logical relations among them) and that considerations of moral experience—the what-it-is-likeness of thinking, deliberating, judging, and reacting that constitute such experiences—are irrelevant for getting at meaning and logic.

This contention is worthy of an extensive reply that would require engaging in phenomenological description of moral experience and showing the ways in which it is indispensable for ethical inquiry. We obviously cannot undertake this project here, so we shall simply offer a few brief remarks in reply, about how moral phenomenology seems to bear importantly on issues in metaethics.

First, we follow Mandelbaum (1955, 115–26) in holding that traditional non-cognitivism (typically presented as an account of the meanings of moral terms and concepts) is problematic because it is at odds with moral phenomenology. According to one type of non-cognitivist view, making or coming to have a moral judgment is a matter of having a non-cognitive attitude directed toward the object of evaluation. The sort of phenomenology at least suggested by this sort of view is one where an individual is aware of or focused on some (actual or possible) descriptive state of affairs and this prompts in her a pro- or con-attitude, which is then experienced as the source of the moral judgment. But this description of moral experience is not faithful to the phenomenological facts; it seems to have these facts backwards. For instance, my feeling of moral outrage, directed toward some object of evaluation, appears to me (at least upon reflection) to be prompted by, or result from, my judging that the object in question is outrageous. Arguably, in at least many cases, one experiences some action, in virtue of its nature, as calling for a certain reaction, and one experiences the reaction as prompted by, and a response to, the nature of the act. If this is right, then the non-cognitivist view (at least the version under consideration) is not faithful to moral phenomenology. This is not supposed to be a knock-down objection to the sort of non-cognitivism under discussion, but it does illustrate how facts about moral phenomenology can be brought to bear on philosophical views about the meanings of moral terms and the concepts they express.<sup>11</sup>

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various alternative actions will produce if performed. In his 1912 *Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), Moore gave up this definition of 'right' but still maintained that, as a matter of substantive fact, the rightness of an action is entirely determined by the intrinsic value of its consequences together with causal facts about the consequences of actions.

<sup>11</sup> We do not think that what are now called 'expressivist' metaethical views (descendants of traditional non-cognitivism) need be in tension with facts about moral experience. For instance, Blackburn's quasi-realist form of expressivism and our own cognitivist version of expressivism claim

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The phenomenological observation just noted is an instance of a general feature of moral experience that is one driving force behind realist views in metaethics, namely, the sense that one experiences obligation and value as something ‘external’ to oneself, and thus as something objective. In relation to direct moral experiences, we have already noted Mandelbaum’s observation (quoted earlier) that in judging that one ought or ought not perform some action, one typically experiences a felt demand that ‘we experience as emanating from “outside” us, and being directed against us’ (1955, 54). So, not only is moral phenomenology a basis for objecting to certain metaethical positions (for example, non-cognitivism), it can seem to positively favor others (for example, moral realism).<sup>12</sup>

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Having noted some possible reasons why Moore thought (or might have thought) that moral phenomenology is not relevant to the main tasks of ethical inquiry, and having offered some prima-facie evidence to the contrary, let us turn to what we maintain is of phenomenological significance in Moore’s metaethics.

### III The lesson of the open question argument

As we have said, the fact that Moore says little or nothing about the phenomenology of concrete moral experience does not mean that his metaethical views are not of phenomenological import. Moore presented his open question argument as an exercise in conceptual investigation: against attempts to define fundamental moral terms (and the concepts they express) in ‘natural’ or ‘metaphysical’—and thus in non-normative—terms (and concepts), Moore asks his readers to pose certain questions (based on whatever putative definition is under consideration) which, if the definition is correct, ought to strike the reader (once she has brought the concepts clearly before her mind) as a closed question. If ‘good’ just means ‘more highly evolved’, then the questions: (1) X is good, but is it more highly evolved? and (2) X is more highly evolved, but is it good? ought to strike any competent English-language speaker as having obviously affirmative answers—obvious given ~~their~~ understanding of the concepts involved in the questions. Except for the phenomenology of grasping or understanding terms and concepts (involved in the process of ‘bringing before one’s mind’), how is Moore’s open question argument of phenomenological significance?

not to be at odds with the phenomenological facts of ordinary moral experience. See Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and T. Horgan and M. Timmons, ‘Cognitivist Expressivism’, in T. Horgan and M. Timmons (eds.), *Metaethics after Moore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Whether the appeal to moral phenomenology really does favor some version or other of moral realism is a delicate issue which we take up briefly in section V of this paper.

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Our answer to this question involves two claims. First, we follow a standard line of interpretation of the lesson of Moore's argument, according to which its import is that moral terms and concepts are *normative*—in the sense that judgments involving them are *reason-providing*.<sup>13</sup> Second, we claim that the irreducible normative character of moral terms and concepts has an experiential counterpart in one's concrete moral experiences: concrete moral experiences involve, as a constitutive aspect of their nature, the experience of normativity. In the remainder of this section, we focus on the first point about normativity, and in the next section we take up the second point about normativity as an aspect of moral phenomenology.

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To focus thinking, let us distinguish a number of central theses in Moore's metaethics, beginning with what we are taking to be the general upshot of the open question argument.

*Moral normativity:* Basic moral terms and concepts are at least partly normative in the sense that judgments containing them express fundamental reasons for engaging in some action or responding with some attitude with respect to the item being evaluated.

In addition to this thesis, Moore held a certain view about the conceptual interconnections among types of ethical terms and concepts. As noted above, in *Principia*, he defines the rightness (oughtness) of actions in terms of intrinsic value: '[T]he assertion "I am morally bound to perform this action" is identical with the assertion "This action will produce the greatest possible amount of good in the Universe"' (1903, §89, 197). And, similarly, for the concept of virtue: 'a virtue may be defined as an habitual disposition to perform certain actions, which generally produce the best possible results' (1903, §103, 221). We may sum this up in the following thesis:

*Goodness is basic:* The concept of intrinsic goodness is the basic concept in ethics: all other ethical concepts, including those of rightness and virtue, are to be understood partly in terms of the concept of intrinsic goodness.<sup>14</sup>

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If one embraces both the moral normativity thesis and the thesis that goodness is basic, then a consequence is this:

*Fundamental normativity of goodness:* The concept of intrinsic goodness is the fundamental normative concept in ethical thought: that something is intrinsically good provides a fundamental reason for responding (in action or attitude) to it in some way.

<sup>13</sup> Here is how William Frankena in his 'Obligation and Value in the Ethics of G. E. Moore', in Paul A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1942) puts the point: '[T]o my mind, what makes ethical judgments seem irreducible to natural or to metaphysical judgments is their apparently normative character' (102).

<sup>14</sup> As explained above in n. 10, Moore eventually gave up his claim that obligation and rightness can be reductively *defined* in terms of the concept good. He nevertheless still held that goodness is more basic than rightness, and so continued to hold the thesis that goodness is basic.

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Among those philosophers who accept the moral normativity thesis, there is dispute over the basicness of goodness thesis and, hence, dispute over the fundamental normativity of goodness thesis. Those who challenge the former typically claim that the concept of ought is the most basic normative concept in ethics.<sup>15</sup> We do not wish to weigh in here on this issue. Rather, we wish to place emphasis on the moral normativity thesis in developing a moral phenomenology, and to remain neutral about both (1) the thesis of the basicness of goodness; and (2) whether or not reasons for action and attitude are provided at all by considerations of intrinsic value. A *robust* Moorean moral phenomenology would embrace both the moral normativity thesis and the thesis of the basicness of goodness, whereas a more *modest* Moorean moral phenomenology would embrace the moral normativity thesis and remain neutral about the basicness thesis. It will be enough for our purposes to sketch a modest Moorean moral phenomenology.

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## IV Toward a Moorean moral phenomenology

We have been saying that we wish to preserve the lesson of Moore's open question argument in presenting an adequate moral phenomenology of judgment-involving direct experiences. But there is another Moorean element we wish to preserve: direct moral judgments are genuine *beliefs*. So in order to accomplish the task of developing the rudiments of a Moorean moral phenomenology, we will proceed to do the following.

- (1) Make a case for the claim that direct ought-judgments are genuine beliefs by investigating the phenomenology of belief and arguing that these judgments exhibit that phenomenology. In so doing, vindicate the cognitivist element of Moore's view.
- (2) Call attention to how such beliefs are typically embedded in an overall experience that is psychologically complex: the felt demand (described above) that is characteristic of direct moral judgments is phenomenologically grounded in one's experiencing certain actions or attitudes as fitting or

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., A. C. Ewing, *The Definition of Good* (New York: Macmillan, 1947). Granted, Moore held that the concept of intrinsic value is synonymous with the concept of what *ought to be or exist for its own sake*. See *Principia*, preface, 34, §13, 68, §68, 166, §69, 169, §70, 170. But some of Moore's critics have argued that Moore's conception of intrinsic value as a simple, non-relational property, even understood as equivalent to the concept of what ought to exist for its own sake, is incompatible with what we are calling the normativity of goodness thesis. See, e.g., W. Frankena, 'Obligation and Value', and Stephen Darwall, 'How Should Ethics Relate to (the Rest of) Philosophy?: Moore's Legacy', in T. Horgan and M. Timmons, *Metaethics after Moore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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unfitting (depending on whether one experiences an action (or an attitude) as demanded by or prohibited by the circumstances in which one is placed).

- (3) Call attention to the fact that the experiences of fit and unfit, which are the normative core of moral judgments, have a sui generis, irreducible element even though they also involve interesting structural complexity.<sup>16</sup>

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We now proceed to take each of these points in order.

### i The phenomenology of belief and direct ought-judgments

Occurrent beliefs, we claim, have a phenomenology: there is something it is like to occurrently believe something.<sup>17</sup> They also have other features *qua* beliefs: they are semantically assessable (one can ascribe truth and falsity to their contents) and they have a functional role to play in the overall psychological economy of agents. In a previous article (Horgan and Timmons, 2006b) we have explored these generic features of belief, making a case that moral judgments are, indeed, a type of belief. But here we can afford to focus exclusively on the phenomenological dimension of belief generally and moral belief in particular.<sup>18</sup>

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We wish to call attention to five interrelated features of the what-it-is-likeness of occurrent belief generally (its phenomenology), making a case as we go that each of these features is possessed by direct moral judgments. The phenomenological features of occurrent belief include: (1) psychologically ‘coming down’ on some issue (2) through which one classifies or sorts something into one or more categories (3) that is typically experienced as involuntary and in which (4) one experiences the coming down in this way as a cognitive response to some consideration that is (at least peripherally) experienced as a sufficient reason for the categorization, and also (5) as a judgment that is apt for assertion and hence is naturally expressible by a declarative sentence in language. We now proceed to take up these elements in order, illustrating

<sup>16</sup> In our discussion of the open question argument, we did not mention Moore’s claim that the concept of goodness (and the corresponding property) is *simple*. We think that issues of unanalyzability, simplicity, and the lesson of the open question argument are muddled in Moore—as he himself noted in his ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ to *Principia*, unpublished until Baldwin’s 1993 edition of Moore’s book. We note here that it is possible to read Moore’s texts in a way that would allow him to embrace these three points while also maintaining that the fundamental notion in ethics is simple. That is, his texts might allow for the idea that fittingness is a primitive, irreducible relation and in *that* sense it is simple, though allowing that (1) its relata are often complex, and (2) fittingness *facts*, because they are relational facts, are structurally complex.

<sup>17</sup> So did Hume. See Hume’s appendix to *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1739), 628–9.

<sup>18</sup> The following remarks reflect what we say in Horgan and Timmons, ‘Cognitivist Expressivism’, 263–5.

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each of them first in connection with descriptive beliefs and then in connection with direct moral judgments

(1) I glance up from my computer and see my dog chewing an old tennis shoe. In so doing, I ‘come down’ on the issue of what she is chewing. Here the experience of coming down is spontaneous: I do not need to think about what she is doing, ~~but~~ rather I just see what she is doing—which immediately prompts the corresponding thought. But often my coming down on some issue requires more or less thought, as when I ponder the evidence and then come down on some issue. I glance up, see my dog chewing away with her back to me, I think for a few moments about what she could be chewing and, remembering that the only item available to her is her favorite toy, I come down on the matter of what she is chewing: she is chewing her favorite toy.

Next, consider all-things-considered direct ought-judgments. In some cases, one finds oneself spontaneously coming down on the matter of what one ought to do given what one is currently experiencing. Seeing that a nearby child has lost her footing and slipped into the deep end of a swimming pool, one spontaneously judges that, one ought to pull her out. In other cases, of course, coming down on some issue is preceded by some amount of reflection, as when one judges that, in the midst of a conversation, one ought to withhold a certain comment that might wrongly be taken as an insult. Direct ought-judgments, then—like beliefs about matters of non-moral, descriptive fact—involve as part of their phenomenology the experience of coming down on some issue.

(2) Of course, many non-belief psychological states also involve the experience of coming down, as, for example, when one forms an intention to get a beer from the fridge. Intentions are, like beliefs, psychological states in which one comes down on a matter of what to do, but arguably intentions are not themselves beliefs. The sort of coming down that does distinguish beliefs from intentions involves the experience of categorizing or sorting the item(s) being thought about. Presumably, intending to get a beer from the fridge is partly based on one’s belief that there is a beer there, and in having this belief one is categorizing a beer as belonging in the ‘being in the fridge (currently)’ category. In the case of non-moral descriptive beliefs, things get sorted into descriptive categories by the use of category-concepts that purport to represent some worldly object-kind or some property.

Similarly, when a person judges of some action that she ought to do it, she experiences her coming down morally as involving the classifying or categorizing the act in question as being *something to be done by her*. And this same sort of phenomenological feature is typically present in what we have called removed moral judgments as well—for instance, where one judges of someone else that their action was *something to be done by them*.

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(3) Beliefs are most often involuntary. This feature of the phenomenology of belief is implicit in how we have described our previous examples. In glancing up from my computer and looking across the room, my belief that the dog is chewing a shoe is (at least in normal frames of mind) involuntary. I can, of course, withhold belief about how things are—for example, when (owing to past experience) my seeing what looks like water further down the highway no longer prompts me to spontaneously believe that there is water in that place. Involuntariness is also characteristic of beliefs that result from deliberation and reflection: the evidence seems to compel (at least in many cases) a particular verdict which one experiences as involuntary.

Clearly, direct ought-judgments are normally experienced as involuntary in roughly the same way as are experiences of non-moral beliefs. One finds oneself being psychologically compelled to judge, for example, that one ought to rush to assist an elderly person who is losing his balance and about to take a bad tumble. And this same involuntary character of the phenomenology of moral judgment is also clearly present (in most cases) where one mulls over her present circumstances and comes to think that she really ought to open her door and prepare for her 8:30 meeting with the student. Psychologically, the all-things-considered ought-judgment is experienced as 'forced' by the particulars of the circumstances (as she takes them to be); it is experienced as involuntary.

(4) Beliefs about non-moral matters of fact are further experienced as grounded in considerations that serve as sufficient reasons for the belief in question. My occurrent belief about my dog and her chewing is grounded in my perceptual awareness, which I (implicitly) take to be a sufficient basis for my belief that she is chewing an old tennis shoe. My perceptually grounded belief is here experienced as grounded in the authority of reasons provided by my visual experience. Similar remarks apply to beliefs about non-moral (non-evaluative) matters—for instance, when I come to a belief about who ate the last brownie, on the basis of strong circumstantial evidence.

Occurrent, first-person judgments of moral obligation are likewise grounded in the authority of reasons. In judging that one ought to rush toward the elderly person about to fall, one experiences this judgment as grounded in what one takes to be morally salient features of the situation that are perceptually manifest: the person is frail-looking and is losing his balance, no one else is nearby, and so on. And, of course, the same is true (and even more obvious) in cases where one deliberates about what to do, and after weighing everything up, comes to judge that (all things considered) she ought to do this or that action.

(5) Finally, ordinary descriptive beliefs are naturally experienced as apt for assertion in sentences in the declarative mood. The same holds for moral judgments generally and direct ought-judgments in particular. In giving voice to her thought, the teacher affirms (out loud to herself) that she ought to keep the appointment. Here, the

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relevant psychological state is a categorizing, coming-down state that is not willfully imposed as when one forms an intention to do some action. Rather, the teacher's judgment that she ought to keep the appointment is experienced as demanded by sufficient reasons. This kind of involuntary, reason-based categorizing judgment is naturally expressible by an act of assertion—i.e., by uttering a declarative sentence.

So, reflection on the what-it-is-likeness of uncontentious cases of belief—non-moral, descriptive belief—reveals a number of interrelated phenomenological features of belief which are also possessed by moral judgments generally and direct ought-judgments in particular. Of course, as mentioned above, there is more to being a belief than its phenomenology: there are also considerations of semantic assessability and of functional role. And, as noted, elsewhere we have argued that moral judgments do, indeed, possess these further belief-characterizing features. All of this, we submit, favors a cognitivist construal of moral judgments—Moore was right about this much: moral judgments are beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

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### ii The experience of fittingness as phenomenologically basic

So far, in developing a Moorean moral phenomenology of judgment-involving direct moral experiences, we have made two principal observations. First, such experiences are characterized by a felt 'reflexive' demand on the part of the agent, which is experienced as a kind of force whose origin is 'external' to the agent and directed against the agent. Second, the moral judgments involved in such experiences—judgments of the form, *I ought/must/should do (not do) A*—are experienced as beliefs. But now one may ask whether there is anything that is experienced as a *basis* for this kind of felt demand and the associated moral ought-judgment.

Mandelbaum (1955, 59–71) posed just this question, and he claimed that the phenomenological basis of direct moral judgments is the 'apprehension' of the relationship of some action's being 'fitting' or 'unfitting' to the circumstances facing the agent. To explain this, let us first say something about these relations and then explain how, at least on Mandelbaum's view, experiences of them are phenomenologically basic.

The experiences of fit and unfit involve the relationship between some circumstance (or situation) that the agent currently faces (at least as she takes them to be) and some possible action on her part of which she is aware. To return to our earlier example of

<sup>19</sup> But to say this is not, on our view, to say that moral beliefs are descriptive beliefs—beliefs whose overall content is a *way-the-world-might-be* content. Our above characterization leaves this open. Elsewhere in Horgan and Timmons, 'Cognitivist Expressivism' and 'Nondescriptivist Cognitivism: Toward a New Metaethic', *Philosophical Papers*, 29, 121–53, we argue that they are not best interpreted as descriptive. We return to this matter of the descriptivity of moral beliefs below in section 5.

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the felt demand on the instructor to meet with her student, her circumstances include such considerations as her having agreed to meet the student, that the agreed-upon time is near, that it is the student's last opportunity to meet with her, and so forth. These features of her present circumstance 'call for' an action (or series of actions) on her part: the actions of opening her door, clearing off a chair for the student, getting out the student's paper and reading it, and so on, are experienced by her as a fitting, indeed the most fitting, series of actions for her to perform in her circumstances. Other, alternative courses of action are experienced by her as unfitting or less fitting (and as all-things-considered unfitting).

This experience of some action fitting or not fitting one's present circumstances is, evidently, what phenomenologically grounds the experience of a felt objective demand—a demand that is reflected in the associated ought-judgment. In the example under discussion, it is the instructor's sense of the circumstances *calling for* a series of actions and, correlatively, an envisioned series of actions being most appropriately *suited to* the circumstances that prompts the felt demand to engage in the series of envisioned actions. Two phenomenological observations are worth making here. First, as we have already noted, the sense that some set of 'external' circumstances are experienced as *themselves* calling for an action, independently of the desires or aversions one may have toward elements of those circumstances, provides the phenomenological basis of the felt *objectivity* of the demand. Second, this sense of circumstances calling for some action reflects a lately noted feature of the phenomenology of moral belief, namely, that such beliefs are experienced as being grounded in the authority of reasons—considerations that one takes to objectively demand a certain course of action.

Thus, to sum up: judgment-involving direct moral experiences involve three phenomenologically salient elements: (1) a felt reflexive objective-seeming demand; (2) an ought-belief; and (3) an experience of fit or unfit. And what we have just noted is that the first two elements are phenomenologically grounded in the third. But one should be careful here about how one understands talk of phenomenological grounding. In articulating these elements (largely following Mandelbaum), we have, in effect, teased apart aspects of a unified kind of experience. We do not mean to suggest that direct moral experiences of these elements must be temporally segmented and causally ordered—that one *first* apprehends something's being fitting or unfitting and *then* experiences this apprehension as *causing* one to make a moral ought-judgment which one *then* experiences as *causing* one to experience a kind of affective pressure to do or not do something. Rather, the phenomenology is typically seamless, in that these elements are fused together: the experience of reacting to some situation with the thought that one ought to perform some action is mixed with the felt demand coming from the circumstances and being directed at oneself.

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iii *Sui generis* moral normative experiences

Having spelled out the rudiments of a phenomenology of judgment-involving direct moral experiences, let us now return to the issue of how our view is Moorean. We have claimed (along with others) that the lesson of the open question argument is the idea that moral terms and concepts are irreducibly normative—that they concern the idea of there being *reasons* for or against acting or for or against reacting; that some considerations ‘call for’ certain responses and, correlatively, certain responses are ‘called for’ by various considerations. Those responses ‘called for’ are fitting and sometimes most fitting, and those responses ‘uncalled for’ are unfitting. The irreducibility of these concepts is to be understood as the fact that they cannot be defined or adequately characterized without the use of normative concepts. But irreducibility in this sense does not entail a *kind* of metaphysical brute monadic simplicity that Moore perhaps thought was possessed by the property of intrinsic goodness. However, there is a sense in which the concept of fittingness, despite being relational, does involve a kind of simplicity—a point we mentioned in note 16, but is worth emphasizing here. That is, one can sensibly claim that the very idea of fittingness is of an irreducibly simple relation and thus a primitive normative notion. But saying this is compatible with this concept picking out a relation whose relata are often complex, and with the fact that fittingness *facts* are themselves complex. That fittingness is simple in this way is enough to justify the claim that this concept is *sui generis*. Rather than attempting to define or reduce the concept of fittingness, one explains it by clarifying the items involved in this relational notion, and also by calling attention to various instances of it—i.e., experiences of contemplated actions being fit or appropriate, unfit or inappropriate, in relation to a contemplated set of circumstances. There is something that it is like to experience an action as something demanded of you given your understanding of your circumstances, and this particular normative what-it-is-likeness—the sense of fit and unfit—is experientially *sui generis*.<sup>20</sup>

So Moore was right about the ultimate irreducibility of moral concepts, but he might have done better to focus on the closely related concepts of ought, normative

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<sup>20</sup> Here it is appropriate to note what Moore said about fittingness judgments: ‘by saying that a certain relation between two things is fitting or appropriate, we can only mean that the existence of that relation is absolutely good in itself. . . .’ *Principia*, 152. If to say that a relation between two things is fitting just means that the relation between them is intrinsically good—by which we take it that Moore means to say that a specific relational *fact* is fitting (e.g., the fact that a contemplated act would bear the relation ‘performed in’ to certain specific circumstances)—then one might embrace both the moral normativity thesis and the thesis of goodness as basic. This could serve as a basis for developing a moral phenomenology that would yield what we called earlier a robust Moorean view of moral experience. According to this robust view, fittingness is not a normative concept that is distinct from, and more basic than, goodness. Rather, experiences of fittingness are themselves really just experiences of the absolute intrinsic goodness of certain relationally characterizable (actual or potential) states of affairs.

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reason, and fittingness as at the heart of this irreducibility. Moreover, the conceptual irreducibility that moral concepts enjoy is reflected in the sorts of concrete moral experiences that we have been describing—experiences that we clearly have.

We conclude this section by noting some historical resistance to Moore's own moral metaphysics—resistance that is naturally construed as grounded in introspective attention to moral phenomenology. In evaluating Moore's claim that the property goodness is a *simple* non-natural property, it is standard to raise metaphysical queerness worries that Mackie (1977, ch. 1) famously pressed against Moore and the realist tradition in ethics generally. Such worries are partly grounded in considerations of moral phenomenology. Toward the end of his 1937 'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms', C. L. Stevenson raises the worry that his emotivist construal of moral terms does not capture what moral judgments are about—namely a (presumably) simple moral property—and thus does not capture the idea that moral judgments are supposed to be responsive to moral truths. He writes in response to this complaint:

I can only answer that I do not understand. What is this truth to be *about*? For I recollect no Platonic Idea, nor do I know what to *try* to recollect. I find no indefinable property, nor do I know what to look for. (30)

Now one might attribute this response to Stevenson's strong empiricist leanings, but the rationalist A. C. Ewing makes a similar remark in his 1947 *The Definition of Good*. In challenging attempts to reduce moral terms and concepts to 'natural' terms and concepts, Ewing complained that 'the philosophers who give naturalistic definitions of ethical terms, do not, despite their predilection for empiricism, commend their conclusions as the direct result of a plain empirical investigation of our moral experience . . .'. (44) He then goes on to note that perhaps the best argument against a naturalistic account of ethical terms is that, 'if goodness were, as Moore claimed, a simple property, it is strange that nobody has discovered this until the time of Sidgwick. If we were aware of such a simple property or concept, must we not know that we are aware of it?' (45). Ewing concludes that people do not experience the sort of simple property often associated with Moore's view. He also offers a non-naturalistic definition of intrinsic value in terms of the concept of ought, which he further analyzes in terms of fittingness. So in cases where one judges of some action that it is intrinsically good, Ewing claims, 'There are various psychological characteristics, for example, the direction of the will to a certain end, and there are non-natural characteristics based on these, of being an action which ought to be done and of being a fitting object of admiration, but besides these there is no further quality of goodness that I can detect' (157).

One finds a similar phenomenological reaction in Frankena's contribution to the Schilpp volume on Moore's philosophy: 'I cannot discover in the things which may

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be considered to be good in themselves any simple quality of goodness in addition to their non-ethical qualities and the property of being right for an appropriate agent to pursue or produce' (1942, 108).

All three authors—Stevenson, Ewing, and Frankena—are offering phenomenological arguments against what was apparently Moore's moral metaphysics of intrinsic value. Clearly these phenomenologically based reactions are out of place when one focuses on experiences of fit and unfit, and one embraces only a *modest* Moorean phenomenology. Indeed, experiences of actions being fitting are common and not confined to moral experiences. For example, one responds to certain social situations with a sense of what would and would not be fitting from the point of view of custom and etiquette. One also has experiences of prudential fittingness—what would be fitting in relation to one's own welfare. Epistemological fittingness of certain beliefs relative to certain evidence is yet another example. The list can be extended.

## V Moral phenomenology and moral realism

At this point the attentive reader may be thinking or sensing that the Moorean moral phenomenology we have been describing cries out for some discussion of its bearing on questions of moral metaphysics. If direct, judgment-involving moral experiences have as an essential part of their phenomenology a sense of some action's fitting or not fitting the circumstances, and if the associated felt demand is experienced as having its source in the external circumstances, then don't such experiences have intentional content that involves fittingness as an objective, in-the-world, *relational property*? Don't these experiences thereby purport to represent objective, in-the-world, *moral facts*? If, furthermore, one takes one's experiences of the world as providing presumptive evidence for how the world really is, then doesn't the phenomenology of moral experience (at least direct moral experience) provide a presumptive reason to favor moral realism? And, if so, aren't views that deny the reality of such putative normative properties forced to embrace a form of the error theory?

In the space remaining we will not be able to address these questions with the philosophical care they deserve. Instead, we will simply indicate, in a series of rapid-fire remarks, how we view the issue of the bearing of Moorean moral phenomenology on questions about moral metaphysics, leaving a full defense of our position for elsewhere.

*The question.* The question at hand is whether or not the presentational content of one's moral phenomenology is the presentation of objective moral properties being instantiated in the world—and/or the presentation of objective moral relations

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being instantiated. The question is whether one's moral phenomenology has *descriptive purport*—whether, that is, the moral judgments embedded in moral experience purport to represent some worldly state of affairs that involves the instantiation of a moral property or a moral relation by some worldly item or items.

*Our core non-descriptivist contention, and two related claims.* Our core contention is that the answer to this question is No—even if one construes realism broadly enough to include 'dispositionalist' accounts of moral properties that would construe them on analogy with colors and other secondary qualities. The Moorean moral phenomenology we have described—what can be regarded as a common 'base-level' phenomenology—does not carry descriptive purport.<sup>21</sup> To this, we would add two supplemental claims. First, the answer to the question whether moral phenomenology has descriptive purport is *not introspectively manifest*; i.e., one cannot readily determine, just on the basis of introspective attention to one's own moral phenomenology, the answer to this question. Second, it is very easy to form the mistaken belief that a Yes answer to the question of descriptive purport is introspectively manifest—and thus to form the belief (seemingly on secure introspective grounds) that the answer is indeed Yes. For, the very features of moral phenomenology that constitute the what-it-is-like of occurrent *belief*—the aspects of involuntary, external-reason-based, categorizing, 'coming down' on an issue (as described in section IV.i above)—are features that make it easy to construe one's own involuntary moral categorization-judgment as a representation of a state of affairs consisting of the in-the-world instantiation of a moral property or relation. But that is an over-interpretation of the belief-ish aspects of moral phenomenology.

*Appeals to grammar.* Appeals to the so-called realist-seeming grammar of moral discourse do not help the realist's presumptive case based on moral phenomenology. That is, one might be tempted to argue that moral thought and discourse is expressed in declarative sentences in which such predicates as 'is wrong', 'is right', 'is good', 'is bad' are employed—thus strongly suggesting that sentences featuring them are used to attribute properties to objects of evaluation. Add to this grammatical observation the thought that the grammar reflects something about moral experiences, and one might be tempted to conclude that moral experiences have descriptive purport. But the argument here moves too quickly. To borrow an example from Michael Smith (1988), the predicate, 'is nauseating' functions grammatically just like many other

<sup>21</sup> Of course, there may be *further* aspects of the moral experiences of some individuals that do carry descriptive purport, but this does not affect our present point about what we are calling 'base-level' moral experience. (Some people's overall moral phenomenology may well be somewhat colored by their beliefs, perhaps in such a way that beliefs about the existence of objective moral facts can imbue moral experience itself with objective purport. But that would be a belief-induced 'overlay' of phenomenological descriptivity, superimposed upon non-descriptive base-level moral phenomenology.)

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moral and non-moral predicates—as, for example, when someone thinks or says, ‘That painting is nauseating’. But people do not suppose that this form of expression is deeply revealing of some aspect of their phenomenology—that their experiences and the associated judgments about what is and is not nauseating have descriptive purport. Those wishing to appeal to moral phenomenology to make a presumptive case for moral realism must find something else besides surface grammar to make their case. Indeed, on our view, given the belief-ish nature of moral judgments, the indicative mood is a natural linguistic vehicle for expressing these judgments—whether or not they are descriptive in their overall content.

*Appeals to belief.* But doesn’t the belief-ish nature of moral judgments—featured in judgment-involving moral experiences—itsself provide strong prima-facie reason to favor a realist moral metaphysics? After all, isn’t it constitutive of a psychological state’s being a genuine *belief* that it has descriptive purport—that it represents the world as being a certain way? Here, again, our response is negative. In other writings we have argued for a conception of belief according to which (1) a belief is a *commitment state* with respect to one or more descriptive contents; and (2) there are two distinct logically basic species of belief, namely, ‘is-commitment’ and ‘ought-commitment’. On our view, that a psychological state is a belief state does not entail that its overall content is descriptive content. Moral ought-judgments, we claim, are a species of non-descriptive belief—they involve a distinctive sort of commitment directed toward some non-moral descriptive possible state of affairs—an ought-commitment, *vis-à-vis* a way the world might be. On our view, then, when one sincerely thinks or says ‘I ought to express gratitude toward Jones’, one thereby expresses an ought-commitment directed toward the possible states of affairs, *my expressing gratitude toward Jones*. So we deny that because judgment-involving moral experiences involve making or having moral beliefs, one must embrace a realist moral metaphysics. (For an elaboration and defense of this view, see Horgan and Timmons 2000, 2006b.)

*Appeal to an is/seems distinction.* Another route for trying to go from moral phenomenology to a presumption in favor of moral realism is to argue that moral experiences permit a distinction between what *seems* to be the case, morally speaking, and what really *is* the case. In this way they might be thought to resemble experiences of color and stand in contrast to experiences of nausea. Pursuing the apparent analogy between color experiences and color judgments on the one hand and moral experiences and judgments on the other would take us deep into the heart of the question under consideration, and is beyond the scope of this paper. We will simply make one observation that leads to the next and final point we wish to make. It would appear that someone who denies the descriptive purport of moral phenomenology can easily draw an is/seems distinction by pointing to the fact that, to make this distinction, it is sufficient if one can make sense of certain modal claims such as, ‘Although it

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seems to me that I ought to help her with that project, *I might be mistaken*.<sup>22</sup> If, as we think, those who deny the descriptive purport of moral experience can make sense of such modal remarks about one's own possibly being in error, then the mere appeal to the facts of moral phenomenology to support moral realism does not go through. We concede that an important burden on moral irrealism is to make plausible sense of the is/seems distinction and of the thought, 'I could be mistaken'. But we claim that this burden can be met, and if we are right about this, then the fact that moral phenomenology admits of an is/seems distinction does not show that it has descriptive purport.

*Upshot.* We maintain that the facts of moral phenomenology do not favor realist over irrealist views in ethics; to think otherwise is to try to make the phenomenology do too much. Rather, questions about realism vs. irrealism will require that various theoretical considerations be brought to bear on matters of moral metaphysics. Returning for a moment to our Moorean moral phenomenology featuring the idea of fittingness, we maintain that this sort of phenomenological description does favor the idea that morality is in some sense objective. In cases of judgment-involving direct experiences of obligation, one does experience the circumstances which one confronts as 'calling for' a certain action. But how to understand this phenomenology, as it is related to questions of moral metaphysics, is a subtle and complex matter, and is not something that can be easily 'read off' from what is manifest in the phenomenology itself. We contend that, even though the moral phenomenology we have described is indeed objective in the sense lately noted, it does not purport to represent fittingness as a relation that is 'out there' in the fabric of reality, a relation that obtains or does not obtain completely independently of one's own reactive attitudes. Experiences of fit and unfit being independent of one's desires and preferences, as they surely are, is one thing; but complete independence of one's own fittingness-sensibility is quite another.<sup>23</sup>

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## VI Conclusion

Our main task has been to sketch a decidedly Moorean moral phenomenology. After explaining what we mean by the phenomenology of concrete moral experience, we

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., S. Blackburn, 'Errors and the Phenomenology of Value', in *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); M. Timmons, *Morality without Foundations*, ch. 4, and T. Horgan and M. Timmons, ~~(2000) and (2006)~~.

<sup>23</sup> On this point, see T. Horgan and M. Timmons, 'Moral Phenomenology and Moral Theory', 'Cognitivist Expressivism'; and S. Kirchin, 'Ethical Phenomenology and Moral Realism', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 6 (2003), 241–64.

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proceeded to discuss what is often taken to be the main lesson of the open question argument—namely, the idea that moral concepts are ineliminably and irreducibly normative. Here, on the basis of reflection on the nature of normativity, we concluded that the notion of fittingness is arguably the fundamental normative notion in ethical thought and discourse. Our goal, then, was to sketch a phenomenology of certain moral experiences—experiences of what Mandelbaum calls direct moral obligation—that reflects the normative lesson of Moore’s open question argument. In doing so, we followed the lead of Mandelbaum in proposing that direct moral experiences involve a felt ‘reflexive’ demand that is phenomenologically grounded in an apprehension of the fittingness of an action to a situation. It is this normative apprehension—a *sui generis* element of direct moral experience—that reflects the lesson of the open question argument. Finally, questions about moral phenomenology are thought to be relevant to questions in metaethics, including questions about moral metaphysics. And so, in the penultimate section, we claimed (although we did not fully argue) that the facts of moral phenomenology are non-committal with regard to the issue of moral realism vs. irrealism. But in saying this we do not mean to claim that considerations of moral phenomenology do not have much bearing on other metaethics questions and on questions in normative ethics. We have noted, for instance, that Moorean moral phenomenology bears quite directly on questions of ethical objectivity, and that it tells against traditional non-cognitivism. Pursuing the connections between moral phenomenology and other issues in ethics is something befitting another occasion.<sup>λ</sup>

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